Heartsease

by Charlotte M. Yonge

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HEARTSEASE,

or BROTHER’S WIFE

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PART I

And Maidens call them Love in Idleness. —Midsummer Night’s Dream

CHAPTER 1

There are none of England’s daughters that bear a prouder presence.

And a kingly blood sends glances up, her princely eye to trouble, And the shadow of a monarch’s crown is softened in her hair. —ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

The sun shone slanting over a spacious park, the undulating ground here turning a broad lawn towards the beams that silvered every blade of grass; there, curving away in banks of velvet green; shadowed by the trees; gnarled old thorns in the holiday suit whence they take their name, giant’s nosegays of horse-chestnuts, mighty elms and stalwart oaks, singly or in groups, the aristocracy of the place; while in the background rose wooded coverts, where every tint of early green blended in rich masses of varied foliage.

An avenue, nearly half a mile in length, consisted of a quadruple range of splendid lime trees of uniform growth, the side arcades vaulted over by the meeting branches, and the central road, where the same lights and shadows were again and again repeated, conducting the eye in diminishing perspective to a mansion on a broad base of stone steps. Herds of cattle, horses, and deer, gave animation to the scene, and near the avenue were a party of village children running about gathering

cowslips, or seated on the grass, devouring substantial plum buns.

Under a lordly elm sat a maiden of about nineteen years; at her feet a Skye terrier, like a walking door-mat, with a fierce and droll countenance, and by her side a girl and boy, the one sickly and poorly clad, the other with bright inquiring eyes, striving to compensate for the want of other faculties. She was teaching them to form that delight of childhood, a cowslip ball, the other children supplying her with handfuls of the gold-coated flowers, and returning a pull of the forelock or a bobbed curtsey to her smiling thanks.

Her dress was of a plain brown-holland looking material, the bonnet she had thrown off was of the coarsest straw, but her whole air declared her the daughter of that lordly house; and had gold and rubies been laid before her instead of cowslips with fairy favours, they would well have become her princely port, long neck, and stately head, crowned with a braid of her profuse black hair. That regal look was more remarkable in her than beauty; her brow was too high, her features not quite regular, her complexion of gypsy darkness, but with a glow of eyes very large, black, and deeply set, naturally grave in expression, but just now beaming and dancing in accordance with the encouraging smiles on her fresh, healthy, red lips, as her hands, very soft and delicate, though of large and strong make, completed the ball, threw it in the little boy's face, and laughed to see his ecstasy over the delicious prize; teaching him to play with it, tossing it backwards and forwards, shaking him into animation, and ever and anon chasing her little dog to extract it from between his teeth.

Suddenly she became aware of the presence of a spectator, and instantly assuming her bonnet, and drawing up her tall figure, she exclaimed, in a tone of welcome:

'Oh, Mr. Wingfield, you are come to see our cowslip feast.'

'There seems to be great enjoyment,' replied the young curate, looking, however, somewhat pre-occupied.

‘Look at Charlie Layton,’ said she, pointing to the dumb boy. ‘That ball is perfect felicity, he had rather not play with it, the delight is mere possession.’ She was turning to the boy again, when Mr. Wingfield said, not without hesitation—‘You have not heard when to expect your party from Madeira?’

‘You know we cannot hear again. They were to sail by the next packet, and it is uncertain how soon they may arrive.’

‘And—and—your brother Arthur. Do you know when he comes home?’

‘He promised to come this spring, but I fancy Captain Fitzhugh has inveigled him somewhere to fish. He never writes, so he may come any day. But what—is anything the matter?’

‘I have a letter here that—which—in Lord Martindale’s absence, I thought it might be better—you might prefer my coming direct to you. I cannot but think you should be aware’—stammered Mr. Wingfield.

‘Well,’—she said, haughtily.

‘Here is a letter from my cousin, who has a curacy in the Lake country. Your brother is at Wrangerton, the next town.’

‘Arthur is well?’ cried she, starting.

‘Yes, yes, you need not be alarmed, but I am afraid there is some entanglement. There are some Miss Mosses—’

‘Oh, it is that kind of thing!’ said she, in an altered tone, her cheeks glowing; ‘it is very silly of him to get himself talked about; but of course it is all nothing.’

‘I wish I could think so,’ said Mr. Wingfield; ‘but, indeed, Miss Martindale,’ for she was returning to the children, ‘I am afraid it is a serious matter. The father is a designing person.’

‘Arthur will not be taken in,’ was her first calm answer; but perceiving the curate unconvinced, though unwilling to contradict, she added, ‘But what is the story?’

Mr. Wingfield produced the letter and read; ‘Fanshawe, the curate of Wrangerton, has just been with me, telling me his rector is in much difficulty and perplexity about a son of your parishioner, Lord Martindale. He came to Wrangerton with another guardsman for the sake of the fishing, and has been drawn into an engagement with one of the daughters of old Moss, who manages the St. Erme property. I know nothing against the young ladies, indeed Fanshawe speaks highly of them; but the father is a disreputable sort of attorney, who has taken advantage of Lord St. Erme’s absence and neglect to make a prey of the estate. The marriage is to take place immediately, and poor Mr. Jones is in much distress at the dread of being asked to perform the ceremony, without the consent of the young man’s family.’

‘He cannot do it,’ exclaimed the young lady; ‘you had better write and tell him so.’

‘I am afraid,’ said Mr. Wingfield, diffidently, ‘I am afraid he has no power to refuse.’

‘Not in such a case as this? It is his duty to put a stop to it.’

‘All that is in his power he will do, no doubt, by reasoning and remonstrance; but you must remember that your brother is of age, and if the young lady’s parents consent, Mr. Jones has no choice.’

‘I could not have believed it! However, it will not come to that: it is only the old rector’s fancy. To make everything secure I will write to my brother, and we shall soon see him here.’

‘There is still an hour before post-time,’ said Mr. Wingfield; ‘shall I send the children home?’

‘No, poor little things, let them finish their game. Thank you for coming to me. My aunt will, I hope, hear nothing of it. Good evening.’

Calling an elder girl, she gave some directions; and Mr. Wingfield watched her walking down the avenue with a light-footed but decided and characteristic tread, expressing in every step, ‘Where I am going, there I will go, and nothing shall stop

me.’

‘Nonsense!’ she said to herself; ‘Arthur cannot be so lost to the sense of everything becoming. Such pain cannot be in store for me! Anything else I could bear; but this must not, cannot, shall not be. Arthur is all I have; I cannot spare him; and to see him shipwrecked on a low-bred designing creature would be too much misery. Impossible—so clear-headed as he is, so fastidious about women! And yet this letter spoke decidedly. People talk of love! and Arthur is so easy, he would let himself be drawn on rather than make a disturbance. He might be ensnared with his eyes open, because he disliked the trouble of breaking loose, and so would not think of the consequence. Nothing could save him so well as some one going to him. He can read a letter or not as he chooses. Oh, if papa were at home—oh, if Mr. Wingfield were but Percy Fotheringham—he who fears no man, and can manage any one! Oh! if I could go myself; he heeds me when he heeds no one else. Shall I go? Why not? It would save him; it would be the only effectual way. Let me see. I would take Simmonds and Pauline. But then I must explain to my aunt. Stuff! there are real interests at stake! Suppose this is exaggeration—why, then, I should be ridiculous, and Arthur would never forget it. Besides, I believe I cannot get there in one day—certainly not return the same. I must give way to conventionalities, and be a helpless young lady.’

She reached the house, and quickly dashed off her letter:—

‘My Dear Arthur,—I hope and trust this letter may be quite uncalled for, though I feel it my duty to write it. I used to have some influence with you, and I should think that anything that reminded you of home would make you pause.

‘Report has of course outrun the truth. It is impossible you should be on the brink of marriage without letting us know—as much so, I should trust, as your seriously contemplating an engagement with one beneath your notice. I dare say you find it very pleasant to amuse yourself; but consider, before you allow yourself to form an

attachment—I will not say before becoming a victim to sordid speculation. You know what poor John has gone through, though there was no inferiority there. Think what you would have to bear for the sake, perhaps, of a pretty face, but of a person incapable of being a companion or comfort, and whom you would be ashamed to see beside your own family. Or, supposing your own affections untouched, what right have you to trifle with the feelings of a poor girl, and raise expectations you cannot and ought not to fulfil? You are too kind, when once you reflect, to inflict such pain, you, who cannot help being loved. Come away while it is time; come home, and have the merit of self-sacrifice. If your fancy is smitten, it will recover in its proper sphere. If it costs you pain, you know to whom you have always hitherto turned in your vexations. Dear Arthur, do not ruin yourself; only come back to me. Write at once; I cannot bear the suspense.

‘Your most affectionate sister,

‘THEODORA A. MARTINDALE.’

She made two copies of this letter; one she directed to ‘The Hon. Arthur Martindale, Grenadier Guards, Winchester;’ the other, ‘Post-Office, Wrangerton.’ In rather more than a week she was answered:—

‘My Dear Theodora,—You judged rightly that I am no man to trifle, or to raise expectations which I did not mean to fulfil. My wife and I are at Matlock for a few days before joining at Winchester.

‘Your affectionate brother,

‘ARTHUR N. MARTINDALE,’

CHAPTER 2

She’s less of a bride than a bairn, She’s ta’en like a colt from the heather, With sense and discretion to learn. A chiel maun be patient and steady That yokes with a mate

in her teens. Woo'd and Married and A' JOANNA BAILLIE

A gentleman stood waiting at the door of a house not far from the Winchester barracks.

'Is my brother at home, James?' as the servant gave a start of surprise and recognition.

'No, sir; he is not in the house, but Mrs.—; will you walk in? I hope I see you better, sir.'

'Much better, thank you. Did you say Mrs. Martindale was at home?'

'Yes, sir; Mr. Arthur will soon be here. Won't you walk in?'

'Is she in the drawing-room?'

'No, I do not think so, sir. She went up-stairs when she came in.'

'Very well. I'll send up my card,' said he, entering, and the man as he took it, said, with emphasis, and a pleading look, 'She is a very nice young lady, sir,' then opened a room door.

He suddenly announced, 'Mr. Martindale,' and that gentleman unexpectedly found himself in the presence of a young girl, who rose in such confusion that he could not look at her as he shook her by the hand, saying, 'Is Arthur near home?'

'Yes—no—yes; at least, he'll come soon,' was the reply, as if she hardly knew what her words were.

'Were you going out?' he asked, seeing a bonnet on the sofa.

'No, thank you,—at least I mean, I'm just come in. He went to speak to some one, and I came to finish my letter. He'll soon come,' said she, with the rapid ill-assured manner of a school-girl receiving her mamma's visitors.

'Don't let me interrupt you,' said he, taking up a book.

'O no, no, thank you,' cried she, in a tremor lest she should have been uncivil. 'I didn't mean—I've plenty of time. 'Tis only to my home, and they have had one by

the early post.'

He smiled, saying, 'You are a good correspondent.'

'Oh! I must write. Annette and I were never apart before.'

'Your sister?'

'Yes, only a year older. We always did everything together.'

He ventured to look up, and saw a bright dew on a soft, shady pair of dark eyes, a sweet quivering smile on a very pretty mouth, and a glow of pure bright deep pink on a most delicately fair skin, contrasted with braids of dark brown hair. She was rather above the ordinary height, slender, and graceful, and the childish beauty of the form or face and features surprised him; but to his mind the chief grace was the shy, sweet tenderness, happy and bright, but tremulous with the recent pain of the parting from home. With a kindly impulse, he said, 'You must tell me your name, Arthur has not mentioned it.'

'Violet;' and as he did not appear at once to catch its unusual sound, she repeated, 'Violet Helen; we most of us have strange names.'

'Violet Helen,' he repeated, with an intonation as if struck, not unpleasingly, by the second name. 'Well, that is the case in our family. My sister has an uncommon name.'

'Theodora,' said Violet, pausing, as if too timid to inquire further.

'Have you only this one sister?' he said.

'Six, and one brother,' said she, in a tone of exulting fondness. A short silence, and then the joyful exclamation, 'There he is!' and she sprang to the door, leaving it open, as her fresh young voice announced, full of gratulation, 'Here's your brother.'

'Guileless and unconscious of evil, poor child!' thought the brother; 'but I wonder how Arthur likes the news.'

Arthur entered, a fine-looking young man, of three-and-twenty, dark, bright

complexioned, tall, and robust. He showed not the least consciousness of having offended, and his bride smiled freely as if at rest from all embarrassment now that she had her protector.

‘Well, John,’ was his greeting, warmly spoken. ‘You here? You look better. How is the cough?’

‘Better, thank you.’

‘I see I need not introduce you,’ said Arthur, laying his hand on the arm of his blushing Violet, who shrank up to him as he gave a short laugh. ‘Have you been here long?’

‘Only about five minutes.’

‘And you are come to stay?’

‘Thank you, if you can take me in for a day or two.’

‘That we can. There is a tolerable spare room, and James will find a place for Brown. I am glad to see you looking so much better. Have you got rid of the pain in your side?’

‘Entirely, thank you, for the last few weeks.’

‘How is my mother?’

‘Very well. She enjoyed the voyage extremely.’

‘She won’t concoct another Tour?’

‘I don’t think so,’ said John, gravely.

‘There has SHE,’ indicating his wife, ‘been thinking it her duty to read the old Italian one, which I never opened in my life. I declare it would take a dictionary to understand a page. She is scared at the variety of tongues, and feels as if she was in Babel.’

John was thinking that if he did not know this rattling talk to be a form of embarrassment, he should take it for effrontery.

‘Shall I go and see about the room?’ half-whispered Violet.

‘Yes, do;’ and he opened the door for her, exclaiming, almost before she was fairly gone, ‘There! you want no more explanation.’

She is very lovely!’ said John, in a tone full of cordial admiration.

‘Isn’t she?’ continued Arthur, triumphantly. ‘Such an out-of-the-way style;—the dark eyes and hair, with that exquisite complexion, ivory fairness,—the form of her face the perfect oval!—what you so seldom see—and her figure, just the right height, tall and taper! I don’t believe she could be awkward if she was to try. She’ll beat every creature hollow, especially in a few years’ time when she’s a little more formed.’

‘She is very young?’

‘Sixteen on our wedding-day. That’s the beauty of it. If she had been a day older it would have been a different thing. Not that they could have spoilt her,—she is a thoroughbred by nature, and no mistake.’

‘How did your acquaintance begin?’

‘This way,’ said Arthur, leaning back, and twirling a chair on one of its legs for a pivot. ‘Fitzhugh would have me come down for a fortnight’s fishing to Wrangerton. There’s but one inn there fit to put a dog to sleep in, and when we got there we found the house turned out of window for a ball, all the partitions down on the first floor, and we driven into holes to be regaled with distant fiddle-squeak. So Fitzhugh’s Irish blood was up for a dance, and I thought I might as well give in to it, for the floor shook so that there was no taking a cigar in peace. So you see the stars ordained it, and it is of no use making a row about one’s destiny,’ concluded Arthur, in a sleepy voice, ceasing to spin the chair.

‘That was your first introduction?’

‘Ay. After that, one was meeting the Mosses for ever; indeed, we had to call on the

old fellow to get leave for fishing in that water of Lord St. Erme's. He has a very pretty sort of little place out of the town close to the park, and—and somehow the weather was too bright for any sport, and the stream led by their garden.'

'I perceive,' said John.

'Well, I saw I was in for it, and had nothing for it but to go through with it. Anything for a quiet life.'

'A new mode of securing it,' said John, indignant at his nonchalance.

'There you don't display your wonted sagacity,' returned Arthur coolly. 'You little know what I have gone through on your account. If you had been sound-winded, you would have saved me no end of persecution.'

'You have not avoided speculation as it is,' John could not help saying.

'I beg to observe that you are mistaken. Old Moss is as cunning a fox as ever lived; but I saw his game, and without my own good-will he might have whistled for me. I saw what he was up to, and let him know it, but as I was always determined that when I married it should be to please myself, not my aunt, I let things take their course and saved the row at home.'

'I am sure she knew nothing of this.'

'She? Bless you, poor child. She is as innocent as a lamb, and only thinks me all the heroes in the world.'

'She did not know my father was ignorant of it?'

'Not she. She does not know it to this day.' John sat thinking; Arthur twirled the chair, then said, 'That is the fact. I suppose my aunt had a nice story for you.'

'It agreed in the main with yours.'

'I was unlucky,' said Arthur, 'I meant to have brought her home before my aunt and Theodora had any news of it. I could have got round them that way, but somehow Theodora got scent of it, and wrote me a furious letter, full of denunciation—two of

them—they hunted me everywhere, so I saw it was no use going there.'

'She is much hurt at your letter. I can see that she is, though she tries to hide her feelings. She was looking quite pale when we came home, and I can hardly bear to see the struggle to look composed when you are mentioned.'

This evidently produced some compunction, but Arthur tried to get rid of it. 'I am sure there was nothing to take to heart in it—was there, John?'

'I don't know. She had burnt it without letting any one see it; and it was only through my aunt that we learnt that she had received it.'

'Well! her temper is up, and I am sorry for it,' said Arthur. 'I forget what I said. I dare say it was no more than she deserved. I got one of these remonstrances of hers at Wrangerton, on the day before, and another followed me a couple of days after to Matlock, so I could not have that going on for ever, and wrote off to put a stop to it. But what does his lordship say?'

'Do you wish him to forgive or not?' said his brother, nearly out of patience.

'Of course—I knew he would, he can't leave us with nothing to live on. There's nothing to be done but to go through the forms, and I am quite ready. Come, what's the use of looking intensely disgusted? Now you have seen her, you don't expect me to profess that I am very sorry, and "will never do so no more."'

'I say nothing against her, but the way of doing it.'

'So much trouble saved. Besides, I tell you I am ready to make whatever apology my father likes for a preliminary.'

His brother looked vexed, and dropped the conversation, waiting to see more of the bride before he should form an opinion.

It was seeing rather than hearing, for she was in much awe of him, blushed more than she spoke, and seemed taken up by the fear of doing something inappropriate, constantly turning wistful inquiring looks towards her husband, to seek

encouragement or direction, but it was a becoming confusion, and by no means lessened the favourable impression.

‘The next morning Arthur was engaged, and left her to be the guide to the cathedral, whereat she looked shy and frightened, but Mr. Martindale set himself to re-assure her, and the polished gentleness of his manner soon succeeded.

They stood on the hill, overlooking the town and the vale of Itchen, winding away till lost between the green downs that arose behind their crested neighbour, St. Catherine’s Hill, and in the valley beneath reposed the gray cathedral’s lengthened nave and square tower, its lesser likeness, St. Cross, and the pinnacles of the College tower.

‘A very pretty view,’ said Mr. Martindale.

‘The old buildings are very fine, but it is not like our own hills.’

‘No, it is hard on Hampshire downs to compare them to Cumberland mountains.’

‘But it is so sunny and beautiful,’ said the bright young bride. ‘See the sunshine on the green meadows, and the haymaking. Oh! I shall always love it.’ John heard a great deal of happiness in those words. ‘I never saw a cathedral before,’ she added.

‘Have you been over this one?’

‘Yes, but it will be such a treat to go again. One can’t take a quarter of it in at once.’

‘No, it takes half a lifetime to learn a cathedral properly.’

‘It is a wonderful thing,’ she said, with the same serious face; then, changing her tone to one of eagerness, ‘I want to find Bishop Fox’s tomb, for he was a north-country bishop.’

John smiled. ‘You are perfect in the cathedral history.’

‘I bought a little book about it.’

Her knowledge was, he found, in a girlish state of keen interest, and not deficient, but what pleased him best was that, as they entered and stood at the west door,

looking down the whole magnificent length of nave, choir, and chapel, the embowed roof high above, sustained on massive pillars, she uttered a low murmur of ‘beautiful!’ and there was a heart-felt expression of awe and reverence on her face, a look as of rapt thought, chased away in a moment by his eye, and giving place to quiet pensiveness. After the service they went over the building; but though eager for information, the gravity did not leave her, nor did she speak at once when they emerged into the Close.

‘It is very impressive,’ said John.

‘I suppose you have seen a great many cathedrals?’

‘Yes, many foreign ones, and a few English.’

‘I wonder whether seeing many makes one feel the same as seeing one.’

‘How do you mean?’

‘I do not think I could ever care for another like this one.’

‘As your first?’

‘Yes; it has made me understand better what books say about churches, and their being like—’

‘Like?’

She changed her sentence. ‘It makes one think, and want to be good.’

‘It is what all truly beautiful things should do’ said John.

‘Oh! I am glad you say so,’ exclaimed Violet. ‘It is like what Annette and I have wondered about—I mean why fine statues or pictures, or anything of that kind, should make one feel half sad and half thoughtful when one looks at them long.’

‘Perhaps because it is a straining after the only true beauty.’

‘I must tell Annette that. It was she that said it was so,’ said Violet; ‘and we wondered Greek statues gave one that feeling, but I see it must be the reason.’

‘What statues have you seen?’

‘Those at Wrangerton House. Lord St. Erme is always sending cases home, and it is such a festival day to go up and see them unpacked, and Caroline and Annette go and take drawings, and I like to wander about the rooms, and look at everything,’ said Violet, growing talkative on the theme of home. ‘There is one picture I like above all, but that is a sacred subject, so no wonder it should have that feeling in it.’

‘What is it?’

‘It is a Madonna,’ she said, lowering her voice. ‘A stiff old-fashioned one, in beautiful, bright, clear colouring. The Child is reaching out to embrace a little cross, and his Mother holds him towards it with such a sad but such a holy face, as if she foreboded all, and was ready to bear it.’

‘Ah! that Ghirlandajo?’

‘That is the name!’ cried Violet, enchanted. ‘Have you seen it?’

‘I saw Lord St. Erme buy it.’

‘Do you know Lord St. Erme?’ said Violet, rather awe-struck.

‘I used to meet him in Italy.’

‘We wish so much that he would come home. We do so want to see a poet.’

John smiled. ‘Is he never at home?’

‘O, no, he has never been at Wrangerton since his father died, twelve years ago. He does not like the place, so he only comes to London when he is in England, and papa goes up to meet him on business, but he is too poetical to attend to it.’

‘I should guess that.’

‘I have done wrong, said Violet, checking herself; ‘I should not have said that. Mamma told us that we ought never to chatter about his concerns. Will you, please, not remember that I said it?’

As far as the outer world is concerned, I certainly will not,’ said John kindly. ‘You

cannot too early learn discretion. So that picture is at Wrangerton?'

'I am so glad you liked it.'

'I liked it well enough to wish for a few spare hundreds, but it seems to have afforded no more pleasure to him than it has given to me. I am glad it is gone where there is some one who can appreciate it.'

'Oh, said Violet,' Matilda knows all about the best pictures. We don't appreciate, you know, we only like.'

'And your chief liking is for that one?'

'It is more than liking,' said Violet; 'I could call it loving. It is almost the same to me as Helvellyn. Annette and I went to the house for one look more my last evening at home. I must tell her that you have seen it!' and the springing steps grew so rapid, that her companion had to say, 'Don't let me detain you, I am obliged to go gently up-hill.' She checked her steps, abashed, and presently, with a shy but very pretty action, held out her arm, saying timidly, 'Would it help you to lean on me? I ought not to have brought you this steep way. Matilda says I skurry like a school-girl.'

He saw it would console her to let her think herself of service and accepted of the slender prop for the few steps that remained. He then went up-stairs to write letters, but finding no ink, came to the drawing-room to ask her for some. She had only her own inkstand, which was supplying her letter to Annette, and he sat down at the opposite side of the table to share it. Her pen went much faster than his. 'Clifton Terrace, Winchester,' and 'My dear father—I came here yesterday, and was most agreeably surprised,' was all that he had indited, when he paused to weigh what was his real view of the merits of the case, and ponder whether his present feeling was sober judgment, or the novelty of the bewitching prettiness of this innocent and gracious creature. There he rested, musing, while from her pen flowed a description of her walk and of Mr. Martindale's brother. 'If they are all like him, I shall be perfectly happy,' she wrote. 'I never saw any one so kind and considerate, and so

gentle; only now and then he frightens me, with his politeness, or perhaps polish is the right word, it makes me feel myself rude and uncourteous and awkward. You said nothing gave you so much the notion of high-breeding as Mr. Martindale's ease, especially when he pretended to be rough and talk slang, it was like playing at it. Now, his brother has the same, without the funny roughness, but the greatest gentleness, and a good deal of quiet sadness. I suppose it is from his health, though he is much better now: he still coughs, and he moves slowly and leans languidly, as if he was not strong. He is not so tall as his brother, and much slighter in make, and fairer complexioned, with gray eyes and brown hair, and he looks sallow and worn and thin, with such white long hands.'

Here raising her eyes to verify her description, she encountered those of its subject, evidently taking a survey of her for the same purpose. He smiled, and she was thereby encouraged to break into a laugh, so girlish and light-hearted, so unconscious how much depended on his report, that he could not but feel compassionate.

Alarmed at the graver look, she crimsoned, exclaiming, 'O! I beg your pardon! It was very rude.'

'No, no,' said John; it was absurd!' and vexed at having checked her gladsomeness, he added, 'It is I rather who should ask your pardon, for looks that will not make a cheerful figure in your description.'

'Oh, no,' cried Violet; 'mamma told me never to say anything against any of Mr. Martindale's relations. What have I said?'—as he could not help laughing—'Something I could not have meant.'

'Don't distress yourself, pray,' said John, not at all in a bantering tone. 'I know what you meant; and it was very wise advice, such as you will be very glad to have followed.'

With a renewed blush, an ingenuous look, and a hesitating effort, she said,

‘INDEED, I have been telling them how very kind you are. Mamma will be so pleased to hear it.’

‘She must have been very sorry to part with you,’ said he, looking at the fair girl sent so early into the world.

‘Oh, yes!’ and the tears started to the black eyelashes, though a smile came at the same time; ‘she said I should be such a giddy young housekeeper, and she would have liked a little more notice.’

‘It was not very long?’ said John, anxious to lead her to give him information; and she was too young and happy not to be confidential, though she looked down and glowed as she answered, ‘Six weeks.’

‘And you met at the ball!’

‘Yes, it was very curious;’ and with deepening blushes she went on, the smile of happiness on her lips, and her eyes cast down. ‘Annette was to go for the first time, and she would not go without me. Mamma did not like it, for I was not sixteen then; but Uncle Christopher came, and said I should, because I was his pet. But I can never think it was such a short time; it seems a whole age ago.’

‘It must,’ said John, with a look of interest that made her continue.

‘It was very odd how it all happened. Annette and I had no one to dance with, and were wondering who those two gentlemen were. Captain Fitzhugh was dancing with Miss Evelyn, and he—Mr. Martindale—was leaning against the wall, looking on.’

‘I know exactly—with his arms crossed so—’

‘Yes, just so,’ said Violet, smiling; ‘and presently Grace Bennet came and told Matilda who they were; and while I was listening, oh, I was so surprised, for there was Albert, my brother, making me look round. Mr. Martindale had asked to be introduced to us, and he asked me to dance. I don’t believe I answered right, for I thought he meant Matilda. ‘But,’ said she, breaking off, ‘how I am chattering and

hindering you!' and she coloured and looked down.

'Not at all,' said John; 'there is nothing I wish more to hear, or that concerns me more nearly. Anything you like to tell.'

'I am afraid it is silly,' half-whispered Violet to herself; but the recollection was too pleasant not to be easily drawn out; and at her age the transition is short from shyness to confidence.

'Not at all silly,' said John. 'You know I must wish to hear how I gained a sister.'

Then, as the strangeness of imagining that this grave, high-bred, more than thirty-years-old gentleman, could possibly call her by such a name, set her smiling and blushing in confusion, he wiled on her communications by saying, 'Well, that evening you danced with Arthur.'

'Three times. It was a wonderful evening. Annette and I said, when we went to bed, we had seen enough to think of for weeks. We did not know how much more was going to happen.'

'No, I suppose not.'

'I thought much of it when he bowed to me. I little fancied—but there was another odd coincidence—wasn't it? In general I never go into the drawing-room to company, because there are three older; but the day they came to speak to papa about the fishing, mamma and all the elder ones were out of the way, except Matilda. I was doing my Roman history with her, when papa came in and said, we must both come into the drawing-room.'

'You saw more of him from that time?'

'O yes; he dined with us. It was the first time I ever dined with a party, and he talked so much to me, that Albert began to laugh at me; but Albert always laughs. I did not care till—till—that day when he walked with us in the park, coming home from fishing.'

Her voice died away, and her face burnt as she looked down; but a few words of interest led her on.

‘When I told mamma, she said most likely he thought me a little girl who didn’t signify; but I did not think he could, for I am the tallest of them all, and every one says I look as if I was seventeen, at least. And then she told me grand gentlemen and officers didn’t care what nonsense they talked. You know she didn’t know him so well then,’ said Violet, looking up pleadingly.

‘She was very prudent.’

‘She could not know he did not deserve it,’ said the young bride, ready to resent it for her husband, since his brother did not, then again excusing her mother. ‘It was all her care for me, dear mamma! She told me not to think about it; but I could not help it! Indeed I could not!’

‘No, indeed,’ and painful recollections of his own pressed on him, but he could not help being glad this tender young heart was not left to pine under disappointment. ‘How long ago was this?’

‘That was six weeks ago—a month before our wedding-day,’ said she, blushingly. ‘I did wish it could have been longer. I wanted to learn, how to keep house, and I never could, for he was always coming to take me to walk in the park. And it all happened so fast, I had no time to understand it, nor to talk to mamma and Matilda. And then mamma cried so much! I don’t feel to understand it now, but soon perhaps I shall have more quiet time. I should like to have waited till Lord Martindale came home, but they said that could not be, because his leave of absence would be over. I did wish very much though that Miss Martindale could have left her aunt to come to our wedding.’

John found reply so difficult, that he was glad to be interrupted by Arthur’s return. He soon after set out to call upon Captain Fitzhugh, who had been at Wrangerton with Arthur.

From him more of the circumstances were gathered. Mr. Moss was the person universally given up to reprobation. ‘A thorough schemer,’ said the Irish captain. As to the Miss Mosses, they were lady-like girls, most of them pretty, and everywhere well spoken of. In fact, John suspected he had had a little flirtation on his own account with some of them, though he took credit to himself for having warned his friend to be careful. He ended with a warm-hearted speech, by no means displeasing to John, hoping he would make the best of it with Lord Martindale, for after all, she was as pretty a creature as could be seen, one that any man might be proud of for a daughter-in-law; and to his mind it was better than leaving the poor girl to break her heart after him when it had gone so far.

Arthur himself was in a more rational mood that evening. He had at first tried to hide his embarrassment by bravado; but he now changed his tone, and as soon as Violet had left the dining-room, began by an abrupt inquiry, ‘What would you have me do?’

‘Why don’t you write to my father!’

Arthur writhed. ‘I suppose it must come to that,’ he said; ‘but tell me first the state of things.’

‘You could not expect that there would not be a good deal of indignation.’

‘Ay, ay! How did you get the news? Did Theodora tell you?’

‘No; there was a letter from Colonel Harrington; and at home they knew the circumstances pretty correctly through a cousin of Wingfield’s, who has a curacy in that neighbourhood.’

‘Oh! that was the way Theodora came by the news. I wish he had let alone telling her,—I could have managed her alone;—but there! it was not in human nature not to tell such a story, and it did not much matter how it was done. Well, and my aunt is furious, I suppose, but I’ll take care of her and of my lady. I only want to know how my father takes it.’

‘He cannot endure the notion of a family feud; but the first step must come from you.’

‘Very well:—and so you came to set it going. It is very good-natured of you, John. I depended on you or Theodora for helping me through, but I did not think you would have come in this way. I am glad you have, for now you have seen her you can’t say a word against it.’

‘Against her, certainly not. I have made acquaintance with her this morning, and—and there is everything to interest one in her:’ and then, as Arthur looked delighted, and was ready to break into a rhapsody—‘Her simplicity especially. When you write you had better mention her entire ignorance of the want of sanction. I cannot think how she was kept in such unconsciousness.’

‘She knows nothing of people’s ways,’ said Arthur. ‘She knew you were all abroad, and her own family told her it was all right. Her father is a bit of a tyrant, and stopped the mother’s mouth, I fancy, if she had any doubts. As to herself, it was much too pretty to see her so happy, to let her set up her little scruples. She did just as she was told, like a good child.’

‘O Arthur! you have undertaken a great responsibility!’ exclaimed John.

But Arthur, without seeming to heed, continued, ‘So you see she is quite clear; but I’ll write, and you shall see if it is not enough to satisfy my father, before he sets us going respectably.’

‘I can’t answer for anything of that sort.’

‘Something he must do,’ said Arthur, ‘for my allowance is not enough to keep a cat; and as to the ninth part of old Moss’s pickings and stealings, if I meant to dirty my fingers with it, it won’t be to be come by till he is disposed of, and that won’t be these thirty years.’

‘Then, he let you marry without settling anything on her!’

‘He was glad to have her off his hands on any terms. Besides, to tell you the truth, John, I am convinced he had no notion you would ever come home again. He knew I saw his game, and dreaded I should be off; so he and I were both of one mind, to have it over as soon as possible.’

‘I only hope you will make her happy!’ said John, earnestly.

‘Happy!’ exclaimed Arthur, surprised, ‘small doubt of that! What should prevent me?’

‘I think you will find you must make some sacrifices.’

‘It all depends on my father,’ said Arthur, a little crossly, and taking his writing-case from another table.

He was so well pleased with his performance that, as soon as he was alone with Violet, he began, ‘There, I’ve done it! John said it could not be better, and after the impression you have made, no fear but he will pacify the great folks.’

She was perplexed. ‘Who?’ said she; ‘not Lord and Lady Martindale? Oh! surely I have not done anything to displease them.’

‘You must have been ingenious if you had.’

‘Pray, do tell me! Why are they to be pacified? What is the matter? Do they think they shan’t like me? Ought I to do anything?’

‘My little bird, don’t twitter so fast. You have asked a dozen questions in a breath.’

‘I wish you would tell me what it means,’ said Violet, imploringly.

‘Well, I suppose you must know sooner or later. It only means that they are taken by surprise.’

Violet gazed at him in perplexity, then, with a dawning perception, ‘Oh! surely you don’t mean they did not approve of it.’

‘Nobody asked them,’ said Arthur, carelessly, then as she turned away, covering her face with her hands, ‘But it is nothing to take to heart in that way. I am my own

master, you know, you silly child, and you had plenty of consent, and all that sort of thing, to satisfy you, so you are quite out of the scrape.'

She scarcely seemed to hear.

'Come, come, Violet, this won't do,' he continued, putting his arm round her, and turning her towards him, while he pulled down her hands. 'This is pretty usage. You can't help it now if you would.'

'Oh! Mr. Martindale!'

'Ah! you don't know what I have saved you. I was not going to see all that pink paint worn off those cheeks, nor your life and my own wasted in waiting for them to bring their minds to it. I have seen enough of that. Poor John there—'

'How?—what?' said Violet, with alarmed curiosity.

'She died,' said Arthur.

'How long ago? What was her name?'

'Helen Fotheringham. She was our old parson's daughter. They waited eight years, and she died last summer. I see he wears his mourning still.'

Violet looked aghast, and spoke low. 'How very sad! Helen! That was the reason he looked up when he heard it was my name. Poor Mr. John Martindale! I saw the crape on his hat. Was that what made him so ill?'

'It nearly killed him last year, but he never had lungs good for anything. First, my aunt set my father against it, and when he gave in, she had a crabbed decrepit old grandfather, and between them they were the death of her, and almost of him. I never thought he would rally again.'

'Only last year?' exclaimed Violet. 'O dear! and there have I been telling him all about—about this spring. I would not have done it, if I had known. I thought he looked melancholy sometimes. Oh! I wish I had not.'

'You did, did you?' said Arthur, much amused. 'You chatterbox.'

‘Oh! I am so sorry. I wish—’

‘No, no, he only liked you the better for it. I assure you, Violet, he almost said so. Then that was what made him lay such stress on your being an innocent little victim.’

‘Would you be so kind as to explain it to me?’ said Violet, in such serious distress that he answered with less trifling than usual, ‘There is nothing to tell. I knew how it would be if I asked leave, so I took it. That’s all.’

‘And—and surely they didn’t know this at home?’

‘The less said about that the better, Violet,’ said Arthur. ‘You are all right, you know, and in great favour with John. He can do anything with my father, and I have written. We shall be at home before the end of another month, and set going with a decent income in London. A house—where shall it be? Let me see, he can’t give me less than £1000 a year, perhaps £1600. I vow I don’t see why it should not be £2000. John wants no more than he has got, and will never marry now, and there is only Theodora. I was always my aunt’s favourite, and if you mind what you are about we shall have our share of the old sugar-planter’s hoards, better than the Barbuda property—all niggers and losses. I wash my hands of it, though by rights it should come to the second son.’

Neither understanding nor heeding all this, Violet interrupted by gasping out, ‘Oh! I am so grieved.’

‘Grieved!—say that again. Grieved to be Mrs. Arthur Martindale?’

‘O no, no; but—’

‘Grieved to have found such a fool as to risk everything, and run counter to all his friends for the sake of that silly little ungrateful face?’

She was coaxed out of vexation for the present; but she awoke the next morning with a feeling of culpability and dread of all the Martindale family.

John could not understand her altered manner and the timid bashfulness, greater than even at their first meeting. In fact, the history of his grief inspired her with a sort of reverential compassion for him, and the perception of the terms on which she stood, made her laugh of yesterday seem to her such unbecoming levity, that upon it she concentrated all her vague feelings of contrition.

When he came as before, to borrow some ink, as she gave it to him her hand shook, and her colour rose. After standing musing a little while, she said, mournfully, ‘I am very sorry!’

‘What is the matter?’ said he, kindly.

‘I am so vexed at what I did yesterday!’

‘What do you mean?’

‘For laughing,’ said she, in a tone of distress. ‘Indeed, indeed, I did not know,’ and though she averted her face, he saw that the crimson had spread to her neck. He did not at once reply, and she went on incoherently. ‘I did not know—I could not guess. Of course—I wondered at it all. I knew I was not fit—but they never told me—O, I am so much grieved.’

Most soothingly did John say, coming towards her, ‘No, no, you need not distress yourself. No one can blame you.’

‘But Lord Martindale’—she murmured.

‘He will look on you like a daughter. I know I may promise you that. Yes, indeed, I have no doubt of it, my dear little sister,’ he repeated, as she looked earnestly at him. ‘I have told him how entirely you deserve his kindness and affection, and Arthur has written, such a letter as will be sure to bring his forgiveness.’

‘Ah!’ said Violet, ‘it is all for my sake. No wonder they should be angry.’

‘Don’t fancy that any one is angry with you. We all know that you were ignorant how matters stood.’

‘But I should have done the same if I had known. I could not have helped it,’ said Violet.

‘I know,’ said John, ‘no one could expect it of you. Arthur told me at once that you were free from any shadow of blame, and no one thinks of imputing any.’

‘But are they very much displeased?’ said poor Violet.

‘Of course,’ said John, after a little consideration, ‘it was a shock to hear of such an important step being taken without my father’s knowledge; but he is very anxious there should be no estrangement, and I am sure he will behave as if things had gone on in the usual course. You may have great confidence in his kindness, Violet.’

She was somewhat reassured, and presently went on—‘I don’t wonder they are vexed. I know how much beneath him I am, but I could not help that. Oh! I wish Matilda was here to tell me how to behave, that every one may not be ashamed of me and angry with him.’

‘Don’t be frightened’ said John, ‘you have pleased two of the family already; you know, and depend upon it, you will make them all like you in time as much as I do.’

‘If YOU can overlook that laugh!’ said Violet.

‘I could say I liked you the better for it,’ said John, pleasantly; ‘only I don’t know whether it would be a safe precedent. It has made us feel well acquainted, I hope. Don’t make a stranger of me,’ he continued, ‘don’t forget that we are brother and sister.

‘I’m sure,’—and she broke off, unable to express herself; then added, ‘Lady Martindale! I was frightened before at the thought of her, but it is much worse now.’

‘You must not frighten yourself. You will find out how kind she is when you come to know her, and soon get over your first strangeness and shyness.’

‘And there is your sister,’ said Violet; ‘Theodora—I do long to see her. Is she most like you or your brother?’

‘Remarkably like him. She always makes children very fond of her,’ he added, pausing to find something safe and yet encouraging; ‘but I don’t know half as much of her as Arthur does. We have not been as much together as I could wish.’

‘I see now why she never wrote,’ said Violet, with some shame, and yet glad to have it accounted for. ‘But she will be sure to help me, and tell me how to behave. She will want them to be able to bear me for his sake.’

Without much reply, he applied himself to his letter, feeling that he could hardly give an impartial judgment. It had been a great effort to come to visit the bridal pair, but he found himself rewarded in a way he had not expected by the new pleasure given him by her engaging ways, her freshness and artlessness rousing him from long-continued depression of spirits.

After some pondering, she suddenly looked up, and exclaimed, ‘Well, I’ll try!’

‘Try what, Violet!’

‘I’ll try to do my very best!’ said she, cheerfully, though the tears still were in her eyes. ‘I know I shall make mistakes, and I can never be like a great lady; but I’ll do the best I can, if they will only bear with me, and not be angry with him.’

‘I am sure you will do well, with such resolutions.’

‘One thing I am glad of,’ added she, ‘that we came here just now. That old cathedral! I did not think much before—it was all strange and new, and I was too happy. But I shall never be so thoughtless now—or if I am! O, I know,’ she exclaimed, with renewed energy, ‘I’ll buy one of those pretty white cups with views of the cathedral on them. Did you not see them in the shop-window? That will put me in mind if I am going to be careless of all my resolutions.’

‘Resolutions so made are likely to be kept,’ said John, and she presently left the room, recollecting that her store of biscuits needed replenishing before luncheon. She was putting on her bonnet to go to order them, when a doubt seized her whether she was transgressing the dignities of the Honourable Mrs. Martindale. Matilda had

lectured against vulgarity when Arthur had warned her against ultra-gentility, and she wavered, till finding there was no one to send, her good sense settled the question. She walked along, feeling the cares and troubles of life arising on her, and thinking she should never again be gay and thoughtless, when she suddenly heard her husband's voice—'Ha! whither away so fast!' and he and Captain Fitzhugh overtook her.

'I was going into the town on an errand.'

'Just the moment I wanted you. There's a cricket match in the College Meads. Come along.'

And with her arm in his, Violet's clouds vanished, and she had no recollection of anxieties or vexations. The summer sky was overhead, the river shone blue and bright, the meadows smiled in verdure, the whole scene was full of animation, and the game, of which she knew nothing, was made charming by Arthur's explanations. Nearly an hour had passed before she bethought herself of suggesting it was almost time to go home.

'Presently,' said Arthur, 'let us see this fellow out.'

Another ten minutes. 'Would you look at your watch please? There's your brother waiting for his luncheon.'

'O, ay, 'tis nearly time,' and he was again absorbed. She thought he would not be pleased if she went home alone, nor was she sure of the way; so she waited in much annoyance, till at length he said, 'Now, Violet,' and they walked briskly home, all that she had endured passing entirely out of her mind.

She rejoiced to find Mr. Martindale unconscious that it was not far from two o'clock. He said he had been glad of time to finish his letters, and Arthur, as his eye fell on one of them, asked, 'What is Percy doing now?'

'He has been in Anatolia, going over some of the places we saw together. He has made some discoveries about the Crusades, and is thinking of publishing some of his

theories.'

'Did I not hear of his writing something before this?'

'Yes; he sent some curious histories of the eastern Jews to some magazine. They are to be published separately, as they have been very successful; but I am glad this book is to be what he calls "self-contained." He is too good to be wasted upon periodicals.'

Violet, curious to know who was this literary correspondent, glanced at the letter, and read the address, to 'Antony Percival Fotheringham, Esquire, British Embassy, Constantinople.' She started to find it was the surname of that lost betrothed of whom she thought with an undefinable reverent pity.

All speculations were put to flight, however, by the entrance of the luncheon tray, containing nothing but slices of cold mutton and bread and butter. With a grievous look of dismay, and lamentable exclamation, she began to pour out explanations and apologies, but the gentlemen seemed too intent on conversing about Mr. Fotheringham either to hear her or to perceive anything amiss.

She remembered black looks and sharp words at home; and feeling dreadfully guilty at having failed immediately after her resolutions, she retreated to her room, and there Arthur found her in positive distress.

'Oh, I am so much concerned! It was so wrong to forget those biscuits. Your brother ate nothing else yesterday at luncheon!'

'Is that all?' said Arthur, laughing; 'I thought something had happened to you. Come, on with your bonnet. Fancy! John will actually walk with us to St. Cross!'

'Let me first tell you how it happened. There are a couple of ducks—'

'Let them be. No housekeeping affairs for me. Whatever happens, keep your own counsel. If they serve you up a barbecued puppy dog, keep a cool countenance, and help the company round. No woman good for anything mentions her bill of fare in

civilized society. Mind that.’

Violet was left imagining her apologies a breach of good manners. What must Mr. Martindale think of her? Silly, childish, indiscreet, giggling, neglectful, underbred! How he must regret his brother’s having such a wife!

Yet his pleasant voice, and her husband’s drawing her arm into his, instantly dispelled all fear and regret, and her walk was delightful.

She was enchanted with St. Cross, delighted with the quadrangle of gray buildings covered with creepers, the smooth turf and gay flowers; in raptures at the black jacks, dole of bread and beer, and at the silver-crossed brethren, and eager to extract all Mr. Martindale’s information on the architecture and history of the place, lingering over it as long as her husband’s patience would endure, and hardly able to tear herself from the quiet glassy stream and green meadows.

‘If Caroline were only here to sketch it!’ she cried, ‘there would be nothing wanting but that that hill should be Helvellyn.’

‘You should see the mountain convents in Albania,’ said John; and she was soon charmed with his account of his adventures there with Mr. Fotheringham. She was beginning to look on him as a perfect mine of information—one who had seen the whole world, and read everything. All that was wanting, she said, was Matilda properly to enter into his conversation.

Another day brought letters, inviting Arthur to bring home his bride for a fortnight’s visit, as soon as he could obtain leave of absence.

CHAPTER 3

Who is the bride? A simple village maid, Beauty and truth, a violet in the shade. She takes their forced welcome and their wiles For her own truth, and lifts her head and smiles. They shall not change that truth by any art, Oh! may her love change them

before they part. She turns away, her eyes are dim with tears, Her mother's blessing lingers in her ears, 'Bless thee, my child,' the music is unheard, Her heart grows strong on that remembered word. FREDERICK TENNYSON

'Here we are!' said Arthur Martindale. 'Here's the lodge.' Then looking in his wife's face, 'Why! you are as white as a sheet. Come! don't be a silly child. They won't bite.'

'I am glad I have seen Mr. John Martindale,' sighed she.

'Don't call him so here. Ah! I meant to tell you you must not "Mr. Martindale" me here. John is Mr. Martindale.'

'And what am I to call you?'

'By my name, of course.'

'Arthur! Oh! I don't know how.'

'You will soon. And if you can help shrinking when my aunt kisses you, it will be better for us. Ha! there is Theodora.'

'O, where?'

'Gone! Fled in by the lower door. I wish I could have caught her.'

Violet held her breath. The grand parterre, laid out in regularly-shaped borders, each containing a mass of one kind of flower, flaming elscholchias, dazzling verbenas, azure nemophilas, or sober heliotrope, the broad walks, the great pile of building, the innumerable windows, the long ascent of stone steps, their balustrade guarded by sculptured sphinxes, the lofty entrance, and the tall powdered footmen, gave her the sense of entering a palace. She trembled, and clung to Arthur's arm as they came into a great hall, where a vista of marble pillars, orange trees, and statues, opened before her; but comfort came in the cordial brotherly greeting with which John here met them.

'She is frightened out of her senses,' said Arthur.

John’s reply was an encouraging squeeze of the hand, which he retained, leading her, still leaning on her husband’s arm, into a room, where an elderly gentleman was advancing; both her hands were placed within his by her supporters on either side, and he kissed her, gravely saying, ‘Welcome, my dear.’ He then presented her to a formal embrace from a tall lady; and Arthur saying, ‘Well, Theodora! here, Violet,’ again took her hand, and put it into another, whose soft clasp was not ready, nor was the kiss hearty.

Presently Violet, a little reassured by Lord Martindale’s gentle tones, ventured on a survey. She was on the same sofa with Lady Martindale; but infinitely remote she felt from that form like an eastern queen, richly dressed, and with dark majestic beauty, whose dignity was rather increased than impaired by her fifty years. She spoke softly to the shy stranger, but with a condescending tone, that marked the width of the gulf, and Violet’s eyes, in the timid hope of sympathy, turned towards the sister.

But, though the figure was younger, and the dress plainer, something seemed to make her still more unapproachable. There was less beauty, less gentleness, and the expression of her countenance had something fixed and stern. Now and then there was a sort of agitation of the muscles of the face, and her eyes were riveted on Arthur, excepting that if he looked towards her, she instantly looked out of the window. She neither spoke nor moved: Violet thought that she had not given her a single glance, but she was mistaken, Theodora was observing, and forming a judgment.

This wife, for whose sake Arthur had perilled so much, and inflicted such acute pain on her, what were her merits? A complexion of lilies and roses, a head like a steel engraving in an annual, a face expressing nothing but childish bashfulness, a manner ladylike but constrained, and a dress of studied simplicity worse than finery.

Lady Martindale spoke of dressing, and conducted her meek shy visitor up a grand

staircase, along a broad gallery, into a large bed-room, into which the western sun beamed with a dazzling flood of light.

The first use Violet made of her solitude was to look round in amaze at the size and luxury of her room, wondering if she should ever feel at home where looking-glasses haunted her with her own insignificance. She fled from them, to try to cool her cheeks at the open window, and gaze at the pleasure-ground, which reminded her of prints of Versailles, by the sparkling fountain rising high in fantastic jets from its stone basin, in the midst of an expanse of level turf, bordered by terraces and stone steps, adorned with tall vases of flowers. On the balustrade stood a peacock, bending his blue neck, and drooping his gorgeous train, as if he was ‘monarch of all he surveyed.’

Poor Violet felt as if no one but peacocks had a right here; and when she remembered that less than twelve weeks ago the summit of her wishes had been to go to the Wrangerton ball, it seemed to be a dream, and she shut her eyes, almost expecting to open them on Annette’s face, and the little attic at home. But then, some one else must have been the fabric of a vision! She made haste to unclose them, and her heart bounded at thinking that he was born to all this! She started with joy as his step approached, and he entered the room.

‘Let us look at you,’ he said. ‘Have you your colour? Ay, plenty of it. Are you getting tamer, you startled thing?’

‘I hope I have not been doing wrong. Lady Martindale asked me to have some tea. I never heard of such a thing before dinner, but I thought afterwards it might have been wrong to refuse. Was it!’

He laughed. ‘Theodora despises nothing so much as women who drink tea in the middle of the day.’

‘I am so afraid of doing what is unladylike. Your mother offered me a maid, but I only thought of not giving trouble, and she seemed so shocked at my undoing my

own trunk.’

‘No, no,’ said he, much diverted; ‘she never thinks people can help themselves. She was brought up to be worshipped. Those are her West Indian ways. But don’t you get gentility notions; Theodora will never stand them, and will respect you for being independent. However, don’t make too little of yourself, or be shy of making the lady’s maids wait on you. There are enough of them—my mother has two, and Theodora a French one to her own share.

‘I should not like any one to do my hair, if that is not wrong.’

‘None of them all have the knack with it you have, and it is lucky, for they cost as much as a hunter.’

‘Indeed, I will try to be no expense.’

‘I say, what do you wear this evening?’

‘Would my white muslin be fit?’

‘Ay, and the pink ribbons in your hair, mind. You will not see my aunt till after dinner, when I shall not be there; but you must do the best you can, for much depends on it. My aunt brought my mother up, and is complete master here. I can’t think how my father’—and he went on talking to himself, as he retreated into his dressing-room, so that all Violet heard was, ‘wife’s relations,’ and ‘take warning.’

He came back to inspect her toilette and suggest adornments, till, finding he was overdoing them, he let her follow her own taste, and was so satisfied with the result, that he led her before the glass, saying, ‘There. Mrs. Martindale, that’s what I call well got up. Don’t you?’

‘I don’t mind seeing myself when I have you to look at.’

‘You think we make a handsome couple? Well, I am glad you are tall—not much shorter than Theodora, after all.’

‘But, oh! how shall I behave properly all dinner-time? Do make a sign if I am doing

anything wrong.’

‘Nonsense!’

‘I know I shall make mistakes. Matilda says I shall. I had a letter from her this morning to warn me against “solecisms in etiquette,” and to tell me to buy the number of the “Family Friend” about dinner-parties, but I had not time, and I am sure I shall do wrong.’

‘You would be much more likely, if you had Matilda and her prig of a book,’ said Arthur, between anger and diversion. ‘Tell her to mind her own business—she is not your mistress now, and she shall not teach you affectation. Why, you silly child, should I have had you if you had not been “proper behaved”? You have nothing to do but to remember you are my wife, and as good as any of them, besides being twenty times prettier. Now, are you ready?’

‘Yes, quite; but how shall I find my way here again?’

‘See, it is the third door from the stairs. The rest on this side are spare rooms, except where you see those two green baize doors at the ends. They lead to passages, the wings on the garden side. In this one my aunt’s rooms are, and Miss Piper, her white nigger, and the other is Theodora’s.’

‘And all these opposite doors?’

‘Those four belong to my father and mother; these two are John’s. His sitting-room is the best in the house. The place is altogether too big for comfort. Our little parlour at Winchester was twice as snug as that overgrown drawing-room down-stairs.’

‘Dear little room! I hope we may go back to it. But what a view from this end window! That avenue is the most beautiful thing I have seen yet. It looks much older than the house.’

‘It is. My father built the house, but we were an old county family long before. The old Admiral, the first lord, had the peerage settled on my father, who was his

nephew and head of the family, and he and my Aunt Nesbit having been old friends in the West Indies, met at Bath, and cooked up the match. He wanted a fortune for his nephew, and she wanted a coronet for her niece! I can't think how she came to be satisfied with a trumpery Irish one. You stare, Violet; but that is my aunt's notion of managing, and the way she meant to deal with all of us. She has monstrous hoards of her own, which she thinks give her a right to rule. She has always given out that she meant the chief of them for me, and treated me accordingly, but I am afraid she has got into a desperately bad temper now, and we must get her out of it as best we can.'

This not very encouraging speech was made as they stood looking from the gallery window. Some one came near, and Violet started. It was a very fashionably-dressed personage, who, making a sort of patronizing sweeping bend, said, 'I was just about to send a person to assist Mrs. Martindale. I hope you will ring whenever you require anything. The under lady's maid will be most happy to attend you.'

'There,' said Arthur, as the lady passed on, 'that is the greatest person in the house, hardly excepting my aunt. That is Miss Altisidora Standaloft, her ladyship's own maid.'

Violet's feelings might somewhat resemble those of the Emperor Julian when he sent for a barber, and there came a count of the empire.

'She must have wanted to look at you,' proceeded Arthur, 'or she would never have treated us with such affability. But come along, here is Theodora's room.'

It was a cheerful apartment, hung with prints, with somewhat of a school-room aspect, and in much disorder. Books and music lay confused with blue and lilac cottons, patterns, scissors, and papers covered with mysterious dots; there were odd-looking glass bottles on the mantel-shelf with odder looking things in them, and saucers holding what Violet, at home, would have called messes; the straw-bonnet lay on the floor, and beside it the Scotch terrier, who curled up his lips, showed his

white teeth, and greeted the invaders with a growl, which became a bark as Arthur snapped his fingers at him. ‘Ha! Skylark, that is bad manners. Where’s your mistress? Theodora!’

At the call, the door of the inner room opened, but only a little dark damsel appeared, saying, in a French accent, that Miss Martindale was gone to Miss Gardner’s room.

‘Is Miss Gardner here?’ exclaimed Arthur.

‘She is arrived about half an hour ago,’ was the reply. Arthur uttered an impatient interjection, and Violet begged to know who Miss Gardner was.

‘A great friend of Theodora’s. I wish she would have kept further off just now, not that she is not a good-natured agreeable person enough, but I hate having strangers here. There will be no good to be got out of Theodora now! There are two sisters always going about staying at places, the only girls Theodora ever cared for; and just now, Georgina, the youngest, who used to be a wild fly-away girl, just such as Theodora herself, has gone and married one Finch, a miserly old rogue, that scraped up a huge fortune in South America, and is come home old enough for her grandfather. What should possess Theodora to bring Jane here now? I thought she would never have forgiven them. But we may as well come down. Here’s the staircase for use and comfort.’

‘And here is the hall! Oh!’ cried Violet, springing towards it, ‘this really is the Dying Gladiator. Just like the one at Wrangerton!’

‘What else should he be like!’ said Arthur, laughing. ‘Every one who keeps a preserve of statues has the same.’

She would have liked to linger, recognizing her old friends, and studying this museum of wonders, inlaid marble tables, cases of stuffed humming birds, and stands of hot-house plants, but Arthur hurried her on, saying it was very ill-contrived, a draught straight through it, so that nothing warmed it. He opened

doors, giving her a moment's glimpse of yellow satin, gilding and pictures, in the saloon, which was next to the drawing-room where she had been received, and beyond it the dining-room. Opposite, were the billiard-room, a library, and Lord Martindale's study; and 'Here,' said he, 'is where Theodora and I keep our goods. Ha!' as he entered, 'you here, Theodora! Hallo! what's this? A lot of wooden benches with their heels in the air. How is this? Have you been setting up a charity school in my room?'

'I found the children by the wood were too far from school, so I have been teaching them here. I came to see about taking the benches out of your way. I did not expect you here.'

'I was showing her our haunts. See, Violet, here's my double barrel, and here are the bows. I forget if you can shoot.'

'Matilda and Caroline do.'

'You shall learn. We will have the targets out. Where's the light bow you used to shoot with, Theodora?'

'It is somewhere,' said Theodora, without alacrity; 'no, I remember, I gave it to Mr. Wingfield's little nephew.'

'Unlucky! Yours will never do for those little fingers.' Theodora abruptly turned to Violet, and said,' She must be tired of standing there.' Violet smiled with pleasure at being addressed, thanked, and disclaimed fatigue.

'She is of your sort, and does not know how to be tired,' said Arthur. 'I wondered to hear your bosom friend was here. What brings her about now?'

'If you call her my bosom friend, you answer the question,' was the proud reply, and it provoked him to carry on the teasing process.

'I thought she was not THE friend,' he continued; 'I ought to have congratulated you on THE friend's capture. A goldfinch of the South American breed is a rare

bird.’

Theodora drew up her head, and impetuously heaped some school-books together. ‘Have you seen the pretty caged bird?’

‘Never.’

In a soft tone, contrasting with the manner of his last sayings, Arthur invited his wife to come out on the lawn, and walked away with her. She was surprised and uneasy at what had taken place, but could not understand it, and only perceived he would prefer her not seeming to notice it.

It was all the strange influence of temper. In truth, Theodora’s whole heart was yearning to the brother, whom she loved beyond all others; while on the other hand his home attachments centred on her, and he had come to seek her with the fixed purpose of gaining her good-will and protection for his young bride. But temper stepped between. Whether it began from Theodora’s jealousy of the stranger, or from his annoyance at her cold haughty manner to his wife, he was vexed, and retaliated by teasing; she answered coldly, in proud suffering at being taunted on a subject which gave her much pain, and then was keenly hurt at his tone and way of leaving her, though in fact she was driving him away. She stood leaning against a pillar in the hall, looking after him with eyes brimming with tears; but on hearing a step approach, she subdued all signs of emotion, and composedly met the eye of her eldest brother. She could not brook that any one should see her grief, and she was in no mood for his first sentences: ‘What are you looking at?’ and seeing the pair standing by the fountain, ‘Well, you don’t think I said too much in her favour?’

‘She is very pretty,’ said Theodora, as if making an admission.

‘It is a very sweet expression. Even as a stranger, it would be impossible not to be interested in her, if only for the sake of her simplicity.’

Theodora glanced at Violet’s dress, and at the attitude in which she was looking up, as Arthur gathered some roses from a vase; then turned her eyes on John’s

thoughtful and melancholy countenance, and thought within herself, that every man, however wise, can be taken in by a fair face, and by airs and graces.

‘Poor thing,’ continued John, ‘it must be very trying; you don’t see her to advantage, under constraint, but a few kind words will set her at ease.’

He paused for an answer, but not obtaining one, said, ‘I did not know you expected Miss Gardner to-day.’

She surprised him, by answering with asperity, prompted by a second attack on this subject, ‘I can’t help it. I could not put her off,—what objection can there be?’

‘Nothing, nothing,—I meant nothing personal. It was only that I would have avoided having spectators of a family meeting like this. I am afraid of first impressions.’

‘My impressions are nothing at all.’

‘Well, I hope you will make friends—I am sure she will repay your kindness.’

‘Do you know that you are standing in a tremendous draught?’ interrupted Theodora.

‘And there’s my mother on the stairs. I shall go and call them in; come with me, Theodora.’

But she had turned back and joined her mother.

He found Violet all smiles and wonder: but she relapsed into constraint and alarm as soon as she entered the drawing-room. Miss Gardner presently came down,—a lady about five or six and twenty, not handsome, but very well dressed, and with an air of ease and good society, as if sure of her welcome. As Violet listened to her lively conversation with Lord Martindale, she thought how impossible it was that she should ever be equally at home there.

The grandeur of the dining-room was another shock, and the varieties of courses revived her remorse for the cold mutton. She sat between Lord Martindale and John, who talked to her as soon as he thought she could bear the sound of her own voice,

and, with Arthur opposite, her situation was delightful compared to the moment when, without either of her protectors, she must go with the imperial Lady Martindale to encounter the dreaded aunt.

When the time came, Arthur held open the door, and she looked up in his face so piteously, that he smiled, and whispered ‘You goose,’ words which encouraged her more than their tenor would seem to warrant.

Warm as it was, the windows were shut, and a shawl was round Mrs. Nesbit’s tall, bending, infirm figure. Violet dared not look up at her, and thought, with mysterious awe, of the caution not to shrink if she were kissed, but it was not needed, Lady Martindale only said, ‘My aunt, Mrs. Arthur Martindale,’ and Mrs. Nesbit, half rising, just took her hand into her long skinny fingers, which felt cold, damp, and uncertain, like the touch of a lizard.

Violet was conscious of being scanned from head to foot—nay, looked through and through by black eyes that seemed to pierce like a dart from beneath their shaggy brows, and discover all her ignorance, folly, and unfitness for her position. Colouring and trembling, she was relieved that there was another guest to call off Mrs. Nesbit’s attention, and watched the readiness and deference with which Miss Gardner replied to compliments on her sister’s marriage; and yet they were not comfortable congratulations, thought Violet; at least they made her cheeks burn, and Theodora stood by looking severe and melancholy; but Miss Gardner seemed quite to enter into the sarcastic tone, and almost to echo it, as if to humour the old lady.

‘Your sister acted very sensibly,’ said Mrs. Nesbit, with emphasis. ‘Very good management; though Theodora was somewhat taken by surprise.’

‘Yes, I know we used her very ill,’ said Miss Gardner; ‘but people have unaccountable fancies about publishing those matters. Mr. Finch was in haste, and we all felt that it was best to have it over, so it was talked of a very short time previously.’

‘Speed is the best policy, as we all know,’ said Mrs. Nesbit; and Violet felt as if there was a flash of those eyes upon her, and was vexed with herself for blushing. She thought Miss Gardner’s answer good-naturedly unconscious:

‘Oh, people always shake together best afterwards. There is not the least use in a prolonged courtship acquaintance. It is only a field for lovers’ quarrels, and pastime for the spectators.’

‘By the bye,’ said Mrs. Nesbit, ‘what is become of your cousin, Mrs. George Gardner’s son?’

‘Mark! Oh, he is abroad. Poor fellow, I wish we could find something for him to do. Lady Fotheringham asked her nephew, Percival, if he could not put him in the way of getting some appointment.’

‘Failed, of course,’ said Mrs. Nesbit.

‘Yes; I never expected much. Those diplomats are apt to be afraid of having their heels trodden upon; but it is a great pity. He is so clever, and speaks so many languages. We hope now that Mr. Finch may suggest some employment in America.’

‘Highly advisable.’

‘I assure you poor Mark would be glad of anything. He is entirely steadied now; but there are so few openings for men of his age.’

An interruption here occurring, Miss Gardner drew off to the window. Theodora sat still, until her friend said, ‘How lovely it is! Do you ever take a turn on the terrace after dinner?’

Theodora could not refuse. Violet wished they had asked her to join them; but they went out alone, and for some moments both were silent. Miss Gardner first spoke, remarking, ‘A beautiful complexion.’

There was a cold, absent assent; and she presently tried again, ‘Quite a lady,’ but

with the same brief reply. Presently, however, Theodora exclaimed, ‘Jane, you want me to talk to you; I cannot, unless you unsay that about Percy Fotheringham. He is not to be accused of baseness.’

‘I beg your pardon, Theodora, dear; I have no doubt his motives were quite conscientious, but naturally, you know, one takes one’s own cousin’s part, and it was disappointing that he would not help to give poor Mark another chance.’

‘That is no reason he should be accused of petty jealousies.’

‘Come, you must not be so very severe and dignified. Make some allowance for poor things who don’t know how to answer Mrs. Nesbit, and say what first occurs. Indeed, I did not know you were so much interested in him.’

‘I am interested in justice to the innocent.’

‘There! don’t annihilate me. I know he is a very superior person, the pride of Lady Fotheringham’s heart. Of course he would have recommended Mark if he had thought it right; I only hope he will find that he was mistaken.’

‘If he was, he will be the first to own it.’

‘Then I am forgiven, am I? And I may ask after you after this long solitary winter. We thought a great deal of you.’

‘I needed no pity, thank you. I was well off with my chemistry and the parish matters. I liked the quiet time.’

‘I know you do not care for society.’

‘My aunt is a very amusing companion. Her clear, shrewd observation is like a book of French memoirs.’

‘And you are one of the few not afraid of her.’

‘No. We understand each other, and it is better for all parties that she should know I am not to be interfered with. Positively I think she has been fonder of me since we measured our strength.’

‘There is a mutual attachment in determined spirits,’ said Miss Gardner.

‘I think there must be. I fancy it is resolution that enables me to go further with her than any one else can without offending her.’

‘She is so proud of you.’

‘What is strange is, that she is prouder of me than of mamma, who is so much handsomer and more accomplished,—more tractable, too, and making a figure and sensation that I never shall.’

‘Mrs. Nesbit knows better,’ said Miss Gardner, laughing.

‘Don’t say so. If John’s illness had not prevented my coming out last year, I might have gone into the world like other girls. Now I see the worth of a young lady’s triumph—the disgusting speculation! I detest it.’

‘Ah! you have not pardoned poor Georgina.’

‘Do you wish for my real opinion?’

‘Pray let me hear it.’

‘Georgina had a grand course open to her, and she has shrunk from it.’

‘A grand course!’ repeated Jane, bewildered.

‘Yes, honest poverty, and independence. I looked to her to show the true meaning of that word. I call it dependence to be so unable to exist without this world’s trash as to live in bondage for its sake. Independence is trusting for maintenance to our own head and hands.’

‘So you really would have had us—do what? Teach music?—make lace?’

‘If I had been lucky enough to have such a fate, I would have been a village school-mistress.’

‘Not even a governess?’

‘I should like the village children better; but, seriously, I would gladly get my own

bread, and I did believe Georgina meant to wait to be of age and do the same.'

'But, Theodora, seriously! The loss of position.'

'I would ennoble the office.'

'With that head that looks as if it was born in the purple, you would ennoble anything, dear Theodora; but for ordinary—'

'All that is done in earnest towards Heaven and man ennobles and is ennobled.'

'True; but it needs a great soul and much indifference to creature comforts. Now, think of us, at our age, our relations' welcome worn out—'

'I thought you were desired to make Worthbourne your home.'

'Yes, there was no want of kindness there; but, my dear, if you could only imagine the dulness. It was as if the whole place had been potted and preserved in Sir Roger de Coverley's time. No neighbours, no club-books, no anything! One managed to vegetate through the morning by the help of being deputy to good Lady Bountiful; but oh! the evenings! Sir Antony always asleep after tea, and no one allowed to speak, lest he should be awakened, and the poor, imbecile son bringing out the draught-board, and playing with us all in turn. Fancy that, by way of enlivenment to poor Georgina after her nervous fever! I was quite alarmed about her,—her spirits seemed depressed for ever into apathy!'

'I should think them in more danger now.'

'Oh! her Finch is a manageable bird. Her life is in her own power, and she will have plenty of all that makes it agreeable. It is winning a home instead of working for it; that is the common sense view—'

'Winning it by the vow to love, honour, and obey, when she knows she cannot?'

'Oh, she may in the end. He is tame, and kind, and very much obliged. My dear Theodora, I could feel with you once; but one learns to see things in a different light as one lives on. After all, I have not done the thing.'

‘If you did not promote it, you justify it.’

‘May I not justify my sister to her friend?’

‘I do no such thing. I do not justify Arthur. I own that he has acted wrongly; but—No, I cannot compare the two cases. His was silly and bad enough, but it was a marriage, not a bargain.’

‘Well, perhaps one may turn out as well as the other.’

‘I am afraid so,’ sighed Theodora.

‘It has been a sad grief to you, so fond of your brother as you were.’

‘Not that I see much harm in the girl,’ continued Theodora; ‘but—’

‘But it is the loss of your brother! Do you know, I think it likely he may not be as much lost to you as if he had chosen a superior person. When the first fancy is over, such a young unformed thing as this cannot have by any means the influence that must belong to you. You will find him recurring to you as before.’

Meanwhile, Violet sat formal and forlorn in the drawing-room, and Lady Martindale tried to make conversation. Did she play, or draw? Matilda played, Caroline drew, she had been learning; and in horror of a request for music, she turned her eyes from the grand piano. Was she fond of flowers? O, yes! Of botany? Caroline was. A beautifully illustrated magazine of horticulture was laid before her, and somewhat relieved her, whilst the elder ladies talked about their fernery, in scientific terms, that sounded like an unknown tongue.

Perceiving that a book was wanted, she sprang up, begging to be told where to find it; but the answer made her fear she had been officious. ‘No, my dear, thank you, do not trouble yourself.’

The bell was rung, and a message sent to ask Miss Piper for the book. A small, pale, meek lady glided in, found the place, and departed; while Violet felt more discomposed than ever, under the sense of being a conceited little upstart, sitting

among the grand ladies, while such a person was ordered about.

Ease seemed to come back with the gentlemen. Lord Martindale took her into the great drawing-room, to show her Arthur's portrait, and the show of the house—Lady Martindale's likeness, in the character of Lalla Rookh—and John began to turn over prints for her, while Arthur devoted himself to his aunt, talking in the way that, in his schoolboy days, would have beguiled from her sovereigns and bank-notes. However, his civilities were less amiably received, and he met with nothing but hits in return. He hoped that her winter had not been dull.

Not with a person of so much resource as his sister. Solitude with her was a pleasure—it showed the value of a cultivated mind.

'She never used to be famous for that sort of thing,' said Arthur.

'Not as a child, but the best years for study come later. Education is scarcely begun at seventeen.'

'Young ladies would not thank you for that maxim.'

'Experience confirms me in it. A woman is nothing without a few years of grown-up girlhood before her marriage; and, what is more, no one can judge of her when she is fresh from the school-room. Raw material!'

Arthur laughed uneasily.

'There is Mrs. Hitchcock—you know her?'

'What, the lady that goes out with the hounds, and rides steeple-chases? I saw her ride through Whitford to-day, and she stared so hard into the carriage, that poor Violet pulled down her veil till we were out of the town.'

'Well, she was married out of a boarding-school, came here the meekest, shyest, little shrinking creature, always keeping her eyelids cast down, and colouring at a word.'

Arthur thought there was a vicious look at his bride's bending head, but he endured

by the help of twisting the tassel of the sofa cushion, and with another laugh observed, ‘that all the lady’s shyness had been used up before he knew her.’

‘Then there was Lord George Wilmot, who ran away with a farmer’s daughter. She made quite a sensation; she was quite presentable, and very pretty and well-mannered—but such a temper! They used to be called George and the Dragon. Poor man! he had the most subdued air—’

‘There was a son of his in the Light Dragoons—’ began Arthur, hoping to lead away the conversation, ‘a great heavy fellow.’

‘Exactly so; it was the case with all of them. The Yorkshire farmer showed in all their ways, and poor Lord George was so ashamed of it, that it was positively painful to see him in company with his daughters. And yet the mother was thought ladylike.’

Arthur made a sudden observation on John’s improved looks.

‘Yes. Now that unhappy affair is over, we shall see him begin life afresh, and form new attachments. It is peculiarly important that he should be well married. Indeed, we see every reason to hope that—’ And she looked significant and triumphant.

‘Much obliged!’ thought Arthur. ‘Well! there’s no use in letting oneself be a target for her, while she is in this temper. I’ll go and see what I can make of her ladyship. What new scheme have they for John? Rickworth, eh?’

He was soon at his mother’s side, congratulating her on John’s recovery, and her looks were of real satisfaction. ‘I am glad you think him better! He is much stronger, and we hope this may be the period when there is a change of constitution, and that we may yet see him a healthy man.’

‘Has he been going out, or seeing more people of late?’

‘No—still keeping in his rooms all the morning. He did drive one day to Rickworth with your father, otherwise he has been nowhere, only taking his solitary ride.’

‘I never was more surprised than to see him at Winchester!’

‘It was entirely his own proposal. You could not be more surprised than we were; but it has been of much benefit to him by giving his thoughts a new channel.’

‘He likes her, too,’ said Arthur.

‘I assure you he speaks most favourably of her.’

‘What did he say?’ cried Arthur, eagerly.

‘He said she was a lady in mind and manners, and of excellent principles, but he declared he would not tell us all he thought of her, lest we should be disappointed.’

‘Are you?’ said Arthur, with a bright, confident smile.

‘By no means. He had not prepared me for so much beauty, and such peculiarly graceful movements. My drawing days are nearly past, or I should be making a study of her.’

‘That’s right, mother!’ cried Arthur. ‘What a picture she would make. Look at her now! The worst of it is, she has so many pretty ways, one does not know which to catch her in!’

Perhaps Lady Martindale caught her aunt’s eye, for she began to qualify her praise. ‘But, Arthur, excuse me, if I tell you all. There is nothing amiss in her manners, but they are quite unformed, and I should dread any contact with her family.’

‘I never mean her to come near them,’ said Arthur. ‘Though, after all, they are better than you suppose. She has nothing to unlearn, and will pick up tone and ease fast enough.’

‘And for education? Is she cultivated, accomplished?’

‘Every man to his taste. You never could get learning to stick on me, and I did not look for it. She knows what other folks do, and likes nothing better than a book. She is good enough for me; and you must take to her, mother, even if she is not quite up to your mark in the ologies. Won’t you? Indeed, she is a good little Violet!’

Arthur had never spoken so warmly to his mother, and the calm, inanimate dignity of her face relaxed into a kind response, something was faltered of ‘every wish to show kindness;’ and he had risen to lead his wife to her side, when he perceived his aunt’s bead-like eyes fixed on them, and she called out to ask Lady Martindale if Lady Elizabeth Brandon had returned.

The young ladies came in late; and Arthur in vain tried to win a look from his sister, who kept eyes and tongue solely for Miss Gardner’s service.

At night, as, after a conversation with his brother, he was crossing the gallery to his own room, he met her.

‘Teaching my wife to gossip?’ said he, well pleased.

‘No, I have been with Jane.’

‘The eternal friendship!’ exclaimed he, in a changed tone.

‘Good night!’ and she passed on.

He stood still, then stepping after her, overtook her.

‘Theodora!’ he said, almost pleadingly.

‘Well!’

He paused, tried to laugh, and at last said, rather awkwardly, ‘I want to know what you think of her?’

‘I see she is very pretty.’

‘Good night!’ and his receding footsteps echoed mortification.

Theodora looked after him. ‘Jane is right,’ she said to herself, ‘he cares most for me. Poor Arthur! I must stand alone, ready to support him when his toy fails him.’

CHAPTER 4

They read botanic treatises And works of gardeners through there, And methods of

transplanting trees To look as if they grew there. —A. TENNYSON

Theodora awoke to sensations of acute grief. Her nature had an almost tropical fervour of disposition; and her education having given her few to love, her ardent affections had fastened upon Arthur with a vehemence that would have made the loss of the first place in his love painful, even had his wife been a person she respected and esteemed, but when she saw him, as she thought, deluded and thrown away on this mere beauty, the suffering was intense.

The hope Jane Gardner had given her, of his return to her, when he should have discovered his error, was her first approach to comfort, and seemed to invigorate her to undergo the many vexations of the day, in the sense of neglect, and the sight of his devotion to his bride.

She found that, much as she had dreaded it, she had by no means realized the discomposure she secretly endured when they met at breakfast, and he, remembering her repulse, was cold—she was colder; and Violet, who, in the morning freshness, was growing less timid, shrank back into awe of her formal civility.

In past days it had been a complaint that Arthur left her no time to herself. Now she saw the slight girlish figure clinging to his arm as they crossed the lawn, and she knew they were about to make the tour of their favourite haunts, she could hardly keep from scolding Skylark back when even he deserted her to run after them; and only by a very strong effort could she prevent her mind from pursuing their steps, while she was inflicting a course of Liebig on Miss Gardner, at the especial instance of that lady, who, whatever hobby her friends were riding, always mounted behind.

Luncheon was half over, when the young pair came in, flushed with exercise and animation; Arthur talking fast about the covers and the game, and Violet in such high spirits, that she volunteered a history of their trouble with Skylark, and ‘some dear little partridges that could not get out of a cart rut.’

In the afternoon Miss Gardner, ‘always so interested in schools and village

children,' begged to be shown 'Theodora's little scholars,' and walked with her to Brogden, the village nearly a mile off. They set off just as the old pony was coming to the door for Violet to have a riding lesson; and on their return, at the end of two hours, found Arthur still leading, letting go, running by the side, laughing and encouraging.

'Fools' paradise!' thought Theodora, as she silently mounted the steps.

'That is a remarkably pretty little hat,' said Miss Gardner. Theodora made a blunt affirmative sound.

'No doubt she is highly pleased to sport it. The first time of wearing anything so becoming must be charming at her age. I could envy her.'

'Poor old pony!' was all Theodora chose to answer.

'There, they are leaving off,' as Arthur led away the pony, and Violet began to ascend the steps, turning her head to look after him.

Miss Gardner came to meet her, asking how she liked riding.

'Oh, so much, thank you.'

'You are a good scholar?'

'I hope I shall be. He wants me to ride well. He is going to take me into the woods to-morrow.'

'We have been admiring your hat,' said Miss Gardner. 'It is exactly what my sister would like. Have you any objection to tell where you bought it?'

'I'll ask him: he gave it to me.'

'Dressing his new doll,' thought Theodora; but as Violet had not been personally guilty of the extravagance, she thought amends due to her for the injustice, and asked her to come into the gardens.

'Thank you, I should like it; but will he, will Mr.—will Arthur know what has become of me?'

‘He saw you join us,’ said Theodora, thinking he ought to be relieved to have her taken off his hands for a little while.

‘Have you seen the gardens?’ asked Jane.

‘Are not these the gardens?’ said Violet, surprised, as they walked on through the pleasure-ground, and passed a screen of trees, and a walk trellised over with roses.

There spread out before her a sweep of shaven turf, adorned with sparkling jets d’eau of fantastic forms, gorgeous masses of American plants, the flaming or the snowy azalea, and the noble rhododendron, in every shade of purple cluster among its evergreen leaves; beds of rare lilies, purely white or brilliant with colour; roses in their perfection of bloom; flowers of forms she had never figured to herself, shaded by wondrous trees, the exquisite weeping deodara, the delicate mimosa, the scaly Himalaya pines, the feathery gigantic ferns of the southern hemisphere.

Violet stood gazing in a silent trance till Arthur’s step approached, when she bounded back to him, and clinging to his arm exclaimed, so that he alone could hear, ‘Oh, I am glad you are come! It was too like enchanted ground!’

‘So you like it,’ said Arthur, smiling.

‘I did not know there could be anything so beautiful! I thought the pleasure-ground finer than anything—so much grander than Lord St. Erme’s; but this! Did you keep it to the last to surprise me!’

‘I forgot it,’ said Arthur, laughing to see her look shocked. ‘It is not in my line. The natives never have any sport out of a show-place.’

‘It is simply a bore,’ said Theodora, ‘a self-sacrifice to parade.’

‘To the good of visitors,’ replied Miss Gardner, smiling, to Violet, who, fearing her own admiration was foolish, was grateful to hear her say, ‘And in that capacity you will allow Mrs. Martindale and me to enjoy.’

‘Did not I bring you to make the grand tour!’ said Theodora. ‘Come, prepare to be

stifled. Here are all the zones up to the equator,' and she led the way into the conservatory.

Arthur's protection and his satisfaction in Violet's pleasure set her at ease to enter into all the wonders and beauties; but he did not know one plant from another, and referred all her inquiries to his sister, who answered them in a cold matter-of-fact way that discouraged her from continuing them, and reduced her to listening to the explanations elicited by Jane Gardner, until a new-comer met them, thus greeted by Arthur—'Ah! here is the authority! Good morning, Harrison. Mrs. Martindale wants to know the name of this queer striped thing.'

He bowed politely, and Violet, as she bent and smiled, supposed they were too familiar for the hand-shake, while he went on to name the plant and exhibit its peculiarities. Her questions and remarks seemed to please him greatly, and while he replied graciously with much curious information, he cut spray after spray of the choicest flowers and bestowed them upon her, so that when the tour was completed, and he quitted them, she said, with smiling gratitude, 'It is the most exquisite bouquet I ever saw.'

'A poor thing, 'was the proud humility answer, 'but honoured by such hands!'

'Well done, Harrison!' ejaculated Arthur, as soon as he was out of ear-shot.

'Who is he?' asked Violet, still blushing; then, as the truth dawned on her, 'can he be the gardener? I thought him some great botanist allowed to study here.'

'Pray tell Miss Piper, Theodora,' said Arthur. 'If it goes round to him, Violet will never want for flowers.'

'It is so exactly what he considers himself,' said Jane.

'Except his being allowed,' said Arthur. ''Tis we that are there on sufferance.'

Miss Piper was seen advancing on the same walk, and Violet was uncomfortable, dreading to see her treated as an inferior; but to her great satisfaction, Arthur

addressed the little lady in his cordial manner, and Theodora congratulated her on being out of doors on this fine evening.

‘Mrs. Nesbit wished me to ask Mr. Harrison for a frond of the new Trichomanes,’ said Miss Piper.

‘You will find him somewhere near the forcing-house,’ said Theodora; ‘but pray don’t hurry in. I am going to my aunt’s room, and you should go and look at the Japan lilies, they are fine enough to make even me admire them.’ Then running after her to enforce her words, ‘mind you stay out—be quite at rest till dinner-time—I have scarcely been with my aunt to-day. I am sure a walk will do you good.’

The kind solicitude went deep into the affections of the lonely little woman. Violet longed for anything like such notice; then, in a state between wonder, delight, and disappointment, went to her room to attempt a description of the fairy land which she had been visiting, and to enjoy the splendours by thinking how much it would gratify her mother and sisters to hear of her sharing them.

Mrs. Nesbit greeted Theodora with exclamations on Miss Piper’s tardiness, and she explained in the authoritative way which she alone ventured to use towards her aunt; then, in a tone of conciliation, spoke of the garden and the beauty of the Japan lilies.

‘Harrison grows too many; they are losing their rarity, and look like a weed.’

‘They are hardy, are they not?’ said Theodora, maliciously. ‘I shall get some for my school garden.’

‘That is your way of making everything common, and depreciating all that is choice.’

‘No,’ said Theodora, ‘I would have beauty as widely enjoyed and as highly appreciated as possible.’

‘And pray, if all privileges are extended to the lower classes, what is left to the higher orders?’

‘Themselves,’ said Theodora, proudly. ‘No, aunt, we only lower ourselves by exclusiveness. It is degrading to ourselves and our tastes to make them badges of vanity. Let them be freely partaken, we shall be first still. The masses cannot mount higher without raising us.’

‘A levelling theory,’ said Mrs. Nesbit.

‘No, exalting. Has Latin and Greek made Harrison a gentleman? Can even dress in better taste make Pauline look as much a lady as Miss Piper?’

‘There is a good deal in that,’ said Mrs. Nesbit. ‘Even Lady Elizabeth Brandon cannot hide her good blood, though she does her best to do so.’

‘And so does Emma,’ said Theodora.

‘Foolish girl,’ said Mrs. Nesbit, ‘I would have given anything to see her attractive.’

‘Too late now!’ said Theodora, with a look of repressed scorn and triumph.

‘Too late for ARTHUR,’ replied Mrs. Nesbit, with emphasis. ‘And you’ll never, never succeed in the other quarter!’

‘Young people always have those fancies. I know what you would say, but John is not so young now. It is just the time of life when men take a turn. Depend upon it, now he has had his boy’s romance, he is not going to play the disconsolate lover for the rest of his life. No! that girl shall never be Lady Martindale.’

‘Well, I shan’t dispute’ said Theodora; ‘but—’

‘Believe when you see, said Mrs. Nesbit.

‘And so you mean it to be Emma Brandon,’ said Theodora, with the same sarcastic incredulity.

‘Let me tell you there are things more unlikely. John thinks much of Lady Elizabeth, and is just one of the men to marry a plain quiet girl, fancying she would be the more domestic; and for yourself, you would find Emma very accommodating—never in your way.’

‘No indeed,’ said Theodora.

‘Nothing could give your mother more pleasure. It is more than ever important now. What have you seen of Arthur’s piece of wax? He seems to have been playing with her all day long.’

‘Yes, poor fellow,’ said Theodora, sighing. ‘However, it might have been worse. I believe she is an innocent child, and very ladylike.’

‘There is an instance of the effect of your dissemination notions! This would never have happened if every country attorney did not bring up his daughters to pass for ladies!’

‘I am glad she is nothing outwardly to be ashamed of.’

‘I had rather that she was than for her to have the opportunity of worming herself into favour! Those modest airs and her way of peeping up under her eyelashes seem to make a great impression,’ said Mrs. Nesbit, with a sneer.

‘Really, I think she is simple and shy.’

Mrs. Nesbit laughed. ‘You, too! What has she to do with shyness? She has had her lesson; but you are like the rest! Your mamma actually proposing to take her likeness, but I told her it was not to be thought of. There will be plenty to fill her with presumption.’

‘And papa—what does he think?’ said Theodora, who was wont to obtain the family politics from her aunt.

‘Oh! men are sure to be caught by a pretty face, and they cannot make enough of her. I thought your father had more sense, but since John has had his ear, everything has been past my management. I cannot bear to see Arthur’s cool way—but no wonder. There will be no end to their expectations, treated as they are.’

‘Then papa means to do something for them?’

‘I cannot tell. He may do as he pleases. It is no affair of mine. They cannot touch my

property. Your father may try how he likes supporting them.'

'He will then?'

'He cannot help it, after having invited them here.'

Theodora could no longer bear to hear Arthur thus spoken of, and began to read aloud, relieved in some degree by finding Arthur was not to suffer poverty. If he had been persecuted, she must have taken his part; now she could choose her own line. However, the world must not suppose that she disapproved of his wife, and she was grateful to the unmeaning words amiable and ladylike, especially when she had to speak to Mr. Wingfield. He observed on the lady's beauty, and hoped that the affair was as little unsatisfactory as possible under the circumstances, to which she fully agreed. They proceeded to parish matters, on which they had so much to say to each other, that Violet thus reflected—'Ah! it is just as Mr. Martindale used to sit with me in the window at home! She is going to give up all her grandeur for the sake of this good clergyman! How good she is! If she could only like me one little bit.'

For the present this mattered the less to Violet, as she was extremely happy out of doors with her husband, who took up her time so exclusively, that she scarcely saw the rest, except at meals and in the evening. Then, though less afraid of 'solecisms in etiquette,' she made no progress in familiarity, but each day revealed more plainly how much too lowly and ignorant she was to be ever one of the family.

Mrs. Nesbit was always formidable and sarcastic, alarming her the more because she could not understand her irony, though conscious it was levelled against her; Lady Martindale always chilling in condescending courtesy, and daily displaying more of the acquirements that frightened Violet by their number and extent; Theodora always gravely and coldly polite and indifferent. Miss Gardner was her great resource. Her pleasant manners and ready conversation were universally liked, and more than once she dexterously helped Violet out of a state of embarrassment, and made a connecting link, through which she ventured to talk to the other ladies.

With the gentlemen she was happier. Lord Martindale was kind in manner, and she improved in the power of speaking to him, while John was, as she knew, her best friend; but she saw very little of him, he lived apart from the family, often not meeting them till dinner-time, and she began to understand Arthur's surprise at his doings at Winchester, when she found that his usual habits were so solitary that his father was gratified if he joined him in a ride, and his mother esteemed it a favour if he took a turn in the garden with her.

The parish church was so distant that the carriage was always used to convey thither the ladies, except Theodora, who ever since her fourteenth year had made it her custom to walk early to the school, and to remain there in the interval between the services. It was believed that she enjoyed a wet Sunday, as an occasion for proving her resolution, now so well established that no one thought of remonstrance, let the weather be what it might. The first Sunday of Violet's visit happened to be showery, and in the afternoon, Lord Martindale had gone to John's room to dissuade him from going to church a second time, when, as the door stood open, they heard Arthur's voice in the gallery.

'Hollo! you are not setting out in these torrents!'

'Do let me, please!' returned the pleading note.

'Why, the avenue is a river, and you are not a real goose yet, you know.'

'We never did miss church for weather, and it is further off at Wrangerton.'

'Nobody is going, I tell you. It is not in common sense. You are as bad as Theodora, I declare.'

'I don't mean to be wilful!' said she, piteously; 'I won't go if you tell me not, but please don't. I have no Sunday-book, and nothing to do, and I should feel wrong all the week.'

'To be sure you can't smoke a cigar,' said Arthur, in a tone of commiseration; 'so wilful will to water! Now for an aquatic excursion!'

Their steps and voices receded, and the father and brother looked amused. ‘A good honest child!’ ‘She will do something with him after all!’ and Lord Martindale (for Arthur had made too broad an assertion in declaring no one was going) followed them down, and showed positively paternal solicitude that Violet should be guarded from the rain, even sending to Pauline for a cloak of Miss Martindale’s.

It was early when they reached the village, and Lord Martindale, saying he must speak to a workman, took them through a pretty garden to a house, the front rooms of which were shut up; they entered by the back door, and found themselves in a kitchen, where a couple of labouring people were sitting, in church-going trim. While Violet shook off the rain, and warmed herself at the fire, Lord Martindale spoke to the man; and then opening a door, called her and Arthur to look.

There were several rooms, without trace of ever having been inhabited, and not looking very inviting. The view of the park, which Violet would fain have admired, was one gush of rain.

‘This might be made something of,’ said Lord Martindale. ‘It was built at the same time as the house. There was some idea of Mrs. Nesbit’s living here; and of late years it has been kept empty for poor John.’

He broke off. Violet wondered if it was to be her abode, and whether those empty rooms could ever be as pleasant as the parlour at Winchester; but no more passed, and it was time to go into church.

After this, Lord Martindale pressed to have their stay prolonged; which Arthur could not persuade his wife to believe a great compliment to her, though she was pleased, because he was, and because she hoped it was a sign that she was tolerated for his sake. Personally, she could have wished that his leave of absence might not be extended, especially when she found that by the end of the next two months it was likely that the regiment would be in London, so that she had seen the last of her dear Winchester lodging; but she had so little selfishness, that she reproached herself

even for the moment's wish, that Arthur should not remain to be happy at his own home.

It was a great loss to her that Miss Gardner was going away, leaving her to the unmitigated coldness and politeness of the other ladies. She grieved the more when, on the last morning, Jane made positive advances of friendship, and talked affectionately of meeting in London.

'My home is with my sister, and we shall be delighted to see you. You will be fixed there, no doubt.'

'Thank you. I cannot tell; but I shall be so glad to see you!'

'And I shall be delighted to introduce you to my sister. I know you will be great friends. What a season it will be! Two such sisters as Mrs. and Miss Martindale making their appearance together will be something memorable.'

Violet blushed excessively, and made some inarticulate disavowals. She felt it presumption to let her name be coupled with Miss Martindale's, and there was a sense of something dangerous and wrong in expecting admiration.

Miss Gardner only smiled encouragingly at her youthfulness. 'I will not distress you, though I look forward to what I shall hear. I shall feel that I have a right to be proud of you, from priority of acquaintance.'

'You are very kind; but, please, don't talk so. It is bad, I know, for me.'

'You are very right, I quite agree with you. No doubt it is the wisest way; but so very few feel as you do. I wish more were like you, or, indeed, like Theodora, who is positively displeased with me for speaking of her making a sensation.'

'Oh! of course she does not care,' said Violet. 'So very good as she is.'

'Appallingly so, some people say,' returned Jane, with a peculiar look; 'but, I know her well, though she was more my sister's friend than mine.'

'Then you have known her a long time?'

‘All her life. We used to meet every day in London, when she and my sister were two madcaps together, playing endless wild pranks. We used to tell her she ruled the governesses, and no one could control her—nor can—’

‘But she is very good,’ repeated Violet, puzzled.

‘Ah! she took a serious turn at about fourteen, and carried it out in her own peculiar way. She has worked out a great deal for herself, without much guidance. She has a standard of her own, and she will not acknowledge a duty if she does not intend to practise it.’

‘I don’t understand,’ said Violet. ‘I thought if one saw a duty one must try to practise it.’

‘I wish all the world went upon your principles’ said Miss Gardner, with a sigh. ‘I am afraid you will find many not half so consistent with their own views as yourself, or Theodora.’

‘Oh! of course one must fail,’ said Violet. ‘One cannot do half one means, but Theodora seems so strong and resolute.’

‘Ay, no one has been able to cope with her, not even Mrs. Nesbit; who, as a kindred spirit, might have had a chance!’

‘Mrs. Nesbit has had a great deal to do with her education?’

‘I dare say you have found out the real head of the family. I see you are very acute, as well as very guarded.’

‘Oh dear! I hope I have said nothing I ought not,’ cried Violet, in a fright.

‘No, indeed, far from it. I was admiring your caution.’

Violet thought she had done wrong in betraying her dislike; she knew not how; and trying to ascribe all to shyness, said, ‘It was so strange and new; I have never been out till now.’

‘Yes, if you will allow me to say so, I thought you got on admirably, considering

how trying the situation was.’

‘Oh! I was very much frightened; but they are very kind—Mr. Martindale especially.’

‘Poor Mr. Martindale! I wish he could recover his spirits. He has never held up his head since Miss Fotheringham’s death. He is an admirable person, but it is melancholy to see him spending his life in that lonely manner.’

‘It is, indeed. I often wish anything would cheer him!’

‘All the family are devoted to him, if that would comfort him. It is the only point where Lady Martindale is not led by her aunt, that she almost worships him!’

‘I thought Mrs. Nesbit was fond of him.’

‘Did you ever hear that Percy Fotheringham once said of her, “That woman is a good hater”? She detested the Fotheringham family, and Mr. Martindale, for his engagement. No, he is out of her power, and she cannot endure him; besides, he is a rival authority—his father listens to him.’

‘I suppose Mrs. Nesbit is very clever.’

‘She has been one of the cleverest women on earth. She formed her niece, made the match, forced her forward into the very highest society—never were such delightful parties—the best music—every lion to be met with—Lady Martindale herself at once a study for beauty, and a dictionary of arts and sciences—Mrs. Nesbit so agreeable. Ah! you cannot judge of her quite, she is passee, broken, and aged, and, poor thing! is querulous at feeling the loss of her past powers; but there used to be a brilliance and piquancy in her conversation that has become something very different now.’

Violet thought it most prudent only to remark on Lady Martindale’s varied accomplishments.

‘She has carried them on much longer than usual. People generally give them up

when they marry, but she has gone on. I am not sure whether it was the wisest course. There is much to be said on both sides. And I have sometimes thought Theodora might have been a little less determined and eccentric, if she had not been left so much to governesses, and if her affections had had more scope for development.'

Theodora came in, and Violet blushed guiltily, as if she had been talking treason.

Miss Gardner's object in life, for the present, might be said to be to pick up amusement, and go about making visits; the grander the people the better, adapting herself to every one, and talking a sort of sensible scandal, with a superior air of regret; obtaining histories at one house to be detailed at another, and thus earning the character of being universally intimate. The sentiments of the young bride of Martindale had been, throughout her visit, matter of curiosity; and even this tete-a-tete left them guess work. Theodora's were not so difficult of discovery; for, though Jane had never been the same favourite with her as her more impetuous sister, she had, by her agreeable talk and show of sympathy, broken down much of the hedge of thorns with which Theodora guarded her feelings.

'I have been talking to Mrs. Martindale,' Jane began, as they went up-stairs together. 'She is a graceful young thing, and Georgina and I will call on her in London. Of course they will be settled there.'

'I don't know,' said Theodora. 'A notion has been started of his leaving the Guards, and their coming to live at the cottage at Brogden.'

'Indeed!' exclaimed Miss Gardner.

'It is not settled, so don't mention it. I doubt how it would answer to set Arthur down with nothing to do.'

'I doubt, indeed! I have seen a good deal of families living close together.'

'Nothing shall make me quarrel with Arthur, or his wife. You smile, but it needs no magnanimity to avoid disputes with anything so meek and gentle.'

‘You can’t judge of her; a girl of sixteen in a house full of strangers! Give her a house of her own, and she will soon learn that she is somebody. As long as your eldest brother is unmarried, she will expect to be looked upon as the wife of the heir. She will take offence, and your brother will resent it.’

‘And there will be discussions about her,’ said Theodora.

‘Depend upon it, ‘tis easier to keep the peace at a distance. Fancy the having to call for her whenever you go out to dinner. And oh! imagine the father, mother, and half-dozen sisters that will be always staying there.’

‘No, Arthur has not married the whole family, and never means them to come near her.’

‘There are two words to that question,’ said Miss Gardner, smiling. ‘Quiet as she seems now, poor thing she has a character of her own, I can see, and plenty of discernment. To be so guarded, as she is, at her age, shows some resolution.’

‘Guarded! has she been saying anything?’

‘No, she is extremely prudent.’

‘Inferring it, then,’ exclaimed Theodora. ‘Well, her expectations must be high, if she is not satisfied; one comfort is, the Brogden scheme is only John’s and papa’s. My aunt can’t bear it, because it seems quite to give up the chance of John’s marrying.’

‘Well, Georgina and I will do the best we can for her. I suppose you wish it to be understood that you approve.’

‘Of course: you can say everything with truth that the world cares for. She is pleasing, and amiable, and all that.’

‘She will be extremely admired.’

‘And her head so much turned as to ruin all the sense there may be in it! I hate the thought of it, and of what is to become of Arthur when he wakes from his trance.’

‘He will find that he has a sister,’ said Jane, who had learnt that this was the secret

of consolation; and, accordingly, a softer ‘Poor Arthur!’ followed.

‘And will you write, dear Theodora?’

‘I don’t promise. I hardly ever write letters.’

‘And you will not send your love to poor Georgina?’

‘I forgive her for having pained and disappointed me. I hope she will be happy, but I am very much afraid she has not gone the right way to be so.’

‘Am I to tell her so?’

‘I dare say you will, but don’t call it my message. If she makes a good use of her means, I shall try to forget the way she obtained them.’

‘I only hope, with your notions, that you will not get into a scrape yourself. I’m a little afraid of that curate.’

‘We both know better,’ said Theodora.

Jane departed, and Violet felt as if she had a friend and protector the less. She was sitting forlorn in the great drawing-room, waiting for Arthur, who was trying horses; presently Theodora came in, and with something of compassion, said, ‘I hope you have an entertaining book there.’

Oh yes, thank you, “La Vie de Philippe Auguste”. I like it very much; it is as amusing as “Philip Augustus” itself.’

‘James’s novel, you mean?’

‘Have you read it?’

‘His novels are exactly alike,’ said Theodora, leaving the room, but checked by the thought that it would be merciful to take her into her room. ‘No, nonsense,’ said second thoughts; ‘I shall have nothing but chatter ever after, if I establish her coming to me when Arthur is out; and if this cottage scheme comes to pass, she will be marching up whenever she has nothing better to do. Give an inch, and she will take an ell.’

She was interrupted by a diffident, hesitating call, and, looking back, as she was mounting the stairs, beheld Violet, who changed the appellation into ‘Miss Martindale.’

‘Well!’ said she, feeling as if her citadel were in jeopardy.

‘Would you—would you be so very kind as to lend me a French dictionary?’

‘Certainly; I’ll give you one in a moment,’ said Theodora; with so little encouragement as would have deterred a person bent on gaining the entree. Violet stood meekly waiting till she brought the book, and received it with gratitude disproportionate to the favour conferred.

CHAPTER 5

Some heavy business hath my lord in hand, And I must know it, else he loves me not. —King Henry IV

Miss Gardner’s departure threw the rest of the party more together, and Theodora did not hold herself as much aloof as before. Indeed she perceived that there were occasions when Arthur seemed to be returning to his preference for her. She had more conversation, and it often fell on subjects of which the bride had no knowledge, while the sister was happy in resuming old habits. Sometimes Violet was entertained; but one day when they were riding, the talk was going on eagerly on some subject of which she knew nothing, while they rode faster than she liked, and she fancied she was insecure in her saddle. Twice she timidly called Arthur; but he was too much absorbed to attend to her, without a degree of scream, which she did not feel would be justified. Each moment she grew more alarmed and miserable, and though at last, when he perceived that she wanted him, he was off his horse in a moment and set all to rights, she completely forgot her distress,—the charm had been broken, she was no longer his first thought.

The sensation of loneliness often returned during the next few weeks; there was no

real neglect, and she would not so have felt it if she had not depended on him alone, and so long enjoyed his exclusive attention. His fondness and petting were the same, but she perceived that he found in his sister a companionship of which she did not feel capable. But to Theodora herself, whenever she succeeded in engrossing Arthur, it seemed a victory of sisterly affection and sense over beauty and frivolity.

Arthur was anxious to know the family politics, and resumed the habit of depending on his sister for gathering intelligence from Mrs. Nesbit. On her he bestowed his complaints that his father would not see things as he wished, and with her talked over his projects. In truth, he could not bear to disclose to his wife the footing on which he stood,—looking on her as a mere child, sure to be satisfied, and not requiring to be consulted.

Theodora gave him tidings of the proposal that he should settle in the village, and finding him undecided, threw all her weight into the opposite scale. She sincerely believed she was consulting his happiness and the harmony of the family by speaking of the irksomeness of living there with nothing to do, and by assisting him in calculating how large an income would be necessary to enable him to keep hunters, go from home, &c., without which he declared it would be intolerable, and as there was little probability of his father allowing him so much, continuing in his profession was the only alternative.

Violet saw them in frequent consultation, and once John said something to her of his hopes of seeing her at Brogden; then, finding her in ignorance, drew back, but not till he had said enough to make her restless at hearing no more. She would, of course, have preferred living in the country; but when she figured to herself Arthur always with Theodora, and herself shut up in the little parlour she had seen in the rain, she grew extremely disconsolate.

One morning, unable to read or sit quiet under these anticipations, she went out to dispel them by a turn among the flowers, and a conversation with the peacock. At

the corner of the lawn, she heard Arthur's voice—'Exactly so; two thousand is the very least. Ha, Violet!' as he and Theodora emerged from a shady alley.

'Oh, I did not mean to interrupt you,' said Violet, confused; 'I only came out for some fresh air.'

'Unbonneted, too, do you want to get roasted brown?' said Arthur.

'I never am burnt,' said Violet; 'but I will not be in your way, I'll go.'

'Nonsense,' said he, drawing her arm into his. 'Come in good time,' and he yawned, tired of the discussion. 'Ha, Mr. Peacock, are you there?'

'He always follows me,' said Violet. 'Miss Piper showed me where his food is kept, and I can almost get him to eat out of my hand.'

Theodora walked off, thinking there was an end of her brother's sense, and Violet looked after her rather sadly, thinking, while exhibiting to Arthur her friendship with the peacock, 'he consults her, he only plays with me. Perhaps it is all I am good for; but I wish we were at Winchester.'

As Theodora went up-stairs, she saw her eldest brother standing at the south window of the gallery. He called to her, saying, 'Here's a pretty picture, Theodora.'

In front of the sparkling crystal arches of the fountain stood Violet, bending forward, and holding out her hand full of grain to invite the beautiful bird, which now advanced, now withdrew its rich blue neck, as in condescension, then raised its crested head in sudden alarm, its train sweeping the ground in royal splendour. Arthur, no unpicturesque figure in his loose brown coat, stood by, leaning against the stand of one of the vases of plants, whose rich wreaths of brightly coloured blossoms hung down, making a setting for the group; and while Violet by her blandishments invited the peacock to approach, he now and then, with smiling slyness, made thrusts at it with her parasol, or excited Skylark to approach.

'A pretty scene, is it not?' said John.

‘Like a Sevres china cup,’ Theodora could not help saying.

‘Fountain and peacock, and parasol for shepherd’s crook, forming a French Arcadia,’ said John, smiling. ‘I suppose it would hardly make a picture. It is too bright.’

Theodora only answered by a sigh, and was turning away, when John added, ‘I am glad she has him at last, I was afraid she had a long solitary morning while you were out with him. I saw you walking up and down so long.’

‘He was talking over his plans,’ said Theodora, with an assumption of sullen dignity.

‘I have been wishing to speak to you about that very thing,’ said John. ‘I think you may be in danger of putting yourself between him and his wife.’

It was a new thing to her to hear that this was a danger, but, in an offended manner, she replied, ‘I can hardly be accused of that. He ceases all rational talk about his most important concerns to go to child’s play with her.’

‘But why keep her out of the rational talk?’

‘That is his concern. He knows what she is capable of, I suppose.’

‘I doubt whether he does,’ said John; ‘but I don’t want to interfere with his behaviour, only to give you a caution. It is natural that you should wish to have him what he was before. I knew his marriage was a great blow to you.’

‘I knew he would marry,’ said Theodora, coldly; for she could not bear compassion. ‘It is the common course of things.’

‘And that the wife should be first.’

‘Of course.’

‘Then would it not be better to bear that in mind, and make up your mind to it, rather than try to absorb his confidence?’

‘He is not bound to consult no one but that child. You would not drive him back to her if he came to you for advice.’

‘I should not pass her over; I should assume that her opinion was to be respected.’

‘I can’t be untrue.’

‘Then try to make it valuable.’

‘He wants no help of mine to make him fond of her!’ cried Theodora. ‘Does not he dote on her, and make himself quite foolish about her complexion and her dress!’

‘That is a different thing. She cannot be always a toy; and if you want to do the most inestimable service to Arthur, it would be by raising her.’

‘Trying to educate a married sister-in-law! No, thank you!’

‘I don’t see what is to become of them,’ said John, sadly. ‘He will be always under some influence or other, and a sensible wife might do everything for him. But she is a child; and he is not the man to form her character. He would have spoilt her already if she did not take his admiration, for mere affection; and just at the age when girls are most carefully watched, she is turned out into the world without a guide! If he ceases to be happy with her, what is before them? You think he will fall back on you; but I tell you he will not. If you once loosen the tie of home, and he seeks solace elsewhere, it will be in the pursuits that have done him harm enough already.’

‘He has given up his race-horses,’ said Theodora.

The luncheon-bell interrupted them; but as they were going down, John added, ‘I hope I have said nothing to vex you. Indeed, Theodora, I feel much for your loss.’

‘I am not vexed,’ was her haughty reply, little guessing how, in her pursuit of the brother who had escaped her, she was repelling and slighting one who would gladly have turned to her for sisterly friendship. His spirits were in that state of revival when a mutual alliance would have greatly added to the enjoyment of both; but Theodora had no idea of even the possibility of being on such terms. He seemed like one of an elder generation—hardly the same relation as Arthur.

‘So, Lady Elizabeth comes,’ said Lady Martindale, as they entered the room.

‘Is she coming to stay here!’ asked John.

‘Yes; did you not hear that we have asked her to come to us for the Whitford ball?’

‘Oh, are we in for the Whitford ball?’ said Theodora, in a tone of disgust that checked the delighted look on Violet’s face.

‘Yes, my dear; your papa wishes us to go.’

‘What a bore!’ exclaimed Theodora.

‘Yes,’ sighed Lady Martindale; ‘but your papa thinks it right.’

‘A necessary evil—eh, Violet?’ said Arthur.

‘I hope you don’t mind it?’ said Violet, looking anxiously at him.

‘Ah, you will enjoy it,’ said her ladyship, graciously regarding her folly.

‘Oh, yes, thank you,’ said Violet, eagerly.

‘Have you been to many balls?’

‘Only to one;’ and she blushed deeply, and cast down her eyes.

‘And so the Brandons are coming to stay! For how long, mamma?’ proceeded Theodora.

‘From Wednesday to Saturday,’ said Lady Martindale. ‘I have been writing cards for a dinner-party for Wednesday; and your father says there are some calls that must be returned; and so, my dear, will you be ready by three?’

‘You don’t mean me, mamma?’ said Theodora, as nobody answered.

‘No; you are a resolute rebel against morning visits. You have no engagement for this afternoon, my dear?’

Violet started, saying, ‘I beg your pardon; I did not know you meant me. Oh, thank you! I am very much obliged.’

‘I suppose you will not go with us, Arthur?’

He looked as if he did not like it, but caught a beseeching glance from his wife, and was beginning to consent, when Theodora exclaimed, ‘Oh, Arthur, don’t; it will be such a famous opportunity for that ride.’

‘Very well; you know where my cards are, Violet!’

‘Yes,’ she answered, submissively, though much disappointed, and in dread of the drive and of the strangers.

‘Really, I think you had better go, Arthur,’ said John, greatly displeased at Theodora’s tone. ‘It is the sort of occasion for doing things regularly.’

‘Indeed, I think so,’ said Lady Martindale; ‘I wish Arthur would go with us this once. I doubt if it will be taken well if he does not.’

‘You will find no one at home. His going won’t make a bit of difference,’ said Theodora, who now regarded keeping him as a matter of power.

‘Surely your ride might wait,’ said her mother. ‘No, it won’t, mamma. It is to see that old man, Mary’s father.’

‘What Mary, my dear?’

‘The scullery-maid. I want to speak to him about her confirmation; and the only way is over Whitford Down—all manner of leaping places, so we must go without Violet.’

Violet feared there was little hope for her, for Arthur looked much invited by the leaping places, but John made another effort in her favour, and a great one for him.

‘Suppose you accept of me for your escort, Theodora?’ Every one looked astonished, Lady Martindale positively aghast.

‘Were you ever on Whitford Down, John?’ said Arthur.

‘Why, yes,—in old times; I know the place, I believe.’

‘You talk of knowing it, who never hunted!’ said Arthur. ‘No, no; you are a great traveller, John, but you don’t know the one horse-track on Whitford Down that does

not lead into a bog—’

‘Theodora does, I dare say.’

‘Yes, I know it, but it is too far for you, John, thank you, and not at all what would suit you. I must give it up, if Arthur prefers playing the disconsolate part of a gentleman at a morning call.’

‘Do you really dislike going without me?’ asked Arthur, and of course nothing was left for Violet to say but, ‘O, thank you, pray don’t stay with me. Indeed, I had much rather you had your ride.’

‘You are sure?’

‘O yes, quite. I shall do very well’ and she smiled, and tried to make a show of ease and confidence in his mother, by looking towards her, and asking upon whom they were to call.

Lady Martindale mentioned several ladies who had left their cards for Mrs. Arthur Martindale, adding that perhaps it would be better to leave a card at Rickworth Priory.

‘Is that where Lady Elizabeth Brandon lives?’ asked Violet.

‘Yes,’ said Lady Martindale. ‘It belongs to her daughter. Lady Elizabeth is a highly excellent person, for whom Lord Martindale has a great regard, and Miss Brandon is one of Theodora’s oldest friends.’

‘Hum!’ said Theodora.

‘My dear, she is a very nice amiable girl—just your own age, and admirably brought up.’

‘Granted,’ said Theodora.

‘I cannot see that Emma Brandon wants anything but style and confidence,’ proceeded Lady Martindale, ‘and that I believe to be entirely poor Lady Elizabeth’s fault for keeping her so much in retirement. That German finishing governess, Miss

Ohnglaube, whom we were so sorry to lose, would have been the person to teach her a little freedom and readiness of manner. I wish we could have kept her a little longer.'

'I told Lady Elizabeth about her,' said Theodora; but Lady Martindale, without hearing, said she must go to her aunt, and renewing injunctions to Violet to be ready by three, left the room.

'You did not astonish her weak mind with the ghost story?' said Arthur.

'With its cause.'

'You would not have thought, Violet,' continued Arthur, 'that we had a ghost in the north wing.'

'What was it?' said Violet. 'You don't mean really?'

'Only a Turk's-head broom, with phosphorus eyes, and a sheet round the handle,' said Theodora. 'It had a grand effect when Arthur stood on the second landing-place, and raised it above the balusters—a sort of bodilessness rising from vacancy.'

'Didn't she faint?' said Arthur.

'No, I was afraid she would, and then it would have been all over with us; but I dragged her safe into the school-room, and there she was so hysterical that I nearly relented.'

'Then was it all in play?' said Violet.

'In earnest,' said Arthur. 'It was the only way of getting quit of mademoiselle.'

'That lady who used to talk metaphysics and sing!' said John. 'I remember the lamentations at her not choosing to remain. Why was she victimized?'

'There was no help for it,' said Theodora. 'She considered the book of Genesis as a "sehr schone mythische Geschichte", and called the Patriarchs the Hebrew Avatars.'

'Theodora! You don't mean it!' exclaimed John.

‘I do, but I had my revenge, for, after the Turk’s-head adventure, she never slept without my Bible under her pillow. If by broad daylight she would have renounced the Avatar theory, I really would have forgiven her, for she was very good-natured, and she admired “the high Roman fashion” so much, I was half afraid she might follow it herself if we tormented her much more.’

‘But why keep it to yourself! I can hardly believe it possible! Why play these tricks instead of telling all?’

‘I did tell Aunt Nesbit, but Miss Ohnglaube was always reading Jean Paul with her and mamma; they were in raptures with her, and my aunt only said I was too well instructed to be misled.’

‘How old were you?’

‘About fifteen.’

‘It is beyond belief. Why could you not tell my father?’ said John.

‘I hardly saw him—I never spoke to him.’

‘Was not I at home!’

‘Yes, shut up in your room. I never thought of speaking to you. All I could do was to be as restive as possible, and when she did not care for that, there was nothing for it but playing on her German superstition. So Arthur told her some awful stones about whipping blacks to death, and declared West Indian families were very apt to be haunted; but that it was a subject never to be mentioned to mamma nor my aunt.’

‘And having paved the way, we treated her to the Turk’s-head,’ concluded Arthur. ‘I would do it again to hear her sigh and scream, and see Theodora acting as coolly as if she was in daily intercourse with the defunct nigger. If mademoiselle had not been frightened out of her senses, her self-possession would have betrayed us.’

‘I could not act fright,’ said Theodora.

‘And this was the best plan you could devise for getting rid of an infidel governess!’

said John.

And as they dispersed, he stood looking after his sister, thinking that there was more excuse for her inconsistencies than he had yet afforded her, and that, in fact, she deserved credit for being what she was. His aunt had done even more harm than the ruin of his happiness.

Theodora triumphed, and carried Arthur off, but Violet found the reality of the expedition less formidable than the anticipation. She knew her mother would have enjoyed seeing her well dressed, and setting forth in that style; the drive was agreeable, and Lady Martindale kind and gracious. Alone with her, she lost much of her dread, and felt better acquainted; but all froze up into coldness when they came home.

The ladies at Rickworth had not been at home; and as they did not arrive on the Wednesday till Violet had gone to dress, she had time to frighten herself by imagining an heiress on the pattern of Lady Martindale, and an earl's daughter proportionably unapproachable. Her trepidation was increased by Arthur's not coming in, though she heard guests arriving, and when at last he appeared, it was so late, that he desired her to go down and say he was 'just ready.'

It was a serious thing to encounter alone that great saloon full of strangers, and with cheeks of the brightest carnation Violet glided in, and after delivering her message to Lord Martindale, was glad to find herself safely seated on an ottoman, whence she looked for the chief guests. In the distance, beside Lady Martindale, sat a quiet elderly lady in black; Theodora was paying a sort of scornful half-attention to a fine showy girl, who was talking rather affectedly; and, thought Violet, no one but an heiress could wear so many bracelets.

Her survey completed, she became conscious that a small, fair-haired, pale girl was sitting near her, looking so piteously shy and uncomfortable, that she felt bound to try and set her at ease, and ventured an observation on the weather. It was responded

to, and something about the harvest followed; then, how pretty the country, and, thereupon, Violet said it only wanted mountains to be beautiful.

‘Ah! when one has once seen a mountain one cannot forget it.’

‘Never!’ said Violet. ‘I miss Helvellyn every morning when I look out of window.’

‘Do you know the Lake country?’ said the young lady.

‘My home—my old home—is within sight of the Westmoreland hills. Have you been there?’

‘Mamma and I once spent a month there, and enjoyed it exceedingly.’

‘Oh! and did you go up Helvellyn!’

‘Yes, that we did, in spite of the showers; and what a view we had!’

They were surprised to find that dinner had been announced. Violet was placed next to Mr. Martindale, and was able to ask the name of her new acquaintance.

‘Miss Brandon, you mean.’ ‘O no, not Miss Brandon, but that light pale girl in the lilac worked muslin, who was talking to me!’

‘I saw you talking to Miss Brandon.’

‘Could it be? She looked all astray and frightened, like me!’

‘That description answers to Emma Brandon,’ said John, smiling.

‘Who would have thought it! I should never have begun talking to her if I had guessed who she was. I only did it because she looked so uncomfortable. I hope it was not being forward.’

‘Not in the least. You know you are at home here,—it was a great kindness.’

‘Do you like her?’ said Violet.

‘I believe she is a very good kind of girl, and her mother is one of our oldest friends. They are very excellent sensible people, and do a great deal of good in their own parish.’

‘And only think! She has been in Westmoreland! She has seen Helvellyn!’

Violet was the only person who ever spoke to John in that hearty confidence of sympathy in rejoicing; and quite refreshed by her bright looks, he led her into a history of an ascent of Helvellyn, which had, until this spring, been the great event of her life.

On coming into the drawing-room, Miss Brandon shrank up to her mother’s side. Violet wished she had a mother to protect her; and not daring to place herself among the great ladies, stood in the group of younger ones, with whom Theodora was keeping up a cold formal converse. Country neighbours thought much of being asked to Martindale; but the parties there were of the grandest and stiffest. Moreover, every one had to give their friends a description of the bride; and the young ladies were more inclined to study her appearance than to find conversation, regarding her as an object of curiosity, as well as with some of their general dread of the house of Martindale.

After an awkward ten minutes, Lady Martindale came towards her, and said, ‘My dear, Lady Elizabeth Brandon wishes to be introduced to you.’

‘To me!’ and Violet followed her, blushed and bent, then found her hand cordially shaken, and a most comfortable voice addressing her. Room was made for her on the sofa, between Lady Elizabeth and her daughter, and she was supremely happy in talking about her own dear lake country. Arthur smiled, and looked well pleased to see her in such company; and Mr. Martindale came and talked to Lady Elizabeth all the evening.

Violet expected Theodora to monopolize Miss Brandon the next morning, but Theodora had reasons of her own for not breaking her habit of spending the morning in her own occupations. She knew Lady Elizabeth to be perfectly guiltless of manoeuvring; but from the time she had become conscious of Mrs. Nesbit’s designs on Rickworth, first for Arthur and now for John, it had been her decided purpose to

give no colour for throwing the heiress in their way by any friendship of hers; and as she considered Emma one of the dullest and most silly girls of her acquaintance, it was very pleasant to be justified in neglecting her.

The office of companionship to the younger visitor fell to Mrs. Martindale. She showed off the peacock, and they wandered happily in the gardens, most amiably received by Mr. Harrison, who delighted in displaying his treasures, and almost overwhelmed Violet with his graciousness, when she shyly asked if he could spare her a few of his white roses for her hair.

Miss Brandon groaned and sighed about the ball, declaring it her detestation; she should be tired to death; she hated dancing; and above all, there was the nuisance of dressing.

‘Oh! I am sorry you don’t like it,’ said Violet, ‘but that is the way with all sensible people.’

‘No; mamma says it is not being sensible, but because I don’t dance well, and she wishes I did.’

‘I am glad of that. My mamma does not think it foolish.’

‘Do you like dancing, then?’

‘That I do,’ cried Violet, making a few steps; ‘I only wish I might dance with him still!’

This was the only difference of opinion—on school-teaching books—heroes, historical and fictitious—on the “Bridal of Triermain”—and Wordsworth’s Waggoner, their sentiments accorded exactly. Perhaps Emma’s mind was the more formed and cultivated, but Violet’s was the more discerning and diffident in judgment.

Emma took the first opportunity of pouring out to her mother a perfect rapture about Mrs. Martindale, dwelling on her right views, and all that showed she had been well

brought up.

‘She is a sweet-looking creature,’ said Lady Elizabeth, ‘and I do hope she is all she seems. Lord Martindale has been telling me how entirely the marriage was her father’s doing, and that she was perfectly ignorant and innocent, poor thing.’

‘She looks as if she could never do anything wrong. Mamma, I hardly know whether you would like me to make friends with her, but I could not help it, and she said such nice things that I knew you would like her. I never could get on with any one before, you know, but, from the moment she came blushing in, and spoke to me in that sweet low voice, I felt as if I most be fond of her—before I made out who she was—and even then I could not like her less.’

‘She is so unaffected and unassuming!’ said Lady Elizabeth. ‘I little expected Arthur Martindale’s marriage to have turned out so well.’

‘I don’t wonder at his falling in love at first sight! I don’t see how he could help it. I am sure I should!’

‘I think you have, said Lady Elizabeth, smiling.

‘Wasn’t it charming, mamma? Theodora never came near us all the morning, and very soon got out of my way in the afternoon, so we were so comfortable!’

‘Take care what you say about her, my dear.’

‘Oh, yes. We never spoke of her at all. I wonder what Mrs. Martindale does here! It is a dreadful place, and they are all one more stately than the other,’

‘Not the sons.’

‘Oh! poor Mr. Martindale is worse than stately. There’s something in that gentle melancholy tone of his that is so different from other people—and he looks so refined and thoughtful. He frightens me more than any of them!’

‘I hope he is in rather better spirits. I have had a good deal of talk with him this evening. Indeed, his father told me he had been roused by all this affair about his

brother. But, Emma, my dear, you have not rung all this time! Here am I almost dressed. I shall have to fulfil my threat, and leave you to come down alone.'

It had to be fulfilled. Emma left insufficient time for her maid to try to set out her soft light scanty hair, to make her satin and gauze look anything but limp and flabby, and to put on her jewels, in the vain hope of their making her seem well dressed. Whatever was ordained for her to wear, Emma always looked exactly the same. She opened her door at the same moment as Violet advanced into the gallery, her tall taper figure arrayed in bridal lace, not much whiter than her long neck and rounded arms, a wreath of roses around her dark tresses, brilliant flowers in her hand, her soft eyes bright with pleasure, and her beauteous complexion deepened by bashfulness.

Emma could not repress her delight. 'Oh!' she exclaimed, 'you can't think how beautiful you are!'

'Isn't she?' said a proud, playful voice. 'Thank you;' but seeing Emma disconcerted, Arthur hastened down-stairs.

'Oh, I didn't know he was there!'

'Never mind!' said Violet, among her blushes. 'I'm glad he was. He liked it.'

'I could not help it,' said Emma. 'You are so like a story! I can hardly believe you are real!'

Violet felt familiar enough to prove herself substantial by a playful pinch. 'But look here! See what I found on my table.'

'One of those serpent bracelets. It is very pretty!'

'Was not it kind of Lord Martindale?'

'You have to thank him for it! Oh! dreadful!'

'I don't mind speaking to him. It is so kind. "Mrs. A. Martindale, from her affectionate father," the direction said. Oh! it is so very, very pleasant that he should be so kind to me. Is not it a beautiful creature! Look at its scales and its crown, and

eyes. Arthur says they are sapphires.'

'Yes, I never saw a prettier one.'

'I wish Annette could see it, and all at home. Is it not like a creature in a fairy tale?'

'Like Zelinda's singing serpents?'

'Just like them. Do you know, I sometimes think I have got into a fairy tale. Everything is so beautiful and so bewildering, and unlike what I fancied.'

'Because you are so like a fairy princess yourself. Are you sure you have not a talisman ring!'

'I think I have,' and Violet pulled off her glove. 'There—that forget-me-not—the first ring I ever had. From the day he gave me that it has all been so strange, that now and then I have been almost afraid to awake, for fear it should not be true. But may I look at that diamond butterfly of yours? It shines as if it would flash in the dark.'

'Never mind mine. Stupid things that came as heir-looms, and have no pleasure belonging to them. The only thing I do care for is this'—and she drew out a locket from within her dress. 'There, that is my father's hair, and that is my little brother's. They both died before I can remember; and there is dear mamma's nice pepper-and-salt lock round them.'

Theodora swept by in black lace, her coronal of hair wreathed with large pearls, and her lofty air like the Tragic Muse.

'Comparing ornaments! Worthy of such a friendship,' thought she, as she held back, and made them go down before her, Emma glad to hold by Violet's arm for protection.

Mrs. Nesbit was in the drawing-room talking to Lady Elizabeth, and with her keen piercing eyes watching John, who was reading the newspaper by the table. She was pleased to see him lay it aside, look up, and smile, as the two friends entered, but she

could have beaten them both, the one for her insignificance, and the other for her radiant loveliness; and she was still further provoked to see Miss Brandon sit down as near her mother as possible, while Violet went up to him to show him her bracelet. She stood by him for some little time, while he was examining and praising it, and congratulating her on the choice bouquet that Harrison had bestowed on her, but surprised to see her eyes cast pensively down, and a grave look on that fair young face. He little suspected that she was saddened by the contrast between her joys and his sorrow and ill health, and thought it unkind to speak of her delight to one so far removed from it.

Theodora began to indulge in a hearty grumbling.

‘Well, my dear,’ said Mrs. Nesbit, ‘you will only show yourselves there, and go home. Miss Brandon is not more inclined to Whitford balls than you are.’

‘No, I am rather surprised at having dragged Emma so far,’ said Lady Elizabeth. ‘I hope they will both find it turn out better than they expect. You must teach them,’ and she looked smilingly at Violet.

Mrs. Nesbit was extremely annoyed at the quantity of notice Violet had lately received, and was the more resolved to put her down. ‘No one can expect them to like country balls,’ she said. ‘One attends them as a duty, for the sake of the neighbourhood; but as to pleasure in them, that is only for the young ladies of the place on the look-out for the military.’

She had fulfilled her purpose of making every one uncomfortable, except one—namely, Violet. John looked at her, and perceived she was too innocent and clear in conscience to understand or appropriate the taunt, so he thought it better to leave the field open to Lady Elizabeth’s calm reply, ‘Well, I used to enjoy country balls very much in my time.’

Arthur evaporated his indignation by shaking his foot, and murmuring, not so low but that his sister heard it, ‘Old hag!’

Lord and Lady Martindale came in together, and Violet's blushing gratitude was so pretty and bright that it made Lord Martindale smile, and silence it by a kiss, which perhaps surprised and gratified her more than the bracelet did.

Lady Elizabeth begged to have her in her carriage; and growing intimate in the sociable darkness, she found out that the mother was as loveable as the daughter, and was as much at home with them as if she had known them for years.

The evening exceeded even Violet's anticipations, though her one former ball had been such as could never be equalled. Lord Martindale wished every one to know how entirely he accepted his new daughter, so he gave his arm to her, and presented her to the principal ladies, while she felt herself followed by her husband's encouraging and exulting eye. It certainly was a very different thing to go into society as Miss Violet Moss or as Mrs. Arthur Martindale, and there was a start of fear as the thought crossed her—was her pleasure pride and vanity?

She was chiefly sorry that she could not see Miss Brandon enjoy herself: all that could be extracted from her by the most animated appeal was a resigned smile, and a little quizzing of some of the sillier young ladies. She professed, however, that she had never disliked any ball so little, since she had the pleasure of watching Mrs. Martindale, hearing how universally she was acknowledged to be the prettiest person present, and telling Arthur all that was said of her.

Miss Brandon and Arthur had for some years past kept at a respectful distance, each in dread of designs of the other; but now they were fast resuming the childish familiarity of tone of the ancient times, when the rough but good-natured, gentlemanlike boy had been a companion much preferred to the determined, domineering girl. They danced a quadrille, and talked a great deal of Violet. Emma began to think much better of his capacity.

As to Theodora, she was talking, laughing, dancing, and appearing so full of spirits, that Violet could not help venturing a remark, that she surely liked it better than she

expected.

‘Not at all,’ was the answer; ‘but if one is to make oneself absurd, it is as well not to do so by halves.’

So far was she from doing so by halves, that when her mother was ready to go home, she was engaged so many deep, that it was settled she should be left with Arthur and Violet. She danced indefatigably till morning shone into the room, and was handed into the carriage by a gentleman who, it was the private opinion of her young chaperone, had, like Arthur, fallen in love at first sight. Poor man! it was a pity he could not know about Mr. Wingfield; or she could almost suppose that Theodora did not care so much for Mr. Wingfield, after all.

The drive home was very amusing. Violet was so tired that it was a trouble to speak; but she liked to hear the brother and sister discuss the ball, and laugh over the people; and leant back in her corner so comfortably, that she only dreaded the moment of rousing herself to walk up-stairs.

Theodora never stopped talking all the way, sprung nimbly out of the carriage, ran up the steps, and admired the morning sky; and Violet believed she did not go to bed at all, for it seemed a very short time before the distant notes of the singing class were heard; yet she looked as fresh and blooming as ever when they met at breakfast, and did not flag in any of her usual employments.

The other ladies were capable of nothing but loitering; and it was a day for making great advances in intimacy. Most delightful was that first friendship, as they wandered arm-in-arm, talked gravely or gaily, and entered more and more into each other’s minds. Theodora held aloof, despising their girlish caressing ways, and regarding the intimacy with the less toleration because it was likely to serve as a pretext to Mrs. Nesbit for promoting her views for John; and though the fewest words possible had passed between him and Miss Brandon, she found that Mrs. Nesbit was building hopes on the satisfaction he showed in conversing with Lady

Elizabeth. The visit ended with a warm invitation to Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Martindale to come and stay at Rickworth before they left the country.

CHAPTER 6

Is it that they have a fear Of the dreary season near, Or that other pleasures be Sweeter even than gaiety? —WORDSWORTH

Were they to leave the country? This was still under consideration. The next fortnight made some difference in Theodora's wishes respecting Brogden Cottage. Violet becoming less timid, ventured to show that she took interest in poor people; and Theodora was pleased by finding her able to teach at school, and to remember the names of the children. Especially her sweet looks and signs gained the heart of little Charley Layton, the dumb boy at the lodge—the creature on whom Theodora bestowed the most time and thought. And on her begging to be shown the dumb alphabet, as the two sisters crossed fingers, they became, for one evening, almost intimate.

Theodora began to think of her as not only harmless, but likely to be useful in the parish; and could afford to let Arthur have her for a plaything, since he made herself his confidante. She withdrew her opposition; but it was too late. Arthur had declared that he could not live there without £2500 a year, and this his father neither could nor would give him. The expense of building the house, and the keeping up of such a garden and establishment, did not leave too much available of the wealth Lady Martindale had brought, nor was the West Indian property in a prosperous state; the demand was preposterous; and Theodora found herself obliged to defend poor Violet, who, her aunt declared, must have instigated it in consequence of the notice lavished upon her; while, as Theodora averred with far more truth, 'it was as much as the poor thing did to know the difference between a ten-pound note and a five.' Twelve hundred pounds a year, and the rent of a house in London, was what his

elder brother would have married upon; and this, chiefly by John's influence, was fixed as the allowance, in addition to his pay; and as his promotion was now purchased for him, he had far more than he had any right to expect, though he did not seem to think so, and grumbled to Theodora about the expense of the garden, as if it was consuming his patrimony.

How the income would hold out, between his carelessness and her inexperience, was a question over which his father sighed, and gave good advice, which Arthur heard with the same sleepy, civil air of attention, as had served him under the infliction many times before.

John gave only one piece of advice, namely, that he should consign a fixed sum for household expenses into his wife's hands; so that he might not be subject to continued applications.

On this he acted; and subtracting to himself, wine, men, and horses, the full amount of his bachelor income, he, for the first time, communicated to Violet the result of the various consultations.

'So the upshot of it all is, that we are to have a house somewhere in Belgravia,' he began.

'That is near Lord Martindale's London house, is it not?'

'Yes; you will be in the way of all that is going on.'

'Do we go there next month?'

'I suppose so.'

'Oh! I am glad.'

'Are you? I thought you liked being here.'

'Yes, yes, of course, that I do; but it will be so pleasant to be at home, and to have you all to myself.'

She repented the next moment, as if it had been a complaint; but he was gratified,

and called her a little monopolist.

‘Oh, I don’t mean to be troublesome to you,’ said she, earnestly; ‘I shall have so much more to do in our own house, that I shall not miss you so much when you are out; besides, we can have Annette to stay with us.’

‘We’ll see about that. But look here,’ laying a paper with some figures before her; ‘that’s all my father leaves me for you to keep house with. I put it into your hands, and you must do the best you can with it.’

‘You don t mean to put all that into my hands!’ exclaimed Violet in alarm. ‘What a sum!’

‘You won’t think so by the end of the year; but mind, this must do; it will be of no use to come to me for more.’

‘Then is it little?’ asked Violet.

‘See what you think of it by and by; you won’t find it such an easy thing to make both ends meet.’

‘I will write and ask mamma to tell me how to manage.’

‘Indeed,’ said Arthur, with sharpness such as she had never seen in him before, ‘I beg you will not. I won’t have my affairs the town talk of Wrangerton.’ But seeing her look frightened, and ready to cry, he softened instantly, and said, affectionately, ‘No, no, Violet, we must keep our concerns to ourselves. I don’t want to serve for the entertainment of Matilda’s particular friends.’

‘Mamma wouldn’t tell—’

‘I’ll trust no house of seven women.’

‘But how am I to know how to manage?’

‘Never mind; you’ll get on. It comes as naturally to women as if it was shooting or fishing.’

‘I wonder how I shall begin! I don’t know anything.’

‘Buy a cookery book.’

‘Aunt Moss gave me one; I didn’t mean that. But, oh, dear, there’s the hiring of servants, and buying things!’

‘Don’t ask me: it is woman’s work, and always to be done behind the scenes. If there’s a thing I mortally hate, it is those housekeeper bodies who go about talking of their good cooks.’

Violet was silenced, but after much meditation she humbly begged for answers to one or two questions. ‘Was she to pay the servants’ wages out of this?’

‘Your maids—of course.’

‘And how many are we to have?’

‘As many as will do the work.’

‘A cook and housemaid—I wonder if that would be enough?’

‘Don’t ask me, that’s all’

‘I know you don’t like to be teased,’ she said, submissively; ‘but one or two things I do want to know. Is James to be in the house?’

‘Why, yes; he is a handy fellow. We will have him down for Simmonds to give him some training.’

‘Then ought we to have two maids or three?’

He held up his hands, and escaped.

That morning John, happening to come into the drawing-room, found Violet disconsolately covering a sheet of paper with figures.

‘Abstruse calculations?’ said he.

‘Yes, very,’ said she, sighing, with the mystified face of a child losing its way in a long sum.

He did not like to leave her in such evident difficulties, and said, with a smile, ‘Your

budget? Are you good at arithmetic?'

'I can do the sums, if that was all, but I don't know what to set out from, or anything about it. Mamma said she could not think how I should keep house.'

'She would be the best person to give you counsel, I should think.'

'Yes, but—' and she looked down, struggling with tears, 'I must not write to ask her.'

'How so!'

'Arthur says the Wrangerton people would gossip, and I should not like that,' said she; 'only it is very hard to make out for myself, and those things tease Arthur.'

'They are not much in his line,' said John; 'I don't know,' he added, hesitating, 'whether it would be of any use to you to talk it over with me. There was a time when I considered the management of such an income; and though it never came to practice, mine may be better than no notions at all.'

'Oh, thank you!' said Violet, eagerly; then, pausing, she said, with a sweet embarrassment, 'only—you can't like it.'

'Thank you,' replied he, with kind earnestness; 'I should like to be of use to you.'

'It is just what I want. I am sure Arthur would like me to do it. You see this is what he gives me, and I am to buy everything out of it.'

'The best plan,' said John; 'it never answers to be always applying for money.'

'No,' said Violet, thoughtfully, as she recollected certain home scenes, and then was angry with herself for fancying Arthur could wear such looks as those which all the house dreaded.

Meanwhile John had perceived how differently Arthur had apportioned the income from what his own intentions had been. He had great doubts of the possibility of her well-doing, but he kept them to himself. He advised her to consider her items, and soon saw she was more bewildered than helpless. He knew no more than Arthur on

the knotty point of the number of maids, but he was able to pronounce her plan sensible, and her eyes brightened, as she spoke of a housemaid of mamma's who wanted to better herself, and get out of the way of the little ones, 'who were always racketing.'

'And now,' said John, 'we passed over one important question—or is that settled otherwise?—your own pocket-money!'

'Oh! I have plenty. Arthur gave me fifty pounds when we went through London, and I have twelve left.'

'But for the future! Is it included here?'

'I should think so. Oh!' shocked at the sum he set down, 'a quarter of that would be enough for my dress.'

'I don't think Miss Standaloft would say so,' said John, smiling.

'But Arthur said we must economize, and I promised to be as little expense as possible. Please let me write down half that.'

'No, no,' said John, retaining the pencil, 'not with my consent. Leave yourself the power of giving. Besides, this is to cover all the sundries you cannot charge as household expenses. Now let me mark off another hundred for casualties, and here is what you will have for the year. Now divide.'

'Surely, two people and three servants can't eat all that in one week.'

'Fires, candles,' said John, amused, but poor Violet was quite overpowered.

'Oh, dear! how many things I never thought of! Mamma said I was too young! These coals. Can you tell me anything about them?'

'I am afraid not. You are getting beyond me. If you wanted to know the cost of lodgings in Italy or the south of France, I could help you; but, after all, experience is better bought than borrowed.'

'But what shall I do? Suppose I make Arthur uncomfortable, or spend his money as I

ought not when he trusts me?'

'Suppose you don't,' said John. 'Why should you not become an excellent housewife? Indeed, I think you will' he proceeded, as she fixed her eyes on him. 'You see the principle in its right light. This very anxiety is the best pledge. If your head was only full of the pleasure of being mistress of a house, that would make me uneasy about you and Arthur.'

'Oh! that would be too bad! Mamma has talked to me so much. She said I must make it a rule never to have debts. She showed me how she pays her bills every week, and gave me a great book like hers. I began at Winchester.'

'Why, Violet, instead of knowing nothing, I think you know a great deal!'

She smiled, and said something about mamma. 'I don't say you will not make mistakes,' he continued, 'but they will be steps to learn by. Your allowance is not large. It seems only fair to tell you that it may not be sufficient. So, if you find the expenses exceed the week's portion, don't try to scramble on; it will only be discomfort at the time, and will lead to worse. Go boldly to Arthur, and make him attend; it is the only way to peace and security.'

'I see,' said Violet, thoughtfully. 'Oh, I hope I shall do right. One thing I should like. I mean, I thought one ought to set apart something for giving away.'

'That is one use in reserving something for yourself,' said John, in his kindest manner. 'Of the rest, you are only Arthur's steward.'

'Yes, I hope I shall manage well.'

'You will if you keep your present frame of mind.'

'But I am so young and ignorant. I did not think enough about it when I was married,' said Violet, sorrowfully, 'and how it seems all to come on me. To have all his comfort and the well-being of a whole house depending on such as I am.'

'I can only say one thing in answer, Violet, what I know was the best comfort to one

who, without it, would have sunk under the weight of responsibility.' His whole countenance altered, his voice gave way, a distressing fit of coughing came on, the colour flushed into his face, and he pressed his hand on his chest. Violet was frightened, but it presently ceased, and after sitting for a few moments, exhausted, with his head resting on his hand, he took up the pencil, and wrote down—'As thy day, so shall thy strength be'—pushed it towards her, and slowly left the room.

Violet shed a few tears over the paper, and was the more grieved when she heard of his being confined to his room by pain in the side. She told Arthur what had passed. 'Ah! poor John,' he said, 'he never can speak of Helen, and any agitation that brings on that cough knocks him up for the rest of the day. So he has been trying to "insense" you, has he? Very good-natured of him.'

'I am so grieved. I was afraid it would be painful to him. But what was the responsibility he spoke of?'

'Looking after her grandfather, I suppose. He was imbecile all the latter part of his life. Poor John, they were both regularly sacrificed.'

John took the opportunity of a visit from his father that afternoon to tell him how much good sense and right feeling Violet had shown, and her reluctance to appropriate to herself what he had insisted on as absolutely necessary.

'That is only inexperience, poor girl,' said Lord Martindale. 'She does not know what she will want. If it is not confidential, I should like to know what she allows herself.'

John mentioned the sum.

'That is mere nonsense!' exclaimed his father. 'It is not half as much as Theodora has! And she living in London, and Arthur making such a point about her dress. I thought you knew better, John!'

'I knew it was very little, but when I considered the rest, I did not see how she could contrive to give herself more.'

‘There must be some miscalculation,’ said Lord Martindale. ‘There is not the least occasion for her to be straitened. You thought yourself the allowance was ample.’

‘That it is; but you know Arthur has been used to expensive habits.’

‘More shame for him.’

‘But one can hardly expect him to reduce at once. I do think he is sincere in his promises, but he will be careless, even in ordinary expenditure. I don’t say this is what ought to be, but I fear it will be. All the prudence and self-denial must be upon her side.’

‘And that from a girl of sixteen, universally admired! What a business it is! Not that I blame her, poor thing, but I don’t see what is to become of them.’

The conversation was not without results. Lord Martindale, some little time after, put into Violet’s hand an envelope, telling her she must apply the contents to her own use; and she was astounded at finding it a cheque for £100. He was going to London, with both his sons, to choose a house for Arthur, and to bid farewell to John, who was warned, by a few chilly days, to depart for a winter in Madeira.

Violet was, during her husband’s absence, to be left at Rickworth; and in the last week she had several other presents, a splendid dressing-case from Lady Martindale, containing more implements than she knew how to use, also the print of Lalla Rookh; and even little Miss Piper had spent much time and trouble on a very ugly cushion. Theodora declared her present should be useful, and gave all the household linen, for the purpose of having it hemmed by her school-children;—and this, though she and Miss Piper sat up for three nights till one o’clock to hasten it, was so far from ready, that Captain and Mrs. Martindale would have begun the world without one table-cloth, if old Aunt Moss had not been hemming for them ever since the day of Arthur’s proposal.

Theodora was weary and impatient of the conflict of influence, and glad to be left to her own pursuits, while she thought that, alone with Violet, Arthur must surely be

brought to a sense of his mistake.

Violet's heart bounded at the prospect of a renewal of the happy days at Winchester, and of a release from the restraint of Martindale, and the disappointment of making no friends with the family,—Mr. Martindale was the only one of them with whom she was sorry to part; and she had seen comparatively little of him. Indeed, when the three gentlemen set out, she thought so much of Arthur's being away for a week, that she could not care for John's voyage to Madeira, and looked preoccupied when he affectionately wished her good-bye, telling her to watch for him in the spring,—her house would be his first stage on his return. Then, as he saw her clinging to Arthur to the last moment, and coming down with him to the bottom of the long steps, he thought within himself, 'And by that time there will be some guessing how much strength and stability there is with all that sweetness, and she will have proved how much there is to trust to in his fondness!'

There was not much time for bewailing the departures before Emma Brandon came to claim her guest; and the drive was pleasant enough to make Violet shake off her depression, and fully enjoy the arrival at Rickworth, which now bore an aspect so much more interesting than on her former drive.

The wooded hills in the first flush of autumn beauty sloped softly down to the green meadows, and as the carriage crossed the solid-looking old stone bridge, Violet exclaimed with transport, at a glimpse she caught of a gray ruin—the old priory! She was so eager to see it that she and Emma left the carriage at the park gate, and walked thither at once.

Little of the building remained, only a few of the cloister arches, and the stumps of broken columns to mark the form of the chapel; but the arch of the west window was complete, and the wreaths of ivy hid its want of tracery, while a red Virginian creeper mantled the wall. All was calm and still, the greensward smooth and carefully mown, not a nettle or thistle visible, but the floriated crosses on the old

stone coffin lids showing clearly above the level turf, shaded by a few fine old trees, while the river glided smoothly along under the broad floating water-lily leaves, and on its other side the green lawn was repeated, cattle quietly grazing on the rich pasture, shut in by the gently rising woods. The declining sun cast its long shadows, and all was peace,—the only sounds, the robin's note and the ripple of the stream.

Violet stood with her hands resting on Emma's arm, scarcely daring to break the silence. 'How lovely!' said she, after a long interval. 'O Emma, how fond you must be of this place!'

'Yes, it is beautiful,' said Emma, but with less satisfaction than Violet expected.

'It is worth all the gardens at Martindale.'

'To be sure it is,' said Emma, indignantly.

'It puts me in mind of St. Cross.'

'But St. Cross is alive, not a ruin,' said Emma, with a sigh, and she asked many questions about it, while showing Violet the chief points of interest, where the different buildings had been, and the tomb of Osyth, the last prioress. Her whole manner surprised Violet, there was a reverence as if they were actually within a church, and more melancholy than pleasure in the possession of what, nevertheless, the young heiress evidently loved with all her heart.

Turning away at length, they crossed the park, and passed through the garden, which was gay with flowers, though much less magnificent than Mr. Harrison's. Emma said, mamma was a great gardener, and accordingly they found her cutting off flowers past their prime. She gave Violet a bouquet of geranium and heliotrope, and conducted her to her room with that motherly kindness and solicitude so comfortable to a lonely guest in a strange house.

Not that the house could long seem strange to Violet. It was an atmosphere of ease, where she could move and speak without feeling on her good behaviour. Everything throughout was on an unpretending scale, full of comfort, and without display, with

a regularity and punctuality that gave a feeling of repose.

Violet was much happier than she had thought possible without Arthur, though her pleasures were not such as to make a figure in history. There were talks and walks, drives and visits to the school, readings and discussions, and the being perfectly at home and caressed by mother and daughter. Lady Elizabeth had all the qualities that are better than intellect, and enough of that to enter into the pursuits of cleverer people. Emma had more ability, and so much enthusiasm, that it was well that it was chastened by her mother's sound sense, as well as kept under by her own timidity.

It was not till Violet was on the point of departure that she knew the secret of Emma's heart. The last Sunday evening before Arthur was to fetch her away, she begged to walk once more to the Priory, and have another look at it. 'I think,' said she, 'it will stay in my mind like Helvellyn in the distance.'

Emma smiled, and soon they stood in the mellow light of the setting sun, beside the ruin. 'How strange,' said Violet, 'to think that it is three hundred years since Sunday came to this chapel.'

'I wonder' said Emma, breaking off, then beginning, 'O Violet, it is the wish of my heart to bring Sundays back to it.'

'Emma! but could it be built up again?'

'Mamma says nothing must be done till I am twenty-five—almost six years hence. Not then, unless I am tame and sober, and have weighed it well.'

'Restore it?—build a church?'

'I could have a sort of alms-house, with old people and children, and we could look after them ourselves.'

'That would be delightful. Oh, I hope you will do it.'

'Don't think of it more than as a dream to myself and mamma. I could not help saying it to you just then; but it is down too deep generally even for mamma. It must

come back somehow to God’s service. Don’t talk of it any more, Violet, dearest, only pray that I may not be unworthy.’

Violet could hardly believe a maiden with such hopes and purposes could be her friend, any more than Prioress Osyth herself; and when, half-an-hour afterwards, she heard Emma talking over the parish and Sunday-school news in an ordinary matter-of-fact way, she did not seem like the same person.

There were many vows of correspondence, and auguries of meeting next spring. Lady Elizabeth thought it right that her daughter should see something of London life, and the hope of meeting Violet was the one thing that consoled Emma, and Violet talked of the delight of making her friend and Annette known to each other.

To this, as Lady Elizabeth observed, Arthur said not a word. She could not help lecturing him a little on the care of his wife, and he listened with a very good grace, much pleased at their being so fond of her.

She wished them good-bye very joyously, extremely happy at having her husband again, and full of pleasant anticipations of her new home.

PART II

There’s pansies for you, that’s for thoughts. —Hamlet

CHAPTER 1

How far less am I blest than they, Daily to pine, and waste with care, Like the poor plant, that from its stem Divided, feels the chilling air. —MICKLE’S Cumnor Hall

Arthur and Violet arrived at their new home in the twilight, when the drawing-room fire burnt brightly, giving a look of comfort. The furniture was good; and by the fire stood a delightful little low chair with a high back, and a pretty little rosewood work-table, on which was a coloured glass inkstand, and a table-stand of books in

choice bindings.

‘Arthur, Arthur, how charming! I am sure this is your doing.’

‘No, it is John’s; I can’t devise knick-knackeries, but he is a thorough old bachelor, and has been doing all sorts of things to the house, which have made it more tolerable.’

‘How very kind he is! The books—how beautiful! Just what I wanted. That one he lent me—he talked to me of that. This Emma has—I saw your sister reading that, and wished to see more of it. But I can’t look at them all now; I must see Sarah, she was to bring something from home.’

A Wrangerton face had great charms, though it was starched and severe, without one smile in answer to the joyous greeting, ‘Well, Sarah, I am glad you could come. How are they all?’

‘Thank you, ma’am, Mr. and Mrs. Moss, and the young ladies, and Mr. Albert, are all very well, and desires their love,’ replied a voice solemn enough for the announcement that they were all at the point of death. Violet’s spirits would have been damped but for the sight of the table spread with parcels directed in dear familiar writing, and she was pouncing on them when Sarah began her grave requests for orders, and Violet felt her own ignorance and incapacity growing more patent every moment as questions about arrangements beset and tormented her on every side. At last she was left to enjoy the out-spreading of the precious gifts, the devices characteristic of the kind hands that had prepared them, and all her own private possessions—a welcome sight.

It was a happy evening, and the days that followed were full of pleasure and occupation—in settling her treasures and making purchases. When she seated herself in her own carriage, she thought now indeed it would be delightful to show herself to her mother and sisters. She had no relation in London but an uncle, a solicitor, fond and proud of her, but too sensible to wish to frequent her house. He

gave her a silver tea-pot; and being asked to dinner now and then on Sunday was all the attention he required. Her brother Albert did, indeed, sometimes come to town on business; and Violet, after many hopes, was, one evening, charmed at seeing him make his appearance. Arthur asked him to stay to dinner, after which they were going to a party.

Albert, a spruce, good-looking youth, had been too grand to make friends with so young a sister; but, now that she was a person of consequence, his tone was different. He talked his best, and she had a perfect feast of Wrangerton news—showed him all her presents, and enjoyed the thought of Annette's smile at hearing of her little Violet stepping into her carriage for a party at a countess's.

Arthur said London was empty, but Violet thought her visitors innumerable, and, as the autumn advanced towards winter, had many invitations. She enjoyed going out; her shyness had nearly worn off; and she was everywhere received so as to make Arthur, proud and pleased. Indeed she had doubts whether she was not growing too gay, and if it was right to pay so much attention to her appearance. She asked Arthur, and was laughed at for her pains.

However, Violet was not without her troubles from the first. She was very much afraid of Sarah, and never spoke to her without shrinking back into Miss Violet, and being conscious that it was mere presumption in her to try to order one so much wiser than herself. The cook, a relation of Miss Standaloft, was much more smooth and deferential, full of resources, which seemed to come from Mrs. Martindale herself; and though the weekly bills always exceeded her reckonings, so many things were wanting, as Mrs. Cook observed, just getting into a house. The first time of having any guests at dinner, Violet was in much anxiety, but all went off to general satisfaction until the bills came in on Monday morning. The cost was beyond her calculations, exceeded her week's portion, and devoured the savings of the days when they had not dined at home. Invitations had been sent out for another

party, and Violet tried to bring it within bounds; but the cook was civilly superior—'It was always so in the first families, such as she was accustomed to, but if Mrs. Martindale liked to have things in a different style—'

She knew Arthur would consent to no external change, and all she could do was to look at the price of all she ordered, reject sundry expensive delicacies, and trust to living on the relics of the feast for the rest of the week; but, behold! they scarcely served for one luncheon, and on Monday the bills had mounted up in an inexplicable manner. There were no savings left, and she made up the deficiency from her own resources. A third party was impending, and she strove more resolutely for frugality. 'Well, ma'am, if you choose, it must be so; but it was not what I was used to in the families such as I have lived in.'

But Violet was firm, whereupon the cook harassed her with contrarieties; and late hours and London air had so far told upon her that she could not shake off her cares cheerfully. She knew all would turn out ill—tormented herself—brought on a headache, and looked unwell when the evening came. The cook sent up the dinner with just enough want of care to keep her in such continual apprehension that she could hardly attend to the conversation.

'You did not make such a good hand of it to-day,' said Arthur, when the guests were gone; 'that soup was ditch-water, and—'

Violet was so worn out that she burst into tears. 'Hey? What's the matter now? I said nothing to cry for.'

She tried to speak, but the tears would not let her.

'Well, if you can't bear to be told everything is not perfection, I don't know what is to be done.' And Arthur, in displeasure, took up a candle and walked off to smoke a cigar in his sitting-room down-stairs.

Her tears were checked by consternation, and, earnest to be forgiven, she followed; then, as he turned impatiently, said, in a trembling pleading voice, 'Dear Arthur, I've

done crying. I did not mean to be cross.'

'Well, that's enough, never mind,' said he, not unkindly, but as if in haste to dismiss the subject, and be left to the peaceful enjoyment of his cigar.

'And you forgive me?'

'Forgive? nonsense—only don't begin crying about nothing again. There's nothing more intolerable than for a woman to be always crying, whenever one speaks to her.'

''Twas not so much that,' said Violet, meekly, 'as that I was vexed at the dinner not looking well, and it won't, without spending such quantities of money!'

'Quantities—what do you call quantities?'

She named the cost of the last dinner, and he laughed at her horror; then, when she was going to prove that it was disproportionate to their means, he silenced her:

'Well, well, never mind; we are not going to give any more dinners just yet; but when we do, have done with pinching and squeezing. Why, you don't look fit to be seen after it.'

'I'm only tired.'

'Ay, with worrying. Go to bed and to sleep, and forget it all!'

She was consoled for that time; but the perplexity continued. She strove to reduce the ordinary expenditure, but Arthur had a fashion of bringing home a friend to dinner without notice; and she underwent indescribable miseries, while reflecting on her one chicken, or five mutton chops; and though something was sure to be extemporized by the cook, the result was that these casual guests were as expensive as a banquet. She ventured to beg Arthur to tell her when he was going to ask any one, but he was vexed, and said he liked to bring home a man by chance; there need be nothing out of the common way, and a dinner for two was a dinner for three. Poor Violet thought, 'Ah! this is not like the time at Winchester. It is my own fault, I am

not companion, enough.’

She began to grow tired of going out in the evening; late hours tried her; she felt listless and unwell; and her finances could not support the dress expenses, but when she tried to excuse herself, she found Arthur determined on taking her out, though he had previously grumbled, and declared he only went for her sake. When she looked pale and languid he seemed annoyed, in a way that gave her the impression that he valued nothing but her beauty. She believed he found home dull, and her not what he expected.

The truth was, perhaps, that Violet’s spirits were naturally not strong, and she was scarcely equal to the cares that had come on her. She missed the companionship of the large family at home; and a slight degree of indisposition or of anxiety was sufficient to set her tormenting herself with every imaginable fear and grief; above all, the dread that he was not pleased with her.

She believed herself to have strictly adhered to the rule of paying for everything at once; but she was dismayed by a shower of bills at Christmas, for things ordered by the cook without her knowledge, several of which she disowned altogether; and several that her memory and ‘great book’ both declared she had paid; though the tradesmen and the cook, through whom the money had been sent, stoutly denied it. She was frightened, paid the sums, and so went the last remains of Lord Martindale’s present.

Sure that the woman was dishonest, yet not knowing how to prove it; afraid to consult Arthur on the household concerns, that he detested; and with a nervous dread of a disturbance, Violet made arrangements for conveying no more payments through Mrs. Cook; and, for the rest, thought she must go on as she could, till the time should come, when, near the end of May, she reckoned on having her mother with her. She would repair her mistakes, make her feel herself mistress in her own house, and help her to all she wanted to know, without fear of Wrangerton gossip.

That hope strengthened and cheered her in all her troubles; and oh! suppose Annette came too!

Poor Violet! the first time she referred to her mother's coming, Arthur looked annoyed, gave a sort of whistle, and said, as if searching for an excuse, 'Why, they never could spare her from Wrangerton.'

'O, that they would,' said Violet, eagerly; 'or if not mamma herself, at least, I am sure, Matilda would come to me, or Annette.'

'Whew!' again whistled Arthur; 'I don't know whether that will do.'

'Arthur!'

'There will be my mother close by, and Lady Elizabeth. No, no, you won't want to have any one up from there.'

'May I not have my own mamma?' pleaded poor Violet, urged into something like pertinacity.

But Arthur cut her short; his great dislike to what he had to say making him speak the more ungraciously: 'I don't want to vex you, Violet, but once for all we must come to an understanding. You must not expect to have your family here. They are good sort of people, and all that style of thing,'—he faltered at her looks of imploring consternation, and tried to work himself into anger in order to be able to finish. 'It is of no use looking wretched, I tell you, you must put it out of your head. They belong to a different set altogether, and it won't do any way. There now, don't go and be nervous about yourself; Theodora shall see to you, and you'll do very well, I have no doubt.'

With these words he hastily quitted her, that he might not witness the distress he had occasioned, though he had not the least idea what his refusal was to her.

The sense of her own helplessness and inexperience, and the prospect of illness, without mother or sister, were lost in the more overpowering sorrow at his

unkindness. How could he love her if he denied her this at such a time, and in such a manner?' He is ashamed of my family! ashamed of me! He is disappointed in me! I can't make it pleasant to him at home. I am not even good-tempered when I am not well, and I am not half as pretty as I used to be! Oh! if he had but married me for anything but my prettiness! But I was not worth vexing every one for! I am only a plague and trouble! Well, I dare say I shall die, now there is no one to take care of me, and then, perhaps, he will be sorry for me. Just at last, I'll tell him how I did mean to be a good wife, and tried all I could.'

But then poor Violet fell into a maze of terror. She roused herself and dried her tears on hearing some one approaching. It was James, bringing in a parcel. It contained a beautiful and costly silk dress. After the first glance she pushed it from her, and her grief burst forth again. 'Does he think that can make up to me for my mother? How silly he must think me! Yet he is kind and tries to please me still, though I am so troublesome! Dear, dear Arthur!'

She took it back upon her lap, and tried to admire, but her heart failed her; and she could not look at it till the sound of his entrance revived her; she felt as if she had been injuring him, and recalling her smiles, met him with what he thought delighted gratitude.

He was relieved to find the late subject blown over, and only wishing to keep it out of her mind, he invited her to take a walk.

Violet had begun to dread his walks, for he was a loiterer, apt to go further and stay out longer than he intended, and she could not bear to tease him by hints of fatigue; but to-day she could not demur at anything he asked, and she only observed that they had better not go far, as they had an engagement for the evening.

At first the air and his attention did her good; but when she saw Captain Fitzhugh approaching, she knew that Arthur's arm was the only further use she should have of him, and there would be an endless sauntering and talk about horses or fishing,

while he would all the time fancy himself going home.

The consequence was, that she was obliged to go at once to bed on coming in, and was declared by Arthur to have been very silly never to have mentioned her fatigue; while Sarah, bestowing grim and sour looks upon them both, attended on her with the most assiduous and minute care. Arthur was greatly concerned, and very unwilling to go to the party alone, but Violet persuaded him, and he promised to return early; then found the evening pleasant, and never knew how time went, while she was lying awake, imagining that something dreadful had happened to him, and mourning over her grievances.

The effects of that over-fatigue did not pass away, and she was forced to give up all evening engagements. He meant to be kind, but was too ignorant and inconsiderate not to do her as much harm as good. One day he almost overwhelmed her with attentions, the next left her to herself. He offered to refuse all invitations for her sake, but it ended in her spending more than half her evenings alone; and when the horse was wanted for him in the evening, she lost her drive. Very soon she fell out of the habit of going out, for now that she was no companion for his long rambles, he found other ways of disposing of his afternoons; and she was still so countrified as to dislike and dread walking alone, even in the quiet Belgravian regions, so that she was always relieved to decide that the gray mist was such as could do no one any good, or that she really was not well enough for a walk.

She did not know the use of change of scene, and the bracing effect of resolution,—she had no experience of self-management, and had not learnt that it was a duty not to let herself pine. Though most conscientious, she had not yet grown up to understand religion as a present comfort. To her it was a guide and an obligation, and as such she obeyed its dictates, to the best of her power, but only as an obedient child, without understanding the immediate reward in this life, namely, confidence, support, and peace. It is a feeling generally belonging to an age beyond

hers, though only to be won by faithful discipline. She was walking in darkness, and, by and by, light might come. But there was one omission, for which she long after grieved; and which, though she knew it not, added to her present troubles.

All heart and hope had been taken from her since she had been forbidden to see her mother and sister. The present was dreary, the future nothing but gloom and apprehension, and she had little to distract her attention. She strove hard to fulfil what she knew were duties, her household concerns and the readings she had fixed as tasks; but these over, she did not try to rouse her mind from her cares; nor had she perhaps the power, for her difficulties with the cook were too much for her, and it was very trying to spend so many hours of the dingy London day and long evening in solitude.

Her amusing books were exhausted, and she used to lie forlorn on the sofa, with her needlework, hearing the roar of carriage-wheels, and, her mind roaming from the perplexities of her accounts to her sad forebodings and her belief in Arthur's coldness, till her heart seemed ready to break,—and her tears gathered, first in solitary drops, then in floods. She had no one to cheer her spirits, to share her hopes and fears. Her plans and employments were tedious to her husband, and he must not be troubled with them,—and so, locked up within herself, they oppressed her with care and apprehension. In letter-writing there was only pain; she could not bear to be supposed unwell or unhappy, and, above all, dreaded saying what might lead to an offer from her mother to come to her. Her letters became mere comments on home news; she wrote less frequently, feared they would think her grown too fine to care for them, and then wept and sobbed with home sickness. There was a little more comfort in writing to Rickworth, for she expected the Brandons early in May, and her only hope was in Lady Elizabeth for care and counsel: for as to Arthur's dependence, his mother and sister, she felt as if the fear and restraint of their presence would be unbearable.

Her husband never guessed how she languished. In his presence she was a different creature, forgetting her griefs in the one wish of pleasing him. No matter what she had been undergoing in his absence, his knock raised her spirits, in a moment life darted into her limbs and colour into her cheeks. She had no notion of complaining. Her mother had always been silent, though often with greater cause for remonstrance; and poor Violet, imagining herself a burden, would not for the world have made herself more troublesome than she could help. Her whole desire was to win a smile, a fond word, a caress, and she sat watching as if those were life to her; her cheeks burning with eagerness so much that Arthur little guessed how wan they were in his absence.

The colour was heightened by warm rooms, for Arthur was of a chilly race, and could not understand how oppressive the close atmosphere of London was to one used to mountain breezes. He would come in shivering, and be provoked to find her sitting by the smallest of fires; till she learnt that their estimate of heat was so different, that the only safety was in keeping the room like an oven. The folding doors into the back drawing-room had a trick of opening of their own accord; and the trouble given her by this draught-trap, as Arthur called it, can hardly be estimated, especially one windy week in March, when he had a cold.

She had never been wont to think seriously of colds but when it came to coughing and feverishness all night, and Arthur, with his hand on his chest, persisted that it was all in his throat and told her to send for a blister, she grew alarmed, but this only displeased him. He disdained her entreaty that he would remain in bed; and said women always made a fuss about nothing, when she timidly suggested sending for ‘some one.’

For three deplorable days he sat over the fire, with a distaste for everything, while she did her utmost to make him comfortable, and when she failed, thought it her own fault, reproached herself for her inefficiency, and imagined that he was going to

be as ill as his brother, and that she should be of no use to him. How hard on him to have such a bad wife! She could not even entertain him while he was kept indoors—for she could not find anything to talk about, so long was it since she had been out, or read anything amusing.

However, on the third afternoon, he brightened up, found the soup good, talked and laughed, and declared that if to-morrow was fine, he should be out again. And the next day she was so delighted to find his cough was gone—more quickly than he had ever known so severe a cold depart—that it was not till he was out of the house that she remembered that she was condemned to solitude for many hours.

Here was quarter-day, bringing fresh confusion, in those inexplicable household expenses, and a miserable sense of wastefulness, and unfaithfulness to her charge. She thought of John's advice, to make her husband attend, if she found her means insufficient; and set herself to draw up a statement of the case, to lay before him; but she grew more and more puzzled; the cook's dishonesty weighed on her, and her fears of taking any measures increased. Her calculations always ended in despairing tears.

She was lying on her bed, recovering from one of these almost hysterical fits, when she was roused from a doze by a knock at her door; and started up, trying to hide that anything had been the matter, as Sarah came in, and said, with a tone of authority,

'Mrs. Finch and Miss Gardner, ma'am! but I will say you are not well enough to see them.'

'O no, Sarah, I am quite well, I was only asleep.'

'You had better not go down,' sternly repeated Sarah. 'You had much best lie down, and have your sleep out, after being kept awake till two o'clock last night, with Captain Martindale not coming home. And you with the pillow all awry, and that bit of a shawl over you! Lie you down, and I'll set it straight.'

But Violet was on her feet—the imputation on Captain Martindale had put her on her mettle. ‘Thank you, I don’t want anything; I am going down directly.’

Sarah shook her head, and looked significantly at the glass; and there, indeed, Violet perceived that her eyes bore traces of recent weeping; but, still, she would do anything rather than own her tears. ‘My head aches a little—that makes my eyes heavy,’ said she. ‘It will do me good to see Miss Gardner. I knew her at Martindale.’

But when Violet found herself in the presence of Miss Gardner, and of a tall fashionable lady, she did not like the recollection that she had been talked of as a beauty.

She was glad to meet Miss Gardner, but Mrs. Finch’s style was dashing and almost boisterous, and her voice quick and loud, as she seized on her hand, exclaiming, ‘I want no introduction, I have heard so much of you! I know we shall be excellent friends. I must hear of Theodora. You know she is the greatest ally I have on earth. When did you hear of her last? When are they coming to town! I would not miss Theodora’s first appearance for all the world.’

Violet felt overpowered by the torrent; but thought it was giving no right impression of her husband to look disconsolate, and exerted herself to be cheerful, and answer.

But they would speak of Martindale, and oblige her to expose her ignorance. She did not know when the family were coming to town, nor had she heard when Mr. Martindale’s return might be expected.

If Miss Gardner had been alone, she thought she might have got on better; but the quieter elder sister hardly put in a word, so unceasing was the talk of the younger; whose patronage became oppressive, when she began on Mrs. Martindale herself; told her she was lazy, taking too much care, and growing nervous: and even declared she should come some day, take her by storm, and carry her out for a drive in the park.

Poor Violet felt as if to be shut up in the carriage with this talking lady would kill

her outright; begged she would not take the trouble; but only met with smiles, and declarations that Theodora would scold her well when she came.

The next afternoon Violet listened with dread to the sounds of wheels, and was not at all inclined to blame a headache, which was sufficient excuse for sending down thanks and refusal. On the following, she had just made up her mind that the danger was over for that day, when her alarm was excited by a thundering knock, and in walked her brother.

‘Well, Violet, I have caught you at home. I’m come to town about Lord St. Erme’s business—go back by the mail train. Are you dining at home? Can you give me a dinner?’

‘Oh, yes!’ said Violet; but fears came over her of Arthur’s not being pleased, especially supposing he should bring back any one with him. And therewith came dismay at finding herself giving no better welcome to her own brother, and she eagerly asked for all at home.

‘In a high state of preservation. And how are you? You don’t look quite the thing.’

‘Oh, yes, I am, thank you.’

‘And how is Martindale?’

‘He would not call him so to his face!’ thought the wife. ‘Oh! I wish he would sit anywhere but in Arthur’s chair, and not fidget me with playing with that horrid little piece of watch-chain!’ ‘He is very well, thank you. He had a bad cold last week, but it is quite gone now. I hope he will soon come in.’

‘I am not sorry to have found you alone. I want to hear something of these relations of yours.’

‘Oh! I shall be sure to say something wrong!’ thought she, and as the best thing to put forward, announced that they would soon be in London.

‘And they are not high with you? I hear fine accounts of their grandeur,—they say

the lady and her daughter are eaten up with pride, and think no one fit to speak to.'

'Miss Martindale has the plainest ways in the world. She will do anything for the poor people.'

'Ay, ay, that's the way with fine ladies,—they like to be condescending and affable. And so you say they receive you well? make you one of the family—eh?'

Violet hoped it was not wrong to utter a faint 'yes.'

'Does Martindale's sister write to you?'

'No; she does not write letters much. But I told you how very kind they are—Mr. Martindale, his brother, especially.'

'Ay!' said Albert, 'he disconcerted our calculations. He seems to have taken out a new lease.'

'He is a great deal better.'

'But he has no lungs left. His life can't be worth a year's purchase, by what the governor heard. He would never have let Martindale have you on such easy terms if he had not looked on you as good as her ladyship.'

Such shame and disgust came over Violet that she felt unworthy to sit on John Martindale's chair, and moved to the sofa, trying to change the subject; but Albert persisted in inquiries about Mr. Martindale's age, health, and the likelihood of his marrying, till she could no longer be without the perception that not only had her husband been to blame for their marriage—her father's part had been far worse.

Albert hoped the old lord was coming down handsomely and tried to make her tell their income. She was glad not to know and he began calculating it from their style of living, with such disregard to her feelings, as made her contrast his manners with those of the true gentlemen to whom she was now accustomed, and feel sadly that there was reason in her husband's wish to keep her family at a distance. There was no checking or silencing this elder brother; she could only feel humiliated by each

proof of his vulgarity of mind, and blame herself, by turns, for churlishness to him, and for permitting conversation Arthur would so much dislike.

Why would not Arthur come and put a stop to it! It was not the first time she had waited dinner for him in vain, and though she tried to make Albert think she liked it, she knew she was a very bad dissembler.

When she at length ordered in dinner, the conversation changed to Wrangerton doings, the Christmas gaieties, jokes about her sisters and their imputed admirers, and a Miss Louisa Davies—a new-comer, about whom Albert seemed to wish to be laughed at himself. But poor Violet had no spirits even to perceive this,—she only thought of home and the familiar scenes recalled by each name. What a gulf between her and them! In what free, careless happiness they lived! What had her father done in thrusting her into a position for which she was unfit,—into a family who did not want her, and upon one to whom she was only a burthen! At home they thought her happy and fortunate! They should never guess at her wretchedness.

But when the time for Albert's departure came, Violet forgot his inconvenient questions, and would have given the world to keep him. He was her own brother—a part of home; he loved her—she had felt inhospitable to him, and perhaps she should never see him again.

When he recurred to her pale looks and languid manner, and expressed concern, it was all she could do to keep from bursting into tears, and telling all her griefs; and she could not control the rapid agitated tones that belied her repeated assurances that nothing was amiss, and that he must not give a bad account of her and alarm her mother.

She could hardly let him go; and when he bade her goodbye, there was a moment's intense desire to be going with him, from this lonely room, home to her mother and Annette, instantly followed by a horror at such a wish having occurred, and then came the sobs and tears. She dreaded that Arthur might be displeased at the visit; but

he came home full of good humour, and on hearing of it, only hoped she had good news from Wrangerton, and said he was glad he had been out of the way, so that she had been able to have her brother all to herself.

Her fears of the effect of Albert's account of her were better founded; for two mornings after, on coming down to breakfast, she found a letter from her mother to exhort her to be careful, assuring her that she need have no scruple in sending for her, and betraying so much uneasiness as to add to all her terrors. She saw this in one glance; for she knew that to dwell on the tender affectionate letter would bring on a fit of weeping, and left it and the dreadful consideration of her reply till Arthur should be gone, as he was to spend the day in fishing with a friend in the country. He had come home late last night, and was not yet dressed, and she waited long, gazing at the gleams of sunshine on the square gardens, thinking how bright this second day of April must be anywhere but here, where it was close and oppressive, and wondering whether Helvellyn was beginning to lose his snow; then, as Helvellyn brought the sensation that led to tears, she took the newspaper, and had read more than she cared for before Arthur appeared, in the state of impatience which voluntary lateness is sure to produce.

She gave him his tea as quickly as she could, but all went wrong: it was a horrid cold day, ALL east wind—there was a cold wind coming in somewhere.

'The back drawing-room window! I'm sorry I did not see it was open.'

'What makes you go to shut it?' said he, hastily marching across the room, and closing it and the doors. 'I shall be gone in a moment, and you may let in a hurricane if you like. Have you seen my cigar-case!'

'It was on the ledge of your wardrobe.'

'Some of your maids have been and hid it.'

'I told Sarah never to put your things away. I think I could find it.'

'No, don't go, I have looked everywhere.'

As he never found things, even when before his eyes, this was not conclusive; and she undertook the search in spite of another careless ‘No, no, don’t,’ knowing it meant the contrary.

She could not find it in his dressing-room, and he looked annoyed, again accusing the maids. This made her feel injured, and though growing exhausted, as well she might, as she had not even begun breakfast, she said she would look in the sitting-room. He half remonstrated, without looking up from the paper, but she hoped to be gladdened by thanks, hunted in all his hiding-places in vain, and found she must give it up, after a consultation with Sarah, who resentfully denied all knowledge of it, and told her she looked ready to drop.

Dolefully coming into the hall, she saw Arthur’s black travelling-bag. Was it for more than the day? The evenings were bad enough—but a desolate night! And he had never told her!’

‘I suppose you have not found it?’

‘No; I wish I could!’

‘Never mind; it will turn up. You have tired yourself.’

‘But, Arthur, are you not coming home to-night?’

‘Didn’t I tell you? If I can’t get away by the seven o’clock train, I thought of sleeping there. Ten o’clock, I declare! I shall miss the train!’

She came to the head of the stairs with him, asking plaintively, ‘When DO you come home? To-morrow, at latest?’

Perhaps it was her querulous tone, perhaps a mere boyish dislike to being tied down, or even it might be mere hurry, that made him answer impatiently, ‘I can’t tell—as it may happen. D’ye think I want to run away! Only take care of yourself.’

This was in his coaxing voice; but it was not a moment when she could bear to be turned aside, like an importunate child, and she was going to speak; but he saw the

wrong fishing-rod carried out, called hastily to James, ran down-stairs, and was gone, without even looking back at her.

The sound of the closing door conveyed a sense of utter desolation to her over-wrought mind—the house was a solitary prison; she sank on the sofa, sobbing, ‘Oh, I am very, very miserable! Why did he take me from home, if he could not love me! Oh, what will become of me? Oh, mamma! mamma!’

CHAPTER 2

What is so shrill as silent tears? —GEORGE HERBERT

Arthur came home late in the afternoon of the following day. The door was opened to him by his brother, who abruptly said, ‘She is dying. You must not lose a moment if you would see her alive.’

Arthur turned pale, and gave an inarticulate exclamation of horror-stricken inquiry—‘Confined?’

‘Half-an-hour ago. She was taken ill yesterday morning immediately after you left her. She is insensible, but you may find her still living.’

Nothing but strong indignation could have made John Martindale thus communicate such tidings. He had arrived that day at noon to find that the creature he had left in the height of her bright loveliness was in the extremity of suffering and peril—her husband gone no one knew whither; and the servants, too angry not to speak plainly, reporting that he had left her in hysterics. John tried not to believe the half, but as time went on, bringing despair of the poor young mother’s life, and no tidings of Arthur; while he became more and more certain that there had been cruel neglect, the very gentleness and compassion of his nature fired and glowed against him who had taken her from her home, vowed to cherish her, and forsaken her at such a time. However, he was softened by seeing him stagger against the wall, perfectly stunned, then gathering breath, rush up-stairs without a word.

As Arthur pushed open the door, there was a whisper that it was he, too late, and room was made for him. All he knew was, that those around watched as if it was not yet death, but what else did he see on those ashy senseless features?

With a cry of despair he threw himself almost over her, and implored her but once to speak, or look at him. No one thought her capable even of hearing, but at his voice the eyelids and lips slightly moved, and a look of relief came over the face. A hand pressed his shoulder, and a spoon containing a drop of liquid was placed in his fingers, while some one said, ‘Try to get her to take this.’

Scarcely conscious he obeyed, and calling her by every endearing name, beyond hope succeeded in putting it between her lips. Her eyes opened and were turned on him, her hand closed on his, and her features assumed a look of peace. The spark of life was for a moment detained by the power of affection, but in a short space the breath must cease, the clasp of the hand relax.

Once more he was interrupted by a touch, and this time it was Sarah’s whisper—‘The minister is come, sir. What name shall it be!’

‘Anything—John,’ said he, without turning his head or taking in what she said.

The clergyman and John Martindale were waiting in the dressing-room, with poor Violet’s cathedral cup filled with water.

‘She does not know him?’ asked John, anxiously, as Sarah entered.

‘Yes, sir, she does,’ said Sarah, contorting her face to keep back the tears. ‘She looked at him, and has hold of his hand. I think she will die easier for it, poor dear.’

‘And at least the poor child is alive to be baptized?’

‘O, yes, sir, it seems a bit livelier now,’ said Sarah, opening a fold of the flannel in her arms. ‘It is just like its poor mamma.’

‘Is it a girl?’ he inquired, by no means perceiving the resemblance.

‘A boy, sir. His papa never asked, though he did say his name should be John.’

‘It matters little,’ said John, mournfully, for to his eye there was nothing like life in that tiny form. ‘And yet how marvellous,’ thought he, ‘to think of its infinite gain by these few moments of unconscious existence!’

At the touch of the water it gave a little cry, which Sarah heard with a start and glance of infinite satisfaction.

She returned to the chamber, where the same deathly stillness prevailed; the husband, the medical men, the nurse, all in their several positions, as if they had neither moved nor looked from the insensible, scarcely breathing figure.

The infant again gave a feeble sound, and once more the white features moved, the eyes opened, and a voice said, so faintly, that Arthur, as he hung over her, alone could hear it, ‘My baby! O, let me see it!’

‘Bring the child,’ and at the sound of those words the gleam of life spread over her face more completely.

He could not move from her side, and Sarah placed the little creature upon his broad hand. He held it close to her. ‘Our baby!’ again she murmured, and tried to kiss it, but it made another slight noise, and this overcame her completely, the deathly look returned, and he hastily gave back the infant.

She strove hard for utterance, and he could hardly catch her gasping words, ‘You’ll be fond of it, and think of me.’

‘Don’t, don’t talk so, dearest. You will soon be better. You are better. Let me give you this.’

‘Please, I had rather lie still. Do let me.’ Then again looking up, as if she had been losing the consciousness of his presence, ‘Oh! it is you. Are you come? Kiss me and wish me good-bye.’

‘You are better—only take this. Won’t you? You need not move; Violet, Violet, only try. To please me! There, well done, my precious one. Now you will be more

comfortable.'

'Thank you, oh no! But I am glad you are come. I did wish to be a good wife. I had so much to say to you—if I could—but I can't remember. And my baby; but oh, this is dying,' as the sinking returned. 'O, Arthur, keep me, don't let me die!' and she clung to him in terror.

He flung his arm closer round her, looking for help to the doctors. 'You shall not, you will not, my own, my darling.'

'You can't help it,' sighed she. 'And I don't know how—if some one would say a prayer?'

He could only repeat protests that she must live, but she grew more earnest. 'A prayer! I can't recollect—Oh! is it wicked? Will God have mercy? Oh! would you but say a prayer?'

'Yes, yes, but what? Give me a book.'

Sarah put one into his hand, and pointed to a place, but his eyes were misty, his voice faltered, broke down, and he was obliged to press his face down on the pillows to stifle his sobs.

Violet was roused to such a degree of bewildered distress and alarm at the sight of his grief, that the doctors insisted on removing him, and almost forced him away.

There had been prayers offered for her, of which she knew nothing.

The clergyman was gone, and John had despatched his melancholy letter to Lord Martindale, when he heard the steps on the stairs. Was it over! No, it was only one of the doctors with Arthur, and they did not come to him, but talked in the back drawing-room for some moments, after which the doctor took leave, repeating the words in John's hearing, that Arthur must compose himself before returning to her—agitation would be at once fatal. Arthur had thrown himself on the sofa, with his face hidden in his hands, in such overpowering distress, that his brother's

displeasure could not continue for a moment, and he began to speak soothingly of the present improvement.

‘It cannot last,’ said Arthur. ‘They say it is but a question of minutes or hours,’ and again he gave way to a burst of grief, but presently it changed to an angry tone. ‘Why was I never sent for?’

John explained that no one knew whither to send. He could hardly credit this, and his wrath increased at the stupidity of the servants; it seemed to relieve him to declaim against them.

‘Then you left her well?’

‘Of course I did. She had been searching over the house for that abominable cigar-case of mine, which was in my pocket all the time! I shall never bear to see it again,’ and he launched it into the fire with vehemence. ‘I suppose that upset her! Why did I not prevent her? Fool that I was not to know it was not fit for her, though she chose to do it. But I never took care of her.’

‘She is so very unselfish,’ said John.

‘That was it. I thought women always looked out for themselves. I should have known I had one not like the rest! She had never one thought for herself, and it is killing her, the sweetest, loveliest, best—my precious Violet! John, John! is there nothing that can be done for her?’ cried he, starting up in a tumultuous agony of grief, and striking his foot on the floor.

‘Could we not send for her mother? Brown might set off at once to fetch her.’

‘Thank you, but no, it is of no use. No railroad within forty miles of the place. She could not be here till—till—and then I could not see her.’ He was pacing the room, and entangled his foot in Violet’s little work-table, and it fell. Her work-box flew open, and as they stooped to pick up the articles, Arthur again wept without control as he took up a little frock, half made, with the needle hanging to it. The table-drawer had fallen out, and with it the large account-book, the weekly bills, and

a sheet of paper covered with figures, and blotted and blistered with tears. The sight seemed to overwhelm him more than all. ‘Crying over these! My Violet crying! Oh! what have I been doing?’

‘And why? What distressed her?’

‘It was too much for her. She would plague herself with these wretched household accounts! She knew I hated the sound of them. I never let her bring them to me; but little did I think that she cried over them alone!’

‘She was cheerful with you?’

‘Was not she?’ I never saw that dear face without its sweet smile, come when I would. I have never heard a complaint. I have left her to herself, madman as I was, when she was unwell and anxious! But—oh! if she could only recover, she should see—Ha! Sarah, can I come?’

‘Yes, sir, she is asking for you; but, if you please, sir, Mr. Harding says you must come very quiet. She seems wandering, and thinking you are not come home, sir,’ said Sarah, with a grisly satisfaction in dealing her blow home.

John tried to rectify the confusion in the work-box with a sort of reverential care; not able to bear to leave it in disorder, whether its mistress were ever to open it again or not, yet feeling it an intrusion to meddle with her little feminine hoards of precious trifles.

‘Poor Arthur!’ said he to himself, ‘he may fairly be acquitted of all but his usual inconsiderateness towards one too tender for such treatment. He deserves more pity than blame. And for her—thank Heaven for the blessing on them that mourn. Innocent creature, much will be spared her; if I could but dwell on that rather than on the phantom of delight she was, and my anticipations of again seeing the look that recalls Helen. If Helen was here, how she would be nursing her!’

John saw his brother no more that evening—only heard of Violet ‘as barely kept alive, as it seemed, by his care.’ Each report was such that the next must surely be

the last; and John sat waiting on till his servant insisted on his going to bed, promising to call him if his brother needed him.

The night passed without the summons, and in the morning there was still life. John had been down-stairs for some little time, when he heard the medical man, who had spent the night there, speaking to Arthur on the stairs. ‘A shade of improvement’ was the report. ‘Asleep now; and if we can only drag her through the next few days there may be hope, as long as fever does not supervene.’

‘Thank Heaven!’ said John, fervently. ‘I did not venture to hope for this.’

But Arthur was utterly downcast, and could not take heart. It was his first real trouble, and there was little of the substance of endurance in his composition. That one night of watching, grief, and self-reproach, had made his countenance so pale and haggard, and his voice so dejected and subdued, that John was positively startled, as he heard his answer—

‘I never saw any one so ill.’

‘Come and have some breakfast, you look quite worn out’

‘I cannot stay,’ said he, sitting down, however. ‘She must not miss me, or all chance would be over. You don’t mind the door being open?’

‘No, indeed. Is she sensible now?’

‘Clear for a minute, if she has my hand; but then she dozes off, and talks about those miserable accounts—the numbers over and over again. It cuts me to the heart to hear her. They talk of an over-strain on the mind! Heigh-ho! Next she wakes with a dreadful frightened start, and stares about wildly, fancying I am gone.’

‘But she knows you,’ said John, trying to speak consolingly.

‘Yes, no one else can do anything with her. She does not so much as hear them. I must be back before she wakes; but I am parched with thirst. How is this? Where is the tea?’

‘I suppose you put in none. Is this the chest?’

Arthur let his head drop on his hand, helpless and overcome, as this little matter brought home the sense of missing his wife, and the remembrance of the attentions he had allowed her to lavish upon him. His brother tried the tea-chest, and, finding it locked, poured out some coffee, which he drank almost unconsciously, then gave his cup for more, sighed, pushed his hair back, and looked up somewhat revived. John tended him affectionately, persuading him to take food; and when he had passively allowed his plate to be filled, his appetite discovered that he had tasted nothing since yesterday morning, and therewith his spirits were refreshed; he looked up cheerfully, and there was less despondency in his tone as he spoke of her sleep towards morning having been less disturbed.

‘The child woke her with a squall, and I thought we were undone, but no such thing. I declare nothing has done her so much good; she had him brought, and was so happy over him, then went off to sleep again.’

‘This is a great relief,’ said John. ‘From your manner, I dreaded to ask for him, but I hope he may be doing well.’

‘I am sure I hope so, or it would be all over with her. I believe both their lives hang on one thread. To see her with him this morning—I did not know such fondness was in women. I declare I never saw anything like it; and she so weak! And such a creature as it is; the smallest thing that ever was born, they say, and looking—like nothing on earth but young mice.’

John could not help smiling: ‘That is better than yesterday, when I could scarcely believe he was alive.’

‘What! did you see him?’

‘When he was baptized.’

‘Was he? What did you call him?’

‘You sent word to name him John.’

‘Did I? I had not the least recollection of it. I forgot all about him till he made himself heard this morning, and she wanted to know whether he was boy or girl.’

‘A son and heir,’ said John, glad to see the young father able to look gratified.

‘Well, it is the best name; I hope she will like it. But, hollo, John, where did you drop from?’ as it suddenly occurred to him to be surprised.

‘I came home on some business of Fotheringham’s. I landed early yesterday, and came up from Southampton.’

‘A fine state of things to come to,’ sighed Arthur. ‘But you will not go away?’

‘Certainly not till she is better.’

‘Ah! you were always fond of her; you appreciated her from the first. There is no one whom I should have liked so well to have here.’ Then, with a pause, he added, in a tone of deep feeling: ‘John, you might well give me that warning about making her happy; but, indeed, I meant to do so!’ and his eyes filled with tears.

‘As far as affection could go, you have done so,’ said John, ‘or you could not have recalled her to life now.’

‘You little know,’ said Arthur sadly; ‘Heaven knows it was not want of affection; but I never guessed what she underwent. Sarah tells me she spent hours in tears, though she would never allow them to be noticed.’

‘Poor Violet! But what could be her trouble?’

‘Her household affairs seem to have overpowered her, and I never would attend to them; little thinking how she let them prey upon her. I never thought of her being lonely; and her sweet, bright face, and uncomplaining ways, never reminded me. There never was any one like her; she was too good for me, too good to live, that is the truth; and now I must lose her!’

‘Do not think so, Arthur; do not give way. The getting through this night is more

than could have been hoped. Happiness is often the best cure; and if she is able to take so much pleasure in you, and in the child, it is surely a hopeful sign.'

'So they said; that her noticing the child made them think better of her. If she can but get over it, she shall see. But you will stay with me, John,' said he, as if he clung to the support.

'That I will, thank you. I could not bear to go. I can sleep in Belgrave Square, if you want my room for her mother.'

'We shall see how it is by post-time. I tried whether it would rouse her to tell her I would write to Mrs. Moss, but she took no heed, and the old nurse looked daggers at me.'

He was interrupted; Violet had awakened in an alarming fit of trembling, imploring to be told why he was angry, and whether he would ever come back.

So glimmered the feeble ray of life throughout the day; and when the post went out, the end was apparently so near, that it was thought in vain to send for Mrs. Moss; whom Arthur shrank from seeing, when it should be too late. He was so completely overwhelmed with distress, that in the short intervals he spent out of the sick-room, it was his brother's whole work to cheer and sustain him sufficiently to perform those offices, which Violet was incapable of receiving from any one else.

It was no wonder he broke down; for it was a piteous sight to see that fair young mother, still a child in years, and in her exhausted state of wavering consciousness, alive only through her fond affections; gleams of perception, and momentary flashes of life, called forth only by her husband, or by the moanings of the little frail babe, which seemed to have as feeble and precarious a hold of life as herself. The doctors told John that they were haunted through the day by the remembrance of her face, so sweet, even in insensibility, and so very lovely, when the sound of her babe's voice, for a moment, lighted up the features. Their anxiety for her was intense; and if this was the case with strangers, what must it not have been for her husband, to whom

every delirious murmur was an unconscious reproach, and who had no root of strength within himself! The acuteness of his grief, and his effectiveness as a nurse, were such as to surprise his brother, who only now perceived how much warmth of heart had been formerly stifled in a cold, ungenial home.

Sustained from hour to hour by his unremitting care, she did, however, struggle through the next three days; and at last came a sounder sleep, and a wakening so tranquil, that Arthur did not perceive it, till he saw, in the dim lamp-light, those dark eyes calmly fixed upon him. The cry of the infant was heard, and she begged for it, fondling it, and murmuring over it with a soft inarticulate sound of happiness.

‘You purr like an old cat over her kitten,’ said Arthur, longing to see her smile once more; and he was not disappointed; it was a bright, contented, even joyous smile, that played on the colourless features, and the eyes beamed softly on him as she said, ‘Kiss him, papa.’

He would have done anything for her at that moment, and another bright look rewarded him.

‘Does mamma know about this dear little baby?’ she said, presently.

‘Yes, dearest, I have written every day. She sends you her love;’ and as Violet murmured something of ‘Dear mamma—’

‘Do you wish to have her here?’

‘No, indeed, I don’t wish it now,’ said Violet; ‘you do make me so very happy.’

She was returning to her full self, with all her submission to his will, and in fact she did not wish for any change; her content in his attention was so complete, so peaceful, that in her state of weakness there was an instinctive dread of breaking the charm. To lie still, her babe beside her, and Arthur watching her, was the perfect repose of felicity, and imperceptibly her faculties were, one by one, awakening. Her thoughtfulness for others had revived; Arthur had been giving her some nourishment, and, for the first time, she had taken it with a relish, when it so

chanced that the light fell for a moment on his face, and she was startled by perceiving the effects of anxiety and want of sleep. In vain he assured her there was nothing the matter. She accused herself of having been exacting and selfish, and would not be comforted, till he had promised to take a good night's rest. He left her, at length, nearly asleep, to carry the tidings to his brother, and enjoy his look of heart-felt rejoicing. Never had the two very dissimilar brothers felt so much drawn together; and as John began, as usual, to wait on him, and to pour out his coffee, he said, as he sat down wearied, 'Thank you, John, I can't think what would have become of me without you!'

'My father would have come to you if I had not been here.'

'Where's his letter?—I forgot all about it. Is there none from Theodora?'

'No; I suppose she waited for further accounts.'

Arthur began reading his father's letter. 'Very kind! a very kind letter indeed,' said he, warmly. '"Earned so high a place in our regard—her sweetness and engaging qualities,"—I must keep that to show her. This is very kind too about what it must be to me. I did not think he had appreciated her so well!'

'Yes, indeed, he did,' said John. 'This is what he says to me. "Never have I seen one more gentle and engaging, and I feel sure she would have gained more on our affections every day, and proved herself a treasure to the family."'

'That is right,' said Arthur. 'He will get to know her well when they come to London! I'll write to him to-morrow, and thank him, and say, no need for him to come now! "Hopes his grandson will live to be a comfort to me!"' and Arthur could not help laughing.

'Well, I am not come to that yet!'

'He is much pleased at its being a son,' said John.

'Poor little mortal!' said Arthur, 'if he means to be a comfort I wish he would stop

that dismal little wail—have one good squall and have done with it. He will worry his mother and ruin all now she takes more notice. So here's Mrs. Moss's letter. I could not open it this morning, and I have been inventing messages to Violet from her—poor woman! I have some good news for her now. It is all about coming, but Violet says she does not want her. I can't read it all, my eyes are so weak! Violet said they were bloodshot,' and he began to examine them in the glass.

'Yes, you are not equal to much more nursing; you are quite done for.'

'I am!' said Arthur, stretching. 'I'm off to bed, as she begged me; but the worst is over now! We shall do very well when Theodora comes; and if she has a taste for the boy, she and Violet will make friends over him,—good night.'

With a long yawn, Arthur very stiffly walked up-stairs, where Sarah stood at the top waiting for him. 'Mrs. Martindale is asleep, sir; you had best not go in,' said she. 'I have made up a bed in your dressing-room, and you'd best not be lying down in your clothes, but take a good sleep right out, or you'll be fit for nothing next. I'll see and call if she wants you.'

'Thank you, Sarah; I wonder how long you have been up; you will be fit for nothing next.'

'It don't hurt me,' said Sarah, in disdain; and as Arthur shut his door, she murmured to herself, 'I'm not that sort to be knocked up with nothing; but he is an easy kind-spoken gentleman after all. I'll never forget what he has done for missus. There is not so much harm in him neither; he is nothing but a great big boy as ought to be ashamed of hisself.'

The night passed off well; Violet, with a great exertion of self-command, actually composed herself on awaking in one of her nervous fits of terror; prevented his being called; and fairly deserved all the fond praise he lavished on her in the morning for having been so good a child.

'You must not call me child now,' said she, with a happy little pride. 'I must be

wiser now.’

‘Shall I call you the prettiest and youngest mamma in England?’

‘Ah! I am too young and foolish. I wish I was quite seventeen!’

‘Have you been awake long?’

‘Yes; but so comfortable. I have been thinking about baby’s name.’

‘Too late, Violet; they named him John: they say I desired it.’

‘What! was he obliged to be baptized? Is he so delicate? Oh, Arthur! tell me; I know he is tiny, but I did not think he was ill.’

Arthur tried to soothe her with assurances of his well-doing, and the nurse corroborated them; but though she tried to believe, she was not pacified, and would not let her treasure be taken from within her arms till Mr. Harding arrived—his morning visit having been hastened by a despatch from Arthur, who feared that she would suffer for her anxiety. She asked so many questions that he, who last night had seen her too weak to look up or speak, was quite taken by surprise. By a little exceeding the truth, he did at length satisfy her mind; but after this there was an alteration in her manner with her baby; it was not only the mere caressing, there was a sort of reverence, and look of reflection as she contemplated him, such as made Arthur once ask, what she could be studying in that queer little red visage?

‘I was thinking how very good he is!’ was her simple answer, and Arthur’s smile by no means comprehended her meaning.

Her anxious mind retarded her recovery, and Arthur’s unguarded voice on the stairs having revealed to her that a guest was in the house, led to inquiries, and an endless train of fears, lest Mr. Martindale should be uncomfortable and uncared for. Her elasticity of mind had been injured by her long course of care, and she could not shake off the household anxieties that revived as she became able to think.

Indeed there were things passing that would have greatly astonished her. Sarah had

taken the management of everything, including her master; and with iron composure and rigidity of demeanour, delighted in teasing him by giving him a taste of some of the cares he had left her mistress to endure. First came an outcry for keys. They were supposed to be in a box, and when that was found its key was missing. Again Arthur turned out the unfortunate drawer, and only spared the work-box on John's testifying that it was not there, and suggesting Violet's watch-chain, where he missed it, and Sarah found it and then, with imperturbable precision, in spite of his attempts to escape, stood over him, and made him unlock and give out everything himself. 'If things was wrong,' she said, 'it was her business that he should see it was not owing to her.'

Arthur was generally indifferent to what he ate or drank,—the reaction, perhaps, of the luxury of his home; but having had a present of some peculiar trout from Captain Fitzhugh, and being, as an angler, a connoisseur in fish, many were his exclamations at detecting that those which were served up at breakfast were not the individuals sent.

Presently, in the silence of the house, John heard tones gradually rising on the stairs, till Arthur's voice waxed loud and wrathful 'You might as well say they were red herrings!'

Something shrill ensued, cut short by, 'Mrs. Martindale does as she pleases. Send up Captain Fitzhugh's trout.'

A loud reply, in a higher key.

'Don't tell me of the families where you have lived—the trout!'

Here John's hand was laid upon his arm, with a sign towards his wife's room; whereupon he ran down-stairs, driving the cook before him.

Soon he came hastily up, storming about the woman's impertinence, and congratulating himself on having paid her wages and got rid of her.

John asked what was to be done next? and was diverted with his crestfallen looks,

when asked what was to become of Violet.

However, when Sarah was consulted, she gravely replied, ‘She thought as how she could contrive till Mrs. Martindale was about again;’ and the corners of her mouth relaxed into a ghastly smile, as she replied, ‘Yes, sir,’ in answer to her master’s adjurations to keep the dismissal a secret from Mrs. Martindale.

‘Ay!’ said John, ‘I wish you joy of having to tell her what revolutions you have made.’

‘I’ll take care of that, if the women will only hold their tongues.’

They were as guarded as he could wish, seeing as plainly as he did, how fretting over her household matters prolonged her state of weakness. It was a tedious recovery, and she was not able even to receive a visit from John till the morning when the cough, always brought on by London air, obliged him reluctantly to depart.

He found her on the sofa, wrapped in shawls, her hair smoothed back under a cap; her shady, dark eyes still softer from languor, and the exquisite outline of her fair, pallid features looking as if it was cut out in ivory against the white pillows. She welcomed him with a pleased smile; but he started back, and flushed as if from pain, and his hand trembled as he pressed hers, then turned away and coughed.

‘Oh, I am sorry your cough is so bad,’ said she.

‘Nothing to signify,’ he replied, recovering. ‘Thank you for letting me come to see you. I hope you are not tired?’

‘Oh, no, thank you. Arthur carried me so nicely, and baby is so good this morning.’

‘Where is he? I was going to ask for him.’

‘In the next room. I want to show him to you, but he is asleep.’

‘A happy circumstance,’ said Arthur, who was leaning over the back of her sofa.

‘No one else can get in a word when that gentleman is awake.’

‘Now, Arthur, I wanted his uncle to see him, and say if he is not grown.’

‘Never mind, Violet,’ said Arthur. ‘Nurse vouches for it, that the child who was put through his mother’s wedding-ring grew up to be six feet high!’

‘Now, Arthur! you know it was only her bracelet.’

‘Well, then, our boy ought to be twelve feet high; for if you had not stuffed him out with long clothes, you might put two of him through your bracelet.’

‘If nurse would but have measured him; but she said it was unlucky.’

‘She would have no limits to her myths; however, he may make a show in the world by the time John comes to the christening.’

‘Ah!’ said Violet, with a sweet, timid expression, and a shade of red just tinting her cheek as she turned to John. ‘Arthur said I should ask you to be his godfather.’

‘My first godchild!’ said John. ‘Thank you, indeed; you could hardly have given me a greater pleasure.’

‘Thank you,’ again said Violet. ‘I like so much for you to have him,—you who,’ she hesitated, unable to say the right words, ‘who DID IT before his papa or I saw the little fellow;’ then pausing—’ Oh, Mr. Martindale, Sarah told me all about it, and I have been longing to thank you, only I can’t!’ and her eyes filling with tears, she put her hand into his, glancing at the cathedral cup, which was placed on the mantel-shelf. ‘It was so kind of you to take that.’

‘I thought you would like it,’ said John; ‘and it was the most ecclesiastical thing I could find.’

‘I little thought it would be my Johnnie’s font,’ said Violet, softly. ‘I shall always feel that I have a share in him beyond my fellow-sponsors.’

‘O, yes, he belongs to you,’ said Violet; ‘besides his other godfather will only be Colonel Harrington, and his godmother—you have written to ask your sister, have you not, Arthur?’

‘I’d as soon ask Aunt Nesbit,’ exclaimed Arthur, ‘I do believe one cares as much as

the other.'

'You must send for me when you are well enough to take him to church,' said John.

'That I will. I wish you could stay for it. He will be a month old to-morrow week, but it may wait, I hope, till I can go with him. I must soon get down-stairs again!'

'Ah! you will find the draught trap mended,' said Arthur. 'Brown set to work on it, and the doors shut as tight as a new boot.'

'I am often amused to see Brown scent out and pursue a draught,' said John.

'I have been avoiding Brown ever since Friday,' said Arthur; 'when he met me with a serious "Captain Martindale, sir," and threatened me with your being laid up for the year if I kept you here. I told him it was his fault for letting you come home so early, and condoled with him on your insubordination.'

'Ah! Violet does not know what order Sarah keeps you in?' retorted John.

'I am afraid you have both been very uncomfortable!'

'No, not in the least, Sarah is a paragon, I assure you.'

'She has been very kind to me, but so has every one. No one was ever so well nursed! You must know what a perfect nurse Arthur is!'

Arthur laughed. 'John! Why he would as soon be nursed by a monkey as by me. There he lies on a perfect bank of pillows, coughs whenever you speak to him, and only wants to get rid of every one but Brown. Nothing but consideration for Brown induces him to allow my father or Percy Fotheringham now and then to sit up.'

'A comfortable misanthropical picture,' said John, 'but rather too true. You see, Violet, what talents you have brought out.'

Violet was stroking her husband's hand, and looking very proud and happy. 'Only I was so selfish! Does not he look very pale still?'

'That is not your fault so much as that of some one else,' said John. 'Some one who declares smoking cigars in his den down-stairs refreshes him more than a sensible

walk.'

'Of course,' said Arthur, 'it is only ladies, and men who have nursed themselves as long as you have, who ever go out for a constitutional.'

'He will be on duty to-morrow,' said Violet, 'and so he will be obliged to go out.'

'And you will write to me, Violet,' said John, 'when you are ready? I wish I could expect to hear how you get on, but it is vain to hope for letters from Arthur.'

'I know,' said Violet; 'but only think how good he has been to write to mamma for me. I was so proud when he brought me the letter to sign.'

'Have you any message for me to take?' said John, rising.

'No, thank you—only to thank Lord and Lady Martindale for their kind messages. And oh'—but checking herself—'No, you won't see them.'

'Whom?'

'Lady Elizabeth and Emma. I had such a kind letter from them. So anxious about me, and begging me to let some one write; and I am afraid they'll think it neglectful; but I turn giddy if I sit up, and when I can write, the first letter must be for mamma. So if there is any communication with Rickworth, could you let them know that I am getting better, and thank them very much!'

'Certainly. I will not fail to let them know. Good-bye, Violet, I am glad to have seen you.'

'Good-bye. I hope your cough will be better,' said Violet.

He retained her hand a moment, looked at her fixedly, the sorrowful expression returned, and he hastened away in silence.

Arthur followed, and presently coming back said, 'Poor John! You put him so much in mind of Helen.'

'Poor Mr. Martindale!' exclaimed Violet. 'Am I like her?'

'Not a bit,' said Arthur. 'Helen had light hair and eyes, a fat sort of face, and no

pretence to be pretty—a downright sort of person, not what you would fancy John's taste. If any one else had compared you it would have been no compliment; but he told me you had reminded him of her from the first, and now your white cheeks and sick dress recalled her illness so much, that he could hardly bear it. But don't go and cry about it.'

'No, I won't,' said Violet, submissively, 'but I am afraid it did not suit him for us to be talking nonsense. It is so very sad.'

'Poor John! so it is,' said Arthur, looking at her, as if beginning to realize what his brother had lost. 'However, she was not his wife, though, after all, they were almost as much attached. He has not got over it in the least. This is the first time I have known him speak of it, and he could not get out her name.'

'It is nearly two years ago.'

'Nearly. She died in June. It was that cold late summer, and her funeral was in the middle of a hail-storm, horridly chilly.'

'Where was she buried?'

'At Brogden. Old Mr. Fotheringham was buried there, and she was brought there. I came home for it. What a day it was—the hailstones standing on the grass, and I shall never forget poor John's look—all shivering and shrunk up together.' He shivered at the bare remembrance. 'It put the finishing touch to the damage he had got by staying in England with her all the winter. By night he was frightfully ill—inflammation worse than ever. Poor John! That old curmudgeon of a grandfather has much to answer for, though you ought to be grateful to him, Violet; for I suppose it will end in that boy of yours being his lordship some time or other.'

The next morning was a brisk one with Violet. She wished Arthur not to be anxious about leaving her, and having by no means ceased to think it a treat to see him in uniform, she gloried in being carried to her sofa by so grand and soldierly a figure, and uttered her choicest sentence of satisfaction—'It is like a story!' while his

epaulette was scratching her cheek.

‘I don’t know how to trust you to your own silly devices,’ said he, laying her down, and lingering to settle her pillows and shawls.

‘Wise ones,’ said she. ‘I have so much to do. There’s baby—and there’s Mr. Harding to come, and I want to see the cook—and I should not wonder if I wrote to mamma. So you see ‘tis woman’s work, and you had better not bring your red coat home too soon, or you’ll have to finish the letter!’ she added, with saucy sweetness.

On his return, he found her spread all over with papers, her little table by her side, with the drawer pulled out.

‘Ha! what mischief are you up to? You have not got at those abominable accounts again!’

‘I beg your pardon,’ said she, humbly. ‘Nurse would not let me speak to the cook, but said instead I might write to mamma; so I sent for my little table, but I found the drawer in such disorder, that I was setting it to rights. Who can have meddled with it!’

‘I can tell you that,’ said Arthur. ‘I ran against it, and it came to grief, and there was a spread of all your goods and chattels on the floor.’

‘Oh! I am so glad! I was afraid some of the servants had been at it.’

‘What! aren’t you in a desperate fright? All your secrets displayed like a story, as you are so fond of saying—what’s the name of it—where the husband, no, it was the wife, fainted away, and broke open the desk with her head.’

‘My dear Arthur!’ and Violet laughed so much that nurse in the next room foreboded that he would tire her.

‘I vow it was so! Out came a whole lot of letters from the old love, a colonel in the Peninsula, that her husband had never heard of,—an old lawyer he was.’

‘The husband? What made her marry him?’

‘They were all ruined horse and foot, and the old love was wounded, “kilt”, or disposed of, till he turned up, married to her best friend.’

‘What became of her?’

‘I forget—there was a poisoning and a paralytic stroke in it.’

‘Was there! How delightful! How I should like to read it. What was its name?’

‘I don’t remember. It was a green railway book. Theodora made me read it, and I should know it again if I saw it. I’ll look out for it, and you’ll find I was right about her head. But how now. Haven’t you fainted away all this time?’

‘No; why should I?’

‘How do you know what I may have discovered in your papers? Are you prepared? It is no laughing matter,’ added he, in a Blue Beard tone, and drawing out the paper of calculations, he pointed to the tear marks. ‘Look here. What’s this, I say, what’s this, you naughty child?’

‘I am sorry! it was very silly,’ whispered Violet, in a contrite ashamed way, shrinking back a little.

‘What business had you to break your heart over these trumpery butchers and bakers and candlestick makers?’

‘Only candles, dear Arthur,’ said Violet, meekly, as if in extenuation.

‘But what on earth could you find to cry about?’

‘It was very foolish! but I was in such a dreadful puzzle. I could not make the cook’s accounts and mine agree, and I wanted to be sure whether she really—’

‘Cheated!’ exclaimed Arthur. ‘Well, that’s a blessing!’

‘What is?’ asked the astonished Violet.

‘That I have cleared the house of that intolerable woman!’

‘The cook gone!’ cried Violet, starting, so that her papers slid away, and Arthur

shuffled them up in his hand in renewed confusion. ‘The cook really gone? Oh! I am so glad!’

‘Capital!’ cried Arthur. ‘There was John declaring you would be in despair to find your precious treasure gone.’

‘Oh! I never was more glad! Do tell me! Why did she go?’

‘I had a skrimmage with her about some trout Fitzhugh sent, which I verily believe she ate herself.’

‘Changed with the fishmonger!’

‘I dare say. She sent us in some good-for-nothing wretches, all mud, and vowed these were stale—then grew impertinent.’

‘And talked about the first families?’

‘Exactly so, and when it came to telling me Mrs. Martindale was her mistress, I could stand no more. I paid her her wages, and recommended her to make herself scarce.’

‘When did it happen?’

‘Rather more than a fortnight ago.’

Violet laughed heartily. ‘O-ho! there’s the reason nurse scolds if I dare to ask to speak to the cook. And oh! how gravely Sarah said “yes, ma’am,” to all my messages! How very funny! But how have we been living? When I am having nice things all day long, and giving so much trouble! Oh dear! How uncomfortable you must have been, and your brother too!’

‘Am I not always telling you to the contrary? Sarah made everything look as usual, and I suspect Brown lent a helping hand. John said the coffee was made in some peculiar way Brown learnt in the East, and never practises unless John is very ill, or they are in some uncivilized place; but he told me to take no notice, lest Brown should think it infra dig.’

‘I’m afraid he thought this an uncivilized place. But what a woman Sarah is! She has all the work of the house, and yet she seems to me to be here as much as nurse!’

‘She has got the work of ten horses in her, with the face of a death’s head, and the voice of a walking sepulchre!’

‘But isn’t she a thorough good creature! I can’t think what will become of me without her! It will be like parting with a friend.’

‘What would you part with her for? I thought she was the sheet-anchor.’

‘That she is; but she won’t stay where there are children. She told me so long ago, and only stayed because I begged her for the present. She will go when I am well.’

‘Better give double wages to keep her,’ said Arthur.

‘I’d do anything I could, but I’m afraid. I was quite dreading the getting about again, because I should have to lose Sarah, and to do something or other with that woman.’

‘What possessed you to keep her?’

‘I wasn’t sure about her. Your aunt recommended her, and I thought you might not like—and at first I did not know what things ought to cost, nor how long they ought to last, and that was what I did sums for. Then when I did prove it, I saw only dishonesty in the kitchen, and extravagance and mismanagement of my own.’

‘So the little goose sat and cried!’

‘I could not help it. I felt I was doing wrong; that was the terrible part; and I am glad you know the worst. I have been very weak and silly, and wasted your money sadly, and I did not know how to help it; and that was what made me so miserable. And now, dear Arthur, only say you overlook my blunders, and indeed I’ll try to do better.’

‘Overlook! The only thing I don’t know how to forgive is your having made yourself so ill with this nonsense.’

‘I can’t be sorry for that,’ said Violet, smiling, though the tears came. ‘That has been

almost all happiness. I shall have the heart to try more than ever—and I have some experience; and now that cook is gone, I really shall get on.'

'Promise me you'll never go bothering yourself for nothing another time. Take it easy! That's the only way to get through the world.'

'Ah! I will never be so foolish again. I shall never be afraid to make you attend to my difficulties.'

'Afraid! That was the silliest part of all! But here—will you have another hundred a year at once? and then there'll be no trouble.'

'Thank you, thank you! How kind of you! But do you know, I should like to try with what I have. I see it might be made to do, and I want to conquer the difficulty; if I can't, I will ask you for more.'

'Well, that may be best. I could hardly spare a hundred pounds without giving up one of the horses; and I want to see you riding again.'

'Besides, this illness must have cost you a terrible quantity of money. But I dare say I shall find the outgoings nothing to what the cook made them.' And she was taking up the accounts, when he seized them, crumpling them in his hand. 'Nonsense! Let them alone, or I shall put them in the fire at once.'

'Oh, don't do that, pray!' cried she, starting, 'or I shall be ruined. Oh, pray!'

'Very well;' and rising, and making a long arm, he deposited them on the top of a high wardrobe. 'There's the way to treat obstinate women. You may get them down when you can go after them—I shan't.'

'Ah! there's baby awake!'

'So, I shall go after that book at the library; and then I've plenty to tell you of inquiries for Mrs. Martindale. Good-bye, again.'

Violet received her babe into her arms with a languid long-drawn sigh, as of one wearied out with happiness. 'That he should have heard my confession, and only pet

me the more! Foolish, wasteful thing that I am. Oh, babe! if I could only make you grow and thrive, no one would ever be so happy as your mamma.'

Perhaps she thought so still more some hours later, when she awoke from a long sleep, and saw Arthur reading "Emilia Wyndham", and quite ready to defend his assertion that the wife broke open the desk with her head.

CHAPTER 3

But there was one fairy who was offended because she was not invited to the Christening.—MOTHER BUNCH

Theodora had spent the winter in trying not to think of her brother.

She read, she tried experiments, she taught at the school, she instructed the dumb boy, talked to the curate, and took her share of such county gaieties as were not beneath the house of Martindale; but at every tranquil moment came the thought, 'What are Arthur and his wife doing!'

There were rumours of the general admiration of Mrs. Martindale, whence she deduced vanity and extravagance; but she heard nothing more till Jane Gardner, a correspondent, who persevered in spite of scanty and infrequent answers, mentioned her call on poor Mrs. Martindale, who, she said, looked sadly altered, unwell, and out of spirits. Georgina had tried to persuade her to come out, but without success; she ought to have some one with her, for she seemed to be a good deal alone, and no doubt it was trying; but, of course, she would soon have her mother with her.

He leaves her alone—he finds home dull! Poor Arthur! A moment of triumph was followed by another of compunction, since this was not a doll that he was neglecting, but a living creature, who could feel pain. But the anticipation of meeting Mrs. Moss, after all those vows against her, and the idea of seeing his house filled with vulgar relations, hardened Theodora against the wife, who had thus gained her point.

Thus came the morning, when her father interrupted breakfast with an exclamation of dismay, and John's tidings were communicated.

I wish I had been kind to her! shot across Theodora's mind with acute pain, and the image of Arthur in grief swallowed up everything else. 'I will go with you, papa—you will go at once!'

'Poor young thing!' said Lord Martindale; 'she was as pretty a creature as I ever beheld, and I do believe, as good. Poor Arthur, I am glad he has John with him.'

Lady Martindale wondered how John came there,—and remarks ensued on his imprudence in risking a spring in England. To Theodora this seemed indifference to Arthur's distress, and she impatiently urged her father to take her to him at once.

He would not have delayed had Arthur been alone; but since John was there, he thought their sudden arrival might be more encumbering than consoling, and decided to wait for a further account, and finish affairs that he could not easily leave.

Theodora believed no one but herself could comfort Arthur, and was exceedingly vexed. She chafed against her father for attending to his business—against her mother for thinking of John; and was in charity with no one except Miss Piper, who came out of Mrs. Nesbit's room red with swallowing down tears, and with the under lady's-maid, who could not help begging to hear if Mrs. Martindale was so ill, for Miss Standaloft said, 'My lady had been so nervous and hysterical in her own room, that she had been forced to give her camphor and sal volatile.'

Never had Theodora been more surprised than to hear this of the mother whom she only knew as calm, majestic, and impassible. With a sudden impulse, she hastened to her room. She was with Mrs. Nesbit, and Theodora following, found her reading aloud, without a trace of emotion. No doubt it was a figment of Miss Standaloft, and there was a sidelong glance of satisfaction in her aunt's eyes, which made Theodora so indignant, that she was obliged to retreat without a word.

Her own regret and compassion for so young a creature thus cut off were warm and

keen, especially when the next post brought a new and delightful hope, the infant, of whose life John had yesterday despaired, was said to be improving. Arthur's child! Here was a possession for Theodora, an object for the affections so long yearning for something to love. She would bring it home, watch over it, educate it, be all the world to Arthur, doubly so for his son's sake. She dreamt of putting his child into his arms, and bidding him live for it, and awoke clasping the pillow!

What were her feelings when she heard Violet was out of danger? For humanity's sake and for Arthur's, she rejoiced; but it was the downfall of a noble edifice. 'How that silly young mother would spoil the poor child!'

'My brothers' had always been mentioned in Theodora's prayer, from infancy. It was the plural number, but the strength and fervency of petition were reserved for one; and with him she now joined the name of his child. But how pray for the son without the mother? It was positively a struggle; for Theodora had a horror of mockery and formality; but the duty was too clear, the evil which made it distasteful, too evident, not to be battled with; she remembered that she ought to pray for all mankind, even those who had injured her, and, on these terms, she added her brother's wife. It was not much from her heart; a small beginning, but still it was a beginning, that might be blessed in time.

Lord Martindale wished the family to have gone to London immediately, but Mrs. Nesbit set herself against any alteration in their plans being made for the sake of Arthur's wife. They were to have gone only in time for the first drawing-room, and she treated as a personal injury the proposal to leave her sooner than had been originally intended; making her niece so unhappy that Lord Martindale had to yield. John's stay in London was a subject of much anxiety; and while Mrs. Nesbit treated it as an absurd trifling with his own health, and his father reproached himself for being obliged to leave Arthur to him, Theodora suffered from complicated jealousy. Arthur seemed to want John more than her, John risked himself in London, in order

to be with Arthur and his wife.

She was very eager for his coming; and when she expected the return of the carriage which was sent to meet him at the Whitford station, she betook herself to the lodge, intending him to pick her up there, that she might skim the cream of his information.

The carriage appeared, but it seemed empty. That dignified, gentlemanly personage, Mr. Brown, alighted from the box, and advanced with affability, replying to her astonished query, ‘Mr. Martindale desired me to say he should be at home by dinner-time, ma’am. He left the train at the Enderby station, and is gone round by Rickworth Priory, with a message from Mrs. Martindale to Lady Elizabeth Brandon.’

Theodora stood transfixed; and Brown, a confidential and cultivated person, thought she waited for more information.

‘Mr. Martindale has not much cough, ma’am, and I hope coming out of London will remove it entirely. I think it was chiefly excitement and anxiety that brought on a recurrence of it, for his health is decidedly improved. He desired me to mention that Mrs. Martindale is much better. She is on the sofa to-day for the first time; and he saw her before leaving.’

‘Do you know how the little boy is?’ Theodora could not help asking.

‘He is a little stronger, thank you, ma’am,’ said Brown, with much interest; ‘he has cried less these last few days. He is said to be extremely like Mrs. Martindale.’

Brown remounted to his place, the carriage drove on, and Theodora impetuously walked along the avenue.

‘That man is insufferable! Extremely like Mrs. Martindale! Servants’ gossip! How could I go and ask him? John has perfectly spoilt a good servant in him! But John spoils everybody. The notion of that girl sending him on her messages! John, who is treated like something sacred by my father and mother themselves! Those damp Rickworth meadows! How could Arthur allow it? It would serve him right if he was

to marry Emma Brandon after all!'

She would not go near her mother, lest she should give her aunt the pleasure of hearing where he was gone; but as she was coming down, dressed for dinner, she met her father in the hall, uneasily asking a servant whether Mr. Martindale was come.

'Arthur's wife has sent him with a message to Rickworth,' she said.

'John? You don't mean it. You have not seen him?'

'No; he went round that way, and sent Brown home. He said he should be here by dinner-time, but it is very late. Is it not a strange proceeding of hers, to be sending him about the country!'

'I don't understand it. Where's Brown?'

'Here's a fly coming up the avenue. He is come at last.'

Lord Martindale hastened down the steps; Theodora came no further than the door, in so irritated a state that she did not like John's cheerful alacrity of step and greeting. 'She is up to-day, she is getting better,' were the first words she heard. 'Well, Theodora, how are you?' and he kissed her with more warmth than she returned.

'Did I hear you had been to Rickworth?' said his father.

'Yes; I sent word by Brown. Poor Violet is still so weak that she cannot write, and the Brandons have been anxious about her; so she asked me to let them know how she was, if I had the opportunity, and I came round that way. I wanted to know when they go to London; for though Arthur is as attentive as possible, I don't think Violet is in a condition to be left entirely to him. When do you go?'

'Not till the end of May—just before the drawing-room,' said Lord Martindale.

'I go back when they can take the boy to church. Is my mother in the drawing-room? I'll just speak to her, and dress—it is late I see.'

‘How well he seems,’ said Lord Martindale, as John walked quickly on before.

‘There was a cough,’ said Theodora.

‘Yes; but so cheerful. I have not seen him so animated for years. He must be better!’

His mother was full of delight. ‘My dear John, you look so much better! Where have you been?’

‘At Rickworth. I went to give Lady Elizabeth an account of Violet. She is much better.’

‘And you have been after sunset in that river fog! My dear John!’

‘There was no fog; and it was a most pleasant drive. I had no idea Rickworth was so pretty. Violet desired me to thank you for your kind messages. You should see her to-day, mother; she would be quite a study for you; she looks so pretty on her pillows, poor thing! and Arthur is come out quite a new character—as an excellent nurse.’

‘Poor thing! I am glad she is recovering,’ said Lady Martindale. ‘It was very kind in you to stay with Arthur. I only hope you have not been hurting yourself.’

‘No, thank you; I came away in time, I believe: but I should have been glad to have stayed on, unless I made room for some one of more use to Violet.’

‘I wish you had come home sooner. We have had such a pleasant dinner-party. You would have liked to meet the professor.’

It was not the first time John had been sensible that that drawing-room was no place for sympathy; and he felt it the more now, because he had been living in such entire participation of his brother’s hopes and fears, that he could hardly suppose any one could be less interested in the mother and child in Cadogan-place. He came home, wishing Theodora would go and relieve Arthur of some of the care Violet needed in her convalescence; and he was much disappointed by her apparent indifference—in reality, a severe fit of perverse jealousy.

All dinner-time she endured a conversation on the subjects for which she least cared; nay, she talked ardently about the past dinner-party, for the very purpose of preventing John from suspecting that her anxiety had prevented her from enjoying it. And when she left the dining-room, she felt furious at knowing that now her father would have all the particulars to himself, so that none would transpire to her.

She longed so much to hear of Arthur and his child, that when John came into the drawing-room she could have asked! But he went to greet his aunt, who received him thus:

‘Well, I am glad to see you at last. You ought to have good reasons for coming to England for the May east winds, and then exposing yourself to them in London!’

‘I hope I did not expose myself: I only went out three or four times.’

‘I know you are always rejoiced to be as little at home as possible.’

‘I could not be spared sooner, ma’am.’

‘Spared? I think you have come out in a new capacity.’

John never went up his aunt without expecting to undergo a penance.

‘I was sorry no one else could be with Arthur, but being there, I could not leave him.’

‘And your mother tells me you are going back again.’

‘Yes, to stand godfather.’

‘To the son and heir, as they called him in the paper. I gave Arthur credit for better taste; I suppose it was done by some of her connections?’

‘I was that connection,’ said John.

‘Oh! I suppose you know what expectations you will raise?’

John making no answer, she grew more angry. ‘This one, at least, is never likely to be heir, from what I hear; it is only surprising that it is still alive.’

How Theodora hung upon the answer, her very throat aching with anxiety, but hardening her face because John looked towards her.

‘We were very much afraid for him at first,’ he said, ‘but they now think there is no reason he should not do well. He began to improve from the time she could attend to him.’

A deep sigh from his mother startled John, and recalled the grief of his childhood—the loss of two young sisters who had died during her absence on the continent. He crossed over and stood near her, between her and his aunt, who, in agitated haste to change the conversation, called out to ask her about some club-book. For once she did not attend; and while Theodora came forward and answered Mrs. Nesbit, she tremulously asked John if he had seen the child.

‘Only once, before he was an hour old. He was asleep when I came away; and, as Arthur says, it is a serious thing to disturb him, he cries so much.’

‘A little low melancholy wailing,’ she said, with a half sob. But Mrs. Nesbit would not leave her at peace any longer, and her voice came beyond the screen of John’s figure:—

‘Lady Martindale, my dear, have you done with those books! They ought to be returned.’

‘Which, dear aunt?’ And Lady Martindale started up as if she had been caught off duty, and, with a manifest effort, brought her wandering thoughts back again, to say which were read and which were unread.

John did not venture to revert to a subject that affected his mother so strongly; but he made another attempt upon his sister, when he could speak to her apart. ‘Arthur has been wondering not to hear from you.’

‘Every one has been writing,’ she answered, coldly.

‘He wants some relief from his constant attendance,’ continued John; ‘I was afraid at

first it would be too much for him, sitting up three nights consecutively, and even now he has not at all recovered his looks.'

'Is he looking ill?' said Theodora.

'He has gone through a great deal, and when she tries to make him go out, he only goes down to smoke. You would do a great deal of good if you were there.'

Theodora would not reply. For Arthur to ask her to come and be godmother was the very thing she wished; but she would not offer at John's bidding, especially when Arthur was more than ever devoted to his wife; so she made no sign; and John repented of having said so much, thinking that, in such a humour, the farther she was from them the better.

Yet what he had said might have worked, had not a history of the circumstances of Violet's illness come round to her by way of Mrs. Nesbit. John had told his father; Lord Martindale told his wife; Lady Martindale told her aunt, under whose colouring the story reached Theodora, that Arthur's wife had been helpless and inefficient, had done nothing but cry over her household affairs, could not bear to be left alone, and that the child's premature birth had been occasioned by a fit of hysterics because Arthur had gone out fishing. No wonder Theodora pitied the one brother, and thought the other infatuated. To write to Arthur was out of the question; and she could only look forward to consoling him when the time for London should come. Nor was she much inclined to compassionate John, when, as he said, the east wind—as his aunt said, the London fog—as she thought, the Rickworth meadows—brought on such an accession of cough that he was obliged to confine himself to his two rooms, where he felt unusually solitary.

She went in one day to carry him the newspaper. 'I am writing to Arthur,' he said, 'to tell him that I shall not be able to be in London next Sunday; do you like to put in a note?'

'No, I thank you.'

‘You have no message?’

‘None.’

He paused and looked at her. ‘I wish you would write,’ he said. ‘Arthur has been watching eagerly for your congratulation.’

‘He does not give much encouragement,’ said Theodora, moving to the door.

‘I wish he was a letter writer! After being so long with them, I don’t like hearing nothing more; but his time has been so much engrossed that he could hardly have written at first. I believe the first letter he looked for was from you.’

‘I don’t know what to say. Other people have said all the commonplace things.’

‘You would not speak in that manner—you who used to be so fond of Arthur—if you by any means realized what he has gone through.’

Theodora was touched, but would not show it. ‘He does not want me now,’ she said, and was gone, and then her lips relaxed, and she breathed a heavy sigh.

John sighed too. He could not understand her, and was sensible that his own isolation was as a consequence of having lived absorbed in his affection and his grief, without having sought the intimacy of his sister. His brother’s family cares had, for the first time, led him to throw himself into the interests of those around him, and thus aroused from the contemplation of his loss, he began to look with regret on opportunities neglected and influence wasted. The stillness of his own room did not as formerly suffice to him; the fears and hopes he had lately been sharing rose more vividly before him, and he watched eagerly for the reply to his letter.

It came, not from Arthur, but in the pointed style of Violet’s hardest steel pen, when Matilda’s instructions were most full in her mind; stiff, cramped, and formal, as if it had been a great effort to write it, and John was grieved to find that she was still in no state for exertion. She had scarcely been down-stairs, and neither she nor the

baby were as yet likely to be soon able to leave the house, in spite of all the kind care of Lady Elizabeth and Miss Brandon. Violet made numerous apologies for the message, which she had little thought would cause Mr. Martindale to alter his route.

In fact, those kind friends had been so much affected by John's account of Violet's weak state, under no better nursing than Arthur's, that, as he had hoped, they had hastened their visit to London, and were now settled as near to her as possible, spending nearly the whole of their time with her. Emma almost idolized the baby, and was delighted at Arthur's grateful request that she would be its sponsor, and Violet was as happy in their company as the restlessness of a mind which had not yet recovered its tone, would allow her to be.

In another fortnight John wrote to say that he found he had come home too early, and must go to the Isle of Wight till the weather was warmer. In passing through London, he would come to Cadogan-place, and it was decided that he should arrive in time to go with the baby to church on the Tuesday, and proceed the next morning.

He arrived as Violet came down to greet her party of sponsors. Never had she looked prettier than when her husband led her into the room, her taper figure so graceful in her somewhat languid movements, and her countenance so sweetly blending the expression of child and mother. Each white cheek was tinged with exquisite rose colour, and the dark liquid eyes and softly smiling mouth had an affectionate pensiveness far lovelier than her last year's bloom, and yet there was something painful in that beauty—it was too like the fragility of the flower fading under one hour's sunshine; and there was a sadness in seeing the matronly stamp on a face so young that it should have shown only girlhood's freedom from care. Arthur indeed was boasting of the return of the colour, which spread and deepened as he drew attention to it; but John and Lady Elizabeth agreed, as they walked to church, that it was the very token of weakness, and that with every kind intention Arthur did not know how to take care of her—how should he?

The cheeks grew more brilliant and burning at church, for on being carried to the font, the baby made his doleful notes heard, and when taken from his nurse, they rose into a positive roar. Violet looked from him to his father's face, and there saw so much discomposure that her wretchedness was complete, enhanced as it was by a sense of wickedness in not being able to be happy and grateful. Just as when a few days previously she had gone to return thanks, she had been in a nervous state of fluttering and trembling that allowed her to dwell on nothing but the dread of fainting away. The poor girl's nerves had been so completely overthrown, that even her powers of mind seemed to be suffering, and her agitated manner quite alarmed Lady Elizabeth. She was in good hands, however; Lady Elizabeth went home with her, kept every one else away, and nursing her in her own kind way, brought her back to common sense, for in the exaggeration of her weak spirits, she had been feeling as if it was she who had been screaming through the service, and seriously vexing Arthur.

He presently looked in himself to say the few fond merry words that were only needed to console her, and she was then left alone to rest, not tranquil enough for sleep, but reading hymns, and trying to draw her thoughts up to what she thought they ought to be on the day of her child's baptismal vows.

It was well for her that the christening dinner (a terror to her imagination) had been deferred till the family should be in town, and that she had no guest but John, who was very sorry to see how weary and exhausted she looked, as if it was a positive effort to sit at the head of the table.

When the two brothers came up to the drawing-room, they found her on the sofa.

'Regularly done for!' said Arthur, sitting down by her. 'You ought to have gone to bed, you perverse woman.'

'I shall come to life after tea,' said she, beginning to rise as signs of its approach were heard.

‘Lie still, I say,’ returned Arthur, settling the cushion. ‘Do you think no one can make tea but yourself! Out with the key, and lie still.’

‘I hope, Violet,’ said John, ‘you did not think the Red Republicans had been in your drawers and boxes. I am afraid Arthur may have cast the blame of his own doings on the absent, though I assure you I did my best to protect them.’

‘Indeed he did you more justice,’ said Violet, ‘he told me the box was your setting to rights, and the drawer his. It was very honest of him, for I must say the box did you most credit.’

‘As to the drawer,’ said Arthur, ‘I wish I had put it into the fire at once! Those accounts are a monomania! She has been worse from the day she got hold of that book of hers again, and the absurd part of it is that these are all bills that she pays!’

‘Oh! they are all comfortable now,’ said Violet.

‘And what did you say to Arthur’s bold stroke!’ said John.

‘Oh! I never laughed more in my life.’

‘Ah ha’’ said Arthur, ‘it was all my admirable sagacity! Why, John, the woman was an incubus saddled upon us by Miss Standaloft, that this poor silly child did not know how to get rid of, though she was cheating us out of house and home. Never were such rejoicings as when she found the Old Man of the Sea was gone!’

‘It is quite a different thing now,’ said Violet. ‘Nurse found me such a nice niece of her own, who does not consume as much in a fortnight as that dreadful woman did in a week. Indeed, my great book has some satisfaction in it now.’

‘And yet he accuses it of having thrown you back.’

‘Everything does that!’ said Arthur. ‘She will extract means of tiring herself out of anything—pretends to be well, and then is good for nothing!’

‘Arthur! Arthur! do you know what you are doing with the tea?’ cried Violet, starting up. He has put in six shellfuls for three people, and a lump of sugar, and

now was shutting up the unfortunate teapot without one drop of water!' And gaily driving him away, she held up the sugar-tongs with the lump of sugar in his face, while he laughed and yielded the field, saying, disdainfully, 'Woman's work.'

'Under the circumstances,' said John, 'putting in no water was the best thing he could do.'

'Ay,' said Arthur, 'a pretty fellow you for a West Indian proprietor, to consume neither sugar nor cigars.'

'At this rate,' said John, 'they are the people to consume nothing. There was such an account of the Barbuda property the other day, that my father is thinking of going to see what is to be done with it.'

'No bad plan for your next winter,' said Arthur. 'Now, Violet, to your sofa! You have brewed your female potion in your female fashion, and may surely leave your betters to pour it out.'

'No, indeed! How do I know what you may serve us up?' said she, quite revived with laughing. 'I won't give up my place.'

'Quite right, Violet,' said John, 'don't leave me to his mercy. Last time he made tea for me, it consisted only of the other ingredient, hot water, after which I took the law into my own hands for our mutual benefit. Pray what became of him after I was gone?'

'I was obliged to have him up into my room, and give him his tea properly there, or I believe he would have existed on nothing but cigars.'

'Well, I shall have some opinion of you when you make him leave off cigars.'

'Catch her!' quietly responded Arthur.

'There can't be a worse thing for a man that gets bad coughs.'

'That's all smoke, Violet,' said Arthur. 'Don't tell her so, or I shall never have any peace.'

‘At least, I advise you to open the windows of his den before you show my mother and Theodora the house.’

‘As to Theodora! what is the matter with her!’ said Arthur.

‘I don’t know,’ said John.

‘In one of her moods? Well, we shall have her here in ten days’ time, and I shall know what to be at with her.’

‘I know she likes babies,’ said Violet, with confidence. She had quite revived, and was lively and amused; but as soon as tea was over, Arthur insisted on her going to bed.

The loss of her gentle mirth seemed to be felt, for a long silence ensued; Arthur leaning against the mantel-shelf, solacing himself with a low whistle, John sitting in meditation. At last he looked up, saying, ‘I wish you would all come and stay with me at Ventnor.’

‘Thank you; but you see there’s no such thing as my going. Fitzhugh is in Norway, and till he comes back, I can’t get away for more than a day or two.’

‘Suppose,’ said John, rather doubtingly; ‘what should you think of putting Violet under my charge, and coming backwards and forwards yourself?’

‘Why, Harding did talk of sea air, but she did not take to the notion; and I was not sorry; for, of all things I detest, the chief is sticking up in a sea place, with nothing to do. But it is wretched work going on as we do, though they say there is nothing the matter but weakness. I verily believe it is all that child’s eternal noise that regularly wears her out. She is upset in a moment; and whenever she is left alone, she sets to work on some fidget or other about the house, that makes her worse than before.’

‘Going from home would be the best cure for that.’

‘I suppose it would. I meant her to have gone out with my mother, but that can’t be anyway now! The sea would give her a chance; I could run down pretty often; and

you would see that she did not tire herself.'

'I would do my best to take care of her, if you would trust her to me.'

'I know you would; and it is very kind in you to think of it.'

'I will find a house, and write as soon as it is ready. Do you think the end of the week would be too soon for her? I am sure London is doing her harm.'

'Whenever you please; and yet I am sorry. I wanted my father to have seen the boy; but perhaps he had better look a little more respectable, and learn to hold his tongue first. Besides, how will it be taken, her going out of town just as they come up?'

'I rather think it would be better for her not to meet them till she is stronger. Her continual anxiety and effort to please would be too much strain.'

'Very likely; and I am sure I won't keep her here to expose her to Miss Martindale's airs. She shall come as soon as you like.'

Arthur was strengthened in his determination by the first sound that met him on going up-stairs—the poor babe's lamentable voice; and by finding Violet, instead of taking the rest she so much needed, vainly trying to still the feeble moaning. He was positively angry; and almost as if the poor little thing had been wilfully persecuting her, declared it would be the death of her, and peremptorily ordered it up-stairs; the nurse only too glad to carry it off, and agreeing with him that it was doing more harm to its mother than she did good to it. Violet, in submissive misery, gave it up, and hid her face. One of her chief subjects for self-torment was an imagination that Arthur did not like the baby, and was displeased with its crying; and she felt utterly wretched, hardly able to bear the cheerful tone in which he spoke! 'Well, Violet, we shall soon set you up. It is all settled. You are to go, at the end of the week, to stay with John in the Isle of Wight.'

'Go away?' said Violet, in an extinguished voice.

'Yes; it is the very thing for you. I shall stay here, and go backwards and forwards.

Well, what is it now?'

She was starting up, as the opening of the door let out another scream. 'There he is still! Let me go to him for one minute.'

'Folly!' said Arthur, impatiently. 'There's no peace day or night. I won't stand it any longer. You are half dead already. I will not have it go on. Lie down; go to sleep directly, and don't trouble your head about anything more till morning.'

Like a good child, though choking with tears, she obeyed the first mandate; and presently was rather comforted by his listening at the foot of the stairs, and reporting that the boy seemed to be quiet at last. The rest of the order it was not in her power to obey; she was too much fatigued to sleep soundly, or to understand clearly. Most of the night was spent in broken dreams of being separated from her child and her husband, and wakening to the knowledge that something was going to happen.

At last came sounder slumbers; and she awoke with an aching head, but to clearer perceptions. And when Arthur, before going down to breakfast, asked what she wished him to say to John, she answered: 'It is very kind of him—but you never meant me to go without you?'

'I shall take you there, and run down pretty often; and John has been used to coddling himself all his life, so of course he will know how to take care of you.'

'How kind he is, but I don't'—she broke off, and looked at the little pinched face and shrivelled arms of the tiny creature, which she pressed more closely to her; then, with a hesitating voice, 'Only, if it would do baby good!'

'Of course it would. He can't be well while things go on at this rate. Only ask Harding.'

'I wonder whether Mr. Martindale knew it was what Mr. Harding recommended! But you would be by yourself.'

'As if I had not taken care of myself for three-and-twenty years without your help!'

‘And all your party will be in town, so that you will not miss me.’

‘I shall be with you very often. Shall I tell John you accept?’

‘Tell him it is very kind, and I am so much obliged to him,’ said Violet, unable to speak otherwise than disconsolately.

Accordingly the brothers agreed that Arthur should bring her to Ventnor on Saturday, if, as John expected, he could be prepared to receive her; placing much confidence in Brown’s savoir faire, though Brown was beyond measure amazed at such a disarrangement of his master’s methodical habits; and Arthur himself gave a commiserating shake of the head as he observed that there was no accounting for tastes, but if John chose to shut himself up in a lodging with the most squallingest babby in creation, he was not the man to gainsay him; and further reflected, that if a man must be a younger son, John was a model elder brother.

Poor Violet! Her half-recovered state must be an excuse for her dire consternation on hearing it was definitively settled that she was to be carried off to Ventnor in four days’ time! How arrange for Arthur? Where find a nursemaid? What would become of the baby so far from Mr. Harding? The Isle of Wight seemed the ends of the earth—out of England! Helpless and overpowered, she was in despair; it came to Arthur’s asking, in displeasure, what she wanted—whether she meant to go or not. She thought of her drooping infant, and said at once she would go.

‘Well, then, what’s all this about?’

Then came tears, and Arthur went away, declaring she did not know herself what she would be at. He had really borne patiently with much plaintiveness, and she knew it. She accused herself of ingratitude and unreasonableness, and went into a fresh agony on that score; but soon a tap at the door warned her to strive for composure. It was Sarah, and Violet felt sure that the dreaded moment was come of her giving warning; but it was only a message. ‘If you please, ma’am, there’s a young person wants to see you.’

‘Come as a nursery maid?’ said Violet, springing up in her nervous agitated way. ‘Do you think she will do?’

‘I don’t think nothing of her,’ said Sarah, emphatically. ‘Don’t you go and be in a way, ma’am; there’s no hurry.’

‘Yes, but there is, Sarah. Baby and I are to go next Saturday to the Isle of Wight, and I can’t take old nurse. I must have some one.’

‘You won’t get nobody by hurrying,’ said Sarah.

‘But what’s to be done, Sarah? I can’t bear giving the dear baby to a stranger, but I can’t help it.’

‘As for that, said Sarah, gloomily, ‘I don’t see but I could look after Master John as well as any that is like to offer for the present.’

‘You! Oh, that would be nice! But I thought you did not like children?’

‘I don’t, but I don’t mind while he is too little to make a racket, and worrit one out of one’s life. It is only for the present, till you can suit yourself, ma’am—just that you may not be lost going into foreign parts with a stranger.’

Sarah had been nursing the baby every leisure moment, and had, during the worst part of Violet’s illness, had more to do with him than the regular nurse. This was happily settled, and all at which Violet still demurred was how the house and its master should be provided for in their absence; to which Sarah replied, ‘Mary would do well enough for he;’ and before Violet knew to which she must suppose the pronoun referred, there was a new-comer, Lady Elizabeth, telling her that Arthur had just been to beg her to come to her, saying he feared he had hurried her and taken her by surprise.

Under such kind soothing Violet’s rational mind returned. She ceased to attempt to put herself into a vehement state of preparation, and began to take so cheerful a view of affairs that she met Arthur again in excellent spirits.

Emma Brandon pitied her for being left alone with Mr. Martindale, but this was no subject of dread to her, and she confessed that she was relieved to escape the meeting with the rest of the family. The chief regret was, that the two friends would miss the constant intercourse with which they had flattered themselves—the only thing that made London endurable to poor Emma. She amused Violet with her lamentations over her gaieties, and her piteous accounts of the tedium of parties and balls; whereas Violet declared that she liked them very much.

‘It was pleasant to walk about with Arthur and hear his droll remarks, and she liked seeing people look nice and well dressed.’

‘Ah! you are better off. You are not obliged to dance, and you are safe, too. Now, whenever any one asks to be introduced to me I am sure he wants the Priory, and feel bound to guard it.’

‘And so you don’t like any one, and find it stupid?’

‘So I do, of course, and I hope I always shall. But oh! Violet, I have not told you that I saw that lady again this morning at the early service. She had still her white dress on, I am sure it is for Whitsuntide; and her face is so striking—so full of thought and earnestness, just like what one would suppose a novice. I shall take her for my romance, and try to guess at her history.’

‘To console you for your godson going away?’

‘Ah! it won’t do that! But it will be something to think of, and I will report to you if I make out any more about her. And mind you give me a full account of the godson.’

Arthur wished the journey well over; he had often felt a sort of superior pity for travellers with a baby in company, and did not relish the prospect; but things turned out well; he found an acquaintance, and travelled with him in a different carriage, and little Johnnie, lulled by the country air, slept so much that Violet had leisure to enjoy the burst into country scenery, and be refreshed by the glowing beauty of the green meadows, the budding woods, and the brilliant feathery broom blossoms that

gilded the embankments. At Winchester Arthur came to her window, and asked if she remembered last year.

‘It is the longest year of my life,’ said she. ‘Oh, don’t laugh as if I had made a bad compliment, but so much has happened!’ There was no time for more; and as she looked out at the cathedral as they moved on, she recollected her resolutions, and blamed herself for her failures, but still in a soothed and happier frame of hope.

The crossing was her delight, her first taste of sea. There was a fresh wind, cold enough to make Arthur put on his great-coat, but to her it brought a delicious sense of renewed health and vigour, as she sat inhaling it, charmed to catch a drop of spray on her face, her eyes and cheeks brightening and her spirits rising.

The sparkling Solent, the ships at Spithead, the hills and wooded banks, growing more defined before her; the town of Ryde and its long pier, were each a new wonder and delight, and she exclaimed with such ecstasy, and laughed so like the joyous girl she used to be, that Arthur felt old times come back; and when he handed her out of the steamer he entirely forgot the baby.

At last she was tired with pleasure, and lay back in the carriage in languid enjoyment; fields, cottages, hawthorns, lilacs, and glimpses of sea flitting past her like pictures in a dream, a sort of waking trance that would have been broken by speaking or positive thinking.

They stopped at a gate: she looked up and gave a cry of delight. Such a cottage as she and Annette had figured in dreams of rural bliss, gable-ends, thatch, verandah overrun with myrtle, rose, and honeysuckle, a little terrace, a steep green slope of lawn shut in with laburnum and lilac, in the flush of the lovely close of May, a view of the sea, a green wicket, bowered over with clematis, and within it John Martindale, his look of welcome overpowering his usual gravity, so as to give him an air of gladness such as she had never seen in him before.

CHAPTER 4

The inmost heart of man if glad Partakes a livelier cheer, And eyes that cannot but be sad Let fall a brightened tear. Since thy return, through days and weeks Of hope that grew by stealth, How many wan and faded cheeks Have kindled into health. —WORDSWORTH'S Ode to May

'I say,' called Arthur, standing half in and half out of the French window, as Sarah paced round the little garden, holding a parasol over her charge, 'if that boy kicks up a row at night, don't mind Mrs. Martindale. Carry him off, and lock the door. D'ye hear?'

'Yes, sir,' said the unmoved Sarah.

'Stern, rugged nurse!' said Arthur, drawing in his head. 'Your boy ought to be virtue itself, Violet. Now for you, John, if you see her at those figures, take them away. Don't let her think what two and two make.'

'You are like one of my little sisters giving her doll to the other to keep,' said Violet.

'Some folks say it is a doll, don't they, John?'

'Well, I will try to take as much care of your doll as she does of hers,' said John, smiling.

'Good-bye, then! I wish I could stay!'

Violet went to the gate with him, while John stood at the window watching the slender girlish figure under the canopy of clematis, as she stood gazing after her husband, then turned and slowly paced back again, her eyes on the ground, and her face rather sad and downcast.

That pretty creature was a strange new charge for him, and he dreaded her pining almost as he would have feared the crying of a child left alone with him.

'Well, Violet,' said he, cheerfully, 'we must do our best. What time would you like to take a drive?'

‘Any time, thank you,’ said she, gratefully, but somewhat plaintively; ‘but do not let me be a trouble to you. Sarah is going to hire a chair for me to go down to the beach. I only want not to be in your way.’

‘I have nothing to do. You know I am no great walker, and I am glad of an excuse for setting up my carriage. Shall we dine early, and go out when the sun is not so high?’

‘Thank you! that will be delightful. I want to see those beautiful places that I was too tired to look at on Saturday.’

Sarah’s rounds again brought her in sight; Violet crossed the grass, and the next moment was under the verandah with the little long-robed chrysalis shape in her arms, declaring he was growing quite good, and getting fat already; and though to John’s eyes the face was as much as ever like a very wizened old man, he could not but feel heartfelt pleasure in seeing her for once enjoying a young mother’s exultation.

‘Poor thing!’ said he to himself, as she carried the babe upstairs, ‘she has done too much, thought too much, felt too much for her years. Life has begun before she has strength for the heat and burthen of the day. The only hope is in keeping those overtasked spirits at rest, guarding her from care, and letting her return to childhood. And should this work fall on me, broken down in spirits and energy, with these long-standing habits of solitude and silence? If Helen was but here!’

He was relieved by Violet’s reappearance at dinner-time, full of smiles, proud of Johnnie’s having slept half the morning, and delighted with “Mary Barton”, which, on his system of diversion for her mind, he had placed in her way. She was amazed and charmed at finding that he could discuss the tale with interest and admiration.

‘Arthur calls such books trash,’ said she.

‘He reads them, though.’

‘Yes, he always reads the third volume while I read the first.’

‘The best way. I always begin at the end to judge whether a book is worth reading.’

‘I saw a French book on the table; are you reading it?’

‘Consulting it. You are welcome to it.’

‘I think,’ she said, timidly, ‘I ought to read some history and French, or I shall never be fit to teach my little boy.’

‘I have a good many books at home, entirely at your service.’

‘Thank you, thank you! I thought last winter if I could but have read, I should not have minded half so much.’

‘And why could you not?’

‘I had finished all my own books, and they cost too much to hire, so there was only a great Roman History that Arthur had had at school. I could not read more than thirty pages of that a day, it was so stupid.’

‘And you read those as a task! Very wise!’

‘Matilda said my education was incomplete, and she feared I should be found deficient; and mamma told me to make a point of reading something improving every day, but I have not begun again.’

‘I have some work on my hands,’ said John. ‘I was with Percy Fotheringham eight years ago in Syria and Asia Minor. He has gone over the same places a second time, and has made the journals up into a book on the Crusaders, which he has sent from Constantinople for me to get ready for publication. I shall come to you for help.’

‘Me! How can I?’ exclaimed Violet, colouring with astonishment.

‘Let us enjoy our holiday first,’ he replied, smiling. ‘See there.’

A low open carriage and a pair of ponies came to the gate; Violet was enchanted, and stood admiring and patting them, while John looked on amused, telling her he was glad she approved, for he had desired Brown to find something in which Captain Martindale would not be ashamed to see her.

They drove along the Undercliff, and her enjoyment was excessive. To one so long shut up in town, the fresh air, blue sky, and green trees were charms sufficient in themselves, and when to these were added the bright extent of summer sea, the beautiful curving outline of the bay ending in the bold Culver Cliffs, and the wall of rocks above, clothed in part with garland-like shrubs and festoons of creepers, it was to her a perfect vision of delight. There was an alternation of long pauses of happy contemplation, and of smothered exclamations of ecstasy, as if eye and heart were longing to take a still fuller grasp of the beauty of the scene. The expression her face had worn at the cathedral entrance was on it now, and seemed to put a new soul into her features, varied by the beaming smiles as she cried out joyously at each new object-the gliding sails on the water, the curious forms of the crags, or the hawks that poised themselves in the air.

The flowers, too! They came to a lane bordered with copse, blue with wild hyacinth. ‘Oh! it was so long since she had seen a wild flower! Would he be so kind as to stop for one moment to let her gather one. She did so much wish to pick a flower for herself once more!’

He drew up, and sat, leaning back, watching her with one of his smiles of melancholy meaning, as she lightly sprang up the bank, and dived between the hazel stems; and there he remained musing till, like a vision of May herself, she reappeared on the bank, the nut-bushes making a bower around her, her hands filled with flowers, her cheek glowing like her wild roses, and the youthful delicacy of her form, and the transient brightness of her sweet face, suiting with the fresh tender colouring of the foliage, chequered with flickering sunshine.

‘Oh! I hope I have not kept you waiting too long! but, indeed, I did not know how to turn back. I went after an orchis, and then I saw some Solomon’s seal; and oh! such bluebells, and I could not help standing quite still to feel how delicious it was! I hope that it was not long.’

‘No, not at all, I am glad.’

There was a moisture around the bright eyes, and perhaps she felt a little childish shame, for she put up her hand to brush it off. ‘It is very silly,’ she said. ‘Beautiful places ought not to make one ready to cry—and yet somehow, when I stood quite still, and it was all so green, and I heard the cuckoo and all the little birds singing, it would come over me! I could not help thinking who made it all so beautiful, and that He gave me my baby too.’—And there, as having said too much, she blushed in confusion, and began to busy herself with her flowers, delighting herself in silence over each many-belled hyacinth, each purple orchis, streaked wood sorrel, or delicate wreath of eglantine, deeming each in turn the most perfect she had ever seen.

John let her alone; he thought the May blossoms more suitable companions for her than himself, and believed that it would only interfere with that full contentment to be recalled to converse with him. It was pleasure enough to watch that childlike gladsomeness, like studying a new life, and the relief it gave him to see her so happy perhaps opened his mind to somewhat of the same serene enjoyment.

That evening, when Brown, on bringing in the tea, gave an anxious glance to judge how his master fared, he augured from his countenance that the change of habits was doing him no harm.

In the evening, Mr. Fotheringham’s manuscript was brought out: John could never read aloud, but he handed over the sheets to her, and she enjoyed the vivid descriptions and anecdotes of adventures, further illustrated by comments and details from John, far more entertaining than those designed for the public. This revision was their usual evening occupation, and she soon became so well instructed in those scenes, that she felt as if she had been one of the travellers, and had known the handsome Arab sheik, whose chivalrous honour was only alloyed by desire of backsheesh, the Turkish guard who regularly deserted on the first alarm, and the

sharp knavish Greek servant with his contempt for them all, more especially for the grave and correct Mr. Brown, pining to keep up Martindale etiquette in desert, caravanserai, and lazzeretto. She went along with them in the researches for Greek inscription, Byzantine carving, or Frank fortress; she shared the exultation of deciphering the ancient record in the venerable mountain convent, the disappointment when Percy's admirable entrenched camp of Bohemond proved to be a case of 'praetorian here, praetorian there;' she listened earnestly to the history, too deeply felt to have been recorded for the general reader, of the feelings which had gone with the friends to the cedars of Lebanon, the streams of Jordan, the peak of Tabor, the cave of Bethlehem, the hills of Jerusalem. Perhaps she looked up the more to John, when she knew that he had trod that soil, and with so true a pilgrim's heart. Then the narration led her through the purple mountain islets of the Archipelago, and the wondrous scenery of classic Greece, with daring adventures among robber Albanians, such as seemed too strange for the quiet inert John Martindale, although the bold and gay temper of his companion appeared to be in its own element; and in truth it was as if there was nothing that came amiss to Percival Fotheringham, who was equally ready for deep and scholarly dissertation, or for boyish drollery and good-natured tricks. He had a peculiar talent for languages, and had caught almost every dialect of the natives, as well as being an excellent Eastern scholar, and this had led to his becoming attached to the embassy at Constantinople, where John had left him on returning to England. He was there highly esteemed, and in the way of promotion, to the great satisfaction of John, who took a sort of affectionate fatherly pride in his well-doing.

The manuscript evinced so much ability and research, and was so full of beautiful and poetical description, as not only charmed Violet, but surpassed even John's expectations; and great was his delight in dwelling on its perfections, while he touched it up and corrected it with a doubtful, respectful hand, scarcely perceiving how effective were his embellishments and refinements. Violet's remarks and

misunderstanding were useful, and as she grew bolder, her criticisms were often much to the point. She was set to search in historical authorities, and to translate from the French for the notes, work which she thought the greatest honour, and which kept her mind happily occupied to the exclusion of her cares.

Fresh air, busy idleness, the daily renewed pleasure of beautiful scenery, the watchful care of her kind brother, and the progressive improvement of her babe, produced the desired effect; and when the promised day arrived, and they walked to the coach-office to meet Arthur, it was a triumph to hear him declare that he had been thinking that for once he saw a pretty girl before he found out it was Violet, grown rosy in her sea-side bonnet.

If the tenor of John's life had been far less agreeable, it would have been sufficiently compensated by the pleasure of seeing how happy he had made the young couple, so joyously engrossed with each other, and full of spirits and merriment.

Violet was gladsome and blithe at meeting her husband again, and Arthur, wholesomely and affectionately gay, appearing to uncommon advantage. He spoke warmly of his father. It seemed that they had been much together, and had understood each other better than ever before. Arthur repeated gratifying things which Lord Martindale had said of Violet, and, indeed, it was evident that interest in her was the way to find out his heart. Of his mother and sister there was less mention, and John began to gather the state of the case as he listened in the twilight of the summer evening, while Arthur and Violet sat together on the sofa, and he leant back in his chair opposite to them, his book held up to catch the fading light; but his attention fixed on their talk over Arthur's news.

'You have not told me about the drawing-room.'

'Do you think I am going there till I am obliged!'

'What! You did not go with Lady Martindale and Theodora? I should like to have seen them dressed. Do tell me how they looked.'

‘Splendid, no doubt; but you must take it on trust.’

‘You did not see them! What a pity! How disappointed Theodora must have been!’

‘Were there not folks enough to look at her?’

‘As if they were of any use without you.’

‘Little goose! I am not her husband, thank goodness, and wishing him joy that gets her.’

‘O, Arthur, don’t! I want to hear of Lady Albury’s party. You did go to that!’

‘Yes, my mother lugged me into it, and a monstrous bore it was. I wish you had been there.’

‘Thank you, but if it was so dull—’

‘Emma Brandon and I agreed that there was not a woman who would have been looked at twice if you had been there. We wanted you for a specimen of what is worth seeing. Fancy! it was such a dearth of good looks that they were making a star of Mrs. Finch! It was enough to put one in a rage. I told Theodora at last, since she would have it, there was nothing in the woman but impudence.’

John glanced over his book, and perceived that to Arthur there appeared profanation in the implied comparison of that flashy display of beauty with the pure, modest, tender loveliness, whose every blush and smile, as well as the little unwonted decorations assumed to honour his presence, showed, that its only value was the pleasure it gave to him. His last speech made her tone somewhat of reproof. ‘Oh! that must have vexed her, I am afraid. She is very fond of Mrs. Finch.’

‘Out of opposition,’ said Arthur. ‘It is too bad, I declare! That Georgina was well enough as a girl, spirited and like Theodora, only Theodora always had sense. She was amusing then, but there is nothing so detestable as a woman who continues “fast” after marriage.’

‘Except a man,’ observed John, in a tone of soliloquy. ‘She has grown so thin, too!’

continued Arthur. ‘She used to be tolerably handsome when she was a fine plump rosy girl. Now she is all red cheek-bone and long neck! We are come to a pretty pass when we take her for a beauty!’

Oh! but there is your sister,’ said Violet. ‘Do tell me how she likes going out. She thought it would be such a penance.’

‘All I know is, that at home she is as sulky as a Greenland bear, and then goes out and flirts nineteen to the dozen.’

Arthur!’ came the remonstrating voice again, ‘how you talk—do you mean that she is silent at home? Is she unhappy? What can be the matter with her?’

‘How should I know?’

‘Has not she said anything about baby?’

‘Not she. Not one of them has, except my father.’

‘I thought she would have liked to have heard of baby,’ said Violet, in a tone of disappointment; ‘but if there is anything on her spirits, perhaps she cannot think about him. I wonder what it can be. It cannot be any—any—’

‘Any love affair! No! no! Miss Martindale may break hearts enough, but she will take care of her own, if she has one.’

‘Is she so much admired?’

‘Of course she is. You do not often see her style, and she talks and goes on at no end of a rate.’

‘I remember how she grew excited at the ball, after disliking the prospect.’

‘Is this mere general admiration,’ asked John, ‘or anything more serious?’

‘Upon my word, I cannot say. There is no earnest on her part. She will rattle on with a poor fellow one night as if she had eyes for no one else, then leave him in the lurch the next. She cares not a rush for any of them, only wants to be run after. As to her followers, some of them are really smitten, I fancy. There was Fitzhugh, but he is an

old hand, and can pay her in her own coin, and that sober-faced young Mervyn—it is a bad case with him. In fact, there is a fresh one whenever she goes out—a Jenny Dennison in high life—but the most bitten of all, I take it, is Lord St. Erme.'

'Lord St. Erme!' exclaimed both auditors in a breath.

'Ay. She met him at that breakfast, walked about the gardens with him all the morning, and my mother wrote to my aunt, I believe, that she was booked. Then at this Bryanstone soiree, the next night, Fitzhugh was in the ascendant—poor St. Erme could not so much as gain a look.'

'So he is in London!' said Violet. 'Do tell me what he is like.'

'Like a German music-master,' said Arthur. 'As queer a figure as ever I saw. Keeps his hair parted in the middle, hanging down in long lank rats' tails, meant to curl, moustache ditto, open collar turned down, black ribbon tie.'

'Oh! how amazed the Wrangerton people would be!'

'It is too much to study the picturesque in one's own person in England!' said John, laughing. 'I am sorry he continues that fashion.'

'So, of course,' continued Arthur, 'all the young ladies are raving after him, while he goes mooning after Theodora. How the fair sex must solace itself with abusing "that Miss Martindale!"'

'I wish he would be a little more sensible,' said John. 'He really is capable of something better.'

'Where did you know him?'

'At Naples. I liked him very much till he persecuted me beyond endurance with Tennyson and Browning. He is always going about in raptures with some new-fashioned poet.'

'I suppose he will set up Theodora for his muse. My mother is enchanted; he is exactly one of her own set, music, pictures, and all. The second-hand courtship is a

fine chance for her when Miss Martindale is ungracious.'

'But it will not come to anything,' said John. 'In the meantime, her ladyship gets the benefit of a lion, and a very tawny lion, for her soirees.'

'Oh! that soiree will be something pleasant for you,' said Violet.

'I shall cut it. It is the first day I can be here.'

'Not meet that great African traveller?'

'What good would Baron Munchausen himself do me in the crowd my mother is heaping together?'

'I am sure your mother and sister must want you.'

'Want must be their master. I am not going to elbow myself about and be squashed flat for their pleasure. It is a dozen times worse to be in a mob at home, for one has to find chairs for all the ladies. Pah!'

'That is very lazy!' said the wife. 'You will be sorry to have missed it when it is too late, and your home people will be vexed.'

'Who cares? My father does not, and the others take no pains not to vex us.'

'O, Arthur! you know it makes it worse if you always come to me when they want you. I could wait very well. Only one day above all you must come,' said she, with lowered voice, in his ear.

'What's that?'

John could not see how, instead of speaking, she guided her husband's hand to her wedding-ring. His reply transpired—'I'll not fail. Which day is it?'

'Friday week. I hope you will be able!'

'I'll manage it. Why, it will be your birthday, too!'

'Yes, I shall be so glad to be seventeen. I shall feel as if baby would respect me more. Oh! I am glad you can come, but you must be good, and go to the soiree. I do

think it would not be right always to leave them when they want you. Tell him so, please, Mr. Martindale.’

John did so, but Arthur made no promises, and even when the day came, they were uncertain whether they might think of him at the party, or as smoking cigars at home.

CHAPTER 5

Her scourge is felt, unseen, unheard, Where, though aloud the laughter swells, Her secret in the bosom dwells, There is a sadness in the strain As from a heart o’ercharged with pain. —The Baptistery

Theodora had come to London, hating the idea of gaieties, liking nothing but the early service and chemical lectures, and shrinking from the meeting with her former friend. She enjoyed only the prospect of the comfort her society would afford her brother, depressed by attendance on a nervous wife, in an unsatisfactory home.

No Arthur met them at the station: he had left a message that he was taking Mrs. Martindale to the Isle of Wight, and should return early on Tuesday.

Theodora stayed at home the whole of that day, but in vain. She was busied in sending out cards to canvass for her dumb boy’s admission into an asylum, when a message came up to her sitting-room. She started. Was it Arthur? No; Mrs. Finch was in the drawing-room; and at that moment a light step was on the stairs, and a flutter of gay ribbons advanced. ‘Ha! Theodora! I knew how to track you. The old place! Dear old school-room, how happy we have been here! Not gone out? Any one would think you had some stern female to shut you up with a tough exercise! But I believe you always broke out.’

‘I stayed in to-day, expecting my brother.’

‘Captain Martindale? Why, did not I see him riding with your father? Surely I did.’

‘Impossible!’ exclaimed Theodora.

‘Yes, but I did though; I am sure of it, for he bowed. He had that sweet pretty little mare of his. Have you seen her, Theodora? I quite envy her; but I suppose he bought it for his wife; and she deserves all that is sweet and pretty, I am sure, and has it, too.’

Theodora could not recover from the thrill of pain so as to speak, and Mrs. Finch rattled on. ‘She was not in good looks when I saw her, poor thing, but she looked so soft and fragile, it quite went to my heart; though Jane will have it she is deep, and gets her own way by being meek and helpless. I don’t go along with Jane throughout; I hate seeing holes picked in everybody.’

‘Where is Jane?’

‘Gone to some charity sermonizing. She will meet some great folks there, and be in her element. I am glad to have you alone. Why, you bonny old Greek empress, you are as jolly a gipsy queen as ever! How you will turn people’s heads! I am glad you have all that bright red-brown on your cheeks!’

‘No self-preservation like a country life and early rising,’ said Theodora, laughing. ‘You have not kept yourself as well, Georgina. I am sorry to see you so thin.’

‘Me! Oh, I have battered through more seasons than you have dreamt of!’ said Mrs. Finch, lightly, but with a sigh. ‘And had a fever besides, which disposed of all my fat. I am like a hunter in fine condition, no superfluous flesh, ready for action. And as to action—what are you doing, Theodora?—where are you going?’

‘I don’t know. Mamma keeps the cards. I don’t want to know anything about it.’

Georgina burst into a laugh, rather unnecessarily loud.

‘Just like you! Treat it as you used your music! What can’t be cured must be endured, you know. Well, you poor victim, are you going to execution to-night?’

‘Not that I know of.’

‘Famous! Then I’ll tell you what: there is going to be a lecture on Mesmerism to-night. Wonderful! Clairvoyante tells you everything, past, present, and to come! You’ll detect all the impostures; won’t it be fun? I’ll call for you at eight precisely.’

Theodora thought of Arthur, and that she should miss the tidings of his child; then recollected that he had not afforded her one minute’s greeting. She would show him that she did not care, and therefore made the agreement.

Cold and moody she came down to dinner, but her heart was beating with disappointment at not seeing Arthur, though a place was prepared for him. Mrs. Finch was right; he had been with his father all the afternoon, but had not supposed the ladies to be at home; an explanation which never occurred to Theodora.

He came in a few minutes after they had sat down; he was heated by his hasty walk from his empty house, and his greeting was brief and disconcerted at finding himself late. His mother made her composed inquiries for the party at Ventnor, without direct mention of the child, and he replied in the same tone. His cordial first intelligence had been bestowed upon his father, and he was not disposed to volunteer communications to the sister, whose apparent gloomy indifference mortified him.

He had not sat down ten minutes before word came that Mrs. Finch was waiting for Miss Martindale. Theodora rose, in the midst of her father and brother’s amazement. ‘I told mamma of my arrangement to go with Georgina Finch to a lecture on Mesmerism,’ she said.

‘Mesmerism!’ was the sotto voce exclamation of Lord Martindale. ‘But, my dear, you did not know that Arthur was at home this evening?’

‘Yes, I did,’ said Theodora, coldly; mentally adding, ‘and I knew he had been five hours without coming near me.’

‘Who is going with you? Is Mr. Finch?’

‘I have not heard. I cannot keep Georgina waiting.’

It was no place for discussion. Lord Martindale only said—

‘Arthur, cannot you go with your sister?’

Arthur muttered that ‘it would be a great bore, and he was as tired as a dog.’ He had no intention of going out of his way to oblige Theodora, while she showed no feeling for what concerned him most nearly; so he kept his place at the table, while Lord Martindale, displeased and perplexed, came out to say a few words to his daughter, under pretext of handing her to the carriage. ‘I am surprised, Theodora. It cannot be helped now, but your independent proceedings cannot go on here as at home.’

Theodora vouchsafed no answer. The carriage contained only Mrs. Finch and Miss Gardner. Lord Martindale paused as his daughter stepped in, gravely asking if they were going to take up Mr. Finch. Georgina’s laugh was not quite what it would have been to a younger inquirer, but it did not tend to console him. ‘Mr. Finch! O no! We left him to the society of his port wine. I mean to test the clairvoyante by asking what he is dreaming about. But there is no fear of our coming to harm. Here’s sister Jane for a duenna, and I always find squires wherever I go.’

Lord Martindale sat at home much annoyed, and preparing a lecture for his wilful daughter on her return. Sooth to say, Theodora did not find any great reward in her expedition. The sight was a painful one; and her high principles had doubts whether it was a legitimate subject for encouragement. She longed all the time to be sitting by Arthur’s side, and hearing of his little boy. How young and gay he looked to be a father and head of a family! and how satisfying it seemed to have his bright eyes in sight again! She looked so thoughtful that Georgina roused her by threatening to set the poor clairvoyante to read her meditations.

When Theodora came home, she would have gone straight up to her own room, but her father waylaid her, and the first sound of his voice awoke the resolution to defend her freedom of action. Perhaps the perception that he was a little afraid of the

rebuke he was about to administer added defiance to her determination.

‘Theodora, I wish to speak to you. I do not wish to restrain your reasonable freedom, but I must beg that another time you will not fix your plans without some reference.’

‘I told mamma,’ she answered.

‘I am not satisfied with the subject you have chosen—and I do not quite like what I see of Mrs. Finch. I had rather you made no engagements for the present.’

‘I will take care,’ said Theodora: ‘but when mamma does not go out, I must have some one. I will do nothing worthy of disapproval. Good night.’

She walked off, leaving Lord Martindale baffled. That evening seemed to give its colour to the subsequent weeks. It was a time of much pain to Theodora, estranging herself from her brother, fancying him prejudiced against her, and shutting herself up from her true pleasures to throw herself into what had little charm for her beyond the gratification of her self-will.

She really loved Georgina Finch. There was the bond of old association and girlish friendship, and this could not be set aside, even though the pair had grown far asunder. Perhaps the strongest link had been their likeness in strength of expression and disregard of opinion; but it now seemed as if what in Theodora was vehemence and determination, was in Georgina only exaggeration and recklessness. However, Georgina had a true affection for Theodora, and looked up to her genuine goodness, though without much attempt to imitate it, and the positive enthusiasm she possessed for her friend was very winning to one who was always pining for affection. Therefore Theodora adhered to her intimacy through all the evidences of disapproval, and always carried the day.

Georgina was well-born, and her sphere was naturally in the higher circles, and though her marriage had been beneath her own rank, this was little thought of, as she was rich, and by many considered very handsome, fashionable, and agreeable. Mr. Finch was hardly ever seen, and little regarded when he was; he was a quiet,

good-natured old man, who knew nothing but of money matters, and was proud of his gay young wife. She had her own way, and was much admired; sure to be in every party, and certain to be surrounded with gentlemen, to whom she rattled away with lively nonsense, and all of whom were ready to be her obedient squires. Her manners were impetuous, and, as well as her appearance, best to be described as dashing. Some people disliked her extremely; but she was always doing good-natured generous things, and the worst that could be said of her was, that she was careless of appearances, and, as Arthur called her, “fast”. Theodora knew there was sincerity and warmth of heart, and was always trusting that these might develop into further excellences; moreover, she was sensible of having some influence for good. More than one wild freak had been relinquished on her remonstrance; and there was enough to justify her, in her own eyes, for continuing Georgina’s firm friend and champion.

She had no other friendships; she did not like young ladies, and was still less liked by them; and Jane Gardner was nobody when her sister was by, though now and then her power was felt in double-edged sayings which recurred to mind.

However, Theodora found society more intoxicating than she had expected. Not that her sober sense enjoyed or approved; but in her own county she was used to be the undeniable princess of her circle, and she could not go out without trying to stand first still, and to let her attractions accomplish what her situation effected at home. Her princely deportment, striking countenance, and half-repelling, half-inviting manner, were more effective than the more regular beauty of other girls; for there was something irresistible in the privilege of obtaining a bright look and smile from one whose demeanour was in general so distant; and when she once began to talk, eager, decided, brilliant, original, and bestowing exclusive and flattering attention, for the time, on the favoured individual, no marvel that he was bewitched, and when, the next night, she was haughty and regardless, he only watched the more ardently for a renewal of her smiles. The general homage was no pleasure to her; she took it

as her due, and could not have borne to be without it. She had rather been at home with her books, or preparing lessons to send to her school at Brogden; but in company she could not bear not to reign supreme, and put forth every power to maintain her place, though in her grand, careless, indifferent manner, and when it was over, hating and despising her very success.

Arthur had thawed after his second visit to Ventnor; he had brought away too much satisfaction and good humour to be pervious to her moody looks; and his freedom and ease had a corresponding effect upon her. They became more like their usual selves towards each other; and when he yielded, on being again exhorted to stay for the soiree, she deemed it a loosening of the trammels in which he was held. He became available when she wanted him; and avoiding all mention of his family, they were very comfortable until Theodora was inspired with a desire to go to a last appearance of Mademoiselle Rachel, unfortunately on the very evening when Violet had especially begged him to be with her.

If he would have said it was his wedding-day, there could have been no debate; but he was subject to a sort of schoolboy reserve, where he was conscious or ashamed. And there were unpleasant reminiscences connected with that day—that unacknowledged sense of having been entrapped—that impossibility of forgetting his sister's expostulation—that disgust at being conspicuous—that longing for an excuse for flying into a passion—that universal hatred of everything belonging to the Mosses. He could not give a sentimental reason, and rather than let it be conjectured, he adduced every pretext but the true one; professed to hate plays, especially tragedies, and scolded his sister for setting her heart on a French Jewess when there were plenty of English Christians.

'If you would only give me your true reason, I should be satisfied,' said she at last.

'I love my love with a V,' was his answer, in so bright a tone as should surely have appeased her; but far from it; she exclaimed,

‘Ventnor! Why, will no other time do for THAT?’

‘I have promised,’ Arthur answered, vexed at her tone.

‘What possible difference can it make to her which day you go?’

‘I have said.’

‘Come, write and tell her it is important to me. Rachel will not appear again, and papa is engaged. She must see the sense of it. Come, write.’

‘Too much trouble.’

‘Then I will. I shall say you gave me leave.’

‘Indeed,’ said Arthur, fully roused, ‘you will say no such thing. You have not shown so much attention to Mrs. Martindale, that you need expect her to give way to your convenience.’

He walked away, as he always did when he thought he had provoked a female tongue. She was greatly mortified at having allowed her eagerness to lower her into offering to ask a favour of that wife of his; who, no doubt, had insisted on his coming, after having once failed, and could treat him to plenty of nervous and hysterical scenes.

Him Theodora pitied and forgave!

But by and by her feelings were further excited. She went with her mother to give orders at Storr and Mortimer’s, on the setting of some jewels which her aunt had given her, and there encountered Arthur in the act of selecting a blue enamel locket, with a diamond fly perched on it. At the soiree she had heard him point out to Emma Brandon a similar one, on a velvet round a lady’s neck, and say that it would look well on Violet’s white skin. So he was obliged to propitiate his idol with trinkets far more expensive than he could properly afford!

Theodora little guessed that the gift was received without one thought of the white throat, but with many speculations whether little Johnnie would soon be able to

spare a bit of flaxen down to contrast with the black lock cut from his papa's head.

There was nothing for it but to dwell no more on this deluded brother, and Theodora tried every means to stifle the thought. She threw herself into the full whirl of society, rattling on in a way that nothing but high health and great bodily strength could have endured. After her discontented and ungracious commencement, she positively alarmed her parents by the quantity she undertook, with spirits apparently never flagging, though never did she lose that aching void. Books, lectures, conversation, dancing, could not banish that craving for her brother, nothing but the three hours of sleep that she allowed herself. If she exceeded them, there were unfailing dreams of Arthur and his child.

She thought of another cure. There was another kind of affection, not half so valuable in her eyes as fraternal love; it made fools of people, but then they were happy in their blindness, and could keep it to themselves. She would condescend to lay herself open to the infection. It would be satisfying if she could catch it. She examined each of her followers in turn, but each fell short of her standard, and was repelled just as his hopes had been excited. One 'Hollo, Theodora, come along,' would have been worth all the court paid to her by men, to some of whom Arthur could have ill borne a comparison.

CHAPTER 6

Thy precious things, whate'er they be, That haunt and vex thee, heart and brain, Look to the Cross, and thou shall see How thou mayst turn them all to gain. —Christian Year

All went well and smoothly at Ventnor, until a sudden and severe attack of some baby ailment threatened to render fruitless all Mr. Martindale's kind cares.

Violet's misery was extreme, though silent and unobtrusive, and John was surprised to find how much he shared it, and how strong his own personal affection had

become for his little nephew; how many hopes he had built on him as the point of interest for his future life; the circumstances also of the baptism giving him a tenderness for him, almost a right in him such as he could feel in no other child.

Their anxiety did not last long enough for Arthur to be sent for; a favourable change soon revived the mother's hopes; and the doctor, on coming down-stairs after his evening's visit, told John that the child was out of danger for the present; but added that he feared there were many more such trials in store for poor Mrs. Martindale; he thought the infant unusually delicate, and feared that it would hardly struggle through the first year.

John was much shocked, and sat in the solitary drawing-room, thinking over the disappointment and loss, severely felt for his own sake, and far more for the poor young mother, threatened with so grievous a trial at an age when sorrow is usually scarcely known, and when she had well-nigh sunk under the ordinary wear and tear of married life. She had been so utterly cast down and wretched at the sight of the child's suffering, that it was fearful to imagine what it would be when there would be no recovery.

'Yes!' he mused with himself; 'Violet has energy, conscientiousness, high principle to act, but she does not know how to apply the same principle to enable her to endure. She knows religion as a guide, not as a comfort. She had not grown up to it, poor thing, before her need came. She wants her mother, and knows not where to rest in her griefs. Helen, my Helen, how you would have loved and cherished her, and led her to your own precious secret of patience and peace! What is to be done for her? Arthur cannot help her; Theodora will not if she could, she is left to me. And can I take Helen's work on myself, and try to lead our poor young sister to what alone can support her? I must try—mere humanity demands it. Yes, Helen, you would tell me I have lived within myself too long. I can only dare to speak through your example. I will strive to overcome my reluctance to utter your dear name.'

He was interrupted by Violet coming down to make tea. She was now happy, congratulating herself on the rapid improvement in the course of the day, and rejoicing that John and the doctor had dissuaded her from sending at once for Arthur.

‘You were quite right, she said, ‘and I am glad now he was not here. I am afraid I was very fretful; but oh! you don’t know what it is to see a baby so ill.’

‘Poor little boy—’ John would have said more, but she went on, with tearful eyes and agitated voice.

‘It does seem very hard that such a little innocent darling should suffer. He is not three months old, and his poor little life has been almost all pain and grief to him. I know it is wrong of me, but I cannot bear it! If it is for my fault, why cannot it be myself? It almost makes me angry.’

‘It does seem more than we can understand, said John, mournfully; ‘but we are told, “What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.”’

‘When all the other young things—lambs, and birds, and all—are so happy, and rejoicing in the sunshine!’ continued Violet; ‘and children too!’ as some gay young voices floated in on the summer air, and brought the tears in a shower.

‘Don’t grudge it to them, dear Violet,’ said John, in his gentlest tone; ‘my dear little godson is more blessed in his gift. It seems to accord with what was in my mind when we took him to church. I do not know whether it was from my hardly ever having been at a christening before, or whether it was the poor little fellow’s distressing crying; but the signing him with the cross especially struck me, the token of suffering even to this lamb. The next moment I saw the fitness—the cross given to him to turn the legacy of pain to the honour of partaking of the Passion—how much more for an innocent who has no penalty of his own to bear!’

‘I have read things like that, but—I know I am talking wrongly—it always seems hard and stern to tell one not to grieve. You think it very bad in me to say so; but,

indeed, I never knew how one must care for a baby.’

‘No, indeed, there is no blaming you; but what would comfort you would be to think of the Hand that is laid on him in love, for his highest good.’

‘But he wants no good done to him,’ cried Violet. ‘He has been good and sinless from the time before even his father or I saw him, when you—’

‘We cannot tell what he may need. We are sure all he undergoes is sent by One who loves him better than even you do, who may be disciplining him for future life, or fitting him for brighter glory, and certainly giving him a share in the cross that has saved him.’

His gentle tones had calmed her, and she sat listening as if she wished him to say more. ‘Do you remember,’ he added, ‘that picture you described to me this time last year, the Ghirlandajo’s Madonna?’

‘Oh, yes,’ said Violet, pleased and surprised.

‘She does not hold her son back from the cross, does she, though the sword was to pierce through her own heart?’

‘Yes; but that was for the greatest reason.’

‘Indeed, it was; but He who was a Child, the firstborn Son of His mother, does not afflict your baby without cause. He has laid on him as much of His cross as he can bear; and if it be yours also, you know that it is blessed to you both, and will turn to glory.’

‘The cross!’ said Violet; adding, after some thought, ‘Perhaps thinking of that might make one bear one’s own troubles better.’

‘The most patient person I ever knew found it so,’ said John; and with some hesitation and effort, ‘You know about her?’

‘A little,’ she timidly replied; and the tears flowed again as she said, ‘I have been so very sorry for you.’

‘Thank you,’ he answered, in a suppressed tone of grateful emotion, for never was sympathy more refreshing to one who had long mourned in loneliness.

Eager, though almost alarmed, at being thus introduced to the melancholy romance of his history, Violet thought he waited for her to speak. ‘It was dreadful,’ she said; ‘it was so cruel, to sacrifice her to those old people.’

‘Was it cruel? Was it wrong?’ said John, almost to himself. ‘I hope not. I do not think I could have decided otherwise.’

‘Oh, have I said anything wrong? I don’t properly know about it. I fancied Arthur told me—I beg your pardon.

‘I do not think Arthur knew the circumstances; they have never been much talked of. I do not know whether you would care to listen to a long story; but I should like you, as far as may be, to understand her, and consider her as your sister, who would have been very fond of you.’

‘And do you like to talk of it?’

‘That I do, now,’ said John; her delicate, respectful sympathy so opening his heart, that what had been an effort became a relief.

‘I should be so glad. Baby is asleep, and I came down to stay with you. It is very kind of you.’

‘You are very kind to listen,’ said John. ‘I must go a long way back, to the time when I lost my little sisters.’

‘Had you any more sisters?’ said Violet, startled.

‘Two; Anna and another Theodora. They died at four and two years old, within two days of each other, while my father and mother were abroad with my aunt.’

‘What was their illness, poor little things?’ anxiously asked Violet.

‘I never knew. We all of us have, more or less, a West Indian constitution; that accounts for anything.’

‘How old were you? Do you remember them?’

‘I was five. I have no distinct recollection of them, though I was very fond of Anna, and well remember the dreariness afterwards. Indeed, I moped and pined so much, that it was thought that to give me young companions was the only chance for me; and the little Fotheringhams were sent for from the parsonage to play with me.’

‘And it really began then!’

‘Yes,’ said John, more cheerfully. ‘She was exactly of my own age, but with all the motherly helpful kindness of an elder sister, and full of pretty, childish compassion for the little wretched solitary being that I was. Her guarding me from the stout riotous Percy—a couple of years younger—was the first bond of union; and I fancy the nurses called her my little wife, I know I believed it then, and ever after. We were a great deal together. I never was so happy as with them; and as I was a frail subject at the best, and Arthur was not born till I was nine years old, I was too great a treasure to be contradicted. The parsonage was the great balance to the home spoiling; Mr. and Mrs. Fotheringham were most kind and judicious; and Helen’s character could not but tell on all around.’

‘Was she grave?’

‘Very merry, full of fun, but with a thoughtful staidness in her highest spirits, even as a girl. I saw no change when we met again’—after a pause: ‘No, I cannot describe her. When we go home you shall see her picture. No one ever reminded me of her as you do, though it is not flattering you to say so. If the baby had been a girl, I think I should have asked you to call it by your second name. Well, we seldom spent a day without meeting, even after I had a tutor. The beginning of our troubles was her fifteenth birthday, the 10th of July. I had saved up my money, and bought a coral cross and a chain for her; but Mrs. Fotheringham would not let her keep it; she said it was too costly for me to give to any one but my sister. She tried to treat it lightly; but I was old enough to perceive her reason; and I can feel the tingling in all my

veins as I vowed with myself to keep it till I should have a right to offer it.'

'What did she do?'

'I cannot tell; we did not wish to renew the subject. The worst of it was, that my aunt, who hears everything, found this out. She interrogated me, and wanted me to give it to Theodora, a mere baby. I felt as if I was defending Helen's possession, and refused to give it up unless at my father's command.'

'I hope he did not order you.'

'He never said a word to me. But our comfort was over; suspicion was excited; and I am afraid my aunt worried Mrs. Fotheringham. Nothing was said, but there was a check upon us. I was sent to a tutor at a distance; and when I was at home, either she went out on long visits in the holidays, or there was a surveillance on me; and when I did get down to the parsonage it was all formality. She took to calling me Mr. Martindale (by the bye, Violet, I wish you would not), was shy, and shrank from me.'

'Oh! that was the worst,' cried Violet. 'Did not she care?'

'I believe her mother told her we were too old to go on as before. They were all quite right; and I can now see it was very good for me. When Mr. Fotheringham died, and they were about to leave the parish, I spoke to my father. He had the highest esteem for them all, was fond of her, knew they had behaved admirably. I verily believe he would have consented at once—nay, he had half done so, but—'

'Mrs. Nesbit, I am sure,' exclaimed Violet.

'He was persuaded to think I had not had time to know my own mind, and ought not to engage myself till I had seen more of the world.'

'How old were you?'

'Nineteen.'

'Nineteen! If you did not know your own mind then, when could you?'

John smiled, and replied, ‘It was better to have such a motive. My position was one of temptation, and this was a safeguard as well as a check on idle prosperity. An incentive to exertion, too; for my father held out a hope that if I continued in the same mind, and deserved his confidence, he would consent in a few years, but on condition I should neither say nor do anything to show my feelings.’

‘Then you never told her?’

‘No.’

‘I should not have liked that at all. But she must have guessed.’

‘She went with her mother to live in Lancashire, with old Mr. and Mrs. Percival, at Elsdale. There she lost her mother.’

‘How long did it go on before Lord Martindale consented?’ asked Violet, breathlessly.

‘Five years, but at last he was most kind. He did fully appreciate her. I went to Elsdale’—and he paused. ‘For a little while it was more than I can well bear to remember.’

‘You gave her the cross?’ said Violet, presently.

‘On her next birthday. Well, then came considerations. Old Mrs. Percival was nearly blind, and could hardly move from her chair, the grandfather was very infirm, and becoming imbecile. His mind had never been clear since his daughter’s death, and he always took Helen for her. She was everything to them.’

‘And they would not spare her?’

‘She asked me what was to be done. She put it entirely in my hands, saying she did not know where her duty lay, and she would abide by my decision.’

‘Then it was you! I can’t think how you could.’

‘I trust it was not wrong. So asked, I could not say she ought to leave those poor old people to their helplessness for my sake, and I could not have come to live with

them, for it was when I was in Parliament, and there were other reasons. We agreed, then, that she should not leave them in her grandfather's lifetime, and that afterwards Mrs. Percival should come to our home, Brogden, as we thought it would be. Indeed, Violet, it was a piteous thing to hear that good venerable old lady entreating my pardon for letting Helen devote herself, saying, she would never have permitted it but for Mr. Percival, for what would become of him without his granddaughter—hoping they would not long stand in our way, and promising us the blessing that Helen enjoys. We could not regret our decision, and to be allowed to stand on such terms with each other was happiness enough then; yet all the time I had a presentiment that I was giving her up for ever, though I thought it would be the other way; the more when the next year I had the illness that has made me good for nothing ever since. That made it much easier to me, for I should have led her such a life of nursing and anxiety as I would not inflict on any woman.'

'Surely she had the anxiety all the same?'

'There is a good deal spared by not being on the spot.'

'How can he think so! said Violet to herself. I can't imagine how she lived as long as she did. 'Did you not see her at all when you were ill?' she said.

'Yes, we had one great treat that winter when I was at the worst. It was one of my father's especial pieces of kindness; he wrote to her himself, and sent Simmonds to fetch her to Martindale.'

'And were you able to enjoy having her?'

'It was inflammation on the chest, so all my senses were free. She used to sit by me with her sober face, at work, ready to read and talk to me, and left sayings and thoughts that have brought refreshment at every such time. It was indeed a blessing that she could come that first time to teach me how to bear illness.'

'How long did she stay?'

'Only three weeks, for her absence only showed how little she could be spared; but

she left an influence on that room of mine that it has never lost.’

‘How solitary it must have been when you were recovering.’

‘I had her letters. I will show you some of them some day. She used to write almost daily.’

‘And it was when you were getting better that you took the great journey in the East?’

‘Yes; Percy had just left Cambridge, and was ready to take the care of me on his hands. Those two years went pleasantly by, and what a happy visit it was at Elsdale afterwards! You can’t think how this talking over our travels has brought it back. As long as Mrs. Percival lived we did pretty well. She made Helen take care of herself, and I could go and stay there; but after her death the poor old man grew more childish and exacting. I once tried staying at the curate’s, but it did not answer. He could not bear to have her out of his sight, and had taken an unhappy aversion to me, fancying me some old admirer of his own daughter, and always warning her against me.’

‘How distressing! How wretched! It would have killed me long before! How did she bear it? I know it was patiently, but I cannot understand it!’

‘Her letters will best show you. It was the perfect trust that it was good for us; but what she underwent in those last three years we never knew. Her brother was at Constantinople. I could not go to Elsdale, and there was no one to interfere. We could not guess from her cheerful letters how she was wearing herself out, bearing his caprices, giving up sleep and exercise. I knew how it would be the first moment I met her, when I went to Elsdale to the funeral; but it was supposed to be only over-fatigue, and her aunt, Lady Fotheringham, took her home to recover. She grew worse, and went to London for advice. There I met her, and—and there she herself told me she had disease of the heart, and could not live a year.’

Violet gave a sort of sob.

‘She held up to me that cross—that first gift—she bade me think of the subjection of wills and affections it betokened. Little had we once thought of that meaning!’

‘And then?’ asked Violet, with face flushed and hands clasped.

‘Lady Fotheringham took her to Worthbourne.’

‘Could you be with her?’

‘Yes. One of the especial subjects of thankfulness was that I was well enough to stay with her. She was perfectly happy and contented, chiefly concerned to soften it to me. It was as if she had finished her work, and was free to enjoy, as she sank into full repose, sunsets, hoar frosts, spring blossoms, the having me with her, her brother’s return—everything was a pleasure. I can hardly call it a time of grief, when she was so placid and happy. All the wishing and scheming was over, and each day that I could look at her in her serenity, was only too precious.’

‘Was there much suffering?’

‘At times there was, but in general there was only languor. She used to lie by the window, looking so smiling and tranquil, that it was hard to believe how much she had gone through; and so peaceful, that we could not dare to wish to bring her back to care and turmoil. The last time she was able to talk to me, she showed me the cross still round her neck, and said she should like to think it would be as much comfort to any one else as it had been to her. I did not see her again till I was called in for her last look on anything earthly, when the suffering was passed, and there was peaceful sinking.’

Violet was crying too much for words, until at last she managed to say, ‘How could you—what could you do?’

‘My illness was the best thing that could happen to me.’

‘How sorry you must have been to get well.’

He replied,

‘Her wings were grown, To heaven she’s flown, ‘Cause I had none I’m left.’

‘Those lines haunted me when I found myself reviving to the weary useless life I spend here.’

‘O how can you call it so?’ cried Violet. ‘How could Arthur and I do without you?’

There was a sound up-stairs, and she started to the door, ran up, but came down in a few moments. ‘He is awake and better,’ she said. ‘I cannot come down again, for Sarah must go to supper. Good night; thank you for what you have told me;’ then, with an earnest look, ‘only I can’t bear you to say your life is useless. You don’t know how we look to you.’

‘Thank you for your kind listening,’ he answered. ‘It has done me a great deal of good; but do not stay,’ as he saw her evidently longing to return to her child, yet lingering in the fear of unkindness to him. ‘I am glad he is better; you and he must both have a good night.’

John was indeed refreshed by the evening’s conversation. It had disclosed to him a new source of comfort, for hitherto his grief had never known the relief of sympathy. His whole soul had been fixed on one object from his boyhood; the hopes of deserving Helen had been his incentive to exertion in his youth, and when disabled by sickness, he had always looked forward to a new commencement of active usefulness with her. It had been a life of waiting: patient, but without present action, and completely wrapped up in a single attachment and hope. When that was taken from him he had not failed in faith and submission, but he had nothing to occupy him or afford present solace and interest; he had no future save lonely waiting still, until he should again rejoin her who had been his all on earth.

However, the effort made to reconcile his brother with the family had produced an unlooked-for influence, and enlarged his sphere of interest. At first came languid amusement in contemplating the pretty young bride, then liking and compassion for her, then the great anxiety in her illness, and afterwards real affection and solicitude

for her and her child had filled his mind, and detached him from his own sorrows; and he now became sensible that he had, indeed, while trying to serve her and his brother, done much for his own relief. What she said of their dependence on him was not only a pleasure to him, but it awoke him to the perception that he had not been so utterly debarred from usefulness as he had imagined, and that he had neglected much that might have infinitely benefited his brother, sister, and father. He had lived for himself and Helen alone!

He tried to draw out Helen's example to teach Violet to endure, and in doing so the other side of the lesson came home to himself. Helen's life had been one of exertion as well as of submission. It had not been merely spent in saying, 'Thy will be done,' but in doing it; she had not merely stood still and uncomplaining beneath the cross, but she had borne it onward in the service of others.

CHAPTER 7

Sweeter 'tis to hearken Than to bear a part, Better to look on happiness Than to carry a light heart, Sweeter to walk on cloudy hills, With a sunny plain below, Than to weary of the brightness Where the floods of sunshine flow. —ALFORD

One morning John received a letter from Constantinople, which he had scarcely opened before he exclaimed, 'Ha! what does he mean? Given up his appointment! Coming home! It is just like him. I must read you what he says, it is, so characteristic.'

'You must have been provoked at my leaving you all this time in doubt what to do with our precious tour, but the fact is, that I have been making a fool of myself, and as the Crusaders are the only cover my folly has from the world, I must make the most of them. I give out that my literary affairs require my presence; but you, as the means of putting me into my post, deserve an honest confession. About six weeks ago, my subordinate, Evans, fell sick—an estimable chicken-hearted fellow. In a

weak moment, I not only took his work on my hands, but bored myself by nursing him, and thereby found it was a complaint only to be cured by my shoes.'

'Shoes! exclaimed Violet. John read on.

'It was a dismal story of an engagement to a clergyman's daughter; her father just dead, she reduced to go out as a governess, and he having half nothing of his own, mending the matter by working himself into a low fever, and doing his best to rid her of all care on his account. Of course I rowed him well, but I soon found I had the infection—a bad fit of soft-heartedness came over me.'

'Oh!' cried Violet, 'he gives up for this poor man's sake.'

'I thought all peace was over if I was to see poor Evans enacting the enamoured swain every day of my life, for the fellow had not the grace to carry it off like a man—besides having his business to do; or, if he should succeed in dying, I should not only be haunted by his ghost, but have to convey his last words to the disconsolate governess. So, on calculation, I thought trouble would be saved by giving notice that I was going home to publish the Crusaders, and sending him to fetch his bride, on whose arrival I shall bid a long farewell to the Grand Turk. I fancy I shall take an erratic course through Moldavia and some of those out-of-the-way locations, so you need not write to me again here, nor think of me till you see me about the end of August. I suppose about that time Theodora will have finished the course of severe toil reserved for young ladies every spring, so I shall come straight home expecting to see you all.'

'Home; does that mean Martindale?' said Violet.

'Yes. He has never looked on any place but Brogden as his home.'

'You don't think he repents of what he has done?'

'No, certainly not. He has seen what a long engagement is.'

'Yes; I almost wonder at his writing to you in that tone.'

‘He banters because he cannot bear to show his real feeling. I am not anxious about him. He has £300 a year of his own, and plenty of resources,—besides, the baronetcy must come to him. He can afford to do as he pleases.’

‘What a noble character he must be!’ said Violet; ‘it is like a story. How old is he?’

‘About nine-and-twenty. I am glad you should see him. He is a very amusing fellow.’

‘How clever he must be!’

‘The cleverest man I know. I hope he will come soon. I should like to have a little time with him before my winter migration. We have not met since he was obliged to return, a fortnight after her death, when I little expected ever to see him again.’

This prospect seemed to set John’s mind more than ever on Helen, as if he wanted to talk over her brother’s conduct with her, and was imagining her sentiments on it.

He spoke much of her in the day, and in the evening brought down a manuscript-book.

‘I should like to read some of this to you,’ he said. ‘She had so few events in her life at Elsdale that her letters, written to occupy me when I was laid up, became almost a journal of her thoughts. I copied out some parts to carry about with me; and perhaps you would like to hear some of them.’

‘Indeed, I should, thank you, if you ought to read aloud.’

He turned over the pages, and seemed to be trying whether he could bear to read different passages; but he gave up one after another, and nearly half-an-hour had passed before he began.

‘February 20. It was the winter after her coming to Martindale.’

‘This morning was a pattern one for February, and I went out before the brightness was passed, and had several turns in the walled garden. I am afraid you will never be able to understand the pleasantness of such a morning. Perhaps you will say the very

description makes you shiver, but I must tell you how beautiful it was. The frost last night was not sharp, but just sufficient to detain the dew till the sun could turn it into diamonds. There were some so brilliant, glancing green or red in different lights, they were quite a study. It is pleasant to think that this pretty frost is not adorning the plants with unwholesome beauty, though the poor little green buds of currant and gooseberry don't like it, and the pairs of woodbine leaves turn in their edges. It is doing them good against their will, keeping them from spreading too soon. I fancied it like early troubles, keeping baptismal dew fresh and bright; and those jewels of living light went on to connect themselves with the radiant coronets of some whom the world might call blighted in—'

It had brought on one of his severe fits of coughing. Violet was going to ring for Brown, but he stopped her by a sign, which he tried to make reassuring. It was worse, and lasted longer than the former one, and exhausted him so much, that he had to rest on the sofa cushions before he could recover breath. At last, in a very low voice, he said,

'There, it is of no use to try.'

'I hope you are better; pray don't speak; only will you have anything?'

'No, thank you; lying still will set me to rights. It is only that these coughs leave a pain—nothing to mind.'

He settled himself on the sofa, not without threatenings of a return of cough, and Violet arranged the cushions, concerned at his trying to thank her. After a silence, he began to breathe more easily, and said,

'Will you read me the rest of that?'

She gave him the book to find the place, and then read—

'The world might call them blighted in their early bloom, and deprived of all that life was bestowed for; but how different is the inner view, and how glorious the thought of the numbers of quiet, commonplace sufferers in homely life, like my

currant and gooseberry bushes, who have found their frost has preserved their dewdrops to be diamonds for ever. If this is too fanciful, don't read it, but I go rambling on as the notions come into my head, and if you only get a laugh at my dreamings, they will have been of some use to you.'

'How beautiful!' said Violet; 'how you must have liked receiving such letters!'

'Yes; the greatest blank in the day is post time.'

He held out his hand for the book, and found another passage for her.

'I have been thinking how kindly that sentence is framed: "Casting all your care on Him." All, as if we might have been afraid to lay before Him our petty perplexities. It is the knowing we are cared for in detail, that is the comfort; and that when we have honestly done our best in little things, our Father will bless them, and fill up our shortcomings.

'That dressmaker must have been a happy woman, who never took home her work without praying that it might fit. I always liked that story particularly, as it shows how the practical life in the most trivial round can be united with thus casting all our care upon Him—the being busy in our own station with choosing the good part. I suppose it is as a child may do its own work in a manufactory, not concerning itself for the rest; or a coral-worm make its own cell, not knowing what branches it is helping to form, or what an island it is raising. What a mercy that we have only to try to do right from moment to moment, and not meddle with the future!'

'Like herself,' said John.

'I never thought of such things,' said Violet. 'I never thought little matters seemed worth treating in this way.'

'Everything that is a duty or a grief must be worth it,' said John. 'Consider the worthlessness of what we think most important in That Presence. A kingdom less than an ant's nest in comparison. But, here, I must show you a more everyday bit. It was towards the end, when she hardly ever left her grandfather, and I had been

writing to urge her to spare herself.’

Violet read—

‘You need not be afraid, dear John; I am quite equal to all I have to do. Fatigue never knocks me up, which is a great blessing; and I can sleep anywhere at the shortest notice. Indeed, I don’t know what should tire me, for there is not even any running up and down stairs; and as to spirits, you would not think them in danger if you heard how I talk parish matters to the curate, and gossip with the doctor, till grandpapa brightens, and I have to shout an abstract of the news into his ear. It is such a treat to bring that flash of intelligence on his face—and it has not been so rare lately; he seems now and then to follow one of the Psalms, as I read them to him at intervals through the day. Then for pastime, there is no want of that, with the two windows looking out different ways. I can’t think how you could forget my two beautiful windows—one with a view of the back door for my dissipation, and the other with the garden, and the varieties of trees and the ever-changing clouds. I never look out without finding some entertainment; my last sight was a long-tailed titmouse, popping into the yew tree, and setting me to think of the ragged fir tree at Brogden, with you and Percy spying up, questioning whether golden-crest or long-tailed pye lived in the dome above. No, no; don’t waste anxiety upon me. I am very happy, and have everything to be thankful for.’

‘“My mind to me a kingdom is,” she might have said,’ observed John.

‘She might indeed. How beautiful! How ashamed it does make one of oneself!’

So they continued, he choosing passages, which she read aloud, till the evening was over, when he asked her whether she would like to look through the book?’

‘That I should, but you had rather I did not.’

‘Yes, I do wish you to read it, and to know Helen. There is nothing there is any objection to your seeing. I wrote them out partly for Percy’s sake. Your reading these to me has been very pleasant.’

‘It has been so to me, I am sure. I do not know how to thank you; only I am grieved that you have hurt yourself. I hope you are better now.’

‘Yes, thank you; I shall be quite right in the morning.’

His voice was, however, so weak, and he seemed so uncomfortable, that Violet was uneasy; and as Brown lighted her candle in the hall, she paused to consult him, and found that, though concerned, he did not apprehend any bad consequences, saying that these attacks were often brought on by a chill, or by any strong excitement; he had no doubt this was occasioned by hearing of Mr. Fotheringham’s intended return; indeed, he had thought Mr. Martindale looking flushed and excited all day.

Never did charge appear more precious than those extracts. She had an enthusiastic veneration for Helen, and there was a youthful, personal feeling for her, which made her apply the words and admire them far more than if they had been in print. As she dwelt upon them, the perception grew on her, that not only was it a duty to strive for contentment, but that to look on all trials as crosses to be borne daily, was the only way to obtain it.

Helen’s many homely trials and petty difficulties were what came to her chiefly as examples and encouragements, and she began to make resolutions on her own account.

Yet, one day, when Arthur was expected and did not come, she conjured up so many alarms, that it was well that consideration for her companion obliged her to let him divert her mind.

The next day John led her to the beach, and set her to find rare sea-weeds for his mother. The charm of the pursuit, the curling tide, the occasional peeps at Johnnie as he was paraded, serene and sleepy, in Sarah’s arms, made time speed so fast that she was taken by surprise when voices hailed them, and she beheld Arthur and his father.

No wedding-day being in the case, Arthur had gladly put off his coming on a

proposal from his father to accompany him, see John's menage, and be introduced to his grandson.

Much more warmly than in former times did Lord Martindale greet his daughter-in-law, and quickly he asked for the baby. In spite of the doctor's prognostications, the little fellow had begun to mend, and he looked his best, nearly hidden in hood and mantle, and embellished by his mother's happy face, as she held him in her arms, rejoicing in the welcome bestowed on the first grandson.

Violet had never been so comfortable with Lord Martindale. There was the advantage of being the only lady, and he unbent more than he ever did at home. He had come partly to see what was to be the next arrangement. Five weeks of London had been almost too much for Lady Martindale, with whom it never agreed, and who had found a season with her unmanageable daughter very different from what it had formerly been, when her aunt arranged everything for her; and the family were about to return home. Arthur was to bring his wife to Martindale as soon as his leave began—but this would not be for a month; and his father, concerned to see her still so delicate, advised him not to think of her return to London in the hottest part of the year, and proposed to take her and the baby home with him. John, however, declared that he should prefer staying on at Ventnor with her; the place agreed with him, and he liked the quiet for finishing Percy Fotheringham's work besides, it suited Arthur better to be able to come backwards and forwards. The only doubt was whether she was tired of his dull company.

Arthur answered for her, and she was well satisfied, thinking it a great escape not to have to go to Martindale without him, but afraid John was giving up a great deal to her, when she must be a very tiresome companion; at which Arthur laughed, telling her of John's counter fears, and adding, that he had never seen his brother in such good spirits in all his life—he was now actually like other people.

Lord Martindale also feared that John found his undertaking wearisome, and talked

it over with him, saying it was very kind of him, very good for Arthur's wife; but was she society enough? 'Would he not like to have Theodora to relieve him of the charge, and be more of a companion?'

'Thank you,' said John, 'we shall be very glad to have Theodora, if she likes to come. It is a very good opportunity for them to grow intimate.'

'I'll send her next time Arthur comes.'

'But you must not think it an act of compassion, as if Violet was on my hands. She is a particularly agreeable person, and we do very well together. In fact, I have enjoyed this time very much; and Theodora must not think herself obliged to come for my sake, as if I wanted help.'

'I understand,' said his father; 'and of course it will depend on what engagements they have made; but I should be very glad she should be more with you, and if she saw more of Arthur's wife, it might detach her from those friends of hers. I cannot think how it is Theodora is not disgusted with Mrs. Finch! It is a comfort, after all, that Arthur did not marry Miss Gardner!'

'A great one!'

'This girl has simplicity and gentleness at least, poor thing,' continued Lord Martindale; 'and I am quite of your opinion, John, that marriage has improved him greatly. I never saw him so free from nonsense. Strangely as it has come about, this may be the making of him. I only wish I could see her and the poor child looking stronger. I will send your sister, by all means.'

So Lord Martindale returned, and proposed the plan to his daughter. At first, she was flattered at being wanted, and graciously replied, 'Poor John, he must want some variety.'

'Not exactly that,' said her father. 'They are so comfortable together, it is a pleasure to see them. I should like to stay there myself, and it is a very agreeable scheme for you.'

‘I was considering my engagements,’ said Theodora. ‘Of course, if I am really wanted, everything must be put aside.’

‘John desired you would not think it an act of charity,’ said her father. ‘He says he finds her a most agreeable companion, and you need only look upon it as a pleasant scheme for all parties.’

‘Oh,’ said Theodora, in a different tone.

‘He said you were not to put yourself out of the way. He would be very glad of your company, and it will be very good for you all to be together.’

‘Oh! then I don’t think it is worth while for me to go,’ said Theodora. ‘I am much obliged to John, but I should only interfere with his course of education.’

‘Not go?’ said her father.

‘No, there is no occasion; and I wish to be at home as soon as I can.’

‘Well, my dear, you must decide your own way, but I thought you would be glad of the opportunity of being with John, and I should be glad, too, that you should see more of your sister. She is a very engaging person, and I am sure you would find her a more satisfactory companion than Mrs. Finch.’

After this speech, Theodora would have suffered considerably rather than have gone.

‘They will soon be at Martindale,’ she said, ‘and I cannot stay longer away from the village.’

‘I wish at least that you would go down as I did for a day with Arthur. You would enjoy it, and it would give them all pleasure. Indeed, I think it would only be a proper piece of attention on your part.’

She made no answer, but the next time Arthur was going, she instantly stopped all her father’s arrangements for her accompanying him, by saying she was going to a lecture on electricity; then, when Lord Martindale began asking if Arthur could not

change his day, she majestically said, ‘No, Arthur would not disappoint Mrs. Martindale on my account.’

‘If you would go, Theodora,’ said Arthur, eagerly, ‘Violet would not mind waiting. She would be specially pleased to show you the boy. It is very jolly there.’

The first time he had spoken to her of his three months’ old son. If she had not been in a dire fit of sullen jealousy, it would have softened as much as it thrilled her, but she had the notion that she was not wanted, except to do homage to the universally-petted Violet.

‘I cannot spare a day.’

So Arthur was vexed, and the frost was harder. John had not much expected Theodora, and was more sorry for her sake than his own. The last month was still better than the first, the brother and sister understood each other more fully, and their confidence had become thoroughly confirmed. The baby had taken a start, as Sarah called it, left off unreasonable crying, sat up, laughed and stared about with a sharp look of inquiry in his dark eyes and tiny thin face, so ridiculously like his grandfather, Mr. Moss, that his mother could not help being diverted with the resemblance, except when she tormented herself with the fear that the likeness was unpleasing to Arthur, if perchance he remarked it; but he looked so little at the child, that she often feared he did not care for him personally, though he had a certain pride in him as son and heir.

Violet herself, though still delicate and requiring care, had recovered her looks and spirits, and much of her strength, and John walked and conversed more than he had done for years, did not shrink from the society of the few families they were acquainted with, and seemed to have derived as much benefit from his kind scheme as the objects of it. In fact his hopes and affections were taking a fresh spring—the effects of his kindness to Arthur and Violet had shown him that he could be useful to others, and he thus discovered what he had missed in his indulged life, crossed in

but one respect—he saw that he had set himself aside from family duties, as well as from the more active ones that his health prohibited, and with a feeling at once of regret and invigoration, he thought over the course that lay open to him, and soon began to form plans and discuss them with his ever ready listener. His foreign winters need no longer be useless, he proposed to go to Barbuda to look after his mother's estates—indeed, it seemed so obvious that when he once thought of it he could not imagine why it had never occurred to him before; it would save his father the voyage, and when he and Violet began to figure to themselves the good that could be done there, they grew animated and eager in their castles.

That month sped fast away, and their drives were now last visits to the places that had charmed them at first. Their work was prepared for Mr. Fotheringham's inspection, and Violet having copied out her favourite passages of Helen's book, returned it on the last evening. 'I don't think I half understand all she says, though I do admire it so much, and wish I was like it.'

'You will be, you are in the way.'

'You don't know how foolish I am,' said Violet, almost as if he was disrespectful to Helen.

'Helen was once seventeen,' said John, smiling.

'Oh, but I have no patience. I fret and tease myself, and fancy all sorts of things, instead of trusting as she did. I don't know how to do so.'

'I know how weakness brings swarming harassing thoughts,' said John; 'it is well for us that there are so many external helps to patience and confidence.'

'Ah! that is what shows how bad I am,' said Violet, despondingly. 'I never keep my mind in order at church, yet I am sure I was more unreasonably discontented when I was not able to go.'

'Which shows it is of use to you. Think of it not only as a duty that must be fulfilled, but watch for refreshment from it, and you will find it come.'

‘Ah! I have missed all the great festivals this year. I have not stayed to the full service since I was at Rickworth, and what is worse, I do not dislike being prevented,’ said Violet, falteringly; as if she must say the words, ‘I don’t like staying alone.’

‘You must conquer that,’ said John, earnestly. ‘That feeling must never keep you away. Your continuance is the best hope of bringing him; your leaving off would be fatal to you both. I should almost like you to promise never to keep away because he did.’

‘I think I can promise,’ said Violet, faintly. ‘It is only what mamma has always had to do; and, last Christmas, it did keep me away. I did think then he would have come; and when I found he did not—then I was really tired—but I know I could have stayed—but I made it an excuse, and went away.’ The tears began to flow. ‘I thought of it again when I was ill; and afterwards when I found out how nearly I had been dying, it was frightful. I said to myself, I would not miss again; but I have never had the opportunity since I have been well.’

‘It is monthly at home,’ said John. ‘Only try to look to it as a favour and a comfort, as I said about church-going, but in a still higher degree—not merely as a service required from you. Believe it is a refreshment, and in time you will find it the greatest.’

‘I’ll try,’ she said, in a low, melancholy voice; ‘but I never feel as good people do.’

‘You have had more than usual against you,’ said John; cares for which you were not prepared, and weakness to exaggerate them; but you will have had a long rest, and I hope may be more equal to the tasks of daily life.’

They were interrupted by tea being brought; and the conversation continued in a less serious style.

‘Our last tea-drinking,’ said John. ‘Certainly, it has been very pleasant here.’

‘This island, that I thought so far away, and almost in foreign parts,’ said Violet,

smiling; ‘I hope it has cured me of foolish terrors.’

‘You will bravely make up your mind to Martindale.’

‘I shall like to show Johnnie the peacock,’ said Violet, in a tone as if seeking for some pleasant anticipation.

John laughed, and said, ‘Poor Johnnie! I shall like to see him there in his inheritance.’

‘Dear little man! I hope his grandfather will think him grown. I am glad they did not see him while he was so tiny and miserable. I am sure they must like him now, he takes so much notice.’

‘You must not be disappointed if my mother does not make much of him,’ said John; ‘it was not her way with her own.’

Then, as Violet looked aghast, ‘You do not know my mother. It requires a good deal to show what she can be, beneath her distant manner. I never knew her till two years ago.’

‘When you were past thirty!’ broke from Violet’s lips, in a sort of horror.

‘When I was most in need of comfort,’ he answered. ‘There has been a formality and constraint in our life, that has not allowed the affections their natural play, but indeed they exist. There have been times when even I distrusted my mother’s attachment; but she could not help it, and it was all the stronger afterwards. Madeira taught me what she is, away from my aunt.’

‘I do hope it is not wrong to feel about Mrs. Nesbit as I do! I am ready to run away from her. I know she is spying for my faults. Oh! I cannot like her.’

‘That is a very mild version of what I have felt,’ said John; ‘I believe she has done us all infinite harm. But I am hardly qualified to speak; for, from the time she gave up the hope of my being a credit to the family, she has disliked me, said cutting things, well-nigh persecuted me. She did harass Helen to give me up; but, after all,

poor woman, I believe I have been a great vexation to her, and I cannot help being sorry for her. It is a pitiable old age, straining to keep hold of what used to occupy her, and irritated at her own failing faculties.'

'I will try to think of that,' said Violet.

'I wonder what powers she will give me over her West Indian property; I must try,' said John; 'it will make a great difference to my opportunities of usefulness. I must talk to my father about it.'

'How very kind Theodora is to poor little Miss Piper,' said Violet.

'Yes; that is one of Theodora's best points.'

'Oh! she is so very good; I wish she could endure me.'

'So do I,' said John. 'I have neglected her, and now I reap the fruits. In that great house at home people live so much apart, that if they wish to meet, they must seek each other. And I never saw her as a child but when she came down in the evening, with her great black eyes looking so large and fierce. As a wild high-spirited girl I never made acquaintance with her, and now I cannot.'

'But when you were ill this last time, did she not read to you, and nurse you?'

'That was not permitted; there might have been risk, and besides, as Arthur says, I only wish to be let alone. I had not then realized that sympathy accepted for the sake of the giver will turn to the good of the receiver. No; I have thrown her away as far as I am concerned; and when I see what noble character and religious feeling there is with that indomitable pride and temper, I am the more grieved. Helen walked with her twice or three times when she was at Martindale, and she told me how much there was in her, but I never tried to develop it. I thought when Helen was her sister—but that chance is gone. That intractable spirit will never be tamed but by affection; but, unluckily, I don't know,' said John, smiling, 'who would marry Theodora.'

‘Oh! how can you say so? She is so like Arthur.’

John laughed. ‘No, I give up the hope of a Petruchio.’

‘But Mr. Wingfield, I thought—’

‘Wingfield!’ said John, starting. ‘No, no, that’s not likely.’

‘Nor Lord St. Erme!’

‘I hope not. He is fancy-bit, I suppose, but he is not her superior. Life with him would harden rather than tame her. No. After all, strangely as she has behaved about him, when she has him in sight, I suspect there is one person among us more likely to soften her than any other.’

‘Arthur?’

‘Arthur’s son.’

‘Oh! of course, and if she will but love my Johnnie I don’t much care about his mamma.’

CHAPTER 8

In glowing health, with boundless wealth, But sickening of a vague disease, You know so ill to deal with time, You needs must play such pranks as these. —TENNYSON

In spite of herself, Theodora’s heart bounded at the prospect of having Arthur’s child in the house. She visited the babies in the village, and multiplying their charms by the superior beauty of Arthur and his wife, proportionably raised her expectations, but, of course, she betrayed none of her eagerness, and would not give up one iota of her course of village occupations for the sake of being at home for the arrival.

Nevertheless, she returned across the park, through burning sunshine, at double-quick pace, only slackened on seeing a carriage, but it proved to be her aunt,

who was being assisted out of it, and tottering up the steps with the help of Lady Martindale's arm, while Miss Piper, coming down to give her assistance, informed them that the party had arrived about an hour before. The two gentlemen had gone out, and Mrs. Arthur Martindale was in her own room.

Trembling with eagerness, Theodora followed the tardy steps of her mother and aunt as they mounted the stairs. As they entered the gallery, a slender figure advanced to meet them, her apple-blossom face all smiles, and carrying a thing like a middle-sized doll, if doll had ever been as bald, or as pinched, or as skinny, or flourished such spare arms, or clenched such claw-like fingers. Was this the best she could give Arthur by way of son and heir? Yet she looked as proud and exulting as if he had been the loveliest of children, and the little wretch himself had a pert, lively air of speculation, as if he partook her complacency.

Lady Martindale gave her stately greeting, and Mrs. Nesbit coldly touched her hand; then Theodora, with some difficulty, pronounced the words, 'How are you?' and brought herself to kiss Violet's cheek, but took no apparent notice of the child, and stood apart while her mother made all hospitable speeches, moving on, so as not to keep Mrs. Nesbit standing.

Theodora followed her aunt and mother, and as soon as the baize door was shut on them, Violet hugged her baby closely, whispering, 'No welcome for the poor little boy! nobody cares for him but his own mamma! Never mind, my Johnnie, we are not too grand to love each other.'

Theodora in the meantime could not help exclaiming, 'Poor child! It is just like a changeling!'

'Don't talk of it, my dear,' said Lady Martindale, with a shudder and look of suffering. 'Poor little dear! He looks exactly as your poor little brother did!' and she left the room with a movement far unlike her usually slow dignified steps.

'Ah!' said her aunt, in a tone between grief and displeasure; 'here's a pretty

business! we must keep him out of her way! Don't you ever bring him forward, Theodora, to revive all that.'

'What is the meaning of it?' said Theodora. 'I did not know I ever had another brother.'

'It was long before your time, my dear, but your mamma has never entirely got over it, though he only lived nine weeks. I would not have had the recollection recalled on any account. And now John has brought this child here! If he was to die here I don't know what the effect on your mamma would be.'

'He is not going to die!' said Theodora, hastily; 'but let me hear of my other brother, aunt.'

'There is nothing to hear, my dear,' said Mrs. Nesbit. 'How could the girl think of bringing him on us without preparation? An effect of John's spoiling her, of course. She expects him to be made much of; but she must be taught to perceive this is no house of which she can make all parts a nursery.'

'Let me hear about my brother,' repeated Theodora. 'How old would he be? What was his name?'

'His name was Theodore. He never could have lived,' said Mrs. Nesbit: 'it was much as it was with this child of Arthur's. He was born unexpectedly at Vienna. Your mamma had a dreadful illness, brought on by your father's blundering sudden way of telling her of the death of poor little Dora and Anna. He has not a notion of self-command or concealment; so, instead of letting me prepare her, he allowed her to come home from the drive, and find him completely overcome.'

Theodora better understood her mother's stifled sympathy for Violet, and her father's more openly shown feeling for Arthur.

'We were in great alarm for her,' continued Mrs. Nesbit, 'and the poor child was a miserable little thing, and pined away till we thought it best to send him home to be under English treatment; and your father chose to go with him to see John, who was

in a very unsatisfactory state.’

‘And mamma did not go?’

‘She was unfit for the journey, and I remained with her. It was a fortunate arrangement of mine, for I knew he could not survive, and anxiety for him retarded her recovery, though we had hardly ever let her see him.’

‘Then he died?—how soon?’

‘At Frankfort, a fortnight after we parted with him. It was a dreadful shock to her; and if it had happened in the house, I do not think she would ever have recovered it. Was it a fortnight? Yes, I know it was; for it was on the 3rd of September that I had your papa’s letter. We were going to a party at Prince K—‘s, where there was to be a celebrated Italian improvisatrice, and I would not give her the letter till the next morning.’

Theodora stared at her in incredulous horror.

‘It threw her back sadly; but I did my utmost to rally her spirits, and her health did not suffer so materially as I feared; but she has strong feelings, and the impression has never been entirely removed. She scarcely ventured to look at Arthur or at you. How could your papa have let this child come here?’

‘Is he like poor little Theodore?’ said the sister.

‘Only as one wretched-looking baby is like another. This one is not a bit like the Martindales; it is exactly his mother’s face.’

‘Is he buried here?’

‘Who—Theodore? Yes; your papa came home, and managed matters his own way, sent off all the governesses, put John under that ignorant old nurse, and began the precious intimacy with the Fotheringhams, that led to such results. I could have told him how it would be; but I believe he did repent of that!’

‘Did John know about Theodore?’

‘No; his sisters’ death had such an effect on him that they kept the knowledge from him. You had better never mention it, my dear; and especially,’ she added, somewhat pleadingly, ‘I would not have the party at the Prince’s transpire to your papa.’

Theodora felt her indignation would not endure concealment much longer. She called Miss Piper, and hastened away, the next moment finding herself vis-a-vis with John.

‘Are you just come in?’ said he, greeting her.

‘No, I have been with my aunt. How are you now?’

‘Quite well, thank you. I wish you could have come to Ventnor. You would have enjoyed it very much.’

‘Thank you.’

‘Have you seen Violet?’

‘Yes, I have.’

‘And the little boy?’

‘Yes.’

‘I can’t say he is a beauty, but you who are such a baby fancier will find him a very animated, intelligent child. I hope all fear is over about him now; he has thriven wonderfully of late.’

Perverseness prompted Theodora to say, ‘The baby at the lodge is twice the size.’

John saw there was no use in talking, and shut himself into his room. The next instant Sarah appeared, with the baby on one arm, and a pile of clothes on the other.

No one was in sight, so Theodora could gratify her passionate yearnings for her brother’s babe; justifying herself to her own pride, by considering it charity to an overloaded servant.

‘Let me have him. Let me carry him up.’

‘Thank you, ma’am, I’ll not fash you,’ said Sarah, stiffly.

‘Let me! Oh! let me. I have often held a baby. Come to me, my precious. Don’t you know your aunt, your papa’s own sister? There, he smiled at me! He will come! You know me, you pretty one?’

She held him near the window, and gazed with almost devouring eyes.

‘He will be handsome—he will be beautiful!’ she said. ‘Oh! it is a shame to say you are not! You are like your papa—you are a thorough Martindale! That is your papa’s bright eye, and the real Martindale brow, you sweet, little, fair, feeble, helpless thing! Oh, nurse, I can’t spare him yet, and you have to unpack. Let me hold him. I know he likes me. Don’t you love Aunt Theodora, babe?’

Sarah let her keep him, mollified by her devotion to him, and relieved at having him off her hands in taking possession of the great, bare, scantily-furnished nursery. Theodora lamented over his delicate looks, and was told he would not be here now but for his mamma, and the Isle of Wight doctor, who had done him a power of good. She begged to hear of all his wants; rang the bell, and walked up and down the room, caressing him, until he grew fretful, and no one answering the bell she rang again in displeasure, Sarah thanking her, and saying she wished to have him ready for bed before his mamma came up.

After her public reception, Theodora would not be caught nursing him in secret, so hastily saying she would send some one, she kissed the little blue-veined forehead, and rushing at full speed down the back stairs, she flew into the housekeeper’s room; ‘Jenkins, there’s no one attending to the nursery bell. I wish you would see to it. Send up some one with some hot water to Master Martindale directly.’

As fast she ran back to her own room, ordered off Pauline to help Master Martindale’s nurse, and flung herself into her chair, in a wild fit of passion.

‘Improvisatrice! Prince’s parties! this is what it is to be great, rich, horrid people, and live a heartless, artificial life! Even this silly, affected girl has the natural

instincts of a mother, she nurses her sick child, it lies on her bosom, she guards it jealously! And we! we might as well have been hatched in an Egyptian oven! No wonder we are hard, isolated, like civil strangers. I have a heart! Yes, I have, but it is there by mistake, while no one cares for it—all throw it from them. Oh! if I was but a village child, a weeding woman, that very baby, so that I might only have the affection that comes like the air to the weakest, the meanest. That precious baby! he smiled at me; he looked as if he would know me. Oh! he is far more lovable, with those sweet, little, delicate features, and large considering eyes, than if he was a great, plump, common-looking child. Dearest little Johnnie! And my own brother was like him—my brother, whom my aunt as good as killed! If he had lived, perhaps I might still have a brother to myself. He would be twenty-eight. But I mind nothing now that dear child is here! Why, Pauline, I sent you to Master Martindale.'

'Yes, ma'am; but Mrs. Martindale is there, and they are much obliged to you, but want nothing more.'

Indeed Violet, who had been positively alarmed and depressed at first, at the waste and desolate aspect of the nursery, which seemed so far away and neglected, as almost, she thought, to account for the death of the two little sisters, had now found Sarah beset on all sides by offers of service from maids constantly knocking at the door, and Theodora's own Pauline, saying she was sent by Miss Martindale.

Violet could hardly believe her ears.

'Yes,' said Sarah, 'Miss Martindale has been here herself ever so long. A fine, well-grown lassie she is, and very like the Captain.'

'Has she been here?' said Violet. 'It is very kind of her. Did she look at the baby?'

'She made more work with him than you do yourself. Nothing was not good enough for him. Why, she called him the most beautifullest baby she ever seen!'

'And that we never told you, my Johnnie,' said Violet, smiling. 'Are you sure she was not laughing at you, baby?'

‘No, no, ma’am,’ said Sarah, affronted; ‘it was earnest enough. She was nigh ready to eat him up, and talked to him, and he look up quite ‘cute, as if he knew what it all meant, and was quite good with her. She was ready to turn the house upside down when they did not answer the bell. And how she did kiss him, to be sure! I’d half a mind to tell her of old nurse telling you it warn’t good for the child to be always kissing of him.’

‘No, no, she won’t hurt him,’ said Violet, in a half mournful voice. ‘Let her do as she likes with him, Sarah.’

Violet could recover from the depression of that cold reception now that she found Johnnie did not share in the dislike. ‘She loves Arthur’s child,’ thought she, ‘though she cannot like me. I am glad Johnnie has been in his aunt’s arms!’

Violet, as she sat at the dinner-table, understood Lord Martindale’s satisfaction in hearing John talking with animation; but she wondered at the chill of manner between her husband and his sister, and began to perceive that it was not, as she had supposed, merely in an occasional impatient word, that Arthur resented Theodora’s neglect of her.

‘How unhappy it must make her! how much it must add to her dislike! they must be brought together again!’ were gentle Violet’s thoughts. And knowing her ground better, she could venture many more steps towards conciliation than last year: but Theodora disappeared after dinner, and Violet brought down some plants from the Isle of Wight which John had pronounced to be valuable, to his mother; but Mrs. Nesbit, at the first glance, called them common flowers, and shoved them away contemptuously, while Lady Martindale tried to repair the discourtesy by condescending thanks and admiration of the neat drying of the specimens; but her stateliness caused Violet to feel herself sinking into the hesitating tremulous girl she used to be, and she betook herself to her work, hoping to be left to silence; but she was molested by a very sharp, unpleasant examination from Mrs. Nesbit on the style

of John's housekeeping at Ventnor, and the society they had met there. It was plain she thought he had put himself to a foolish expense, and something was said of 'absurd' when cross-examination had elicited the fact of the pony-carriage. Then came a set of questions about Mr. Fotheringham's return, and strong condemnation of him for coming home to idle in England.

It was a great relief when John came in, and instantly took up the defence of the ophrys, making out its species so indisputably, that Mrs. Nesbit had no refuge but in saying, specimens were worthless that had not been gathered by the collector, and Lady Martindale made all becoming acknowledgments. No wonder Mrs. Nesbit was mortified; she was an excellent botanist, and only failing eyesight could have made even prejudice betray her into such a mistake. Violet understood the compassion that caused John to sit down by her and diligently strive to interest her in conversation.

Theodora had returned as tea was brought in, and Violet felt as if she must make some demonstration out of gratitude for the fondness for her child; but she did not venture on that subject, and moving to her side, asked, with somewhat timid accents, after Charlie Layton, the dumb boy.

'He is very well, thank you. I hope to get him into an asylum next year,' said Theodora, but half-pleased.

'I looked for him at the gate, and fancied it was him I saw with a broad black ribbon on his hat. Is he in mourning?'

'Did you not hear of his mother's death?'

'No, poor little fellow.'

Therewith Theodora had the whole history to tell, and thawed as she spoke; while Violet's deepening colour, and eyes ready to overflow, proved the interest she took; and she had just begged to go to-morrow to see the little orphan, when Arthur laid his hand on her shoulder, and told her he had just come from the stables, where her horse was in readiness for her, and would she like to ride to-morrow?

‘What will suit you for us to do?’ said Violet, turning to Theodora.

‘Oh, it makes no difference to me.’

‘Tuesday. It is not one of your schooldays, is it?’ said Violet, appearing unconscious of the chill of the answer; then, looking up to Arthur, ‘I am going, at any rate, to walk to the lodge with Theodora to see the poor baby there. It is just the age of Johnnie.’

‘You aren’t going after poor children all day long,’ said Arthur: and somehow Violet made a space between them on the ottoman, and pulled him down into it; and whereas he saw his wife and sister apparently sharing the same pursuits, and on friendly terms, he resumed his usual tone with Theodora, and began coaxing her to ride with them, and inquiring after home interests, till she lighted up and answered in her natural manner. Then Violet ventured to ask if she was to thank her for the delicious geranium and heliotrope she had found in her room.

‘Oh no! that is an attention of Harrison or Miss Piper, I suppose.’

‘Or? probably and?’ suggested Arthur. ‘How does that go on?’

‘Take care,’ said Theodora, peeping out beyond the shadow of his broad shoulder. ‘Tis under the strictest seal of confidence; she asked my advice as soon as she had done it.’

‘What! has she accepted him!’ said Violet. ‘Has it come to that?’

‘Ay; and now she wants to know whether people will think it odd and improper. Let them think, I say.’

‘A piece of luck for her,’ said Arthur; ‘better marry a coal-heaver than lead her present life.’

‘Yes; and Harrison is an educated man though a coxcomb, and knows she condescends.’

‘But why are they waiting!’ asked Violet.

‘Because she dares not tell my aunt. She trembles and consults, and walks behind my aunt’s chair in the garden, exchanging glances with Harrison over her head, while he listens to discourses on things with hard names. The flutter and mystery seem to be felicity, and, if they like it, ‘tis their own concern.’

‘Now I know why Miss Piper told me Miss Martindale was so considerate,’ said Violet.

What had become of the estrangement! Arthur had forgotten it, Violet had been but half-conscious of it, even while uniting them; Theodora thought all was owing to his being at home, and she knew not who had restored him.

Indeed, the jealous feeling was constantly excited, for Arthur’s devotion to his wife was greater than ever, in his delight at being with her again, and his solicitude to the weakness which Theodora could neither understand nor tolerate. She took all unclassified ailments as fine lady nonsense; and was angry with Violet for being unable to teach at school, contemptuous if Arthur observed on her looking pale, and irate if he made her rest on the sofa.

John added to the jealousy. Little as Theodora apparently regarded him, she could not bear to be set aside while Violet held the place of the favourite sister, and while her father openly spoke of the benefit he had derived from having that young bright gentle creature so much with him.

The alteration was indeed beyond what could have been hoped for. The first day, when his horse was led round with the others, it was supposed to be by mistake, till he came down with his whip in his hand; and not till they were past the lodge did Theodora believe he was going to make one of the riding party. She had never seen him take part in their excursions, or appear to consider himself as belonging to the younger portion of the family, and when they fell in with any acquaintance Arthur was amused, and she was provoked, at the surprised congratulations on seeing Mr. Martindale with them.

Lord Martindale was delighted to find him taking interest in matters to which he had hitherto scarcely paid even languid attention; and the offer to go to Barbuda was so suitable and gratifying that it was eagerly discussed in many a consultation.

He liked to report progress to Violet, and as she sat in the drawing-room, the two brothers coming to her with all their concerns, Theodora could have pined and raged in the lonely dignity of her citadel up-stairs. She did not know the forbearance that was exercised towards her by one whom she had last year taught what it was to find others better instructed than herself in the family councils.

Violet never obtruded on her, her intimacy with John's designs, thinking it almost unfair on his sister that any other should be more in his confidence.

So, too, Violet would not spoil her pleasure in her stolen caresses of little Johnnie by seeming to be informed of them. She was grateful for her love to him, and would not thrust in her unwelcome self. In public the boy was never seen and rarely mentioned, and Theodora appeared to acquiesce in the general indifference, but whenever she was secure of not being detected, she lavished every endearment on him, rejoiced in the belief that he knew and preferred her enough to offend his doting mamma, had she known it; never guessing that Violet sometimes delayed her visits to the nursery, in order not to interfere with her enjoyment of him.

Violet had not yet seen the Brandons, as they had been making visits before returning home; but she had many ardent letters from Emma, describing the progress of her acquaintance with Miss Marstone, the lady who had so excited her imagination, and to whom she had been introduced at a school festival. She seemed to have realized all Emma's expectations, and had now come home with her to make some stay at Rickworth. Violet was highly delighted when, a few days after their return, her friends were invited to dinner, on the same evening that Mr. Fotheringham was expected. The afternoon of that day was one of glowing August sunshine, almost too much for Violet, who, after they had ridden some distance, was

rather frightened to hear Theodora propose to extend their ride by a canter over the downs; but John relieved her by asking her to return with him, as he wanted to be at home in time to receive Mr. Fotheringham.

Accordingly, they rode home quietly together, but about an hour after, on coming up-stairs, he was surprised to find Violet in her evening dress, pacing the gallery with such a countenance that he exclaimed, ‘I hope there is nothing amiss with the boy.’

Oh, nothing, thank you, he is quite well,’ but her voice was on the verge of tears. ‘Is Mr. Fotheringham come?’

No, I have given him up now, till the mail train; but it is not very late; Arthur and Theodora can’t be back till past seven if they go to Whitford down,’ said John, fancying she was in alarm on their account.

‘I do not suppose they can.’

‘I am afraid we took you too far. Why are you not resting?’

‘It is cooler here,’ said Violet. ‘It does me more good than staying in my room.’

‘Oh, you get the western sun there.’

‘It comes in hot and dazzling all the afternoon till it is baked through, and I can’t find a cool corner. Even baby is fretful in such a hot place, and I have sent him out into the shade.’

‘Is it always so?’

‘Oh, no, only on such days as this; and I should not care about it to-day, but for one thing’—she hesitated, and lowered her voice, partly piteous, partly ashamed. ‘Don’t you know since I have been so weak and stupid, how my face burns when I am tired? and, of all things, Arthur dislikes a flushed race. There, now I have told you; but I could not help it. It is vain and foolish and absurd to care, almost wicked, and I have told myself so fifty times; but I have got into a fret, and I cannot leave off. I

tried coming here to be cool, but I feel it growing worse, and there's the dinner-party, and Arthur will be vexed'—and she was almost crying. 'I am doing what I thought I never would again, and about such nonsense.'

'Come in here,' said John, leading her into a pleasant apartment fitted up as a library, the fresh air coming through the open window. 'I was wishing to show you my room.'

'How cool! Arthur told me it was the nicest room in the house,' said Violet, her attention instantly diverted.

'Yes, am I not a luxurious man? There, try my great armchair. I am glad to have a visit from you. You must come again.'

'Oh! thank you. What quantities of books! No wonder every book one wants comes out of your room.'

'I shall leave you the use of them.'

'Do you mean that I may take any of your books home with me?'

'It will be very good for them.'

'How delightful,' and she was up in a moment reading their titles, but he made her return to the great chair.

'Rest now, there will be plenty of time, now you know your way. You must make this your retreat from the sun. Ah, by the bye, I have just recollected that I brought something for you from Madeira. I chose it because it reminded me of the flowers you wore at the Whitford ball.'

It was a wreath of pink and white brier roses, in the feather flowers of Madeira, and she was delighted, declaring Arthur would think it beautiful, admiring every bud and leaf, and full of radiant girlish smiles. It would exactly suit her dress, Arthur's present, now worn for the first time.

'You are not going yet?'

‘I thought I might be in your way.’

‘Not at all; if I had anything to do, I would leave you to the books; but I have several things to show you.’

‘I was wishing to look at those drawings. Who is that queen with the cross on her arm?’

‘St. Helena; it is a copy from a fresco by one of the old masters.’

‘What a calm grave face! what strange stiff drawing!—and yet it suits it: it is so solemn, with that matronly dignity. That other, too—those apostles, with their bowed heads and clasped hands, how reverent they look!’

‘They are from Cimabue,’ said John: ‘are they not majestically humble in adoration?’

Between, these two hung that awful dark engraving from Albert Durer.

‘These have been my companions,’ said John.

‘Through all the long months that you have been shut up here?’

‘My happiest times.’

‘Ah! that does, indeed, make me ashamed of my discontent and ingratitude,’ sighed Violet.

‘Nay,’ said John, ‘a little fit of fatigue deserves no such harsh names.’

‘When it is my besetting sin—all here speaks of patience and unrepining.’

‘No, no, said John—‘if you cannot sit still; I have sat still too much. We have both a great deal to learn.’

As he spoke he unlocked a desk, took out a miniature, looked at it earnestly, and then in silence put it into her hand. She was disappointed; she knew she was not to expect beauty; but she had figured to herself a saintly, spiritual, pale countenance, and she saw that of a round-faced, rosy-cheeked, light-haired girl, looking only as if she was sitting for her picture.

After much doubt what to say, she ventured only, ‘I suppose this was done a long time ago?’

‘When she was quite a girl. Mrs. Percival gave it to me; it was taken for her long before. I used not to like it.’

‘I did not think she would have had so much colour.’

‘It was a thorough English face: she did not lose those rosy cheeks till want of air faded them. Then I should hardly have known her, but the countenance had become so much more—calm it had always been, reminding me of the description of Jeanie Deans’ countenance—I cannot tell you what it was then! I see a little dawning of that serenity on the mouth, even as it is here; but I wish anything could give you an idea of that look!’

Thank you for showing it to me,’ said Violet, earnestly.

After studying it a little while, he restored it to its place. He then took out a small box, and, after a moment’s hesitation, put into Violet’s hands a pink coral cross, shaped by the animals themselves, and fastened by a ring to a slender gold chain.

‘The cross!’ said Violet, holding it reverently: ‘it is very kind of you to let me see it.’

‘Would you like to keep it, Violet?’

‘Oh!’ she exclaimed, and stopped short, with tearful eyes.

‘You know she wished some one to have it who would find comfort in it, as she did.’

‘No one will prize it more, but can you bear to part with it?’

‘If you will take it, as her gift.’

‘But just now, when I have been so naughty—so unlike her!’

‘More like her than ever, in struggling with besetting failings; you are learning to see in little trials the daily cross; and if you go on, the serenity which was a gift in

her will be a grace in you.’

They were interrupted: Brown, with beaming face, announced ‘Mr. Fotheringham’; and there stood a gentleman, strong and broad-shouldered, his face burnt to a deep red, his dark brown hair faded at the tips to a light rusty hue, and his irregular features, wide, smiling mouth, and merry blue eyes, bright with good humour.

‘Ha, Percy! here you are!’ cried John, springing towards him with joyful alacrity, and giving a hand that was eagerly seized.

‘Well, John, how are you?’ exclaimed a hearty voice.

‘Arthur’s wife:’ and this unceremonious introduction caused her to be favoured with a warm shake of the hand; but, much discomfited at being in their way, she hastily gathered up her treasures, and glided away as John was saying, ‘I had almost given you up.’

‘I walked round by Fowler’s lodge, to bestow my little Athenian owl. I brought it all the way in my pocket, or on my hand, and I put him in Tom Fowler’s charge while I am here. I could not think what fashionable young lady you had here. How has that turned out?’

‘Excellently!’ said John, warmly.

‘She is a beauty!’ said Percival.

‘She can’t help that, poor thing,’ said John: ‘she is an admirable creature; indeed, she sometimes reminds me of your sister.’

Then, as Percy looked at him, as if to be certain he was in his senses, ‘I don’t expect others to see it; it is only one expression.’

‘How are you? You look in better case.’

‘I am wonderfully well, thank you. Has your romance come to a satisfactory denouement?’

‘The happy pair were at Malta when I started.’

‘And where have you been?’

‘Oh! in all manner of queer places. I have been talking Latin with the folks in Dacia. Droll state of things there; one could fancy it Britain, or Gaul half settled by the Teutons, with the Roman sticking about them. But that’s too much to tell, I have heard nothing from home this age. How is Theodora? I am afraid she has outgrown her antics.’

‘She is not too much like other people.’

‘Are you all at home, and in “statu quo”?’

‘Yes, except that my aunt is more aged and feeble.’

‘And Master Arthur has set up for a domestic character. It must be after a fashion of his own.’

‘Rather so,’ said John, smiling; ‘but it has done him a great deal of good. He has more heart in him than you and I used to think; and home is drawing it out, and making a man of him in spite of himself.’

‘How came she to marry him?’

‘Because she knew no better, poor thing; her family promoted it, and took advantage of her innocence.’

‘Is she a sensible woman?’

‘Why, poor child, she has plenty of sense, but it is not doing her justice to call her a woman. She is too fine a creature to come early to her full growth—she is a woman in judgment and a child in spirits.’

‘So, Arthur has the best of the bargain.’

‘He does not half understand her; but they are very much attached, and some day she will feel her influence and use it.’

‘Form herself first, and then him. I hope Mark Gardner will keep out of the way during the process.’

‘He is safe in Paris.’

‘And how have you been spending the summer?’

‘I have been at Ventnor, getting through the Crusaders, and keeping house with Violet and her child, who both wanted sea air.’

‘What’s her name?’

‘Violet.’

‘Well, that beats all! Violet! Why, Vi’let was what they called the old black cart-horse! I hope the child is Cowslip or Daisy!’

‘No, he is John, my godson.’

‘John! You might as well be called Man! It is no name at all. That Arthur should have gone and married a wife called Violet!!’

Meanwhile Violet was wondering over the honour she had received, caressing the gift, and thinking of the hopes that had faded over it till patience had done her perfect work. She did not remember her other present till she heard sounds betokening the return of the riders. She placed it on her head, and behold! the cheeks had no more than their own roseate tinting, and she was beginning to hope Arthur would be pleased, when she became aware of certain dark eyes and a handsome face set in jet-black hair, presenting itself over her shoulder in the long glass.

‘You little piece of vanity! studying yourself in the glass, so that you never heard me come in? Well, you have done it to some purpose. Where did you get that thing?’

‘John brought it from Madeira.’

‘I did not think he had so much taste. Where have you bottled it up all this time!’

‘He forgot it till there was an opportunity for wearing it. Is it not pretty? And this is your silk, do you see?’

‘Very pretty, that’s the real thing. I am glad to find you in good trim. I was afraid Theodora had taken you too far, and the heat would knock you up, and the boy

would roar till you were all manner of colours.’

‘I was hot and tired, but John invited me into his nice cool room, and only think! he showed me Helen’s picture.’

‘He has one, has he? She was nothing to look at; just like Percy—you know he is come?’

‘Yes, he came while I was in John’s room. He is not at all like what I expected.’

‘No, ladies always expect a man to look like a hero or a brigand. She had just that round face, till the last when I saw her in London, and then she looked a dozen years older than John—enough to scare one.’

‘See what he gave me.’

‘Ha! was that hers? I remember, it was that my aunt kicked up such a dust about. So he has given you that.’

‘Helen said she should like some one to have it who would find as much comfort in it as she did.’

‘Comfort! What comfort do you want?’

‘Only when I am foolish.’

‘I should think so; and pray what is to be the comfort of a bit of coral like that?’

‘Not the coral, but the thoughts, dear Arthur,’ said Violet, colouring, and restoring the cross to its place within her dress.

‘Well! you and John understand your own fancies, but I am glad you can enter into them with him, poor fellow! It cheers him up to have some one to mope with.’

CHAPTER 9

P. Henry.—But do you use me thus, Ned; must I marry your sister? Poins.—May the wench have no worse fortune, but I never said so. —K. Henry IV

Arthur met the new-comer, exclaiming, ‘Ha! Fotheringham, you have not brought me the amber mouth-piece I desired John to tell you of.’

‘Not I. I don’t bring Turks’ fashion into Christian countries. You ought to learn better manners now you are head of a family.’

Theodora entered, holding her head somewhat high, but there was a decided heightening of the glow on her cheek as Mr. Fotheringham shook hands with her. Lord Martindale gave him an affectionate welcome, and Lady Martindale, though frigid at first, grew interested as she asked about his journey.

The arriving guests met him with exclamations of gladness, as if he was an honour to the neighbourhood; and John had seldom looked more cheerful and more gratified than in watching his reception.

At length came the names for which Violet was watching; and the presence of Lady Elizabeth gave her a sense of motherly protection, as she was greeted with as much warmth as was possible for shy people in the midst of a large party. Emma eagerly presented her two friends to each other, and certainly they were a great contrast. Miss Marstone was sallow, with thin sharply-cut features, her eyes peered out from spectacles, her hair was disposed in the plainest manner, as well as her dress, which was anything but suited to a large dinner-party. Violet’s first impulse was to be afraid of her, but to admire Emma for being attracted by worth through so much formidable singularity.

‘And the dear little godson is grown to be a fine fellow,’ began Emma.

‘Not exactly that,’ said Violet, ‘but he is much improved, and so bright and clever.’

‘You will let us see him after dinner?’

‘I have been looking forward to it very much, but he will be asleep, and you won’t see his pretty ways and his earnest dark eyes.’

‘I long to see the sweet child,’ said Miss Marstone. ‘I dote on such darlings. I always

see so much in their countenances. There is the germ of so much to be drawn out hereafter in those deep looks of thought.'

'My baby often looks very intent.'

'Intent on thoughts beyond our power to trace!' said Miss Marstone.

'Ah! I have often thought that we cannot fathom what may be passing in a baby's mind,' said Emma.

'With its fixed eyes unravelling its whole future destiny!' said Miss Marstone.

'Poor little creature!' murmured Violet.

'I am convinced that the whole course of life takes its colouring from some circumstance at the time unmarked.'

'It would frighten me to think so,' said Violet.

'For instance, I am convinced that a peculiar bias was given to my own disposition in consequence of not being understood by the nurse and aunt who petted my brother, while they neglected me. Perhaps I was not a prepossessing child, but I had deeper qualities which might have been drawn out, though, on the whole, I do not regret what threw me early on my own resources. It has made me what I am.'

Violet was rather surprised, but took it for granted that this was something admirable.

'Your dear little boy, no doubt, occupies much of your attention. Training and instruction are so important.'

'He is not five months old,' said Violet.

'You cannot begin too early to lead forward his mind. Well chosen engravings, properly selected toys, the habit of at once obeying, the choice of nursery songs, all are of much importance in forming these dear little lambs to the stern discipline of life.'

'You must have had a great deal to do with little children,' said Violet, impressed.

‘Why, not much personally; but I believe Emma has sent you my little allegory of the “Folded Lambs”, where you will find my theories illustrated.’

‘Yes, Emma gave it to me—it is very pretty,’ said Violet, looking down. ‘I am too stupid to understand it all, and I have been hoping for Emma to explain it to me.’

‘Many people find it obscure, but I shall be delighted to assist you. I am sure you will find some of the ideas useful to you. What were your difficulties?’

It made Violet so very shy to be spoken to by an authoress in public about her own books, that she was confused out of all remembrance of the whole story of the “Folded Lambs”, and could only feel thankful that the announcement of dinner came to rescue her from her difficulties. She was not to escape authors; for Mr. Fotheringham took her in to dinner, Lady Martindale assigned Miss Brandon to John; but Arthur, with a droll look, stepped between and made prize of her, leaving John to Miss Marstone.

Violet trusted she was not likely to be examined in the “Track of the Crusaders”, of which, however, she comprehended far more than of the “Folded Lambs”. Presently her neighbour turned to her, asking abruptly, ‘Who is that next to Theodora?’

‘Mr. Wingfield, the clergyman here.’

‘I know. Is he attentive to the parish!’

‘O yes, very much so.’

‘Does Theodora take to parish work?’

‘Indeed she does.’

‘What, thoroughly?’

‘She goes to school twice a week, besides Sundays, and has the farm children to teach every morning.’

‘That’s right.’

‘And she is so kind to the children at the Lodge.’

‘Let me see, they were afraid the boy was deaf and dumb.’

‘Yes, he is, poor little fellow, and Theodora teaches him most successfully.’

‘Well done! I knew the good would work out. How tall she is! and she looks as full of spirit as ever. She has had a season in London, I suppose!’

‘Yes, she went out a great deal this spring.’

‘And it has not spoilt her?’

‘O no!’ cried Violet, warmly, feeling as if she had known him all her life, ‘she is more eager than ever in her parish work. She spares no trouble. She got up at four one morning to sit with old Betty Blain, that her daughter might get a little rest.’

‘That head and brow are a fine study. She has grown up more striking than even I thought she would. Curious to see the difference between natural pride and assumed,’ and he glanced from Theodora to her mother. ‘How well Lady Martindale preserves! She always looks exactly the same. Who is that chattering in John’s ear?

‘Miss Marstone, a friend of Miss Brandon’s.’

‘What makes her go about such a figure?’

‘She is very good.’

‘I trust, by your own practice, that is not your test of goodness?’

‘I should not think it was, said Violet, blushing and hesitating.

‘What crypt did they dig her out of? Is she one of the Marstones of Gothlands?’

‘I believe she is. She has two sisters, gay people, whose home is with an uncle. She lives with a lawyer brother.’

‘Sam Marstone! I know him! I pity him. So Emma Brandon is come out? Which is she?’

‘She is next to Arthur, on this side the table where you cannot see her.’

‘What sort of girl is she!’

‘Oh!’ said Violet, and paused, ‘she is the greatest friend I have in the world!’

He looked surprised, laughed, and said, ‘So I must ask no more questions.’

Violet felt as if she had spoken presumptuously, and said, ‘Lady Elizabeth has been so very kind to me. Emma is my baby’s godmother.’

‘And John its godfather.’

‘Yes. Did he tell you so?’

‘Ay! he spoke as if it was very near his heart.’

‘He has been—O, so very—I believe he is very fond of baby,’ hastily concluded Violet, as her first sentence stuck in her throat.

‘I am heartily glad he has something to take interest in. He looks better and less frail. Is he so, do you think?’

‘O yes, much better. He hardly ever coughs—’

‘Does he get those bad fits of cough and breathlessness?’

‘Very seldom; he has not had one since the day we heard you were coming home, and that, Brown thought, was from the excitement.’

‘Ay! ay! he seems stronger every way.’

‘Yes, he can bear much more exertion.’

‘Then I hope he will be stirred up to do something. That’s what he wants.’

‘I am sure he is always very busy,’ said Violet, displeased.

‘Ay? Cutting open a book was rather arduous. If he was not at his best he left it to Brown.’

‘No! no! I meant going over parchments; writing for Lord Martindale;’ she did not know if she might mention the West Indian scheme.

‘Ho! there’s something in that. Well, if he comes to life after all, there’s no one so capable. Not that I am blaming him. Illness and disappointment broke him down,

and—such a fellow seldom breathed. If I had not had him at Cambridge it might have been a different story with me. So you need not look like his indignant champion.'

'I don't know what Arthur and I should have done without him,' said Violet.

'Where's the aunt? I don't see her.'

'She never comes down to dinner, she is only seen in the evening.'

There was a sound in reply so expressive of relief that Violet caught herself nearly laughing, but he said, gravely, 'Poor woman, then she is growing aged.'

'We thought her much altered this year.'

'Well!' and there was a whole sentence of pardon conveyed in the word. Then, after an interval, 'Look at John and his neighbour.'

'I have been trying to catch what they are saying.'

'They! It is all on one side.'

'Perhaps,' said Violet, smiling, 'it was something about chants.'

'Yes. Is it not rare to see his polite face while she bores him with that kind of cant which is the most intolerable of all, and he quietly turning it aside?'

'Is it cant when people are in earnest?' asked Violet.

'Women always think they are.'

'How are they to know?'

'If they hold their tongues'—a silence—Well!'

'Well,' said Violet.

'Where's the outcry?'

'Did you mean me to make one!'

'What could you do but vindicate your sex?'

'Then you would not have thought me in earnest.'

He made a funny pleased face and a little bow.

‘The truth was,’ said Violet, ‘I was thinking whether I understood you.’

‘May I ask your conclusion?’

‘I don’t exactly know. I don’t think you meant we should never talk of what interests us.’

‘When they know when to hold their tongues, perhaps I should have said.’

‘O, yes, that I quite think.’

Another silence, while Violet pondered, and her neighbour continued his malicious listening to Miss Marstone, who spoke in a key too audible for such a party. Presently, ‘He has got her to the Royal Academy. She has gone forthwith to the Prae-Raffaelites. Oh! she is walking Prae-Raffaelitism herself. Symbols and emblems! Unfortunate John! Symbolic suggestive teaching, speaking to the eye! She is at it ding-dong! Oh! he has begun on the old monk we found refreshing the pictures at Mount Athos! Ay, talk yourself, ‘tis the only way to stop her mouth; only mind what you say, she will bestow it freshly hashed up on the next victim on the authority of Mr. Martindale.’

Violet was excessively entertained; and, when she raised her eyes, after conquering the laugh, was amazed to find how far advanced was the state dinner, usually so interminable. Her inquiries after the Athenian owl led to a diverting history of its capture at the Parthenon, and the adventures in bringing it home. She was sorry when she found Lady Martindale rising, while Mr. Fotheringham, as he drew back his chair, said, ‘How shall you get on with Prae-Raffaelitism? I should like to set her and Aunt Nesbit together by the ears!’

Certainly it was not convenient to be asked by Emma what made her look so much amused.

She felt as if it would be much pleasanter to show off her babe without the stranger,

and was glad to find that Miss Marstone had fallen into a discussion with Theodora, and both looked much too eager to be interrupted.

So Violet fairly skipped up-stairs before her friends, turning round to speak to them with such smiling glee, that Lady Elizabeth dismissed all fears of her present well-doing. Emma fell into raptures over her godson's little cot, and quoted the "Folded Lambs", and "Pearls of the Deep", another as yet unpublished tale of her friend's, to teach his mother how to educate him, and stood by impatiently contemning the nursery hints which Violet was only too anxious to gather up from Lady Elizabeth.

'And are you not charmed with her!' said Emma, as they went down-stairs.

'I have seen so little of her,' replied Violet, embarrassed. 'Why does she dress in that way?'

'That is just what I say,' observed Lady Elizabeth. 'I was sorry to see her in that dress this evening.'

'Mamma does not like it,' said Emma; 'but Theresa feels it such a privilege not to be forced to conform to the trammels of fashions and nonsense.'

'She does everything on high principle,' said Lady Elizabeth, as if she was trying to bring her mind as usual into unison with her daughter's. 'She is a very superior person, and one does not like to find fault with what is done on right motives; but I should be sorry to see Emma follow the same line. I have always been taught that women should avoid being conspicuous.'

'That I could never bear to be, mamma,' said Emma; 'but Theresa is of a firmer, less shrinking mould.'

Lady Elizabeth repeated that she was a very superior person, but was evidently not happy in her guest.

Miss Marstone was holding earnest tete-a-tetes all the evening, but Violet having

sheltered herself under Lady Elizabeth's wing, escaped the expected lecture on the allegories.

When the Rickworth party had taken leave, Mr. Wingfield, the last guest, was heard to observe that Miss Marstone was an admirable person, a treasure to any parish.

'Do you wish for such a treasure in your own?' said Mr. Fotheringham, bluntly.

The curate shook his head, and murmuring something about Brogden being already as fortunate as possible, departed in his turn: while Arthur ejaculated, 'There's a step, Wingfield. Why, Theodora, he was setting up a rival.'

'Who is she?' said Theodora. 'Where did Emma pick her up?'

'Emma was struck with her appearance—'

The gentlemen all exclaimed so vehemently, that Violet had to repeat it again, whereupon Mr. Fotheringham muttered, 'Every one to his taste;' and Arthur said there ought to be a law against women making themselves greater frights than nature designed.

'So, it is a fit of blind enthusiasm,' said John.

'Pray do you partake it?' asked Percy. 'How do you feel after it?'

'Why, certainly, I never met with a person of more conversation,' said John.

'Delicately put!' said Arthur, laughing heartily. 'Why, she had even begun lecturing my father on the niggers!'

'I would not be Lady Elizabeth!' said Mr. Fotheringham.

'Those romantic exaggerations of friendship are not satisfactory,' said John. 'Emma is too timid to be eccentric herself at present; but a governing spirit might soon lead her on.'

'That it might,' said Theodora, 'as easily as I used to drag her, in spite of her terrors, through all the cows in the park. I could be worse to her than any cow; and this Ursula—or what is her outlandish name, Violet?'

‘Theresa; Sarah Theresa.’

‘Well, really,’ said John, ‘it is not for the present company to criticize outlandish names.’

‘No,’ said Arthur, ‘it was a happy instinct that made us give my boy a good rational working-day name, fit to go to school in, and no choice either to give him the opportunity of gainsaying it, like Emma’s friend, and some others—Sir Percival that is to be! A hero of the Minerva press!’

‘No, indeed—if I was to be Sir Anything, which probably I never shall be, I would hold, like my forefathers, to my good old Antony, which it was not my doing to disregard.’

‘Which earned him the title of Lumpkin, by which only he was known to his schoolfellow!’ said Arthur. ‘If you ask after Fotheringham, they invariably say, “Oh, you mean old Lumpkin!” So much for romantic names!’

‘Or imperial ones,’ said Percy. ‘Did not you tell me Theodora came straight from the Palaeologos who died in the West Indies? I always considered that to account for certain idiosyncrasies.’

Theodora was called away to assist Mrs. Nesbit up-stairs; and as Violet followed, she heard the aunt observing that Percival Fotheringham was more bearish than ever; and that it was intolerable to see him encouraged in his free-and-easy manner when he had thrown away all his prospects.

‘For poor John’s sake,’ began Lady Martindale.

‘For his own,’ interrupted Theodora. ‘He has every right to be at home here, and it is an honour to the place that he should be so.’

‘Oh, yes, I know; and he will be expecting your father to exert himself again in his behalf.’

‘No, he will be beholden to no one,’ said Theodora.

‘I do wish his manners were less rough and eccentric,’ said Lady Martindale.

‘Presuming,’ said Mrs. Nesbit; ‘in extremely bad taste. I never was more sensible of our good fortune in having missed that connection. There was nothing but their being of a good old family that made it by any means endurable.’

At this hit at her brother’s wife, Theodora was going to speak, but she forbore, and only wished her aunt good night. It would not be repressed, however; she stood in the gallery, after parting with the elder ladies, and said, loud enough for them to hear,

‘I hate good old family, and all such humbug! She was a noble, self-devoted creature; as much above the comprehension of the rest of the world as her brother!’

‘Did you know her well?’ said Violet.

Theodora’s tone instantly changed. She was not going to gratify childish curiosity. ‘I never had the opportunity,’ she said, coolly. ‘Good night.’

Violet was disappointed; for the tone of enthusiasm had given her a moment’s hope that they had at last found a subject on which they could grow warm together, but it was evident that Theodora would never so have spoken had she been conscious of her presence.

The next morning as Arthur and his wife were going down to breakfast, he said, ‘We shall see some rare fun now Theodora and Fotheringham have got together.’

Theodora, with her bonnet on, was, according to her usual Sunday fashion, breakfasting before the rest of the party, so as to be in time for school. John and his friend made their appearance together, and the greetings had scarcely passed, before John, looking out of window, exclaimed, ‘Ah! there’s the boy! Pray come and see my godson. Come, Violet, we want you to exhibit him.’

Arthur looked up with a smile intended to be disdainful, but which was gratified, and moved across, with the newspaper in his hand, to lean against the

window-shutter.

‘There’s John without his hat—he is growing quite adventurous. Very pretty Violet always is with the boy in her arms—she is the show one of the two. Hollo, if Percy has not taken the monkey himself; that’s a pass beyond me. How she colours and smiles—just look, Theodora, is it not a picture?’

If he had called her to look at Johnnie, she must have come; but she was annoyed at his perpetual admiration, and would not abet his making himself ridiculous.

‘I must not wait,’ she said, ‘I am late.’

Arthur shrugged his shoulders, and turned to his paper.

She put on her gloves, and took up her books. Percy meeting her, as she came down the steps, said, ‘I have been introduced to your nephew.’

‘I hope you are gratified.’

‘He has almost too much countenance,’ said Percy. ‘There is something melancholy in such wistful looks from a creature that cannot speak, just as one feels with a dog.’

‘I am afraid he is very weakly,’ said Theodora.

‘I am sorry to hear it; it seems like a new life to John, and that pretty young mother looks so anxious. Do you see much of her?’

‘Not much; I have not time to join in the general Violet worship.’

‘They are not spoiling her, I hope. It does one good to see such a choice specimen of womankind.’

‘There, don’t come any further; I must make haste.’

‘Like all the rest,’ she thought; ‘not a man but is more attracted by feminine airs and graces than by sterling qualities.’

On coming out of church, in the afternoon, John, looking at the beautiful green shady bank of the river, proposed a walk along it; all the party gladly acceded, except Theodora, who, not without a certain pleasure in separating herself from

them, declared that there was a child who must be made to say her hymn before going home.

‘Can’t you excuse her for once?’ said Lord Martindale.

‘No, papa.’

‘Not if I beg her off publicly?’

‘No, thank you. There is a temper that must be overcome.’

‘Then flog her well, and have done with it,’ said Arthur. Deigning no reply, she pounced upon her victim as the procession of scholars came out of church, ‘Come, I am waiting to hear you say it. “How doth the little—“’

The child stood like a post.

‘That is a Benson, I am sure,’ said Mr. Fotheringham. Theodora told him he was right, and went on exhorting the child; ‘Come, I know you can say it. Try to be good.

‘“How doth—“’

‘You know I always keep my word, and I have said I will hear you before either of us goes home.’

‘“How doth—“’

‘If you please, papa, would you go on? I shall never make her do it with you all looking on.’

She sat down on a tombstone, and placed the child before her. After an hour’s walk, there was a general exclamation of amusement and compassion, on seeing Theodora and the child still in the same positions.

‘She will never say it at all now, poor child,’ said Violet; ‘she can’t—she must be stupefied.’

‘Then we had better send down the tent to cover Theodora for the night,’ said Arthur.

‘As if Theodora looking at her in that manner was not enough to drive off all recollection!’ said John.

‘It is too much!’ said Lord Martindale. ‘Arthur, go, and tell her it is high time to go home, and she must let the poor child off.’

Arthur shrugged his shoulders, saying, ‘You go, John.’

‘Don’t you think it might do harm to interfere?’ said John to his father.

‘Interfere by no means,’ said Arthur. ‘It is capital sport. Theodora against dirty child! Which will you back, Percy? Hollo! where is he? He is in the thick of it. Come on, Violet, let us be in for the fun.’

‘Patience in seven flounces on a monument!’ observed Mr. Fotheringham, in an undertone to Theodora, who started, and would have been angry, but for his merry smile. He then turned to the child, whose face was indeed stupefied with sullenness, as if in the resistance she had forgotten the original cause. ‘What! you have not said it all this time? What’s your name? I know you are a Benson, but how do they call you?’ said he, speaking with a touch of the dialect of the village, just enough to show he was a native.

‘Ellen,’ said the girl.

‘Ellen! that was your aunt’s name. You are so like her. I don’t think you can be such a very stupid child, after all. Are you? Suppose you try again. What is it Miss Martindale wants you to say?’

The child made no answer, and Theodora said, ‘The Little Busy Bee.’

‘Oh! that’s it. Not able to say the Busy Bee? That’s a sad story. D’ye think now I could say it, Ellen?’

‘No!’ with an astonished look, and a stolid countrified tone.

‘So you don’t think I’m clever enough! Well, suppose I try, and you set me right if I make mistakes. “How doth the great idle wasp—“’

‘Busy bee!’ cried the child, scandalized.

By wonderful blunders, and ingenious halts, he drew her into prompting him throughout, then exclaimed, ‘There! you know it much better. I thought you were a clever little girl! Come, won’t you say it once, and let me hear how well it sounds?’

She was actually flattered into repeating it perfectly.

‘Very well. That’s right. Now, don’t you think you had better tell Miss Martindale you are sorry to have kept her all this time?’

She hung her head, and Theodora tried to give him a hint that the apology was by no means desired; but without regarding this, he continued, ‘Do you know I am come from Turkey, and there are plenty of ladies there, who go out to walk with a sack over their heads, but I never saw one of them sit on a tombstone to hear a little girl say the Busy Bee. Should you like to live there?’

‘No.’

‘Do you suppose Miss Martindale liked to sit among the nettles on old Farmer Middleton’s tombstone?’

‘No.’

‘Why did she do it then? Was it to plague you?’

‘Cause I wouldn’t say my hymn.’

‘I wonder if it is not you that have been plaguing Miss Martindale all the time. Eh? Come, aren’t you sorry you kept her sitting all this time among the nettles when she might have been walking to Colman’s Weir, and gathering such fine codlings and cream as Mrs. Martindale has there, and all because you would not say a hymn that you knew quite well? Wasn’t that a pity?’

‘Yes,’ and the eyes looked up ingenuously.

‘Come and tell her you are sorry. Won’t you? There, that’s right,’ and he dictated as she repeated after him, as if under a spell, ‘I’m sorry, ma’am, that I was sulky and

naughty; I'll say it next Sunday, and make no fuss.'

'There, that will do. I knew you would be good at last,' said Percy, patting her shoulder, while Theodora signified her pardon, and they turned homewards, but had made only a few steps before the gallop of clumsy shoes followed, and there stood Ellen, awkwardly presenting a bunch of the willow herb. Theodora gave well-pleased thanks, and told her she should take them as a sign she was really sorry and meant to do better.

'And as a trophy of the force of Percy's pathetic picture of Miss Martindale's seven flounces among the nettles on Farmer Middleton's tombstone,' said Arthur.

'You certainly are very much obliged to him,' said her father.

'And most ungratefully she won't confess it,' said Arthur.

'I despise coaxing,' said Theodora.

'The question is, what you would have done without it,' said John.

'As if I could not subdue a little sprite like that!'

'You certainly might if it was a question of physical force,' said Percy, as he seemed to be measuring with his eye the strength of Theodora's tall vigorous person.

'I spoke of moral force.'

'There the sprite had decidedly the advantage. You could "gar her greet," but you could not "gar her know." She had only to hold out; and when Miss Martindale found it time to go home to dinner, and began to grow ashamed of her position, the victory was hers.'

'He has you there, Theodora,' said Arthur.

'I don't know what he is driving at,' said Theodora.

'I am trying to find out whether Miss Martindale has the power of confessing that she was in a scrape.'

'That you may triumph,' said Theodora.

‘No, not for the sake of triumph, but of old times,’ he answered, in a lower, more serious tone.

Theodora’s face softened, and drawing nearer, she asked, ‘How are old times to be satisfied by such an admission?’

‘Because then candour used to boast of conquering pride,’ said Percy, now speaking so as to be heard by her alone.

‘Well. It was becoming a predicament, and you rescued me very ingeniously. There, will that content you?’ said Theodora, with one of the smiles the more winning because so rare. I am perfectly ready to own myself in the wrong when I see it.’

‘When you see it,’ said Percy, drily.

‘I was wrong just now not to confess my obligation, because Arthur teased and triumphed; but I don’t see why you all treat me as if I was wrong to set myself to subdue the child’s obstinacy.’

‘Not wrong, but mistaken,’ said Percy. ‘You forgot your want of power to enforce obedience. You wanted victory, and treated her with the same determination she was treating you with. It was a battle which had the hardest will and could hold out longest.’

‘And if I had conquered she would have gone away angry with me, only having yielded because she could not help it. You softened her and made her sorry. I see. She really is a good child on the whole, and I dare say I shall do something with her now.’

‘Is old Benson alive?’

And a long conversation on village matters ensued. Theodora was happier that evening than she had been for more than a year. That home-thrust at her pride, astonishing as it was that any one should venture it, and the submission that followed, had been a positive relief. She thought the pleasure was owing to the

appeal to old times, recalling happy days of wild frolics, sometimes shared, sometimes censured by her grown-up playfellow; the few hours with his sister that had influenced her whole life; and the lectures, earnest, though apparently sportive, by which he had strengthened and carried on the impression; that brief time, also, of their last spending together, when his sorrow for his sister was fresh, and when John was almost in a hopeless state, and when she had been the one of the family to whom he came to pour out his grief, and talk over what his sister had been.

It was a renewal of happiness to her heart, wearied with jealousy, to find one to whom old times were precious, and who took her up where he had last seen her. His blunt ways, and downright attacks, were a refreshment to a spirit chafing against the external smoothness and refinement of her way of life, and the pleasure of yielding to his arguments was something new and unexampled. She liked to gain the bright approving look, and with her universal craving for attention, she could not bear not to be engrossing him, whether for blame or praise, it did not matter; but she had the same wish for his notice that she had for Arthur’s.

Not that she by any means always obtained it. He was in request with every one except Mrs. Nesbit. Even Lady Martindale took interest in his conversation, and liked to refer questions about prints and antiques to his decision, and calls on his time and attention were made from every quarter. Besides, he had his own manuscript to revise, and what most mortified Theodora was to hear Violet’s assistance eagerly claimed, as she knew her way better than John did through the sheets, and could point to the doubtful passages. Never was work more amusing than this, interspersed with debates between the two friends, with their droll counter versions of each other’s anecdotes, and Mr. Fotheringham’s quizzings of John, at whom he laughed continually, though all the time it was plain that there was no one in the world whom he so much reverenced.

The solitary possession of her own mornings was now no boon to Theodora. She

was necessary to no one, and all her occupations could not drive away the ever-gnawing thought that Violet attracted all the regard and attention that belonged to her. If the sensation went away when she was down-stairs, where Percy's presence obliged her to be amiable against her will, it came back with double force in her lonely moments.

One day, when they had dispersed after luncheon, her father came in, inquiring for Violet. He was going to Rickworth, and thought she would like to go with him. He wished to know, as otherwise he should ride instead of driving; and, as she was up-stairs, desired Theodora to go and find out what would suit her.

'Papa, too!' thought Theodora, as with some reluctance she for the first time knocked at her sister's door, and found her with the baby.

'How very kind!' said she. 'I should be delighted, but I don't know whether Arthur does not want me. Is he there?'

'I think he is in the library.'

'If I could but go down! But I must not take baby, and Sarah is at dinner. Should you mind holding him for one minute?'

Theodora held out her arms, but Johnnie, though usually delighted to come to her from Sarah, turned his head away, unwilling to leave his mother. He did not quite cry, but was so near it that she had to do her utmost to amuse him. She caught up something bright to hold before him, and was surprised to see it was a coral cross, which Violet, in changing her dress, had laid for a moment on the dressing-table. The coincidence was strange, thought Theodora.

Violet was coming back, and she would have laid it down, but Johnnie had grasped it in his little fingers. As his mother appeared, his merriest smile shone out, and his whole little person was one spring of eagerness to return to her.

'Little man! Is he glad to come back to his mamma?' Violet could not help saying, as he nestled joyously on her neck; but the cold face of Theodora made her sorry

that the words had escaped her, and she began to express her thanks.

Theodora was stooping to pick up the cross, and a concerned exclamation passed Violet's lips on observing its fall.

'It is safe,' said Theodora. 'I beg your pardon, I took it up to amuse him.'

'Thank you,' said Violet. 'I am sorry I seemed vexed. There's no harm done; but I was frightened, because it was Helen's.'

'Helen's' exclaimed Theodora, extremely amazed. 'Did John give it to you?'

'Yes, a little while ago,' said Violet, colouring. 'He—'

But Theodora was gone, with bitterer feelings than ever. This girl was absorbing every one's love! John had never given her anything that had belonged to Helen; he had never even adverted to his engagement, when she almost adored her memory! She had never supposed him capable of speaking of his loss; and perhaps it was the hardest blow of all to find Violet, whose inquiries she had treated as mere curiosity, preferred to such confidence as this. She did not remember how she had once rejected his sympathy. She forgot whose fault it was that she had not been in the Isle of Wight; she laid it all on the proneness of men to be interested by sweetness of manner, and thought of herself as a strong-minded superior woman, who could never be loved, and who could only suffer through her woman's heart.

Yet she could not entirely harden herself as she intended, while combats with Percy cast brightening gleams across her existence. She thought she should again settle into the winter's life of hard work and indifference, which was on the whole most comfortable to her.

When the party should be broken up, Percy was to be the first to depart; he was going to publish The Crusaders, take a lodging in London, and there busy himself with literature while awaiting the fulfilment of a promise of further diplomatic employment. Arthur and Violet were also to return home after paying a visit at Rickworth, and John would soon after sail for Barbuda. In the meantime he was

much engaged in going over accounts, and in consulting with his father and the man of business.

One morning, towards the end of September, he came down to Violet in the drawing-room, looking much flushed and extremely annoyed.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘I have often declared I would never let my aunt have a discussion with me again. I have been obliged to submit to this. I hope it will be the last.’

‘About the West Indian property,’ said Violet.

‘Yes. She does give me power to act for her; but it is dearly bought! I wish I had never asked her! Every subject that she knew to be most unpleasant to me has she stirred up! How a woman of her age can go on with her eyes fixed on these matters I cannot guess. I am sure it is a warning what one sets one’s heart upon!’

‘You are quite worried and tired. Oh! it has made you cough! You had better lie down and rest.’

‘I want you to put me into good humour,’ said he, half reclining on the sofa. ‘I feel as if I had been under a nutmeg-grater! What do you think of her taking me to task for having Fotheringham here, for fear he should marry Theodora! I wish there was any such chance for her; but Percy has far too much sense!’

‘Why, how could Mrs. Nesbit think it? They are always disputing!’

‘I should not take that as a reason for thinking it impossible. But Percy knows her far too well. No, it is only one of my aunt’s fancies. She has set her hopes on Theodora now; but it is of no use to talk of it. I don’t want to dwell on it. It is too pitiable to be angry about. What are you reading?’

Violet was as glad to talk to him of her book as he was to lose the thought of his vexatious conversation, which had been even more annoying that he had chosen to tell her.

Mrs. Nesbit had taken occasion to speak of the reversion of an estate, which she said

she wished to go to augment the property of the title; and now she should have no hesitation in bequeathing it to him, provided she could see him, on his side, make such a connection as would be for the consequence of the family.

John tried silence, but she drove him so hard that he was obliged to reply that, since she had begun on the subject, he had only to say that he should never marry; and, with thanks for her views, the disposal of her property would make no difference to him.

She interrupted him by reproaches on a man of his age talking romantic nonsense, and telling him that, for the sake of the family, it was his duty to marry.

‘With such health as mine,’ replied John, quietly, ‘I have long made up my mind that, even if I could enter on a fresh attachment, it would not be right. I am not likely to live many years, and I wish to form no new ties. You will oblige me, ma’am, by not bringing forward this subject again.’

‘Ay, I know what you are intending. You think it will come to Arthur and his wife; but I tell you what, Mr. Martindale, no attorney’s daughter shall ever touch a sixpence of mine.’

‘That is as you please, ma’am. It was not to speak of these matters that I came here; and if you have told me all you wish with regard to the property, I will leave the papers for your signature.’

She was above all provoked by his complete indifference to the wealth, her chief consideration throughout her life, and could not cease from reproaching him with absurd disregard to his own interest, at which he very nearly smiled. Then she revived old accusations, made in the earlier days of her persecution about his engagement, that he was careless of the consequence and reputation of the family, and had all his life been trying to lower it in the eyes of the world; otherwise why had he set himself to patronize that wife of Arthur’s, or why bring Percy Fotheringham here, just to put his sister in the way of marrying beneath her? And

when he had answered that, though he saw no probability of such an event, opinions might differ as to what was beneath Theodora, she took the last means that occurred to her for tormenting him, by predicting that Arthur's sickly little child would never live to grow up—he need not fix any hopes on him.

He escaped at last, leaving her much irritated, as Theodora presently found her. She began to complain bitterly of the ingratitude of her great-nephews, after all her labours for the family! John treating her whole fortune as if it was not worth even thanks, when she had been ready to settle the whole on him at once, as she would have done, since (and she looked sharply at Theodora) he was now free from that Fotheringham engagement; for none of that family should ever have a share in her property.

Theodora looked, if possible, more indifferent than John, as she answered,

'John could not want it. I always thought you meant it for Arthur.'

'Arthur! as if you did not know he had forfeited all claim upon me!'

'His marriage is a reason for his needing it more,' said Theodora.

'It is of no use to speak of him. No, Theodora, you alone have acted as I could wish; and if you continue to deserve my regard—'

'Don't say that, Aunt Nesbit,' said Theodora. 'I shall act as, I hope, may deserve regard; but I don't want anybody's fortune, and if you left me yours it would be very unfair, and I certainly should give at least half of it to Arthur. I give you fair warning; but I did not come to talk of such hateful things, but to read to you.'

That afternoon Mrs. Nesbit wrote a letter to her lawyer, and surprised Miss Piper by asking if that puny child up-stairs had any name but John.

CHAPTER 10

Unschooled affections, strong and wild, Have been my playmates from a child, And

strengthening in the breast unseen, Poisoned the fount within. —Thoughts in Past Years

The morning of the next day had been fine, and was spent in shooting by Arthur and Mr. Fotheringham; but the latter came home in time to ride with John, to make a call on some old friends, far beyond what had long been John's distance.

The afternoon closed in a violent storm of wind and rain, which drove Arthur indoors, and compelled Violet to resort for exercise to the gallery, where she paced up and down with Johnnie in her arms, watching for the return of the others, as each turn brought her to the end window. As Lord Martindale came up-stairs, he paused at the sight of the slender young figure—her head bent over her little one. Perhaps he was thinking what might have been, if his own children had ever been as much to their mother; for when Violet turned towards him he sighed, as he roused himself, and asked whether she saw John coming. Then joining her, he looked at his grandson, saying, 'He is improving very fast. How like you he grows!'

'Poor little fellow, he was not at all well yesterday, and I began to think of asking whether I should send for Mr. Legh.'

'Whatever you do, beware of doctoring!' was Lord Martindale's rather hasty answer. 'Of doctoring and governessing!—I have seen enough of it, and I resolved my two youngest should run wholesomely wild, never be dosed, and never learn a lesson till they were six years old.'

'But this poor little man is really delicate, and I have no experience,' pleaded Violet.

'Depend upon it, my dear,' said Lord Martindale, with sorrowful emotion in his voice, as he saw the little fair head resting caressingly on her neck, 'you are doing more for him than all the physicians in England. You must not tease him and yourself with fretting and anxiety.'

'I know it is my duty not to be over-anxious,' said Violet, with her heart full, as she clasped her hands close round her tiny treasure.

‘You must not,’ said his grandfather. ‘It was the notion that mine could never have enough teaching or doctoring-as if that was what they wanted! Some system or other was always being tried on them, and they were never left to healthy action of mind or body, till the end was that I lost my two pretty little girls! And poor John, I never saw a more wretched-looking child than he was when I took him to Dr.—.’

‘And what was his advice?’

‘His advice was this. “Throw away lessons and physic. Give him other children to play with, make him wear a brown holland pinafore, and let him grope in the dirt.” I believe it saved his life! I begged Mrs. Fotheringham to let him do just like her children, little thinking what was to come of that.’ Then catching himself up, as if fearing to give Violet pain, ‘Not that I should have regretted that connection. She was all that could be wished, and I judged by personal merits.’ He hesitated, but spoke warmly, as if applying the words to Violet. ‘Their youth was my only objection from the first. Nothing would have rejoiced me more than their marriage.’

‘O, yes,’ said Violet, ‘he says so much of your kindness.’ She feared she had said too much, but Lord Martindale caught at her words. ‘Has he ever adverted to that affair!’

‘Sometimes,’ said Violet, shyly.

‘What! Actually spoken of poor Helen! I am heartily glad to hear it. How is he bearing it? Does he speak calmly?’

‘Yes, calmly and cheerfully, as if he liked to dwell on the thought.’

Lord Martindale laid his hand on her arm, and said, gratefully, ‘You have done him a great deal of good.’

Seldom had she been more gratified, but at that moment a dripping figure burst on them, and Theodora’s voice impetuously exclaimed, ‘Violet! you must know something of babies! What shall I do for the child at the lodge? She will die if something is not done quickly.’

She was in an agony of breathless agitation; the motherless baby at the lodge had been taken violently ill, the parish doctor was not at home, and she feared that Mr. Legh could not arrive from Whitford in time!

Violet shared in her distress, and gathering from her description that it might be such an attack as Johnnie's at Ventnor, longed to be on the spot, and tried to believe the rain lessening enough for her to go. Theodora seized on her proposal, but Lord Martindale interfered. 'How can you be so thoughtless?' said he, in a far more decided manner than usual.

'The child's life depends on it!' said Theodora, vehemently.

'Pshaw!' said Lord Martindale, 'Violet has her own life and her child's to think of.'

'Then you won't come!'

'I am afraid I ought not,' said Violet, mournfully.

Theodora flung away in passionate despair and contempt, and was rushing off, when Violet pursued her, and implored her to listen one moment, and she could not let go her last hope. Violet offered some medicine that had been prepared for Johnnie—which she was sure could at least do no harm, and she could give some advice. Perhaps she mingled it with too many excuses and lamentations at being forced to stay at home; at least, Theodora thought her fanciful, rejoicing in the self-importance of imaginary ill-health.

'Why! there's the carriage!' she exclaimed, as it drove down the avenue.

'Yes, it is gone for John,' said Theodora, bluntly.

'Where is he?'

'At the Goldingsby turnpike. He took shelter there, and Percy came back to order the carriage to fetch him. Percy is gone on to Whitford for Mr. Legh.'

'What a pity! I could have gone to the lodge in the carriage.'

Theodora was provoked that her impatience had made her miss this chance: so,

without answering, she ran down the steps, and was almost whirled along the avenue by the wild wind that roared in the branches, tearing the leaves from the trees, and whirling them round and round. She hardly felt it—her whole soul was set upon the little orphan; the misery of watching the suffering she could not relieve, joined with passionate resentment at her father and sister-in-law, who she fancied made light of it. Only Mr. Fotheringham, when stopping at the lodge on his way, had shown what she thought tolerable humanity. He had shared her concern, consoled her despair, suggested asking counsel of Mrs. Martindale, and finally rode off five miles to Whitford in quest of the doctor.

Violet's advice proved not to be despicable; the measures she recommended relieved the little one, and by the time Percy and the apothecary made their appearance, it was asleep on Theodora's lap, and Mr. Legh pronounced that it was in a fair way to do well. She wished she could have watched it all night, but it was late, and Mr. Fotheringham stood waiting at the door. So she laid it in the cradle, gave her directions to the old woman who had charge of it, and resumed her brown cloak and hood, in which she walked about in all weathers, without umbrella, for which, as for parasols, she had a supreme aversion.

Mr. Legh wished to prevail on her to let him drive her home, but she would not hear of it. Percy put up his umbrella, and offered to shelter her, but she held aloof.

'No, no. Where did you get that elegant cotton machine?'

'I borrowed it at the turnpike.'

'And rode home with it on Arthur's mare?'

'Of course I did. I was not going to get wet through.'

'But how did you get her to let you carry it. She objects to his taking out his handkerchief.'

'I am not going to be beaten by a mare, and she soon found that out.'

‘What have you done with her?’

‘I took her home, and came back again. I wonder what Arthur will say to me for taking his gallant gray on to Whitford. I must get up a pathetic appeal to the feelings of a father!’

‘Well, I did not recollect you had the gray, or I would have told you to take my horse. However, there’s no harm done, and it saved time.’

‘Whoo—h!’ as the gust came roaring down furiously upon them, pelting fiercely with rain, flapping and tearing at Theodora’s cloak, like the wind in the fable, trying to whirl her off her feet, and making vehement efforts to wrench the umbrella out of Percy’s hand. A buffet with wind and weather was a frolic which she particularly enjoyed, running on before the blast, then turning round to walk backwards and recover breath to laugh at him toiling with the umbrella. Never had she looked brighter, her dark eyes, lately so sad and soft, now sparkling and dancing with mirth, her brown cheek glowing with fresh red from the rain and wind that had loosened her hair, and was sporting with a long black tress that streamed beyond her bonnet, and fluttered over her face—life, strength, and activity in every limb, and her countenance beaming with sportiveness and gaiety, the more charming because so uncommon. It was a rare chance to catch Theodora at play.

‘Ha! you’ll be beat! You will have to shut up the miserable invention unknown to our forefathers.’

‘Not I. I shall not give up the distinction between man and beast in the rain.’

‘Man! Why even ants carry parasols.’

‘That is in the sun. Parasols belong to an epoch of earlier civilization. Vide Ninevite carvings—Persian satraps!’

‘So you reduce yourself to a Persian satrap!’

‘No; it was reserved for modern times to discover the true application of the

umbrella. Were you rational enough to come back in the carriage?'

'No, indeed. To do justice to Violet, she would have come down in it, if I had not forgotten to tell her of it.'

'I am glad you do her justice for once.'

She would not answer, and took advantage of another combat with the wind to cover her silence.

'Theodora,' said he, abruptly, 'I cannot help it; I must say it!'

'Well?'

'I do not think you feel as you ought towards your brother's wife.'

'John has told you this?'

'No; I have observed it. You had set your affections on Arthur; and thinking he had thrown himself away, you do not resist the common propensity to hate a sister-in-law.'

'You like to provoke me,' said Theodora; 'but,' and her voice trembled, 'it is unkind to bring this up—the pain and grief of my life, when I was happy and forgetful for once.'

'Far, far from unkindness. It is because I cannot bear to see you unhappy.'

'I trusted no one saw that.'

'I have known you too long, and thought of you too much, not to be grieved at the sight of your forced spirits and suppressed sorrow.'

It would have angered her from another; from him it touched her to find how closely and kindly he had watched her.

'I cannot help it,' she said. 'He was my all.'

'Have you striven with it?'

'Of course I have. I have lived in a tumult of occupation, but—'

‘But you have not conquered yourself, and grappled with the serpents that poison your life.’

‘Pray what do you call those serpents?’

‘If you look them in the face, I believe you will find they are pride and jealousy.’

‘You like to find generic names,’ said Theodora, trying for a cold smile.

‘Because it is safer to know and crush a venomous beast than to dally with it.’

‘If I find there are such serpents, I will crush them and thank you.’

‘No other woman would so have answered,’ cried Percy, exultingly.

‘Because,’ said she, her throat swelling, ‘no other man is true and downright friend enough to warn me honestly.’

‘Theodora, Theodora, you are a grand creature, nearly thrown away for want of breaking in.’

‘Too true,’ said she, sadly.

‘I must say it. Will you let me? Will you trust yourself and your happiness to me? It has been the vision and hope of my solitude to see you what you might be! the flaws in that noble nature corrected, its grandeur and devotedness shining forth undimmed. Together we would crush the serpents—bring out all that is excellent.’

‘I think there might be a chance for me with you,’ said she, in an odd sort of tone.

‘You mean it?’ he exclaimed, trying to see her face, but her hood flapped over it.

‘I do. You appreciate me.’

She let him walk beside her, and hold the umbrella over her; but not a word was spoken till they were ascending the steps, when she said, ‘Don’t tell papa till night. I do not choose to look foolish.’

‘Good luck to thee, umbrella!’ said Percy, holding it on high, ere closing it. ‘Thy sea-green dome has been a canopy of bliss. Honour to thy whalebones!’ Then, in a

very different manner, ‘Oh! Theodora, could you but guess how you have mingled in every scheme or wish of mine; how often I have laughed myself to scorn for dreaming, as if there could be any chance!’

‘Ah! what an uproar my aunt will make!’ exclaimed Theodora, somewhat exultingly. Some one crossed the hall, and she ran away, but stepped back from the foot of the stairs, laid her hand on his arm, and with a face inexpressibly sweet and brilliant, said, ‘We shall get on very well together. We need have no nonsense. But I did not know how happy you had made me.’

She escaped again; she would not have said thus much if she had not known there could be no reply, for Lady Martindale was sailing down the grand staircase.

She met him no more till dinner, when he was silent, and she talkative and flighty, so that Violet suspected there had been a quarrel.

The next morning, the first tidings were that John had a cold and was confined to his bed by cough and pain in the chest; while something too was said of his having been kept up late at night talking. Theodora paid a visit to the sick child in the early morning, and after breakfast accompanied Violet to the lodge, where Violet found the poor little thing nursed with more goodwill than skill by its old aunt and Theodora, took it into her own motherly arms, gave it food and medicine, and hushed it to sleep so successfully, that Theodora respected what she called the feminine element.

The two sisters walked back happily together; but at the door Lord Martindale met them, exclaiming, ‘Where have you been, Theodora? Come here.’

Violet wished to be certified that John was not worse, but could find no one but Mr. Fotheringham, who, with a little twist of the corner of his mouth, assured her that there was no cause for uneasiness on that account.

Some time had gone by; she was writing letters, while Percy stood in the deep window, reading the newspapers, and making a great rustling with them. Suddenly

Arthur entered, exclaiming,

‘Well, Violet, here is a piece of news! Guess!’

‘That is the way people always tell wedding news.’

‘Right. Now then for the victims.’

‘Your sister? What really? And who? Oh, not Lord St. Erme?’

‘The very antipodes, as Harrison would say! Guess again.’

‘Help me, Mr. Fotheringham,’ she began; but Arthur, with a tremendous start, exclaimed, ‘Hollo! if that is not a shame! How I wish I had said what a shocking bad match it is!’

‘You think so, do you?’ said Percy, advancing, and heartily shaking Arthur’s ready hand.

‘Oh! that is your look-out,’ said Arthur, shrugging his shoulders.

‘But, do you really mean it?’ said Violet, looking from one to the other, as Percy’s hand seemed to claim the same welcome from her.

‘Indeed, I do,’ said Percy, earnestly. ‘O, how glad John will be!’ was her congratulation.

‘So, I must say nothing about the gray,’ proceeded Arthur. ‘What is it some one says about Cupid’s steeds? I vow I will call her Psyche, if it is only to make Theodora savage!’

‘Where is your father?’ said Percy.

‘With John. That was where I heard it.’ Then, as Percy was leaving the room, ‘Well, you are a bold man! I hope you mean to kill the cat on the wedding-day. That is all.’

‘I am obliged for your experience,’ said Percy.

‘If you make her like this one by the end of a year—’

‘O, hush, Arthur!’

Percy hastened from the room. Violet could not recover from her astonishment. ‘Could Lord Martindale actually have consented?’

‘Makes no difficulty at all. He has grown wiser since poor John’s time. I have taught him one may be trusted to choose for oneself.’

‘But your aunt?’

‘Ah! there is nothing she hates like a Fotheringham; but she has not the power over my father she once had. She will have to take up with us for very spite. But what they are to live on I do not know, unless my father keeps them.’

‘I thought he was heir to a baronetcy.’

‘Yes; but there is a half-witted son of old Sir Antony in the way, who will keep Percy out of the property for the term of his natural life, as well as if he was a wise man.’

After luncheon, Violet had a message from John to ask for a visit from her. She found him on the sofa in the sitting-room, apparently oppressed and uncomfortable; but he looked brightened by her entrance, and pleased when she offered to stay and read to him.

‘The very thing I have been figuring to myself as most agreeable. I don’t want to talk or think. I have been overdoing both.’

So she had to repress her curiosity, and give him the repose of her pleasant reading, till he dropped asleep; and after waiting some time, in the fear of awakening him, she gently left the room, and had time for another visit to the lodge, where she fell in with the lovers, and found them disputing about the cotton umbrella. Percy announced that he should give his own in exchange, and retain it for ever, as a trophy of what could be accomplished with both horse and woman. Theodora was a little cross. If he wished to keep it out of sentiment, that was all very well; but to give it the turn of glorying over her was displeasing. He wanted to make her confess that she had submitted to its shelter.

‘No, you only walked by me, and held it up.’

‘I appeal to you, Mrs. Martindale. Is not that the popular view of being under an umbrella?’

Theodora would not speak, and Violet thought him wrong in teasing her. Silence ensued, but ended in his saying, as they came to the steps, ‘Well, Theodora, shall I restore the umbrella as a hated object?’

‘No, no,’ said she; ‘do what you please with it, only don’t talk nonsense about it.’

Then, when Violet was gone,—‘You must not triumph over me, Percy; I cannot bear it. If it is pride, have patience with me.’

‘I should have asked you to forgive me,’ said Percy, affected by the tone of humility.

‘No, no, indeed!’ said Theodora, smiling; ‘but I warn you, my serpent is dealt with more safely by treading on it than by irritating it,’ and there was an indignant gleam in her dark eye. ‘Now I am going to tell my aunt.’

‘I would wish you well through it; but I believe you are eager for the battle. Only let me say one thing, Theodora—be forbearing, or you will be fostering the enemy.’

‘I can deal with her,’ said Theodora.

But she was met in a manner she had not expected. Mrs. Nesbit beckoned her to her side, laid her hand on hers, and peered up in her face with witch-like eyes, that disconcerted her usually ready speech, and called up a blush.

‘I see,’ said Mrs. Nesbit. ‘I do not blame you for the fault of your father and brother. I knew how it would be.’

‘Has mamma told you?’ said Theodora. ‘Papa promised that I should be the first to tell!’

‘Your mamma does not know what will mortify her so extremely.’

‘Then how have you heard it?’

‘I have seen it. I knew what you had to tell from the instant you entered. And your

father has given you his consent?' raising her hand, as if to say, 'I give up all hopes of him.'

'Yes, he highly approves.'

Here Lady Martindale came into the room.

'You need not be vexed, my dear,' began Mrs. Nesbit. 'It will not be made public, and there will be no harm done.'

'What will not, dear aunt? you alarm me.'

'This foolish affair into which Lord Martindale and John have drawn this poor child.'

'Aunt! aunt!' cried Theodora, 'you do not know what you say. It is of my own free will—uninfluenced. I would choose him, and hold fast to him through worlds of opposition.'

'Yes, yes; we understand all that,' said Mrs. Nesbit, with a contemptuous accent; 'but as it cannot be at once, you will soon have enough of that overbearing temper. At twenty, there is plenty of time to get over such an affair, and form a more suitable connection.'

'Never!' cried Theodora.

'What, my dear!' said astonished Lady Martindale. 'You engaged, and you have not told me!'

'Only since yesterday, mamma. He spoke to papa only this morning.'

'But who is it? Nothing that your aunt disapproves, I trust, my dear.'

'Percy Fotheringham,' said Theodora, standing firm, and exulting in defiance; but her aunt continued that same provoking disregard.

'Yes, you see it is of no use to oppose her. For my part, I think her papa has acted wisely in permitting the engagement. Contradiction would embellish her hero; while, left to him, she will soon find him out. I do not concern myself, for Miss

Martindale can get over a little matter of this kind.'

'It is of no use to make protestations,' said Theodora; and she left the room much more annoyed than she could have been by the violent opposition for which she was prepared. Cool contempt was beyond everything irritating, especially where reply was impossible, and argument undignified.

Mrs. Nesbit continued to behave as if the engagement did not exist, and Violet could not suppose her informed of it. Lady Martindale looked melancholy and distressed, especially after having been with John, whom, however, she declared to be better, and desirous of seeing his sister. Theodora went to him, but remained a very short time.

Violet ventured in with his mother, to wish him good night, and he thanked her warmly for having read him to sleep. 'When I am laid up again, you will know where to find a nurse for me,' added he to his mother; a speech which obtained for Violet a positively cordial and affectionate good night from Lady Martindale.

Though mending, he did not leave his room the next day, as it was damp and chilly; and he again asked for Violet's company in the afternoon, since he supposed she was not thinking of going out.

'O, no; no one does, except Theodora. I saw something brown half-way across the park, which must be either her cloak, or the old cow-man's worst round frock.'

'And Percy not in attendance?'

'No; he and Arthur are lingering at luncheon, talking about the Austrian army. When did you hear about this?'

'As soon as I came in. He marched into my room, sat down, and said, "There! I've done it." I thought he had broken the knees of Arthur's gray, till he explained—"No; I have taken your sister on my hands."'

'So you were watching them all the evening!'

‘Yes; I was very anxious as to how my father might view it.’

‘I suppose that hurt you more than the rain?’

‘Excitement, as Brown would say. Perhaps it might. We talked long and late, and afterwards I fell into the old strain of thought. From what Percy tells me, his sister must have influenced Theodora far more than I thought possible. To her he ascribes her religious tone. If he is right, my mistake in neglecting her has been worse than I supposed.’

‘Then this is all the better! Do you remember saying you despaired of a Petruchio?’

‘It is on the Petruchio principle that he takes her, and avowedly. None but Katharina was ever so wooed or so won!’

‘That is very much to her honour.’

‘If she realizes his being in earnest. She would make one doubt whether she has any earnest. Yesterday evening she so treated, the subject that I was on the point of saying, “Reply not to me with a fool-born jest.” And how do you think she answered my father, when he asked her if she knew what she undertook? As my namesake said, “I shall wash all day and ride out on the great dog at night.”

‘Was not that a sort of shyness?’

‘I would fain hope so. If I had ever seen anything like deep earnest feeling I should be satisfied. Yet Percy declares, I trust he may be right, that she has the very strongest affections, and much tenderness of character. He says her nature came straight from the tropics, and must not be judged by sober English rules.’

‘If you had seen her distress about the child at the lodge!’

‘Ah! he said those tears settled the matter, and showed him that she had the woman’s heart as well as the candour that would conquer her waywardness. It sounds a little too like a lover’s self-justification.’

‘Do you think so?’ said Violet. ‘You do not know what she is with the dumb boy,

and with Johnnie.’

‘I was just going to have instanced her neglect of Johnnie.’

‘I assure you,’ cried Violet, eagerly, ‘that is only because she does not like me. You cannot think how fond she is of him. When I am out of the way she goes to the nursery and pets him till Sarah is almost jealous of his fondness for her.’

‘I have no patience with her,’ exclaimed John.

‘I thought you would have been glad.’

‘I do not like Percy to make a mistake, and get his feelings trifled with. He deserves a wife like himself.’

‘Did you hear of Arthur’s advice to him?’

‘To kill the cat on the wedding-day. That might answer if it were to be at once; but it is a cat with nine lives, and I do not think she will bear to have it killed before the wedding-day.’

‘Then it is not to be soon?’

‘No, my father thinks her not fit for a poor man’s wife, and cannot give her more than £5000, so they must wait till they can begin on an income equal to yours.’

‘And I suppose that will be when he gets some appointment.’

‘And there is the Worthbourne estate as a provision for the future, so that there is no imprudence. For my part, I regret the delay; Theodora would shine if she had to rough it, provided always she was truly attached to her husband.’

‘She would bear poverty beautifully.’

‘But it is not a thing to advise. I am accused already of being romantic and imprudent, yet I would urge it on my father if I saw them desirous to hasten it. I do not understand them, and perhaps I am unreasonable. I do not like his happiness to be in such perverse hands, yet I am uneasy at the delay. It suits my aunt’s predictions, and they are far too apt to come true. I feel them like a spell. She always

foretold that Helen and I should never marry. And it cannot be denied that she has great insight into character, so that I am alarmed at her declaring this will not come to good. If not, I have no hope for Theodora! She will either be hard and unfeminine, or turn to worldliness, and be such another as my aunt. She has it in her.'

'You are taking to horrid predictions yourself.'

'Well, I acknowledge her capabilities, but there has been woful mismanagement, and my father feels it.'

'I was surprised at his consenting so readily.'

'He has once been too much grieved to be led to act against his own judgment again. He thinks very highly of Percy, and is glad Theodora should be in safe keeping; she was so wilful this last season in London as to make him very uneasy.'

Mr. Fotheringham came in, and Violet was going, but was claimed for some more work upon the Crusaders, and told that Arthur was gone out to inspect his gray.

Arthur found the weather better than it appeared from indoors, and strolled into the park to indulge in a cigar. Ere long he perceived the brown waterproof cloak, and throwing away the end of his cigar, called out, 'Halloa! a solitary ramble. Have you given Earl Percy the slip?'

'You do not expect him to be always philandering after me?'

'There's a popular delusion with regard to lovers.'

'We are not such ninnies.'

'But seriously, Theodora, what can induce Fotheringham to have you?'

'I expected you to ask what induced me to have him.'

'That in its own time! Tell me, first, why he takes you.'

'The same reason that you took Violet.'

'As if you and Violet were to be named together!'

‘Or you and Percy!’

They laughed, and Theodora then spoke with deep feeling. ‘It does surprise me, Arthur, but it is the more pleasure. He has known me all my life, and sees there is less humbug in me than in other women. He knows I have a heart.’

‘That scientific discovery is his reason. Now for yours.’

‘Because he understands me.’

‘So your partnership is founded on a stock of mutual understanding! I devoutly hope it is; for my notion is that Percy will stand no nonsense.’

‘Of course not.’

‘It remains to be proved how you will like that.’

‘I am not given to nonsense.’

Arthur whistled.

‘That means that I will not yield when I am not convinced.’

‘And he will make you.’

‘He will never be unreasonable,’ exclaimed Theodora.

‘It does not follow that you will not.’

‘That is unjust. I yield where duty, good sense, or affection make it needful.’

‘Oho! Affection! That is like other people. Now I see some hope of you.’

‘Did you think I would have had him without it?’

‘Certainly, it is the only explanation. You will not find being wife to a scrub of an attache the same thing as being Miss Martindale.’

‘I am glad of it. My mind revolts at the hollowness of my present life.’

‘Well done!’ ejaculated Arthur.

‘I do,’ said Theodora, vehemently. ‘Ours has never been a home; it was all artificial, and we had separate worlds. You and I amalgamated best; but, oh! Arthur, you

never cared for me as I did for you. The misery of my life has been want of affection. Any one who loved me could have guided me at will. You doubt! You don't know what is in me! How I felt as if I would work night and day at my lessons, if they were ever to be heard by mamma! I remember once, after a day's naughtiness, lying awake, sobbing, and saying, again and again, half aloud, "I would be good if they would love me!"'

'No one would have thought such fancies were in a wild colt like you.'

'I would not have had them guessed for worlds. Then came that one gleam of Helen. It was a new life; but it could not last. She went back, and I cannot say things in letters. She told me to talk to John, but he was of no use. He has always despised me.'

'I don't think you are right there.'

'He would help me in trouble, but I am nothing to him. You were all I had, and when you gave yourself away from me I was left alone with the heart-ache, and began to think myself born to live without love.'

'In spite of the lovers you had in London?'

'You know better. That was the Honourable Miss Martindale. What did they know of the real Theodora?'

'Poor critturs, what indeed! They would have run far enough if they had.'

'I knew it. It is the soft, gentle, feminine mould that attracts men.'

'Another curious discovery.'

'I cannot change my nature. But when he comes, superior to them all, understanding my true self, seeing me high-spirited and cold-mannered, but able to look into me, and perceive there is warmth and soundness—oh! is not that a new well-spring of happiness!'

'Yes, he is as much out of the common run of folks as you are. You'll go as well

together as Smithson's pair of piebalds. I am satisfied; I only wanted to know whether you cared for him, for you don't "act as sich."'

'I can't talk stuff. I managed pretty well with papa, but I could not bear it with John. He began to praise Percy, which made me ready to cry, and that provoked me: besides, I know he does not believe in me. He cares for Helen's brother far more than for his own sister, and does not think me good enough for him. I saw he thought I should trifle, and meant to give me a lecture; and I could not stand that, you know, so I got away as fast as I could.'

'John does not lecture as you might expect, if you give him his full swing. He is the best and kindest fellow in the world.'

'I know how Percy looks up to him. The only thing I don't like is, that I believe one cause of Percy's attachment is my being his sister.'

'I tell you, Theodora, if you are so outrageously jealous, you will never get through the world in peace.'

'I shall have no reason for jealousy.'

'And for fear he should, had you not better give a hint to Wingfield? You are turning the poor fellow's head with your confabulations over the dirty children, and you'll have him languishing in an unrequited attachment.'

'He understands me too well,' said Theodora.

'You reckon a great deal on understanding! And you put yourselves to the test. Why don't you marry out of hand, and trust to the fates?'

'We have talked it over,' said Theodora. 'As to our income being equal to yours, that is nonsense. We have no expensive habits; but Percy says £450 a year is too little, so we shall wait for the appointment, or till he has made it up to £700. But I own I did not expect such ready consent from papa.'

'Ha! You would have liked a little opposition? You would sing a different song if he

had set his face against it. It is very knowing of my aunt to take the line she does.'

'I wish my aunt was twenty years younger!'

'That you might fight it out, eh!'

'One comfort is, she will never leave me her money now! But I must go in, and send Miss Piper for a walk with Harrison. My aunt must be repaying herself on her.'

'Then I shall take another cigar, to get the damp out of my throat.'

'You wretch, you like to boast of it!'

'Ah! you don't know what Percy learnt in Turkey.'

'I know he always abominated smoking.'

'Perhaps he'll let you think so till you are married.'

'For shame, Arthur! That's the way you served your wife.'

'Not I. She is duly grateful to me for only smoking at fit times and places, wherein I don't resemble her precious brother.'

Arthur thus reported this conversation to his wife. 'I met Theodora in the park. She is as remarkable an article as ever I saw.'

'What do you think?—is she really attached to him?'

'I know as little as she does.'

It was determined that the secret should be strictly kept; it was the one point on which Lady Martindale was anxious, being thereto prompted by her aunt. Theodora declared she had no one to tell, and Mr. Fotheringham only desired to inform his uncle and aunt, Sir Antony and Lady Fotheringham. He was now going to pay them a visit before settling in his lodgings in London. Theodora's engagement certainly made her afford to be kinder to Violet, or else it was Percy's influence that in some degree softened her. She was pleased at having one of her favourite head girls taken as housemaid under Sarah's direction, her only doubt being whether Violet was a sufficiently good mistress; but she had much confidence in Sarah, whose love of

dominion made her glad of a young assistant.

The party was now breaking up, Violet in high spirits at returning home, and having Arthur all to herself, as well as eager to put her schemes of good management into practice. The sorrow was the parting with John, who was likely to be absent for several years.

Before going he had one last conversation with his sister, apropos to some mention of a book which she wished to send to London to be returned to Miss Gardner.

‘Does Violet visit her?’ he asked.

‘There have been a few calls; Jane Gardner has been very good-natured to her.’

‘Is that cousin of theirs, that Gardner, still abroad?’

‘Yes, I believe so.’

‘I hope he will stay there. He used to have a most baneful influence over Arthur. Theodora, if by any chance it should be in your power, you ought to do your utmost to keep them from coming in contact. It may be a very superfluous fear, but your intimacy with those ladies might be the means of bringing them together, and there is nothing I should so much dread.’

‘Surely Arthur may be trusted to choose his own friends.’

‘You don’t know what happened in their school days! No, you were too young. It was discovered that there was a practice of gambling and drinking wine in the boys’ rooms, and Arthur was all but expelled; but it turned out that he had been only weak, and entirely led by this fellow, and so he was spared. Percy could tell you many histories of Gardner’s doings at Cambridge. Arthur’s worst scrape since he has been in the Guards was entirely owing to him, and it was evident he still had the same power over him.’

‘Arthur is no boy now.’

‘I doubt,’ said John, half smiling.

‘No one can make the least charge against him since his marriage.’

‘It has done much for him,’ answered John, ‘and she has improved wonderfully. Theodora, now that I am going away, let me once more tell you that you are throwing away a source of much happiness by disregarding her.’

‘Her romantic friendship with Emma Brandon is a proof that she cannot have much in common with me.’

‘There is one thing you have not in common with either,’ exclaimed John, ‘and that is an unassuming temper.’

‘Yes, I know you all think me prejudiced. I do not want you to go away misunderstanding me,’ answered Theodora. ‘She has good principles, she is amiable and affectionate; but there are three points that prevent me from esteeming her as you do. She has a weak fretful temper.’

‘I am sure you have seen no sign of it.’

‘It is just what is never shown; but I am convinced poor Arthur suffers from it. Next, she thinks a great deal of her appearance; and, lastly, she is fond of power, and tries to govern, if not by coaxing, by weakness, tears, hysterics—all the artillery of the feeble. Now, a woman such as that I can pity, but cannot love, nor think a fit wife for my brother.’

‘I can’t tell, I don’t know,’ said John, hesitating in displeasure and perplexity; ‘but this once I must try whether it is of any use to talk to you. Her spirits and nerves are not strong, and they were cruelly tried last spring; but Arthur only saw her cheerful, and never guessed at the tears she shed in secret, till we found her papers blistered with them, when her never complaining and letting him go his own way had almost cost her her life! and if you knew her, you would see that the tendency to over-anxiety is the very failing with which she struggles. I wish I could make you see her in her true light.’

‘I cannot help it, John,’ said Theodora, ‘I must speak the truth. I see how it is. Men

are not clear-sighted in judging of a pretty woman of engaging manners. They are under a fascination. I don't blame you—it is exactly the same with papa and Percy.'

'Indeed?'

And for the last time baffled, John parted with his sister in much anxiety and disappointment, such as made it repose to turn to that other gentle, open-hearted, confiding sister, whose helplessness and sympathy had first roused him from despondency and inaction.

He begged her to write to him; an honour and a pleasure indeed; and now there was no fear of her letters being such as that she had sent him at Martindale. He declared the correspondence would be a great pleasure to him—he could not bear to think of hearing of those in whom he took so much interest only at second-hand; and besides, he had been accustomed to pour out his mind so much in his letters to Helen, that he felt the want of full and free confidence. His letters to his mother were not safe from the eye of his aunt, and neither his father nor Mr. Fotheringham could be what a lady correspondent would be to a man of his character, reflective, fond of description, and prone to dwell on the details of what interested him.

So the time of his departure came, whereat Arthur lamented, vowing it was a horrid bore that he could not live in England, and hoping that Barbuda would patch him up for good; while Violet made arrangements for his convenience and pleasure on the voyage, such as no sister had ever supplied for him before.

CHAPTER 11

So she had prayed, and He who hears, Through Seraph songs the sound of tears, From that beloved babe had ta'en The fever and the beating pain, And more and more smiled Isobel To see the baby sleep so well. —E. B. BROWNING (Isobel's Child)

On a bright cold afternoon the next spring, Theodora was setting out for a walk,

when she saw a carriage driving up the avenue, and Arthur emerging from it. Joyously she sprang forward—'Arthur! Arthur! this is pleasant. How glad I am. This is like old times.'

'Ay, I thought you would be ready for me. I have had a cold, and I am come home to shake off the end of it.'

'A cold—not a bad one, I hope?'

'Not very. I wanted Violet to come too, but the boy is poorly.'

'Oh! I hope there is not much the matter?'

'Only teeth, I believe. He is desperately fretful, and she can't attend to anything else.'

'Well, I hope you are come for a good long visit.'

'I can stay a week.'

'That's right, it will do you good. I was just going to write to you. I have a great mind to go back with you, if I shall not be in the way.'

'Not at all. It will be famous having you; but what makes you come? To gratify Fotheringham?'

'I have many reasons. I've got Charlie Layton elected to the Deaf and Dumb Asylum, and I must take him there.'

'I'm not going to take him! 'Tis enough to have to carry about one's own babies, without other people's.'

'We'll settle that,' said Theodora. 'Will you walk with me! There is no one at home, and I am stupefied with reading French novels to my aunt. Such horrid things! She has lost her taste for the natural, and likes only the extravagant. I have been at it ever since luncheon, and at last, when the wretches had all charcoaled themselves to death, I came out to breathe fresh air and purity.'

'Where's the Piper!'

‘Piper no longer. Have you not heard?’

‘Not a word since Percy announced that my aunt and Harrison had come to a split about the orchids.’

‘You have great things to hear. Harrison got a magnificent appointment, as he calls it—situation is not grand enough—to some botanic gardens; splendid salary. Nothing hindered the wedding but Miss Piper’s dread of my aunt. It was not only that she could not tell her, but she could not face her after it was told, though I offered to undertake that. So the upshot was, that for very cowardice she preferred stealing the match and taking French leave. It was a silly piece of business; but I could not help that, and they were accountable to no one. I promised to announce it to my aunt when the deed was done, and satisfied the poor little woman’s conscience by undertaking to be my aunt’s white nigger till she bought another.’

‘If that’s not self-devotion, I don’t know what is,’ said Arthur. ‘I trust she has got one.’

‘She comes to-morrow.’

‘How was the wedding managed?’

‘Harrison came with his license from Whitford, and I walked forth with sal volatile in one hand and salts in the other, administering them by turns to the fainting bride. I dragged her all the way by main strength, supported her through the service, and was very near giving her away by mistake, for there was no one else to do it but old Brand. He and I are the witnesses in the register. I received her hysterical farewells, and Harrison’s elegant acknowledgments; saw them into their fly, and came home, trusting to Providence that I could inform my aunt without bringing on a fit.’

‘After surviving the news of your engagement she may bear anything.’

‘Ah! there she takes refuge in incredulity. Now this was a fact. So there was nothing for it but to take a high tone. I gave the history, and told my own share; then, in the style of Richard II, when Wat Tyler was killed, declared I would be her companion;

and, after some bandying of words, we settled down peaceably.'

'One thing amazes me. How did you get Wingfield to do it? I had plague enough with the old parson at Wrangerton, and I should have thought Wingfield harder to manage.'

'They had no consent to ask—no one could forbid the banns. He soon saw the rights of it,' said Theodora, unable to prevent herself from blushing.

'You talked him over, eh?'

'Arthur, you are looking at me as if you wanted to put me out of countenance. Well, you shall hear the truth; it is safe with you, and no one else knows it. It is my chief reason for wishing to go to London.'

'Ah ha!'

'Yes, you were right in warning me. He must needs think I worked in the parish for his sake; and one fine day, as I was walking home, he joined company, and before I knew where I was he was making me an offer.'

'And learnt what disdain means, if he did not know before.'

'No,' said Theodora, gravely, and blushing deeply. 'I recollected your warning, and saw that if there had not been something like encouragement he would not have forgotten the distance between us. This wedding has occasioned conferences; besides, Percy was exacting at Christmas, and I had rather tried to tease him. I thought, living close by, Mr. Wingfield must have known the state of the case, and that I need not be on my guard; so that, having so far taken him in, I thought it right to tell him I was afraid he had not been fairly used, for I had trusted to his knowing I was engaged. So we parted amicably; but it is a great bore, for he is much more cut up than I expected, poor man. He went from home the next Monday, and is but just come back, looking disconsolate enough to set people wondering what is on his spirits, and avoids me, so as to show them. It would be the best possible thing for me to get out of the way till it is blown over, for I have no comfort in parish work. It has

been a relief to be always shut up with my aunt, since that was a reason for not going into the village.'

'Then you will stay till the family migration?'

'I don't think there will be any this year. Papa talks about bad times, and says the season in London is too expensive; and mamma was worried and tired last year, and did not enjoy it, so she will be glad to avoid it and stay with my aunt.'

'And, you being no longer a subject for speculation, there's no object.'

'Yes; I am glad to have ended that hateful consciousness.'

'Well, Violet will do her best for you.'

'I don't want her to trouble herself; I only want house-room.'

'And a change after a month's white niggering.'

'That's another reason. My aunt has grown so dependent on me, that this new lady will not have a fair chance if I am at home; and if I don't break the habit, I shall never call my time my own again.'

In fact, Theodora had been suffering under a fit of restlessness and dissatisfaction, which made her anxious to change the scene. The school, her great resource, was liable to be a place of awkward meetings. She was going to lose her dumb charge; and with Percy and Arthur both at a distance, there was no excitement nor relief to the tedium of home. The thorough self-sacrificing attendance on her aunt had been the sole means left her of maintaining the sense of fulfilling a duty.

The unexpected arrival of her favourite brother was as a reward. Her spirits rose, and she talked with gaiety and animation, delighted to find him claiming her company for walks and rides to be taken in his holiday week, and feeling as if now the prediction had truly come to pass, that he would be relieved to come to her from the annoyances of his home.

Every one seemed glad to see Arthur—even Mrs. Nesbit. In the course of the

evening something was said about a dinner party for the ensuing Saturday, and Lady Martindale asked if he could stay for it.

‘Saturday? Yes; I need not go back till Monday.’

‘I wish Violet could have come,’ said Lord Martindale. ‘I am glad you can give us a week; but it is a long time for her to be alone. I hope she has some friend to be with her.’

‘Oh, she wants no one,’ said Arthur. ‘She begged me to go; and I fancy she will be rather glad to have no distraction from the child. I am only in the way of her perpetual walking up and down the room with him whining in her arms.’

‘Ah! it is an unlucky affair,’ said Mrs. Nesbit, in her sarcastic tone of condolence; ‘she will never rear it.’

She seemed, in her triumph, to have forgotten that its father was present, and his impatient speech had certainly not been such as to bring it to mind; but this was too much, and, starting, he hastily exclaimed, ‘Children always do make a fuss about their teeth!’

‘I do not speak without the authority of medical men,’ said Mrs. Nesbit. ‘I don’t blame your wife, poor thing.’

What do you mean? cried Arthur, colour and voice both rising.

‘I am surprised your brother kept it from you,’ said she, gratified at torturing him; ‘you ought to have been informed.’

‘Tell me at once,’ said Arthur.

‘Only this, Arthur,’ said his father, interposing: ‘when first the doctor at Ventnor saw him he thought him very delicate, and told John that he would hardly get through the first year without great care.’

‘He has all but done that!’ said Arthur, breathing more freely; ‘he will be a year old on the third.’

‘Yes; afterwards the doctor thought much better of him, and John saw no occasion to make you and Violet more anxious.’

‘Then it all goes for nothing!’ said Arthur, looking full at his aunt with defiance, and moving to the furthest end of the room.

But it did not go for nothing. He could not shake off the impression. The child’s illness had never been so alarming as to stir up his feelings, though his comfort had been interfered with; and there were recollections of impatience that came painfully upon him. He knew that Violet thought him more indifferent to his child than he really was; and, though she had never uttered a complaint or reproach, he was sure that he had hurt and distressed her by displeasure at the crying, and by making light of the anxieties, which he now learnt were but too well founded.

Arthur’s easiness and selfishness made him slow to take alarm, but when once awakened there was no limit to his anxiety. He knew now what it would be to lose his first-born. He thought of the moment when the babe had been laid on his hand, and of the sad hours when that feeble cry had been like a charm, holding the mother to life; and his heart smote him as he thought of never hearing again the voice of which he had complained. What might not be happening at that moment? As grisly a train of chances rose before him as ever had haunted Violet herself, and he thought of a worse return home than even his last. Yet he had never desired her to let him know whether all was well!

He could not sleep, and in the morning twilight he sought out writing materials, and indited his first letter to his wife:—

‘Dear Violet,—I hope you and the boy are well. I have not coughed since I left London. I come home on Monday, if all goes well, and Theodora with me. She has made the place too hot to hold her.

‘Yours ever,

‘A. N. MARTINDALE.

‘P.S. Write and say how the boy is.’

Having hunted up a servant, and sent him with this missive to the early post, Arthur’s paternal conscience was satisfied; and, going to bed again, he slept till breakfast was half over, then good-humouredly listened to exclamations on his tardiness, and loitered about the rest of the morning, to the great pleasure of his sister.

The companion, Mrs. Garth, the highly recommended widow of a marine officer, arrived in the afternoon; and Arthur, meeting her on the stairs, pronounced that she was a forbidding-looking female, and there was no fear that she would not be able to hold her own.

Rejoicing in newly-recovered freedom, Theodora had a long ride with him; and having planned another to a village near a trout-stream, where he wanted to inquire about lodgings for his indefatigable fishing friend, Captain Fitzhugh, she was working hard to dispose of her daily avocations before breakfast the next day, when Arthur knocked at her door. ‘Good morning,’ he said hastily. ‘I must go home. My little boy is very ill.’

‘Is he? What is it?’

‘A bad fit of croup. He was better when the letter went. My poor Violet! She has called in further advice; but it may come back. Do you like to come with me?’

‘If you like to have me.’

‘Only be quick. I must be gone by the ten o’clock train. You must be ready to start by nine.’

‘I’ll be ready at once,’ said Theodora, hastily ringing for Pauline, and rushing upon her preparations. She could not bear to part with him in his grief, and thought, in case of the child’s severe illness or death, that he would be in need of her comfort when he had his wife on his hands. She would not take Pauline—she would not be dependent, and trouble their small household with another servant; but Charles

Layton she could not leave, and having given orders to pack up her things, she flew off down the avenue to desire his aunt to prepare him.

Up and down, backwards and forwards, giving directions to every one, she hurried about till her father summoned her to breakfast.

‘I am glad you are going with him, my dear,’ he said, as he went down the steps with her. ‘We shall depend on you for hearing of the little boy.’

That genuine cordial approbation was so pleasant that the thought crossed her, ‘Was she going to be a blessing to her family?’

‘Good-bye, Arthur,’ said Lord Martindale, warmly pressing his hand. ‘I hope you will find him better, and Violet not doing too much. Give my love to her.’

Arthur was moved by his father’s unwonted warmth, and leaned back in the carriage in silence. Theodora watched him anxiously, and did not speak for some time.

‘Had there been any tendency to croup before?’ she asked at last.

‘Tender throat, I believe; Violet always was anxious. I wish I had not come away; it is too much for her alone! Ha! what are we stopping for now?’

‘To pick up Charles Layton.’

‘You’ll make us miss the train.’

‘No, here he is. He shall be in nobody’s way. I’ll put him into the housemaid’s charge in Belgrave square.’

And with her eyes and fingers she encouraged the poor child as he was lifted up to the box. ‘There, I’ve not stopped you long.’

‘What shall you do with him on the railroad!’

‘Take him with us, of course.’

‘I won’t have him going in a first-class with me.’

‘Then I shall go in a second-class with him.’

Here it occurred to her that this was a strange way of fulfilling her mission of comfort, and she would fain have recalled her words, but only sat silent till they came to the station, where, without any further question, they were all three lodged in the same carriage, where presently a county neighbour entered, attracted by the sight of Arthur. Theodora was provoked, feeling for Arthur, and thinking it was the stranger's presence that hindered her from resuming the task of cheering him, but she was more annoyed when Arthur plunged into a hunting discussion.

She sat working up the scene which awaited them, the child just expiring, his mother in hysterical agonies, and she herself displaying all her energy and resources, perhaps saving Johnnie's life—at any rate, being her brother's stay and support when his wife gave way.

His silence and anxious looks returned as they drove from the station, and she could think of nothing to say but the old hope that the baby was better. As they stopped, he threw open the carriage-door, and springing out, impatiently rang.

'Child better?' were his hurried words to James.

'Yes, sir.'

Before even this brief answer was spoken, Arthur was halfway upstairs. No one was in the drawing room; he dashed up to the bed-room; that, too, was empty; he climbed on where he had never been before, and opened the nursery-door.

There sat Violet on a low chair by the fire, with the little boy on her lap. With a cry of joy she rose; and in another moment was standing, almost unable to speak, as she saw Johnnie, looking much surprised, but well pleased, to find himself in those strong arms, and his soft face scrubbed by the black whiskers.

'He is pleased! He is smiling. You know papa, don't you, my Johnnie?' cried the happy Violet.

'And he is all right again?'

‘So much better to-day! We trust the cold is gone. Does he not breathe softly and freely? If only there’s no return to-night.’

‘Was there last night?’

‘Indeed there was. It was too dreadful!’ said Violet, leaning against him, and lowering her voice. ‘Once Sarah and Mr. Harding both thought it was all over, and I never dared to expect to see those eyes come back to their own dear look at me! O, Arthur, when I thought if I could but once have seen him in your arms! I never thought to be so happy as this!’ and she caressed the child to hide the tears of thankfulness. ‘I’m glad you weren’t there.’

‘My Violet, why!’

‘You could not have borne to have seen and heard, and now you won’t have it to remember. At least, I trust not! Think of their once wanting me to go away, saying it was not fit, and that I was of no use; but you knew better, Johnnie. You held mamma’s finger tight, and when you came to yourself, your sweet look and smile were for her! And at last he went to sleep over my shoulder, as he likes best; and I felt each one of his breathings, but they grew soft and smooth at last, and after two good hours he woke up quite himself.’

‘And you! Sitting up all night! You are not fit for such things. How did you get through it?’

‘I don’t know; I hardly remember,’ said Violet. ‘Your letter was such a pleasure! and oh! I had help.’

‘What, Harding—’

‘I did not mean that, though he was very kind. No, I meant thoughts—verses in the Bible,’ said Violet, hanging her head, and whispering, ‘I don’t mean at the worst. Then one could only pray he might not suffer so much; but things his uncle had helped me to, did come so comfortably while he was asleep. Don’t you remember saying I had no troubles for Helen’s cross to comfort me in!’

‘And did it?’ said Arthur, half smiling.

‘Not itself, you know; but it helped to put me in mind to be sure that all he was going through would somehow be a blessing. I could bear it then, and not be angry, as I was last year. Dear little fellow, it is as if he would put me in mind himself, for the only thing like play he has done to-day has been holding it up, and pulling its chain.’

‘There! go to your mother, Johnnie,’ said Arthur, giving him back. ‘She is a rare one, I tell you, and you understand each other. He does not look much amiss either. He really is a very pretty little fellow!’

No wonder Arthur made the discovery, as he for the first time remarked the large wistful dark eyes, the delicately fair skin, which the heat of the fire had tinged with soft pink, on the cheeks, the shapely little head, with its flaxen waves of curl; and the tiny, bare, rosy feet, outstretched to enjoy the warmth. Very small, tender, and fragile he looked, and his features had an almost mournful expression, but there was something peculiarly engaging in this frail little being.

Violet was charmed with the tribute of admiration: indeed, she had hardly known whether she might hope for Arthur’s return, though she had felt as if her heart would break if her child should die without his coming. The winter, though cheerful, had been spent in endeavours against her want of faith and hope, and this hard trial in the spring had brought with it a comfort and beginning of resignation that proved that her efforts had not been in vain.

Very happy she was as, Sarah coming up, she prepared to go down with Arthur, who now remembered to inform her of the arrival of ‘Theodora and her dummy.’

These two personages were waiting in the drawing-room, Theodora in an excited state of anticipation and energy, prepared for a summons to take care of the baby, while Arthur was supporting his wife in hysterics.

Long she waited and listened; at last there was an opening of doors, then what she

fancied the first shriek, and she started, alarmed, in spite of being wound up, but it sounded nearer—much too like a bona fide laugh, the very girlish sound she had condemned—Arthur's voice—Violet's gaily answering! They came in, full of smiles, Violet with outstretched hands, and warm unconstrained welcome. 'How kind of you to come! I'm sorry you have been so long alone, but I did not know it,' said she, kissing her sister-in-law, and giving a kind silent greeting to the dumb boy.

Disconcerted at her waste of preparation, Theodora stood for a moment, fancying Violet triumphant in having spoilt Arthur's holiday by what must have been an exaggerated trifle. She was almost ready to make no inquiry for Johnnie, but 'conventional instinct' prevailed, and his parents were so full of him, and of each other, that it set them off into an eager conversation, such as made her, in her present mood, believe herself neglected for the sake of Arthur's weak, tyrannical, exacting idol. She resolved to take Charles at once to her father's house. If it would not have been an insult to her brother, she would have slept there herself. She surprised the others by rising from her seat, and taking up the boy's cap.

'Oh!' exclaimed Violet, 'I had forgotten him, poor little fellow. I will take him to Susan to have some tea.'

'Thank you, I am going to take him to the maid at our house.'

'O, pray do not,' said Violet, imploringly; 'there's plenty of room here, and we can see about him so much better.'

'I had rather,' persisted Theodora.

'But see, it is getting dark. The lamps are lighted. You can't go now.'

'I shall not lose my way,' said Theodora, taking by the hand the poor boy, who seemed unwilling to leave the fire and Mrs. Martindale's kind looks.

'Now, Arthur! you wont let her go!' said Violet, distressed.

'What's the row?' said Arthur. 'Setting out on your travels again, Theodora!'

‘Only to take Charlie to Belgrave-square.’

‘I sha’n’t come with you.’

‘I can go by myself.’

‘Nonsense. You have rattled the poor child about enough for one day. Stay at home like a rational woman, and Violet will see to him.’

The dumb child gazed as if he read their faces, and was begging to remain; he gladly allowed Violet to take his hand, and she led him away, inviting Theodora to come and give her own directions about him to Susan, the girl from Brogden.

So sweet was the manner, so kind the welcome, and so pretty the solicitude for her comfort, that pride and prejudice had much difficulty in maintaining themselves. But Theodora thought that she did not like blandishments, and she was angry at the sensation of being in the inferior situation of Violet’s guest, at a moment of its being so signally shown that she could not permit Arthur to enjoy himself without her. To get home again as fast as possible was her resolution, as she merely unpacked the articles for immediate use, and after a hasty toilette, returned to the drawing-room.

Arthur and Violet were in earnest conversation. She fancied herself an interruption, and did not second their attempts to make it general. Violet had received a letter from John, and was offering it to Arthur, who only yawned.

‘Five sheets! He writes an abominably small hand! You may tell me what it is about. Niggers and humming-birds and such cattle, I suppose.’

‘He has been to see the bishop. He wants a chaplain to live in the house with him to teach the negroes, and have the church when it is built.’

‘No chance of his coming home, then?’

‘No, he is so well and busy. Percy Fotheringham is to send out some plans for the church—and only think! he has told Percy to come and ask me about Mr. Fanshawe—don’t you remember him?’

‘The curate at the chapel at Wrangerton?’

‘I once told John of his wish for missionary work, so Percy is to see about it, and if it will do, send him to Lord Martindale. Percy called yesterday, but I could not see him; indeed, I had not time to read my letter; and oh, Theodora, I am so glad you are come, for he wants all manner of infant school pictures and books for the picaninnies, and it is just the commission you understand.’

The hearing of John’s letter read, so far from mollifying Theodora, renewed the other grievance. At home, it was only by chance that she heard of her eldest brother’s plans, even when matured and submitted to his father; and she now found that they were discussed from the first with Violet, almost requiring her approval. The confidential ease and flow made it seem unlike John’s composition, used as Theodora was to hear only such letters of his as would bear unfriendly inspection, entertaining, but like a book of travels. It was a fresh injury to discover that he had a style from his heart.

Theodora was in a mood to search for subjects of disapproval, but the cheerful rooms, and even the extemporized dinner, afforded her none; the only cause of irritation she could find was Arthur’s anxiety when the lamplight revealed Violet’s pale exhausted looks. She had forgotten her fatigue as long as there was anything to be done, and the delight of the arrival had driven it away; but it now became evident that Arthur was uneasy. Theodora was gloomy, and not responding to her languid attempts at conversation, thinking there was affectation in her worn-out plaintive voice.

As soon as the tedious dinner was over, Arthur insisted on her going at once to bed, without listening to her entreaties that, as it was Theodora’s first evening, she might lie on the sofa and hear them talk. She turned back at the door to tell Theodora that there was a new review on the table, with something in it she would like to read, and then let Arthur take her up-stairs.

‘Ah!’ thought Theodora, ‘tormenting him about the child does not suffice—she must be ill herself! It is even beyond what I expected. When she had brought him home she might have let him have his evening in peace; but I suppose she is displeased at my coming, and won’t let him stay with me. She will keep him in attendance all the evening, so I may as well see what books she has got. “The West Indies”; “The Crusaders”—of course! “Geoffroi de Villechardouin”—Percy’s name in it. Where’s this review? Some puff, I suppose. Yes, now if I was a silly young lady, how much I should make of Percy because he has made a good hit, and is a literary lion; but he shall see the world makes no difference to me. I thought the book good in manuscript; and all the critics in the country won’t make me think a bit better of it or of its author. However, I’ll just see what nonsense they talk till she chooses to release Arthur.’

What would have been her displeasure if she had known that Arthur was lingering up-stairs giving his wife a ludicrous version of her adventure with Mr. Wingfield!

After a time the drawing-room door opened, but she did not heed it, meaning to be distant and indifferent; but a browner, harder hand than Arthur’s was put down on the book before her, and an unexpected voice said, ‘Detected!’

‘Percy! Oh, how are you?’ she exclaimed.

‘I am very glad you are come; I came to inquire at the door, and they told me that you were here. How is she, poor thing?’

‘She is gone to bed; Arthur thinks her knocked up.’

‘It is well he is come; I was much concerned at her being alone yesterday. So little Johnnie is better?’

‘Like Mother Hubbard’s dog.’

‘The croup is no joke,’ said Percy, gravely.

‘Then you think there was really something in it?’

‘Why, what do you mean? Do you think it was humbug?’

‘Not at all; but it was such a terrific account, and alarmed poor Arthur so much, that it gave one rather a revulsion of feeling to hear her laughing.’

‘I am very glad she could laugh.’

‘Well, but don’t you think, Percy, that innocently, perhaps, she magnified a little alarm?’

‘You would not speak of little alarms if you had seen Harding this morning. I met him just coming away after a fearful night. The child was in the utmost danger, but his mother’s calmness and presence of mind never failed. But I’ll say no more, for the sound wholesome atmosphere of this house must cure you of your prejudices.’

Arthur came down dispirited; and Percy, who had thought him an indifferent father, was pleased with him, and set himself to cheer his spirits, seconded by Theodora, who was really penitent.

She could not be at peace with herself till she had made some amends; and when she had wished her brother good night, found her way to the nursery, where her old friend Sarah sat, keeping solemn watch over the little cot by the fire. One of her sepulchral whispers assured the aunt that he was doing nicely, but the thin white little face, and spare hand and arm, grieved Theodora’s heart, and with no incredulity she listened to Sarah’s description of the poor little fellow’s troubles and sweet unconscious patience, and that perfect trust in his mother that always soothed and quieted him. It appeared that many nights had been spent in broken rest, and for the last two neither mother nor nurse had undressed. Sarah was extremely concerned for her mistress, who, she said, was far from strong, and she feared would be made as ill as she was last year, and if so, nothing could save her. This made Theodora feel as if she had been positively cruel, and she was the more bent on reparation. She told Sarah she must be over-tired, and was told, as if it was a satisfactory answer, that Mrs. Martindale had wished her to go to bed at six this morning. However, her

eyes looked extinguished, and Theodora, by the fascinating manner she often exercised with inferiors, at last persuaded her to lie down in her clothes, and leave her to keep watch.

It was comfortable to hear the deep breathings of the weary servant, and to sit by that little cot, sensible of being for once of substantial use, and meaning that no one ever should know it. But she was again disconcerted; for the stairs creaked, the door was softly opened, and Arthur stood on the threshold. The colour mantled into her face, as if she had been doing wrong.

‘The poor maid is worn out; I am come for the first part of the night,’ she said, in a would-be cold whisper. But his smile and low-toned ‘Thank you,’ were so different from all she had ever known from him, that she could hardly maintain her attempt at impassibility.

‘I thought Violet would sleep better for the last news,’ said he, kneeling on one knee to look at the child, his face so softened and thoughtful that it was hardly like the same; but recovering, he gave a broad careless smile, together with a sigh: ‘Little monkey,’ he said, ‘he gets hold of one somehow—I wish he may have got through it. Theodora, I hope you will have no alarms. Violet will take it very kind of you.’

‘Oh, don’t tell her.’

‘Good night,’ and he leaned over her and kissed her forehead, in a grave grateful way that brought the tears into her eyes as he silently departed.

Her vigil was full of thoughts, and not unprofitable ones. Her best feelings were stirred up, and she could not see Arthur, in this new light, without tenderness untainted by jealousy. Percy had brought her to a sense of her injustice—this was the small end of the wedge, and the discovery of the real state of things was another blow. While watching the placid sleep of the child, it was not easy to harden herself against its mother; and after that first relenting and acknowledgment, the flood of honest warm strong feeling was in a way to burst the barrier of haughtiness, and

carry her on further than she by any means anticipated. The baby slept quietly, and the clock had struck two before his first turn on the pillow wakened Sarah, though a thunder-clap would not have broken her slumber. She was at his cradle before he had opened his eyes, and feeding and fondling hushed his weak cry before it had disturbed his mother. Theodora went to her room on good terms with herself.

She had never allowed late hours to prevent her from going to the early service, and as she left her room prepared for it, she met Violet coming out of the nursery. Theodora for once did not attempt to disguise her warmth of heart, and eagerly asked for the little boy.

'Quite comfortable—almost merry,' answered Violet, and taking the hand stretched out in a very different way from the formal touch with which it usually paid its morning greeting, and raising her eyes with her gentle earnest look, she said, 'Dear Theodora, I am afraid you don't like it, but you must let me this once thank you.'

Theodora's face was such that Violet ventured to kiss her, then found an arm round her neck, and a warm kiss in return. Theodora ran down-stairs, thinking it a discovery that there was more beauty in those eyes than merely soft brown colour and long black lashes. It was a long time since her heart had been so light. It was as if a cold hard weight was removed. That one softening had been an inexpressible relief, and when she had thrown aside the black veil that had shrouded her view, everything looked so bright and sweet that she could hardly understand it.

The whole scene was new. She had been seldom from home, and only as a visitor in great houses, whither Lady Martindale carried formality; and she had never known the charm of ease in a small family. Here it would have been far more hard to support her cold solitary dignity than in the 'high baronial pride' of Martindale. She was pleased to see how well Arthur looked as master of the house, and both he and his wife were so much delighted to make her welcome now that she would allow them, that it seemed extraordinary that a year and three quarters had passed without

her ever having entered their house. Violet was, she owned, a caressing, amiable, lovable creature, needing to be guarded and petted, and she laid herself open to the pleasure of having something to make much of and patronize.

After breakfast, Violet installed her in the back drawing-room, promising that she should there be entirely free from interruption, but she had no desire to shut herself up; she was eager to see little Johnnie, and did not scruple to confess it. He was their chief bond of union, and if she was charmed with him now, when feeble and ailing, how much more as he recovered. Even at his best, he was extremely delicate, very small, thin, and fair, so that face and arms, as well as flaxen hair, were all as white as his frock, and were only enlivened by his dark eyes. He was backward in strength, but almost too forward in intelligence; grave and serious, seldom laughing, and often inclined to be fretful, altogether requiring the most anxious care, but exceedingly engaging and affectionate, and already showing patience and obedience to his mother that was almost affecting. Their mutual fondness was beautiful, and Theodora honoured it when she saw that the tenderness was judicious, obviating whines, but enforcing obedience even when it was pain and grief to cross the weakly child.

Moreover, Theodora was satisfied by finding that she had diligently kept up the Sunday-school teaching of the little Brogden maid; and as to her household management, Theodora set herself to learn it; and soon began to theorize and devise grand plans of economy, which she wanted Violet to put in practice at once, and when told they would not suit Arthur, complacently answered, ‘That would not be her hindrance.’

Violet wrote to John that if he could see Theodora and Percy now, he would be completely satisfied as to their attachment and chances of happiness.

CHAPTER 12

I saw her hold Earl Percy at the point With lustier maintenance than I did look for Of such an ungrown warrior. —King Henry IV

As soon as Violet could leave her little boy without anxiety, the two sisters deposited Charles Layton at the Deaf and Dumb Asylum, with hopes that a few years' training there would enable him to become Miss Martindale's little page, the grand object of his desires.

Their next and merriest excursion was to Percy's lodgings, where he had various Greek curiosities which he wished to show them; and Theodora consented to come with her brother and sister in a simple straightforward way that Violet admired.

His rooms were over a toy-shop in Piccadilly, in such a roar of sounds that the ladies exclaimed, and Arthur asked him how much he paid for noise.

'It is worth having,' said Percy; 'it is cheerful.'

'Do you think so?' exclaimed Violet. 'I think carriages, especially late at night, make a most dismal dreary sound.'

'They remind me of an essay of Miss Talbot's where she speaks of her companions hastening home from the feast of empty shells,' said Theodora.

'Ay! those are your West-end carriages,' said Percy; 'I will allow them a dreary dissatisfied sound. Now mine are honest, business-like market-waggons, or hearty tradesfolk coming home in cabs from treating their children to the play. There is sense in those! I go to sleep thinking what drops of various natures make up the roar of that great human cataract, and wake up dreaming of the Rhine falls.

"Bright volumes of vapour through Lothbury glide, And a river flows down the vale of Cheapside."

Eh, Mrs. Martindale?'

Violet, who always received a quotation of Wordsworth as a compliment to the north, smiled and answered, 'I am afraid with me it would end in,

“The stream will not flow, the hill will not rise.”’

‘Pish, Violet,’ said her husband, ‘how can you expect to feel like poets and lovers? And halloo! he is coming it strong! “Poems by A.”; “The White Hind and other Poems”; “Gwyneth: a tale in verse”; “Farewell to Pausilippo”, by the Earl of St. Erme. Well done, Percy! Are you collecting original serenades for Theodora? I’ll never betray where they came from.’

‘It is all in the way of trade,’ said Percy.

‘Reviewing?’ said Theodora.

‘Yes; there has been such an absurd amount of flattery bestowed on them that it must provoke any reasonable being. It really is time to put forth a little common sense, since the magazines will have it that earls write better than other people.’

‘Some of the verses in Lord St. Erme’s last volume seem to me very pretty,’ said Violet.

‘There, she is taking up the cudgels for her countryman,’ said Arthur, always pleased when she put herself forward.

‘Which do you mean?’ said Percy, turning on her incredulously.

‘I like those about the Bay of Naples,’ she answered.

‘You do not mean these?’ and he read them in so good-humoured a tone that no one could be vexed, but marking every inconsistent simile and word tortured out of its meaning, and throwing in notes and comments on the unfaithfulness of the description.

‘There! it would do as well for the Bay of Naples as for the farm-yard at Martindale—all water and smoke.’

Arthur and Theodora laughed, but Violet stood her ground, blushingly but resolutely.

‘Anything so read would sound ill,’ she said. ‘I dare say it is all right about the

faults, but some parts seem to me very pretty. This stanza, about the fishermen's boats at night, like sparks upon the water, is one I like, because it is what John once described to me.'

'You are right, Mrs. Martindale,' said Percy, reading a second time the lines to which she alluded. 'They do recall the evening scene; Mount Vesuvius and its brooding cloud, and the trails of phosphoric light upon the sea. I mark these for approval. But have you anything to say for this Address to the Mediterranean?'

He did not this time mar the poem in the reading, and it was not needed, the compound words and twisted epithets were so extravagant that no one gainsaid Arthur's sentence, 'Stilts and bladders!'

'And all that abuse of the savage north is unpardonable,' said Theodora. 'Sluggish torpid minds, indeed, frozen by skies bound in mist belts! If he would stay at home and mind his own business, he would not have time to talk such nonsense.'

'Now,' said the still undaunted Violet, when the torrent of unsparing jest had expended itself, 'now it is my turn. Let me show you one short piece. This—"To L."'

It was an address evidently to his orphan sister, very beautiful and simple; and speaking so touchingly of their loneliness together and dependence on each other, that Mr. Fotheringham was overcome, and fairly broke down in the reading—to the dismay of Violet, who had little thought his feelings so easily excited.

'Think of the man going and publishing it,' said Theodora. 'If I was Lady Lucy, I should not care a rush for it now.'

'That is what you get by belonging to a poet,' said Arthur. 'He wears his heart outside.'

'This came straight from the heart, at least,' said Percy. 'It is good, very good. I am glad you showed it to me. It would never do not to be candid. I will turn him over again.'

‘Well done, councillor,’ cried Arthur. ‘She has gained a verdict for him.’

‘Modified the sentence, and given me some re-writing to do,’ said Percy. ‘I cannot let him off; the more good there is in him, the more it is incumbent on some one to slash him. Authors are like spaniels, et cetera.’

‘Hear, hear, Theodora!’ cried Arthur. ‘See there, he has the stick ready, I declare.’

For in truth Arthur would hardly have been so patient of hearing so much poetry, if it had not been for the delight he always took in seeing his wife’s opinion sought by a clever man, and he was glad to turn for amusement to Percy’s curiosities. Over the mantel-piece there was a sort of trophy in imitation of the title-page to Robinson Crusoe, a thick hooked stick set up saltire-wise with the green umbrella, and between them a yataghan, supporting a scarlet blue-tasselled Greek cap. Percy took down the stick, and gave it into Theodora’s hand, saying, ‘It has been my companion over half Europe and Asia; I cut it at—’

‘By the well of St. Keyne?’ suggested the malicious brother.

‘No, at the source of the Scamander,’ said Percy. It served us in good stead when we got into the desert of Engaddi.’

‘Oh! was that when the robbers broke into John’s tent?’ exclaimed Violet. ‘Surely you had some better weapon?’

‘Not I; the poor rogues were not worth wasting good powder on, and a good English drubbing was a much newer and more effective experiment. I was thenceforth known by the name of Grandfather of Clubs, and Brown always manoeuvred me into sleeping across the entrance of the tent. I do believe we should have left him entombed in the desert sands, if John’s dressing-case had been lost!’

‘What a capital likeness of John,’ said Theodora. ‘Mamma would be quite jealous of it.’

‘It belonged to my sister,’ said Percy. ‘He got it done by an Italian, who has made

him rather theatrically melancholy; but it is a good picture, and like John when he looked more young-mannish and sentimental than he does now.'

A hiss and cluck made Violet start. In a dark corner, shrouded by the curtain, sat Pallas Athene, the owl of the Parthenon, winking at the light, and testifying great disapproval of Arthur, though when her master took her on his finger, she drew herself up and elevated her pretty little feathery horns with satisfaction, and did not even object to his holding her to a great tabby cat belonging to the landlady, but which was most at home on the hearth-rug of the good-natured lodger.

'I always read my compositions to them,' said Percy. 'Pallas acts sapient judge to admiration, and Puss never commits herself, applauding only her own music—like other critics. We reserve our hisses for others.'

'How do you feed the owl, Percy?'

'A small boy provides her with sparrows and mice for sixpence a dozen. I doubted whether it was cruelty to animals, but decided that it was diverting the spirit of the chase to objects more legitimate than pocket-handkerchiefs.'

'Ho! so there you seek your proteges!'

'He sought me. I seized him fishing in my pocket. I found he had no belongings, and that his most commodious lodging-house was one of the huge worn-out boilers near Nine-Elms—an illustration for Watts's Hymns, Theodora.'

'Poor little creature!' said Violet, horrified. 'What will become of him?'

'He is doing justice to the patronage of the goddess of wisdom,' said Percy. 'He is as sharp as a needle, and gets on in the world—has discarded "conveying," and promoted himself to selling lucifers.'

'A happy family theirs will be,' said Arthur. 'Cat, owl, and two rival pages!'

So, having duly admired all, curious books, potteries, red and black, tiles and lachrymatories, coins, scraps of ancient armour, a stuffed bee-eater, and the bottled

remains of a green lizard that had been a pet at Constantinople—and having been instructed in the difference between various Eastern modes of writing—the merry visit closed; and as the two sisters went home they planned a suit of clothes for the owl's provider, Theodora stipulating for all the hard and unusual needlework.

CHAPTER 13

I am ashamed that women are so simple To offer war when they should kneel for peace, Or seek the rule, supremacy, and sway, When they are bound to serve, love, and obey. —Taming of the Shrew

It was an early season, and Theodora had not been a fortnight at her brother's before numerous arrivals necessitated a round of visits, to which she submitted without more than moderate grumbling. The first call was on the Rickworth ladies; but it was not a propitious moment, for other visitors were in the drawing-room, and among them Miss Marstone. Emma came to sit by Violet, and was very anxious to hear whether she had not become intimate with Theresa. Violet could not give a good account of herself in this respect; their hours did not suit, and they had only twice met.

'And is she not delightful?'

'She is a very superior person' said Violet, looking down. 'Do you know her sisters? I liked one of them.'

'We shall have to call on them, but they are mere ordinary girls—no companions to Theresa. She laments it very much, and has had to make a line for herself. I must come and tell you about it some morning. It is nonsense to meet in this way and think of conversation.

Theodora had, in the meantime, had the exclusive attention of Miss Marstone. 'So Emma is constant to the Prae-Raffaelite,' said Theodora, as they drove from the door. 'What is all this about the Priory?'

‘Did Miss Marstone talk about that?’ said Violet, aghast.

‘She said something about a restoration. What! is it a secret?’

‘I suppose she thought you must know it, since I did. I was much surprised by her beginning about it to me, for when Emma first mentioned it to me, Lady Elizabeth seemed vexed, and begged me never to hint at it.’

‘So Emma wants to make restitution. Well done, little Emma! I did not think it was in her.’

‘It has been her darling scheme for years; but Lady Elizabeth has made her promise to wait till she is five-and-twenty, and not to consider herself pledged.’

‘How like Lady Elizabeth! One respects her like an institution! I hope Emma may hold out, but she has a firebrand in her counsels. I am glad you are not infatuated.’

‘I am sure I don’t know what I think of Miss Marstone. I cannot like her; yet I want to admire her—she is so good.’

‘Let her be as good as she pleases; why should she be silly?’

‘Oh! she is very clever.’

‘When good and clever people are silly, they are the biggest simpletons of all.’

‘Then I don’t think I quite know what you mean by silliness.’

‘Not turning one’s sense to the best advantage, I suppose,’ said Theodora. ‘That Miss Marstone provokes me. If her principles were not right I should not care; but when she has sound views, to see her go on talking, with no reserve, only caring for what is out of the way, it makes one feel oneself turned to ridicule. How can Lady Elizabeth endure it?’

‘I don’t think she likes it, but Emma is so fond of her!’

‘Oh! as to Emma, her poor little imagination is dazzled. It is providential that she has four years to wait! Unless, indeed, there is a reaction, and she marries either a broken-down fox-hunter or a popular preacher.’

Violet's horrified protests were cut short by the carriage stopping. In returning, they called at Mrs. Finch's house, to inquire when the family were expected to return from Paris. They had arrived that morning, and Violet said she would make a short visit, and then go home and send the carriage back, but Theodora preferred walking home.

As they were announced, Mrs. Finch started up from a gilded sofa on which she had been reclining, reading a French brochure. Her dress was in the excess of the newest Parisian fashion, such as even to London eyes looked outre, and, as well as her hair, had the disordered look of being just off a journey. Her face had a worn aspect, and the colour looked fixed. Theodora, always either rigidly simple or appropriately splendid, did not like Violet to see her friend in such a condition, and could almost have shrunk from the eager greeting. 'Theodora Martindale! This is delightful! It is a real charity to look in on us to-day! Mrs. Martindale, how are you? You look better than last time I saw you. Let me introduce you to Mr. Finch.'

Mr. Finch was a little dried-up man, whose ceremonious bow put Violet in mind of the Mayor of Wrangerton. Bending low, he politely gave her a chair, and then subsided into oblivion; while Miss Gardner came forward, as usual, the same trim, quiet, easy-mannered person, and began to talk to Violet, while Mrs. Finch was loudly conversing with Theodora.

The apartment was much in the same style as the lady's dress, full of gilding and bright colour, expensive, but not producing a good effect; especially as the sofa had been dragged forward to the fire, and travelling gear and newspapers lay about untidily. Altogether there was something unsatisfactory to the feelings of both Theodora and Violet, though Mrs. Finch was very affectionate in her impetuous way, and Miss Gardner gently kind to Violet, asking many questions about her little boy.

Violet soon took leave, and Mr. Finch went down with her to the carriage.

‘That is a fresh complexion that does one good to see!’ cried Mrs. Finch, when she was gone. ‘I am glad to see her in better looks and spirits.’

‘She understands the art of dress,’ said Miss Gardner. Theodora was on the point of making a sharp answer. It was the consequence of having once allowed her brother’s wife to be freely canvassed, and she was glad that an opening door checked the conversation.

There entered a tall fashionable-looking man, with a glossy brown moustache, and a very hairy chin, but of prepossessing and gentlemanlike appearance. He leant over the sofa, and said a few words in a low voice to Mrs. Finch, who answered with nods, and a display of her white teeth in smiles. Raising himself, as if to go, he said, ‘Ah! by the bye, who is that pretty friend of yours that I met Finch escorting down-stairs? A most uncommon style of beauty—’

‘That was Mrs. Martindale,’ said Miss Gardner, rather in haste.

‘Arthur Martindale’s village maid? Ha! Jane, there’s jealousy; I thought you told me—’

‘Georgina!’ exclaimed Jane, ‘you should have introduced Mark to Miss Martindale.’

As Theodora moved her stately neck she felt as if a thunder-bolt had fallen; but the gentleman’s manner was particularly pleasing.

‘It is Jane’s concern,’ said Mrs. Finch, laughing. ‘I leave you to infer why she checks his communications.’

‘There is nothing more awkward than “You told me so,”’ said Mr. Gardner, ‘since the days of “Who is your next neighbour, sir?” I may be allowed some interest in the matter, for your brother is an old school-fellow of mine.’

‘Come!’ exclaimed Georgina, ‘if you stay dawdling here, my letter won’t be written, and my vases won’t come. Fancy, Theodora, such delicious Sevres vases, big enough to hold the Forty Thieves, sky blue, with medallions of Mars and Venus, and

Cupids playing tricks—the loveliest things imaginable—came from Versailles—absolutely historical.'

'Lauzun is supposed to have been hidden in one,' said Mr. Gardner.

'I vowed I would have them, and I never fail. Mark has been through fire and water for them.'

'And I suppose they cost—' said Theodora.

'The keep of half-a-dozen starving orphans,' said Mrs. Finch, triumphantly. 'Ay, you may look, Theodora; but they are my trophies.'

'I wish you joy of them,' said Theodora.

'So you shall, when you see them; and that she may, off with you, Mark, or the post will go.'

'My cousin is a despot,' said Mark, moving off, with a bow to Theodora; Mrs. Finch, following, spoke a few words, and then shut him into the other room.

'Poor Mark'' said Jane, in the interval. 'We have brought him home. He has had a little property left him, and means to clear off his debts and make a fresh beginning. His poor mother is so delighted!'

'The coast is clear,' said Mrs. Finch, returning. 'Now, Theodora, is it true that you are going to be married?'

Point blank questions did not excite Theodora's blushes; and she composedly answered,

'Some time or other.'

'There! I knew it could not be true,' cried Jane.

'What is not true?' said Theodora.

'Not that you are going to have the curate!' said Mrs. Finch. 'Jane, Jane, that has brought the rouge! Oh! I hope and trust it is not the curate.'

‘Certainly not,’ said Theodora, in a grave deliberate voice.

‘That’s a mercy!’ said Mrs. Finch. ‘I had not the slightest confidence in you. I always reckoned on your making some wild choice. Oh! by the bye, do tell me where Percy Fotheringham is to be found. I must have him at our first party. What a charming book that is!’

‘Even at Paris every one is full of it, already,’ said Jane. ‘I feel quite jealous of you, Theodora, for knowing him so well, when we, his cousins, never saw him at all.’

‘Cousins in royal fashion,’ said Theodora, glad that the blush had begun for Mr. Wingfield. ‘What is the exact connection?’

‘You explain, Jane; it is past me. I am content to count kindred with the royal beast.’

‘Lady Fotheringham, his uncle’s wife, is sister to Mark’s mother, my uncle’s wife,’ said Jane. ‘There! I trust that is lucidly done.’

‘That is all, is it?’ said Theodora.

‘Enough for the sending of a card. Tell me where, if you know.’

Theodora named the place.

‘Does he show off well? Mark says he has claws—’

‘I have known him too long to tell how he appears to strangers,’ said Theodora, as the colour mounted again.

‘Do you see much of him?’

‘He comes to Arthur’s house.’

‘You have ventured there?’ said Jane. ‘It was hard not to be able to come for the season otherwise.’

‘I came up to bring the dumb boy to the Asylum. I am staying on because I like it.’

‘Do you mean to go out with her?’

‘When she goes, I do so too, but I am not come for the season. My brother’s

regiment is ordered to Windsor, and perhaps I may stay to be with her.'

'She has more manner than last year,' said Jane: 'she is greatly improved in looks. You will believe me, Theodora, all I said to Mark only referred to her paleness.'

'It won't do, Jane,' said her sister; 'you only make it worse. I see how it is; Theodora has found out that her sister-in-law is a pretty little pet of a thing that does her no harm, and you have got into the wrong box by flattering her first dislike. Yes, yes, Theodora, we know Jane of old; and never could get her to see the only safe way is to tell one's mind straight out.'

'I don't see it established that I did not tell Theodora my real mind,' said Jane, quietly; 'I always thought Mrs. Martindale pretty and elegant—'

'Self-evident,' said Georgina; 'but if I had been among you, would not I have told Theodora the poor child was cowed by her dignities, and Mrs. Nesbit and all the rest? Oh, I would have made much of her, and brought her forward. She should have been my queen of Violets: I would have done it last year if that unlucky baby had not come in the way.'

'And now she does not need patronage,' said Jane.

'No; and now Theodora has found her out for herself—a better thing,' said Mrs. Finch. 'You look all the better for it! I never saw you look so bright or so handsome, Theodora! You are a happy girl!'—and there was a sigh. Some interruption here occurring, Theodora took her leave, and walked home. She felt ruffled by her visit, and as she came indoors, ran up-stairs and knocked at her sister's door. The room looked cool and pleasant, and Violet was lying down in her white, frilled dressing-gown, so freshly, purely, delicately neat, and with so calm and sweet a smile, that the contrast marked itself strongly, and Theodora thought no one ever looked more innocent and engaging. 'I hope you are not tired?'

'Oh, no; I only thought it wiser to rest, thank you.'

'I came to tell you that Georgina Finch wants us to go to a party next Tuesday week.

There's nothing to prevent it, is there?'

'I know of nothing; but Arthur will say—'

'We are to bring Percy. I meant to have told them of our affair; but I did not think they deserved it just then. I am glad he is no real relation to that Mr. Gardner.'

'Was it Mr. Gardner who met me going down-stairs?' said Violet, with an unpleasant recollection of having been stared at. 'Is he their brother?'

'No; their cousin. I wonder what you think of them?' said Theodora, hastily throwing aside her bonnet and gloves, and seating herself.

'Miss Gardner is very good-natured and pleasing.'

'Those words are made for her. But what of Georgina?'

'I hardly know her,' said Violet, hesitating. 'This is only the second time I have seen her; and last year I was so unwell that her liveliness was too much for me.'

'Overpowering,' said Theodora. 'So people say. It is time she should steady; but she will not think. I'm provoked with her. I did not like her looks to-day, and yet she has a good warm heart. She is worth a dozen Janes! Don't prefer Jane to her, whatever you do, Violet!' Then breaking off, she began earnestly: 'You see, Violet, those are my oldest friends; I never could care for any girl but Georgina, and we have done such things together as I never can forget. They had great disadvantages; a set of wretched governesses—one worse than the other, and were left entirely to their mercy. My education was no pattern; but it was a beauty to theirs, thanks to my father. I do believe I was the only person with any serious notions that Georgina ever came in contact with, in all her growing up. Their father died just as she was coming out, leaving very little provision for them; and they were shifted about among fine relations, who only wanted to get rid of them, and gave them to understand they must marry for a home.'

'Poor girls! What a miserable life!'

‘Jane knew she was no beauty, and took to the obliging line. She fawns, and is intimate and popular. I never liked her silkiness, though it creeps into one at the time. Georgina had more in her. I wish you could have seen her at eighteen. She was such a fine, glowing, joyous-looking girl, with those bright cheeks, and her eyes dancing and light hair waving, and exuberant spirits that no neglect or unkindness could daunt—all wild gaiety, setting humbug at defiance, and so good-natured! Oh! dear, it makes one melancholy!’

‘And what made the change?’

‘She had a long, low, nervous fever, as they called it; but I have never known much about it, for it was when we were all taken up with John’s illness. She was very long in recovering, and I suppose her spirit was broken, and that the homelessness grew unbearable; for, whereas she had always declared for honest independence and poverty, the next thing I heard of her was, that she had accepted this miserable money-making old wretch!’

‘Perhaps she liked him.’

‘No, indeed! She despises him, and does not hide it! She is true! that is the best of her. I cannot help caring for Georgina. Poor thing, I hate to see it! Her spirits as high as ever, and with as little ballast; and yet she looks so fagged. She was brought up to dissipation—and does not know where else to turn. She has not a creature to say a word the right way!’

‘Not her sister?’ said Violet. ‘She seemed serious and good.’

‘No one can tell what is the truth in Jane,’ said Theodora; ‘and her sister, who knows her best, is the last person to be influenced by her. Some one to whom she could look up is the only chance. Oh, how I wish she had a child! Anything to love would make her think. But there was something in the appearance of that room I cannot get over.’

‘The confusion of arriving—’

‘No, nothing ever could have made it so with you! I don’t know what it was, but—Well, I do think nothing else prevented me from telling them about Percy. I meant it when I said I would stay after you; and they talked about his book, and asked if I saw much of him, and I faced it out, so that they never suspected it, and now I think it was cowardly. I know! I will go at once, and write Georgina a note, and tell her the truth.’

She went, and after a little interval, Violet began to dress for a party at the house of a literary friend of Lady Martindale’s, where they were to meet an Eastern grandee then visiting London. As she finished, she bethought herself that Theodora had never before had to perform a grand toilette without a lady’s maid; and going to her room, found her, indeed, with her magnificent black tresses still spread over her shoulders, flushed, humiliated, almost angry at her own failures in disposing of them.

‘Don’t I look like an insane gipsy?’ said she, looking up, and tossing back the locks that hung over her face.

‘Can I do anything to help you?’

‘Thank you; sit down, and I’ll put all this black stuff out of the way,’ said Theodora, grasping her hair with the action of the Tragic Muse. ‘I’ll put it up in every-day fashion. I wish you would tell me what you do to yours to get it into those pretty plaits.’

‘I could show you in a minute; but as it is rather late, perhaps you would not dislike my trying to put it up for you.’

‘Thank you—no, pray don’t; you will tire yourself.’ But it was spoken with none of the old disdain, and left an opening for coaxing.

‘I used to be thought a good hand with my sisters’ hair. It will be such a treat if you will only let me try,’ said she, emboldened to stroke the raven tresses, and then take the comb, while Theodora yielded, well pleased. ‘On condition you give me a lesson

to-morrow. I am not to be maid-ridden all my life,' and it ended with 'Thank you! That is comfortable. You came in my utmost need. I am only ashamed of having troubled you.'

'Don't say so. I am so much obliged to you for letting me try. It is more like being at home with you,' murmured Violet, turning away; but her voice as well as the glass betrayed her tearful eyes, and Theodora's sensation was a reward for her pride having slumbered and allowed her to accept a service.

Mr. Fotheringham came to dinner that he might go with them to the party. As they were drinking coffee before setting out, Mrs. Finch's invitation was mentioned.

'You had better leave your card for her, Percy,' said Theodora. He made no answer.

'Will you dine with us first and go?' said Violet.

Thank you; I do not mean to visit them.'

'No!' exclaimed Theodora. 'They are connections!'

'The more cause for avoiding them.'

'I have promised to introduce you.'

'I am afraid you reckoned without your host.'

'Ha!' cried Arthur, 'the lion is grown coquettish with fine feeding. He is not easy of leading.'

'She is my greatest friend,' said Theodora, as if it was conclusive; but Percy only answered, I should be very sorry to believe so,' set down his cup, and began to read the paper. She was the more irritated. 'Percy,' she said, 'do you really not intend to go to the party!'

'Certainly not.'

'Not to visit a relation of your own, and my most intimate friend, when it is my especial desire?'

'You do not know what you are talking of,' he answered, without raising his eyes.

‘Percy!’ exclaimed Theodora, her pride and affection so mortified that she forgot that Arthur was looking on with mischievous glee, ‘have you any reason for this neglect?’

‘Of course I have,’ said he, reading on.

‘Then let me hear it.’

‘You force it from me, Theodora,’ said Percy, laying down the paper: ‘it is because I will not enter into any intercourse I can avoid with persons whose conduct I disapprove.’

Violet coloured and shrank closer to her husband. Theodora’s face and neck turned almost crimson, and her eyes sparkled, but her voice only showed unmoved disdain. ‘Remember, she is my FRIEND.’

‘You do not know her history, or you would not call her so.’

‘I do. What is there to be ashamed of?’

‘I see, you know nothing of the prior attachment,’ said Percy, not without anger at her pertinacity.

‘A boy and girl liking that had been long past.’

‘O it had, had it?’ said Percy, ironically. ‘So you approve her marrying an old rogue and miser, who had heaped up his hoards by extortion of wretched Indians and Spaniards, the very scum of Mammon, coming to the top like everything detestable?’

‘I never heard his money was ill-gotten.’

‘Those who spend don’t ask whence gold comes. And you justify her keeping the old love, this cousin, dangling about her house all the winter till she is the talk of Paris!’

‘I don’t believe gossip.’

‘Can you deny that he is in London in her train?’

‘He has come into some property, and means to turn over a new leaf.’

‘Ay, and a worse leaf than before.’

‘How can you judge of his resolutions?’

Arthur laughed, saying, ‘I’d not bet much on Mark Gardner’s.’

Much to Violet’s relief, the carriage was announced; the gentlemen walked, and Theodora talked of indifferent matters fast and gaily. Percy handed Mrs. Martindale out, and gave her his arm, leaving Theodora to her brother.

It was a small select party, almost every one known to Theodora; and she was soon in eager conversation at some distance from Violet, who was sorry for Percy, as he stood in silence beside her own chair, vexation apparent on his honest face.

‘Who is that talking to Theodora?’ he presently asked. It was a small light-complexioned gentleman, whose head and face, and the whole style of his dress and person, might have made him appear a boy of seventeen, but for a pale moustache and tuft on the chin. Theodora looked very animated, and his face was glowing with the pleasure of her notice.

‘I cannot tell,’ said Violet; ‘there is Arthur, ask him.’

Percy was moving towards Arthur, when he was caught by the master of the house, and set to talk to the Oriental in his own language. Violet had never been so impressed by his talents as while listening to his fluent conversation in the foreign tongue, making the stranger look delighted and amused, and giving the English audience lively interpretations, which put them into ready communication with the wonder at whom they had hitherto looked in awkwardness. Theodora did not come near the group, nor seem to perceive Violet’s entreating glances; and when the Eastern prince departed, Percy had also disappeared. Violet was gratified by the ladies around her descanting on his book and his Syriac, and wished Theodora could hear them.

At that moment she found Theodora close to her, presenting Lord St. Erme to Mrs. Arthur Martindale! After so much dislike to that little insignificant light man for being the means of vexing Percy, to find him the poet hero, the feudal vision of nobility, the Lord of Wrangerton! What an adventure for her mother to hear of!

It was a pleasant and rather pretty face when seen near, with very good blue eyes, and an air of great taste and refinement, and the voice was very agreeable, as he asked some question about the Eastern prince. Violet hardly knew what she answered.

‘I met him yesterday, but it was flat,’ he said. ‘They had a man there whose Syriac was only learnt from books, and who could not understand him. The interpreter to-night was far more au-fait—very clever he seemed. Who was he?’

‘Mr. Fotheringham,’ said Theodora.

‘The Crusader? Was it, indeed?’ said Lord St. Erme, eagerly. ‘Is he here? I wish particularly to make his acquaintance.’

‘I believe he is gone,’ said Violet, pitying the unconscious victim, and at once amused, provoked, and embarrassed.

‘You know him?’

Violet marvelled at the composure of Theodora’s reply. ‘Yes, my eldest brother was his travelling companion.’

‘Is it possible? Your brother the “M” of the book?’ exclaimed the young Earl, with enthusiastic delight and interest. ‘I never guessed it! I must read it again for the sake of meeting him.’

‘You often do meet him there,’ said Theodora, ‘as my sister can testify. She was helping him to revise it last summer at Ventnor.’

‘I envy you!’ cried Lord St. Erme; ‘to go through such a book with such a companion was honour indeed!’

‘It was delightful,’ said Violet.

‘Those are such delicious descriptions,’ proceeded he. ‘Do you remember the scene where he describes the crusading camp at Constantinople? It is the perfection of language—places the whole before you—carries you into the spirit of the time. It is a Tasso unconscious of his powers, borne along by his innate poetry;’ then pausing, ‘surely you admire it, Miss Martindale?’

‘O, yes,’ said Theodora, annoyed at feeling a blush arising. The Earl seemed sensible of a check, and changed his tone to a sober and rather timid one, as he inquired after Mr. Martindale. The reply was left to Violet.

‘He has never been so well in his life. He is extremely busy, and much enjoys the beauty of the place.’

‘I suppose it is very pretty,’ said Lord St. Erme.

‘Nothing can be more lovely than the colour of the sea, and the wonderful foliage, and the clearness. He says all lovers of fine scenery ought to come there.’

‘Scenery can hardly charm unless it has a past,’ he replied.

‘I can controvert that,’ said Theodora.

With much diffidence he replied: ‘I speak only of my own feeling. To me, a fine landscape without associations has no soul. It is like an unintellectual beauty.’

‘There are associations in the West Indies,’ said Theodora.

‘Not the most agreeable,’ said Lord St. Erme.

‘There is the thought of Columbus,’ said Violet, ‘his whole character, and his delight as each island surpassed the last.’

‘Now, I have a fellow-feeling for the buccaneers,’ said Theodora. ‘Bertram Risingham was always a hero of mine. I believe it is an ancestral respect, probably we are their descendants.’

Violet wondered if she said so to frighten him.

‘“Rokeby” has given a glory to buccaneering,’ he replied. ‘It is the office of poetry to gild nature by breathing a soul into her. It is what the Americans are trying to do for their new world, still turning to England as their Greece.’

‘I meant no past associations,’ said Theodora, bluntly. ‘John carries his own with him.’

‘Yes; all may bear the colour of the imagination within.’

‘And of the purpose,’ said Theodora. ‘It is work in earnest, no matter where, that gives outward things their interest. Dreaming will never do it. Working will.’

Their conversation here closed; but Theodora said as they went home: ‘What did you think of him, Violet?’

‘He looks younger than I expected.’

‘He would be good for something if he could be made to work. I long to give him a pickaxe, and set him on upon the roads. Then he would see the beauty of them! I hate to hear him maunder on about imagination, while he leaves his tenantry to take their chance. HE knows what eyes Percy and John see things with!’

‘I am glad to have seen him,’ said Violet, reassured.

‘He desired to be introduced to you.’

‘I wonder—do you think—do you suppose he remembers—?’

‘I don’t suppose he thinks anything about it,’ said Theodora, shortly.

CHAPTER 14

I am not yet of Earl Percy’s mind. —King Henry IV

‘Violet,’ said Theodora, the next morning, ‘I want to know if Percy said more to Arthur than to us?’

She spoke with deepening colour, and Violet’s glowed still more, as she answered:

‘Arthur asked him, and he said he would not BEGIN an acquaintance, but that there was no occasion to break off the ordinary civilities of society. He accused her of no more than levity. Yes, those were Arthur’s words.’

‘I am going to get to the bottom of it,’ said Theodora; ‘and give Georgina a thorough lecture.’

She departed; and Violet sat down to her letters, with little Johnnie crawling at her feet; but in a few minutes she was interrupted by the entrance of Mr. Fotheringham, asking for Theodora.

‘She is gone out. She could not rest without an explanation from Mrs. Finch.’

‘A proper farrago she will hear,’ said Percy. ‘I found I could settle to nothing, so I thought it best to come and have it out.’

‘I hope she will soon come in.’

‘Don’t let me interrupt you. Go on with your letters.—Ha! little master!’

In his present temper, play with the baby was the most congenial occupation, and he made the little fellow very happy till he was carried off for his midday sleep. Then he tried to read, but seemed so uneasy, that Violet wondered if it would be intermeddling to hint at Theodora’s real views. At last, as if he could bear it no longer, he abruptly said, ‘Mrs. Martindale, do you know anything of these people?’

‘Very little,’ she answered. ‘Theodora was telling me about them yesterday, before you came. I believe she only likes them for old acquaintance’ sake.’

‘Is it true that she used to go out with them last year?’

‘I believe that she did sometimes.’

‘At least, I hope that will not happen again.’

‘No, I should not think it would. I am sure Theodora does not entirely approve of Mrs. Finch.’

‘She defended her through thick and thin.’

‘You shocked her with the suddenness of what you said. She cannot forget the having been happy together as children; but she thinks as you do, and disliked the marriage very much. Before you came, she had been lamenting over Mrs. Finch.’

‘Then, it was pure perverseness!’

‘If I said so, I wonder what you would answer,’ said Violet, with a bright, arch look.

‘I should hear reason,’ said Percy, roughly, as if to repel the sweetness; yet it had a mollifying effect, and he presently spoke with less irritation and more regret.

‘She suspects no evil, and cannot understand any imputation on her friend. She fancies I speak from report, but I have known this fellow, Mark, all my life. His mother is a sister of my Aunt Fotheringham. They wanted me to hunt up an appointment to get him out of the young lady’s way.’

‘Before her marriage?’

‘Ay. When I was last in England, there was a great to-do at the discovery of an engagement between this youth and Miss Georgina. I suppose, considering her bringing-up, she was not much to be blamed. I remember my aunt thought the poor girl harshly dealt with.’

‘O, that must have been the cause of the nervous fever Theodora mentioned. She said she knew no particulars.’

‘She has not been openly dealt with,’ said Percy. ‘They do not dare to let her see their doings.’

‘So the poor thing was tormented into this marriage?’

‘No torment needed. The elder sister did try to warn her that it could not turn out well. I should think the old rogue had found his punishment for his extortions. Fine stories I could tell you of him in South America. Now, am I not justified in keeping clear of them? Let Theodora say what she will, it does not make it right for me to put myself in the way of those great extravagant dinners and parties of theirs, where

they want me for nothing but a show-off.'

'I am sure Theodora will think with you, when she is cooler, and not taken by surprise.'

The clock struck.

'There, I have an appointment!'

'I wish you could wait for luncheon. She must come then.'

'What are you going to do this evening?'

'I am sorry to say that we dine out; but to-morrow is Sunday, and you will be sure to find us at home.'

He went, and one o'clock came, but no Theodora. Violet had waited ten minutes for luncheon before she returned.

'I did not know how late it was,' said she. 'I wish you had begun without me.'

Then, throwing her bonnet into a chair, and cutting some cake, she proceeded: 'Such hours as they keep! No one but Jane was up when I came, so I went to her room, and told her I would hear the rights of it.'

'Were you satisfied?'

'Georgina has been foolish and unguarded, and the world is very ill-natured. I hate it altogether, from beginning to end,' said Theodora, with an impatient gesture. 'Most decidedly,' she added, 'Georgina never ought to have married. I forced it from Jane that she had never cared for any one but this Mark. The discovery of his extravagance and misconduct was the real overthrow of my poor Georgina. It was that which brought on her illness; the family were very unkind; and at last weakness and persecution broke down her spirit, and she was ready to do anything to escape.'

'Poor thing! poor thing!'

'She had nothing to fall back upon. Oh, if I had but been there! If I had but known it at the time!'

‘Well, and now?’ said Violet, anxiously.

‘The having Mr. Gardner there now? Really, I don’t think she deserves all this abuse. The other matter is entirely passed away. Mr. Finch likes him, and they understand each other fully. Coming to them detaches him from his former habits, and gives him the best chance. His mother is so relieved to know he is with them. If Jane saw anything in the least amiss, she says she would be the first to take alarm, and I do trust her for that, for the sake of appearances.’

‘I suppose it is a question of appearances,’ said Violet, with the diffident blushes of her eighteen years.

‘Is she to throw away the hope of rescuing her cousin, to save herself from spiteful tongues?’ cried Theodora. ‘Not that I suppose Lady Fotheringham means to be spiteful, but Percy hears it all from her, and we know very well that good ladies in the country have a tendency to think every one good-for-nothing that lives in London or Paris, especially their relations. That is all nonsense. If Percy goes by gossip, I don’t. I go by my own observation, and I see there is nothing at which to take exception. I watched her and Mr. Gardner together, and I do declare there was nothing but ease and frankness. I am sure he was more inclined to pay that sort of attention to me. He really is very entertaining. I must tell you some of his stories.’

‘Percy has been here,’ said Violet.

‘Has he?’

‘He waited till twelve, and then was obliged to go.’

Theodora kept silence for some minutes, then said: ‘If he thinks to make me give my friends up, he is much mistaken! You know I had written to Georgina last night. Well, she thought I had come to be congratulated; and if you had but seen the greeting—the whole manner—when she met me! Oh! you would know how impossible it is not to feel for her, with all one’s heart!’

‘Yes, yes. I suppose you could not say anything about this to her. No, of course not.’

‘Not of course at all, if I could have had her alone, but Jane was there all the time. It was a pleasure to see the contrast between her manner and Jane’s. There was soul in her, real hopes I should be happy, while Jane seemed only to think it tolerable, because I might end in being an ambassadress. I will see her again before the party, and draw my own conclusions.’

‘Does she know that Percy will not go?’

‘I know no such thing.’

She was too proud to ask what had passed in Violet’s interview with him, and indeed was ready to take fire at the idea of their affairs having been discussed with her.

She strove to believe herself the offended party, but her conscience was not easily appeased, though she tried to set it at rest by affectionate care of Violet, and was much gratified by Arthur’s stopping her after Violet had gone up-stairs at night, to beg her to stay, while he was at Windsor with his regiment.

‘Thank you, for making me of use,’ she said.

‘I shall come backwards and forwards continually,’ said Arthur, ‘but she must not be alone; I shall be very glad if you can stay, or I shall be driven to have one of the Mosses here.’

‘Oh, no, no! I shall be most happy to stay. I will take every care of her.’

‘Thank you, Theodora; good night. You have got to know her better now,’ he continued, lingering as on that first night to gain some word of commendation of her.

‘Much better,’ said Theodora cordially. ‘One cannot help growing fond of her—so gentle and engaging.’

She was pleased with his satisfaction; and while she owned Violet’s sincerity and sweetness, considered her one of those soft dependent beings formed to call forth

tenderness from strong and superior spirits, and gloried in being necessary to her: it almost restored her balance of complacency.

On Sunday afternoon Violet stayed at home with little Johnnie, and the vacant place in the seat at church was filled by Mr. Fotheringham. Many thoughts floated through Theodora's mind; but whether the better or the worse would gain the advantage seemed rather to depend on chance than on herself. Perhaps she was not yet conscious what were her besetting sins, and thus the conflict was merely a struggle between her feelings for her friend and for her lover.

Arthur walked home with an acquaintance; but Theodora turned from Percy, and threw herself into eager conversation with Lady Elizabeth.

On entering the house, as Violet was not in the drawing-room, Theodora was going up-stairs, when Percy said, in a tone of authority, 'How long do you intend to go on in this way!'

'In what way?'

'Do you wish to keep all our disputes as a spectacle for Arthur's edification?'

Colouring with shame and displeasure, she sat down with a sort of 'I am ready' air, and took off her walking things, laying them down deliberately, and waiting in complete silence. Did she wish to embarrass him, or did she await his first word to decide what line she should take?

'Theodora,' he said at length, 'when I spoke last night, I did not know how early your acquaintance with this lady had begun, or I should have shown more regard to the feeling that arises between old companions. I am afraid I gave you some unnecessary pain.'

This was unexpected; and she could not at once harden herself in displeasure, so that though she spoke not, her countenance was relenting.

'Did Mrs. Martindale mention what I told her yesterday!'

‘No; she only said you had been here while I was gone to satisfy my mind.’

‘And did you?’

‘I should never have defended Georgina’s marriage if I had known the whole; but the rest of what you have heard is slander.’

‘That is what I came to explain;’ and Percy repeated the history he had before given to Violet, adding a warning of the same kind as John’s against placing Arthur in Mr. Gardner’s way.

‘The point is,’ said Theodora, ‘what construction is to be placed on the present state of things? You and Lady Fotheringham, who have not seen them, take one view; I, who do see them, and who know Georgina intimately, take another, in which I agree with her husband and with the elder sister, who lives with her.’

‘Intimately! When you had no idea of this first affair!’

‘Such follies are not to be published.’

‘You WILL defend them!’ cried Percy, impatiently.

‘Am I to sit quiet when I hear injustice done to my oldest friend?’

‘I wish that unhappy friendship had never begun!’

A silence broken by her coolly saying, ‘Well, what is to come of all this?’

Percy walked about the room and said, ‘What do you mean?’

With a provoking air of meekness she said, ‘I only want to know what you expect of me.’

Excessively annoyed, he sharply answered, ‘To be a reasonable woman.’

‘Well?’ said Theodora, with the same submissive voice. He had recovered himself, and with no further show of temper, he sat down by her, saying, ‘This is folly. We had better say what we mean. You feel strongly with regard to your old playfellow; I cannot think well of her; but while this is matter of opinion, it is childish to dispute. Time will show which is the correct view—I shall be glad if it is yours. The elder

sister is a steady amiable person, whom my aunt likes, and that is in their favour. I do not wish you to break with an old friend while we know of no positive charge against her, though I should think there could be little to attract you. For me it is another matter, and I will not.'

'You will not adopt my friends?'

I will not be talked into it.'

'I do not understand your principle,' said Theodora, but without asperity. 'Why do you decline an acquaintance to which you do not object for me?'

'The beginning has been made in your case, and I know it is old affection, not present approval. You can't be hurt by one like her. But for my part, knowing what I do of them, I will enter on no acquaintance; it is a line of which I have resolved to keep clear. She would think herself patronizing a literary man.'

'Oh! you could not submit to that!' cried Theodora—'never. Stay away, I beg of you.'

'It is for no such nonsense,' said Percy. 'But thinking of them as I do, I cannot receive from them the favours which rich folks consider invitations to poor ones. My connection with them makes it all the more undesirable. I totally disapprove their style of conduct, and will not seem to sanction it by beginning an acquaintance, or appearing at their grand dinners and parties. If I had known them before, the case might be different.'

'I will say no more. You are quite right,' said Theodora, well able to appreciate the manliness of his independence.

She thought over several times the way of communicating to Mrs. Finch, Percy's rejection of her invitation, and made some attempts at seeing her, but without success, until the night of the party. Violet had an undefined dread of it, and was especially glad that her husband was able to go with them. It was one of the occasions when he was most solicitous about her appearance; and he was well

pleased, for she was in very good looks, and prettily dressed with some Irish lace, that to Theodora's amusement she had taken off Miss Marstone's hands; and with his beautiful wife and distinguished-looking sister, he had his wish of displaying woman as she should be.

The room was full, but Violet saw few acquaintance; as Mrs. Finch, with much display of streamer, flounce, jewellery, and shoulders, came to meet them with vehement welcome, and quite oppressed Violet with her attention in finding a seat for her on the sofa.

With a nod and look of gay displeasure at Theodora, she said, 'So, you have brought me no Crusader, you naughty girl! Where's your Red Cross Knight?'

'He would not come,' said Theodora, gravely.

'You dare own it! Where's your power? Ah! you will say it was idleness.'

'I will tell you another time,' said Theodora, blushing inconveniently, and Violet, as she felt her cheeks responding, fancied Mrs. Finch must know why.

'You won't confess! No, you never tried. If you had once set your mind on it, you would have accomplished it. I always cite Theodora Martindale as the person who cannot be resisted.'

'You see your mistake,' returned Theodora. A gentleman here greeted her, then claimed Mrs. Finch's attention, and evidently by his desire, she turned to Violet, and presented him as her cousin, Mr. Gardner, an old friend of Captain Martindale.

Violet acknowledged the courtesy, but it was in confusion and distress.

'I am delighted to make your acquaintance,' was his address. 'Is Captain Martindale here? I have not seen him for years.'

'He is in the room,' said Violet, looking round for him, hoping either that he would come, or that Mr. Gardner would go in search of him, but the conversation continued, though she answered without knowing what she said, till at last he moved

away to communicate to Mrs. Finch that Arthur Martindale's pretty wife had nothing but fine eyes and complexion.

Theodora was satisfied to see a very slight recognition pass between Mr. Gardner and her brother, who was intent on conducting to Violet an officer newly returned from the West Indies, where he had met John. After a pleasant conversation, the two gentlemen moved away, and presently the place next to her was taken by Miss Gardner, with civil inquiries for her little boy.

'We are so vexed at not seeing Mr. Fotheringham! Georgina is furious. We reckoned on him as the lion of the night.'

Violet had no answer to make, and Jane continued. 'I have taken Theodora to task. Fame makes men capricious, and he is very odd; but I tell her she ought to have more influence, and I seriously think so. Do you not?'

'I believe he convinced her,' said Violet, wishing the next moment to recall her words.

'Indeed! I am curious.'

'I believe he thinks it better—fashionable life—' faltered Violet.

'He might have made an exception in favour of such near connections! Why, we shall be related ourselves, Mrs. Martindale. How charmed I shall be.'

Violet turned a bracelet on her arm, and could make no response.

'It is strange enough that we have never met Percival Fotheringham,' said Miss Gardner. 'He is an eccentric being, I hear, but our dear Theodora has a spice of eccentricity herself. I hope it will be for the best.'

'He is an admirable person,' said Violet.

'I rejoice to hear it. I had some doubts. The dear girl is so generous, of such peculiar decision, so likely to be dazzled by talent, and so warmly attached to her eldest brother, that I almost feared it might not have been well weighed. But you are

satisfied?'

'O, yes, entirely so.'

'I am relieved to hear it. In confidence I may tell YOU, it is said in our OWN family, that there is a rough overbearing temper about him. I could not bear to think of dear Theodora's high spirit being subjected to anything of that kind.'

'He is abrupt,' said Violet, eagerly; 'but I assure you the better he is known, the more he is liked. My little boy is so fond of him.'

'I am glad. No doubt you have every means of judging, but I own I was surprised at such ready consent. You were behind the scenes, no doubt, and can tell how that determined spirit carried the day.'

'Lord Martindale gave his consent most readily and gladly,' said Violet; but Jane was only the more convinced that Mrs. Martindale was as ignorant as ever of family secrets.

'It was best to do so with a good grace; but I did think our dear Theodora might have looked higher! Poor Lord St. Erme! He would have been a more eligible choice. The family must have been much disappointed, for she might have had him at her feet any day last summer.'

'I do not think he would have suited her.'

'Well! perhaps not, but an easy gentle temper might. However, it cannot be helped! Only the long engagement is unfortunate—very trying to both parties. I have seen so few turn out well! Poor Pelham Fotheringham! It is a pity he should stand between them and the baronetcy.'

'Is he Sir Antony's son?'

'Yes; it is a sad affair. A fine tall youth, quite imbecile. He is his poor mother's darling, but no more fit to take care of himself than a child of five years old. A most melancholy thing! Old Sir Antony ought to set him aside, and let Percival enjoy the

estate. Indeed, I should think it very probable he would do so—it would be greatly for the happiness of all parties.'

'I think it would,' said Violet.

'Percival can do anything with the old people, and they will be so delighted with the Martindale connection! Perhaps it is an understood thing. Do you know whether it is?'

'I should not think so. I never heard anything of it.'

'Has Theodora ever been introduced to the uncle and aunt?'

'Never.'

'Good old folks, exceedingly primitive. Very kind too, and a fine old-fashioned place; but, oh, so dull! All their ideas are of the seventeenth century. It will be a severe ordeal for poor Theodora, but if Lady Fotheringham, good old soul, is pleased with her, I shall expect grand consequences.'

Violet was glad that Miss Gardner was asked to dance. Presently Arthur returned to her side. 'Tired, Violet?' he asked. 'Slow work, is not it? They have a queer lot here. Scarcely a soul one ever saw before.'

'I was thinking so. Are there not a great many foreigners? I saw some immense moustaches.'

'Ay. Percy would think himself back in Blue Beard's country. There is the King of the Clothes Brushes himself polking with Mrs. Finch. Can't you see?'

'No! I wish I could.'

'An economical fellow! Every man his own clothes brush—two expenses saved at once, to say nothing of soap, an article that mayhap he does not deal in.'

'Oh! hush! you will make me laugh too much. Where 's Theodora?'

'Dancing with Gardner. He seems inclined to make up to her, unless it is a blind.'

'He said he used to know you at school.'

‘Yes, scamp that he is. I had rather he had never turned up again. He is not worth Theodora’s quarrelling about. I hear she is chattering away like fun. Have you had any one to speak to?’

‘Miss Gardner came to me. She seemed to think Sir Antony might settle his property on Percy instead of on his son. Do you think there is any chance of it?’

‘I wish he would. He could not do a wiser thing. But of course it is entailed—there’s always a provision of nature for starving the younger branches. What does she say to Percy’s absence!’

‘I fancy she guesses the reason, but I don’t know.’

‘He is a lucky fellow, I know!’ said Arthur, ‘to be safe in his bed at home! This evening is a bore, and I wish the whole set were further off, instead of deluding Theodora! I’ll get her away when this dance is over.’

‘Ha!’ cried Mrs. Finch, suddenly stopping in front of them, and disengaging herself from her partner, as she breathlessly threw herself down beside Violet. ‘So there’s Captain Martindale, after all! How exemplary! And my poor Mrs. Martindale, that I told Jane and Mark to take such care of, left deserted to her husband’s mercy!’

‘Suppose she wished for nothing better,’ said Arthur, good-humouredly.

‘I can’t allow such things. Such a monopoly of our Guardsmen after two years’ marriage is beyond bearing! What would they say to you in France?’

‘We don’t follow French fashions,’ said Arthur, his gay tone making his earnest like jest. ‘I am going to take my ladies home. I shall see for the carriage, Violet.’

‘Mrs. Martindale will learn my maxim—Never bring a husband to an evening party. There is nothing so much in the way.’

‘Or that would be so glad to be let off,’ said Arthur, going.

‘You don’t mean to take them away? That is the climax of all your crimes. Quite unallowable.’

‘Many things unallowable are done,’ said Arthur; ‘and I don’t allow her to be over-tired.’

‘“Barbare”,’ began Mrs. Finch, but with a bow, as if it was a compliment, he was gone in search of the carriage. She sat for a moment silent, then said, ‘Well, I must forgive him. I never thought to see him so careful of anything. How happy Theodora seems in your “menage”. Quite a different creature; but perhaps that is from another cause?’

Violet made a little attempt at a laugh.

‘I am glad of it,’ said Mrs. Finch, heartily. ‘It is a horrid stiff place for her at home, is it not? And I am delighted she should escape from it. How she got consent, I can’t imagine; and Theodora has notions of her own, and would do nothing without.’

‘Lord Martindale has a very high opinion of Mr. Fotheringham.’

‘I am not surprised. I read that book—a wonder for me, and was perfectly “eprise”. But I did not think a genius with empty pockets would have gone down at Martindale; and he is a bit of a bear, too, they say, though perhaps Theodora likes him the better for that.’

‘Perhaps she does.’

‘I hope he is worthy of her. He is the great pride of the old folks at Worthbourne. One heard of Percy’s perfections there morning, noon, and night, till I could have hated the sound of his name. Very generous of me to ask him here to-night, is it not? but I wish he would have come. I want to judge of him myself. I could not bear all not to be perfect with Theodora.’

There was little occasion for Violet to speak, Mrs. Finch always kept the whole conversation to herself; but she could not but perceive that though the exaggeration and recklessness of style were unpleasing, yet it really was frank and genuine, and Theodora’s declaration that Georgina was far preferable to Jane was less incomprehensible.

The evening was over, much to her relief; but there remained Theodora's bold undertaking to tell Mrs. Finch of Percy's refusal to visit her. Any one else would have let the subject drop, but Theodora thought this would be shabby and cowardly, and was resolved not to shrink from warning her friend.

She found Georgina looking over some cards of invitation, with an air of great dissatisfaction, and almost the first words that greeted her were, 'Have you a card for Lady Albury's party?'

'Yes; I heard Violet ask Arthur if he should be at home for it.'

'Very strange! We left our cards, I know, yet they never asked us to their party this week, and now seem to have missed us again. I wished particularly to go, for one is sure to meet all that is worth seeing, your knight among the rest. They are prim, strait-laced, exclusive people themselves; but it is a house worth going to.'

'I did not remember that you knew them.'

'Oh! yes, we did; we used to be there pretty often when we lived with my Uncle Edward; and it is not that they do not think my poor old man good enough for them, for we went to their parties last year. So, Mrs. Martindale has a card, you say!'

Theodora's colour rose as she said, 'Georgina, I am going to say what no one else will tell you. It is not your marriage, but you must take care—'

The crimson of Mrs. Finch's cheeks, and the precipitation with which she started to her feet, would have disconcerted most persons; but Theodora, though she cast down her eyes, spoke the more steadily. 'You must be more guarded and reserved in manner if you wish to avoid unkind remarks.'

'What—what—what?' cried Georgina, passionately; 'what can the most ill-natured, the most censorious, accuse me of?'

'It is not merely the ill-natured,' said Theodora. 'I know very well that you mean no harm; but you certainly have an air of trying to attract attention.'

‘Well, and who does not? Some do so more demurely and hypocritically than others; but what else does any one go into company for? Do you expect us all to act the happy couple, like Captain and Mrs. Martindale the other night? You should have brought your own Percy to set us the example!’ said she, ending with a most unpleasant laugh.

‘Georgina, you must not expect to see Percy. He has rigid notions; he always avoids people who seek much after fashion and amusement, and (I must say it) he will not begin an acquaintance while you go on in this wild way.’

‘So!’ exclaimed Georgina. ‘It is a new thing for the gentlemen to be particular and fastidious! I wonder what harm he thinks I should do him! But I see how it is: he means to take you away, turn you against me, the only creature in this world that ever cared for me. Are not you come to tell me he forbids you ever to come near me!’

‘No, no; he does not, and if he did, would I listen?’

‘No, don’t, don’t displease him on my account,’ cried Mrs. Finch. ‘Go and be happy with him; I am not worth caring for, or vexing yourself about!’

The tears stood on her burning cheeks, and Theodora eagerly replied, ‘Have no fancies about me. Nothing shall ever make me give up my oldest friend. You ought to know me better than to think I would.’

‘You are so unlike those I live with,’ said Georgina sadly, as an excuse for the distrust. ‘Oh, you don’t know what I have gone through, or you would pity me. You are the only thing that has not failed me. There is Jane, with her smooth tongue and universal obligingness, she is the most selfish creature in existence—her heart would go into a nutshell! One grain of sympathy, and I would never have married. It was all her doing—she wanted luxuries! O Theodora, if I had but been near you!’

‘Hush, Georgina, this is no talk for a wife,’ said Theodora, severely.

‘I thought you pitied me!’

‘I do, indeed I do; but I cannot let you talk in that way.’

‘I never do so: no one else would care to hear me.’

‘Now listen to me, Georgina. You say you rely on me as you do on no one else; will you hear me tell you the only way to be happy yourself—’

‘That is past,’ she murmured.

‘Or to stand well in the opinion of others! I am putting it on low grounds.’

‘I know what you are going to say—Go and live in the country, and set up a charity-school.’

‘I say no such thing. I only ask you to be cautious in your manners, to make Mr. Finch of more importance, and not to let yourself be followed by your cousin—’

Again Georgina burst into her ‘thorn crackling’ laugh. ‘Poor Mark! I thought that was coming. People will treat him as if he was a dragon!’

‘I know you mean no harm,’ repeated Theodora; ‘but it cannot be right to allow any occasion for observations.’

‘Now, Theodora, hear me. I dare say Jane has been telling you some of her plausible stories, which do more harm than good, because no one knows which part to believe. There was some nonsense between Mark and me when we were young and happy—I confess that. Perhaps I thought he meant more than he did, and dwelt upon it as silly girls do, especially when they have nothing else to care for. Then came the discovery of all his debts and scrapes, poor fellow, and—I won’t deny it—it half killed me, more especially when I found he had been attached to some low girl, and avowed that he had never seriously thought of me—he believed I understood it as all sport. I was very ill. I wish I had died. There was no more to be done but to hate him. My uncle and aunt Edward were horridly savage, chiefly because I hindered them from going to Italy; and Mrs. George Gardner thought I had been deluding Mark! Then Lady Fotheringham asked us, and—it was dull enough to be sure, and

poor Pelham was always in the way—but they were kind comfortable folks. Lady Fotheringham is a dear old dame, and I was in dull spirits just then, and rather liked to poke about with her, and get her to tell me about your brother and his Helen—'

'Why, Jane said you were dying of low spirits!'

'Well, so I was. I hated it excessively sometimes. Jane is not entirely false in that. The evenings were horrid, and Sundays beyond everything unbearable. I confess I was delighted to get away to Bath; but there—if Jane would but have helped me—I would, indeed I would, have been thankful to have gone back to Worthbourne, even if I had had to play at draughts with Pelham for the rest of my days. But Jane was resolved, and all my strength and spirit had been crushed out of me. She would not even let me write to you nor to Lady Fotheringham till it was too late.'

'Well, that is all past,' said Theodora, whose face had shown more sympathy than she thought it right to express in words. 'The point is, what is right now?'

And you see it is folly to say there is any harm or danger in my seeing Mark: he never had any attachment to me seven years ago, nor any other time, and whatever I felt for him had a thorough cure. I am not ashamed to say I am glad he should be here to give him a chance of marrying a fortune. That is the whole story. Are you satisfied?'

'Satisfied on what I never doubted, your own intentions, but no further. You ought to abstain from all appearance of evil.'

'I am not going to give my cousin up to please Lady Albury—no, nor all the Fotheringhams put together! You used to say you did not care for gossip.'

'No more I do, but I care for a proper appearance.'

'Very well—hush—here he comes!

HE was Mr. Gardner, and whether it was that Mrs. Finch was more guarded, or that her pleading influenced Theodora's judgment, nothing passed that could excite a

suspicion that anything remained of the former feeling between the cousins. It was in truth exactly as Mrs. Finch said; for whatever were her faults, she was perfectly frank and sincere, clinging to truth, perhaps out of opposition to her sister. Mark was not a man capable of any genuine or strong affection; and as Theodora rightly perceived, the harm of Georgina's ways was not so much what regarded him, as in the love of dissipation, the unguarded forward manner with all gentlemen alike, and the reckless pursuit of excitement. There was a heart beneath, and warmth that might in time be worked upon by better things.

'It is a great pity that people will drop her,' she said to Violet. 'The more she is left to that stamp of society, the worse it is for her whole tone of mind.'

Violet agreed, pitied, and wished it could be helped; but whenever they met Mrs. Finch in company, saw it was not wonderful that people did not like her.

Mr. Gardner was, on the contrary, a general favourite. Every one called him good for nothing; but then, he was so very amusing! Violet could never find this out, shrank from his notice, and withdrew as much as possible from his neighbourhood; Emma Brandon generally adhering closely to her, so as to avoid one whom she viewed as a desperate designer on the Priory.

It was in parties that Violet chiefly saw Emma this spring. Theodora's presence in Cadogan-place frightened her away; and, besides, her mornings were occupied by Miss Marstone's pursuits. Lady Elizabeth made no objection to her sharing in these, though sometimes not fully convinced of the prudence of all the accessories to their charities, and still less pleased at the influence exercised by Theresa over her daughter's judgment.

Emma's distaste to society was now far more openly avowed, and was regarded by her not as a folly to be conquered, but a mark of superiority. Her projects for Rickworth were also far more prominent. Miss Marstone had swept away the veil that used to shroud them in the deepest recess of Emma's mind, and to Violet it

seemed as if they were losing their gloss by being produced whenever the friends wanted something to talk about. Moreover, Emma, who was now within a few months of twenty-one, was seized with a vehement desire to extort her mother's consent to put them at once in execution, and used to startle Violet by pouring out lamentations over her promise, as if it was a cruel thraldom. Violet argued that the scheme was likely to be much better weighed by taking time to think.

'It has been the thought of my life! Besides, I have Theresa's judgment; and, oh! Violet, mamma means it well, I know; but she does not know what she asks of me! Think, think if I should die in the guilt of sacrilege!'

'Really, Emma, you should not say such dreadful things. It is not your doing.'

'No; but I reap the benefit of it. My grandfather bought it. Oh! if it should bring a curse with it!'

'Well, but, Emma, I should think, even if it be wrong to hold it, that cannot be your fault yet. You mean to restore it; and surely it must be better to keep it as yet, than to act directly against your mother's wishes.'

'I don't mean to act against her wishes; but if she would only wish otherwise!'

'Perhaps it is the best preparation to be obliged to wait patiently.'

'If it was for any good reason; but I know it is only because it would better suit mamma's old English notions to see me go and marry in an ordinary way, like any commonplace woman, as Theresa says. Ah! you would like it too, Violet. It is of no use talking to you! As Theresa says, the English domestic mind has but one type of goodness.'

Violet did not like to hear her dear Lady Elizabeth contemned; but she had no ready answer, and humbly resigned herself to Emma's belief that she was less able to enter into her feelings than that most superior woman, Theresa Marstone.

CHAPTER 15

Give unto me, made lowly wise, The spirit of self-sacrifice.

When Arthur went with his regiment to Windsor, the ladies intended to spend their evenings at home, a rule which had many exceptions, although Violet was so liable to suffer from late hours and crowded rooms, that Lady Elizabeth begged her to abstain from parties, and offered more than once to take charge of Theodora; but the reply always was that they went out very little, and that this once it would not hurt her.

The truth was that Theodora had expressed a decided aversion to going out with the Brandons. ‘Lady Elizabeth sits down in the most stupid part of the room,’ she said, ‘and Emma stands by her side with the air of a martyr. They look like a pair of respectable country cousins set down all astray, wishing for a safe corner to run into, and wondering at the great and wicked world. And they go away inhumanly early, whereas if I do have the trouble of dressing, it shall not be for nothing. I ingeniously eluded all going out with them last year, and a great mercy it was to them.’

So going to a royal ball was all Theodora vouchsafed to do under Lady Elizabeth’s protection; and as her objections could not be disclosed, Violet was obliged to leave it to be supposed that it was for her own gratification that she always accompanied her; although not only was the exertion and the subsequent fatigue a severe tax on her strength, but she was often uneasy and distressed by Theodora’s conduct. Her habits in company had not been materially changed by her engagement; she was still bent on being the first object, and Violet sometimes felt that her manner was hardly fair upon those who were ignorant of her circumstances. For Theodora’s own sake, it was unpleasant to see her in conversation with Mr. Gardner; and not only on her account, but on that of Lord St. Erme, was her uncertain treatment of him a vexation to Violet.

Violet, to whom Theodora’s lovers were wont to turn when suffering from her

caprice, was on very friendly terms with the young Earl. He used to come and stand by her, and talk to her about Wrangerton, and seemed quite amused and edified by her quiet enthusiasm for it, and for Helvellyn, and her intimacy with all the pictures which he had sent home and almost forgotten. His sister was another favourite theme; she was many years younger than himself, and not yet come out; but he was very desirous of introducing her to Mrs. and Miss Martindale; and Violet, who had heard of Lady Lucy all her life, was much pleased when a day was fixed for a quiet dinner at Mrs. Delaval's, the aunt with whom she lived. How Mrs. Moss would enjoy hearing of it!

The day before was one of the first hot days of summer, and Violet was so languid that she looked forward with dread to the evening, when they were to go to a soiree at Mrs. Bryanstone's, and she lay nursing herself, wishing for any pretence for declining it. Theodora coming in, declared that her going was out of the question; but added, 'Georgina Finch is to be there, she will call for me.'

'I shall be better when the heat of the day is over.'

'So you may, but you shall not go for all that. You know Arthur is coming home; and you must save yourself for your Delavals to-morrow.'

'I thank you, but only'—she hesitated—'if only you would be so kind as to go with Lady Elizabeth.'

'I will manage for myself, thank you. I shall not think of seeing you go out to-night. Why, I went out continually with Georgina last summer'—as she saw Violets look of disappointment.

'Yes, but all is not the same now.'

'The same in effect. I am not going to attend to nonsensical gossip. Georgina is what she was then, and the same is right for me now as was right last year. I am not going to turn against her—'

'But, Theodora,' said Violet's weak voice, 'Percy said he hoped you never would go

out with her; and I said you never should, if I could help it.'

Never was Theodora more incensed than on hearing that Percy and this young girl had been arranging a check on her actions, and she was the more bent on defiance.

'Percy has nothing to do with it,' she began; but she was interrupted by a message to know whether Lady Elizabeth Brandon might see Mrs. Martindale.

Her entrance strengthened Theodora's hands, and she made an instant appeal to her, to enforce on Violet the necessity of resting that evening. Lady Elizabeth fully assented, and at once asked Theodora to join her.

'I thank you, I have another arrangement,' she said, reckless of those entreating eyes; 'I am to go with Mrs. Finch.'

'And I believe I shall be quite well enough by and by,' said Violet.

'My dear, it is not to be thought of for you.'

'Yes, Lady Elizabeth, I trust her to you to make her hear reason,' said Theodora. 'I shall leave her to you.'

Poor Violet, already in sufficient dread of the evening, was obliged to endure a reiteration of all its possible consequences. Lady Elizabeth was positively grieved and amazed to find her, as she thought, resolutely set upon gaieties, at all risks, and spared no argument that could alarm her into remaining quietly at home, even assuring her that it was her duty not to endanger herself for the sake of a little excitement or amusement. Violet could only shut her eyes to restrain the burning tears, and listen, without one word in vindication, until Lady Elizabeth had exhausted her rhetoric, and, rising, with some coolness told her she still hoped that she would think better of it, but that she wished her husband was at home.

Violet would fain have hid her face in her good friend's bosom, and poured out her griefs, but she could only feel that she was forfeiting for ever the esteem of one she loved so much. She held out, however. Not till the door had closed did she relax her

restraint on herself, and give way to the overwhelming tears. Helpless, frightened, perplexed, forced into doing what might be fatal to her! and every one, even Arthur, likely to blame her! The burst of weeping was as terrified, as violent, as despairing as those of last year.

But she was not, as then, inconsolable; and as the first agitation spent itself she resumed her self-command, checked her sobs by broken sentences of prayer, growing fuller and clearer, then again soft and misty, till she fairly cried herself to sleep.

She slept only for a short interval, but it had brought back her composure, and she was able to frame a prayer to be directed to do right and be guarded from harm; and then to turn her mind steadily to the decision. It was her duty, as long as it was in her power, to be with her husband's sister, and guard her from lowering herself by her associates. She was bound by her promise to Percy, and she could only trust that no harm would ensue.

'If it should,' thought poor Violet, 'I may honestly hope it is in the way of what I believe my duty; so it would be a cross, and I should be helped under it. And if the Brandons blame me—that is a cross again. Suppose I was to be as ill again as I was before—suppose I should not get through it—Oh! then I could not bear to have wilfully neglected a duty! And the next party? Oh! no need for thinking of that! I must only take thought for the day.'

And soon again she slept.

Theodora had gone out so entirely convinced that Violet would relinquish her intention, that, meeting Mrs. Finch, she arranged to be taken up at eleven o'clock.

On returning home she heard that Mrs. Martindale was asleep; and, as they had dined early, she drank coffee in her own room, and read with the Brogden girl, as part of her system of compensation, intending to spare further discussion by seeing Violet no more that night. She proceeded to dress her hair—not as helplessly as at

first, for the lessons had not been without fruit; but to-night nothing had a good effect. Not being positively handsome, her good looks depended on colour, dress, and light; and the dislike to failure, and the desire to command attention, made it irritating to find her hair obstinate and her ornaments unbecoming; and she was in no placid state when Violet entered the room, ready dressed.

‘Violet! This is too foolish!’

‘I am a great deal better now, thank you.’

‘But I have settled it with Georgina; she is coming to call for me.’

‘This is not out of her way; it will make no difference to her.’

‘But, Violet, I will not let you go; Arthur would not allow it. You are not fit for it.’

‘Yes, thank you, I believe I am.’

‘You believe! It is very ridiculous of you to venture when you only believe,’ said Theodora, never imagining that those mild weary tones could withstand her for a moment. ‘Stay at home and rest. You know Arthur may come at any time.’

‘I mean to go, if you please; I know I ought.’

‘Then remember, if you are ill, it is your fault, not mine.’

Violet attempted a meek smile.

Theodora could only show her annoyance by impatience with her toilette. Her sister tried to help her; but nothing suited nothing pleased her—all was untoward; and at last Violet said, ‘Is Percy to be there?’

‘Not a chance of it. What made you think so?’

‘Because you care so much.’

Somehow, that saying stung her to the quick, and the more because it was so innocently spoken.

‘I do not care,’ she said. ‘You are so simple, Violet, you fancy all courtships must be

like your own. One can't spend six years like six weeks.'

The colour rushed painfully into Violet's face, and she quitted the room. It was a moment of dire shame and grief to Theodora, who had not intended a taunt, but rather to excuse her own doings; and as the words came back on her, and she perceived the most unmerited reproach they must have conveyed, she was about to hurry after her sister, explain, and entreat her pardon. Almost immediately, however, Violet returned, with her hands full of some beautiful geraniums, that morning sent to her by Mrs. Harrison.

'See!' said she; 'I think a wreath of these might look well.'

Theodora trusted the blush had been the work of her own guilty fancy, and, recollecting how often Mrs. Nesbit's innuendoes had glanced aside, thought it best not to revive the subject. She did not estimate even the sacrifice it was to part with the glowing fragrant flowers, the arrangement of which had freshened Violet's spirits that evening when not in tune for other occupation; and she did not know that there was one little sigh of fellow-feeling at their destiny of drooping and fading in the crowd and glare. Their brilliant hues had great success, and set off the deep black eyes and hair to unusual advantage when woven by those dexterous fingers. The toilette was complete, and Theodora as kind as she could be, between shame at her own speech and dislike to being softened by little female arts.

'I only wish you looked better yourself,' she said. 'You are too pale for that old white dress.'

'It is the coolest I have ready. It must do.'

Theodora could not accuse her of over-carefulness of her renown as a beauty. Her dress was, of course, appropriate, but aimed at no more; and her worn, languid appearance did not cause her a moment's thought, since Arthur was not there to see.

They found the room very warm and crowded. Theodora saw Violet lodged on an ottoman, and then strayed away to her own friends. Mrs. Finch soon arrived, and

attacked her for having let them go on a fool's errand.

'I could not help it,' said Theodora; 'she would come.'

'She looks very unwell,' said Mrs. Finch; 'but, poor thing, it would be too hard to miss everything this year.'

'Or does she come as your trusty knight's deputy?' asked Jane.

There was dancing; but when Captain Fitzhugh brought Theodora back to her seat, Violet whispered, 'I am sorry, but would you dislike coming home now?'

'Oh! I am engaged to Lord St. Erme, and then to Mr. Gardner, and—but you go home; you have done your duty, my dear. Go home, and to sleep. Georgina will bring me. Captain Fitzhugh will find you the carriage.'

She walked off with Lord St. Erme, and came no more that way. Presently there was some confusion.

'A lady fainting,' said her partner, and she saw Emma looking dreadfully frightened. Conscience was enough, without the name passing from mouth to mouth. Theodora sprang forward, and following the movement, found herself in a room where Violet's insensible figure had just been placed on a bed. Lady Elizabeth was there, and Emma, and Mrs. Bryanstone. Theodora felt as if no one but herself should touch Arthur's wife; but she had never before witnessed a fainting fit, and, in her consternation and guiltiness, knew not how to be serviceable, so that all that was required was done by the other ladies. She had never experienced such alarm and remorse as now, while standing watching, until the eyes slowly opened, looked round uneasily till they fell on her, then closed for a few moments, but soon were again raised, while the soft low words were heard, 'Thank you, I beg your pardon!' then, with an imploring, deprecating gaze on her, 'I am sorry; indeed I could not help it!'

Theodora was almost overcome; but Lady Elizabeth gave a warning squeeze to her arm, whispering, 'Take care, don't agitate her:' and this, recalling the sense that

others were present, brought back her self-possession, and she only kissed Violet, tenderly bade her lie still, and hoped she was better.

She smiled, and declared herself refreshed, as the wind blew on her from the open window, and she felt the cold water on her face, and there was no silencing her thanks and apologies for giving trouble. She said she was well enough to go home; and, as soon as the carriage was found, sat up, looking shivering and forlorn, but still summoning up smiles. ‘Good night, dear Lady Elizabeth,’ she said; ‘thank you very much. You see you were right.’

Lady Elizabeth offered to go home with her; but she could not bear to occasion further sensation, and, besides, understood Theodora’s face. She refused, and her friend kissed her, and promised to come early to-morrow to see her; but, mingled with all this care and kindness there was something of ‘I told you so.’

She trembled so much when she stood up, that Theodora put her strong arm round her, and nearly carried her down-stairs, gratified to find her clinging to her, and refusing all other support. Scarcely a word was spoken as they went home; but Theodora held the hand, which was cold, limp, and shaking, and now and then she made inquiries, always answered by ‘Better, thank you.’

Theodora had her directions from Lady Elizabeth, and intended to make up for her misdeeds by most attentive care; but, on coming home, they found that Arthur had arrived, and gone to bed, so that nothing was in her power but to express more kind wishes and regrets than she could stay to hear or to answer in her extinguished voice.

Theodora was a good deal shocked, but also provoked, at having been put in the wrong. She felt as if she had sustained a defeat, and as if Violet would have an advantage over her for the future, managing her by her health, just as she ruled Arthur.

‘But I will not submit,’ thought Theodora. ‘I will not bear with interference, if not

from Percy, certainly not from his deputy—a mere spoilt child, a very good child, but spoilt by her position, by John's over-estimate of her, and by the deference exacted by her weakness and her engagingness. She has very sweet, winning ways, and I am very fond of her in reason, but it will be very good for her to see I can be kind to her without being her slave.'

In this mind Theodora went to sleep, but was wakened in the early morning by Arthur's voice on the stairs, calling to Sarah. She threw on her dressing-gown, and half-opening her door, begged to know what was the matter.

'Only that you have done for her with your freaks and your wilfulness,' answered Arthur, roughly.

'She is not ill?' exclaimed the terrified sister.

'Of course she is. I can't think what possessed you.'

'I tried hard to keep her at home. But, oh! Arthur, where are you going?'

'To fetch Harding.'

'Can I do anything? Can I be of use? Let me go to her. Oh! Arthur, pray let me.'

He went into the room, and brought back word that Violet wanted no one but Sarah, and was a little more comfortable; only begging Theodora would be so kind as to go to the nursery, lest little Johnnie should awake.

Thither she repaired, but without the satisfaction of usefulness, for the child slept soundly till his nurse returned. Mr. Harding had been there, and Mrs. Martindale was better, needing only complete quiet; but Sarah was extremely brief, scornful, and indignant, and bestowed very few words on Miss Martindale. 'Yes, ma'am—no, ma'am,' was all that hard pumping could extract, except funereal and mysterious sighs and shakes of the head, and a bustling about, that could only be understood to intimate that she wished to have her nursery to herself.

It was still so early that Theodora had time to go to church; as usual, she met the

Brandons; and Lady Elizabeth, much concerned at her tidings, came home with her to see how the patient was going on.

Lady Elizabeth forbore to reproach Violet, but she lectured Arthur on allowing her to be imprudent. He took it in very good part, not quite disagreeing when told they were all too young together, and made a hearty protest that she should be well looked after for the future.

He was certainly doing his part. All the morning he was in and out, up and down stairs, effectually preventing any rest, as his sister thought.

Theodora's time passed in strange variations of contrition, jealousy, and perverseness. She was hurt at his displeasure,—she was injured by her exclusion from Violet's room,—she was wounded even by her little nephew, who cried down-stairs for mamma, and up-stairs for Sarah, and would not be content with her best endeavours to make him happy. And yet, when, after carefully looking to see that he could come to no harm, Sarah was obliged to place him on the floor and leave him for the first time alone with his father, he sat motionless, fixed in earnest, intent contemplation, like a sort of distant worship of him, keeping him likewise in a silent amused wonder, what would come next; and when it ended in a gravely, distinctly pronounced, 'Papa!' Arthur started as if it had been a jackdaw speaking, then picked up the little fellow in his arms and carried him off to show, as a natural curiosity, to his mother! At any other time, Theodora would have been charmed at the rare sight of Arthur fondling his little boy; now she only felt that nobody wanted her, and that she was deprived of even the dignity of a nursery-maid.

Her chief occupation was answering inquiries, and writing notes to decline their evening engagements—the dinner at Mrs. Delaval's among the rest; for she and Arthur were equally resolved to remain at home that evening, and she wished to persuade herself that they were Violet's friends, not her own.

In the midst, Mrs. Finch and Miss Gardner called, and in her state of irritation the

smooth tongue of the latter was oil to the flame.

‘Poor thing, no doubt she thinks she has been making a heroic exertion. Well, she has her reward! It must be delightful to have caused such a sensation. Your brother is a most devoted husband.’

‘And did she really go because she would not trust you without her?’ said Mrs. Finch. ‘Well, that is a good joke!’

‘I think you must be glad they do not live at Brogden,’ quietly added Jane, in the midst of her sister’s laughter.

‘It has been put into her head,’ said Theodora, ‘that she ought to look after me, and a great mistake it is.’

‘Yes, you are not come here to be less free than last year, when Lord and Lady Martindale had you in their own hands, said Georgina. ‘If I were you I would do something strong all at once, and settle that matter. That was the way you used to dispose of the governesses.’

‘I am not quite what I was then, Georgina.’

‘But what is it that she objects to? I see,’ as Jane made a sign, as if to advise her not to inquire. ‘Is it to your coming out with me? Well! I declare, that is pretty well, considering who she was. I thought better things of her, with her soft voice, as if she was thankful to be spoken to, after all the notice I have taken of her.’

‘Hush, hush! I tell you, she would never have originated the notion, but it has been put into her, and when she thinks a thing right nothing will stop her.’

‘We will see that!’ said Georgina. ‘Come and dine with us to-night, and then we are going to “Der Freischutz”. Come—’

‘That is impossible, thank you. We have given up the dinner at the Delavals’, and I do not intend to go out in the evening any more. I came here to take care of her, and I mean to do so thoroughly.’

‘Not to go out any more!’ cried Georgina, horrified. ‘I honour Theodora,’ said Jane. ‘Such devotion is like her, and must win her brother’s gratitude.’

‘No devotion at all. I like a rational evening with her much better than a cram like last night’s.’

‘With her alone?’ said Jane, slyly.

Theodora crimsoned. Percy had instigated Violet’s opposition, and she was in no charity with him. Jane saw there was annoyance, and turned the subject before her sister could open on it. With all her quiet ways, Jane had the mastery over the impetuous Georgina, whom she apparently flattered and cherished as a younger sister, but in reality made subservient to her own purposes. Indeed, Jane was like the Geraldine of Christabel; without actually speaking evil she had the power of insinuating her own views, so that even the lofty and sincere nature of Theodora was not proof against her. Poor Violet! while she perilled herself, and sacrificed her friend’s good opinion, her sister’s mind was being hardened and poisoned against her.

‘I am afraid,’ said Jane, ‘that it is of no use then to talk to you of what Georgina and I have been planning.’

‘Oh! Theodora must come to that at any rate,’ cried Georgina, ‘or I will never forgive her nor Mrs. Martindale neither. Do you remember our old birthday treat to Richmond?’

‘To be sure I do!’ cried Theodora. ‘It was one of the most delightful days I ever had in my life. I have loved cowslips doubly for the treat the sight of them was, in the midst of London and masters, seven years ago. Why, you will be twenty-four next week, Georgina.’

‘Growing to an unmentionable age,’ said Georgina. ‘Well, I have set my heart on a picnic to Richmond again. Mark is to take a steamer for us, and I know of plenty of people who will make a charming party!’

‘I should like it better without the people,’ said Theodora.

‘Oh, nonsense; one can’t babble of green fields and run after cowslips, at our age, unless one is in love,’ said Georgina. ‘If you were going to bring your Percy, perhaps we would not interfere with your sweet rural felicity, my dear.’

‘We will bring some one else,’ said Jane. ‘After poor Mrs. Martindale had carried you off’, Theodora, I found the author of “Pausilippo” looking extremely disconsolate, and hinting to him that such a scheme was in agitation, and that you were included in it, he looked so eager, that he will be for ever beholden to Georgina for an invitation.’

‘Poor Lord St. Erme!’ said Georgina. ‘It really is a shame, Theodora. I rather take him under my protection. Shall he come, or shall he not?’

‘It makes no difference to me,’ said Theodora, coolly.

‘Whatever it does to him, eh?’

‘But, Georgina, you are not in the least secure of Theodora,’ said Jane, satirically. ‘She is devoted to Mrs. Martindale.’

‘If my sister-in-law is not well I shall not leave her, if she is, you may depend upon me.’

‘I shall do no such thing, whatever Georgina does,’ said Jane.

‘I am sure Mrs. Martindale has ways and means.’

‘I shall not stay without real reason.’

‘And bring the Captain,’ entreated Mrs. Finch.

‘Still more doubtful,’ suggested Jane.

‘Yes, I think you will not get him,’ said Theodora; ‘but I will certainly join you, provided Violet is not really ill.’

‘I am very good friends with that pretty sister of yours,’ said Jane. ‘I will call some day, and try to get her permission for him.’

‘Once—twice—you have failed us,’ said Mrs. Finch, rising to take leave. ‘This third time, and I shall believe it is some one else in the shape of Theodora Martindale.’

‘I will not fail,’ repeated Theodora.

They departed, and presently Arthur came down. ‘How long those women have been here! Have they been hatching treason? I want you to go up and sit with Violet; I am going out for an hour.’

It was a tame conclusion to the morning’s alarms when a brisk voice answered, ‘Come in,’ at her knock, and Violet lay very comfortably reading, her eyes bright and lively, and her cheeks with almost their own colour. Her sweet smile and grateful face chased away ill humour; and Theodora was so affectionate and agreeable as to surprise herself, and make her believe herself subject to the fascination Violet exercised over her brothers.

She told Arthur, on his return, that Violet was just ill enough to make waiting on her pretty pastime; but was something between alarmed and angry to find him still uneasy.

CHAPTER 16

Lord Percy sees my fall! —Chevy Chase

Two days after, Miss Gardner calling, found Mrs. Martindale alone in the drawing-room, and pretty well again. The project for the party was now fully developed, and it was explained to Violet with regrets that she was unable to share it, and hopes that Theodora and her brother would not fail to join it.

‘Thank you, I believe Captain Martindale will be at Windsor; he will be on guard next week.’

‘Ah! that is provoking. He is so valuable at this kind of thing, and I am sure would enjoy it. He would meet some old schoolfellows. You must use your influence to

prevent him from being lazy. Guardsmen can always get leave when they think it worth while.'

'Perhaps if Theodora wishes to go, he may manage it; but I am afraid it is not likely that he will be able.'

'You will trust us for taking care of our dear Theodora,' said Miss Gardner; 'we know she is rather high-spirited, and not very fond of control. I can quite enter into your feelings of responsibility, but from my knowledge of her character, I should say that any sense of restraint is most galling to her. But even if we have not the pleasure of Captain Martindale's company, you may fully reckon on our watching over her, myself in especial, as a most dear younger sister.'

'Is your party arranged?' asked Violet.

'Yes, I may say so. We hope for Mrs. Sedley and her daughters. Do you know them? Charming people whom we met in Paris.'

Violet was not acquainted with them, and tried to find out who were the rest. They seemed to be all young ladies, or giddy young wives, like Mrs. Finch herself, and two or three foreigners. Few were personally known to the Martindales; Lord St. Erme was the only gentleman of their own set; and Violet could not smile, as her visitor expected, on hearing how he had been enticed by hopes of meeting Miss Martindale.

Jane Gardner perceived the disapprobation. 'Ah! well,—yes. One cannot but own that our dear Theodora's spirits do now and then make her a little bit of a flirt. It is the way with all such girls, you know. I am sure it was with my sister, but, as in her case, marriage is the only cure. You need not be in the least uneasy, I assure you. All will right itself, though a good deal may go on that startles sober-minded people like us. I could condole with you on the charge, but you will find it the only way not to seem to thwart her. Violet thought it best to laugh, and talk of something else.

'Then I depend on you for the cream of our party,' said Miss Gardner, taking leave.

‘I cannot tell whether Captain Martindale can come,’ said Violet, somewhat bewildered by the conversation.

‘Is that girl a nonentity, or is she a deep genius?’ said Jane to herself as she walked home. ‘I cannot make her out. Now for the trial of power! If Theodora Martindale yields to the Fotheringhams now, and deserts Georgina, it will be a confirmation of all the absurd reports. As long as I have it to say the Martindale family are as intimate as ever, I have an answer for Lady Fotheringham, and if Mark is smitten with her, so much the better. I hope Percy Fotheringham may be properly rewarded for his presumption and ill-nature. The sooner they quarrel the better. I will send Theodora a note to put her on her mettle.’

The note arrived while Percy was spending the evening in Cadogan-place, and Theodora talking so happily that she grudged the interruption of opening and reading it.

‘DEAREST THEODORA,—One line further to secure you, though I told Mrs. Martindale of our plans. She would make no promises, but we reckon on your independence of action, at least. “Should auld acquaintance be forgot?”

‘Yours affectionately,

‘J. GARDNER.

‘P.S.—Mrs. Martindale looked very well. I hope she will have no recurrence of faintings.’

‘From Jane Gardner,’ said Theodora; ‘only to put me in mind of the picnic. Will you go, Arthur?’

‘I never was more glad to be on her Majesty’s service. What an abominable bore it would be!’

‘That is what gentlemen always say of picnics,’ said Theodora.

‘Not at all,’ said Percy. ‘A real country party of merry happy people, knowing each

other well, and full of genuine honest glee, is one of the most enjoyable things that can be.'

'That it is!' cried Violet. 'There was the day we went up Skiddaw, with no one but our cousins and Mr. Fanshawe, and dined on the mountain in sight of the valley of St. John; and the rain came on, and Mr. Fanshawe sat all the time holding an umbrella over Annette and the pigeon-pie.'

'That was worth doing,' said Percy; 'but for a parcel of fine ladies and gentlemen to carry the airs and graces, follies and competitions, born in ball-rooms and nursed in soirees, out into pure country air and daylight, is an insult to the green fields and woods.'

'That is a speech in character of author,' said Theodora.

'In character of rational being.'

'Which you would not have made if the party had not been Georgina Finch's.'

'I had no notion whose it was, or anything about it.'

'It is for her birthday, Tuesday,' said Violet. 'They are to have a steamer to Richmond, walk about and dine there; but I should not think that it would be very pleasant. Mrs. Bryanstone had one of these parties last year to Hampton Court, and she told me that unless they were well managed they were the most disagreeable things in the world; people always were losing each other, and getting into scrapes. She declared she never would have another.'

'Mrs. Bryanstone has no idea of management,' said Theodora.

'I know who has less,' said Arthur. 'Your Georgina will let every one take their chance, and the worse predicaments people get into the louder she will laugh.'

'There is nothing so intolerable as a woman who thinks herself too fashionable for good manners,' said Percy.

'Is any one waiting for an answer?' asked Violet.

‘There is none,’ said Theodora. ‘They know I mean to go.’

‘To go!’ exclaimed all three, who had thought the question settled by Arthur’s refusal.

‘Yes, of course; I go with Georgina.’

‘With Mark Gardner, and the king of the clothes-brushes, and all their train, in moustaches and parti-coloured parasols!’ cried Percy. ‘Theodora, I thought you were a sensible woman.’

‘I am sorry if I forfeit that claim to your regard.’

‘Well, if I was your mother! However, it is devoutly to be hoped that it may rain.’

He then changed the conversation, and no more passed on this subject till, as he wished her good night, he said, in a low voice, ‘Think better of it, Theodora.’

‘My mind is made up,’ was the proud reply. In a few seconds he called Arthur to him on the stairs. ‘Arthur,’ he said, ‘if your sister is set on this wrong-headed scheme, at least don’t let her go with no one to look after her. Let her have some respectable person with her, merely for propriety’s sake. She fancies me prejudiced, and we have agreed to dispute no more on the woman’s goings on; but you have the keeping of her now.’

‘I wish Mrs. Finch was at Jericho, and Theodora after her!’ exclaimed Arthur, petulantly; ‘they will worry my wife to death between them.’

‘Then Theodora had better go home,’ said Percy, soberly.

‘No, no; we can’t do without her. She takes good care of Violet, and is very attentive and useful, and I can’t have Violet left alone. If we could but get her down off her high horse, and drive that impudent woman out of her head!—if you can’t, no one else can.’

‘It is very unfortunate,’ said Percy. ‘There is so much generous feeling and strong affection to prompt her resistance, that it is hard to oppose her, especially as I do

believe there is no worse than folly and levity in this friend of hers. I wish these occasions would not arise. Left to herself these people would soon disgust her but for her own sake we must interfere, and that keeps up her partisanship.'

'What is to be done?' was Violet's disconsolate beginning, as soon as she could see Arthur alone.

'Take it easy'—words which she had taught herself to regard as a warning that she was doleful. 'Never mind; if Theodora is so pig-headed as to rush into this scheme, it is no concern of yours. All you have to do is to take care not to be worried.'

Violet had regained a cheerful voice. 'If you were going with her, it would not signify.'

'It would signify pretty much to me to be bored with all that riff-raff. One would think Theodora bewitched.'

'There is hardly any one of our acquaintance.'

'No, the lady has dropped pretty much in the scale.'

'I wish I knew what your father and mother would think of it.'

'They would hate it as much as we do, but they could not prevent it. Nobody can stop Theodora when once she has the bit between her teeth. As I told Percy, if he can't, 'tis past all power. I wonder if he thinks by this time he has caught a Tartar?'

'Did he call you to speak about it?'

'Yes; to say I must by no means let her go without a respectable female to look after her.'

'I don't know these ladies; but if Mrs. Finch would ask Mrs. Bryanstone, she is so good-natured that I dare say she would go.'

'That would be the most tolerable way of doing it; but I would lay you anything you please that nothing but unmitigated Finch will content her.'

'And that is worse than no one.'

‘I wish some stop could be put to it. It is worse than Percy knows. She can’t speak to a man without flirting, and we shall have her turning some poor fellow’s head, like Wingfield’s. I don’t think it is respectable!’

‘It is very strange, so good and religious as she is.’

‘Where is the use of her religion if it does not bring down her pride or cure her obstinacy? If it would, I should see some good in the rout she makes about going to church and teaching dirty children.’

‘Oh! Arthur, dear, don’t say that.’

‘It is the truth, though.’

‘I think,’ said Violet, diffidently, ‘that some day the good will conquer the rest. Some day she will feel these things to be wrong and strive against them.’

‘Do you mean that she does not know it is wrong to be as wilful and proud as Lucifer?’

‘I do not think she knows she has those tendencies.’

Arthur laughed and shook his head. ‘One learns one’s faults as one grows older, you know,’ continued Violet, ‘and she is so very kind. Think of her giving up all going out in the evening to stay with me; and you don’t know how she waits on baby and me. She is so grand and noble, that kindness from her is delightful, and her face when it softens is so like you! Some book says that high natures have the most trouble with their faults.’

‘Then hers ought to be high indeed.’

Violet began the day by telling Arthur that his sister would go to make arrangements with Mrs. Finch, and asked him to tell her of their decision before he returned to Windsor that morning.

‘Our decision! What do you mean!’

‘Don’t you remember about Mrs. Bryanstone?’

‘Oh! if that is to be done, you must say it. Ladies must manage their own visiting affairs. I don’t understand chaperons and stuff.’

‘Arthur, you don’t mean me to speak?’

‘If it is to be done at all, it is woman’s work, and I see no use in it. She will toss her head, and only be more resolved on her own way.’

‘Oh, Arthur, one moment! Did you not say it ought to be done?’

‘Of course it ought; but it is of no use, and if you are wise, you will not tease yourself.’

‘But you said Percy insisted on it.’

‘So he did, but if he cannot tackle her himself, I am sure we can’t. I’ll have nothing to do with it—it is no affair of mine.’

‘Then, am I to let her alone?’

‘As you choose. I wish she would hear reason, but it is not worth bothering yourself for, when it is of no use.’

‘What do you wish me to do? I wish I knew—’

He shut the door behind him, and Violet tried to recover from her dismay. Thankful would she have been for commands not to interfere; but to be left to her own judgment was terrible when she knew that his true opinion coincided with hers. How could she hope to prevail, or not to forfeit the much-prized affection that seemed almost reluctantly to be at last bestowed?

But, cost what it might, Violet never swerved from a duty, and her mind was clear that to permit Theodora to join the party alone without remonstrance, and without the knowledge of her parents, would be improper. She resolved not to confuse herself with fears and anxieties, and strove to dwell on whatever could steady or calm her mind for the undertaking. How wide a difference in moral courage there was between that tall grenadier and his timid delicate wife.

Arthur and Theodora were both down-stairs before her, and the latter was preparing breakfast, when there was a knock. ‘Percy!’ she thought. ‘He shall see how useless it is to interfere!’

‘Mr. Albert Moss!’

Arthur threw aside his newspaper, and held out his hand with a fair show of welcome. ‘Ha! Moss, how are you? Your sister will be down-stairs directly. Miss Martindale—’

Theodora was resolved against being supercilious, but Mr. Moss’s intention of shaking hands obliged her to assert her dignity by a princess-like inclination.

‘Good morning,’ said Albert. ‘I came to town yesterday—slept at my uncle’s—have this day in London—much occupied—thought myself sure of you at breakfast.’

‘I will tell Mrs. Martindale,’ said Theodora, glad to escape that she might freely uplift her eyes at his self-sufficiency, and let her pity for Arthur exhale safely on the stairs.

She met Violet, and was vexed at her start of joy, only consoling herself by thinking that she did not look as if she was his sister. Indeed, after the momentary instinct of gladness, came fears lest Arthur might not be pleased, and Theodora be annoyed; but the familiar home-like voice drove away all except pleasure as soon as she was certified that her husband’s brow was smooth. His presence was a restraint, keeping Albert on his best behaviour, so that there was nothing to disturb her present enjoyment of home tidings. That good-humour and ease of his were indeed valuable ingredients of comfort.

He asked Albert to dinner, and desired him to bring Uncle Christopher, if they chose to be entertained by the ladies alone, further offering him a seat in his cab as far as their roads lay together. Highly gratified, Albert proceeded to ask his sister whether she was able to execute a commission for Matilda, the matching of a piece of chenille. Violet readily undertook it, and he said, ‘he would explain the occasion on

his return.'

When they were gone, the cares of the morning returned upon her, and by the time her household affairs were finished, all her pulses were throbbing at the prospect of the effort to which she was nerving herself. She ordered herself to be quiet, and lay down on the sofa, leaving the door open that Theodora might not go out without her knowledge.

'It is my duty,' repeated she to herself. 'If I turn from it because it is so dreadful to me, I shall not take up my cross! If she will only listen and not be angry!'

Nearly an hour passed, the day seeming to grow warmer and more oppressive, and a nervous headache coming on. Poor Violet! she was still a frightened child, and when she saw Theodora coming down with her bonnet on, the fluttering of her heart made her call so feeble that Theodora supposed her ill, and came to her with kind solicitude that rendered it still harder to say what she knew would be taken as an affront.

With great difficulty she uttered the words, 'I only wanted to speak to you about this expedition to Richmond.'

'Well,' said Theodora, smiling with what was meant for good-humour, but was only scorn, 'you need not distress yourself, my dear, I am ready to hear.'

'Would you get Mrs. Finch to ask Mrs. Bryanstone, and go with her?' Violet could really speak at no more length.

'It would be folly. Mrs. Bryanstone would be out of her element, and only a nuisance to herself and every one else. That will do. You have discharged your conscience.'

'It is not myself alone,' said Violet, sitting up, and gathering force to speak firmly and collectedly, but with her hand on her heart. 'Your brother and I both think it is not right, nor what Lord and Lady Martindale would approve, that you should join this party without some one they know and like.'

You mistake, Violet. This is not like a ball. There is no absurd conventionality, tacking a spinster to a married woman.'

'No, but since. Arthur cannot be with you, it is needful to take measures to prevent any awkwardness for you.'

'Thank you. I'll take care of that.'

'Dear Theodora, I did not mean to vex you; but will you only put yourself in our place for one moment. Your father and mother let you stay here on the understanding that you go out with us, and when we cannot go, do you think we ought to see you put yourself under the escort of a person to whom we believe they would object?'

'I have told you that I know what my own father and mother permit.'

Violet was silent, and pressed her hand on her brow, feeling as if all her prepared arguments and resolutions were chased away by the cool disregard which seemed to annihilate them even in her own eyes. By an effort, however, she cleared her mind, conjured back her steadiness, and spoke, preserving her voice with difficulty from being plaintive. 'You may know what they permit you, but we owe them duties too. Theodora, if you will not take some one with you whom we know they would approve, we must write and ask what Lord Martindale would wish.'

'Arthur will never write,' said Theodora, in defiance; but the answer took her by surprise—'If he does not, I shall.'

'If there is to be such a rout, I will not go at all.'

'Indeed I think it would be the best plan,' said Violet, removing the hand that had been hiding the springing tears, to look up beseechingly, and see whether the project were resigned, and herself spared the letter which she well knew would be left to her lot.

But for those wistful eyes, Theodora would have felt caught in her own trap; for

such speeches had often brought governess, mother, and even aunt, to humble entreaties that she would take her own course. She had to recollect her words before she perceived that she had yielded, and that she must abide by them. Anything was better than the humiliation of Violets sending home complaints of her conduct. She was greatly incensed; but a glance at the gentle, imploring face, and the hands trying in vain not to tremble with nervousness, could not but turn away her wrath. It was impossible to manifest displeasure; but to speak a word of concession seemed still more impossible. She impetuously threw off her bonnet, seized a pen, dashed off a few lines, and tossed the note and its envelope into Violet's lap, saying, in her low voice of proud submission, 'There! you will send it,' and left the room. Violet read

'MY DEAR GEORGINA,—My brother is engaged at Windsor, and I cannot join your party to Richmond.

'Yours sincerely,

'TH. A. MARTINDALE.

'Mrs. Martindale is pretty well, thank you.'

Violet almost expected Theodora's next note would announce her return home. She had been forced to give up all the affection so slowly gained, and to wound her proud sister-in-law where she was most sensitive. Should she hold Theodora to this renunciation, and send the note she had extorted, or should she once more ask whether this was in earnest, and beg her to reconsider the alternative?

But Violet was convinced that Theodora intended to hear no more about the matter, and that nothing would be such an offence as to be supposed to have acted hastily. She was afraid of renewing the subject, lest her weakness should lose her what she had gained. 'Better,' thought she, 'that Theodora should think me presumptuous and troublesome than that she should mix herself up with these people, and, perhaps, displease Percy for ever. But, oh! if I could but have done it without vexing her, and to-day, too, when she has to bear with Albert.'

Violet felt that she must give way to her headache, trusting that when it had had its will it might allow her to be bright enough to make a fair show before Albert. She lay with closed eyes, her ear not missing one tick of the clock, nor one sound in the street, but without any distinct impression conveyed to her thoughts, which were wandering in the green spots in the park at Wrangerton, or in John's descriptions of the coral reefs of the West Indies. The first interruption was Sarah's bringing down the baby, whom she was forced to dismiss at once.

Again all was still, but the half slumber was soon interrupted, something cold and fragrant was laid on her brow, and, thinking Sarah would not be satisfied without attending to her, she murmured thanks, without opening her eyes. But the hand that changed the cool handkerchief was of softer texture; and, looking up, she saw Theodora bending over her, with the face so like Arthur's, and making every demonstration of kindness and attention—drawing down blinds, administering sal volatile, and doing everything in her service.

Not that Theodora was in the least subdued. She was burning with resentment with every one—with Percy and his prejudice; with the gossiping world; with her friends for making this a trial of power; with Arthur for having put forward his poor young wife when it cost her so much. 'He knew I should not have given way to him! Feebleness is a tyrant to the strong. It was like putting the women and children on the battlements of a besieged city. It was cowardly; unkind to her, unfair on me. She is a witch!'

But candour was obliged to acknowledge that it had not been feebleness that had been the conqueror. Violet had made no demonstration of going into fits; it had been her resolution, her strength, not her weakness, that had gained the victory. Chafe as Theodora might, she could not rid herself of the consciousness that the sister of that underbred attorney—that timid, delicate, soft, shrinking being, so much her junior—had dared to grapple with her fixed determination, and had gained an

absolute conquest. ‘Tyrant!’ thought Theodora, ‘my own brother would have left me alone, but she has made him let her interfere. She means to govern us all, and the show of right she had here has overthrown me for once; but it shall not happen again.’

At this juncture Theodora discovered, from the sounds in the other room, how much Violet had suffered from her effort, and her compassion was instantly excited. ‘I must go and nurse her. She meant to do right, and I honour the real goodness. I am no petted child, to be cross because I have lost a pleasure.’

So she took exemplary care of Violet, read aloud, warded off noises, bribed the brass band at the other side of the square, went up to see why Johnnie was crying, carried up her luncheon, waited on her assiduously, and succeeded so well, that by the time the carriage came round, the head was in a condition to be mended by fresh air.

Mere driving out was one of Theodora’s aversions. If she did not ride, she had district visiting and schooling; but to-day she went with Violet, because she thought her unfit to be tired by Matilda’s commission. It proved no sinecure. The west-end workshops had not the right article; and, after trying them, Theodora pronounced that Violet must drive about in the hot streets no longer. One turn in the park, and she would set her down, and go herself into the city, if necessary, to match the pattern.

And this from Theodora, who detested fancy work, despised what she called ‘dabblers in silk and wool,’ and hated the sight of a Berlin shop!

Violet would not have allowed it; but Theodora threw her determination into the scale, resolved to make herself feel generous and forgiving, and not above taking any trouble to save Violet. So off she set, and was gone so long that Violet had a long rest, and came down-stairs, much revived, to welcome her brother.

Albert arrived alone. Uncle Christopher was engaged, and had charged him with his

excuses, for which Violet was sorry, as he was an unpretending, sensible man, to whom she had trusted for keeping her brother in order; but Albert was of a different opinion. ‘No harm,’ he said. ‘It was very good-natured of Martindale, but he is a queer old chap, who might not go down so well in high life,’ and he surveyed his own elegant toilette.

‘We get on very well,’ said Violet, quietly.

‘Besides,’ added Albert, attempting bashfulness, ‘I have a piece of intelligence, which being slightly personal, I should prefer—you understand.’

Violet was prepared by her sister’s letters for the news that Albert was engaged to Miss Louisa Davis, very pretty, ‘highly accomplished,’ and an heiress, being the daughter of a considerable county banker—a match superior to what Albert could have expected. They had been engaged for the last fortnight, but he had not allowed his sisters to mention it, because he was coming to London, and wished to have the pleasure of himself communicating the intelligence. Violet was much flattered; she who used to be nobody to be thus selected! and she threw herself into all the home feelings. The wedding was fixed for the beginning of July, and this first made her remember the gulf between her and her family.

Seven o’clock was long past when Theodora entered, arrayed in rich blue silk and black lace, put on that Violet’s brother might see she meant to do him honour; and so Violet understood it, but saw that he was only contrasting it with her own quiet-coloured muslin.

Here ended Violet’s comfort. Albert was so much elated that she was afraid every moment of his doing something mal-a-propos. Theodora was resolved to be gracious, and make conversation, which so added to his self-satisfaction, that Violet’s work was to repress his familiarity. At dinner, she made Theodora take Arthur’s place, and called her Miss Martindale, otherwise she believed it would be Theodora the next moment with him, and thus she lost all appearance of ease. She

was shy for her brother, and when he said anything she did not like, tried to colour it rightly; but she was weary and languid, and wanted spirit to control the conversation.

‘So, Violet, Fanshawe’s appointment was a pretty little bit of patronage of yours; but the ladies of Wrangerton will never forgive you. They were going to get up a subscription to give him a piece of plate.’

‘O, yes! and he desired them to send the money to the “Society for the Propagation of the Gospel,”’ said Violet. ‘Annette mentioned it.’

‘I suppose it depends on Mr. Martindale, whether he makes a good thing of it in Barbuda,’ said Albert; but the gov—’ at a dismayed look from her, he turned it into ‘My father is much obliged to you for getting him out of the way. The girls were so taken up with him one hardly knew whether something might not come of it; and really a poor curate—after the manner in which some of the family have connected themselves.’

The ladies were sorry for each other—one ashamed and one amused, neither venturing to look up, and Albert had no opportunity for the bow he intended for Miss Martindale.

‘By the bye,’ continued he, ‘who is this Fotheringham that was to settle with Fanshawe? I thought he was Lord Martindale’s solicitor; but my uncle knows nothing about him.’

Violet coloured crimson, and wished herself under the table; Theodora made violent efforts to keep from an explosion of laughing.

‘No,’ said Violet, rather indignantly; ‘he is—he is—he is—’ she faltered, not knowing how to describe one so nearly a relation, ‘a great friend of—’

Theodora having strangled the laugh, came to her rescue, and replied, with complete self-possession, ‘His sister, who died, was engaged to my eldest brother.’

‘Oh! I beg your pardon. You look on him as a sort of family connection. I suppose, then, he is one of the Fotheringhams of Worthbourne? Matilda fancied he was the literary man of that name; but that could not be.’

‘Why not?’ said Theodora, extremely diverted.

‘A poet, an author! I beg your pardon; but a lady alone could suppose one of that description could be employed in a practical matter. Is not it Shakespeare who speaks of the poet’s eye in a fine frenzy rolling? Eh, Violet? I shall never forget the gove—my father’s indignation when he detected your humble servant in the act of attempting a slight tribute to the Muses. I believe the old gentleman looked on my fate as sealed.’

‘Albert!’ said Violet, feeling as if she must stop his mouth, ‘you are quite mistaken. Mr. Fotheringham does belong to the family you mean, and he did write “The Track of the Crusaders”. He has been attached to the embassy in Turkey, and is waiting for another appointment.’ Then, looking at Theodora, ‘You never told me how far you went to-day.’

Theodora detailed her long pursuit of the chenille, and her successful discovery of it at last. Albert’s gratitude was extreme; his sister would be delighted and flattered, the work would receive an additional value in the eyes of all, and he might well say so, he was a party concerned, the material was for a waistcoat, to be worn on an occasion—but his sister would explain.

Violet thought he had exposed himself quite enough; and as dessert was on the table, she rose with as good a smile as she could, saying, ‘Very well, I’ll explain; you will find your way to the drawing-room,’ and retreated.

Theodora caressingly drew her arm into hers, much pleased with her, and accepting her as entirely Martindale, and not at all Moss. ‘What! is he going to be married in it?’

‘Yes, that is what he meant.’

‘I hope you are satisfied.’

‘O yes, I never saw her; but they are all very much pleased.’

‘Now tell me frankly, which do you like? Shall I leave you at peace with him, or will he think it rude in me?’

Violet decided in favour of Theodora’s absence till tea-time. Alone she had enjoyed Albert, but the toil of watching his manners was too much.

‘Then I’ll come down and make the tea.’

‘Thank you, dear Theodora. It is so kind. I hope it will not be very disagreeable. And one thing—could you tell him how well I really am, except for to-day’s headache, or he will go and take home another bad account of me.’

‘Your head is worse again. There, I’ll fetch some lavender, and do you lie still and rest it till he comes.’

He soon came.

‘Well, Miss Martindale is a fine young lady, upon my word. Real high blood and no mistake. And not so high in her manner after all, when one knows how to deal with her.’

‘She is very kind to me.’

‘And how long does she stay?’

‘O, for some time longer. Till August, most likely.’

‘Why, she will get the command of your house altogether.’

‘I am very glad to have her here.’

‘Ah!’ said Albert, looking confidential, ‘you do right to be prudent, but you may trust me, and I should be glad to know that it is more comfortable than last year.’

‘It never was otherwise,’ said Violet.

‘I hope so,’ said Albert; ‘I honour your prudence, and, after all, you have a

handsome establishment,—capital dinners, good turnout. I only wish I could see you look in better spirits.'

Violet started forward and coloured. 'Albert, don't take up fancies. I am perfectly happy, and you must believe it. They all pet and spoil me with kindness. If you think me looking poorly to-day it is only from a headache, which Miss Martindale has been nursing so carefully and tenderly.'

'Well, you cannot be too cautious if you are to stand well with the family. You do well to be on your guard. Martindale only the second son, and the elder may marry any day. That was one thing I thought I ought to speak to you about. You really should try to get some settlement made on you. You have nothing to depend upon, and, you see, you cannot expect anything from home.'

'Do not talk about such things.'

'You must not be childish, Violet; I am come as your best friend to give you advice. You ought to consider what would become of you if you were left with a family of young children, connected as you are. You depend entirely on one life, and you must not reckon on us, as you MUST see.'

'I see,' said Violet, only wanting him to cease.

'Then you perceive I have your real interest in view when I tell you it is your duty to use what influence you have to get some provision made.'

'Don't go on, Albert. As my marriage was brought about, it would be improper in me to do anything of the kind.'

'I only wished you to see what you have to trust to. Ah! by the bye, there's the old aunt. Have not you expectations from her?'

'No; she was so much offended at our marriage that there is no likelihood of her doing anything for us.'

'Bless me! That's a bad case! But you have been staying there. Can't a pretty

engaging thing like you manage to come round the old lady and get into her good graces?'

'Albert! don't talk so.'

'Really, Violet, it is time to give up being a silly child. You ought not to throw away your true interests, or the time will come when you will be sorry, and remember what I said; but you are not to depend on me.'

'No,' said Violet, and scalding tears arose, 'I do not. You need not be afraid. I have a brother who will take care of me and mine.'

'John Martindale?'

'Yes.'

'Well, you know your own ground. I thought it my duty to warn you, and I hope you will take care to make the most of yourself—it will never do to let yourself seem of no importance, and be overcrowed by this haughty young lady.'

Violet nearly laughed, but the next speech was too much for her patience. 'And you are satisfied at Martindale being so much from home?'

'He must be while his regiment is at Windsor;' and she rang for tea, and sent a message to summon Miss Martindale, feeling her presence her only protection.

Her head ached so much that she was obliged to lie on the sofa and let things take their chance, and Theodora's attempt to represent her in good health only appeared like blindness and indifference. Albert was much enchanted with Miss Martindale, and made himself more ridiculous, until it was a great satisfaction to his sister to see him depart.

'He always comes on unlucky days!' she said. 'I wish I could have made it go off better. Thank you for taking all the trouble.'

'No trouble at all,' said Theodora, kindly. 'I am sorry you had so much to tire you in the morning. Now, come up to your room. I wish I could carry you, as Arthur does.'

She put her arm round her, helped her tenderly up the stairs, and came in several times to her room to see that she was comfortable. At the last good night, Violet whispered, ‘Dear Theodora, don’t think my sisters like this—’

‘I’ll judge them from you, my dear little sister.’

‘And you forgive me?’

‘To be sure I do. You did as you thought right.’ Strange to say, Theodora had more sympathy for Violet after this awkward evening.

In the middle of the following day, Violet and little Johnnie were together in the drawing-room, when Arthur came in, ‘Well, how are you? I am only here for two hours, but I wanted to know how you are getting on.’

‘Very well indeed, thank you.’

‘Theodora sticks to her flight of Finches, I suppose?’

‘She has been so kind! she has given it up.’

You don’t mean it. I thought she was ready to go through fire and water!’ cried Arthur, incredulously.

‘She has written to refuse.’

‘What, Percy brought her to reason?’

‘No, he has not been here, but I suppose his opinion influenced her.’

‘What in the name of wonder prevailed! I never saw her turn when once she had taken up a notion.’

‘I believe it was that I said you or I must write to her father, and ask what he wished.’

‘So that settled her! Ha! Well done! Theodora forced to give up her will, and by you! Well, that is the best thing I have heard a long time. My little Violet to have got the upper hand of Miss Martindale!’ and Arthur burst into such a fit of triumphant laughter as to quite discomfort Violet, but little Johnnie by her side on the sofa,

catching the infection of merriment, gave, what was very unusual with him, a regular shout of baby fun, and went on laughing in ecstasy that set Arthur off on a fresh score. ‘So! young man, you think it very funny that mamma has been too much for Aunt Theodora?’

Theodora could not have chosen a more unlucky moment for walking into the room! However, it must remain uncertain whether she had heard. The visible consequence of the late air was exemplary attention to Violet’s comfort; and that doubt, so often balanced in her sister’s mind, whether she loved Percy, now inclined to the affirmative, for there was a concealed disquietude at his totally absenting himself from Cadogan-place. They did not see him again till the very day of the picnic, when, as they were driving in the park, the exclamation—‘There he is! broke from her, and then she leant back, vexed at having betrayed her joy.

He came to speak to them with such an open beaming look of gratification as Violet trusted was a recompense, but Theodora chose to keep an unmoved countenance; and it was only Violet’s happy congratulating face that assured him that all was right and the Richmond scheme resigned.

She asked him to dinner for that day, and he gladly accepted; but Theodora, considering it a sugar-plum to console her for staying at home, behaved as if it was a matter of indifference.

Violet took care to leave them alone, and she began the subject herself. ‘You find me here to-day, Percy, but it is no proof that I am convinced.’

‘It shows, as I hoped, that your good sense would prevail when left to itself.’

‘No, it was Violet.’

‘I honour her and you more than I ever did before.’

‘That’s your way,’ said Theodora, with the bright smile that was an act of oblivion for all her waywardness. ‘All you value is a slave with no will of her own.’

‘One who has a will, but knows how to resign it.’

‘That you may have the victory.’

‘No, but that you may be greater than he that taketh a city.’

Theodora raised her eyes much softened. She never liked Percy so well as when he made these direct attacks on her faults in general; when it came to a combat over the individual questions, it was a different matter.

‘I am very glad you have given this up,’ Percy proceeded. ‘It is a positive relief to my mind to find that you can yield. Do not be ashamed of it, it is the best thing you have done a long time.’

‘But, Percy, I did not do it on principle; I did it because Violet would have written to papa.’

‘There’s the true sort of spirit! Brave enough to confront even you for the right, yet yielding her own will and wish at the first moment. I think more highly of Mrs. Martindale the more I hear of her.’

‘And you wish me to be like her?’ said Theodora, watching for the blunt negative.

‘No, but to see you what you might and ought to be. It is repeating what I told you when this first began. You have a noble nature, but you will not check yourself, will not control your pride; you cannot bear any attempt to curb you. You are proud of it; but I tell you, Theodora, it is not high spirit, it is absolute sinful temper. If no one else will tell you so, I must.’

Theodora bent her head and cast down her eyes, not in sullenness, but in sorrow. ‘It is true,’ she murmured; ‘I see it sometimes, and it frightens me.’

‘I know,’ he said, much moved, ‘the sense of right must conquer; but, indeed, Theodora, it is time to begin, that it may not be some evil consequence that subdues you.’ He opened “The Baptistery” as it lay on the table, and pointed to the sentence—‘If thou refusest the cross sent thee by an angel, the devil will impose on

thee a heavier weight.'

Theodora looked up in his face; the words were applied in a sense new to her. 'Are humility and submission my cross?' said she.

'If you would only so regard them, you would find the secret of peace. If you would only tame yourself before trouble is sent to tame you! But there, I have said what I felt it my duty to say; let us dwell on it no longer.'

The large tears, however, fell so fast, that he could not bear to have caused them, and presently she said, 'You are right, Percy, I am proud and violent. I have grown up fearfully untamed. No one ever checked me but you, and that is the reason I look up to you beyond all others.'

The lioness was subdued, and the rest of the evening there was a gentleness and sober tone about her that made her truly charming: and a softer sense of happiness was around her when she awoke the next morning, making her feel convinced that this was indeed the only real peace and gladness.

CHAPTER 17

Call me false, or call me free, Vow, whatever light may shine, No man on your face shall see Any grief for change of mine. —E. B. BROWNING (The Lady's Yes)

It appeared as if Mrs. Finch and Miss Gardner were offended at Theodora's defection, for nothing was heard of them for several days, and the household in Cadogan-place continued in a state of peacefulness. Arthur was again at home for a week, and Theodora was riding with him when she next met the two sisters, who at once attacked them for their absence from the picnic, giving an eager description of its delights and of the silence and melancholy of poor Lord St. Erme.

'He and Mark were both in utter despair,' said Jane.

'Well, it is of no use to ask you; I have vowed I never will,' said Mrs. Finch; 'or I

should try to make you come with us on Wednesday.'

'What are you going to do?'

'You living in Captain Martindale's house, and forgetting the Derby!' And an entreaty ensued that both brother and sister would join their party. Arthur gave a gay, unmeaning answer, and they parted.

'What do you think of it?' asked Theodora.

'Too much trouble,' said he, lazily. 'There is no horse running that I take interest in. My racing days are over. I am an old domestic character.'

'Nonsense! You don't look two-and-twenty! Lady Elizabeth's sister would not believe you were my married brother. You have not the look of it.'

Arthur laughed, and said, 'Absurd!' but was flattered.

When he told his wife of the invitation, he added, 'I wonder if there is a fresh breeze blowing up!'

'I trust not.'

'If she really wants to go, and she has never seen the thing, I had rather take her in a sober way by ourselves, and come home at our own time.'

'Why don't you! It would be very pleasant for you both, and I should be so glad. Think how she shuts herself up with me!'

'We will see. Anything for a quiet life.'

Theodora, being fond of horses, and used to hear much about them from her brother, had a real curiosity to go to Epsom, and broached the subject the next morning at breakfast. Before any answer had been given, Mr. Fotheringham made his appearance.

'Well, Percy,' said Arthur, 'you find this sister of mine bent on dragging me to Epsom. Come with us! You will have an opportunity of getting up an article against fashionable life.'

Theodora was ready to hide her desire for his consent, but thought better of it, and said, ‘It is of no use to ask him.’

‘Indeed I would go,’ said Percy; ‘I wish I could; but I came here to tell you that my Aunt Fotheringham is coming to London early on Wednesday for advice for her son, and will only be there two days, so that it is impossible to be away.’

‘Is Sir Antony Fotheringham coming?’ asked Violet, as Theodora did not speak.

‘No; he is a fixture. He has never even seen a railroad. My aunt could hardly persuade him to let her come up without the old chariot and posters.’

‘You will bring them here to dinner,’ said Arthur. ‘Thank you, I must not promise; I cannot tell what Pelham may be fit for. I must take him to the Zoological Gardens. How he will enjoy them, poor fellow! The only thing to guard against will be his growing too much excited.’

Percy was engaged that morning, and soon departed, with hardly a word from Theodora, whose amiability had been entirely overthrown by finding her service postponed to that of his aunt.

‘There’s the Derby happily disposed of!’ said Arthur, rising from the breakfast-table. ‘I don’t see why,’ said Theodora.

‘What! Is not this Percy’s well-beloved aunt, who nursed Helen, and is such a friend of John’s?’

‘I am not going to dance attendance on any one.’

‘It is your concern,’ said Arthur; ‘but, if you don’t take care, Percy won’t stand much more of this.’

Vouchsafing no answer, she quitted the room. Arthur made a gesture of annoyance. ‘She treats Percy like a dog!’ he said. ‘I believe my aunt is right, and that it never will come to good!’

‘Shall you go with her, then?’

‘I must, I suppose. She will not let me off now.’

‘If we do not vex her by refusing, I hope she will give it up of herself. I am almost sure she will, if no one says anything about it.’

‘Very well: I am the last person to begin. I am sick of her quarrels.’

Two wills were dividing Theodora: one calling on her to renounce her pride and obstinacy, take up the yoke while yet there was time, earn the precious sense of peace, and confer gladness on the honest heart which she had so often pained. Violet was as the genius of this better mind, and her very presence infused such thoughts as these, disposing her not indeed openly to yield, but to allow it to drop in silence.

But there was another will, which reminded her that she had thrice been baffled, and that she had heard the soft tyrant rejoicing with her brother over her defeat! She thought of Violet so subjugating Arthur, that he had not even dared to wish for his favourite amusement, as if he could not be trusted!

Such recollections provoked her to show that there was one whose determination would yield to no one’s caprice, and impelled her to maintain the unconquerable spirit in which she had hitherto gloried. Violet’s unexpressed opinion was tricked out as an object of defiance; and if she represented the genius of meekness, wilfulness was not without outward prompters.

Mrs. Finch and Miss Gardner called, and found her alone. ‘There!’ said the former, ‘am I not very forgiving? Actually to come and seek you out again, after the way you served us. Now, on your honour, what was the meaning of it?’

‘The meaning was, that this poor child had been told it was etiquette for me to have a chaperon at my heels, and made such a disturbance that I was obliged to give up the point. I am not ashamed. She is a good girl, though a troublesome one at times.’

‘Who would have thought that pretty face could be so prudish!’

‘I suppose she is against your coming to Epsom!’ said Jane, interrupting her sister.

‘No; my brother and I have been proposing to go, independently; so as to be able to come home at our own time.’

‘You had better be satisfied with that, Georgina,’ said Jane. ‘We shall find ourselves together at the stand, and it will spare a few dangerous hysterics.’

‘I shall do nothing underhand,’ said Theodora. ‘I shall proclaim my intention of joining you; but I doubt, because Lady Fotheringham is coming to London.’

‘Her ladyship herself?’ cried Georgina. ‘What, in the name of wonder, brings her from her antediluvian hall?’

‘She brings her son for advice.’

‘We can say no more,’ said Jane. ‘Percy’s expectations would be ruined if the good lady found his intended concerned in such naughty doings. She must stay at home.’

‘To entertain Pelham!’ cried Mrs. Finch, in a paroxysm of laughing, of her most unreal kind.

‘Let me give you one piece of advice,’ said Jane. ‘Don’t make yourself too great a favourite, as I unwittingly did, or you will have no cessation of “I have a pony; it can trot; it can canter.”’

‘I have not decided.’

‘No,’ said Jane, ‘you cannot do it. We know Lady Fotheringham too well to ask you to lose your place in her regard for our sake. Probably this is a most important visit, and all may depend on her first impressions.’

‘I don’t depend on her.’

‘Ah! you don’t understand. She is the managing partner, and I have little doubt this is only an excuse for coming to inspect you. It is quite in their power, you know, to do the only rational thing under the circumstances—make an eldest son of Percy, and set poor Pelham aside, with enough to make him happy.

‘I do believe that must be it!’ cried Georgina. ‘She would be a dear old woman if she

would only do it!'

'And you see it would be fatal for Theodora to appear as a fashionable young lady, given to races, and the like vanities.'

'I shall seem nothing but what I am.'

'She would find Mrs. Martindale sighing at her inability to keep you out of bad company. So sorry to trust you with us. She did her utmost. No, no, Theodora; you must stay at home, and the good lady will be charmed.'

'I do not intend to be turned from my course.'

'No! Now, Jane, you should not have spoken in that way,' said her sister. 'You will only make Theodora more resolved to come with us; and, indeed, I had rather she did not, if it is to do her any harm.'

'I shall leave you to settle it between you,' said Jane, with apparent carelessness. 'I shall go home to appease for a little while the unfortunate dressmaker, whom we are keeping so long waiting. Make the most of Theodora, while you can have her.'

She would not have gone, had she not believed her work done.

'I have made up my mind,' said Theodora, as the door closed.

'Theodora! I do beg you will not,' cried Georgina, in an agitated voice, fully meaning all she said. 'You will vex and displease them all. I know you will, and I could not bear that! Your happiness is not wasted yet! Go, and be happy with your Percy!'

'I have told Percy of my intentions. Do you think I would alter them for this notion of Jane's?'

'That is my own dear Theodora! But it is not only that. They are such good people—so kind! You must not risk their good opinion, for they would be so fond of you!'

'If their good opinion depends on narrow-minded prejudice, I do not wish for it.'

‘If she would but come a day later,’ said Georgina; ‘for I do want you to be with me very much, Theodora! I know I shall meet with nothing but mortification, if you are not. People will only make that little starched bow! And Mr. Finch has noticed your not being so much with me. But no, no, you shall not come. You shall stay and see dear, good old Lady Fotheringham! Oh! how I wish I could!’ and her breast heaved with a suppressed sob.

‘Why do you not, then, dear Georgina? Let me tell her your feeling, and—’

‘No, no, no, no! I can never see her again! Don’t talk to me about her! She belongs to another state of existence.’

‘This will not do, Georgina. It is vain to turn aside now from what will and must come on you some day.’

‘Don’t! don’t, Theodora!’ said she, petulantly. ‘Everything goes against me! There’s Jane taken to lecturing, and even Mr. Finch is growing crabbed, and declares he shall take me to vegetate in this horrid place he has bought in the country.’

‘Oh, I am so glad!’ exclaimed Theodora. ‘Now then, there is a chance for you. If you will throw yourself into the duties and pursuits—’

‘What! be squiress and Lady Bountiful; doctor old women, and lecture school-children? No, no, that may do for you, but I am at least no hypocrite!’

‘I should be a great hypocrite, if I did not believe the old women and the children far better than myself,’ said Theodora, gravely. ‘But, indeed, trying to make them comfortable would occupy your mind, and interest you till—oh! if it would but help you on the only way to happiness—’

‘Don’t talk of that word any more with me.’

‘If not happiness, it would be peace.’

‘Peace! I don’t know what you mean.’

‘If you watched my sister, you would.’

‘She is happy!’ said Mrs. Finch, in a tone of keen regret, laying her hand on a toy of Johnnie’s; but instantly changing her note, ‘A cold, inanimate piece of wax! That is what you call peace! I would not have it.’

‘You don’t understand her—’

‘I know one thing!’ cried the fitful lady, vehemently; ‘that it is she who governs you all, and wants to divide you from me. ‘Tis she and your Percy who have robbed me of you, with their ill-natured stories.’

‘There is no ill-nature in them, and no one governs me,’ said Theodora.

‘Then you hold fast by me, and come with me?’

‘I do.’

‘My thorough-going old Theodora! I knew they could not spoil you, say what they would!’ for she was by no means insensible of the triumph.

‘But, Georgina,’ continued her friend, earnestly, ‘you must be prudent. Let me speak to you for once.’

‘Only don’t talk of prudence. I am sick of that from Jane.’

‘Yes! it is speaking on this world’s grounds; I will speak of higher motives. Think what is to come by and by: there are things that cannot be kept off by being forgotten. You are weary and dissatisfied as it is; try whether boldly facing the thoughts you dread might not lead to better things. There will be pain at first; but content will come, and—’

‘If you will come and stay with me in the country, you shall teach me all your ways. But no; it would put all the Fotheringhams in commotion! If I had a happy home I might be good. You must not quite forsake me, Theodora. But here’s Mrs. Martindale!’

Violet entering, Mrs. Finch greeted her in a subdued manner, and, indeed, looked so dejected that when she was gone, Violet asked if she was well.

‘Yes, poor thing, it is only the taste of the ashes she eats instead of bread. But I have had her alone, and have got her to hear some grave talk!’

‘Oh, how glad I am.’

‘But I cannot give up meeting her at Epsom. She would feel it a desertion, and my influence is the best hope for her. Besides, I will not sacrifice her to curry favour with the Worthbourne people.’

‘Surely it would not be doing so.’

‘I have made up my mind.’

Her better and worse feelings were alike enlisted in behalf of the expedition. Sincerity, constancy, and generosity were all drawn in to espouse the cause of pride and self-will; and she never once recollected that the way to rescue her friend from the vortex of dissipation was not to follow her into it.

Little was needed to rouse in Arthur the dormant taste so long the prevalent one. So eager was he when once stirred up, that his sister almost doubted whether she might not be leading him into temptation, as she remembered the warning against Mr. Gardner; but she repelled the notion of his being now liable to be led away, and satisfied herself by recollecting that whenever he had met his former school-fellow, he had shown no disposition to renew the acquaintance.

All the notice of Percy that she chose to take, was, that on the Tuesday evening, she said, as she wished Violet good night, ‘If Percy should call with his aunt to-morrow, which I don’t expect, you will explain, and say I hope to call early next day.’

‘Well! I hope you will get into no scrape,’ said Arthur; ‘but mind, whatever comes of it, ‘tis your doing, not mine.’

Words which she answered with a haughty smile, but which she was never to forget.

Violet saw the brother and sister depart, and could only hope that nothing might be heard of the Fotheringham party; but before half the morning had passed, the knock,

for the first time unwelcome, sounded at the door, and there entered not only Percy, but an elderly lady who might have been supposed the grandmother, rather than the mother, of the tall comely youth who bashfully followed her.

Violet strove, by the warmth of her reception, to make up for what was wanting; but her sentences were broken and confused; she was glad and she was sorry, and they would be very sorry, and something about not expecting and calling early, was all mixed together, while she watched with deprecating looks the effect upon Percy.

‘Is she gone?’ he asked, in a low stern voice.

‘Yes; but she told me to say, in case—we hardly thought it likely—but in case Lady Fotheringham should be kind enough to call, she told me to say she will certainly call early to-morrow.’

Violet knew she had made a most tangled speech, and that there was great danger that her trembling sorrowful voice should convey to Lady Fotheringham an impression that there was something amiss; but she could only try to make the intelligence as little mortifying as possible.

The fact was enough. Percy stood in the window in silence, while his aunt, on learning where Miss Martindale was, good-naturedly supposed it had long been settled, and said it must be such a pleasure to the brother and sister to go together, that she should have been grieved if it had been prevented.

Violet spoke of the call to be made to-morrow; but Lady Fotheringham seemed to have so little time free that it was not probable she would be at home. Uneasy at Percy’s silence, Violet did not prosper in her attempts at keeping up the conversation, until Percy, suddenly coming forward, begged that ‘the boy’ might be sent for; his aunt must see John’s godson. It was chiefly for his own solace, for he carried the little fellow back to his window, and played with him there till luncheon-time, while the ladies talked of Mr. Martindale.

Violet won her visitor’s heart by her kind manner to the poor son, who was very

well trained, and behaved like an automaton, but grew restless with the hopes of wild beasts and London shops. His mother was about to take leave, when Percy proposed to take charge of him, and leave her to rest for the afternoon with Mrs. Martindale, a plan very acceptable to all parties.

Lady Fotheringham was a woman of many sorrows. Her husband was very feeble and infirm, and of a large family, the youngest, this half-witted son, was the only survivor. Grief and anxiety had left deep traces on her worn face, and had turned her hair to a snowy whiteness; her frame was fragile, and the melancholy kindness of her voice deeply touched Violet. There was much talk of John, for whom Lady Fotheringham had a sort of compassionate reverence, derived from his patient resignation during Helen's illness, of which Violet now gathered many more particulars, such as added to her affection and enthusiasm for both.

Of her nephew, Percival, Lady Fotheringham spoke in the highest terms, and dwelt with pleasure on the engagement still connecting him with the Martindale family. Violet was glad to be able to speak from her heart of Theodora's excellence and kindness.

By and by, her visitor, in a sad voice, began to inquire whether she ever saw 'a young connection of theirs, Mrs. Finch;' and as Violet replied, said she was anxious to hear something of her, though she feared it was a painful subject. 'I cannot help being interested for her,' she said. 'She was a very fine girl, and had many good dispositions; but I fear she was very ill managed. We grew very fond of her, when she was at Worthbourne, poor thing, and if we and that excellent elder sister could have kept her to ourselves, we might have hoped—But it was very natural that she should grow tired of us, and there was much excuse for her—'

'Indeed there was, from all Theodora has told me.'

'I am glad to hear Miss Martindale keeps up her friendship. While that is the case, I am sure there is nothing positively wrong, though imprudent I fear she must be.'

Violet eagerly explained how every one was fully satisfied that, though Mrs. Finch was too free and dashing in manner, and too fond of attracting notice, there was principle and rectitude at the bottom, and that her life of dissipation was chiefly caused by the tedium of her home. All attachment between her and Mark Gardner had evidently died away; and though it might have been wiser to keep him at a distance, she had some good motives for allowing him to be often at her house.

Lady Fotheringham was relieved to hear this, and added that she might have trusted to Jane. Violet was surprised to find that Miss Gardner held a very high place in Lady Fotheringham's esteem, and was supposed by her to take most watchful, motherly care of her headstrong younger sister. She had made herself extremely agreeable at Worthbourne, and had corresponded with Lady Fotheringham ever since; and now Violet heard that Jane had thought the marriage with Mr. Finch a great risk, and would willingly have dissuaded her sister from it; but that Georgina had been bent upon it! 'thinking, no doubt, poor girl, that riches and gaiety would make her happy! I wish we could have made it pleasanter to her at Worthbourne!'

'She has spoken very affectionately of you.'

'Ah, poor child! she had met with little kindness before. She used to pour out her griefs to me. It was that wretched Mark who broke her heart, and after that she seemed not to care what became of her. But I am a little comforted by your account. I will try to see her to-morrow, poor dear. Percy was hoping I should be able, although I think that he is quite right not to visit them himself.'

Violet agreed to all, and was pleased at the notion of the good old lady's influence being tried on one evidently amenable to right impressions. As far as she herself was concerned, the visit was very gratifying, and when the leave-taking came, it seemed as if they had been intimate for years.

Violet sat pondering whether the dulness of Worthbourne and the disappointment of her first love had been the appointed cross of Georgina Gardner, cast aside in

impatience of its weight. And then she tried to reconcile the conflicting accounts of Jane's influence in the matter, till she thought she was growing uncharitable; and after having tried in vain to measure the extent of Percy's annoyance, she looked from the window to see if carriages seemed to be returning from Epsom, and then with a sigh betook herself to the book Theodora had provided for her solitude.

She had long to wait. Arthur and his sister came home later than she had expected, and did not bring the regale of amusing description that they had promised her.

Arthur was silent and discontented, and went to his smoking-room. Theodora only said it had been very hot, and for the first time really looked tired, and owned that she was so. It had been hard work, first to draw Arthur into Mrs. Finch's party, against which he exerted all his lazy good-humoured "vis inertia"—undertaking to show her everything, and explain all to her, be at her service all the day, if only she would keep away from them and their nonsense. But when their carriage was found, and Arthur was dragged into the midst of them, a still harder task arose. She was frightened to see Mark Gardner conversing with him, while he looked eager and excited, and she hastened to interrupt, put forth every power of attraction, in the resolve entirely to monopolize Mr. Gardner; and for a long time, at the expense of severe exertion in talking nonsense, she succeeded. But some interruption occurred; she missed Mr. Gardner, she missed Arthur; they were waited for; she wondered and fretted herself in vain, and at length beheld them returning in company-heard Mrs. Finch gaily scolding them, and understood that there had been bets passing!

She called it fatigue, but it was rather blank dread, and the sense that she had put herself and others in the way of evil.

It was possible that Arthur might have been only a spectator; or, if not, that he might have known where to stop. He had bought his experience long ago, at high cost; but Theodora was but too well aware of his unsteadiness of purpose and facile temper; and in spite of his resolutions, it was a fearful thing to have seen him in such a place,

in such company, and to know that almost against his own desire she had conducted him thither for the gratification of her self-will.

Vainly did she strive to banish the thought, and to reassure herself by his manner. She knew too well what it was wont to be when he had been doing anything of which he was ashamed. One bet, however, was no great mischief in itself. That book which Percy had given to her spoke of ‘threads turning to cords, and cords to cables strong.’ Had she put the first thread once more into the hand of the Old Evil Habit’?

If she would confess the sin to herself and to her God, with earnest prayer that the ill might be averted, perhaps, even yet, it might be spared to them all.

But the proud spirit declared there was no sin. She had merely been resolute and truthful. So she strengthened herself in her belief in her own blamelessness, and drove down the misgiving to prey on the depths of her soul, and sharpen her temper by secret suffering.

In the morning she accompanied Violet to call on Lady Fotheringham, sullen, proud, and bashful at the sense of undergoing inspection, and resolved against showing her best side, lest she should feel as if she was winning Worthbourne for Percy.

That majestic ill-humour was wasted—Lady Fotheringham was not at home; but Violet left a note begging her to come to luncheon the next day. It passed, and she appeared not: but at twelve on Saturday, Percy’s tread hurried up-stairs and entered the back drawing-room, where Theodora was sitting.

Sounds of voices followed—the buzz of expostulation; tones louder and louder—words so distinct that to prevent her anxious ears from listening, Violet began to practise Johnnie in all his cries of birds and beasts.

All at once the other room door was opened, and Theodora’s stately march was heard, while one of the folding leaves was thrown back, and there stood Percy.

Before a word could be spoken, he snatched up the child, and held him up in the air to the full reach of his arms. Doubtful whether this was to be regarded as play,

Johnnie uttered ‘Mamma,’ in a grave imploring voice, which, together with her terrified face, recalled Mr. Fotheringham to his senses. With an agitated laugh he placed the boy safely beside her, saying, ‘I beg your pardon. What a good little fellow it is!’

Violet asked him to ring for the nurse; and by the time Johnnie had been carried away, he had collected himself sufficiently to try to speak calmly.

‘Do her parents know what is going on?’ he said. ‘I do not speak for my own sake. That is at an end.’

‘Oh!’ exclaimed Violet.

‘I told her I could not be made a fool of any longer, and when she answered “Very well,” what could that mean?’

‘I am very much grieved that it has come to this,’ sighed Violet.

‘How could it come to anything else?’ he said, his face full of sorrow and severity. ‘I was mad to suppose there was any hope for such a temper of pride and stubbornness. Yet,’ he added, softening, and his quick, stern eyes filling with tears, ‘it is a noble nature,—high-minded, uncompromising, deeply tender, capable of anything. It has been a cruel wicked thing to ruin all by education. What could come of it? A life of struggle with women who had no notion of an appeal to principle and affection—growing up with nothing worthy of her love and respect—her very generosity becoming a stumbling-block, till her pride and waywardness have come to such an indomitable pitch that they are devouring all that was excellent.’

He paused; Violet, confused and sorrowful, knew not how to answer; and he proceeded, ‘I have known her, watched her, loved her from infancy! I never saw one approaching her in fine qualities. I thought, and still think, she needs but one conquest to rise above all other women. I believed guidance and affection would teach her all she needed; and so they would, but it was presumption and folly to think it was I who could inspire them.’

‘O, Mr. Fotheringham, indeed—’

‘It was absurd to suppose that she who trifles with every one would not do so with me. Yet, even now, I cannot believe her capable of carrying trifling to the extent she has done.’

‘She was in earnest,—oh! she was!’

‘I would fain think so,’ said he, sadly. ‘I held to that trust, in spite of the evidence of my senses. I persuaded myself that her manners were the effect of habit—the triumph of one pre-eminent in attraction.’

‘That they are! I don’t even think she knows what she does.’

‘So I believed; I allowed for her pleasure in teasing me. I knew all that would come right. I ascribed her determination to run after that woman to a generous reluctance to desert a friend.’

‘Indeed, indeed it is so!’

‘But how am I to understand her neglect of my aunt—the one relation whom I have tried to teach her to value—my aunt, who was the comfort of my sister and of her brother—who had suffered enough to give her a claim to every one’s veneration! To run away from her to the races, and the society of Mark Gardner and Mrs. Finch! Ay, and what do you think we heard yesterday of her doings there, from Gardner’s own mother? That she is giving him decided encouragement! That was the general remark, and on this, poor Mrs. George Gardner is founding hopes of her son settling down and becoming respectable.’

‘Oh! how terrible for you to hear! But it cannot be true. It must be mere report. Arthur would have observed if there had been more than her usual manner.’

‘A pretty manner to be usual! Besides, Jane Gardner did not deny it.’

‘Jane Gardner?’

‘Yes. My aunt called at Mrs. Finch’s, but saw neither of them; but this morning,

before she went, Miss Gardner called. I did not see her. I was out with Pelham, and my aunt spoke to her about all this matter. She answered very sensibly, regretted her sister's giddy ways, but consoled my aunt a good deal on that score, but—but as to the other, she could not say, but that Mark was a great admirer of—of Miss Martindale, and much had passed which might be taken for encouragement on Wednesday by any one who did not know how often it was her way!'

'It is a pity that Miss Gardner has had to do with it,' said Violet. 'When I have been talking to her, I always am left with a worse impression of people than they deserve.'

'You never have a bad impression of any one.'

'I think I have of Miss Gardner. I used to like her very much, but lately I am afraid I cannot believe her sincere.'

'You have been taught to see her with Theodora's eyes. Of course, Mrs. Finch despises and contemns prudence and restraint, and the elder sister's advice is thrown aside.'

'You never saw Jane Gardner?'

'Never;—but that is not the point here. I am not acting on Jane Gardner's report. I should never trouble myself to be jealous of such a scoundrel as Mark. I am not imagining that there is any fear of her accepting him. Though, if such a notion once possessed her, nothing would hinder her from rushing on inevitable misery.'

'Oh, there is no danger of that.'

'I trust not. It would be too frightful! However, I can look on her henceforth only as John's sister, as my little playmate, as one in whom hopes of untold happiness were bound up.' He struggled with strong emotion, but recovering, said, 'It is over! The reason we part is independent of any Gardner. She would not bear with what I thought it my duty to say. It is plain I was completely mistaken in thinking we could go through life together. Even if there was reason to suppose her attached to me, it

would be wrong to put myself in collision with such a temper. I told her so, and there is an end of the matter.'

'It is very, very sad,' said Violet, mournfully.

'You don't think I have used her ill.'

'Oh, no! You have borne a great deal. You could do no otherwise; but Arthur and John will be very much vexed.'

'It is well that it is known to so few. Let it be understood by such as are aware of what has been, that I bear the onus of the rupture. No more need be known than that the break was on my side. We both were mistaken. She will not be blamed, and some day'—but he could not speak calmly—' she will meet one who will feel for her as I do, and will work a cure of all these foibles. You will see the glorious creature she can be.'

'The good will conquer at last,' said Violet, through her tears.

'I am convinced of it, but I fear it must be through much trial and sorrow. May it only not come through that man.'

'No, no!'

'Then good-bye.'

They shook hands with lingering regret, as if unwilling to resign their relationship. 'You will explain this to Arthur, and give him my thanks for his friendliness; and you—accept my very best thanks for your great kindness and sympathy. If she had known you earlier—But good-bye. Only, if I might venture to say one thing more—you and Arthur will not give me up as a friend, will you?'

'Oh!' exclaimed Violet, as well as her tears would permit, 'I am sure we are but too glad—'

He pressed her hand gratefully, and was gone; while overwhelmed with the agitation she sank weeping on the sofa, only conscious that they all were in some sort guilty

of a great injury to Mr. Fotheringham. In this state of distress she was found by Theodora, who came down so lofty and composed, that no one could have divined who was the party chiefly concerned in what had taken place.

Without comment, she treated Violet as for a nervous attack, taking great care of her till the sobs subsided, and there only remained a headache which kept her on the sofa for the rest of the day. Theodora read aloud, but which of them marked the words? Late in the afternoon she put down the book, and wrote a note, while Violet silently marvelled at the unconcern of her countenance.

‘There, I shall take it to the post. You may read it if you like, while I put on my bonnet.’ Violet read.

‘MY DEAR MAMMA,—Our engagement is at an end. Mr. Fotheringham tried to exercise a control over my actions to which I could not submit; and in especial was affronted by my going to Epsom with Arthur, instead of staying at home for the chance of seeing Lady Fotheringham. We came to high words, perceived the error of thinking our tempers accorded, and agreed to part. I have no cause of complaint, though I am at this moment much displeased with him; for when he had done with me he went and stormed to poor Violet till he brought on one of her hysterical affections. No one can have acted with kinder or more conscientious intentions than she has done throughout the affair. I do not mean to come away till after her confinement. London is wide enough for him and for me, and I would not leave her on any account. ‘Your affectionate daughter,

‘THEODORA A. MARTINDALE.’

Violet glowed with indignation at such mention of Percy. She never loved him! It is as John thought!

Theodora, returning, took the note, and began to put it into its envelope without a word.

‘Thank you,’ said Violet; ‘it is very kind in you to stay with me. It is a great comfort

to Arthur.'

'Is it no comfort to you?' said Theodora. 'If I am in your way, I will go.'

'Oh! what should I do without you? It makes such a difference to me. I rely upon you to take care of Arthur, and Johnnie, and everything. Only don't do what is not pleasant to you.'

'I wish to live to be useful. I had rather be useful to you and Arthur than to any one. If you will keep me, I stay.'

All the rest of the day Violet could only feel that she could not be displeased with one so devoted to her. She wondered what Arthur would say. His comment was—

'Well, I always expected it. It is a pity! She has thrown away her only chance of being a reasonable woman.'

'You saw no cause for that horrid report?'

'Not a bit. She is not so frantic as that comes to. She went on in her old way, only a little stronger than usual; but Percy was quite right not to stand it, and so I shall tell her.'

However, Theodora kept him from the subject by the force of her imperturbability, and he could only declaim against her to his wife.

'I don't believe she cared a farthing for him.'

'I almost fear not. Yet how could she accept him?'

'He was the biggest fish that had ever come to her bait. She could not have played her pranks on him without hooking him; but he has broken the line, and it serves her right. I only wish she took it to heart! It is a lucky escape for him. What will his lordship think of it?'

Lord Martindale wrote, evidently in much annoyance, to desire Arthur to send him a full history of the transaction, and after much grumbling, he was obeyed. What he said to his daughter did not transpire, but Violet gathered that the opinion at

Martindale was, that she had not age or authority sufficient for the care of the young lady. In this she fully acquiesced, and, indeed, had some trouble in silencing repining speculations on what might have happened if she had been older, or in stronger health, or more judicious.

It was a universal failure, and she felt as if they were all to blame, while it terrified her to recollect John's predictions as to the effect on Theodora's disposition.

Another question was, how Mrs. Finch would feel on the matter. Theodora had written to her, and received one of her warm impulsive answers, as inconsistent as her whole nature; in one place in despair that her friend's happiness had been sacrificed—in another, rejoicing in her freedom from such intolerable tyranny, and declaring that she was the noblest creature and the naughtiest, and that she must see her at once.

But she never came, and when Theodora called was not at home. Violet had Jane to herself for an unpleasing hour of condolence and congratulation, regrets and insinuations, ending with the by no means unwelcome news that Mr. Finch was tired of London, and that they were going into the country—and not Mark—going to set off in a week's time. Two more calls failed, and Theodora only received a note, in which Mrs. Finch declared herself "abimee desolee" that her husband would drag her off into the country at such short notice, that her world of engagements had hindered her from meeting her best of friends. Then, with a sudden transition to slang, she promised excellent fun in riding, boating, &c., if Theodora would come to see her, and plenty of admirers ready to have their heads turned, ending rather piteously with 'Who knows but I might take a turn for good? I know I wish I could, if it was not so horridly tiresome. You won't forget your poor G. F.'

CHAPTER 18

Oh! woman is a tender tree, The hand must gentle be that rears, Through storm and

sunshine, patiently, That plant of grace, of smiles and tears. —A. CLEVELAND COX

The height of the season was over, and London was beginning to thin. Lady Elizabeth Brandon had accepted invitations for a round of visits to her friends and relations, and Violet thought with regret how little she had seen of her and Emma.

In fact, that unfortunate party at Mrs. Bryanstone's had been a sacrifice of the high esteem in which she had once been held. Emma, with the harshness of youthful judgments, could not overlook the folly that had hazarded so much for the sake of gaiety; and was the more pained because of the enthusiasm she had once felt for her, when she had believed her superior to all the world. She recollected her love-at-first-sight for the pretty bride, and well-nigh regarded the friendship as a romance of her girlhood. She did not blame poor Violet, for no more could have been expected than that so simple a girl would be spoiled by admiration, and by such a husband. She should always be interested in her, but there could be no sympathy for deeper visions and higher subjects in one devoted to the ordinary frivolities of life. Violet owned she could not understand her; what could be more true?

So Emma betook herself more and more to her other friend, lamented over present evils, made visionary amendments and erected dreamy worlds of perfection, till she condemned and scorned all that did not accord with them.

Lady Elizabeth would rather have seen her daughter intimate with Violet. Mistaken though that party was, it was hard measure, she thought, utterly to condemn a girl hardly eighteen. She could understand Violet—she could not understand Miss Marstone; and the ruling domineering nature that laid down the law frightened her. She found herself set aside for old-fashioned notions whenever she hinted at any want of judgment or of charity in the views of the friends; she could no longer feel the perfect consciousness of oneness of mind and sufficiency for each other's comfort that had been such happiness between her and her daughter; and yet

everything in Theresa Marstone was so excellent, her labours among the poor so devoted, and her religion so evidently heartfelt, that it was impossible to consider the friendship as otherwise than an honour to Emma.

Lady Elizabeth could only feel that she should be more at ease when she was not always in dread of interrupting a tete-a-tete, and when there was no longer any need to force Emma into society, and see her put on that resigned countenance which expressed that it was all filial duty to a mother who knew no better. Moreover, Lady Elizabeth hoped for a cessation of the schemes for the Priory, which were so extravagant as to make her dread Emma's five-and-twentieth year.

Desirous as she was of leaving London, she would not consent to go to her brother in the end of June, until she had certified herself that Violet did not wish for her attendance.

Violet did think that it would have been a great comfort, but perceived that it would be at some inconvenience; and further divined that to be extremely useful and important was Theodora's ruling desire. She was afraid of heart-burnings, and, as usual, yielded her own wishes, begged Lady Elizabeth not to disturb her plans, made many declarations of Theodora's kindness and attention; and in return, poor thing! was judged by Emma to be in dread of lectures!

So the Brandons left London, and Violet sighed over the disappointment their stay had been, knew she had given up the chance of a renewal of intimacy, and thought Emma's estrangement all her own fault.

Arthur, likewise, had a fit of restlessness. Some of his friends were intending to go grouse shooting to Scotland, and it was evident that he was desirous of joining them if Violet could only recover in time to spare him. Theodora also wished that he should go, for she had a strong suspicion that he was gliding fast into frequent intercourse with Mr. Gardner, and hoped that absence would put a stop to it.

Not a word, not a look, ever referred to Mr. Fotheringham. Violet thought it

inexplicable, and could only suppose that Theodora had been under some delusion, and had never known the meaning of love, for there was nothing like sorrow or disappointment; she almost seemed to be glad of her release.

It was a trial when the Review was published, containing the critique upon modern poetry. For a whole day it was left unopened, because neither sister liked to touch it in the presence of the other; but when, in the morning, Violet took it to read, she found the leaves cut. Lord St. Erme had been treated with some censure, but with a fair amount of praise, and her own favourite pieces were selected for commendation; but there was sufficient satire and severity to cause the universal remark that it was hard on poor Lord St. Erme.

Often was the observation made, for the article excited much attention—it was so striking and able, keenly and drolly attacking absurdity and affectation, good-humoured and lively, and its praise so cordial and enthusiastic. Every visitor was sure to begin, ‘Have you read the paper on modern poetry?’ ‘Do you know who wrote it?’ or, ‘Is it true it is by Mr. Fotheringham?’

Violet, though much confused, could not help having a sort of satisfaction in seeing that neither could Theodora defend herself from blushes, nor so preserve her equanimity as always to know what she was saying, though she made heroic efforts, and those ignorant of the state of affairs might not, perhaps, detect her embarrassment. If there had been affection, surely this calmness must have given way!

One day Theodora was in a shop, and Violet waiting for her when Mr. Fotheringham passed, and instantly coming to the carriage door, shook hands warmly, seemed rejoiced at the meeting, spoke of his last letter from John in high approval of Mr. Fanshawe, and told her that in two days’ time he was going to take a walking tour in Ireland. At that instant the signal was made for taking up Miss Martindale, and with a hasty farewell he disappeared, as Violet thought, unseen. On coming home,

Theodora went at once up-stairs; Violet some little time after chanced to go to her room to ask her a question on her way to dress, found her knock unanswered, but heard sounds which caused her gently to open the door.

Theodora was kneeling by the bed; her face buried in her hands, her neck crimson, sobbing and weeping in such violent grief as Violet had never witnessed. She stood terrified, unnoticed, hardly able to bear not to offer comfort; but she understood that nature too well not to be convinced that no offence would be so great as to break into her grief and to intrude upon what she chose to hide.

Violet, therefore, retreated, hoping that now there might be an opening for sympathy, some depression that would allow her to show her fellow-feeling; but no: when they met again Theodora was as cheerful and disengaged as ever, and she could almost have persuaded herself that these tears had been a dream.

Perhaps they so appeared to Theodora. She had been surprised into them, and was angry at having been overcome—she who cared so little; but she had woman's feelings, though she had proved to be unfit for the dominion of man, and was henceforth ready to stand alone, and use her strength for the benefit of the weak. She would be the maiden aunt, the treasure of the family, and Arthur's house should be the centre of her usefulness and attachments.

Therefore, so far from struggling against Violet, she delighted in the care of one so tender and caressing; looked on her as the charm and interest of her life, and rejoiced in being valuable at present, and likely to render most important services, attaining in fact the solid practical usefulness she had always coveted.

Everything that could please or amuse Violet she did, even to the length of drawing her out about Wrangerton, and suppressing a certain jealousy of Annette that was ready to spring up on discovering how strong was the affection bestowed on that sister. Violet was especially happy in being able to talk of home just now, when she was continually hearing of Albert's marriage, and the arrangements consequent

thereon, and would have felt it blank, indeed, to have no one but Sarah to share her interest.

Uncle Christopher went to the wedding, and was invited to dinner in Cadogan-place the Sunday after his return. Theodora condescended to be frankly entertained with his dry humorous account of the magnificent doings that had diverted him extremely, and caused Arthur and Violet to congratulate themselves that, in their case, Matilda had not been allowed her own way.

'What a sensible, agreeable person your uncle is,' said Theodora, as Violet lay down to rest on the sofa, after dinner, and to turn over and fondle one by one the little presents sent to her from Wrangerton.

Violet smiled thanks and pleasure in the praise, and Theodora set to work to gratify her, by admiring each gift as much as her conscience would let her, and was well pleased to find that she was not at all wanted to commend a wonderful embroidered sachet from the bride, nor a pair of gorgeous screens from Matilda; but that what was dwelt upon were some sketches in Wrangerton Park, and the most prized of all was a little pair of socks, in delicate fancy knitting, for Johnnie.

'Dear, dear mamma! her own pretty rose-leaf pattern. Think of her knitting for my Johnnie! He will soon know grandmamma's socks!' and she put her fingers into one to judge of the size, and admire the stitch. Theodora could see her do such things now, and not think her foolish.

'Theodora, dear,' said she, after a long pause, 'there is something I have been wanting to say to you for a long time. If I should be as ill as I was before, if I should not live, I should like one thing—'

Theodora took her hand between both hers, for she could not answer.

'I should like to know that his grandmamma would see my Johnnie, if it was only for once. I know poor Arthur could not bear to hear me talk of this, and he is anxious enough already, but you would tell him. You will manage for mamma to see my

boy, won't you?'

'I would take him to her at Wrangerton myself.'

'I am quite content that you should chiefly take care of him, you know. I am glad you have been here so long that he has grown fond of you. It makes it much better to think of leaving him and his dear papa, to know they have you.'

'But, Violet, you must not talk so!' cried Theodora, in a half-choked voice.

'No; I must not make myself cry,' said Violet, quietly. 'I will not go on, when I have asked you one thing more, and that is, to write to John, and tell him that I thank him for all he has done for me, and that this has been a very happy year. You and John will comfort—'

Violet checked herself, for the tears could only be restrained by silence, and she had made many resolutions against agitation.

'All you wish!' exclaimed Theodora; 'but, indeed, you must not think there is any fear—'

'I will not talk about it,' said Violet, in her submissive voice.

'No; nor think about it.'

'I try not to do so more than I ought. I am glad you are here!'

It was dark enough for Theodora to allow her eyes to fill with soft tears, without a struggle to keep them back. The pleasure of being valued was very great, and the entire trust Violet reposed on her gave her as deep delight as she had ever experienced. What would it not be after having nursed her and been everything to Arthur! With Violet and Arthur depending on her, she could feel herself good for something, and filling a place in the world.

CHAPTER 19

The lowliest flowers the closest cling to earth, And they first feel the sun; so violets

blue, So the soft star-like primrose drenched in dew, The happiest of spring's happy fragrant birth, To gentlest touches, sweetest tones reply; So humbleness, with her low-breathed voice, Can steal o'er man's proud heart, and win his choice.

'She is ready to see you,' said Arthur, meeting Theodora, as she came down at nine the next morning after church.

Violet's face, white as a lily, was on the pillow, and a little dark downy head was beside her.

A sense of being too late, of neglect and disappointment, rushed over Theodora, and made her looks not what the mother expected, as with smiling eyes and feeble voice she said, 'Your niece, dear Theodora.'

'I did not know—' were Theodora's first words, and their dissatisfied sound made Arthur regret his abrupt introduction; though she recovered herself enough to say something of gladness, and of hopes that Violet was comfortable.

'Yes, thank you, quite. I am so thankful! I am so glad of everything. Now I hope Arthur will not lose the 12th of August.'

'Only don't talk now, my sweet one. Come, Theodora,' as if he only wanted to get her out of the room.

'I have not looked at the baby. What a fine one!' and she was going to take her.

'Oh, please don't!' said Violet; 'she will begin screaming again!' Then, seeing the cloud return, 'Presently, dear aunt, when she wakes. Is not she a beauty?'

Arthur, his hand on the door, hurried Theodora again.

'I will come' she said, impatiently, 'I will come and sit with you after breakfast, Violet; I only wish I had been called.'

'Indeed, I know how kind you would have been,' said Violet, holding her hand, and watching to see whether the displeasure was removed: 'but it seemed a pity to disturb you. Please don't be vexed; I'll give you plenty of trouble yet.'

She had, roused herself enough to alarm Arthur and the nurse.

‘This will never do,’ he said, laying his hand on his sister’s arm, and drawing her away almost by force: ‘You MUST keep quiet, Violet.’

‘I will, indeed, but please, Theodora—’

‘She pleases all you wish. Never mind,’ said Arthur, fairly putting her out, then stepping back, ‘Lie still, and mind your big baby; that is all you have to do.’

‘Only don’t let her be vexed.’

‘No such thing.’

But when out of Violet’s hearing he could not refrain from telling Theodora his displeasure. ‘I thought you had more sense, or I would never have let you in.’

‘I knew nothing of it.’

‘Your own fault for marching off at that time in the morning! I had been up to tell you, and could not think where you were.’

‘Why was I not allowed to be of use?’

‘A pretty specimen of your usefulness, vexing her with your black looks, till she was talking herself into a fever!’

‘Surely she is doing well?’

‘She was, unless you have undone everything with your humours.’

‘I don’t know what you mean.’

That was the last word. Theodora sat swelling under the sense of injustice and neglect, where she had intended to be so important; and Arthur was weary enough in mind and body to be more than usually sensible of her ungraciousness, and to miss the refreshment of cheerful sympathy. On going up after breakfast he found Violet weaker and more ill than he had previously thought her, and her solicitous inquiries about his sister made him the more attribute this to distress at those moody looks. He would not hear of again admitting Theodora, and in bitterness of spirit she wrote the

letters, and tried to content Johnnie—all in vain; for strive to conceal it as she would, he always seemed to perceive her bad moods, and never would be happy with her when she was in one of them.

Every hour brought fresh mortification. She was jealous of Arthur's being needful to the patient, and jealous of being left by him; angry at being treated as useless, and angry at the work she had to do; certain that her ill temper was Arthur's fancy, yet certain he had caused it; anxious about Violet, yet disdaining his anxiety. She was much annoyed at his keeping aloof from her unpleasing looks, deserting the dinner-table after the first course, and when she had waited long for him, leaving her to discover that he had had a cup of tea in Violet's room, and was gone down to smoke. The kindly affections that had always been the hope of her character were rejected and thwarted, and thus thrown back on herself, the wayward wilful spirit began to rise.

She paced the dull walk in the square gardens in the summer twilight, and thought of the life before her, uncherished at home, an intruder in the family where she had expected to earn fond gratitude, rejected by him who had loved her from childhood!

There was an alternative! One look of encouragement, and Lord St. Erme was at her disposal, ready to rejoice at acceptance, even if she should tell him that she had no heart to bestow. She would be no longer spurned and cast aside; she should be able to befriend Violet, she would live uncontrolled, adored; above all, she would teach Percy Fotheringham that she did not pine for him! She would belie those foolish tears that Violet had seen her shed!

As she opened the gate to leave the gardens, Lord St. Erme rode by with a young lady. Was he passing from her power? The spirit of rivalry prompted a gracious bow and smile. He checked his horse, looked delighted, and introduced 'his sister.'

A fair, delicate, blushing girl of sixteen, a pretty likeness of himself, bent her head low, and Theodora felt that her blue eyes were intently perusing her under their

downcast lids, while the brother's tones almost trembled with the pleasure of her unwonted look of encouragement. He said that he was enjoying having his sister alone with him, at his aunt's house in London, for a short time, and added something about calling. She gave one of her bewitching smiles, and they rode on.

There at least she was prized! How unlike this to the treatment she met with from her own family! If she could not love the Earl, she could do very well without that nonsense; and she should escape from her unloving home, begin a new life, reign queen o'er herself and him, idolized, uncontradicted, with ample opportunities of usefulness, triumphant over him who had disdained her.

So she mused while taking off her bonnet, till Sarah brought a message that Mrs. Martindale would be glad to see her. An hour ago and she would have rejoiced; now, Arthur's household was becoming a secondary object, since they had rejected her, and driven her to seek fresh interests.

She was received with hands outstretched. 'Dear Theodora, thank you. Will you stay and take care of baby and me while nurse goes to supper?'

'If I may.'

'Thank you. Nurse, pray give baby to Miss Martindale. You need not hurry; I shall be so comfortable.'

The sweet pale face and languid eyes were as a charm to expel all but kindly thoughts, as Theodora sat down with the living weight warm on her lap, and the gentle mother at intervals softly asking about her boy. 'Poor little man, they would not let him come in: they kept away both the people I wanted.'

'Arthur guards you most jealously.'

'Yes, is not he a wonderful nurse? I had to exercise a little self-will in getting you here. How good we must be to make him forgive us!'

Next. 'You cannot think what a difference it makes to have you here. I never need

think about Arthur's being made comfortable.'

Theodora's sincerity longed for confession, and she refrained with difficulty. Those unconscious words set her vile temper before her in its true light. She had resented the being treated with consideration, and had been moody towards her brother, because he was under anxiety!

Self-convicted, she gave a deep sigh; but fearing again to distress Violet, began to admire the baby, who was in truth a remarkably large and handsome child, very dark and like the Martindales, and, both in size and serenity, such a contrast to her brother, that, proud as she was of her, her mamma only half liked praise of her that might be depreciation of him, and began to defend him from the charge of crying before he had had strength for it.

Her name, of course, was to be Helen, and to this Violet softly added, Theodora.

'No, no; that will bring her no good. It is Aunt Nesbit's name.'

'It is one I love the sound of.'

'You won't another time.'

Violet vaguely perceived something amiss; but too weak to think about it, closed her eyes and fell into a doze.

Those few gentle sayings had brought back Theodora's affection and sense of right. She longed to recall her glance. If it had taken effect she must persevere. She could not endure the humiliation of having a third time trifled with a lover; she would not feel herself sunk into a mere coquette. But what would Violet think!

Violet suddenly awoke with a terrified gaze. 'Arthur! Arthur! O, where is he!'

'Down-stairs, dearest; he will come.' But to her extreme alarm, the words had no effect.

'Arthur! O, when will he come? Why did he go away?'

Dismayed out of all presence of mind, Theodora rang with a violent peal, and flew

down-stairs, the baby in her arms, rousing Arthur from a slumber in his chair by breathless tidings that Violet was worse—was delirious; Mr. Harding must be sent for—

When Arthur had hurried up-stairs, it proved to be only a frightened wakening, such as had often happened last year. She was perfectly conscious, but so much fluttered and agitated by Theodora's own proceedings, that it was with great difficulty that Arthur could soothe and tranquillize her on her baby's account. The nurse was very angry, and Theodora perceived her delinquency might have serious consequences, especially when she beheld Violet, still tremulous from the alarm, endeavouring to reassure them, to shield her from displeasure, and to take all the blame to herself for her foolish terror.

There was an end of Theodora's grand designs of nursing! She could only enter the room at all by favour of the patient and by sufferance of the nurse; and she could attempt no remonstrance when ordered off by her brother, and even felt unworthy of Violet's kiss.

That little scene of trivialities had been her first true humiliation. It had shown her the vanity of her boast of strength of mind; for when she thought of the morning's unreasonable ill-humour, and unkindness to her brother and his wife at such a moment, and of the coquetry with Lord St. Erme, she was indeed lowered in her own eyes; and it was sorrow, not bitterness.

Her heart was very heavy, but less hard. Slowly had the power of Violet's meekness and lowliness been stealing into her affections and undermining her pride. Perhaps the direct attacks of Percy, though strongly resisted, had in reality given a shock which prepared the way for the silent effect of sweetness and forbearance. At any rate, she was now sincerely sorry for the sin as well as the folly of the past day, and felt that it might bring a penalty in perplexities about Lord St. Erme, if he had really taken her smile for encouragement.

Many were her resolutions of amiability for to-morrow; but she was disappointed. Violet had passed a restless night, and could not be visited; and Arthur, after his experience of yesterday, was in no haste to subject himself to his sister's humours. Her two years of caprice and neglect had told even on his easy temper.

It had long been a scheme of hers to surprise Violet on her recovery with a likeness of Johnnie, taken by a small, humble niece of Mrs. Harrison's, lately started in life as an artist in crayons; and in the midst of yesterday's sullenness she had taken measures which this morning brought the lady to Cadogan-place, at the hour when he was most likely to be in his best looks. Sarah, highly approving of anything that exalted Master John, sedulously traced the one-sided masculine division in his flaxen locks, and tied his best white frock with scarlet ribbons, in honour, as she said, of his being 'a little granny-dear'; and Theodora carried him down, and heard him pronounced 'a lovely interesting darling.'

Sitting well was not, however, one of his perfections; he could not be induced to show his face to a stranger, and turned from toys and pictures, with arms stretched out to his aunt, and piteous calls for mamma: to Theodora's further despair Arthur came in, and stood amazed, so that she had to unfold her plans, and beg him to keep the secret. He smiled, saying she might as well take a picture of a washed-out doll; but that Violet would be sure to like it.

Meantime the child was presenting a golden opportunity; fixed in rapt contemplation of his father, and gazing motionless, with one little foot doubled under him, and one tiny white arm drooping over the crimson sofa cushion. Miss Piper sketched as if for her life. Theodora directed Arthur's attention to his little son. He spoke to him, and was surprised and pleased at the plainness of the reply, and the animated spring of gladness. In another minute he was sitting on the floor, most successfully entertaining the child, while Miss Piper could hardly help drawing that handsome black head in contrast with the small, white creature, whose morsels of hands were

coaxing his brown red cheeks; and Theodora looked on, amused to see how papa succeeded in drawing out those pretty, hesitating smiles, so embellishing to the little face, that had generally more than the usual amount of baby gravity.

They were in full debate whether he should be represented smiling or grave; the aunt wishing the latter as the habitual expression, the father declaring that ‘the fellow was only fit to be seen smiling like his mother;’ when suddenly there was an announcement—

‘Lady Lucy Delaval and Lord St. Erme.’

Arthur hardly had time to start up from the ground, his colour deepening with discomfiture as he glanced at the disarray of the room, littered with playthings, displaced cushions, newspapers, with which he had been playing bo-peep, drawing materials, all in as much confusion as the hair, which, in an unguarded moment, he had placed at the mercy of Johnnie’s fingers.

Theodora comprehended the sharp click with which he rang the nursery bell, and the half frown with which he watched in dread of a cry, while Lady Lucy tried to make friends with Johnnie.

The drawing was brought under discussion, but he held aloof after one look, which Theodora perceived to be disapproving, though she did not know that the reason was that the smile, somewhat overdone by Miss Piper, had brought out one of old Mr. Moss’s blandest looks. Meantime Lord St. Erme talked to the little artist, giving her some valuable hints, which she seized with avidity, and then quietly retreated.

Arthur tried to talk to Lady Lucy; but she was very young, not yet come out, timid, and, apparently, afraid of something that she had to say, watching Miss Martindale as earnestly as she dared; while Lord St. Erme spoke eagerly, yet as if he hardly knew what he was saying, of art, music, books, striving in vain to obtain one of the looks of yesterday.

It warmed Theodora’s heart to feel herself the object of such enthusiastic

admiration, but she preserved her look of rigid indifference. It was a long visit; but at last the brother made the move, looking at his sister, as if to remind her of something.

‘Oh, Miss Martindale,’ said she, with an effort, ‘we thought you must be staying in a great deal. Would you be so kind, now and then, as to walk with me?’

This was an alarming request, and not very easy to refuse. Theodora said something of seeing about it, and hoping—

‘It would be such a treat,’ said Lady Lucy, growing bolder, as the two gentlemen were speaking to each other. ‘My aunt is gone to her brother’s little parsonage, where there is no room for me, and my governess had to go home, luckily, so that we are quite alone together; and St. Erme said perhaps you would be so kind sometimes as to walk with me—’

Theodora smiled. ‘I hope we may meet sometimes,’ said she. ‘If my sister was down-stairs perhaps we might; but I am engaged to her.’

Thus ended the visit, and Arthur, hastily throwing the cushions back into their places, demanded, ‘What on earth could possess those folks to come here now!’

‘It was an inconvenient time,’ said Theodora.

‘Dawdling and loitering here!—a man with nothing better to do with his time!’

‘Nay,’ said Theodora, touched by the injustice; ‘Lord St. Erme is no man not to know how to dispose of his time.’

‘Whew!’ whistled Arthur; ‘is the wind gone round to that quarter? Well, I thought better of you than that you would like a fellow that can do nothing but draw, never shoots over his own moors, and looks like a German singer! But do put the room tidy; and if you must have the nursery down here, put it into the back room, for mercy sake!’

He went away, having thus stirred her feelings in the St. Erme direction, and he left

them to take their chance for the rest of the day. She took a solitary walk; on her return saw a hat in the hall, and asking whether Mr. Harding was there, was told no, but that Mr. Gardner was with Captain Martindale. And after long waiting till Arthur should come to dinner, he only put in his head, saying, ‘Oh, Theodora, are you waiting? I beg your pardon, I am going out to dinner. You can sit with Violet; and if she should want me, which she won’t, James knows where to find me.’

Theodora scorned to inquire of the servant whither his master was gone; but her appetite forsook her at the sight of the empty chair, and the recollection of the warning against Mark Gardner.

This was not her last solitary dinner. Arthur had engagements almost every day, or else went to his club; and when at home, if he was not with Violet, he sat in his own room, and would never again assist at the sittings, which were completed under less favourable auspices, soon enough to allow time for the framing before the mamma should come down-stairs. Her recovery proceeded prosperously; and Theodora was quite sufficiently in request in her room to be satisfied, and to make it difficult to find a spare afternoon to go and order one of her favourite oak frames.

However, she was at length able to make the expedition; and she was busy in giving directions as to the width of margin, when from the interior of the shop there came forward no other than the Earl of St. Erme.

They shook hands, and she sent her excuses to Lady Lucy for having been too much occupied to call, asking whether she was still in town.

‘Only till Thursday,’ he said, ‘when I take her to join my aunt, who is to show her the Rhine.’

‘Do not you go with them?’

‘I have not decided. It depends upon circumstances. Did not I hear something of your family visiting Germany?’

‘Perhaps they may,’ said Theodora, dryly. He began to study the portrait, and saw

some likeness, but was distressed by something in the drawing of the mouth.

‘Yes,’ said Theodora, ‘I know it is wrong; but Miss Piper could not see it as I did, and her alterations only made it worse, till I longed to be able to draw.’

‘I wonder if I might venture,’ said Lord St. Erme, screwing up his eye, and walking round the picture. ‘I am sure, with your artist eye, you must know what it is not to be able to keep your hands off.’

‘Not I,’ said Theodora, smiling. ‘Pencils are useless tools to me. But it would be a great benefit to the picture, and Miss Piper will fancy it all her own.’

‘You trust me, then?’ and he turned to ask for a piece of chalk, adding, ‘But is it not too bold a measure without the subject?’

‘He is in the carriage, with his nurse;’ and Theodora, unable to resist so material an improvement to her gift, brought him in, and set him up on the counter opposite to a flaming picture of a gentleman in a red coat, which he was pleased to call papa, and which caused his face to assume a look that was conveyed to the portrait by Lord St. Erme, and rendered it the individual Johnnie Martindale, instead of merely a pale boy in a red sash.

Theodora was too much gratified not to declare it frankly, and to say how much charmed his mother would be; and she was pleased by a remark of Lord St. Erme, that showed that his poet mind comprehended that wistful intelligence that gave a peculiar beauty to Johnnie’s thin white face.

She thought to pay off her obligations by an immediate visit to his sister, while she knew him to be safe out of the way; and, driving to Mrs. Delaval’s, she sent her nephew home, intending to walk back.

Lady Lucy was alone, and she found her a gentle, simple-hearted girl, with one sole affection, namely, for the brother, who was the whole world to her; and taking Miss Martindale, on his word, as an object of reverence and admiration. It was impossible not to thaw towards her: and when Theodora spoke of the embellishment of the

portrait, she needed no more to make her spring up, and fetch a portfolio to exhibit her brother's drawings. Admirable they were; sketches of foreign scenery, many portraits, in different styles, of Lady Lucy herself, and the especial treasure was a copy of Tennyson, interleaved with illustrations in the German style, very fanciful and beautiful. Theodora was, however, struck by the numerous traces she saw of the Lalla Rookh portrait. It was there as the dark-eyed Isabel; again as Judith, in the Vision of Fair Women; it slept as the Beauty in the Wood; and even in sweet St. Agnes, she met it refined and purified; so that at last she observed, 'It is strange how like this is to my mother.'

'I think it must be,' said Lady Lucy; 'for I was quite struck by your likeness to St. Erme's ideal sketches.'

Rather annoyed, Theodora laughed, and turning from the portfolio, asked if she did not also draw?

'A little; but mine are too bad to be looked at.'

Theodora insisted, and the drawings were produced: all the best had been done under Lord St. Erme's instruction. The affection between the brother and sister touched her, and thinking herself neglectful of a good little girl, she offered to take the desired walk at once. While Lady Lucy was preparing, however, the brother came home, and oh! the inconvenient satisfaction of his blushing looks.

Yet Theodora pardoned these, when he thanked her for being kind to his sister; speaking with a sort of parental fondness and anxiety of his wish to have Lucy with him, and of his desire that she should form friendships that would benefit her.

Never had he spoken with so much reality, nor appeared to so much advantage; and it was in his favour, too, that Theodora contrasted this warm solicitude for his young sister with the indifference of her own eldest brother. There was evidently none of the cold distance that was the grievance of her home.

'Lady Lucy is almost out of the school-room,' she said. 'You will soon be able to

have her with you in the country.’

‘There are certainly some considerations that might make me resolve on an English winter,’ said Lord St. Erme.

‘Every consideration, I should think.’

‘Fogs and frosts, and clouds, that hang like a weight on the whole frame,’ said Lord St. Erme, shivering.

‘Healthy, freshening mists, and honest vigorous frosts to brace one for service,’ said Theodora, smiling.

‘O, Miss Martindale!’ cried Lady Lucy, entering, ‘are you persuading St. Erme to stay all the year in England? I do so wish he would.’

‘Then you ought to make him,’ said Theodora.

‘If Miss Martindale were to express a wish or opinion—’

She saw it was time to cut him short. ‘Every one’s opinion must be the same,’ she said.

‘O,’ cried Lucy, ‘of course Italy is pleasanter. It is selfish to wish to keep him here; but if I had my will, we would live together at Wrangerton, and have such nice poor people.’

‘A “chateau en Espagne” indeed, my little sister. Wrangerton is a most forlorn place, an old den of the worst period of architecture, set down just beyond the pretty country, but in the programme of all the tourists as a show place; the third-rate town touching on the park, and your nice poor people not even the ordinary English peasantry, but an ill-disposed set of colliers.’

Theodora looked, but did not speak.

‘Miss Martindale thinks me a laggard, but she hears my excuse.’

‘If they are ill-disposed,’ said Theodora, in her low, severe voice (she could not help it), ‘it is for want of influence from the right quarter.’

‘My agent tells me they are perfectly impracticable.’

‘Knights of old liked something impracticable.’ She was almost ready to check herself; but there was something inspiriting in the idea of awakening this youth, who seemed to catch at her words as if she were a damsel sending forth a champion. His reply was—

‘Those were days worth living for. Then the knight’s devoir was poetry in real life.’

‘Devoir is always poetry in real life,’ said Theodora. ‘What is it but the work ready to hand? Shrinking from it is shrinking from the battle. Come, Lady Lucy, I will not detain you.’

Lord St. Erme seemed about to say something as he shook hands, but it did not come. The walk was passed by the simple-hearted Lucy discoursing of the events by which she counted her eras, namely, his visits. Her perfect brother was her only theme.

CHAPTER 20

Yet learn the gamut of Hortensio. —Taming of the Shrew

Mrs. Nesbit was recommended to spend some months at Baden Baden; and Theodora formed a design, which highly pleased Arthur and Violet, of spending this time, while the family were absent, and while Arthur was in Scotland, as hostess at Martindale to Violet and the children.

After seeing Arthur off to Windsor for the next fortnight, Theodora had begun writing to propose the scheme to her father, when she was interrupted by the announcement of Lord St. Erme.

To visit her alone was a strong measure, and she put on a panoply of dignified formality. He began to say he had brought a German book, to show her a poem of which their conversation had reminded him.

‘I understand very little German,’ said she, coldly. ‘I once had a German governess whom I disliked so much that I took a disgust to the language.’

‘There is so much that is beautiful and untranslatable in its literature, that I am sure it would recompense you.’

‘I do not like the German tone of mind. It is vapoury and unreal.’

‘I should like to show you cause to alter your opinion, but—’

‘This is English,’ said Theodora, as her eye fell on a paper of verses that marked the place.

‘Ah, Lucy made me put it in. A few lines that occurred to me after watching Mrs. Martindale’s little boy.’

Thankful that they were not inspired by Venus’s little boy, she glanced over them, and saw they were in his best style, simple and pretty thoughts on the child’s content, wherever he traced any symbol of his father.

‘Poor little Johnnie is highly flattered,’ she said. ‘His mamma will be delighted.’

He begged her attention to the German poem, she glanced onward as he read, watching for shoals ahead, and spied something about a “hochbeseeltes madchen” inspiring a “Helden sanger geist”, and grew hotter and hotter till she felt ready to box his ears for intoning German instead of speaking plain English, and having it over. A cotton umbrella arose before her eyes, she heard the plashing gravel, and an honest voice telling her she was a grand creature in great need of being broken in.

The critical stanza had commenced, the reader’s voice trembled; Theodora did not heed, her mind was in the avenue at home. An opening door startled them.

‘Mr. and Mrs. Albert Moss.’

Her brother’s brother-in-law! the son and partner of Lord St. Erme’s steward! Was it thus his suit was to be checked?

There was no recognition; he went on reading his German to himself, while Albert

presented Mrs. Albert Moss, resplendent in bridal finery, and displaying her white teeth in a broad smile, as with a nod, half-gracious, half-apologetic, she said, ‘I fear we interrupt a lesson; but we will not inconvenience you; we will go at once to our dear convalescent.’

‘Thank you, you do not interrupt me, and I do not think my sister is dressed yet. Indeed, I doubt whether I ought to allow her to see any one.’

‘O, you cannot be so cruel!’ cried Mrs. Moss, holding up her hands; ‘one little peep! our only day in town.’

‘Yes,’ said Albert. ‘I could not but gratify my Louisa’s anxiety to be introduced to her new relatives.’

‘I am afraid you must be disappointed, for my brother is with his regiment at Windsor, and my sister is still so weak that she ought to have no excitement.’

‘And we have only a few hours in town. The inexorable claims of business have recalled us to Wrangerton.’

The Earl looked up surprised, as if the word had recalled him from the clouds.

‘You have been in Wales, I think,’ said Theodora. ‘Were you pleased?’

‘Oh, I was enraptured!’ exclaimed the bride; ‘the sublime and romantic could be carried no higher! It makes me quite discontented with our home scenery.

‘Your sister would not approve of that,’ said Theodora to Albert;’ she can bear no slight to Helvellyn.’

‘I forget—is there a view of Helvellyn from Wrangerton?’ said Lord St. Erme, still somewhat dreamily.

Mrs. Moss started at hearing such good English from the German master, and patronizingly said, ‘Yes. Helvellyn is monarch of our picturesque. Do you ever come northwards?’

‘Not so often as, perhaps, I ought. I am afraid I know more of the Alps than of

Helvellyn.’

‘I am sure,’ continued the voluble lady, ‘if ever you thought of such a scheme when the season is over, it would be well worth your while. I could reckon up many respectable families, who with such introductions—let me see, there are the Joneses, and the Dunlops, and the Evelyns, to say nothing of my new sisters, the Miss Mosses.’

‘I have no doubt it is a very good neighbourhood,’ said Lord St. Erme, rising. ‘I must go, or we shall miss the train. Can you tell me how soon you expect Lord Martindale?’

‘About the tenth or eleventh,’ said Theodora.

‘Thank you. Then I must wish you good-bye—’

‘And I must thank you in my sister’s name for the pleasure she will take in what you have done for her little boy. Remember me to Lady Lucy.’

That name was a revelation to Albert, and the door had scarcely closed before he exclaimed—‘Surely, Miss Martindale, that could not be Lord St. Erme!’

‘Yes, it was.’

‘Well!’ cried Mrs. Moss, ‘there was something decidedly the aristocrat in his moustache!’

Albert could not recover from his vexation at having missed such a chance, and was nearly setting off in pursuit of his lordship. Theodora was glad to escape for a moment, on the plea of seeing whether Violet could receive a visit.

In her absence the bride began—‘I can’t see that she is so handsome, after all! And I should be ashamed to wear such a dress as that!’

‘Distinguished people have freaks, my love. Bless me! if I had but known the Earl!’

‘I see how it is,’ said the wife; ‘a proud Countess we shall have.’

‘If one of the girls had but been here! Every one of them is prettier than this Miss

Martindale. Who knows?'

'Ah! I shall take care in a friendly way to let your sister know how her own family feel at her keeping aloof—'

'I do not believe it is her fault, poor child,' said Albert. 'Martindale has set this haughty young lady to keep guard over her—'

'We shall see,' said the bride. 'I am not used to be refused, and once with your sister, I will discover all her secrets.'

Fortunately for Violet, Theodora had found her so much exhausted by the fatigue of dressing, that she thought it safest, considering what a bride it was, not to divulge her presence in the house; and she came down with this intelligence, trying to compensate for it by civility, and by showing the children.

Mrs. Moss was not easily repulsed, she begged Miss Martindale to reconsider her verdict.

'I must not relent; I am accountable to the doctor and to my brother.'

'It shall not be your fault. You shall know nothing of it. I will find my way. Ah! I'm a giddy young thing. Nothing can stop me!' and she stepped forward, laughing affectedly, and trying to look arch.

'I cannot permit this. It might do serious harm,' said Theodora, obliged to stand in her path, and to put on such a look of haughty command, that she was positively subdued and frightened, and went back to her seat in a meek state of silence, whence she only recovered to overwhelm poor Johnnie with her attentions. He cried and was sent away, and Mrs. Moss was obliged to be satisfied with the baby, though she looked as dignified and as little to be taken liberties with as any Martindale of them all.

They lingered on, hoping to weary out Miss Martindale's patience, or that some chance might reveal their presence to Violet; but in vain; Theodora's politeness was

exemplary, and she endured Mrs. Albert Moss's familiarity so well, that when at length they departed, the last words were a parting whisper, 'Good morning, Miss Martindale. If we had known what we interrupted—but ah! I have gone through those things so lately, that I know how to feel for you, and can keep your secret.'

'There is no subject of secrecy that I know of,' said Theodora, more coldly than ever.

Hateful woman! Poor Violet! There, now, it will be all over the country that I am engaged to him! I must take him now, or I hope he will give it up on discovering my connections! Then I can despise him. Foolish man! why could he not say what he wanted? I should have got rid of him then; I was in the mood! However, he is out of the way for the present. Now to make the best of it with Violet.

Violet was grieved, both for her own sake and the vexation at home, but she so sweetly acquiesced in its having been right, and was so sure that her sister meant nothing but kindness, that Theodora, knowing that she herself could not have submitted with anything like patience, admired and loved her more than ever.

The gentleness and quietness of her demeanour were a refreshment to Theodora's tossed and undecided mind; and in administering to her comfort and pleasure, the anxieties and remorse subsided into a calm like her own. How delightful was the day of her introduction to Johnnie's portrait; her admiration, and tearful gratitude to the kind deviser of the gift, were the greatest pleasure Theodora had known for months; the discussion of every feature, the comparison of Johnnie with it, the history of the difficulties, and of his papa's assistance, seemed a never-ending treat to both giver and receiver. The poem, too; it was very amusing to see how she could hardly believe that original verses could possibly be written on her boy, and then when set to guess whose they were, she began with a hesitating 'Miss Marstone is the only person near who makes verses, and these are too pretty to be hers.'

'Ah! if you would follow Emma's advice, and call the baby Osyth, after the first

Prioress, you might have a chance from that quarter.'

It could not be Mr. Fotheringham, the only poet she could think of, and she could only beg to be told.

'There is one whom a Wrangerton woman should not forget.'

'Lord St. Erme! You ARE laughing at me, Theodora. He never even saw Johnnie!'

Theodora explained the two meetings, anxious to see her way of thinking. 'It is a wonderful thing!' was her first remark. 'Who would have told me how it would be three years ago? They are very pretty.'

'I do not think you like them the better for being his,' said Theodora.

'I ought,' said Violet; 'no other great man ever seems to me so grand as our own Earl.'

'I want your real feeling.'

'You know,' said Violet, smiling, 'I cannot think them done only for Johnnie's sake—'

'And, therefore, they do not please you.'

'Not exactly that; but—if you don't mind my saying so, I feel as if I had rather—it might be better—I don't want to be ungrateful, but if you were getting into a scrape for the sake of pleasing me, I should be sorry. Forgive me, Theodora, you made me say so.'

'You are consideration itself,' said Theodora, affectionately. 'Never mind, he is out of the way. We will let him go off poetizing to Germany; and under your wing at home, I will get into no more mischief.'

That was a pleasant prospect, and Violet reposed on the thought of the enjoyment of Martindale without its formidable inhabitants; trying in it to forget the pain of parting with her husband for a month, and her longings to spend it at her own home, and see Johnnie strengthened by Helvellyn breezes; while to Theodora it seemed

like the opening into peace and goodness.

One forenoon, Violet, on coming down-stairs, found her sister writing extremely fast, and seeing an envelope on the table in Lord Martindale's writing, asked if it was his answer to Theodora's plan.

'Yes.'

'Ah!' said Violet, perceiving something was amiss, 'they have spared you to me a long time already.'

'Don't be uneasy,' said Theodora; 'I'll settle it.'

'But,' exclaimed Violet, 'I could not bear that you should be with me if they want you.'

'That is not it; papa has something in his head; I will settle it.'

Violet knew what was indicated by the over-erectness of Theodora's head. To be the cause of family discussion was frightful, but she had a nervous dread of thwarting Theodora.

'I wish you would not look at me,' exclaimed Theodora.

'I beg your pardon,' sighed she.

'What's the use of that when I know you are not satisfied, and do not trust me?'

'Don't be angry with me,' implored Violet, with a quivering voice, and tears of weakness in her eyes. 'I cannot help it. I do not want to interfere, but as it is for me, I must beg you to tell me you are not pressing to stay with me when Lady Martindale wishes for you.'

'No one ever wants me. No, but papa thinks that you and I cannot be trusted together. He says he cannot leave me with one who has so little authority.'

That indignant voice contrasted with the gentle answer, 'I do not wonder; I have always thought if I had been older and better able to manage—'

'No such thing!' exclaimed Theodora; 'you are the only person who ever exercised

any control over me.’

‘O, hush! you do not know what you are saying.’

‘It is the truth, and you know it. When you choose, every one yields to you, and so do I.’

‘Indeed, I did not know it,’ said Violet, much distressed. ‘I am very sorry if I am overbearing; I did not think I was.’

Theodora fairly laughed at such a word being applied to the mild, yielding creature, who looked so pale and feeble. ‘Very domineering, indeed!’ she said. ‘No, no, my dear, it is only that you are always right. When you disapprove, I cannot bear to hurt and grieve you, because you take it so quietly.’

‘You are so very kind to me.’

‘So, if papa wishes me to come to good, he had better leave me to you.’

‘I don’t think that ought to be,’ said Violet, feebly.

‘What, not that you should be my only chance—that you should calm me and guide me when every one else has failed—’

‘Theodora, dear, I do not think I ought to like to hear you say so. It cannot be safe for you to submit to me rather than to your father.’

‘He never had any moral power over me. He never convinced me, nor led me to yield my will,’ said Theodora, proud perhaps of her voluntary submission to her gentle sister-in-law, and magnifying its extent; but Violet was too right-minded, in her simplicity, to be flattered by an allegiance she knew to be misplaced.

‘I should not like baby to say so by and by,’ she whispered.

‘There’s an esprit de corps in parents,’ cried Theodora, half angrily; ‘but Helen will never be like me. She will not be left to grow up uncared for and unloved till one-and-twenty, and then, when old enough for independence, be for the first time coerced and reproached. If people never concern themselves about their children,

they need not expect the same from them as if they had brought them up properly.’

‘That is a sad thought,’ pensively said the young mother.

‘I declare you shall hear the letter, that you may own that it is unreasonable—unbearable!’ And she read—

‘“I have been considering your request to spend the time of our absence at home with Mrs. Martindale, but I cannot think fit to comply with it. Arthur’s income is fully sufficient to provide change of air for his family; and he ought not to expect always to leave his wife on other people’s hands, while he is pursuing his own diversions.”’

Theodora was glad to see that this did rouse Violet’s indignation.

‘Oh! he does not know. Do tell him it was all your kindness! Tell him that Arthur is not going for long. He must not think such things.’

‘He thinks much more injustice,’ said Theodora. ‘Listen:—“After so long an absence, it is high time you should rejoin us; and, considering what has occurred, you cannot be surprised that I should be unwilling to leave you with one so young and of so little authority over you. Though I acquit her of all blame for your indiscretions—” (There, Violet, I hope you are much obliged to him!) “I should not have consented to your remaining with her up to the present time, if it had not been a case of urgent necessity, as I wish to have you under my own eye.” (As if he had ever made any use of it?) “You might as well be alone here as with her; and, after your late conduct, I cannot put the confidence in your prudence that I should desire. Violet has, I have no doubt, acted amiably; and her youth, inexperience, and gentleness fully excuse her in my eyes for having been unable to restrain you; but they are reasons sufficient to decide me on not leaving you with her at present. We shall be in London on Monday, the 11th, and I wish you to be in readiness to join us when we embark for Ostend on the following evening. Give my kind love to Violet, and tell her I am glad she is going on well, and that I am much pleased with my

grand-daughter's intended name." There, Violet, what do you think of that?'

'Pray make him understand that Arthur wanted a change very much, and will not be long gone.'

'Arthur! You cannot feel for any one else!'

'I did not mean to be selfish!' said Violet, sorry for having seemed to be wanting in sympathy.

'No, indeed! You never think what would become of you left alone, with two babies that cannot walk!'

'Never mind me, I shall manage very well, I don't like to have a disturbance made on my account. I cannot think how you can hesitate after such a letter as this.'

'That is the very thing. He would never have dared to say these things to my face! Now let me tell you. I know I have been much to blame; you made me feel it. You are taming me; and if he leaves me to you I may be more dutiful when he comes back. But if he strains his new notion of authority too far, and if you throw me off, I shall be driven to do what will grieve and disappoint you.'

'But surely,' said Violet, 'it cannot be the right beginning of being dutiful to resist the first thing that is asked of you.'

'You wish me to go to be fretted and angered! to be without one employment to drown painful thoughts, galled by attempts at controlling me; my mind poisoned by my aunt, chilled by my mother—to be given up to my worse nature, without perhaps even a church to go to!'

'It is very hard,' said Violet; 'but if we are to submit, it cannot be only when we see fit. Would it not be better to make a beginning that costs you something?'

'And lose my hope of peaceful guidance!'

'I do believe,' said Violet, 'that if you go patiently, because it is your duty, that you will be putting yourself under the true guidance; but for you to extort permission to

stay with me, when your father disapproves, would be only following your own way. I should be afraid. I will not undertake it, for it would not be right, and mischief would be sure to ensue.'

'Then you give me up?'

'Give you up! dear, dear sister;' and Violet rose and threw her arms round Theodora. 'No, indeed! When I am so glad that I may love you as I always wished! I shall think of you, and write to you, and pray for you,' whispered she. 'All I can I will do for you, but you must not say any more of staying with me now. I can help you better in my right place than out of it.'

Theodora returned the caress and quitted the room, leaving Violet to her regrets and fears. It was a great sacrifice of herself, and still worse, of her poor little pale boy, and she dreaded that it might be the ruin of the beneficial influence which, to her amazement, she found ascribed to her, in the most unexpected quarter. It had gone to her heart to refuse Theodora's kindness, and all that was left for her was to try to still her fluttering, agitated spirits by the consciousness that she had striven to do right, and by the prayer that all might work for good.

Indeed, it was very remarkable how, in this critical period of Theodora's life, when repentance was engaged in so severe a conflict with her long-nourished pride and passion, in all the tossings of her mind she had, as it were, anchored herself to her docile, gentle sister-in-law, treating her like a sort of embodiment of her better mind. Violet's serenity and lowliness seemed to breathe peace on a storm-tossed ocean; and her want of self-assertion to make Theodora proud of submitting to her slightest wish without a struggle. Those vehement affections were winding themselves about her and her children; and the temper that had flown into fierce insubordination at the first control from lawful authority, laid itself at the feet of one whose power was in meekness. It was the lion curbed by the maiden; but because the subjection was merely a caprice, it was no conquest of self-will.

CHAPTER 21

But when the self-abhorring thrill Is past, as pass it must, When tasks of life thy spirit fill Risen from thy tears and dust, Then be the self-renouncing will The seal of thy calm trust. —Lyra Apostolica

Arthur quitted London the day after his little girl's christening, talking of being absent only a fortnight, before taking his wife to Windsor; and promising to return at once, if she should find herself in the least unwell or dispirited. She was delighted to be well enough not to spoil his sport, and Theodora was too anxious to have him at a distance from Mr. Gardner to venture on any remonstrance.

It was the day the family were to come to London, and he left orders with the ladies to say 'all that was proper', but the twelfth of August was to him an unanswerable reason for immediate departure.

Theodora and Violet went to receive the party in the house in Belgrave Square, both silent, yet conscious of each other's feelings. Theodora paced the room, while Violet leant back in a great blue damask chair, overcome by the beatings of her heart; and yet, when the carriage arrived, it was she who spoke the word of encouragement: 'Your father is so kind, I know he forgives us!'

Theodora knew Violet thought her own weakness and inefficiency needed pardon, and therefore could bear the saying, and allow it to turn her defiant shame into humility.

Mrs. Nesbit came in, supported between Lord and Lady Martindale, and as Theodora hastened to wheel round the large arm-chair, and settle the cushions for her, her eye glanced in keen inquiry from one niece to the other, and they felt that she was exulting in the fulfilment of her prediction.

Lord Martindale kissed his daughter with grave formality; and, as if to mark the difference, threw much warm affection into his greeting of Violet, and held her hand

for some moments, while he asked solicitously if she were well and strong, and inquired for her little ones.

She made Arthur's excuses and explanations, but broke off, blushing and disconcerted, by that harsh, dry cough of Mrs. Nesbit's, and still more, by seeing Lord Martindale look concerned. She began, with nervous eagerness and agitation, to explain that it was an old engagement, he would not be away long, and then would take her out of town—she was hardly yet ready for a journey. From him she obtained kind smiles, and almost fatherly tenderness; from Lady Martindale the usual ceremonious civility. They asked her to dinner, but she was not equal to this; they then offered to send her home in the carriage, and when she refused, Lord Martindale said he would walk back with her, while Theodora remained with her mother.

He was much displeased with his son for leaving her, especially when he saw how delicate and weak she still looked; and he was much annoyed at being unable to prevent it, without giving Arthur a premium for selfishness; so that all he could do was to treat her with a sort of compassionate affection, increased at each of her unselfish sayings.

'My dear,' he said, 'I wish to have a little conversation with you, when it suits you. I am anxious to hear your account of this unfortunate affair.'

'Very well;' but he felt her arm tremble.

'You must not alarm yourself. You are the last person deserving of blame. I am only sorry that you should have had so much to harass you.'

'O, Theodora has been so very kind to me.'

'I rejoice to hear it; but tell me, will this evening or to-morrow morning suit you best?'

'Thank you, to-morrow, if you please,' said Violet, glad to defer the evil day.

At that moment she was astonished by the sudden apparition of Lord St. Erme, and still more by his shaking hands with her. She thanked him for his touches to her little boy's portrait; he smiled, rejoiced that she did not think he had spoilt it, and remarked upon the likeness. Lord Martindale, who knew him but slightly, listened in surprise; and having now come to her own door, she bade them farewell, and entered the house.

Theodora came back much later than Violet had expected, with a flush on her cheek, and hurry and uncertainty in her manner. She had previously made a great point of their spending this last evening alone together, but her mood was silent. She declared herself bent on finishing the volume of Miss Strickland's "Queens", which they were reading together, and went on with it till bed-time without intermission, then wished Violet good night without another word.

But Violet was no sooner in bed than Theodora came in, in her dressing-gown, and sat down at her feet, looking at her, but hardly answering the few words she ventured to speak. It was not till the clock struck twelve that she rose from her seat.

'Well, I must go; but I don't know how to tear myself from the sight of you. I feel as if I was driven from the only place where I ever might be good.'

'No,' whispered Violet; 'wherever our duty lies, we can be good.'

'I could, if you were with me, to calm me, and tell me such things.'

'You do not want me to tell you them. You have the Bible and Prayer Book.'

'I never saw the right way to follow them; till now, when it was gleaming on me, I have to go away.'

'The same grace that has shown you your way so far, dearest, will go on to show you further, if you follow it on, even though the way be hard!'

'The grace may be with you—it is!' said Theodora, in a heavy, hopeless manner; 'but oh! Violet, think how long I have been driving it away!'

Violet sat up, took her hand, pressed it between both hers, and with tears exclaimed: ‘You must not speak so. If you had not that grace, should you be sorry now?’

‘I don’t know. I can hope and see my way to peace when you look at me, or speak to me; but why should I be forced into the desert of my own heart, to loneliness and temptation?’

‘If you are really resting on me, instead of on the only true help, perhaps it is better you should be left to it. Theodora, dearest, may I tell you something about myself? When first I saw my difficulties, and could not get at mamma, I felt as if there was no one to help me, but somehow it grew up. I saw how to find out guidance and comfort in the Bible and in such things, and ever since I have been so much happier.’

‘How did you find it out?’

‘John helped me; but I think it comes without teaching from without, and there is my hope for you, Theodora.’

‘Them that are meek shall He guide in judgment, and such as are gentle, them shall He learn His way,’ murmured Theodora, hanging over her, with tears fast dropping.

‘He shows Himself to those who will follow Him, and yield their own will,’ said Violet.

‘Good night! Oh! what shall I do when I have not you to send me to bed comforted? I had more to say to you, but you have smoothed it all, and I cannot ruffle it up again.’

A night of broken sleep, and perplexed waking thoughts, was a bad preparation for the morning’s conference. Lord Martindale came to breakfast, and, as before, reserved all his kindness for Violet and the children. Theodora disappeared when the little ones were carried away, and he began the conversation by saying to Violet, ‘I am afraid you have had a great deal of trouble and vexation.’

She replied by warm assurances of Theodora's kindness; whence he led her to tell the history of the rupture, which she did very mournfully, trying to excuse Theodora, but forbidden, by justice to Percival; and finding some relief in taking blame to herself for not having remonstrated against that unfortunate expedition to the races.

'No, my dear, it was no fault of yours. It was not from one thing more than another. It was owing to unhappy, unbroken temper. Take care of your children, my dear, and teach them submission in time.' Then presently resuming: 'Is it your idea that she had any attachment to poor Fotheringham?'

'Much more than she knew at the time,' said Violet.

'Ha! Then you do not think she has given encouragement to that absurd-looking person, Lord St. Erme?'

'Lord St. Erme!' cried Violet, startled.

'Yes; when I parted with you yesterday, he walked back with me, and proceeded to declare that he had been long attached to her, and to ask my sanction to his following us to Germany to pay his addresses.'

'Surely he has not spoken to her?'

'No; he said something about not presuming, and of having been interrupted. I could only tell him that it must rest with herself. There is no objection to the young man, as far as I know, though he is an idle, loitering sort of fellow, not what I should have thought to her taste.'

'I do not believe she likes him,' said Violet.

'You do not? I cannot make out. I told her that she was at liberty to do as she pleased; I only warned her neither to trifle with him, nor to rush into an engagement without deliberation, but I could get nothing like an answer. She was in one of her perverse fits, and I have no notion whether she means to accept him or not.'

'I do not think she will.'

‘I cannot say. No one knows, without a trial, what the notion of a coronet will do with a girl. After all her pretensions she may be the more liable to the temptation. I have not told her aunt, that she may be the more unbiassed. Not that I say anything against him, it is everything desirable in the way of connection, and probably he is an amiable good sort of man. What do you know of him! Are you intimate with him?’

Violet explained the extent of their acquaintance. ‘I do not see my way through it,’ said Lord Martindale. ‘I wish I could be clear that it is not all coquetry. I wish John was at home.’

‘I do not think,’ said Violet, gathering courage—‘I do not think you know how much Theodora wishes to be good.’

‘I wish she was half as good as you are, my dear!’ said Lord Martindale, as if he had been speaking to a child. And he talked to her warmly of her own concerns, and hopes of her visiting Martindale on their return; trying to divest himself of a sense of inhospitality and harshness, which grew on him whenever he looked at her slender figure, and the varying carnation of her thin cheek.

She felt herself obliged to set forth to call on Lady Martindale. Theodora was busy, packing up, and could not accompany her; unfortunately for her, since Mrs. Nesbit took the opportunity of examining her on the same subject, though far from doing it in the same manner; commenting with short sarcastic laughs, censuring Mr. Fotheringham for trying to domineer, but finding much amusement in making out the grounds of his objection to Mrs. Finch, and taking pleasure in bringing, by her inquiries, a glow of confusion and distress on Violet’s cheeks. Next she began to blame her for having visited such an imprudent person; and when Lady Martindale ventured to suggest something about her not knowing, and Mrs. Finch having formerly been a friend of the family, she put her down. ‘Yes, my dear, we are not blaming Mrs. Arthur Martindale. We know it is not possible for every one to be

fastidious. The misfortune was in Miss Martindale's being brought into society which could not be expected to be select.'

Violet did not think herself called upon to stay to be insulted, and rose to take leave, but did not escape without further taunts. 'So you are to be in London alone for the next month?'

'Perhaps only for a fortnight!'

'I can promise you that it will be a month. Young men are not apt to spend more time at home than they can help. I am sorry to interfere with your scheme of being installed at Martindale, but it is out of the question. Theodora's absence has been much felt by the curate, and our past experience has prepared us for anything. I hope you will take care of yourself.'

Mrs. Nesbit, as she lost her power of self-command and her cleverness, without parting with her bitterness of spirit, had pitiably grown worse and worse, so that where she would once have been courteously sarcastic, she was now positively insolent.

It was too much for Lady Martindale, who, as she saw Violet colour deeply, and tremble as she left the room, followed her to the head of the stairs, and spoke kindly. 'You must not imagine, my dear, that either my aunt, or any of us, find fault with you. We all know that you are inexperienced, and that it is not easy to cope with Theodora's eccentricity of character.'

Violet, still very weak, could have been hysterical, but luckily was able to command herself, though, 'thank you!' was all she could say.

'Of course, though such things are unfortunate, we cannot regret the match; Lord Martindale and I are quite convinced that you acted amiably by all parties. Good-bye, my dear; I am sorry I have not time to call and see the children.'

'Shall I send them to you when they wake?' said Violet, pleased that they were at length mentioned.

‘Thank you, my dear,’ said Lady Martindale, as if much tempted. ‘I am afraid not, it might be too much for my aunt. And yet, I should have liked to see the little girl.’

‘She is such a beauty,’ said Violet, much brightened. ‘So exactly like her papa.’

‘I should like to see her! You have your carriage here, of course!’

‘No; I walked.’

‘Walked, my dear!’ said Lady Martindale, dismayed.

Violet explained how short the distance was; but Lady Martindale seemed not to know how to let her go, nor how to relinquish the thought of seeing her grand-daughter. At last she said, as if it was a great resolution, lowering her voice, ‘I wonder if I could walk back with you, just to see her.’

She took Violet into her room while she put on her bonnet, much as if she feared being found out; and in passing the drawing-room door, gathered her dress together so as to repress its rustling.

Wonder of wonders, to find Lady Martindale actually on foot by her side! She went up at once to the nursery, where the children were asleep. At Johnnie she looked little, but she hung over the cot where lay the round plump baby face of little Helen. Though dreadfully afraid of being missed, she seemed unable to turn away from the contemplation.

‘My dear,’ said she, in an agitated voice, as they left the nursery, ‘you must not keep these children here in London. You must not sacrifice their health. It is the first consideration. Don’t let them stay in that hot nursery! Pray do not.’

‘We shall be in the country soon,’ said Violet.

‘Why not at once? Does expense prevent you? Tell me, my dear, what it would cost. I always have plenty to spare. Would £100 do it? and you need tell no one. I could give you £200,’ said Lady Martindale, who had as little idea of the value of money as any lady in her Majesty’s dominions. ‘I must have that dear little girl in the

country. Pray take her to Ventnor. How much shall I give you?'

Much surprised, and more touched, Violet, however, could not accept the offer. She felt that it would be casting a slight on Arthur; and she assured Lady Martindale that she hoped soon to leave London, and how impossible it was for her to move house without Arthur. It seemed to be a great disappointment, and opened to Violet a fresh insight into Lady Martindale's nature; that there was a warm current beneath, only stifled by Mrs. Nesbit's power over a docile character. There seemed to be hopes that they might love each other at last! In the midst there was a knock at the door, and Lord Martindale entered, much surprised, as well as pleased, to find his wife there, though put in some perplexity by her instantly appealing to him to tell Violet that it was very bad for the children to remain in town, and asking if it could not be managed to send them to the sea-side. He made a grave but kind reply, that he was sorry for it himself, but that Violet had assured him it would not be for long; and Lady Martindale (who did not seem able to understand why the lady of the house could not make everything give way to her convenience)—now becoming alive to the fear of her aunt's missing her, and taking to heart her stolen expedition—hurried him off with her at once. It was not till after their departure that Violet discovered that he had been trying to atone for deficiencies, by costly gifts to herself and her children.

All this time Theodora had been in her own room, packing, as she said, but proceeding slowly; for there was a severe struggle of feelings, and she could not bear that it should be seen. In the pain of parting with Violet, she shrank from her presence, as if she could not endure to prolong the space for last words.

They came at last. Theodora sat ready for her journey, holding her god-daughter in her arms, and looking from her to Violet, without a word; then gazing round the room, which had been the scene of such changes of her whole mind.

At last she spoke, and it was very different from what Violet expected,

‘Violet, I will try to endure it; but if I cannot—if you hear of me as doing what you will disapprove, will you refrain from giving me up, and at least be sorry for me?’

After what Lord Martindale had said, Violet could guess at her meaning. ‘Certainly, dear Theodora. You would not do it if it was wrong?’

‘You know what I mean?’

‘I think I do.’

‘And you are not infinitely shocked?’

‘No; for you would not do it unless you could rightly.’

‘How do you mean?’

‘Not if there was—anything remaining—of the former—’

‘You are a good little thing, Violet,’ said Theodora, trying to laugh; ‘nearly as simple as your daughter. You will save her a great deal of trouble, if you tame her while she is young.’

Then came a pause, lasting till Theodora thought she heard the carriage.

‘You will forgive me if I accept him?’

‘I shall know it is all right. I trust you, dear sister.’

‘Tell me something to help me!’

Violet drew out Helen’s cross. ‘Be patient, be patient,’ she said. ‘The worse things are, the more of the cross to be borne.’

Theodora held out her hand for it. ‘I hope I am mending,’ said she, as she gave it back with a melancholy smile. ‘It does not give me the bad jealous thoughts I had when first I knew you possessed it. Tell me something to make me patient.’

‘May I tell you what came into my head after you were talking last night of not seeing your way, and wanting to be led. I thought of a verse in Isaiah.’ Violet found the place and showed it.

‘Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord and stay upon his God.’

‘Thank you, Violet,’ said Theodora, looking on to the next verse. ‘I will try to be patient; I will try not to kindle a fire for myself. But if they tease me much, if I am very weary—’

The summons cut her short—Lord Martindale ran up to hasten her; a fervent embrace—she was gone!

And Violet, with worn-out strength and spirits, remained to find how desolate she was—left behind in dreary summer London. There was nothing for it but to be as foolish as in old times, to lie down on the sofa and cry herself to sleep. She was a poor creature, after all, and awoke to weariness and headache, but to no repining; for she had attained to a spirit of thankfulness and content. She lay dreamily, figuring to herself Arthur enjoying himself on the moors and mountains, till Helvellyn’s own purple cap came to brighten her dreams.

CHAPTER 22

Sigh no more, lady, lady, sigh no more, Men were deceivers ever, One foot on shore and one on land, To one thing constant never. —Percy’s Reliques

‘So, you say Miss Martindale has left town?’

‘Yes; Violet writes me that the family passed through London, and took her to the continent on Tuesday.’

‘Then let Annette know she is to be ready to come with me to town on Monday. We shall see if it is the young lady’s doing, or whether Mrs. Martindale intends to give herself airs with her father and sister.’

‘Poor dear,’ sighed the good care-worn mother, ‘I do long to hear of her; but may I

not write first? I should not like to get the dear child into trouble.’

‘On no account write, or we shall have some excuse about pre-engagements. I shall take Annette at once, and see with my own eyes. Martindale can never have the face to hinder her from asking her own sister to stay in the house, when once she is there.’

‘I hope he is kind to her!’ said Mrs. Moss. ‘I long to hear whether she is quite recovered; and she says so little of herself. She will be glad to see her sister, and yet, one does not like to seem pushing.’

‘Never you mind,’ said the acute, sharp-faced attorney, putting her aside as if she was presuming beyond her sphere; ‘only you get Annette ready. Since we found such a match for Violet, she is bound to help off her sisters; and as to Annette, a jaunt is just what is wanting to drive that black coat out of her head. I wish he had never come near the place. The girl might have had the Irish captain, if she had not been running after him and his school. Tell her to be ready on Monday.’

Meek Mrs. Moss never dared to question her husband’s decision; and she had suffered too much anxiety on her daughter’s account, not to rejoice in the prospect of a trustworthy report, for Violet’s letters were chiefly descriptions of her children.

There was much soreness in the Moss family respecting Violet, and two opinions with regard to her; some inclining to believe her a fine lady, willing to discard her kindred; others thinking her not a free agent, but tyrannized over by Miss Martindale, and neglected by her husband. So Annette, who had pined and drooped under the loss of the twin-like companionship of her sister, was sent out as on an adventure, in much trepidation and mysterious dread of Captain Martindale, by no means consistent with the easy good nature of his days of courtship. And thus her first letter was written and received with such feelings as attend that of an explorer of a new country.

‘Cadogan-place, August 19th.

‘Well, dearest mamma, I am writing from Violet’s house. Yes, she is her own sweet self, our precious flower still—nobody must think anything else—she is not changed one bit, except that she is terribly pale and thin; but she calls herself quite well, and says that if I had seen her when Johnny was five weeks old, I should give her credit now. But Matilda will say I cannot write a comprehensible letter, so I will begin regularly.

‘We slept at Uncle Christopher’s, and after an early breakfast walked here. The man did not think his mistress could see any one, but when he heard who we were, showed us to the drawing-room, and there was Violet, quite alone, breakfasting by herself, for he is gone to Scotland! Poor dear girl! When she saw us, she gave a little scream, and flew up to me, clinging round my neck, and sobbing as she did on her wedding-day; it was as if the two years were nothing. However, in a moment, she composed herself, and said it was silly, but there was still a sob in her throat, and she was shy and constrained as she used to be with papa, in old times. She says she would not tell us Captain Martindale was going to Scotland, because of not tantalizing us with his passing so near, but I fear it is that she will not confess how often she is left alone. I am so glad we are come, now he is out of the way. She has asked us to stay while papa has to be in London, and I shall, but papa finds it more convenient to sleep at Uncle Christopher’s. If we are not here oftener, I am sure it is no fault of hers; and her husband cannot be displeased with this little visit—at least he ought not. She sent for the children; the babe was asleep, but Johnnie came, and oh! how curious it seemed to hear the voice calling her mamma, and see the little creature holding out his arms to go to her. I felt, indeed, how long we have been apart—it was our own Violet, and yet some one else. You would have been amused to see how altered she was by having her son in her arms; how the little morsel seemed to give her confidence, and the shy stiffness went away, and she looked so proud and fond, and smiled and spoke with ease. There was the dear little fair fellow standing on her lap, leaning against her shoulder, with his arm round her neck,

hiding his face when I looked at him too much. She said he was puzzled not to see the aunt he knew, and how I grudged his knowing any aunt better than me! They do look lovely together, and so much alike; but I could cry to see them both so white and wan; not a shade of her pretty colour on her cheek, and the little darling so very tiny and weak, though he is as clever as possible, and understands all you say to him. If I had but got them both in our fresh north countree!

‘Papa could not stay, and as soon as he was gone, she set her boy down on the sofa, and threw her arms round my neck, and we were like wild things—we kissed, and screamed, and laughed, and cried, till poor Johnnie was quite frightened. “Now, Annette, come and see,” said Violet, and took me up-stairs to the nursery, and there half-waking, under the archway of her cradle, lay, like a little queen, that beautiful creature, Helen, opening her black eyes just as we came up, and moving her round arms. How I longed for mamma to see her, and to see Violet’s perfect look of happiness as she lifted her out and said, “Now, is not she worth seeing?” and then Sarah came up. Violet says Sarah threatened to go away, when there were two to be always racketing, but when it came to the point, could not leave Johnnie, whom she keeps in great order, and treats with much ceremony, always calling him Master John. She believes Sarah disapproves of poor Helen altogether, as an intruder upon Johnnie’s comfort; and she is quite savage at admiration of her, as if it was a slight on him; but she has turned out an admirable nurse, in her own queer way. Such a morning as we have had, chattering so fast! all about you all. I am sure she loves us as much as ever, and I do not believe she is unhappy. She talks of her husband as if they were happy, and he has given her such quantities of pretty things, and I hear of so much that seems as if she was on comfortable terms with them all. I am satisfied about her, pray be so too, dear mamma.

‘I am writing while waiting for her to drive to fetch my things from Uncle Christopher’s—She tells me to finish without minding her visitor—I was interrupted by Sarah’s bringing Johnnie down, and he was very good with me, but presently a

gentleman was announced, without my catching his name. I feared Johnnie would cry, but he sprang with delight, and the stranger saying, “Ha! master, you recollect me?” took him in his arms. I said my sister would come directly, and he gave a good-natured nod, and muttered half to himself, “Oh! another of the genus Viola. I am glad of it.” I cannot make him out; he must be a relation, or one of the other officers. Violet did not know he was there, and came in with the baby in her arms; he stepped towards her, saying, “So you have set up another! Man or woman?” and then asked if she was another flower. Violet coloured, as she spoke low, and said, “Her name is Helen.” I must ask Violet the meaning, for he looked gravely pleased, and answered gratefully, “That is very good of you.” “I hope she will deserve it,” Violet said, and was introducing me, but he said Johnnie had done him that honour. He has been talking of Captain Martindale (calling him Arthur), and telling curious things he has seen in Ireland. He is very amusing, bluff, and odd, but as if he was a distinguished person. Now I see that Violet is altered, and grown older—he seems to have such respect for, and confidence in her; and she so womanly and self-possessed, entering into his clever talk as Matilda would, yet in the simple way she always had. You would be proud to see her now—her manners must be perfection, I should think; so graceful and dignified, so engaging and quiet. I wish Louisa had seen her. What are they talking of now?

‘Violet.—How did you find Pallas Athene?

‘Unknown.—Alas, poor Pallas! With the judgment of the cockney who buttered his horse’s hay, the ragged boy skinned her mice and plucked her sparrows in my absence. The consequence was her untimely end. I was met by my landlady with many a melancholy “Ah, sir!” and actually the good creature had had her stuffed.

‘Violet.—Poor Pallas! then the poor boy has lost his employment?

‘Unknown.—Happily, his honesty and his grief so worked upon my landlady, that she has taken him as an errand boy. So that, in fact, Minerva may be considered to

have been the making of his fortune.

‘I leave this for a riddle for the sisters. I am longing to ask Violet who this gentleman is who seems to know all the negroes so well.’ (Scratched out.) ‘What nonsense I have written! I was listening to some letters they were reading from the Mr. Martindale in the West Indies. Violet tells me to finish with her dearest love.

‘Your most affectionate,

‘A. Moss.

‘P.S.—He will come to-morrow to take us to a private view of the Royal Academy, before the pictures are removed.’

The same post carried a letter from Violet to her husband, communicating the arrival of her guests, and telling him she knew that he could not wish her not to have Annette with her for these few days, and that it did make her very happy.

Having done this, she dismissed doubts, and, with a clear conscience, gave herself up to the enjoyment of her sister’s visit, each minute of which seemed of diamond worth. Perhaps the delights were the more intense from compression; but it was a precious reprieve when Arthur’s answer came, rejoicing at Violet’s having a companion, and hoping that she would keep her till his return, which he should not scruple to defer, since she was so well provided for. He had just been deliberating whether he could accept an invitation to the Highlands.

If the wife was less charmed than her sister, she knew that, under any circumstances, she would have had to consent, after the compliment had been paid of asking whether she could spare him; and it was compensation enough that he should have voluntarily extended her sister’s visit.

Annette, formerly the leader of her younger sister, was often pleasantly surprised to find her little Violet become like her elder, and that not only from situation, but in mind. With face and figure resembling Violet’s, but of a less uncommon order, without the beauteous complexion and the natural grace, now enhanced by living in

the best society, Annette was a very nice-looking, lady-like girl, of the same refined tone of mind and manners; and having had a longer space of young ladyhood, she had more cultivation in accomplishments and book knowledge, her good taste saving her from being spoilt, even by her acquiescence in Matilda's superiority. She saw, however, that Violet had more practical reflection, and though in many points simple and youthful, was more of a woman than herself; and it was with that sweet, innocent feeling, which ought not to bear the same name as pride, that she exulted in the superiority of her beloved sister. Selfish jealousies or petty vanities were far from her; it was like a romance to hear Violet describe the splendours of Martindale, or the gaieties of London; and laugh over the confession of the little perplexities as to proprieties, and the mistakes and surprises, which she trusted she had not betrayed.

Still Violet missed the power of fully reciprocating her sister's confidence. Annette laid open every home interest and thought, but Violet had no right to disclose the subjects that had of late engrossed her, and at every turn found a separation, something on which she must not be communicative.

The view of the Exhibition was happily performed under Mr. Fotheringham's escort. Annette, thanks to Lord St. Erme's gallery, had good taste in pictures; she drew well, and understood art better than her sister, who rejoiced in bringing out her knowledge, and hearing her converse with Percy. They had the rooms to themselves, and Annette was anxious to carry away the outline of one or two noted pictures. While she was sketching, Percy wandered to another part of the room, and stood fixedly before a picture. Violet came to see what he was looking at. It was a fine one by Landseer of a tiger submitting to the hand of the keeper, with cat-like complacency, but the glare of the eye and curl of the tail manifesting that its gentleness was temporary.

'It may be the grander animal,' muttered he; 'but less satisfactory for domestic

purposes.'

'What did you say?' asked Violet, thinking it addressed to her.

'That is a presumptuous man,' he said, pointing to the keeper. 'If he trusts in the creature's affection, some day he will find his mistake.'

He flung himself round, as if he had done with the subject, and his tone startled Violet, and showed her that more was meant than met the ear. She longed to tell him that the creature was taming itself, but she did not dare, and he went back to talk to Annette, till it ended in his promising to come to-morrow, to take them to the Ellesmere gallery.

'That's the right style of woman,' soliloquized Percy, as he saw the carriage drive off. 'Gentleness, meekness, and a dash of good sense, is the recipe for a rational female—otherwise she is a blunder of nature. The same stamp as her sister, I see; nothing wanting, but air and the beauty, which, luckily for Arthur, served for his bait.'

When he came, according to appointment, Annette was in the drawing-room, unable to desist from touching and retouching her copy of her nephew's likeness, though Violet had long ago warned her to put it away, and to follow her up to dress.

He carried the portrait to the light. 'M. Piper,' he read. 'That little woman! That mouth is in better drawing than I could have thought her guilty of.'

'Oh! those are Lord St. Erme's touches,' said unconscious Annette. 'He met Miss Martindale taking it to be framed, and he improved it wonderfully. He certainly understood the little face, for he even wrote verses on it.'

Here Violet entered, and Annette had to hurry away for her bonnet. Percy stood looking at the drawing.

'So, Johnnie has a new admirer,' he said. Violet was sorry that he should hear of this; but she laughed, and tried to make light of it.

‘I hear he is in Germany.’

‘Yes; with his sister and their aunt.’

‘Well,’ said Percy, ‘it may do. There will be no collision of will, and while there is one to submit, there is peace. A tigress can be generous to a puppy dog.’

‘But, indeed, I do not think it likely.’

‘If she is torturing him, that is worse.’

Violet raised her eyes pleadingly, and said, in a low, mournful tone: ‘I do not like to hear you speak so bitterly.’

‘No,’ he said, ‘it is not bitterness. That is over. I am thankful to have broken loose, and to be able to look back on it calmly, as a past delusion. Great qualities ill regulated are fearful things; and though I believe trials will in time teach her to bring her religious principle to bear on her faults, I see that it was an egregious error to think that she could be led.’

He spoke quietly, but Violet could not divest herself of the impression that there was more acute personal feeling than he was aware of. In the Ellesmere gallery, he led them to that little picture of Paul Potter’s, where the pollard willows stand up against the sunset sky, the evening sunshine gleaming on their trunks, upon the grass, and gilding the backs of the cows, while the placid old couple look on at the milking, the hooded lady shading her face with her fan.

‘There’s my notion of felicity,’ said he.

‘Rather a Dutch notion,’ said Violet.

‘Don’t despise the Dutch,’ said Percy. ‘Depend upon it, that respectable retired burgomaster and his vrow never had words, as we Brogden folk say.’

‘I think you would find that very stupid,’ said Violet.

‘Not I,’ said Percy. ‘When I want to pick a quarrel, I can get it abroad.’

‘When?’ said Annette, smiling.

‘Yes, I like to keep my teeth and claws sharpened,’ said Percy; but one wants repose at home. That burgomaster is my model.’

He continued to find sights for them, showing Violet more lions of London than had ever come in her way. One day, when a thunder-storm hindered their going to the Zoological Gardens, he stayed the whole afternoon reading to them. In the midst, Violet thought of last September’s storm; she looked up—an idea flashed upon her!

‘How delightful! How well they suit! I shall have my Annette close to me! They can marry at once! My father will be satisfied. How happy they will be! It will be the repose he wants. Dear Annette, what will she not be under his training!’ The joyous impulse was to keep him to dinner; but she had scruples about inviting him in Arthur’s absence, and therefore only threw double warmth into her farewells. Her spirits were up to nonsense pitch, and she talked and laughed all the evening with such merriment as Annette had hardly ever known in her.

But when she was alone, and looked her joy in the face, she was amazed to find how she had been forgetting Theodora, whose affairs had lately been uppermost. Annette might be worth a hundred Theodoras: but that did not alter right and justice.

If Theodora was accepting the Earl! Violet knew he was at Baden; he could not yet have been dismissed: and the sister-in-law had proved a disappointing correspondent, her nature being almost as averse to letter-writing as was Arthur’s. Let her marry him, and all would be well. The question, however, really lay between Percy and Annette themselves; and Violet thought he had made a wise discovery in preferring her gentle, yielding sister to the former lady of his choice. Matters might take their course; Arthur would be gratified by this testimony to her family’s perfections; John would rejoice in whatever was for his friend’s real happiness; to herself, in every way, it would be complete felicity.

Still she hesitated. She had heard of pique driving persons to make a fresh choice, when a former attachment appeared obliterated by indignation, only to revive too

late, and to be the misery of all parties. Percy's late words, harsh when he fancied them indifferent, made her doubtful whether it might not be so in his case. In his sound principle she had entire confidence, but he might be in error as to the actual state of his sentiments; and she knew that she should dread, for the peace of mind of all parties, his first meeting, as her sister's husband, with either Miss Martindale, or the Countess of St. Erme.

She decided that Annette ought to hear the whole, so as to act with her eyes open. If she had been engaged, she should never have heard what was past, but she should not encourage him while ignorant of the circumstances, and, these known, Violet had more reliance on her judgment than on her own. The breach of confidence being thus justified, Violet resolved, and as they sat together late in the evening, found an opportunity of beginning the subject. 'We used to expect a closer connection with him, or I should never have learnt to call him Percy—'

'You told me about poor Mr. Martindale.'

'Yes, but this was to have been a live connection. He was engaged to Theodora.'

Violet was satisfied that the responding interjection was more surprised and curious than disappointed. She related the main features of the story, much to Annette's indignation.

'Why, Violet, you speak as if you were fond of her!'

'That I am. If you knew how noble and how tender she can be! So generous when most offended! Oh! no one can know her without a sort of admiring love and pity.'

'I do not understand. To me she seems inexcusable.'

'No, no, indeed, Annette! She has had more excuse than almost any one. It makes one grieve for her to see how the worse nature seems to have been allowed to grow beyond her power, and how it is like something rending her, when right and wrong struggle together for the mastery.'

So many questions ensued, that Violet found her partial disclosure had rendered the curtain over Martindale affairs far less impenetrable; but she had spoken no sooner than was needful, for the very next morning's post brought an envelope, containing a letter for Miss Moss, and a few lines addressed to herself:—

'My Dear Mrs. Martindale,—Trust me. I have discovered my error, and have profited by my lesson. Will you give the enclosed to your sister? I know you will act as kindly as ever by

'Yours, &c.,

'A. P. F.'

So soon! Violet had not been prepared for this. She gasped with wonder and suspense, as she laid the letter before the place where Annette had been sitting, and returned to her seat as a spectator, though far from a calm one: that warmhearted note had made her wishes his earnest partisans, and all her pulses throbbed with the desire that Annette might decide in favour of him; but she thought it wrong to try to influence her, and held her peace, though her heart leapt into her mouth at her sister's exclamation on seeing the letter, and her cheeks glowed when the flush darted into Annette's.

She glanced in a sort of fright over the letter, then looked for help to Violet, and held it to her. 'Oh, Violet! do you know?'

'Yes, I have a note myself. My darling Annette!'

Annette threw herself down by her side, and sat on the floor, studying her face while she read the note, which thus commenced:—

'My Dear Miss Moss,—You will say that our acquaintance is too short to warrant my thus addressing you; but your sister knows me as well as most people; and in knowing your sister, and seeing your resemblance to her, I know you. If AM=VM, and VM=Wordsworth's "spirit yet a woman too," then AM=the same.'

From this curious opening he proceeded to a more ordinary and very earnest entreaty for her consent to his applying to her father.

‘Well, Violet!’

‘How exactly like him!’

‘How highly he does esteem you!’ said Annette; ‘but if he thinks me like you he would find his mistake. After what you told me—so soon! Oh, I wish it had not happened! Violet, do tell me what to do.’

‘I don’t think any one can advise in a matter like this.’

‘Oh! don’t say so, Violet; you know the people, and I don’t. Pray say something.’

‘He is a most excellent, admirable person,’ said Violet, in an unmeaning tone.

‘Yes, I know that, but—’

‘Really, I think nothing but your own feeling should decide.’

‘Ah! you did not hesitate when you were asked!’ said Annette, sighing; and Violet at once blushed, smiled, and sighed, as she spoke her quick conscious ‘No, no!’

‘Such a romance cannot always be expected,’ said Annette, a little mournfully. ‘He is everything estimable, in spite of his oddness. But then, this affair—so recent! Violet’ (impatiently), ‘what DO you think? what do you wish?’

‘What I wish? To have my own Annette near me. For two such people to belong to each other! Don’t you know what I like? But the question is what you wish.’

‘Yes!’ sighed Annette.

‘I don’t think you wish it much,’ said Violet, trying to get a view of her face.

‘I don’t know whether I ought to make up my mind. I am not much inclined to anything. But I dare say it would turn out well. I do like him very much. But Miss Martindale! Now, Violet, will you not tell me what you think? Take pity on me.’

‘Annette,’ said Violet, not without effort, ‘I see you have not the feeling that would

make you unhappy in giving him up, so I may speak freely. I am afraid of it. I cannot be certain that he is so completely cured of his old attachment as he supposes himself to be while the anger is fresh. He is as good as possible—quite sincere, and would never willingly pain you, whatever he may feel. But his affection for Theodora was of long standing; and without any one's fault there might be worries and vexations—'

'Yes, yes,' said Annette, in a voice that reassured her.

'I think it wiser not, and perhaps more honourable to Theodora. Hitherto I have been wishing that it might yet be made up again. If you had been disposed that way, I should have been anxious,—as you seem doubtful, I fancy it would be safer—'

'O, Violet, I am so glad! It is a great relief to me.'

'But, you know, it is only I that say so.'

'Better you than a hundred! My doubt was this. You know there are a great many of us, and papa wants to see us well married. He has talked more about it since you went. Now this is not romantic; but I was considering whether, for the sake of the rest, I ought not to try whether I could like him. But what you have said sets me quite at ease in refusing him.'

'Poor Percy!' said Violet. 'I am afraid he will be vexed.'

'And it is a great compliment, though that is to you. He takes me on trust from you.'

'And he took me on trust from John,' said Violet. 'I wish he had known you before Theodora.'

'I only hope papa will never hear of it,' said Annette, shrinking. 'How fortunate that he was not here. I shall tell no one at home.'

'If it had not been for Theodora,' sighed Violet, 'I know nothing that would have been more delightful. It was too charming to come true!'

'Violet,' said Annette, with her face averted, 'don't be sorry, for I could not have

been glad of it now; though for their sakes I might have tried to work myself into the feeling. I cannot help telling you, though you will think it more wrong in me, for I shall never see HIM again, and he never said anything.'

'I know whom you mean,' whispered Violet, rightly divining it was Mr. Fanshawe.

'Don't call it anything,' said Annette, with her head drooping. 'I would not have told even you, but to console you about this. Nothing ever passed, and I was silly to dwell on the little things they laughed at me about, but I cannot help thinking that if he had seen any prospect—'

'I wonder if John could—' Violet checked herself.

'O, don't say anything about it!' cried Annette, frightened. 'It may be only my foolish fancy—but I cannot get it out of my mind. You see I have no one to talk over things with now you are gone. I have lost my pair in you, so I am solitary among them, and perhaps that has made me think of it the more.'

'Dearest! But still I think you ought to try to draw away your mind from it.'

'You do not think I ought to try to like Mr. Fotheringham?'

'Indeed, under present circumstances, I could not wish that.'

'But do you think me very wrong for considering whether I could? I hope not, dear Violet,' said Annette, who shared her sister's scrupulous, self-distrustful character, and had not, like her, been taught, by stern necessity, to judge for herself.

'No, indeed,' said Violet; 'but, since that is settled, he ought to know it at once, and not to be kept in suspense.'

It was not until after much affectionate exhortation that Violet could rouse her sister from talking rather piteously over the perplexity it would have been if his case or hers had been otherwise, arguing to excuse herself in her own eyes for the notion of the marriage for expediency, and describing the displeasure that the knowledge of the rejection would produce at home. It was the first time she had had to act for

herself, and either she could not resolve to begin, or liked to feel its importance. Perhaps she was right in saying that Mr. Fotheringham would be disappointed if he supposed her Violet's equal, for though alike in lowliness, amiability, and good sense, she had not the same energy and decision.

At last the letter was begun, in the style of Matilda and the "Polite Letter Writer" combined, though the meek-spirited Annette peeped through in the connecting links of the set phrases. Violet, who was appealed to at every stage, would fain have substituted the simple words in which Annette spoke her meaning; but her sister was shocked. Such ordinary language did not befit the dignity of the occasion nor Matilda's pupil; and Violet, as much overruled as ever by respect for her elder sisters, thought it an admirable composition.

'May I see yours?' asked Annette, resting before making her fair copy.

'And welcome, but it is not worthy of yours.'

'My Dear Mr. Fotheringham,—I wish with all my heart it could be—I am very sorry it must not. Pray say nothing to my father: it would only put her to needless pain. I beg your pardon for not being able to do anything for you. You know how glad I should have been if I had not been obliged to perceive that it would not be really right or kind to either. Only do let me thank you for liking my dear sister, and forgive us if you are grieved. I am very, very sorry.

'Yours, very sincerely,

'V. H. MARTINDALE.'

Annette raised her eyes in surprise. 'Ah!' said Violet, 'it is of no use for me to try to write like Matilda. I did once, but I am not clever enough; it looked so silly and affected, that I have been ashamed to remember it ever since. I must write in the only way I can.'

Her sister wanted to tear up her letter as a piece of affectation, but this she would not allow. It made her feel despairing to think of spending two hours more over it, and

she hoped that she would be satisfied with the argument that the familiar style employed by Mrs. Martindale towards an old friend might not be suited to Annette Moss when rejecting his suit.

Each sentence underwent a revision, till Violet, growing as impatient as was in her nature, told her at last that he would think more of the substance than of the form.

Next, she had to contend against Annette's longing to flee home at once, by Theodora's own saying, 'London was wide enough for both;' and more effectually by suggesting that a sudden departure would be the best means of proclaiming the adventure. It was true enough that Mr. Fotheringham was not likely to molest her. No more was heard of him till, two days after, the owl's provider brought a parcel with a message, that Mr. Fotheringham had given up his lodging and was going to Paris. It contained some books and papers of John's, poor little Pallas Athene herself, stuffed, and directed to Master J. Martindale, and a book in which, under his sister's name, he had written that of little Helen. Violet knew he had intended making some residence at Paris, to be near the public libraries, and she understood this as a kind, forgiving farewell. She could understand his mortification, that he, after casting off the magnificent Miss Martindale, should be rejected by this little humble country girl; and she could not help thinking herself ungrateful, so that the owl, which she kept in the drawing-room, as the object of Johnnie's tender strokings, always seemed to have a reproachful expression in its round glass eyes.

The hope of seeing the expediency of her decision waxed fainter, when she received the unexpected honour of a letter from Lord Martindale, who, writing to intrust her with some commission for John, added some news. 'I have had the great pleasure of meeting with my cousin, Hugh Martindale,' he said; 'who, since the death of his wife, has so overworked himself in his large town parish, as to injure his eyesight, and has been ordered abroad for his health. It does not appear that he will ever be fit to return to his work at Fieldingsby, and I am in hopes of effecting an exchange

which may fix him at Brogden in the stead of Mr. Wingfield. When you are of my age, you will understand the pleasure I have in returning to old times. Theodora has likewise been much with him, and I trust may be benefited by his advice. At present she has not made up her mind to give any definite answer to Lord St. Erme, and since I believe she hesitates from conscientious motives, I am the less inclined to press her, as I think the result will be in his favour. I find him improve on acquaintance. I am fully satisfied with his principles and temper, he has extensive information, and might easily become a valuable member of society. His sister, Lady Lucy, spends much of her time with us, and appears to be an amiable pleasing girl.'

Lord Martindale evidently wished it to be forgotten that he had called Lord St. Erme absurd-looking.

Violet sighed, and tried to counterbalance her regrets by hopes that John would have it in his power to patronize his chaplain. However, these second-hand cares did not hinder her from thriving and prospering so that she triumphed in the hopes of confuting the threat that she would not recover in London, and she gloried in the looks with which she should meet Arthur. A dozen times a day she told her little ones that papa was coming home, till Johnnie learnt to repeat it; and then she listened in ecstasy as the news took a fresh charm from his lips.

She went to meet Arthur at the station; but instead of complimenting her on the renewed carnation of her cheeks, as perhaps, in her pretty conjugal vanity, she had expected, when she had taken such pains with her pink ribbons, he gazed straight before him, and presently said, abruptly, 'Is your sister here?'

Had she been displeasing him the whole time? She only breathed a faint 'Yes.'

'Is Fotheringham in town?'

'No; he is gone to Paris.'

'Then it is humbug, as I thought. I met that precious Miss Gardner in the train going

to Worthbourne, and she would have me believe you were getting up a match between those two! A fine story,—not a year since he proposed to Theodora! There was she congratulating me on the satisfaction it must be to Mrs. Martindale!'

'So she wanted to make mischief between us,' said Violet, much hurt.

'Mischief is meat and drink to her. But not a jot did I believe, I tell you, silly child. You are not wasting tears on that crocodile tongue! I had a mind to tell her to her face that Percy is made of different stuff; and for my own Violet blossom—'

The tears dropped bright and happy. 'Though, dear Arthur, it was true, as far as Percy was concerned. Annette has had to refuse him.'

'A wise girl!' exclaimed Arthur, in indignant surprise. 'But Percy! I could not have believed it. Why would she not have him?'

'Chiefly from thinking it not right to accept him. I hope I did not do wrong in telling her all about it. I thought it only fair, and she did not care enough for him to make the refusal an effort.'

'I should think not! The fickle dog. To go and take up with—No disrespect to Annette,—but after Theodora! So soon, too!'

'I fancied it more pique than inconstancy. There is so much anger about him that I suspect there is more affection than he knows.'

'And you think that mends matters,' said Arthur, laughing. 'Well, I hope Theodora will marry St. Erme at once, so as to serve him right. I am sure she will if she hears of this.'

'And I am afraid Miss Gardner will write to her.'

'That she will, with nice histories of you and me and Annette. And she will tell them at Worthbourne till old Sir Antony disinherits Percy. No more than he deserves!'

She might well be glad of the part she had taken, now that she found her husband so much more alive to the affront to his sister than she had expected. He was in high

good-humour, and talked merrily of his expedition, proceeding even to such a stretch of solicitude as to say he supposed ‘the brats were all right, as he had heard nothing of them.’

His greeting to Annette was warm and cordial, he complimented her on her sister’s recovered looks, and tried to extort a declaration that she looked just like what she had been when he took her from Wrangerton. Annette peeped out under her eyelashes, smiled, and shook her head timidly.

‘Ha! What’s your treason, Miss Annette? Does not she look as well as ever?’

‘Better, in some ways,’ said Annette, looking at Violet, glowing and smiling, with her husband’s hand on her shoulder.

‘And what in others!’

‘I like to look at her better than ever, but I cannot say she is not paler and thinner.’

‘Yes, and sober and matronly. That I am!’ said Violet, drawing herself up. ‘I must stand on my dignity now I have two children. Don’t I look old and wise, Annette?’

‘Not a bit now,’ said Annette.

There was an end of Annette’s doubt and dread of her grand brother-in-law. He talked and laughed, took her on pleasant expeditions, and made much of her with all his ready good-nature, till her heart was quite won. She did not leave them till just as they were departing for Windsor, and as she looked back from her railway carriage, at Violet and her husband, arm-in-arm, she sighed a sigh on her own account, repented of as soon as heaved, as she contrasted her own unsatisfactory home with their happiness.

But the heart knoweth its own bitterness, and Annette little guessed at the grief that lurked in the secret springs of her sister’s joy, increasing with her onward growth in the spirit that brought her sure trust and peace. It was the want of fellowship with her husband, in her true and hidden life. She could not seek counsel or comfort from

above, she could not offer prayer or thanksgiving, she could not join in the highest Feast, without finding herself left alone, in a region whither he would not follow. It was a weariness to him. In the spring she had had hopes. At Easter, an imploring face, and timid, ‘Won’t you come?’ had made him smile, and say he was not so good as she, then sigh, and half promise, ‘Next time, when he had considered.’ But next time he had had no leisure for thinking; she should do as she liked with him when they got into the country. And since that, some influence that she could not trace seemed, as she knew by the intuition of her heart, rather than the acknowledgment of her mind, to have turned him away; the distaste and indifference were more evident, and he never gave her an opening for leading to any serious subject. It was this that gave pain even to her prayers, and added an acuter pang to every secret anxiety.

‘When his children are older, and he feels that they look up to him’ thought Violet, hopefully, and in the meantime she prayed.

CHAPTER 23

Not so, bold knight, no deed of thine Can ever win my hand; That hope, poor youth, thou must resign, For barriers ‘twixt us stand. Yet what doth part us I will now reveal, Nor, noblest one, from thee the truth conceal. —FOUQUE

Arthur guessed rightly. Miss Gardner’s first leisure was spent in writing her tidings to Theodora.

It was on a strange state of mind that they fell. Theodora had gone abroad, softened and conscious of her faults, but her indomitable will boiling up at each attempt to conquer them; knowing that her fate hung in the balance, but helpless in the power of her own pride and temper. Miserable, and expecting to be more wretched, her outward demeanour, no longer checked by Violet, was more than ever harsh, capricious, and undutiful, especially under her present deprivation of the

occupations that had hitherto been channels of kindly feeling.

She was less patient than formerly with her aunt, who was in truth more trying. Quickly gathering the state of affairs with regard to Lord St. Erme, she was very angry with Lord Martindale for not having consulted her, and at the same time caressed her great-niece beyond endurance. Besides, it was unbearable to hear sweet Violet scoffed at. Theodora spoke hastily in her defence; was laughed at for having been gained over; replied vehemently, and then repented of losing temper with one so aged and infirm. Her attention to Mrs. Nesbit had been one of her grounds of self-complacency; but this had now failed her—distance was the only means of keeping the peace and Theodora left her chiefly to her companion, Mrs. Garth, a hard-looking, military dame, who seemed so well able to take care of herself, that there was none of the compassion that had caused Theodora to relieve poor little Miss Piper.

It was not long before Lord St. Erme persuaded his aunt that her tour in Germany would not be complete without a visit to Baden-Baden. Mrs. Delaval and Lady Martindale immediately began to be as intimate as was possible with the latter. Theodora intended to stand aloof, and to be guarded and scornful; but Lady Lucy was such an engaging, affectionate, honest-hearted little thing, regarding Miss Martindale with all her brother's enthusiastic devotion, and so grateful for the slightest notice, that it really was impossible to treat her with the requisite cold dignity.

And to admit Lady Lucy to her friendship was much the same thing as admitting the brother. 'St. Erme' was the one engrossing subject of the young girl's thoughts and discourse, and it was soon plain that not a conversation passed but was reported to him. If Theodora expressed an opinion, 'St. Erme's' remarks on it were certain to be brought to her the next day; if a liking or a wish, he was instantly taking measures for its gratification. She might try to keep him at a distance, but where was the use

of it when, if his moustached self was safely poetizing in the Black Forest, his double in blue muslin was ever at her elbow?

By and by it was no longer a moustached self. The ornaments were shaved off, and she heartily wished them on again. What could be said when Lucy timidly begged to know how she liked the change in St. Erme's face, and whether she shared her regrets for his dear little moustache? Alas! such a sacrifice gave him a claim, and she felt as if each departed hair was a mesh in the net to ensnare her liberty.

And what could she say when Lucy WOULD talk over his poems, and try to obtain her sympathy in the matter of that cruel review which had cut the poor little sister to the heart? It had been so sore a subject in London, that she could not then bear to speak of it, and now, treating it like a personal attack on his character, she told how 'beautifully St. Erme bore it,' and wanted Miss Martindale to say how unjust and shocking it was. Yet Miss Martindale actually, with a look incomprehensible to poor Lucy, declared that there was a great deal of truth in it.

However, in process of time, Lucy came back reporting that her brother thought so too, and that he had gathered many useful hints from it; but that he did not mean to attend to poetry so much, he thought it time to begin practical life; and she eagerly related his schemes for being useful and distinguishing himself.

It was not easy to help replying and commenting on, or laughing at, plans which showed complete ignorance of English life, and then Theodora found herself drawn into discussions with Lord St. Erme himself, who took her suggestions, and built his projects with a reference to her, as his understood directress and assistant; till she grew quite frightened at what she had let him take for granted, and treated him with a fresh fit of coldness and indifference, soon thawed by his sister. She could not make up her mind to the humiliating confession by which alone she could have dismissed him, and the dominion she should enjoy with him appeared more and more tempting as she learnt to know him better, and viewed him as a means of

escape from her present life. If it had not been for recollections of Violet, she would have precipitated the step, in order to end her suspense, but that perfect trust that she would not accept him unless she could do so with a clear conscience always held her back.

It was at this juncture that, one day when walking with her father, there was a sudden stop at the sight of another elderly gentleman. ‘Ha! Hugh!’ ‘What, you here, Martindale!’ were mutually exclaimed, there was an ardent shaking of hands, and she found herself introduced to a cousin, whom she had not seen since she was a child.

He and her father had been like brothers in their boyhood, but the lines they had since taken had diverged far and wide. The hard-working clergyman had found himself out of his element in visits to Martindale, had discontinued them, and almost even his correspondence, so that Lord Martindale had heard nothing of his cousin since his wife’s death, two years ago, till now, when he met him on the promenade at Baden, sent abroad to recruit his worn-out health and eyesight.

All have either felt or beheld, how two such relations, on the verge of old age, meet and refresh themselves with looking back, beyond the tract of middle life, to the days shared together in youth! Lord Martindale had not looked so bright, nor talked and laughed so much for years, as over his boyish reminiscences, and his wanderings up and down the promenade with his cousin seemed as if nothing could terminate them.

Clergymen and school-loving young ladies have a natural affinity, and Theodora found a refuge from the Delavals and an opportunity for usefulness. She offered to read to Cousin Hugh, she talked over parish matters, and after relieving her mind with a conversation on the question of how much the march of intellect ought to penetrate into country schools, it was wonderful how much more equable and comfortable she became. The return to the true bent of her nature softened her on

every side; and without the least attempt to show off, she was so free from the morose dignity with which she had treated her own family since going abroad, that Mr. Hugh Martindale could hardly believe the account of her strange ungovernable character, as it was laid before him by her father, in his wish for counsel.

He watched her anxiously, but made no attempt to force her confidence, and let her talk to him of books, school discipline, parish stories, and abstruse questions as much as she pleased, always replying in a practical, sobering tone, that told upon her, and soothed her almost like Violet's mild influence, and to her great delight, she made him quite believe in Violet's goodness, and wish to be acquainted with her.

But all the time, Lord St. Erme was treated as her acknowledged suitor. Perhaps Mr. Martindale thought it might be better if she were safely married; or, at any rate, only knowing her personally as a high-minded person of much serious thought, he believed her to be conscientiously waiting to overcome all doubts, and honoured her scruples: while it might be, that the desire for his good opinion bound Theodora the more to Lord St. Erme, for with all her sincerity, she could not bear the idea of his discovering the part she was playing, at the very time she was holding such conversations on serious subjects. The true history of her present conduct was that she could not endure to be known as the rejected and forsaken of Mr. Fotheringham, and thus, though outwardly tamer, she was more melancholy at heart, fast falling into a state of dull resignation; if such a name can be applied to mere endurance of the consequences of her own pride and self-will.

Now came Jane Gardner's letter. Theodora read it through, then, with calm contempt, she tore it up, lighted a taper, and burnt it to ashes.

'There, Jane!' said she, as it shrivelled, black and crackling, 'there is all the heed I take. Violet would no more allow me to be supplanted than Percy could be inconstant.'

Inconstant! Where was her right so to term him? Was he not released, not merely by

the cold ‘Very well,’ which seemed to blister her lips in the remembrance, but by her whole subsequent course? That thought came like the stroke of a knife, and she stood motionless and stunned. Love of Percival Fotheringham was a part of herself! Certain from her confidence in Violet that Jane’s news was untrue, the only effect of hearing it was to reveal to her like a flash that her whole heart was his. He had loved her in spite of her faults. Suppose he should do so still! Her spirits leapt up at this glimpse of forfeited unattainable joy; but she beheld a forlorn hope. At least she would restore herself to a condition in which she might meet him without despairing shame. The impulse was given, and eager to obey it, while it still buoyed her above the dislike to self-abasement, she looked round for the speediest measure, caring little what it might be.

Her father was reading his letters in the next room, when, with flushed cheek, and voice striving for firmness, she stood before him, saying, ‘It is time to put an end to this. Will you let Lord St. Erme know that it cannot be!’

‘Now, Theodora!’ exclaimed the much-astonished Lord Martindale, ‘what is the meaning of this?’

‘It cannot be,’ repeated Theodora. ‘It must be put a stop to.’

‘What has happened! Have you heard anything to change your mind?’

‘My mind is not changed, but I cannot have this going on.’

‘How is this? You have been encouraging him all this time, letting him come here—’

‘I never asked him to come here,’ said Theodora, temper coming in, as usual.

‘Theodora! Theodora! did I not entreat you to tell me what you wished, when I first heard of this in London? Could I get a reasonable answer from you?’

Theodora was silent.

‘Do you know what the world thinks of young ladies who go on in this manner?’

‘Let it think as it may, I cannot accept him, and you must tell him so, papa—’

‘No, indeed. I will not be responsible for such usage! It must be your own doing,’ said Lord Martindale, thoroughly displeased. ‘I should be ashamed to look him in the face!’

Theodora turned to leave the room.

‘What are you going to do?’ asked her father.

‘I am going to write to Lord St. Erme.’

‘Come back, Theodora. I must know that you are not going to carry further this ill-usage of a most excellent man, more sincerely attached to you than you deserve. I insist on knowing what you intend to say to him.’

To insist was not the way to succeed with Theodora.

‘I do not exactly know,’ said she.

‘I wish I knew what to do with you!’ sighed Lord Martindale, in anger, grief, and perplexity. ‘You seem to think that people’s affections are made to serve for your vanity and sport, and when you have tormented them long enough, you cast them off!’

Theodora drew her head up higher, and swelled at the injustice. It was at that moment that Lord St. Erme entered the room. She went forward to meet him, and spoke at once. ‘I am glad you are here,’ said she, proudly pleased that her father should see her vindication from the charge of trifling. ‘You are come to hear what I had been desiring my father to tell you. I have used you very ill, and it is time to put a stop to it.’

Lord St. Erme looked from her to her father in wonder and dismay.

‘First understand,’ said Lord Martindale, ‘that this is no doing of mine; I am heartily grieved, but I will leave you. Perhaps you may prevail on this wilful girl—’

Theodora began a protest, and desired him to remain; but he would not, and she

found herself alone with her bewildered lover.

‘What is this? what have I done?’ he began.

‘You have done nothing,’ said she. ‘It is all my own fault. The truth will be a cure for your regrets, and I owe you an explanation. I was engaged to one whom I had known from childhood, but we disputed—my temper was headstrong. He rejected me, and I thought I scorned him, and we parted. You came in my way while I was angry, before I knew that I can never lose my feelings towards him. I know I have seemed to trifle with you; but false shame hindered me from confessing how matters really stood. You ought to rejoice in being freed from such as I am.’

‘But with time!’ exclaimed Lord St. Erme, in broken words. ‘May I not hope that time and earnest endeavours—?’

‘Hope nothing,’ said Theodora. ‘Every one would tell you you have had a happy escape.’

‘And is this all? My inspiration!—you who were awakening me to a sense of the greatness of real life—you who would have led me and aided me to a nobler course—’

‘That is open to you, without the evils I should have entailed on you. I could never have returned your feelings, and it would have been misery for both. You will see it, when you come to your senses, and rejoice.’

‘Rejoice! If you knew how the thought of you is entwined in every aspiration, and for life!’

‘Do not talk so,’ said Theodora. ‘It only grieves me to see the pain I have given; but it would be worse not to break off at once.’

‘Must it be so?’ said he, lingering before his fleeting vision.

‘It must. The kindest thing by both of us is to cut this as short as possible.’

‘In that, as in all else, I obey. I know that a vain loiterer, like myself, had little right

to hope for notice from one whose mind was bent on the noblest tasks of mankind. You have opened new views to me, and I had dared to hope you would guide me in them; but with you or without you, my life shall be spent in them.'

'That will be some consolation for the way I have treated you,' said Theodora.

His face lighted up. 'My better angel!' he said, 'I will be content to toil as the knights of old, hopelessly, save that if you hear of me no longer as the idle amateur, but as exerting myself for something serviceable, you will know it is for your sake.'

'It had better be for something else,' said Theodora, impatiently. 'Do not think of me, nor delude yourself with imagining you can win me by any probation.'

'I may earn your approval—'

'You will earn every one's,' she interrupted. 'Put mine out of your head. Think of life and duty, and their reward, as they really are, and they will inspirit you better than any empty dream of me.'

'It is vain to tell me so!' said the Earl, looking at her glancing eye and earnest countenance. 'You will ever seem to beckon me forwards.'

'Something better will beckon you by and by, if you will only begin. Life is horrid work—only endurable by looking after other people, and so you will find it. Now, let us have done with this. Wish your sister good-bye for me, and tell her that I beg her to forgive me for the pain I have given you. I am glad you have her. She will make you happy—I have only tormented those I loved best; so you are better off with her. Good-bye. Shake hands, to show that you forgive me.'

'I will not harass you by pertinacity,' said poor Lord St. Erme, submissively. 'It has been a happy dream while I was bold enough to indulge in it. Farewell to it, though not, I trust, to its effects.'

Lingering as he held her hand, he let it go; then, returning to the grasp, bent and kissed it, turned away, as if alarmed at his own presumption, and hastened from the

room.

She flung herself into her father's chair to consider of seeing Lady Lucy, of writing to Violet, of breaking the tidings to her aunt, of speaking to her Cousin Hugh; but no connected reflection could be summoned up—nothing but visions of an Athenian owl, and green cotton umbrella. At length the sound of the opening door made her start up.

'Have I interrupted you?' asked her cousin. 'I thought I should find your father here.'

'I do not know where he is,' said Theodora. 'Can I do anything for you? Oh! I beg your pardon; I had forgotten it was time to read to you.'

'You know I always hoped that you would not make it a burden.'

'If you knew the relief it is to be of any sort of use,' returned she, hastily setting his chair, and fetching the books.

Perhaps her attention wandered while she read, for they had hardly finished before she looked up and said, 'That always puts me in mind of Arthur's wife. The ornament of a meek and quiet spirit is so entirely her adorning—her beauty only an accessory.'

'Yes; I wish I knew her,' said Mr. Martindale.

'Oh! how I wish she was here!' sighed Theodora.

'For any special reason?'

'Yes; I want her to soften and help me. She seems to draw and smooth away the evil, and to keep me from myself. Nothing is so dreary where she is.'

'I should not have expected to hear you, at your age, and with your prospects, talk of dreariness.'

'That is all over,' said Theodora. 'I have told him that it cannot be. I am glad, for one reason, that I shall not seem to deceive you any more. Has papa told you what

he thinks my history!'

'He has told me of your previous affair.'

'I wonder what is his view?'

'His view is one of deep regret; he thinks your tempers were incompatible.'

Theodora laughed. 'He has a sort of termagant notion of me.'

'I am afraid you do no justice to your father's affection and anxiety.'

'It is he who does me no justice,' said Theodora.

'Indeed, I do not think that can be your sister's teaching,' said Mr. Martindale.

'I wish she was here!' said Theodora, again. 'But now you have heard my father's story, you shall hear mine;' and with tolerable fairness, she related the history of the last few months. The clergyman was much interested in the narrative of this high-toned mind,—'like sweet bells jangled,' and listened with earnest and sorrowful attention. There was comfort in the outpouring; and as she spoke, the better spirit so far prevailed, that she increasingly took more blame to herself, and threw less on others. She closed her confession by saying, 'You see, I may well speak of dreariness.'

'Of dreariness for the present,' was the answer; 'but of hope. You put me in mind of some vision which I have read of, where safety and peace were to be attained by bowing to the dust, to creep beneath a gateway, the entrance to the glorious place. You seem to me in the way of learning that lesson.'

'I have bent to make the avowal I thought I never could have spoken,' said Theodora.

'And there is my hope of you. Now for the next step.'

'The next! what is it?'

'Thankfully and meekly to accept the consequences of these sad errors.'

'You mean this lonely, unsatisfactory life?'

‘And this displeasure of your father.’

‘But, indeed, he misjudges me.’

‘Have you ever given him the means of forming a different judgment?’

‘He has seen all. If I am distrusted, I cannot descend to justify myself.’

‘I am disappointed in you, Theodora. Where is your humility?’

With these words Mr. Martindale quitted her. He had divined that her feelings would work more when left to themselves, than when pressed, and so it proved.

The witness within her spoke more clearly, and dislike and loathing of her proceedings during the last year grew more strongly upon her. The sense of her faults had been latent in her mind for months past, but the struggle of her external life had kept it down, until now it came forth with an overpowering force of grief and self-condemnation. It was not merely her sins against Mr. Fotheringham and Lord St. Erme that oppressed her, it was the perception of the wilful and rebellious life she had led, while making so high a profession.

Silently and sadly she wore through the rest of the day, unmolested by any remark from the rest of the family, but absorbed in her own thoughts, and the night passed in acute mental distress; with longings after Violet to soothe her, and to open to her hopes of the good and right way of peace.

With morning light came the recollection that, after all, Violet would rejoice in what she had just done. Violet would call it a step in the right direction; and she had promised her further help from above and within, when once she should have had patience to take the right move, even in darkness. ‘She told me, if I put my trust aright, and tried to act in obedience, I should find a guide!’

And, worn out and wearied with the tossings of her mind, Theodora resolved to have recourse to the kind clergyman who had listened to her confidence. Perhaps he was the guide who would aid her to conquer the serpents that had worked her so much

misery; and, after so much self-will, she felt that there would be rest in submitting to direction.

She sought him out, and joined his early walk.

‘Help me,’ she said; ‘I repent, indeed I do. Teach me to begin afresh, and to be what I ought. I would do anything.’

‘Anything that is not required of you, Theodora, or anything that is?’

‘Whatever you or Violet required of me,’ said she, ‘that I would do readily and gladly, cost me what it might.’

‘It is not for me to require anything,’ said Mr. Martindale. ‘What I advise you is to test the sincerity of your repentance by humbling yourself to ask your father’s forgiveness.’

He watched her face anxiously, for his hopes of her almost might be said to depend upon this. It was one of those efforts which she made with apparent calmness. ‘You and Violet ask the same thing,’ she said; ‘I will.’

‘I am glad to hear you say this. I could not think you going on right while you denied him the full explanation of your conduct.’

‘Did you mean that I should tell him all?’ exclaimed Theodora.

‘It would be a great relief to his mind. Few fathers would have left you such complete liberty of action, consented to your engagement, and then acted so kindly and cautiously in not forcing on you this, for which he had begun to wish ardently. You have grieved him extremely, and you owe it to him to show that this has not all been caprice.’

I have promised,’ repeated Theodora.

‘Your second effort,’ said Mr. Martindale, encouragingly. They were nearly opposite an hotel, where a carriage was being packed. Theodora turned, he understood her, and they walked back; but before they could quit the main road, the

travellers rolled past them. Lord St. Erme bowed. Theodora did not look up; but when past asked if any one was with him.

‘Yes; his sister.’

‘I am glad of it,’ said Theodora. ‘She is an excellent little thing, the very reverse of me.’

Without failure of resolution, Theodora returned to breakfast, her mind made up to the effort, which was more considerable than can be appreciated, without remembering her distaste to all that bore the semblance of authority, and the species of proud reserve that had prevented her from avowing to her father her sentiments respecting Mr. Fotheringham, even in the first days of their engagement; and she was honest enough to feel that the manner, as well as the subject of conversation, must show the sincerity of her change. She would not let herself be affronted into perverseness or sullenness, but would try to imagine Violet looking on; and with this determination she lingered in the breakfast-room after her mother and cousin had left it.

‘Papa,’ said she, as he was leaving the room, ‘will you listen to me?’

‘What now, Theodora?’ said poor Lord Martindale, expecting some of those fresh perplexities that made him feel the whole family to blame.

It was not encouraging, but she had made up her mind. ‘I have behaved very ill about all this, papa; I want you to forgive me.’

He came nearer to her, and studied her face, in dread lest there should be something behind. ‘I am always ready to forgive and listen to you,’ he said sadly.

She perceived that she had, indeed, given him much pain, and was softened, and anxious for him to be comforted by seeing that her fault, at least, was not the vanity and heartlessness that he supposed.

‘It was very wrong of me to answer you as I did yesterday,’ she said. ‘I know it was

my own fault that Lord St. Erme was allowed to follow us.'

'And why did you consent!'

'I don't know. Yes, I do, though; but that makes it worse. It was because my perverse temper was vexed at your warning me,' said Theodora, looking down, much ashamed.

'Then you never meant to accept him!' exclaimed her father.

'No, not exactly that; I thought I might,' said she, slowly, and with difficulty.

'Then what has produced this alteration?'

'I will tell you,' said she, recalling her resolution. 'I did not know how much I cared for Percy Fotheringham. Yesterday there came a foolish report about his forming another attachment. I know it was not true; but the misery it gave me showed me that it would be sin and madness to engage myself to another.'

Lord Martindale breathed more freely. 'Forgive me for putting the question, it is a strange one to ask now: were you really attached to Percy Fotheringham?'

'With my whole heart,' answered Theodora, deliberately.

'Then why, or how—'

'Because my pride and stubbornness were beyond what any man could bear,' she answered. 'He did quite right: it would not have been manly to submit to my conduct. I did not know how bad it was till afterwards, nor how impossible it is that my feelings towards him should cease.'

'And this is the true history of your treatment of Lord St. Erme!'

'Yes. He came at an unlucky moment of anger, when Violet was ill, and could not breathe her saving influence over me, and I fancied—It was very wrong, and I was ashamed to confess what I have told you now.'

'Have you given him this explanation?'

'I have.'

‘Well, I am better satisfied. He is a most generous person, and told me he had no reason to complain of you.’

‘Yes, he has a noble character. I am very sorry for the manner in which I have treated him, but there was nothing to be done but to put an end to it. I wish I had never begun it.’

‘I wish so too!’ said Lord Martindale. ‘He is grievously disappointed, and bears it with such generous admiration of you and such humility on his own part, that it went to my heart to talk to him, especially while feeling myself a party to using him so ill.’

‘He is much too good for me,’ said Theodora, ‘but I could not accept him while I contrasted him with what I have thrown away. I can only repent of having behaved so badly.’

‘Well! after all, I am glad to hear you speak in this manner,’ said her father.

‘I know I have been much to blame,’ said Theodora, still with her head bent down and half turned away. ‘Ever since I was a child, I have been undutiful and rebellious. Being with Violet has gradually brought me to a sense of it. I do wish to make a fresh beginning, and to ask you to forgive and bear with me.’

‘My dear child!’ And Lord Martindale stepped to her side, took her hand, and kissed her.

No more was needed to bring the drops that had long been swelling in her eyes; she laid her head on his shoulder, and felt how much she had hitherto lost by the perverseness that had made her choose to believe her father cold and unjust.

There was another trial for the day. The departure of Lord St. Erme and his sister revealed the state of affairs to the rest of the world; Mrs. Delaval came to make Lady Martindale a parting visit, and to lament over their disappointment, telling how well Lord St. Erme bore it, and how she had unwillingly consented to his taking his sister with him to comfort him at that dull old place, Wrangerton.

Lady Martindale, as usual, took it very quietly. She never put herself into collision with her daughter, and did not seem to care about her freaks otherwise than as they affected her aunt. Mrs. Nesbit, who had thought herself on the point of the accomplishment of her favourite designs, was beyond measure vexed and incensed. She would not be satisfied without seeing Theodora, reproaching her, and insisting on hearing the grounds of her unreasonable conduct.

Theodora was silent.

Was it as her mother reported, but as Mrs. Nesbit would not believe, that she had so little spirit as to be still pining after that domineering, presuming man, who had thrown her off after she had condescended to accept him?

‘I glory in saying it is for his sake,’ replied Theodora.

Mrs. Nesbit wearied herself with invectives against the Fotheringhams as the bane of the family, and assured Theodora that it was time to lay aside folly; her rank and beauty would not avail, and she would never be married.

‘I do not mean to marry,’ said Theodora.

‘Then remember this. You may think it very well to be Miss Martindale, with everything you can desire; but how shall you like it when your father dies, and you have to turn out and live on your own paltry five thousand pounds! for not a farthing of mine shall come to you unless I see you married as I desire.’

‘I can do without it, thank you,’ said Theodora.

Mrs. Nesbit burst into a passion of tears at the ingratitude of her nephews and nieces. Weeping was so unusual with her that Lady Martindale was much terrified, sent Theodora away and did her utmost to soothe and caress her; but her strength and spirits were broken, and that night she had another stroke. She was not in actual danger, but was a long time in recovering even sufficiently to be moved to England; and during this period Theodora had little occupation, except companionship to her father, and the attempt to reduce her temper and tame her self-will. Mr. Hugh

Martindale went to take possession of the living of Brogden, and she remained a prisoner at Baden, striving to view the weariness and enforced uselessness of her life, as he had taught her, in the light of salutary chastisement and discipline.

PART III

Heartsease In thy heart shall spring If content abiding, Where, beneath that leafless tree, Life’s still stream is gliding. But, transplanted thence, it fades, For it bloometh only Neath the shadow of the Cross, In a valley lonely. —J. E. L.

CHAPTER 1

Love, hope, and patience, these must be thy graces, And in thine own heart let them first keep school. —COLERIDGE

The avenue of Martindale budded with tender green, and in it walked Theodora, watching for the arrival of the sister-in-law, scarcely seen for nearly four years.

Theodora’s dress was of the same rigid simplicity as of old, her figure as upright, her countenance as noble, but a change had passed over her; her bearing was less haughty; her step, still vigorous and firm, had lost its wilfulness, the proud expression of lip had altered to one of thought and sadness, and her eyes had become softer and more melancholy. She leaned against the tree where the curate had brought her the first tidings of Arthur’s marriage, and she sighed, but not as erst with jealousy and repining.

There was, indeed, an alteration—its beginning may not be traced, for the seed had been sown almost at her birth, and though little fostered, had never ceased to spring. The first visible shoot had been drawn forth by Helen Fotheringham; but the growth, though rapid, had been one-sided; the branches, like those of a tree in a sea-wind, all one way, blown aside by gusts of passion and self-will. In its next stage, the attempt

to lop and force them back had rendered them more crooked and knotty, till the enterprise had been abandoned as vain. But there was a soft hand that had caressed the rugged boughs, softened them with the dews of gratitude and affection, fanned them with gales from heaven, and gently turned them to seek training and culture, till the most gnarled and hardened had learnt patiently to endure the straightening hand and pruning knife.

Under such tranquil uneventful discipline, Theodora had spent the last four years, working with all her might at her labours in the parish, under Mr. Hugh Martindale, and what was a far more real effort, patiently submitting when family duties thwarted her best intentions. Parish work was her solace, in a somewhat weary life, isolated from intimate companionship.

She had, indeed, Mr. Hugh Martindale for a guide and adviser, and to her father she was a valuable assistant and companion; but her mother was more than ever engrossed by the care of Mrs. Nesbit; her eldest brother was still in the West Indies and Arthur only seen in fleeting visits, so short that it had never been convenient for his family to accompany him, nor had Theodora even been spared to attend Violet, when a little girl, now nearly two years old, had been added to her nursery.

Letters ill supplied the lack of personal intercourse: Theodora did not write with ease, and Violet could not pour herself out without reciprocity; so that though there was a correspondence, it languished, and their intimacy seemed to be standing still. Another great and heavy care to Theodora was a mistrust of Arthur’s proceedings. She heard of him on the turf, she knew that he kept racers; neither his looks nor talk were satisfactory; there were various tokens of extravagance; and Lord Martindale never went to London without bringing back some uncomfortable report.

Very anxious and sad at heart, she hoped to be better satisfied by judging for herself; and after long wearying for a meeting, her wishes were at length in the way of fulfilment—Arthur’s long leave was to be spent at home.

The carriage turned in at the lodge gates. She looked up—how differently from the would-be careless air with which she had once watched! But there was disappointment—she saw no brother! In a moment Violet had descended from the carriage, and warmly returned her embrace; and she was kissing the little shy faces that looked up to her, as all got out to walk up the avenue.

‘But where is Arthur?’

‘He is soon coming,’ said the soft sweet voice. ‘He would not let us wait for him.’

‘What! Has he not got his leave?’

‘Yes; but he is going to stay with some of his friends. Mr. Herries came yesterday and insisted.’

Theodora thought there was a mournful intonation, and looked anxiously at her face. The form and expression were lovely as ever; but the bright colouring had entirely faded, the cheeks were thin, and the pensive gentleness almost mournful. A careworn look was round the eyes and mouth, even while she smiled, as Theodora gave a second and more particular greeting to the children.

Johnnie was so little changed that she exclaimed at finding the same baby face. His little delicate features and pure fair skin were as white as ever; for not a spring had gone by without his falling under the grasp of his old enemy the croup; and his small slight frame was the more slender from his recent encounter with it. But he was now a very pretty boy, his curls of silken flax fringing his face under his broad-leafed black hat, and contrasting with his soft dark eyes, their gentle and intelligent expression showing, indeed, what a friend and companion he was to his mother; and it was with a shy smile, exactly like hers, that he received his aunt’s notice.

‘And Helen, my godchild, I have not looked at her! Where are you?’

But the tread of country turf seemed to have put wildness into little Helen. She had darted off, and hidden behind a tree, peeping out with saucy laughter flashing in her glorious black eyes, and dimpling in the plump roseate cheeks round which floated

thick glossy curls of rich dark chestnut. Theodora flew to catch her; but she scampered round another tree, shouting with fun, till she was seized and pressed fast in her aunt's arms and called a mischievous puss, while Theodora exulted in the splendour of her childish beauty, exuberant with health and spirits. The moment she was released, with another outcry of glee, she dashed off to renew the frolic, with the ecstasy of a young fawn, while the round fat-faced Annie tumbled after her like a little ball, and their aunt entered into the spirit of the romp, and pursued them with blitheness for the moment like their own. Johnnie, recovering his mamma's hand, walked soberly beside her, and when invited to join in the sport, looked as if he implored to be excused. Violet, rather anxiously, called them to order as they came near the house, consigned Annie to Sarah, and herself took Helen's hand, observing, gravely, that they must be very good.

'One thing,' she half-whispered; 'I once had a hint from Miss Piper that Mrs. Nesbit did not like Lady Martindale to be called grandmamma. What do you think?'

'What nonsense! Mamma ought to be proud of her grandchildren, and my aunt will probably never see them or hear them at all. She never comes out of the room.'

'Indeed! Is she so much more infirm?'

'Yes, very much aged. Her mind has never been quite itself since the last stroke, though I can hardly tell the difference, but I think it has softened her.'

'I suppose Lady Martindale is very much with her!'

'Almost always. She seems to cling to our presence, and I am never quite secure that Mrs. Garth does not domineer over her in our absence, but with all my watching I cannot discover. My aunt says nothing against her, but I sometimes fancy she is afraid of her.'

'Poor Mrs. Nesbit. She must be altered indeed!'

'She is altered, but I never am clear how far it is any real change, or only weakness. One comfort is, that she seems rather to like Cousin Hugh's coming to read to her

twice a week. How he will delight in these creatures of yours.'

'Ah! we know him,' said Violet. 'You know he comes to us if he is in London. How pleasant it must be for you.'

'Ah, very unlike the days when poor Mr. Wingfield used to come to ask me how to manage the parish,' said Theodora, between a laugh and a sigh. 'When did you hear from John?'

'His godson had a letter from him on his birthday.'

'O, Johnnie! that was an honour! Could you write and answer him?'

'Mamma helped me,' whispered the boy, while eyes and mouth lengthened into a bright blushing smile.

'Steady, Helen, my child! Quiet!' exclaimed Violet, as the little girl's delight grew beyond bounds at the sight of the peacock sunning himself on the sphinx's head, and Johnnie was charmed with the flowers in the parterre; and with 'look but not touch' cautions, the two were trusted to walk together hand-in-hand through the gravelled paths.

'The spirits will break out in little skips!' said Theodora, watching Helen. 'She preserves her right to be called a splendid specimen! What a pair they are!'

'Poor Helen! I shall be in dread of an outbreak all the time we are here,' said Violet; 'but she means to be good, and every one cannot be like Johnnie.'

'Ah! Johnnie one speaks of with respect.'

'I don't know what I should do but for him,' said Violet, with her sad smile; 'he is so entirely my companion, and I suppose he seems more forward in mind from being so much in the drawing-room.'

'Well! he is come to a time of life to merit his papa's notice.'

'More than the rest,' said Violet; 'but unluckily he is a little bit of a coward, and is afraid when papa plays with him. We make resolutions, but I really believe it is a

matter of nerves, and that poor Johnnie cannot help it.'

'What! Arthur is rough and teasing?'

'He does not understand this sort of timidity; he is afraid of Johnnie's not being manly; but I believe that would come if his health would but be stronger. It is very unlucky,' said Violet, 'for it vexes papa, and I think it hurts Johnnie, though I am always forced to blame him for being so silly. One comfort is, that it does not in the least interfere with Johnnie's affection—he admires him almost as he used when he was a baby.'

They were at the foot of the steps, where Charles Layton, now a brisk page, was helping to unpack the carriage, more intelligently than many a youth with the full aid of his senses.

Lord Martindale met them with his grave kind welcome, which awed even Helen into quiet and decorum, though perhaps, from the corners of her eyes, she was spying the Scagliola columns as places for hide-and-seek. She opened them to their roundest extent as her grandmamma came down-stairs, and she tried to take shelter behind her brother from the ceremonious kiss, while Johnnie tightly squeezed his aunt's hand, and Lady Martindale was quite as much afraid of them as they could be of her.

So began the visit—a very different one from any Violet had hitherto paid at Martindale. Theodora's room was now her chief resort in the morning, and there Johnnie went through his lessons with almost too precocious ease and delight, and Helen was daily conquered over Mrs. Barbauld. There they were sure to be welcome, though they were seldom seen downstairs. Johnnie used to appear in the space before dinner, very demure and well-behaved, and there seemed to be a fellow-feeling arising between him and his grandfather, who would take possession of him if he met him out-of-doors, and conduct him to any sight suited to his capacity; but who was so much distressed at his forwardness in intellect and his

backwardness in strength, that Violet hardly dared to hold a conversation about him for fear of a remonstrance on letting him touch a book.

One day Mrs. Nesbit suddenly said to Theodora, ‘Arthur’s wife and children are here, are not they?’

‘Yes; Violet would have come to see you, but we doubted if you were equal to it.’

‘I have nothing to say to Mr. Moss’s daughter, but bring that eldest boy here, I want to see him.’

Theodora stepped out into the gallery, where Johnnie was often to be found curled up in the end window, poring over and singing to himself the “White Doe of Rylstone”, which he had found among his uncle’s books.

She led him in, exhorting him not to be shy, and to speak out boldly in answer to Aunt Nesbit; but perhaps this only frightened him more. Very quiet and silent, he stood under his aunt’s wing with eyes cast down, answering with a trembling effort the questions asked in that sharp searching tone.

‘His mother all over!’ she said, motioning him away; but, the next day, she sent for him again. Poor Johnnie did not like it at all; he could hardly help shuddering at her touch, and at night begged his mamma not to send him to Aunt Nesbit; for he could not bear it without her. She had to represent that Aunt Nesbit was old and ill, and that it would be unkind not to go to her: but then came the difficult question, ‘Why don’t you go, mamma?’ However, when his compassionate feelings were aroused, he bore it better; and though he never got beyond standing silently by her chair for ten minutes, replying when spoken to, and once or twice reading a few sentences, or repeating some verses, when Theodora thought it would please her, it was evident that his visit had become the chief event of her day. One day she gave him a sovereign, and asked what he would do with it. He blushed and hesitated, and she suggested, ‘Keep it, that will be the wisest.’

‘No,’ came with an effort, and an imploring glance at Aunt Theodora.

‘Well, then, what? Speak out like a man!’ Still reluctant, but it was brought out at last: ‘Cousin Hugh told us about the poor sick Irish children that have no potatoes. May I give it to him to send them?’

‘Never mind the Irish children. This is for yourself.’

‘Myself?’ Johnnie looked up, bewildered, but with a sudden thought, ‘Oh! I know, Aunt Theodora, won’t it buy that pretty work-basket to give mamma on her birthday? She said she could not afford it. And Helen wanted the great donkey in the shop-window. Oh! I can get Helen the great donkey; thank you, Aunt Nesbit!’

The next day Aunt Nesbit received Johnnie by giving him five sovereigns to take to Cousin Hugh for the Irish, desiring him to say it was his own gift; and while Johnnie scrupulously explained that he should say that she gave it to him to give, she began to instruct him that he would be a rich man by and by, and must make a handsome and yet careful use of his money. ‘Shall I?’ said Johnnie, looking up, puzzled, at his younger aunt.

‘Yes, that you will,’ replied Mrs. Nesbit. ‘What shall you do then?’

‘Oh! then I shall buy mamma and my sisters everything they want, and mamma shall go out in the carriage every day.

‘She can do that now,’ said Theodora, who had expected less commonplace visions from her nephew.

‘No,’ said Johnnie, ‘we have not got the carriage now. I mean, we have no horses that will draw it.’

It was another of those revelations that made Theodora uneasy; one of those indications that Arthur allowed his wife to pinch herself, while he pursued a course of self-indulgence. She never went out in the evening, it appeared, and he was hardly ever at home; her dress, though graceful and suitable, had lost that air of research and choiceness that it had when everything was his gift, or worn to please his eye; and as day after day passed on without bringing him, Theodora perceived

that the delay was no such extraordinary event as to alarm her; she was evidently grieved, but it was nothing new. It was too plain that Arthur gave her little of his company, and his children none of his attention, and that her calmness was the serenity of patience, not of happiness.

This was all by chance betrayed; she spoke not of herself, and the nightly talks between the two sisters were chiefly of the children. Not till more than a week had passed to renew their intimacy, did Theodora advert to any subject connected with the events of her memorable stay in London, and then she began by asking, ‘What did I overhear you telling papa about Lord St. Erme?’

‘I was speaking of his doings at Wrangerton.’

‘Tell me.’

‘Oh! they are admirable. You know he went there with that good little Lady Lucy, and they set to work at once, doing everything for the parish—’

‘Do your sisters know Lady Lucy?’

‘Very little; it is only formal visiting now and then. She leads a very retired life, and they know her best from meeting her at the schools and cottages.’

‘Good little girl! I knew there was something in her!’

‘She is always with her brother, walking and riding and writing for him, carrying out all his views.’

‘I saw how he came forward about those poor colliery children. Such a speech, as that, was turning his talents to good account, and I am glad to hear it is not all speechifying.’

‘No, indeed, it is real self-denial. The first thing he did was to take his affairs into his own hands, so that my father has comparatively nothing to do with them. He found them in a bad state, which papa could not help, with him living abroad, and attending to nothing, only sending for money, whatever papa could say. So there

was a great outlay wanted for church and schools for the collieries at Coalworth, and nothing to meet it, and that was the way he came to sell off all the statues and pictures.'

'Did he? Well done, Lord St. Erme!' cried Theodora. 'That was something like a sacrifice.'

'O yes! My sisters say they could have cried to see the cases go by the windows, and I cannot help grieving to think of those rooms being dismantled. I am glad they have kept the little Ghirlandajo, that is the only one remaining.'

'I honour them,' said Theodora.

'And it was for the sake of such a set,' proceeded Violet; 'there is a bad Chartist spirit among those colliers, and they oppose him in every way; but he says it is his own fault for having neglected them so long, and goes on doing everything for them, though they are as surly and sullen as possible.

Theodora looked thoughtful. 'Poor Lord St. Erme! Yes, he has found a crusade! I wish—! Well, I ought to be thankful that good has been brought out of evil. I deserved no such thing. Violet, I wish he would marry one of your sisters!'

'O no, don't wish that. I am glad there is no chance of it. Ranks had better not be confounded,' said Violet, with a sad seriousness of manner.

'You have just had a wedding in the family. A satisfactory one, I hope?'

'Yes, I think so. Mamma and Annette like Mr. Hunt very much. They say there is such a straightforward goodness about him, that they are sure dear Olivia will be happy.'

'Was there any difficulty about it!'

'Why—Matilda and Albert seemed to think we should not think it grand enough,' said Violet, half-smiling. 'He is a sort of great farmer on his own estate, a most beautiful place. He is quite a gentleman in manners, and very well off, so that my

father made no difficulty, and I am very glad of it. Olivia is the very person to enjoy that free country life.' Violet sighed as if town life was oppressive.

'To be sure! If one could be a farmer's daughter without the pretension and vulgarity, what a life it would be! That was my favourite notion when I used to make schemes with poor Georgina Gardner. Do you ever hear what she is doing, Violet? They have quite left off writing to me.'

'Last time I heard of them they were in Italy.'

'Going on in the old way, I fear. Poor Georgina! she was sadly thrown away. But, at least, that Mark is not with them.'

'O no,' said Violet, sighing more deeply this time; 'he is always about in London.'

'Ah! you see more of him than you wish, I fear?'

'I see very little of him. Arthur would not ask him to our house at Chichester for the Goodwood races, and it was such an escape!'

'I am glad at least Arthur does not trouble you with him.'

Violet sat with her forehead resting on her hand, and there was a short space of thoughtful silence. It resulted in Theodora's saying, in a sad, low, humble tone, her eyes looking straight into the red fire, 'Do you ever hear of Mr. Fotheringham?'

'I believe he is still at Paris,' said Violet. 'I only hear of him through John, who said he had been thinking of going to Italy. When he came through London, after Lady Fotheringham's death, he left his card, but we were at Chichester. Have you seen that last article of his?'

'What, that on modern novels? I was almost sure it was his, and yet I doubted. It was like and yet not like him.'

'It was his,' said Violet. 'He always has his things sent to me. I am glad you observed the difference. I thought it so much kinder and less satirical than his writings used to be.'

‘It was so,’ exclaimed Theodora. ‘There were places where I said to myself, “This cannot be his; I know what he would have said,” and yet it was too forcible and sensible to have been written by any one else.’

‘The strength is there, but not the sort of triumph in sarcasm that sometimes made one sorry,’ said Violet; ‘and were you not struck by his choice of extracts! I have fancied a different strain in his writings of late.’

Theodora squeezed Violet’s hand. ‘I feared I had hardened him,’ she said. ‘Thank you, good night.’

CHAPTER 2

St. Osyth’s well is turned aside. —CRABBE

On the first convenient day, Lord Martindale sent Violet to call at Rickworth Priory, a visit which she was the more desirous of making, as Emma’s correspondence, after languishing for awhile, had ceased, excepting that she sent a fresh allegory of Miss Marstone’s to Johnnie on each birthday; and the Brandons having given up coming to London for the season, she scarcely knew anything about them, excepting through Theodora, who reported that they retired more and more from society, and that Miss Marstone was much with them.

Theodora would have accompanied Violet, but she was sure that her absence would be a boon to Emma, whom she had of late tried in vain to draw out; and, besides, one of the housemaids was ill, and Theodora, whom her Cousin Hugh called the mother of the maids, wished not to be away at the doctor’s visit. So little Johnnie was his mother’s only companion; but she was disappointed in her hopes of introducing him to his godmother. To her surprise Lady Elizabeth was alone, Emma was at Gothlands with her friend Miss Marstone.

‘They were very kind in asking me,’ said Lady Elizabeth, ‘and so was Emma about leaving me; but I do not wish to be a drag upon her.’

‘Oh! how can you say so?’ exclaimed Violet.

‘It did not suit,’ said Lady Elizabeth. ‘The uncle, old Mr. Randal, is an old-fashioned, sporting squire, and the other Miss Marstones are gay ladies. I felt myself out of my element when I was there before; but now I almost wish I was with her.’

‘You must miss her very much, indeed.’

‘It is what we must all come to, my dear,’ said Lady Elizabeth, looking at the young mother, with her boy leaning against her knee, deep in a book of illustrations. ‘You have a good many years to look forward to with your little flock; but, one way or other, they will go forth from us.’

Lady Elizabeth thought Johnnie too much absorbed to hear; but Violet found his hand lightly squeezing hers.

‘I thought you at least had kept your daughter,’ she said.

‘Emma will be five-and-twenty in the autumn.’

‘But, oh! Lady Elizabeth, I thought—’

‘I cannot tell, my dear. I hope Emma’s arrangements may be such that we may go on together as before.’

‘How do you mean?’ exclaimed Violet, confounded.

‘Her judgment is sound,’ continued Lady Elizabeth, ‘if she will only use it; and when it comes to the point, Miss Marstone’s may be the same.’

‘Is she gone to Gothlands to settle her plans?’

‘Yes; I could not well have gone with her, for we have four little orphan girls in the house, whom I could not well leave to the servants. That is quite as I wish, if the rest could be added without Theresa Marstone making this her home, and introducing all the plans they talk of.’

‘She could not introduce anything to make you uncomfortable!’

‘It is not so much comfort that I mean, my dear. I do not think that I should object to giving up some of the servants, though in my time it was thought right to keep up an establishment. Perhaps a family of women are not called upon to do things in the same style, and there is no doubt that our means may be better employed. We have too many luxuries, and I would not wish to keep them. No, if it was entirely Emma’s doing. I should be satisfied; but there is more influence from Miss Marstone than I quite like. I cannot fully rely on her judgment, and I think she likes to manage.’

‘She could never presume to manage in your house!’

‘Emma’s house, my dear.’

‘But that is the same.’

Lady Elizabeth sighed, and made a movement with her head, then said, ‘All that they think right and conscientious they will do, I am sure, but the worst of it is that Theresa has friends who are not of our Communion, and she does speak strongly of things that do not accord with her notions. I cannot go along with her, and I must confess she sometimes alarms me.

‘And does Emma think with her entirely?’

‘I fear—I mean I think she does; and, by the bye, my dear, do you know anything of a Mr. Gardner?’

‘I do know a Mr. Mark Gardner.’

‘That is his name. He is staying in the neighbourhood of Gothlands, and seems very deep in their counsels. I am afraid he is leading them farther than Theresa Marstone herself would have gone.’

‘Oh, then, he cannot be the same person. I meant a very different style of man, a cousin to those Miss Gardners who used to be friends of Theodora.’

‘Ah! I meant to ask you about Miss Gardner and Percival Fotheringham. What! you have not heard?’

‘No, nothing. What do you mean?’

‘Married.’

‘Married! No, never!’

‘I thought you would have known, all about it, and I was anxious to hear what kind of connection it was for Percival.’

‘Do tell me, how did you hear of it? When was it?’

‘Not long ago, in Italy. I heard of it the other day from my nephew, Edward Howard, who is just returned, and he told me that Mrs. Finch was leading a dashing life at Florence, and that her sister had just married Mr. Fotheringham, “the author.”’

‘O, I do not know how to think it possible! Yet it is such an uncommon name.’

‘Do you know whether his name is Antony?’

‘Yes, it is his first name. I remember Arthur’s laughing at him for being ashamed of it, as he said.’

‘That confirms it. I asked Edward if the Christian name was Percival, and he said it was Antony, and some such name, but he could not be sure.’

‘Ah! there would be a confusion owing to his being always called Percy.’

‘He said, too, that it was a good match for Miss Gardner, as he was heir to an estate in Yorkshire.’

‘Worthbourne! Then I am afraid it must be too true. The author, too!’

‘So Edward was told.’

‘I must write and ask John Martindale. He will be sure to know the whole history.’

The rest of the visit and the homeward drive were like a dream. Violet was lost in amazement, compassion, and disappointment, and in the debate how Theodora should be informed. Should she wait till there were further particulars to confirm it! But when she thought it over, there seemed no more wanting. She knew that Percy

had been thinking of visiting Italy a year ago, and the name, the authorship, and connection with Worthbourne swept away all doubt. As to making inquiries, she did not know Arthur's present address; and even if she had had it, she would have shrunk from saying anything that should lead to one additional conversation with Mark Gardner; besides which, Arthur had a fashion of never answering any question asked by letter.

Nor could Violet venture to delay. It was better that such tidings should come from sympathizing lips than through the gossip of the neighbourhood; and Theodora ought to be aware of them as soon as possible, that she might no longer cherish the shade of her affection. Alas! that he should have done this at the very moment when she had truly become worthy of him, or, at least, of what he had once been!

At night, when Theodora came to linger over her fire, the intelligence was reluctantly and hesitatingly spoken; Violet's eyes were bent down, for she knew how little that spirit could brook that its suffering should be marked.

Theodora stood up before her, at her full height, with flashing eye and indignant voice: 'Do you think I believe it? No, indeed! I may have lost him for ever, but he would never lose himself. I scorn this as I did Jane Gardner's own story that you were going to marry him to your sister. I knew you both too well.'

Violet put her arm round Theodora. 'Dearest, I am the more afraid that we must believe this, because he was not always constant. He did think of Annette.'

'Think of her! What do you mean! Did he make her an offer!'

'Yes. I would never have told you if I did not think it might help you in this.'

'I don't want help,' said Theodora, raising her head and turning from Violet. 'Let him do as he likes.'

But, ere she had made two steps towards the door, her breast heaved with a convulsive sob. She threw herself on the ground, and rested her face on Violet's lap. The sobs came at long intervals, with a tight, oppressed sound. Much alarmed,

Violet caressed her, and tried to soothe her with gentle words, and at last they unlocked her lips.

‘It is not myself! Oh, no! I knew I had forfeited him long ago. I had proved myself unworthy. I had no right to hope. But that he should have changed—let his clear sense be blinded by her art! He, to whom I could have looked up all my life!—who was so noble in rejecting me!’

The large drops had gathered and flowed, seeming to scald their course down her cheeks. ‘O Violet! I wish your sister had married him! Then he would have been happy—he would not have degraded himself. Oh! what change can have come over him?’

‘You know Lady Fotheringham was fond of Jane Gardner, and he might have taken her upon her word.’

‘As if Percy would see with any old woman’s eyes, when once he came in contact with her! No, I see but one explanation. It must have been I who lowered his estimate of woman. Well I might do so, when I treated like a toy the happiness he had confided to me. I, on whom he had fixed his ardent soul for so many years past. No wonder he learnt to hold all women cheap alike! O, that summer of madness! If I have dimmed the brightness of that noble nature!’

‘Dear, dear Theodora, what can I say to comfort you? She may be altered; he may have improved her.’

‘She is not capable of it,’ said Theodora; ‘there is nothing in her but time-serving and selfishness. And he, with that large true heart, so detesting falsehood—he must either be wretched or deceived—debased! No, there is no comfort—there never will be.’

‘Except the best sort,’ tenderly whispered Violet. Theodora rested her head on her hands, and remained perfectly still for some moments, then looked up, and spoke in a depressed voice.

‘I cannot talk any more. I feel shattered from head to foot. I must be quiet.’

‘Then, dearest, pray go to bed at once, and I will come and see you.’

‘I cannot. I undertook to give Maria her draught at one o’clock. May I stay here while you go to bed?’

‘Anything, dearest, dearest sister.’

‘Only let me be in the room with you, and be quiet.’

She would not, as Violet entreated, lie down on the bed beside her, but remained seated on the floor, her eyes riveted on the fire, never looking round, her face stupefied, her hands hanging motionless, like one stunned; and when Violet’s anxious gaze was closed by irresistible sleep, that dark head was still motionless before the fire.

Her mind was indeed a blank, sensible of nothing but the effect of the shock. The phrase now and then occurred, ‘Percy is married to Jane;’ but her perceptions were so sluggish that she scarcely knew that it concerned her. She seemed to have forgotten who Percy was, and to shrink from recalling the remembrance. There was a repose in this state of stupor which she was reluctant to break; and after the great clock, so melancholy in the silence, had tolled half-past twelve, her sensations were absorbed in the dread of hearing One! the summons to exertion.

The single note pealed out, and died quivering slowly away; she rose, lighted her candle, and quitted the room, feeling as if the maid’s illness and the doctor’s directions belonged to some period removed by ages.

CHAPTER 3

This house of splendour and of princely glory Doth now stand desolated, the affrighted servants Rush forth through all its doors. I am the last Therein. —Wallenstein

Theodora was no sooner in the gallery than she was recalled to the present. There was a strange gleam of light reflected on the avenue. Roused at once to action, she hurried towards the window. The fire was within the house. She pushed open the door leading to Mrs. Nesbit's apartments. Light was flashing at every chink of the bed-room door. She threw it back. Out rolled a volume of smoke, the glare of flame burst on her, the curtains were blazing! 'Aunt! Aunt Nesbit, are you there? she cried, in tones low with horror and choked with smoke; she plunged between the burning curtains, felt that she had a hold of something, dragged it out, found it move and gasp, bore it from the room, and, depositing it on a couch in the gallery, only then could perceive that it was indeed Mrs Nesbit, uninjured, though half-suffocated.

Mrs. Garth, who slept in the adjoining room, with the door open, had been waked by her call, and came running out. An old soldier, she had full self-possession, and was at once effective, and it was well, for she exclaimed, 'Miss Martindale, you are on fire,' just as the light and the scorching were revealing the same to herself. There was no time for personal terror, barely for pain, the fire was crushed out between them by the help of a woollen table-cover, they scarcely knew how, they only saw that the draught had increased the blaze in the room, and dense clouds of smoke came bursting out upon them.

Mrs. Nesbit clung terrified to her niece, but Theodora, with a word or two of encouragement, freed herself from her grasp, and leaving her to Mrs. Garth's care, flew up the nursery stairs. She must have the children in their mother's sight before the alarm should reach her. Sarah's first waking impulse was to growl, that Master Johnnie would catch his death of cold, but the next moment she was equal to any emergency; and the little ones were at their mother's door just as she was opening it, thinking the noise more than Maria's illness could occasion, and setting forth to see whether there was anything amiss in the nursery. Theodora put Annie into her arms. 'All safe. It is only the north wing. Don't be frightened. Stay where you are.'

Violet could only obey, thankful at having her three around her, and trying to keep her terror from being visible enough to increase Johnnie's exceeding alarm, or to frighten Helen out of her happy state of inquisitive excitement and curiosity.

Theodora had hurried to call her parents. They were already in motion. Lord Martindale's first care was for Violet and the children, Lady Martindale's for her aunt, and almost instantly she was embracing and supporting the pale shrunken figure, now feebly tottering along the gallery, forsaken by Mrs. Garth, who had gone back to secure her own valuables.

By this time, the gallery was full of screaming maids, whom Sarah had, with difficulty, prevented from leaping at once from attic windows; and staring men, hallooing for water, which no one brought, except little Helen, who, escaping from her mother's room, ran barefooted into the midst, holding aloft the water-bottle triumphantly, and very indignant at being captured, and carried back in the butler's arms.

The fire was spreading so fast that Lord Martindale decided on removing all the helpless to the gardener's house at the end of the pleasure ground. He came himself to call Violet, told her not to be alarmed, and, taking his grandson in his arms, led the way. Mrs. Nesbit was carried on a mattress between two of the servants, Lady Martindale walking beside her, absorbed in trying to guard her from injury or alarm; Annie, asleep and unconscious, was in her mother's arms, and Theodora carried the amused and chattering Helen. At the foot of the stairs, Violet exclaimed, 'My cross, I must not leave it!' and would have turned, but Theodora prevented her. 'I know where it is,' she said, 'I am going to see how they are moving Maria;' and putting Helen into the nearest pair of arms, she ran back.

Harrison's successor, Mr. Armstrong and his wife were on foot, and ready to receive them. Their spare bed was for Mrs. Nesbit, in their own the three children were placed. In all his haste, Lord Martindale paused till he could lay his little shivering

ice-cold charge in the bed, and see him hide his head in his mother's bosom. 'Good boy!' he said, 'I told him not to cry for you, and he has not made a sound, though I have felt him trembling the whole way. Take care of him.'

Little did she need the recommendation, though it sent a thrill of gladness through her that it should have been made at such a time. She had great apprehension of the effect of the shock on the child's tender frame and timid nature, his obedience and self-command seeming almost to enhance the excess of terror. The shuddering horror and convulsive clinging were beyond control, and were renewed whenever a fresh glare broke out from the burning house; to turn him away from the window, or to put up blinds and curtains made it worse, for the shadows of the trees, flickering mysteriously, seemed still more terrific. His sister screamed with excitement and delight at each brighter burst of flame, till she suddenly laid down her head and fell fast asleep; but still his nervous trembling continued at intervals, and his mother could not leave him, nor cease from saying consoling words of his heavenly Guardian, the only means that soothed him, especially when his sighing exclamation recurred, 'O, if papa was but here!' the tune to which her heart was throbbing throughout that dreadful night. She felt guilty of being useless, but he was her first care, and her power of real service was small: so she could only hang over him, and as she watched the healthful sleep of her little girls, join her prayers and thanksgivings with his, that all papa's treasures were safe. Not till the flames were dying down, morning twilight showing cold and gray, and Sarah coming in with bundles of rescued garments, was Johnnie's mind free enough to unclasp his hand, and show something fast held in it. 'Aunt Helen's cross, mamma; I thought I might keep hold of it, because I was frightened.'

Her caresses lulled him at last to sleep, while she grieved at Theodora's having gone in search of the cross. She knew of her safety from Sarah, who reported that she had been working like any ten; but she had not yet seen her, and the silence and suspense became oppressive.

Theodora had hardly spent a moment in seeking the cross, she tied on Violet's bonnet over the hair falling round her, hurried to assist in carrying the sick maid to a bed made up for her at the stables, and then, missing the dumb page from among the servants, she rushed back to look for him, dashed up the stairs through thick smoke, found him asleep, and crossing a floor that almost burnt her foot, she shook him awake, and saw him too in safety. She bethought her of her brother John's possessions, now that the living were all secure; she hurried into the work, she tore down his prints and pictures, carried them and his books out,—desks, drawers, weights she would never have dreamt of lifting, were as nothing to her. Many times did her father meet her, exclaim and urge her to desist, and to go to Armstrong's; she said she was just going: he went in one of the thousand directions in which he was called at once, and presently again encountered her, where he least expected it, coming out of a cloud of smoke with a huge pile of books in her arms! On she worked, regardless of choking, blinding smoke—regardless of the glare of flame—never driven from the field but by a deluge from a fire-engine; when stumbling down-stairs, guided by the banisters, she finally dismayed her father, who thought her long ago in safety, by emerging from the house, dragging after her a marble-topped chess table, when half the upper windows were flashing with flame.

Then he locked her arm into his, and would not let her stir from his side.

Water had been the great deficiency. Fire-engines were slow in coming, and the supply from the fountains was as nothing, so that the attempt had necessarily been to carry out property rather than to extinguish the fire. Sarah, after coolly collecting all that belonged to her mistress or the children, had taken the command of Miss Altisidora Standaloft, (who usually regarded her as vulgarity personified,) scolded away her hysterics, and kept guard over her, while she packed up her lady's jewels and wardrobe, not until then allowing her the luxury of shrieking at every jet of flame. The other servants and the villagers had worked with hearty goodwill below stairs; and when Theodora had time to look around, the pleasure-ground presented a

strange scene. Among the trodden plants and shrubs lay heaps of furniture, sofas, chairs lying tumbled here and there, with plate, pictures, statues, ornaments heaped in wild confusion, crowds of people, in every variety of strange dishabille, gathered round; two long lines of them handing bucket after bucket, with machine-like regularity, from the fountain; others removing the furniture from the terrace; cushions, ormolu, fine china, handed out of the lower windows; the whole seen by the wild lurid light that flashed from the windows above, strangely illuminating the quiet green trees, and bringing out every tiny leaf and spray by its fierce brilliancy, that confused every accustomed shadow, while the clouds of smoke rolled down as if to wither all around.

And above the rushing roaring sound! the thunder of falling ceilings; the red light within some familiar windows; the gray sky reflected in others, till, after a few uncertain flickers, the glow awoke in them also. Then arose the whiter gusts of vapour, when water, hissing and boiling, contended with fire.

In vain! the flame surmounted! Shouts, cries! Lord Martindale pushing nearer, calling to all for heaven's sake to come out, leave all, only come out; men rushing from the doors, leaping from the lower windows; one dark figure emerging at the moment before a tremendous crash shook the earth beneath their feet; the fire seemed for a moment crushed out, then clouds of smoke rose wilder and denser, yellowed by the light of the morning; the blaze rushed upwards uncontrolled, and the intensity of brightness, behind and above the walls, glared on the mass of awe-struck faces. There was not a movement, not a word, not a sound, save that of the roaring flame.

The first voice was Lord Martindale's: 'Are all out? Is every one safe?'

'Yes, my lord, all but the claret of 1826,' said that last to escape, half-clad, grimy, and singed, only in courteous voice, the butler.

'Thank God!' said Lord Martindale, fervently. 'And, Simmonds, thank you for what

you have done to-night;' and he heartily shook the butler's hand.

'Oh, my lord, if it had been more! If that claret was but safe, I should feel I had done my duty,' said Simmonds, almost overcome, but giving place to Mr. Hugh Martindale, who, just released from a chain of buckets in the kitchen yard, was coming up to wring his cousin's hand, say there seemed no more to be done, and repeat his congratulations on the safety of life and limb. But a fresh alarm arose, lest the fire might extend to the stabling; and in watching the horses led out, the spreading of wet tarpaulins on the roof, the engines playing on the burning mass in the house, and the flames rising with diminishing fierceness in the intervals of the bursts of steam, there was such intense excitement that no one could think of aught but the sight before them.

At last there was a touch on Lord Martindale's arm; a message from the gardener's house that he must come directly: Mrs. Nesbit was in a fit.

The morning dewiness and calmness of the garden had a curious effect, as they walked hastily through it, out of sight of the confusion on the lawn; everything looked so blue and pale, especially Violet, who came down to meet them.

'I have sent for Mr. Legh,' she said. 'It is very terrible. She is quite insensible, but—'

She broke off suddenly. Theodora had sat down, untied her bonnet, then tried to rise, but tottered, and sank senseless on the floor.

Her father lifted her, so as to place her with her head on Violet's lap. Violet removed the bonnet, the hair came with it, burnt off in masses, the very eyelashes and brows were singed, the forehead, cheeks, and neck frightfully reddened and blistered. Lord Martindale took her hands to chafe them: they were bleeding, and purple from bruises, the arms scorched and burnt—injuries overlooked in the excitement, but ready to repay themselves after her five hours' violent and incessant exertion. It was a frightfully long swoon; and her father, almost in despair, had sent a second

messenger for medical aid before Violet could look up consolingly, and direct his attention to the signs of returning animation. She presently half opened her eyes, perceived in whose arms she lay, and who was bending over her—she heard his fond words; but reviving no further, closed her eyes, without attempting to speak.

Lord Martindale could no longer delay going up-stairs. There the scene was most distressing; there was complete insensibility, with a tendency to convulsive movement, a condition so plainly hopeless that he would fain have removed his wife, hitherto so unaccustomed to any spectacle of suffering. But Lady Martindale was not to be detached from her who had absorbed her affection from infancy. Wrapped in that one idea, she hardly heard his representations of their daughter's state, and, with piteous looks, repelled his assurances that her care was unavailing, and ought to be relinquished to Mrs. Garth and the maids. He was obliged at length to desist, and returned just as Violet and Mr. Martindale had succeeded in moving Theodora to a slippery horse-hair sofa. She looked up and replied, 'Better, thank you,' to his first inquiry; but when asked if she was in pain, was forced to answer, 'Yes, not much,' and closed her eyes, as if she only wished not to be disturbed.

They held council over her: Mr. Martindale urged taking her at once to his parsonage; he would find the carriage, and Violet should bring her, leaving the children to follow under Sarah's charge when they should awake. Violet only demurred at leaving Lady Martindale; but Lord Martindale authoritatively told her, that it was not fit for her to be in Mrs. Nesbit's room, and he should be much obliged to her to see Theodora properly taken care of.

The transit was serious, every one longed to have it over, but dreaded the arrival of the carriage, which came before it was expected. Resolute as ever, Theodora astonished them by springing at once on her feet, disdaining aid, but she had hardly taken a step, before she faltered, and was just falling, when her father caught her in his arms and carried her to the carriage, where Violet was ready to uphold her

sinking head. Mr. Martindale took the short way, and was at home before them, to lift her out, and transport her at once to her room. Since the marriage of Pauline, Theodora had given up a personal attendant, and no ladies' maids were forthcoming, except Miss Standaloft, whose nerves could not endure the sight of Mrs. Nesbit, far less of Miss Martindale, so the whole business of undressing fell upon Violet, and the rector's little under-maid, who, having been a school-girl, was of course devoted to Miss Martindale. A difficult task it was, for besides the burns, bruises, and faintness, every muscle and sinew were so strained and tender from the violent exertion, and the blows she had unconsciously received, that the gentlest touch and slightest movement were severely painful. Violet was most grateful for her never-failing resolution. Every move was made unhesitatingly the moment it was requisite, and not a complaint was uttered, scarcely even a confession of suffering; on anxious inquiry, 'Never mind, it can't be helped,' was the utmost reply, given in a blunt, almost annoyed manner, as if she could not bear to be disturbed out of that silence of endurance.

In the same manner, between stupefaction and fortitude, the surgeon's visit was gone through, and Violet heard from him that there was no serious consequence to be apprehended, provided fever could be averted. Violet, much alarmed as to the effect of the tidings of the previous night, thought it right to mention that she had undergone a severe shock, and perceived that he thought it greatly increased the chance of serious illness; but he could do nothing but insist on tranquillity; and, as Theodora had now fallen into an exhausted sleep, he returned to his other patient.

The hours seemed to have forgotten their reckoning; it was to Violet as if she had been years without looking after her children, and when she found it was only half-past nine, she was dismayed to think of the length of day yet to come. Leaving Theodora's sleep to be guarded by the little maid, she ventured down. The dumb boy was watching, with tearful eyes, at the foot of the stairs, his whole face one question about Miss Martindale. Answering him reassuringly on the slate, she opened the

dining-room door, and a refreshing sight met her eyes. Round the breakfast-table sat her own three, from their glossy heads to their little shining shoes, in order trim, as if no disaster had ever come near them;—little Annie on Cousin Hugh's knee; Helen's tongue going as fast as ever; Johnnie in shy good behaviour. A general cry of joy greeted her, and they were in an instant around her, telling of the wonders of the lawn, how the dying gladiator was lying on the blue damask bed, and the case of stuffed humming-birds on the top of the kitchen dresser, and the poor peacock so frightened that he hid himself in the laurels, and would not come near them.

All alarms had gone away like a dream of the night, and the day had dawned on the happy creatures in all its freshness and newness, which their elders would fain have shared, but the necessity of attending to them had something reviving in it, and Violet could not look at them without renewed thrills of thankfulness. It was like rescued mariners meeting after a shipwreck, when her father-in-law came in and embraced her and the children affectionately, with a special caress for Johnnie, 'the best little boy he ever saw.' He looked worn and depressed, and Violet hastened to help Mr. Martindale in setting breakfast before him, while he anxiously bade her rest, hoped she had not been hurt by all she had undergone; and asked for Theodora, whose illness, and his wife's despair at her aunt's condition, were the chief actual distress. For the rest, he was so thankful that no life had been lost, as to have hardly a thought to bestow on the ruin and destruction.

There was now time for the question, how did the fire begin? Mrs. Nesbit, before her attack came on, had said, that wishing to take a draught, and not liking to call Mrs. Garth, she had drawn the light near to the curtains, and had, doubtless, left it there. It seemed as if Mrs. Garth had taught her to dread disturbing her at night, and now Lady Martindale shrank with horror from letting her even approach the patient.

But how had Mrs. Nesbit been rescued without the slightest burn, and what had occasioned Theodora's injuries? Not till Violet began to explain did it dawn on her

what a heroine she was describing. All had been so simply and fearlessly done, that it had not struck her till she heard it in her own narration.

Lord Martindale was much affected. ‘My brave girl!’ he said; ‘then under Providence the safety of every one of us is owing to her. I wish she was awake that I might tell her so this minute!’

It was delightful to see how this seemed to compensate for everything; and, indeed, he said it was almost worth while to have been burnt out for the sake of seeing how nobly every one had behaved, servants and neighbours, rich and poor, working alike at the risk of their lives, and he was positively overcome as he spoke of the warm sympathy that met him on all sides, testifying the universal respect and affection with which he was regarded. Notes and messages were coming in from all the neighbourhood to intreat to be allowed to shelter his family; but it was impossible to move at present, and his views were fixed on occupying the house which had so long stood empty.

‘Arthur can have a room fitted up there directly,’ he said. ‘Where is he, my dear? How soon can he come?’

Violet was obliged to confess her ignorance. He had said he should be going about, and had given her no address. Much vexed, Lord Martindale forbore to distress her by remarks, and replied to his cousin’s question whether the house was insured—

‘For twenty thousand pounds, but that is nothing like the amount of damage. I hardly know how we shall meet it. I must have John at home to settle matters. How strange it is to look back. I remember as if it was yesterday, when John was born, Mrs. Nesbit insisting on my pulling down the poor old house, to make the place fit, as she said, for my son’s inheritance, and there is an end of it! Who would have told her that she would burn it down herself, poor woman? She always detested the old hall. Don’t you remember the stags’ antlers, Hugh? Ay, Johnnie, you would have wondered at those—a dozen stags’ heads with branching horns in the hall.’

‘Oh! tell me, grandpapa! Was it where you lived when you were a little boy?’

‘Ay, Johnnie,’ said Lord Martindale, pausing to take him on his knee. ‘Cousin Hugh could tell you how we went on together there! Such jackdaws’ nests as used to be in the chimneys—’

‘I do believe,’ said his cousin, ‘you have more regret at this moment for the old house than for this one!’

‘Well! when I think of going home, the old red pediment with the white facings always comes into my mind, as it used to look up the avenue, when we came back for the holidays. Those old shields with the martlets—see, Johnnie, like that—’ holding up the crest on a spoon, ‘where the martins used to build their nests over the windows, were such as I never saw anywhere else. I found one of them lying about at the farm the other day.’

‘Do you remember the hornet’s nest in the wall of the garden—?’

‘What a garden that was! They have never found any pear equal to that jargonelle, where you ate twenty the first day of the holidays. What do you think of that, Johnnie?’

‘Ay, Johnnie, and I can tell you of something grandpapa did,’ retorted Mr. Hugh Martindale; and to Violet’s diversion, the two old cousins continued to make Johnnie an excuse for bringing up their boyish memories, which seemed to rise on them the more vividly, now that the great mansion no longer obstructed their view. It was complete oblivion of everything else, and seemed to do infinite good to Lord Martindale, but soon it was interrupted; Lady Elizabeth had driven over to beg to carry the whole party back to Rickworth with her, or at least to take home Violet and the children; but this could not be; Violet could not leave Theodora, and though Lord Martindale pressed her to consult her own comfort by removing, he was evidently gratified by her begging to be allowed to remain at the parsonage. He then returned to his wife, and Lady Elizabeth, after offers of every service in her power,

took leave, while Violet returned to her charge.

Theodora awoke with less fever than they had ventured to hope, and quite composed, though much surprised with her first acquaintance with illness, and not even comprehending that she could not get up, till the pain of the attempt corroborated Violet's assurance.

'How base it is,' said she, 'not to be able to do a few hours' work without having to take to one's bed. I flattered myself I was not so despicably weak, for a woman.'

'You might be satisfied,' said Violet, her heart too full to say more.

'Not while your Sarah walks about as if nothing had happened.'

'Where should any of us be but for you?' said Violet, bending over her.

'There's not an inch of me fit for kissing!' exclaimed Theodora, turning away.

'Lord Martindale will soon come to tell you what he thinks of it.'

'Papa! Where is he? I don't remember him since we went down to Armstrong's. Yes, I do though!' she paused, 'but I can't think of it. Crying would be worse. What a queer thing fainting is! I used to speculate what it was like.'

'How do you like it?' said Violet, perceiving her mood.

'Tolerably, in some respects; but it makes one's memory hazy. What has become of mamma? I suppose she is afraid of the sight of my visage.'

'Oh! no, no!'

'My aunt, of course! How could I forget! Mrs. Armstrong spoke of her being ill. Was it another stroke!' said Theodora, alarmed as her recollection returned, and Violet was obliged to tell the whole.

'My poor mother!' said Theodora, gravely, 'I wish I could help—'

There was a knock at the door. Miss Standaloft stood hesitating and making signs to Violet.

‘Is there any news of Mrs. Nesbit?’ asked Theodora. ‘There can be only one thing to hear. Is it over?’

It was, and the end had been quiet. Theodora drew a long breath, and repeated, ‘Poor mamma!’

‘Do you want me? Do you think I might go to her!’ said Violet. ‘She has no one with her but the gentlemen.’

‘I should be very glad if you were there. Only don’t hurt yourself, or Arthur will be angry; and to have you to nurse would be more than could be borne. My poor aunt! I think she softened at the last, and she loved us all very much at one time.’

‘I am glad she was kind to Johnnie,’ said Violet.

Miss Altisidora was induced to sit on the other side the curtain, intending to call Sarah if anything was wanted, and Violet walked across the park, dreading to enter for the first time the presence of the shadow of death, fearing in her lowliness to intrude or presume, but drawn onwards by the warmhearted yearning to perform a daughter’s part, if perchance her husband’s mother could derive the least solace from her attentions.

She crossed the trodden grass, and gazed on the ruin of the abode that had once almost oppressed her with its grandeur. Past away! and with it, she whose hopes and schemes were set on the aggrandizement of the family—she had gone where earthly greatness was weighed in its true balance! And the lime trees budded, new and young in their spring greenness, as when the foundation-stone was laid!

Violet thought how she had been taught to look on this as her boy’s inheritance, and therewith came the prayer that he might win his true inheritance, made without hands, ever spring-like and beyond the power of the flame! She looked up at the shell, for it was no more, she only recognized the nursery windows by their bars; the woodwork was charred, the cement blackened by the fire, where yesterday Helen’s and Annie’s faces had been watching her return! A sick horror passed over her as

she thought how much had depended on Theodora's watchful night, and imagined what might have awaited Arthur!

Then with hopeful, grateful anticipation, she looked to his coming, and his greeting after such perils endured in his absence. 'O, will not thankfulness bring him those thoughts! It must! He must join with me, when he owns the mercy and sees our children safe. Oh! then blessings on this night's danger! Let me see, he will learn it from the paper! When can he come? Oh! how his looks and one word from him will reward Theodora!'

She felt as if her happy anticipation had been selfish when she came near the cottage with its blinded windows. Lord Martindale was speaking to some one, but turned at once to her. 'You here, my dear? You have heard?'

'Yes, I have; but Theodora and I thought as Lady Martindale has no maid here, that I had better come and see if I could do anything for her. Can I?' said she, with her humble sweetness.

'I cannot tell, my dear,' he answered. 'She attends to nothing, and has not been able to shed tears. We cannot rouse her. Indeed, I am sorry you came; you ought to be resting.'

'O, no, we both wished it. Should I be troublesome to her?'

'No, indeed, my dear child,' said he, affectionately. 'It is a great relief to me that you should be with her, for here is much that I must attend to, and I wish nothing so much as to get her to the parsonage. The carriage is waiting, but she will not hear of coming away, and I do not know how to leave her here.'

So saying, he led her into the room; Violet gave one shrinking glance towards the bed, while the chill of awe shot through her veins; but the chief thought was needed for her who sat rigid and motionless, with fixed tearless eyes, and features in cold stillness more than ever like marble. Violet felt as if that deathly life was more painful to look upon than death itself, and her hand trembled in Lord Martindale's

grasp; he pressed it closer, and going up to his wife, said, ‘Anna, my dear, here is our child Violet so kind as to come and see you.’

Lady Martindale made a courteous movement, as if by mechanism, but without looking up. He was delaying, unable to leave them thus, though he was much wanted below stairs.

‘I will stay while you go,’ whispered Violet, though she longed to keep him, for that presence filled her with trembling, and promising speedy return, he departed.

For some minutes she could venture nothing, and the silence in which she heard only the beatings of her own heart seemed more than she could bear; but at last she collected herself, and an impulse suddenly occurring to her, she ventured to touch her mother-in-law, and said, ‘Theodora has been asking for you.’

Lady Martindale shook her head. ‘I cannot come, I cannot leave her.’

‘Poor Theodora is so much hurt!’ pleaded Violet; ‘you will be surprised to see how she is scorched! Such arms and hands, that she cannot help herself—and she wants cold applications continually.’

Lady Martindale once looked attentive, but a glance at her aunt brought back her face of silent misery. Violet was perplexed, but strove on—‘Poor Theodora! I hope you will come to her. She wants care very much. Did you know that it was in saving her that she was so sadly burnt?’

‘No: was it?’

‘Yes; she snatched her out through the burning curtains. That was the way Theodora’s hair was all burnt off, and her arms are so blistered!’ continued Violet, controlling her trembling, and speaking as when she was persuading one of the children—‘Poor Theodora! Will you not come and see her?’

‘Where is she?’

‘She is at the parsonage. They are ready to take us.’

‘Oh, no! I cannot go. You go to her.’

‘Pray, pray come with me. Theodora is so ill! It would do her so much good to see you; and we are afraid of her being anxious or distressed, lest she should have fever. Won’t you come?’

A motion, as if she could not bear this, made Violet fear she must desist, and she paused for a short interval, then said, ‘SHE was very fond of Theodora.’

‘Oh! Yes, yes—’

‘She would not like her to be left so long.’

‘I thought you were taking care of her.’

‘Oh, yes! but I cannot be the same as you would. One always wants one’s mother so much in illness.’

‘She was always a mother to me!’ The tears came at last, and she wept unrestrainedly; while Violet hung over her with soft caressing words of sympathy that cannot be detailed, till the first grief had had its course, and she again tried the experiment of repeating Theodora’s name, and saying how much she was suffering.

Lady Martindale did not reply, but suffered Violet to put on her cloak, and gradually lead her from the room, saying at each pause something of ‘poor Theodora.’

The deed was done; it might be by importunity, but it was worth achieving, even at the risk of being vexatious. Lord Martindale could hardly believe his eyes when he saw his wife on her way to the carriage, and Theodora was equally astonished when she appeared at her bedside.

It was a new thing to see one, hitherto healthy and independent, so completely prostrated; and no more was needed to awaken the natural affection so long stifled or thrust aside. Lady Martindale was greatly shocked, and, perhaps magnifying her daughter’s illness, had no room for any other thought. She wished to do everything for her herself—would hardly admit Violet’s assistance—and took every care, with

skilfulness that was marvellous in one trained to ineffectiveness.

To Theodora her attendance was a new and exquisite repose. It was the first taste of her mother's love, and made her content to be helpless; as there she lay, murmuring thanks, and submitting to be petted with a grateful face of childlike peace, resting in her mother's affection, and made happy by the depth of warm feeling in her father's words.

'It is a good speculation to be ill,' said she, with a smile of strong feeling when they had bidden her good night, and left her to Violet, who was to sleep on a mattress on the floor.

CHAPTER 4

Will you walk into my parlour?' said a spider to a fly. —MARY HOWITT

And where was Arthur?

Spending the day with his sporting friends, much to his own satisfaction, till in the evening, greatly against his will, he was taken out to dine with an old Mr. Randall, of Gothlands, the master of the hounds.

His nieces, the Misses Marstone, were the ladies of the house—well-dressed people, a little 'passees', but apparently not having found it out. Arthur watched the arrivals hoping that the order of precedence might not consign him to the flow of talk, of which he had already had quite a sufficiency, when, to his surprise, two ladies, evidently at home, entered together.

One—thin, sallow, spectacled—was, as he knew, an inhabitant; but the other—small, slight, and retiring, and, in spite of clinging unfresh muslin and shrinking figure, with the unmistakable air of high breeding, was a most unexpected sight. At least, thought he, here was one lady who would not bore him, and making his way to her, he inquired for Lady Elizabeth. Emma, on the other hand, asked after

Violet; and it was curious that both questions were put and answered with constraint, as if each was conscious of being something like a truant.

Another surprise. ‘Mr. Gardner.’ In walked Mark himself, and, after shaking hands with the elder Miss Marstone, came towards Emma and her friend, and was received with cordial familiarity. He entered into conversation with Arthur, drawing a little further from Miss Brandon at each step, till having brought him close to old Mr. Randall, and placed him under the infliction of a long prose about the hounds, he retreated, and was soon again in conversation with the two friends, Emma’s face raised and lighted up with eagerness.

Colonel Martindale had no escape from the head of the table and the eldest of the Misses Marstone. Resigning himself to his fate, he made talk; and, though now broader, redder, and somewhat coarser in feature and complexion than he had been a few years ago, he looked so gay and unencumbered, that his neighbour speculated as to whether he could be the eldest son, and resolved to discover what her sister, Sarah Theresa, knew of him.

‘It is so pleasant when friends meet unexpectedly,’ said she. ‘I did not know you were acquainted with either of our guests.’

‘Miss Brandon is a near neighbour of my father, and a great friend of Mrs. Martindale.’

Death to any incipient scheme of Miss Marstone; but she smiled on, and remarked, ‘A very amiable girl, and a beautiful place, is it not, Rickworth?’

‘Very pretty, a fine property,’ said Arthur, talking as if in his sleep, for he had caught Mark Gardner’s voice saying something about an oratory.

‘My sister is often staying there,’ proceeded the lady. ‘You know Miss Brandon’s scheme of restoring the Priory?’

‘I did not know that was anything more than talk.’

‘I used to think so,’ said Miss Marstone; ‘but both she and my sister Sarah treat it quite seriously, and Mr. Gardner is their prime counsellor.’

Arthur started, and with difficulty refrained from laughing.

‘Ah! I believe he has been a little wild, but that is all over now. He has taken quite a different turn now, and given up everything of that sort—throws himself into all their views.’

‘Indeed!’ said Arthur, who knew to his cost that if the reform had taken place at all, it must have been of extremely recent date.

‘O, yes, I assure you. He is staying with the curate, Mr. Silworth.’

‘Ha! that is an old name at school.’

‘Yes; he was an old schoolfellow—a very good man, to whose persuasions everything is owing.’

She pointed him out, and the first glance was a revelation to Arthur, who recognized him as the boy who, at school, had been the most easily taken in. He soon understood the state of affairs. Mark, clever, gentlemanly in appearance, and apt at catching the tone of the society around him, was making a bold stroke—had persuaded his kind-hearted, simple friend to believe him a sincere penitent, and to introduce him as such to the ladies at Gothlands, from whom he caught the talk most pleasing to them. At present it was all ecclesiastical aesthetics, and discontent with the existing system, especially as regarded penitence; by and by, when his hold should be secure, he would persuade the heiress that she had been the prime instrument in his conversion, and that she had gained his heart.

A bit of rhapsody from Miss Sarah Theresa, and poor Emma’s embellished and animated countenance, were sufficient indications that they were smoothly gliding into the snare; and accustomed as Arthur was to see Mark Gardner in a very different aspect, he was astonished at his perfect performance of his part—the humility and deference befitting the sense of his errors, and conversation so entirely

at home in all their peculiar language and predilections, that Arthur was obliged to feel for the betting-book in his own pocket to convince himself that he was still deeply involved with this most admirable and devoted of penitents. He could not help, as he took leave, giving a knowing look, conveying how easily he could spoil his game.

However, Arthur was in reality much annoyed. Of late years his easy temper had well-nigh surrendered itself to the ascendency of Mark Gardner; and though dissatisfied, remorseful, and anxious, he had allowed himself to be led farther and farther into extravagance. The sight of his home excited regrets, therefore he shunned it; and though weary and discontented in his chains, he was devoid of force or will to break them, and a sort of torpor seemed to make it impossible for him to resist Mark Gardner. Their money matters were much entangled. They had entered into a partnership for keeping horses for the turf, and there was a debt shared between them, the amount of which Arthur dreaded to investigate.

That Gardner should obtain a rich wife would be the greatest relief to Colonel Martindale; but he had rather it should have been any heiress in the world but Emma Brandon. He had a friendly feeling towards her, and a respect for her mother, that made him shrink from allowing her to become a victim, especially when he would himself be the gainer; and, on the other hand, he could not endure to betray a friend,—while he knew that his wife, his father, and his sister would be horrified at his secrecy.

After a night spent in execrating the dinner-party, he received a call from Mr. Gardner, who, without being aware that he took any interest in Miss Brandon, came to put him upon his guard, but found him less manageable than usual. Arthur made a formidable description of Lady Elizabeth’s discretion, underrated the value of Rickworth, and declared that it would be so tied up that Mark would gain nothing but a dull, plain little wife. Not thus deterred, Mark only asked of him discretion;

and when, trying to cloak his earnest under faltering jest, he declared that he had a regard for the Brandons, and should get into a scrape with his father, his friend held out the allurement of freedom from his difficulties, but was obliged to touch on this lightly, for Arthur's honour was ready to take fire at the notion of being bought. It ended in Gardner's treating the matter as if he had engaged not to betray him, and being hardly gainsaid, otherwise than by a sort of bantering proviso, that in case of an appeal direct, he could not be expected to vouch for Mark's entire and disinterested reformation.

With an intense dislike to the world in general, Arthur was considering how to prevent his wife from meeting Lady Elizabeth, and how to be out of the way before the report should spread of Mark's addresses, when everything else was driven from his mind by the arrival of the papers, with the announcement of the fire at Martindale.

The safety of the infant family of the Honourable Lieutenant-Colonel Martindale was the first news that met his eye; next, that of the death of Mrs. Nesbit,—the chief thought that occupied him in his hasty homeward journey.

He had been taught to think himself her heir; and though never forgiven for his marriage, hoped that the will might not have been altered, and considered that, whether it were in his favour or not, so large a property coming into the family could not fail to render his circumstances more easy, by enabling his father to augment his allowance, which, though ample in itself, appeared far from sufficient to a man with expensive tastes and an increasing family. The hope of independence, and of not being obliged to wish success to Gardner, was an opening into liberty and happiness.

By night he was at the parsonage, and Violet in his arms as soon as the door was opened. That moment was perfect—he was so eagerly tender, so solicitous lest she should have been injured by terror or exertion, so shocked at her peril in his absence. In the fulness of her heart she even asked him to come and see the children safely

asleep.

‘Now? What should I do that for?’

There was no unkindness, but the full felicity of the evening was marred.

There was no room for him at the parsonage, and an apartment in the empty house had been fitted up for him, so that she only saw him for an hour of confused talk over the events of the fire, and Theodora’s condition, which was very uncomfortable; for though the fever was slight, the burns and bruises were in an unsatisfactory state, and eyes, arms, and hands of very little use. She was patient, and resolute as ever, and so grateful to her nurses that waiting on her was a pleasure.

In fact, attendance on her was the only resource for occupying Lady Martindale, who, when not thus engaged, was listless and dejected, attending to nothing that passed around her, and sometimes giving way to inconsolable bursts of grief. It was as if her aunt had been her one idea in life, and without her she could turn to nothing else. Violet was very anxious to prevent the children from molesting her, and in much dread of their troubling her, now that all were in such close quarters. It was trying to be engaged with Theodora, and to hear the little feet and voices where they were not intended to be.

But when she was able to hasten to the rescue, she beheld Helen in Lady Martindale’s lap, and Johnnie by her side, all three intent on making bouquets; and all apologies and proposals to fetch them away were replied to by assurances of their goodness, and the pleasure afforded by their company.

It appeared that while playing in the garden, the little brother and sister had been, as it were, fascinated by watching her fixed melancholy figure in the drawing-room. Again and again they had peeped in at the window, striving to forget, but ever attracted by the sweet compassion of their hearts; till at last, after much pausing and whispering, they had betaken themselves to the corner of the garden where Cousin Hugh had given permission to gather as they liked, and at the expense of his own

small fingers, Johnnie had pulled the first bud of sweet-brier. Lady Martindale had felt a soft touch, and heard a little timid, coaxing voice—'Grandmamma, may we? Would you like this little, young rose?' while towards her was raised a face delicate and glowing with pale pink like the bud itself.

Grandchildren and flower were at once in her bosom. Warm, womanly child-love had been forced down to a far corner of her heart; but there it was, and like the rod piercing to the hidden spring, that fragrant gift of love touched it home, and thenceforth it was such fondling as Violet almost feared might be spoiling, especially of Helen; who, however unruly or exacting she might be, seemed only to endear herself the more, and was visibly far more her grandmother's darling than her gentle, well-behaved brother. This new affection for the children opened her heart to their mother, on whom she leant more than she knew. To her she talked of all her aunt's unwearied fondness and care, ever since she had come into her hands an orphan in her infancy. There had been real and entire devotion to each other on the part of the aunt and niece; and the affection she had been able to inspire, together with the solemn feelings towards the newly dead, gave her memory a softness that almost enabled Violet to think of her in Lady Martindale's point of view, forget her harshness, and the worldly pride for her niece and her family, to which she had sacrificed their best happiness.

It was a melancholy retrospect. Mrs. Nesbit might be said to have perfectly succeeded in the object of her life. She had formed her beloved niece, like the fabled image of snow, moulded by the enchanter and animated by no will but his, and had seen her attain the summit of her wishes, universally admired and distinguished for every talent and grace; while still completely under her influence, and as affectionate and devoted as ever. Could any desire be more fully attained? But there had ever been further craving, disappointment, combats, hatred, avarice, disgust; and with all around that could make old age happy and honourable, it had been a querulous melancholy struggle for power, spent in clutching at the toys that had no

pleasure in them—in trying to force worldly advantages on those who cared not for them, then revenging their indifference as a personal insult. She had sunk into the grave without any one having the power to regret her save that one fond, faithful niece, the one creature she had always regarded with genuine unselfish affection.

Lord Martindale, whose wife she had ruled, and whose children had been made unhappy by her, could hardly help owning to himself that her death was a relief to him; and Arthur barely made a fair show of moderate respect, in his anxiety for the property that would free him from embarrassment. His first inquiry was whether the will were burnt. No, it was in the hands of a lawyer, who would bring it on the day of the funeral. Lord Martindale might look reprovingly at Arthur's eagerness, but the matter was no less important to him. He had begun life with an expenditure as large as his income could bear; and as his children had grown up, and unprosperous times had come, he had not been able to contract his expenses. Of late he had almost been in difficulty as to the means of meeting the calls for the year, economy was a thing unknown and uncomprehended by his wife; and the giving up the house in London had been the only reduction he could accomplish. No one else in the family had an idea of self-denial except Theodora, who, perceiving how matters stood, had refused to have a maid of her own, and had begged him no longer to keep a horse for her. Some change ought to be made, but he had gone on in this unsatisfactory manner, trusting that at Mrs. Nesbit's death all would be straight. Her West Indian estates and accumulation of wealth must be bequeathed either to his wife or among his children; and in either case he would be set at ease—either relieved from supporting Arthur, or enabled to do so without difficulty.

The funeral took place in full grandeur. Lady Martindale had made it a special request that every one would mourn as if for her mother, and it was just one of the occasions when pomp was needed to supply the place of grief.

The only real mourner shut herself up in her own room, whither Theodora begged

Violet to follow her. She found her stretched on her bed, abandoned to grief. It was the sense of orphanhood; the first time she had come so close to death and its circumstances, and it was overpowering sorrow; but Violet had better learnt how to deal with her, and could venture to caress and soothe—entreat her to remember how much was left to love her—and then listen to what Lady Martindale began as the rehearsal of her aunt's care to shield her from sorrow; but Violet soon saw it was the outpouring of a pent-up grief, that had never dared to come forth. The last time the vault had been opened it had been for the infant she had lost, and just before for the little girls, who had died in her absence. 'My dear,' she said, 'you do not know how it is all brought back to me. It is as if your three darlings were the same I left when we went abroad. Your sweet Helen is exactly like my precious little Anna, whom I little thought I was never to see again! Oh, my babies!'

Violet was quite relieved to find this excessive grief was not spent on her aunt, but that it was the long-restrained sorrow for an affliction in which she could so much better sympathize. It had been of no avail for Mrs. Nesbit, in mistaken kindness, and ignorance of a mother's heart, to prevent her from ever adverting to her darlings; it had only debarred her from the true source of comfort, and left the wound to ache unhealed, while her docile outward placidity was deemed oblivion. The fear of such sorrow had often been near Violet, and she was never able to forget on how frail a tenure she held her firstborn; and from the bottom of her heart came her soothing sympathy, as she led her on to dwell on the thought of those innocents, in their rest and safety. Lady Martindale listened as if it was a new message of peace; her tears were softer, and she dwelt fondly on little Anna's pretty ways, speaking, and Violet hearing, as if it had been a loss of to-day, instead of more than thirty long years ago.

Lady Martindale opened a dressing-box, saying how relieved she had been to find it safe, and from a secret drawer drew out a paper and showed Violet some soft locks of chestnut hair. 'Their papa gave me these,' she said. 'My dear aunt would not let me look at them—she thought it hurt me; but I must see if Anna's hair is not just

like Helen's.' And then she begged Violet not to be alarmed at the resemblance, and kissed her for saying she was glad of it, and had no fears on that score. She dwelt on these reminiscences as if they were a solace of which she could never taste enough, and did not cease talking over them till Lord Martindale entered. Violet understood his feeling and the reserve hitherto shown to him sufficiently to attempt breaking it down, and ventured, as she quitted the room, to lay her hand on the little curl, and say, 'Grandmamma thinks Helen like her little Anna.'

Seeing Arthur leaning on the balusters, looking discomposed, she went down to him. 'Where have you been!' he said, rather sulkily.

'With your mother; I hope she is growing more calm.'

'Very absurd of her to take it so much to heart!' said Arthur, entering the drawing-room. 'Have you heard about this will?'

'No. What?'

'Never was such a will on this earth! It ought to be brought into court! I verily believe the old hag studied to make it a parting emanation of malice!'

'Oh, hush! hush!' cried Violet, shocked.

'It is all very well saying Hush, hush; but I should like to know what you mean to live upon?'

'What has she done?'

'She has gone and left it all to that child!'

'What child?'

'My son—your boy John, I tell you; but, mark you, so as to do no good to a living soul. Not a penny is he to touch till we are all dead, if we starve meantime. She has tied it up to accumulate till my eldest son—or John's, if he has one—comes to the title, and much good may it do him!'

'Poor little dear!' said Violet, inexpressibly pained by his tone.

‘Anything but poor! It is £100,000 to begin with, and what will it be when he gets it? Think of that doing nothing, and of us with no dependence but the trumpery £5000 by the marriage settlements. It is enough to drive one crazy.’

‘It is a pity,’ said Violet, frightened by his vehemence.

‘It is an end of all chance for me. When she had always taught me to look to it! It is absolute cheating.’

‘Of late she never led us to expect anything.’

‘No; and you never took pains to stand well with her. Some people—’

‘O, Arthur, Arthur!’

‘Well, don’t be foolish! You could not help it. Her spitefulness was past reckoning. To see her malice! She knew John and Theodora would not let me be wronged, so she passes them over, and my mother too, for fear it should be made up to me. Was ever man served so before? My own son, as if to make it more aggravating!’

At an unlucky moment Johnnie ran in, and pulled his mother’s dress. ‘Mamma, may Helen dig in the bed by the garden door!’

‘Go away!’ said Arthur, impatiently. ‘We can’t have you bothering here.’

Though inattentive and indifferent to his children, he had never been positively unkind, and the anger of his tone filled the timid child’s eyes with tears, as he looked appealingly at his mother, and moved away, lingering, and beginning a trembling, ‘but, mamma—’

‘Don’t stay here!’ cried Arthur, in an indiscriminating fit of anger, striking his hand on the table. ‘Did I not order you to go this moment, sir?’

Poor Johnnie fled, without hearing his mother’s consoling ‘I’ll come;’ which only, with her look of grief, further irritated Arthur. ‘Ay, ay! That’s always the way. Nothing but the boy, whenever I want you.’

Violet saw defence would make it worse, and tried to give him the attention he

required; though quivering with suppressed distress for his harshness to his poor little boy, whom she could hardly help going at once to comfort. She hardly heard his storming on about the unhappy will, it only seemed to her like the apple of discord, and great was the relief when it was ended by Lord Martindale's coming down, asking why Johnnie was crying. She hoped this might cause Arthur some compunction, but he only answered, gruffly, 'He was troublesome, he is always fretting.'

Violet found the poor little fellow with tear-glazed face trying to suppress the still heaving sobs, and be grateful to his grandmamma, who had brought him into her room, and was trying to console him, though unable to discover the secret of his woe. As he sprung to his mother's lap, his grief broke forth afresh. His affection for his father was a deep, distant, almost adoring worship; and the misery inflicted by those looks and words was beyond what could be guessed, save by his mother. He thought himself naughty, without knowing why, and could hardly be soothed by her caresses and assurances that papa was not really angry, but he must not interrupt another time.

'But, mamma, Helen wanted to dig up all Cousin Hugh's little green things.'

Violet was thus reminded that she must seek after her daughter, whom she found revelling in mischief, and was obliged to sentence to dire disgrace, causing general commiseration, excepting that her papa, ignorant that it was his own fault, declared children to be the greatest plagues in the world.

She saw him no more in private, but grieved at his moodiness all the evening, and at bed-time watched a red spark moving to and fro in the garden. Her heavy sigh made Theodora ask what was the matter.

'I wish Arthur would not stay out in the dew. He has a little cough already,' said she, putting forward the care that would best bear mention.

'You used to be above caring for dews and night airs.'

‘I must for him and Johnnie!’ said Violet.

‘Ah! what do you say to your son’s prospects?’

‘I don’t suppose it will make much difference to him,’ was the dejected answer, Violet’s eyes still following the red end of the cigar in the darkness.

‘Well! that is contempt for wealth! Fancy what will be in his hands. I thought you would be moralizing on the way to bring him up to use it.’

‘I have not thought of that,’ said Violet; ‘besides, it will be long enough before he has it.’

‘What! will it not be when he is of age!’

‘No, when he comes to the title.’

‘Oh! I see. Mamma did not understand that! She thought it absolutely left to him. How is it, then?’

‘It is put in trust till either he, or John’s son, if he should have one, comes to the title.’

‘Then, it does you no good?’

‘Only harm,’ Violet could not help saying.

‘How harm? It might be worse for you to have it.’

‘Most likely,’ said Violet’s submissive voice. ‘But it vexes Arthur so much!’ and the tears fell unseen.

‘Well it may!’ said Theodora. ‘One cannot say what one thinks of it NOW, but—Poor Arthur! I was very much afraid she was going to leave it to me. Now I wish she had.’

‘I wish so too.’

‘It was silly of me to warn her that Arthur should have his share; but after all, I don’t regret it. I would not have had it on false pretences. Did you hear when the will was

dated?'

'September, 18—.'

'When Johnnie was a baby. Ah! I remember. Well, I am glad we all forfeited it. I think it is more respectable. I only wish mamma had come in for it, because she is the right person, and papa is a good deal straitened. That really was a shame! Why did not she let them have it?'

'Arthur thinks it was for fear we should be helped.'

'No doubt,' said Theodora. 'Well. I wish—! It is a horrid thing to find people worse after they are dead than one thought them. There! I have had it out. I could not have borne to keep silence. Now, let us put the disgusting money matter out of our heads for good and all. I did not think you would have been distressed at such a thing, Violet.'

'I don't want it,' said Violet, amid her tears. 'It is Arthur's disappointment, and the knowing I brought it on him.'

'Nonsense!' cried Theodora. 'If I had Arthur here, I would scold him well; and as to you, he may thank you for everything good belonging to him. Ten million fortunes would not be worth the tip of your little finger to him, and you know he thinks so. Without you, and with this money, he would be undone. Now, don't be silly! You have got your spirits tired out, and sleep will make you a sensible woman.'

Violet was always the better for an affectionate scolding, and went to bed, trusting that Arthur's disappointment might wear off with the night. But his aunt's inheritance had been too much the hope of his life, for him to be without a strong sense of injury, and his embarrassments made the loss a most serious matter. He applied to his father for an increase of allowance, but he could not have chosen a worse time; Lord Martindale had just advanced money for the purchase of his company, and could so ill afford to supply him as before, that but for the sake of his family, he would have withdrawn part of his actual income. So, all he obtained was

a lecture on extravagance and neglect of his wife and children; and thus rendered still more sullen, he became impatient to escape from these grave looks and reproofs, and to return to town before the disclosure of Mr. Gardner's courtship. He made it his pretext that Violet was unwell and overworked in the general service; and she was, in truth, looking very ill and harassed; but he was far more the cause than were her exertions, and it was a great mortification to be removed from his parents and sister when, for the first time, she found herself useful to them, and for such an ungracious reason too, just when they were so much drawn together by the dangers they had shared, and the children seemed to be making progress in their grandmother's affections. Poor Johnnie, too! it was hard to rob him of another month of country air, just as he was gaining a little strength and colour.

But pleading was useless; the mention of Johnnie revived the grievance, and she was told she must not expect everything to give way to that boy of hers; every one was ready enough to spoil him without his help. He would not stay crammed into this small house, with the children eternally in the way, and his father as black as thunder, with no diversion, and obliged to sleep out in that den of a cottage, in a damp, half-furnished room—an allegation hardly true, considering Violet's care to see the room aired and fitted up to suit his tastes; but he was determined, and she had not even the consolation of supposing care for her the true reason; the only ground she could find for reconciling herself to the measure was, that night walks were not mending his cough, which, though so slight that he did not acknowledge it, and no one else perceived it, still made her uneasy. Especially Violet felt the ingratitude of leaving Theodora in her weak, half-recovered state; but it was almost as if he had a sort of satisfaction in returning his father's admonitions on the care of his wife, by making it a plea for depriving them of her in their need, and he fixed his day without remorse.

CHAPTER 5

E’en in sleep, pangs felt before, Treasur’d long in memory’s store, Bring in visions back their pain, Melt into the heart again. By it crost affections taught Chastened will and sobered thought. —AESCHYLUS.—Anstice

Arthur did not succeed in eluding Lady Elizabeth. She called the day after the funeral, begging especially to see Mrs. Martindale. She looked absent and abstracted, while Lord Martindale was talking to her, and soon entreated Violet to come with her for a short drive.

No sooner were they in the carriage than she said, ‘Violet, my dear, can you or Arthur tell me anything of this Mr. Gardner?’

‘I know very little of him personally,’ said Violet, for he was too much an associate of her husband’s for her to be willing to expose him; ‘but are you sure we mean the same person?’

‘Quite sure. Did you not hear that Arthur met him at Gothlands?’

‘No; I have had very little talk with him since he came back, and this fire has put everything out of our minds.’

‘Of course it must, my dear. However, Arthur came with Mr. Herries to dine there, and met Mr. Gardner as an old friend; so he must be the same, and I am particularly anxious for some account of him. I must tell you why—I know I am safe with you—but you will be very much surprised, after all her declarations—’

‘O, Lady Elizabeth, it cannot be that.’

‘I have always been prepared for something of the sort. But what, my dear?’ seeing her agitation, and quickly infected by it.

‘O, don’t let her,’ was all Violet could utter.

‘Tell me! what is he?—what do you know of him? They spoke of him as once having been extravagant—’

Violet drew a long breath, and tried to speak with composure. ‘He is a dreadful man,

gambling, betting, dissipated—such a person that Arthur never lets him come near me or the children. How could he dare think of her?'

'Can it be the same?' said Lady Elizabeth, infinitely shocked, but catching at the hope. 'This man is Lady Fotheringham's nephew.'

'Yes, he is,' said Violet sadly. 'There is no other cousin named Mark. Why, don't you remember all the talk about Mrs. Finch?'

So little had Lady Elizabeth heeded scandal, that she had hardly known these stories, and had not identified them with the name of Gardner. Still she strove to think the best. 'Arthur will be able to tell me,' she said; 'but every one seems fully satisfied of his reformation—the curate of the parish and all. I do not mean that I could bear to think of her being attached to a person who had been to blame. Her own account of him alarmed me enough, poor dear child, but when I hear of the clergyman, and Theresa Marstone, and all admiring his deep feeling of repentance—'

'How can he be so wicked!' exclaimed Violet.

'You are convinced that he is not sincere?'

'Why, of course, one does not like to say anything uncharitable; but there is something shocking in the notion of his talking of being good. If he did repent he would know how horrible it would be for him to marry Emma—'

'He does affect great humility. He declares that no one can be more conscious of his unfitness than himself; but he was betrayed into this confession of his sentiments—Emma's purity and devotedness, as Theresa writes to me, having been such powerful instruments in leading him to a better course. If it was not for poor Emma's fortune, one might trust this more! Oh! Violet, I never so much was inclined to wish that her brother had been spared!'

'But surely—surely Emma cannot like him?'

'I grieve to say that she and her friend have been in one of their fits of enthusiasm.

He seemed to accord with their idea of a penitent—only longing for stricter rules than are to be found with us. From what I have heard, I should have been much less surprised if he had become a monk of La Trappe; in fact, I was almost afraid of it.'

'And does not this undeceive them?'

'No; poor Emma's only doubt is because she cannot bear to be unstable, and to desert the work to which she was almost pledged; but she says she is ashamed to perceive how much the sacrifice would cost her. She adds, that decide as she may, he concurs with her in devoting everything to the restoration of the Priory.'

'Poor Emma! He has debts enough to swallow two-thirds! And Miss Marstone, what does she say?'

'His becoming a suitor seems to have been a surprise and disappointment to her; but if she thinks him a pupil of her own, or expects to govern the Priory in poor Emma's stead, she will be in his favour. No; I have no hope from Theresa Marstone's discretion.'

'The rest of the family?'

'Theresa despises the others too much to attend to them. Mr. Randall seems to be startled at the present aspect of affairs, and asks me to come; and I should have set off this morning, but that I thought I might learn something from you and Arthur.'

'Every one would tell you the same. He was expelled from the University, and has gone on shockingly ever since, breaking his mother's heart! Poor Emma! after dreading every gentleman!'

'I fear she has much to suffer. He made her think him not a marrying man, and put her off her guard. Did you say he was agreeable?'

'Perhaps I might think so if I knew nothing about him; but I have always had a repugnance to him, and it is all I can do not to dislike him more than is right. If I saw him speak to Johnnie, I think I should!'

‘And now tell me, for I ought to have every proof, if you know anything that would convince Emma that this present repentance is assumed?’

Violet coloured excessively. ‘Arthur could tell’ she said, half choked, and as Lady Elizabeth still waited, she was obliged to add, He was active in the same way at the last races. I know there are things going on still that a man who really meant to reform would have broken off. Arthur could give you proofs.’

Violet could not bear to be more explicit. Her own secret feeling was that Mr. Gardner was her husband’s evil genius, leading him astray, and robbing her of his affection, and she was not far mistaken. Sneers, as if he was under her government, were often employed to persuade him to neglect her, and continue his ruinous courses; and if she shrunk from Gardner, he in return held her in malicious aversion, both as a counter influence and as a witness against him. It was the constant enmity of light to darkness, of evil to innocence.

The whole drive was spent in conversing on this engrossing theme; Lady Elizabeth lamenting the intimacy with Sarah Theresa, a clever, and certainly in many respects an excellent person, but with a strong taste for singularity and for dominion, who had cultivated Emma’s naturally ardent and clinging nature into an exclusive worship of her; and, by fostering all that was imaginative in her friends composition, had led her to so exalted an estimate of their own ideal that they alike disdained all that did not coincide with it, and spurned all mere common sense. Emma’s bashfulness had been petted and promoted as unworldly, till now, like the holes in the philosopher’s cloak, it was self-satisfaction instead of humility. This made the snare peculiarly dangerous, and her mother was so doubtful how far she would be guided, as to take no comfort from Violet’s assurances that Mr. Gardner’s character could be proved to be such that no woman in her senses could think, a second time, of accepting him.

‘I cannot tell,’ said poor Lady Elizabeth; ‘they will think all wiped out by his

reform. Emma speaks already of aiding him to redeem the past. Ah! my dear,' in answer to a look, 'you have not seen my poor child of late: you do not know how much more opinionative she has become, or rather, Theresa has made her. I wish she could have been more with you.'

'I never was enough of a companion to her, said Violet. 'In my best days I was not up to her, and now, between cares and children, I grow more dull every day.'

'Your best days! my dear child. Why, how old are you?'

'Almost twenty-two,' said Violet; 'but I have been married nearly six years. I am come into the heat and glare of middle life. Not that I mean to complain,' said she, rousing her voice to cheerfulness; 'but household matters do not make people companions for those who have their youthfulness, and their readings, and schemes.'

'I wish Emma could have been drawn to take interest in your sound practical life.'

'If she would make a friend of Theodora!'

'Yes, but the old childish fear of her is not gone; and Emma used to think her rather wild and flighty, and so indeed did I; but how she is changed! I have been much pleased with conversations with her of late. Do you think it is owing to Mr. Hugh Martindale's influence?'

'In great part it is. What a blessing it is to them all to have him here.'

'Ah! it has been one of the things that made me most dread Theresa, that she will not like that good man.'

'What can she say against him?'

'I don't exactly understand them. They called him a thorough Anglican, and said he did not feel the universal pulse! Now, I know it has been unfortunate for Emma that our own vicar does not enter into these ways of thinking; but I thought, when Mr. Hugh Martindale came into the neighbourhood, that there would be some one to appeal to; but I believe Theresa will trust to no one but of her own choosing.'

They had come back to the parsonage-gate, and Lady Elizabeth set Violet down, promising to write as soon as she arrived at Gothlands; Arthur was sauntering in the garden, and as soon as the carriage was out of sight, came to meet her.

‘O, Arthur, Lady Elizabeth wanted to speak to you. Cannot you catch her?’

‘I? No. Nonsense.’

‘She wanted to ask you about Mr. Gardner. Was it he whom you met at Gothlands?’

‘Well, what of that?’

‘Poor Lady Elizabeth! Is it not shocking that he has been making an offer to Emma?’

‘He has, has he? Well, and what is she going to do?’

‘There can be but one answer,’ said Violet. ‘Lady Elizabeth came to hear about him.’

‘A fine chance for gossip for you.’

‘I was forced to tell her,’ said she, trying to hide the pain given her by his contemptuous tone. ‘I would not have spoken if I could have helped it.’

‘Ay!’ said Arthur, ‘as he says, set on a lady to talk of her husband’s friends.’

‘But, oh! Arthur, what could I do? Think of poor Emma.’

‘Emma is a fool.’

‘Only you must not be angry with me. I would have said nothing without cause, but when it comes to this,—and he is pretending to be reformed.’

‘Well, so he might be if you would let him.’

‘But, Arthur!’ then eagerly seizing a new hope, ‘you don’t mean that he is really improving? Oh! has he given up those horses, and released you?

He turned petulantly away. ‘How can he? You have taken away any chance of it now. You have done for him, and it is of no use to go on any more about it.’

He marched off to his own abode, while she was obliged to sit down under the verandah to compose herself before Theodora should see her.

Theodora perceived that much was amiss; but was spared much anxiety by not being with the family, and able to watch her brother. The cottage was completely furnished from the wreck of Martindale; but the removal thither was deferred by her slow recovery. Though not seriously ill, she had been longer laid up than had been anticipated in a person so healthy and strong; the burns would not heal satisfactorily, and she was weak and languid. It seemed as if the unsparing fatigues she had been in the habit of undergoing; her immoderate country walks—her over late and over early hours, had told on her frame, and rendered the effects of her illness difficult to shake off. Or, thought Violet, those tidings might be the secret cause, although she never referred to them, and continued not merely patient, but full of vigour of mind, cheerful, and as independent and enterprising as submission to orders permitted. Her obedience to irksome rules was so ready and implicit, that Violet marvelled, till she perceived that it was part of her system of combat with self-will; and she took the departure of her sister in the same manner, forbearing to harass Violet with lamentations; and when her mother deplored it, made answer, ‘It is my fault. If I had not persuaded Arthur out of living at Brogden, we should be staying with them.’

As to the chance of permanent disfigurement, she treated it very coolly, listening with indifference to her mother’s frequent inquiries of the surgeon. ‘Never mind, mamma, you and Violet will keep up the beauty of the family till Helen comes out.’

The first time she was able to come down-stairs was the last evening before they were to depart. One of Arthur’s sparks of kindly feeling awoke when he beheld his once handsome, high-spirited sister, altered and wrapped up, entering the room with an invalid step and air; and though she tried to look about in a bright ‘degage’ manner, soon sinking into the cushioned chair by the window with a sigh of languor. The change was greater than he had anticipated from his brief visits to her in her

bed-room; and, recollecting the cause of the injuries, he perceived the ingratitude of depriving her of Violet; but his contrition came too late, for he had already exchanged his leave of absence with another officer.

All that was in his power was to wait upon her with that engaging attention that rendered him so good a nurse. He was his pleasantest self, and she was so lively as to put every one else into good spirits. It was pretty to see the universal pleasure in her recovery—the weeding woman, going home late, and looking up at the window to see if she was there, as Miss Helen had promised, and curtseying, hardly able to speak for joy and grief together, when Theodora beckoned her to the window, and asked after her children. The dumb page, too, had watched an hour for her crossing the hall and when Arthur would have taken the tea from him, to hand to her, he gave such a beseeching glance as was quite irresistible, and the more affecting as Theodora's hands were not yet in condition to converse with him, and she was forced to constitute Johnnie her interpreter.

It was long since any of them had spent so happy an evening; and at night Arthur insisted on helping her up-stairs, and said, 'I declare it is a shame not to leave you Violet. Suppose you keep her till you are all right again?'

'O, thank you, Arthur; but—' for Violet looked doubtful.

'Why, I thought you wanted to stay, Violet?' said Arthur.

'If you could.'

'Too late for that; but you must settle it between you before to-morrow morning. Good night.'

Lady Martindale warmly pressed Violet to stay, and she found it much worse to have personally to make the choice than to be only a piece of property at Arthur's disposal. She was, however, firm, saying that he would be uncomfortable without her; and she was grateful to Theodora for perceiving her motives, and preventing further entreaties.

‘You are right,’ said Theodora, when her mother was gone. ‘It would not be fit to leave him with an empty house, so I must yield you up; but I cannot bear to think of you in London.’

‘I am used to it,’ said Violet, with her patient smile.

‘And it will not be four years before we meet again. I shall try hard to come to you in the autumn.’

‘How comfortable that would be! But you must not be uneasy about me, nor put any one out of the way. I can get on very well, as long as I have Johnnie.’

It was not till both had laid down to rest, and the room was dark, that Theodora said, ‘I understand it now. Her poor sister must have brought her into some bad foreign society, from which he could only rescue her by marrying her.’

So abrupt was this commencement that Violet had to recollect who was meant, and so decided was the tone, that she asked, ‘What have you heard?’

‘Nothing fresh; have you?’

‘No. Arthur had heard nothing from Mr. Mark Gardner; and I am afraid we shall hear no more till John answers my letter.’

‘No matter; I have found out how it must have been. Lady Fotheringham, of whom he made a sort of mother, always liked Jane. Depend upon it, she was anxious about the way in which poor Georgina was reported to be going on abroad, and told Percy, when she died, to try if he could do anything to save Jane. You see he goes to Italy, and there finds, of course, that there is no way of fulfilling his aunt’s wishes but by sacrificing himself.’

‘You have arranged it all most fully!’

‘See if I am not right—or, rather, you will not see; but I know that was the way. It is his nature to be fantastically generous, as some people would call it; and as long as he is the same Percival Fotheringham, the rest is as nothing. I was unjust at the first

moment. Jane has a better nature, which he can develop. There is a sense of religion to work on—a power of adaptation to those she is with, and if what she has seen in Italy has shocked her and made her turn to him, he may be the making of her. She is clever enough; and when she finds that nothing but truth and honesty will succeed with him, she will learn them at last.’

‘How glad I am you take it in this way.’

‘This quiet time has been good for me,’ said Theodora. ‘It would have been maddening to have had no pause before waking to ordinary life.’

‘Then the fire came at the right time for you.’

‘Have you not read of men rushing into battle, hoping each shot would strike them?’

‘O, Theodora!’

‘It did not last long. Don’t be frightened. Woman fear, and the stifling smell, and burning feel, and the sight of the red-hot gulf, were enough to drive it off. I shall never forget the touch of the floor in Charles’s room! I thought of nothing but the fire. The feeling only came back with the fainting. I remember a confused notion that I was glad to be dying with you holding my head and papa so kind. How savage I felt when every one would rouse me, and tell me I was better! I was in hopes the world was all over with me; but I see I have a great deal to do first, and the comfort of lying torpid here has been very great. I have had time to be stunned, and to get a grasp of it and of my own mind.’

‘Dear Theodora! It is indeed sometimes a blessing to be laid up. It brings out so much kindness. It is the easiest of all the crosses.’

‘I should not wonder if my rampant health had helped to make me the more wayward,’ said Theodora. ‘I would not but have been ill for the sake of the kindness from my father and mother. I was sure of you, but there is—It has given me spirit to look out upon life.’

‘I hope there is peace at least in the look.’

‘There is. It is not worse than before, except the vanishing of a lingering foolish hope, and that is safest. Repentance must always be there. My life is like myself; the wounds may heal, but the marks will remain and the freshness and glow will never return here. I am glad I am so much altered. I should not like to be again within the pale of attractive people.’

‘It is strange to hear you say such things so calmly.’

‘I made up my mind long ago. In following poor Georgina—or rather, my own self-will—I threw away the bloom of life. Percy warned me that those who reject light crosses have heavy loads imposed. I made what now seems hardly a cross of reed, into a scourge! Oh, Violet! would that I had done no harm but to myself by those races!’

‘Hush!’ said Violet’s smothered voice.

‘But for that,’ said Theodora, recovering steadiness of tone, ‘I should bear everything peacefully. I was unworthy of Percy, and am better off than I deserve. Oh, Violet! I have wished to thank you for making me go to Baden, and promising that if I would submit, guidance would come. There it was, the instant I really sought it. What would have become of me if I had not been haunted by your look and your words? How many times they saved me from accepting Lord St. Erme! And if I had, how my self-will, and pride, and jealousy would have grown! and how wretched I should be making him now!’

‘It is much better as it is.’

‘Yes, whatever pain I did give him by my very shameful usage, it would have been far worse to have gone on. I was thankful that I was stopped. Now I think I see my own life. There are my home duties; and oh! how could I have spoken as I once did of papa! How shocking it must have seemed to you!’

‘I do not know what it was, but it was under great provocation, and you did not

understand him then.'

'No, you and Hugh drove me to him, and in seeing him pleased with anything I can do for him, there is solid happiness. I have learnt to enter into his affection and deep feeling and anxieties, and I would not have missed these four years of reciprocity with him for anything! And I shall get on better with mamma now. I fancy she has a different nature after all, from what my aunt forced on her. Well, then, you know I have long set up for a maiden aunt, and there is John, who might want a housekeeper. Or if I am of no use to my own folks, there are the poor always. Perhaps I may come to Emma Brandon's priory. It would be fine discipline to be under Mother Theresa.

This unexpected pleasantry Violet could only answer by a groan.

'Seriously,' continued Theodora, 'my doubt would be whether it would be right to turn to such a course only when one has nothing else to do. It is a different thing from giving the energies and wishes and visions of youth, as Emma has done. I could only offer the worn-out. But that is speculation. There is present duty at home and in the village, and brightness in your children, and my hopes are on John. I have used him vilely, because he tried to teach me to take to you, and I do long to see him and ask his pardon, and you will help me, so that he shall believe in my sorrow, and we will be a sober old brother and sister together.'

'I believe he wishes for nothing more. He will feel your having worked for him, instead of saving anything of your own.'

'I had little to care for: my childhood had few recollections, and I had nothing of Helen's. It was a pleasure to work for him. Do you know, when I saw that marble chess-table which had belonged to the parsonage, and which Percy had left in John's charge, a horrid feeling came that I would not save it for Jane, and I left it. Then I remembered that was a nasty spiteful bit of revenge, and I hated myself, and dashed in when I really did know that it was not safe. I was altogether mad, I believe. I felt

desperate, and rather enjoyed facing danger for it. And then I felt the heat of the fire from the gallery again, and the spout from the fire-engine came, and the smoke was so thick that I missed my footing with that great heavy thing, and fell down-stairs to the first landing, and I believe that must have been what hurt my hand and side so much.'

Then as she heard Violet's tightened breath at the thought of the frightful peril,

'Well for me I did not perish with these wild thoughts! I am glad I have told you at last. I have felt as if I ought to confess it, and yet I was ashamed. Is the thing safe?'

'Yes, I saw it at Brogden; but oh, to think of it!'

'I am glad it is safe; it was John's charge, and he ought to restore it: but you will dream of it, like poor little Johnnie, if you take it so much to heart. I should not have told you at night. Put it out of your head, and let us sleep in peace.'

'Good night, dear sister. Thank you for talking to me. O, this is better than the night we parted before.'

'As much better as it is to have found one's anchor than to be tossed at the will of the waves. That was a frightful time. Thank heaven that you made me feel for the cable! There is a dreary voyage to come, but after all, every day we end the Creed with "The life everlasting."'

CHAPTER 6

What have I? Shall I dare to tell? A comfortless and hidden well, A well of love, it may be deep, I trust it is, and never dry. What matter if the waters sleep In silence and obscurity? —WORDSWORTH

Violet experienced the trials to which she knew she was returning. For some time past her husband's habits had been growing less and less domestic, and his disappointment alienated him still more. It was as if Mrs. Nesbit had left behind her

a drop of poison, that perverted and envenomed the pride he used to take in his son, as heir to the family honours, and made him regard the poor child almost in the light of a rival, while he seemed to consider the others as burdens, and their number a hardship and misfortune.

He was so impatient of interruption from them, that Violet kept them carefully out of his way, while he was in the house, and this was seldom for a long space of time. All the fancied trials of the first year of her marriage seemed to have actually come upon her! She hardly saw him from morning to night, and when he did spend an evening at home, he was sullen and discontented, and found fault with everything. She was far from well, but his days of solicitude were gone by, and he was too much wrapped up in his own concerns to perceive her failure in strength, and the effort it cost her to be cheerful. The children were her great solace, but the toil of attending to them was almost beyond her powers, and if it had not been for her boy, she felt as if she must have been quite overwhelmed. Quiet, gentle, and thoughtful, he was a positive assistance in the care of his sisters; and to read with him, hear his remarks, watch his sweet obedience, and know herself the object of his earnest affection, was her chief enjoyment, though even here there was anxiety. His innocence and lovingness had something unearthly, and there was a precocious understanding, a grave serious turn of mind, and a want of childish mirth, which added to the fears caused by his fragile health. Play was not nearly so pleasant to him as to sit by her, reading or talking, or to act as her little messenger; and it was plain that he missed fondness from his father almost as much as she did for him. To be in the room with papa was his most earnest desire, and it saddened her to see that little slight figure silent in the corner, the open book on his lap, but his pale face, soft dark eyes, and parted lips, intent on every movement of his father, till the instant a want was expressed, or the least occasion for a service offered, there was a bound to execute it, and the inattentive indifferent ‘thank you’ was enough to summon up the rosy hue of delight. Would Arthur only have looked, how could he have helped being

touched? But he continued neglectful and unheeding, while the child's affection seemed to thrive the more under disregard.

Violet's only satisfaction was in the absence of Mr. Gardner. She heard constantly from Lady Elizabeth Brandon; but there was little that was hopeful in that quarter. Emma's heart was more entirely in the power of her suitor than even their fears had anticipated. She had kept so entirely aloof from gentlemen, and so suspiciously repelled the most ordinary attention, that when once she had permitted any intimacy the novelty gave it a double charm. He had come upon her at first as one bowed down with sorrow for the follies of his youth, seeking only for the means of repairing what was past, and professing that happiness was over, and all he could hope was to evidence the depth of his repentance by his devotion and self-sacrifice in the cause of the Church. Then, when at unawares he allowed it to be discovered by Theresa that the heart, supposed to be awake only to remorse, had been gained by the earnestness and excellence of her young friend, and that in her was the most powerful means of consoling and aiding him, when he seemed sunk in the depths of despair at having allowed his sentiments to transpire, and only too much humiliated by the idea of being named together with Miss Brandon, it was impossible but that Emma's gentle and enthusiastic spirit should go more than half way to raise him from his despondency. She could not believe his errors so great, after all; or even if they were, who would not overlook them, and rejoice to have the power of comforting such a penitent? Theresa Marstone, with a woman's latent love of romance, was prime confidante to both, encouraged all, and delighted in the prospect of being supreme in the Priory, and moulding the pattern household of the pair formed and united under her auspices.

In the midst of such a dream as this, what chance had Lady Elizabeth of convincing the friends that their penitent, scarcely persuaded to relinquish plans of a hermitage, was a spendthrift adventurer, seeking to repair his extravagance with the estates of Rickworth?

Emma shed indignant tears, and protested that it was cruel to bring up his past faults; talked of the Christian duty of forgiving the returning sinner; and when Lady Elizabeth showed that he had very recently been engaged in his usual courses, Theresa, with a sensible face and reasonable voice, argued that ordinary minds could not enter into the power of the Church's work, and adduced many cases of equally sudden change of life.

She did not mention whether there was always the heiress of ten thousand a year ready as a reward.

The list of charges against Mark's character deepened every day, and added to poor Lady Elizabeth's horror, but he always contrived to render them as nothing to Emma. He had always confessed them beforehand, either to her or to Theresa, with strong professions of sorrow, and so softened and explained away, that they were ready to receive each fresh accusation as an exaggeration of a fault long past, and deeply regretted, and only admired their injured Mark the more. Lady Elizabeth wrote to beg Violet to give her the clue which she had said Arthur possessed to Mark's actual present character.

In much distress Violet wrote the letter, mentioning some disgraceful transactions which she knew to have been taking place at the very time when the good curate believed his friend sincerely repentant. She had heard them, not from Arthur, but from Mrs Bryanstone, who always learnt from her brother every such piece of gossip, but still, after what had passed, and Lady Elizabeth's appeal direct to Arthur, she thought it her duty to tell him before she sent the letter, and to ask if the facts were correct.

It was a most unpleasant duty; but Arthur was not in such a mood as when first she had mentioned the subject to him. He muttered something about the intense folly of a woman who could believe a word out of Gardner's mouth; said if Emma desired to be made miserable for life she could not take a better way; wished he had never set

eyes on the fellow, and then, grumbling at Violet's begging him to read the letter, he cast his eye over it, and said it was all true, and there was worse, too, if Lady Elizabeth did but know it; but what this was he would not tell her. He made no objection to her sending the letter, saying he supposed it must be done, since she was asked; but it was all her doing, and Lady Elizabeth might have gone to some one else; and inconsistently ended with, 'After all, what's the use of making such an uproar about it? Such things have happened twenty times before, and will again.'

'Not with my poor Emma, I hope. Imagine her with such a man as that!'

'Well! there are plenty of such couples. I wonder what would become of the world if wives were not better than their husbands.'

Every rational person at Gothlands thought this letter conclusive; Emma herself was shaken; but a walk in the shrubbery with Mark settled it in her mind that his newly-formed wishes of amendment had then been weak—he had not then seen her, he had not learnt so much as at present. He had not been able to confess these deeds, because others, who had now spoken, were concerned in them; but now it was a relief to be able to tell all to his Emma! The end of it was, that Emma herself was almost ready to press forward the marriage, so as to give him the means of clearing himself from the debts, which, as he insinuated, were the true cause of Colonel Martindale's accusations. He forgave him, however, though if all was known of his dealings with Arthur Martindale—! And then there was a long confidential talk with Theresa Marstone, after which she told Lady Elizabeth that, though Mr. Gardner spared Emma's feelings with regard to her friend, there could be no doubt that Colonel Martindale had done much to lead him astray.

At last, as a dutiful concession, Emma resolved on a compromise, and put him on his probation for a year. This was particularly inconvenient to him, but he was very resigned and humble; 'perhaps he had hoped more from her affection, but he knew it was his penalty, and must submit. If there was but some religious house to which he

could retire for the intermediate space; for he dreaded the effect of being sent back to the world.’

Theresa was wrought upon to counsel haste; but Emma had principle at the bottom of her effervescence of folly, and was too right-minded, as well as too timid, to act in direct opposition to her mother, however she might be led to talk. Therefore they parted, with many tears on Emma’s part, and tender words and promises on Mark’s. Lady Elizabeth had little hope that he would not keep them; but she took advantage of the reprieve to conduct Emma to make visits amongst her relations—sober people, among whom sense was more likely to flourish, and among whom Mr. Gardner could never dare to show himself.

He went, as he told Emma, to seek for some continental convent, where perhaps he might be received as a boarder, and glean hints for the Priory. Ordinary minds believed that his creditors being suspicious of the delay of his marriage with the heiress, had contributed to this resolution.

He spent a few days in London on his way, came to call on Colonel Martindale, and was much with him, as Violet afterwards found, though she did not know of it at the time.

She perceived the renewal of his influence in a project of which Arthur began to talk, of leaving the army and establishing himself at Boulogne. Though by rigid economy and self-denial she had continued to make the original sum apportioned to her cover all household expenses, and his promotion had brought an increase of income, Arthur declared that, with such a family, his means were inadequate to the requirements of his profession, and that unless his father could assist them further, they must reside abroad. Lord Martindale treated the threat with great displeasure, and to Violet it was like annihilation. When thankful for Mark Gardner’s absence, she was to be made to pursue him, probably in order that he might continue to prey on Arthur in secret, and then, at the year’s end, bring them as witnesses that he had

abstained from open transgression; she was to see her husband become the idling Englishman abroad, in the society most likely to be his ruin; to have her children exposed to the disadvantages of a foreign education—what more was wanting to her distress? She ventured to expostulate on their account; but Arthur laughed, and told her they would learn French for nothing; and when she spoke of the evils of bringing up a boy in France, it was with the look which pained her so acutely, that she was answered, 'No fear but that he will be looked after: he is of consequence in the family.'

Never had the future looked so desolate; but sufficient unto the day was the evil thereof. She had the root of peace and strength, and had long been trained in patient trust and endurance. To pray, to strive, to dwell on words of comfort, to bear in mind the blessings of the cross, to turn resolutely from gloomy contemplations, and to receive thankfully each present solace,—these were the tasks she set herself, and they bore the fruit of consolation and hidden support. Her boy's affection and goodness, the beauty and high health of her little girls, and the kindlier moments when Arthur's better nature shone out, were balm and refreshment, because she accepted them as gifts from the Fatherly Hand that laid the trial upon her.

Her submissive distress so far worked on Arthur, that she heard no more of the Boulogne scheme for the present, and she drove it out of her mind, grateful for his silence, whether it was only from consideration for her, or whether he had really relinquished the design, now that Mr. Gardner was no longer near to maintain his ascendancy.

The summer was dreary at Brogden, as well as in Cadogan-place. Theodora soon was able to call herself well, and to resume her usual avocations, but she had not the same sense of energy and strength of body, and her days were combats with inertness and fatigue. She did not slacken her exertions, but they had no zest, and she suffered for them. Moreover, she was uneasy about Arthur and his wife; and to

partake her father's confidence was to share his many anxieties, and to be perplexed by his cares as well as her own. With her mother there were other difficulties. Lady Martindale had been kept so far apart from her daughter, that now it seemed as if they could not amalgamate, and when Theodora no longer was ill, the old habit of reserve returned. Assiduously did Theodora wait on her, read to her, and go out with her in the carriage; but still without becoming familiar, or being able to cheer her spirits. In truth, after having been for years an obedient attendant on her aunt, Lady Martindale felt the blank of the want of occupation, and thus the sense of her loss was ever renewed. Science, literature, and accomplishments had been her pursuits, chiefly because her aunt led her to them, and they had been gradually dropped with Mrs. Nesbit's interest in them. In themselves they had no charm for her, and she turned from them now as painfully recalling what she had lost. Dispirited, and without employment, the natural consequence was that her health suffered, and she became a prey to the varied torments of neuralgia, while Theodora proved herself a better nurse than could have been expected for an illness in which she only half believed.

Many hopes were fixed on John's return; but this was deferred,—he was in the midst of church building, and establishing schemes to which absence would be fatal, and he could only promise to come home next year, when things should be put in train. To his sister he wrote a letter so full of warm affectionate gratitude for her exertions in his behalf, that she was positively soothed and refreshed, and reckoned the more on beginning with him the fraternal union so long delayed, but to which she looked as the solace of her future life.

As to Percival Fotheringham, there was no further explanation of his marriage. John wrote to Violet that he had not heard from him for many months, for it was difficult to keep up a correspondence between Barbuda and the continental towns whither he was journeying. His last letter had spoken of a tour in Italy in contemplation, and that in which he had communicated Lady Fotheringham's death, mentioned some of

her last cares being for Jane and Georgina, and how she had tried to leave some provision which might rescue the former from the necessity of following her sister into the undesirable society she found abroad. This only served to confirm Theodora's conjecture.

From other sources no intelligence was gained. London was empty, and Violet saw no one likely to know anything of his movements; and when she heard that Mark Gardner had been in town, and eagerly inquired whether he had been asked, she found that Arthur had forgotten the whole matter. Lady Elizabeth finished the letter, rejoicing in his departure, by saying—'He confirms what I told you of the marriage of his cousin and Mr. Fotheringham, and calls it a lucky thing for her. I had no opportunity of hearing the particulars.' And, finally, Mrs. Bryanstone had heard of Miss Gardner's marriage with one of the Fotheringhams of Worthbourne, and only wanted Mrs. Martindale to strengthen her in the belief that it was the dear, eccentric Crusader.

CHAPTER 7

'Mid sombre shades of evening dim Upon the rock so lone, so drear, Scorning weak frame and sinking limb, My heart grows bright and bold of cheer; Out of the depths of stormy night My hope looks up with cloudless eyes, And to the one true deathless light, Its joyful pinions swiftly rise: Thanks to the seraph shape that beamed Benign upon my darkened breast, So for her service worthy deemed, My grateful heart abounds in rest. —FOUQUE'S Minstrel Love

'Wrangerton, August 20th.

'You must not be frightened, dearest Violet—Albert is safe; thanks to that most noble-hearted, admirable Lord St. Erme, and above all, thanks to Him who directed this dreadful stroke away from us. I hope you will receive this before you see the newspaper. Mamma has gone up with them, to help them to break it to poor Lady

Lucy. May she be supported!

‘The history, as far as I can toll you, is this:—The men at the collieries have been as troublesome and insubordinate as ever, seeming to think opposition to Lord St. Erme an assertion of their rights as free-born Englishmen; and at last, finding it impossible to do anything with them as long as they did not depend immediately upon himself, he took the pits into his own hands when Mr. Shoreham went away, a fortnight ago. It seems that Mr. Shoreham, knowing that he was going, had let everything fall into a most neglected state, and the overlookers brought reports to Albert that there were hardly any safety-lamps used in the great pit, and that the galleries were so insufficiently supported that there was great danger in continuing to work there. However, the reports were contradictory, and after trying in vain to settle what was to be done, Lord St. Erme rode this morning to the collieries, to make a personal inspection, and insist on the men using the Davy-lamp. After trying to dissuade him, Albert proposed to go down with him; but he would not consent—he only smiled, and said there was no need for it. It did not strike Albert till afterwards that he was conscious of the risk, and would not allow another to share it! He was waiting for him, not far from the shaft, when the earth seemed to give way under his feet; there was a thundering sound, a great cry, and he fell. When he recovered his footing, the mouth of the shaft was gone, the scaffolding prostrate, the people around in horror and consternation. The pit had fallen in, and there were at least twenty men there, besides Lord St. Erme. Oh! how you will share that shuddering thankfulness and sorrow, that we felt, when Albert galloped up to the door and threw himself into the arm-chair, so unnerved by the shock that he could not at first speak. Happily his wife was here, so she heard all at once. He is gone with mamma and papa to tell the poor sister. Alas! though we think most of her, there are many other sufferers.

‘Three, o’clock.—Albert is come back. He says Lady Lucy met them in the hall, pale and trembling, as if she had already worked herself into an agony of fright. She begged them to tell her at once, and stood quite still, only now and then moaning to

herself, “Oh, St. Erme! St. Erme!” Mamma took her by the hand, and tried to speak soothingly; but she did not seem to attend, and presently looked up, flushed and quivering, though she had been so still before, and declared that the whole might not have fallen; she had heard of people being dug out alive; they must begin at once, and she would go to the spot. There is no hope, Albert says; even if not crushed, they must have perished from the foul air, but the poor girl has caught fast hold of the idea, and insists on going to Coalworth at once to urge it on. They cannot prevent her, and mamma cannot bear that she should be alone, and means to go with her. The carriage was ordered when Albert came here! Poor thing, there was never fonder love between a brother and sister; she hardly had a thought that did not centre in him. It breaks my heart to think how often we have seen them walking arm-in-arm together, and said they might be taken for a pair of lovers.

‘Five o’clock.—Annette begs me to conclude her letter. My father has returned home, and fetched her to Coalworth, to be with my mother, and the poor young lady (already, I fear, Countess of St. Erme), who, he tells us, continues buoyed up by the delusion that her brother may yet be found alive, and is calling on all around to use the utmost exertions for his recovery. I regret that I cannot go in Annette’s stead; but I cannot leave home in mamma’s absence, as poor Louisa is much affected by Albert’s peril, and in so nervous a state that she will not hear of my quitting her for a moment. We have indeed received a lesson, that no rank, however exalted, can protect from the strokes of Providence, or the uncertainties of human life. But the postman calls. Adieu.

‘Your affectionate sister,

‘Matilda Moss.’

(The last moral sentiment, be it observed, readied Miss Martindale, rendered illegible by scrawls of ink from Violet’s hand.)

‘Coalworth, August 21st.

‘Dearest Violet,—Matilda told you how I was sent for to come here. They are working on,—relays relieving each other day and night; but no one but poor Lady Lucy thinks there is any hope. Mr. Alder, the engineer, says Lord St. Erme must have been in the farthest gallery, and they cannot reach it in less than a week, so that if the other perils should be escaped, there would be starvation. The real number lost is fourteen, besides Lord St. Erme. It was a strange scene when I arrived at about seven o’clock yesterday evening. The moor looking so quiet, and like itself, with the heath and furze glowing in the setting sun, as if they had no sympathy for us, till, when we came near the black heaps of coal, we saw the crowd standing round,—then getting into the midst, there was the great broken down piece of blackened soil and the black strong-armed men working away with that life-and-death earnestness. By the ruins of a shed that had been thrown down, there was a little group, Lady Lucy, looking so fair and delicate, so unlike everything around, standing by an old woman in a red cloak, whom she had placed in the chair that had been brought for herself, the mother of one of the other sufferers. Mamma and papa were with her; but nothing seems to comfort her so much as going from one to the other of the women and children in the same trouble with herself. She talks to them, and tries to get them to be hopeful, and nurses the babies, and especially makes much of the old woman. The younger ones look cheered when she tells them that history which she dwells on so much, and seem as if they must believe her, but the poor old dame has no hope, and tells her so. “‘Tis the will of God, my lady, don’t ye take on so now. It will be all one when we come to heaven, though I would have liked to have seen Willy again; but ‘tis the cross the Lord sends, so don’t ye take on,” and then Lady Lucy sits down on the ground, and looks up in her face, as if her plain words did her more good than anything we can say, or even the clergyman, who is constantly going from one to the other. Whenever the men come to work, or go away, tired out, Lady Lucy thanks them from the bottom of her heart; and a look at her serves to inspirit and force them on to wonderful

exertions. But alas! what it must end in! We are at the house that was Mr. Shoreham's, the nearest to the spot. It was hard work to get poor Lady Lucy to come in last night. She stood there till long after dark, when the stars were all out, and mamma could only get her away by telling her, that her brother would be vexed, and that, if she made herself ill, she would not be able to nurse him. She did not sleep all night, and this morning she was out again with daylight, and we were obliged to bring her out some breakfast, which she shared with the fellow-sufferers round her, and would have taken nothing herself if the old dame had not coaxed her, and petted her, calling her "My pretty lady," and going back to her lecture on its being a sin to fret at His will. Mamma and I take turns to be with her. When I came in, she was sitting by the old woman, reading to her the Psalms, and the good old creature saying at the end of each, "Yes, yes, He knows what is good for them. Glory be to Him."

'Aug. 22nd.—As before. They have tried if they can open a way from the old shaft, but cannot do it with safety. Lady Lucy still the same, but paler and more worn, I think, less hopeful; I hope, more resigned.

'Aug. 23rd.—Poor Lucy was really tired out, and slept for two whole hours in the heat of the noon, sitting on the ground by old Betty, fairly overpowered. It was a touching sight; the old woman watching her so sedulously, and all the rough people keeping such strict silence, and driving off all that could disturb her. The pitmen look at her with such compassionate reverence! The look and word she gives them are ten thousand times more to them, I am sure, than the high pay they get for every hour they work! Next Wednesday is the first day they can hope to come to anything. This waiting is dreadful. Would that I could call it suspense!

'Aug. 24th, Sunday.—She has been to church this morning. I did not think she could, but at the sound of the bell, she looked up, and the old woman too, they seemed to understand each other without a word, and went together. The service was

almost more than one could bear, but she was composed, except at the references in the sermon to our state of intense anxiety, and the need of submission. At the special mention in the Litany of those in danger, I heard from beneath her hands clasped over her face, that low moan of “O, brother, brother!” Still I think when the worst comes, she will bear it better and be supported.

‘Five o’clock.—THESE IS HOPE!—O Violet! We went to church again this afternoon. The way leads past the old shaft. As we came by it in returning, Lady Lucy stood still, and said she heard a sound. We could hear nothing, but one of the wives said, “Yes, some one was working, and calling down there.” I flew to the main shaft, and called Mr. Alder. He was incredulous, but Lady Lucy insisted. A man went down, and the sound was certain. No words can be made out. They are working to meet them. Lucy burst into tears, and threw her arms round my neck as soon as she heard this man’s report; but oh! thankful as we are, it is more cruel than ever not to know who is saved, and this letter must go to-night without waiting for more.

‘25th.—He is alive, they say, but whether he can rally is most uncertain. All night they worked on, not till six o’clock this morning was any possibility of communication opened. Then questions were asked, “How many were there?” “Fifteen, all living, but one much crushed.” Oh! the suspense, the heart-beating as those answers were sent up from the depths of the tomb—a living tomb indeed; and how Lady Lucy pressed the women’s hard hands, and shed her tears of joy with them. But there was a damp to her gladness. Next message was that Lord St. Erme bad fainted—they could not tell whether he lived—he could not hold out any longer! Then it was that she gave way, and indeed it was too agonizing, but the old woman seemed better able to calm her than we could. Terrible moments indeed! and in the midst there was sent up a folded paper that had been handed out at the small aperture on the point of a tool, when the poor things had first been able to see the lights of their rescuers. It was to Lady Lucy; her brother had written it on the leaf of a

pocket-book, before their single lamp went out, and had given it in charge to one of the men when he found his strength failing. She was too dizzy and trembling to make out the pencil, and gave it to me to read to her. I hope I am not doing wrong, for I must tell you how beautiful and resigned a farewell it was. He said, in case this note ever came to her, she must not grieve at the manner of his death—it was a comfort to him to be taken, while trying to repair the negligence of earlier years; they were a brave determined set of men who were with him, and she must provide for their widows and children. There was much fond thought for her, and things to console her, and one sentence you must have—"If ever you meet with the "hoch-beseeltes Madchen", let her know that her knight thanks and blesses her in his last hour for having roused him and sent him forth to the battlefield. I would rather be here now than what I was when she awoke me. Perhaps she will now be a friend and comforter to you."

'I think those were the words. I could not help writing them. Poor Lucy cried over the note, and we lowered down baskets of nourishment to be handed in, but we heard only of Lord St. Erme's continued swoon, and it was a weary while before the opening could be widened enough to help the sufferers out. They were exhausted, and could work no more on their side. But for him, it seems they would have done nothing; he was the only one who kept his presence of mind when the crash came. One lamp was not extinguished, and he made them at once consider, while the light lasted, whether they could help themselves. One of the hewers knew that they were not far from this old shaft, and happily Lord St. Erme had a little compass hung to his watch, which he used to carry in his wanderings abroad; this decided the direction, and he set them to work, and encouraged them to persevere most manfully. He did not work himself—indeed, the close air oppressed him much more than it did the pitmen, and he had little hope for his own life, however it might end, but he sat the whole time, supporting the head of the man who was hurt, and keeping up the resolution of the others, putting them in mind of the only hope in their dire

distress, and guiding them to prayer and repentance, such as might fit them for life or death. “He was more than ten preachers, and did more good than forty discourses,” said one man. But he had much less bodily strength than they, though more energy and fortitude, and he was scarcely sensible when the first hope of rescue came. It seemed as if he had just kept up to sustain them till then, and when they no longer depended on him for encouragement, he sank. The moment came at last. He was drawn up perfectly insensible, together with a great brawny-armed hewer, a vehement Chartist, and hitherto his great enemy, but who now held him in his arms like a baby, so tenderly and anxiously. As soon as he saw Lady Lucy, he called out, “Here he is, Miss, I hope ye’ll be able to bring him to. If all lords were like he now!” and then his wife had hold of him, quite beside herself with joy; but he shook her off with a sort of kind rudeness, and, exhausted as he was, would not hear of being helped to his home, till he had heard the doctors (who were all in waiting) say that Lord St. Erme was alive. Lady Lucy was hanging over him in a sort of agony of ecstasy, and yet of grief; but still she looked up, and put her little white hand into the collier’s big black one, and said, “Thank you,” and then he fairly burst out crying, and so his wife led him away. I saw Lord St. Erme for one moment, and never was anything more death-like, such ghastly white, except where grimed with coal-dust. They are in his room now, trying to restore animation. He has shown some degree of consciousness, and pressed his sister’s hand, but all power of swallowing seems to be gone, and the doctors are in great alarm. The others are doing well—the people come in swarms to the door to ask for him.

‘26th.—Comfort at last. He has been getting better all night, and this morning the doctors say all danger is over. Mamma says she can hardly keep from tears as she watches the happy placid looks of the brother and sister, as he lies there so pale and shadowy, and she hangs over him, as if she could never gaze at him enough. Several of the men, who were with him, came to inquire for him early this morning; none of them suffered half so much as he did. I went down to speak to them, and I am glad I

did; it is beautiful to see how he has won all their hearts, and to hear their appreciation of his conduct. They say he tended the man who was hurt as if he had been his mother, and never uttered one word of complaint. “He told us,” said one man, “God could hear us out of the depth, as well as when we said our prayers in church; and whenever our hearts were failing us, there was his voice speaking somewhat good to cheer us up, or help us to mind that there was One who knew where we were, and would have a care for us and our wives and children.” “Bless him,” said another, “he has been the saving of our lives;” “Bless him;” and they touched their hats and said Amen. I wish his sister could have seen them!

‘Five o’clock.—Mrs. Delaval is come, and there is no room nor need for us, so we are going home. It is best, for mamma was nursing him all night, and is tired out. He has improved much in the course of the day, and they hope that he may soon be moved home. The pitmen want to carry him back on his mattress on their shoulders. He has made himself king of their hearts! He has been able to inquire after them, and Lady Lucy, who forgets no one, has been down-stairs to see the old Betty. “Ah! my pretty lady,” she said, “you are not sorry now that you tried to take the Lord’s Cross patiently, and now, you see, your sorrow is turned into joy.” And then Lady Lucy would not have it called patience, and said she had had no submission in her, and Betty answered her, “Ah! well, you are young yet, and He fits the burden to the shoulder.” How an adventure like this brings out the truth of every character, as one never would have known it otherwise. Who would have dreamt of that pattern of saintly resignation in the Coalworth heath, or that Lady Lucy Delaval would have found a poor old woman her truest and best comforter? and this without the least forwardness on the old woman’s part.

‘Just going! Lady Lucy so warm-hearted and grateful—and Lord St. Erme himself wished mamma good-bye in such a kind cordial manner, thanking her for all she had done for his sister. I am sorry to go, so as not to be in the way of seeing anything more of them, but it is time, for mamma is quite overcome. So I must close up this

last letter from Coalworth, a far happier one than I thought to end with.

‘Your most affectionate,

A. M.

‘P. S.—Is he not a hero, equal to his “hoch-beseeltes Madchen”? I am ashamed of having written to you what was never meant for other eyes, but it will be safe with you. If you had seen how he used to waylay us, and ask for our tidings from you after the fire, you would see I cannot doubt who the “madchen” is. Is there no hope for him? The other affair was so long ago, and who could help longing to have such minstrel-love rewarded?’

That postscript did not go on to Brogden, though Annette’s betrayal of confidence had been suffered to meet the eye of the high-souled maiden.

The accounts of Lord St. Erme continued to improve, though his recovery was but slow. To talk the adventure over was a never-failing interest to Lady Martindale, who, though Theodora suppressed Annette’s quotation, was much of the opinion expressed in the postscript, and made some quiet lamentations that Theodora had rejected him.

‘No, we were not fit for each other,’ she answered.

‘You would not say so now,’ said Lady Martindale. ‘He has done things as great as yourself, my dear.’

‘I am fit for no one now,’ said Theodora, bluntly.

‘Ah, my dear!—But I don’t know why I should wish you to marry; I could never do without you.’

‘That’s the most sensible thing you have said yet, mamma.’

But Theodora wished herself less necessary at home, when, in a few weeks more, she had to gather that matters were going on well from the large round-hand note, with nursery spelling and folding, in which Johnnie announced that he had a little

brother.

An interval of peace to Violet ensued. Arthur did not nurse her as in old times; but he was gentle and kind, and was the more with her as the cough, which had never been entirely removed, was renewed by a chill in the first cold of September. All went well till the babe was a week old, when Arthur suddenly announced his intention of asking for a fortnight's leave, as he was obliged to go to Boulogne on business.

Here was a fresh thunderbolt. Violet guessed that Mr. Gardner was there, and was convinced that, whatever might be Arthur's present designs, he would come back having taken a house at Boulogne. He answered her imploring look by telling her not to worry herself; he hoped to get 'quit of the concern,' and, at any rate, could not help going. She suggested that his cough would bear no liberties; he said, change of air would take it off, and scouted her entreaty that he would consult Mr. Harding. Another morning, a kind careless farewell, he was gone!

Poor Violet drew the coverlet over her head; her heart failed her, and she craved that her throbbing sinking weakness and feverish anxiety might bring her to her final rest. When she glanced over the future, her husband deteriorating, and his love closed up from her; her children led astray by evil influences of a foreign soil; Johnnie, perhaps, only saved by separation—Johnnie, her precious comforter; herself far from every friend, every support, without security of church ordinances—all looked so utterly wretched that, as her pulses beat, and every sensation of illness was aggravated, she almost rejoiced in the danger she felt approaching.

Nothing but her infant's voice could have recalled her to a calmer mind, and brought back the sense that she was bound to earth by her children. She repented as of impatience and selfishness, called back her resolution, and sought for soothing. It came. She had taught herself the dominion over her mind in which she had once

been so deficient. Vexing cares and restless imaginings were driven back by echoes of hymns and psalms and faithful promises, as she lay calm and resigned, in her weakness and solitude, and her babe slept tranquilly in her bosom, and Johnnie brought his books and histories of his sisters; and she could smile in thankfulness at their loveliness of to-day, only in prayer concerning herself for the morrow. She was content patiently to abide the Lord.

CHAPTER 8

But one, I wis, was not at home, Another had paid his gold away, Another called him thriftless loone, And bade him sharply wend his way. —Heir of Lynne

‘He is done for. That wife of his may feel the consequence of meddling in other folk’s concerns. Not that I care for that now, there’s metal more attractive; but she has crossed me, and shall suffer for it.’ These short sentences met the ear of a broad-shouldered man in a rough coat, as, in elbowing his way through the crowd on the quay at Boulogne, he was detained for a moment behind two persons, whose very backs had all the aspect of the dissipated Englishman abroad. Struggling past, he gained a side view of the face of the speaker. It was one which he knew; but the vindictive glare in the sarcastic eyes positively made him start, as he heard the laugh of triumph and derision, in reply to some remark from the other.

‘Ay! and got enough to get off to Paris, where the old Finch has dropped off his perch at last. That was all I wanted of him, and it was time to wring him dry and have done with him. He will go off in consumption before the year is out—’

As he spoke, the stranger turned on him an honest English face, the lips compressed into an expression of the utmost contempt, while indignation flashed in the penetrating gray eyes, that looked on him steadily. His bold defiant gaze fell, quailing and scowling, he seemed to become small, shrink away, and disappeared.

‘When scamp number two looks round for scamp number one, he is lost in the

crowd,' muttered the traveller, half smiling; then, with a deep breath, 'The hard-hearted rascal! If one could only wring his neck! Heaven help the victim! though, no doubt, pity is wasted on him.'

He ceased his reflections, to enter the steamer just starting for Folkestone, and was soon standing on deck, keeping guard over his luggage. The sound of a frequent cough attracted his attention, and, looking round, he saw a tall figure wrapped in great-coats leaning on the leeward side of the funnel.

'Hollo! you here, Arthur! Where have you been?'

'What, Percy? How d'ye do?' replied a hoarse, languid voice.

'Is Mrs. Martindale here?'

'No.' He was cut short by such violent cough that he was obliged to rest his forehead on his arm; then shivering, and complaining of the cold, he said he should go below, and moved away, rejecting Percy's offered arm with some impatience.

The weather was beautiful, and Percy stood for some time watching the receding shore, and scanning, with his wonted keen gaze, the various countenances of the passengers. He took a book from his pocket, but did not read long; he looked out on the sea, and muttered to himself, 'What folly now? Why won't that name let one rest? Besides, he looked desperately ill; I must go and see if they have made him comfortable in that dog-hole below.'

Percy shook himself as if he was out of humour; and, with his hands in his pockets, and a sauntering step, entered the cabin. He found Arthur there alone, his head resting on his arms, and his frame shaken by the suppressed cough.

'You seem to have a terrible cold. This is a bad time to be crossing. How long have you been abroad?'

'Ten days.—How came you here?'

'I am going to Worthbourne. How are all your folks!'

‘All well;’ and coughing again, he filled up a tumbler with spirits and water, and drank it off, while Percy exclaimed:

‘Are you running crazy, to be feeding such a cough in this way?’

‘The only thing to warm one,’ said he, shuddering from head to foot.

‘Yes, warm you properly into a nice little fever and inflammation. Why, what a hand you have! And your pulse! Here, lie down at once,’ as he formed a couch with the help of a wrapper and bag. Arthur passively accepted his care; but as the chill again crept through his veins, he stretched out his hand for the cordial.

‘I won’t have it done!’ thundered Percy. ‘I will not look on and see you killing yourself!’

‘I wish I could,’ murmured Arthur, letting his hand drop, as if unequal to contest the point.

The conviction suddenly flashed on Percy that he was the victim! ‘You have got yourself into a scrape’ he said.

‘Scrape! I tell you I am ruined! undone!’ exclaimed Arthur, rearing himself up, as he burst out into passionate imprecations on Mark Gardner, cut short by coughing.

‘You! with your wife and little children entirely depending on you! You have allowed that scoundrel, whose baseness you knew, to dupe you to your own destruction!’ said Percy, with slowness and severity.

Too ill and wretched to resent the reproach, Arthur sank his head with a heavy groan, that almost disarmed Percy; then looking up, with sparkling eyes, he exclaimed, ‘No! I did not know his baseness; I thought him a careless scape-grace, but not much worse than he has made me. I would as soon have believed myself capable of the treachery, the unfeeling revenge—’ Again he was unable to say more, and struggling for utterance, he stamped his foot against the floor, and groaned aloud with rage and pain.

Percy persuaded him to lie down again, and could not refrain from forcible expressions of indignation, as he recollected the sneering exultation of Gardner's tone of triumph over one so open-hearted and confiding.

It was a moment when sympathy unlocked the heart, and shame was lost in the sense of injury. Nothing more was needed to call from Arthur the history of his wrongs, as well as he was able to tell it, eking out with his papers the incoherent sentences which he was unable to finish, so that Percy succeeded in collecting, from his broken narration, an idea of the state of affairs.

The horses, kept jointly at his expense and that of Gardner, had been the occasion of serious debts; and on Gardner's leaving England, there had been a pressure on Colonel Martindale that rendered him anxious to free himself, even at the cost of his commission. Gardner, on the other hand, had, it appeared, been desirous to have him at Boulogne, perhaps, at first, merely as a means of subsistence during the year of probation, and on the failure of the first attempt at bringing him thither, had written to invite him, holding out as an inducement, that he was himself desirous of being disembarrassed, in order that Miss Brandon might find him clear of this entanglement, and representing that he had still property enough to clear off his portion of the liability.

With this view Arthur had gone out to Boulogne to meet him, but had found him dilatory in entering on business, and was drawn into taking part in the amusements of the place; living in a state of fevered excitement, which aggravated his indisposition and confused his perceptions, so that he fell more completely than ever into the power of his false friend, and was argued into relinquishing his project of selling the horses, and into taking up larger sums for keeping them on. In fact, the sensation that a severe cold was impending, and disgust at the notion of being laid up in such company rendered him doubly facile; and, in restless impatience to get away and avoid discussion, he acceded to everything, and signed whatever Gardner

pleased. Not till he was on the point of embarking, after having gambled away most of his ready money, did he discover that the property of which he had heard so much was only a shadow, which had served to delude many another creditor; and that they had made themselves responsible for a monstrous amount, for which he was left alone to answer, while the first demand would be the signal for a multitude of other claims. As they parted, Gardner had finally thrown off the mask, and let him know that this was the recompense of his wife's stories to the Brandons. She might say what she pleased now, it mattered not; Mark was on his way to the rich widow of Mr. Finch, and had wanted nothing of Arthur but to obtain the means of going to her, and to be revenged on him.

So Arthur half-expressed, and his friend understood. Save for this bodily condition, Percy could hardly have borne with him. His reckless self-indulgence and blind folly deserved to be left to reap their own fruit; yet, when he beheld their victim, miserable, prostrated by illness and despair, and cast aside with scornful cruelty, he could not, without being as cold-hearted as Gardner himself, refrain from kind words and suggestions of consolation. 'Might not his father assist him?'

'He cannot if he would. Everything is entailed, and you know how my aunt served us. There is no ready money to be had, not even the five thousand pounds that is the whole dependence for the poor things at home in case of my death, which may come soon enough for aught I care. I wish it was! I wish we were all going to the bottom together, and I was to see none of their faces again. It would be better for Violet than this.'

Percy could say little; but, though blunt of speech, he was tender of heart. He did all in his power for Arthur's comfort, and when he helped him on shore at Folkestone, recommended him to go to bed at once, and offered to fetch Mrs. Martindale.

'She cannot come,' sighed Arthur; 'she has only been confined three weeks.'

More shame for you, had Percy almost said; but he no longer opposed Arthur's

homeward instinct, and, finding a train ready to start, left their luggage to its fate, and resolved not to lose sight of him till he was safely deposited at his own house. Such care was in truth needed; the journey was a dreadful one, the suffering increased every hour, and when at length, in the dusk of the evening, they arrived in Cadogan-place, he could hardly mount the stairs, even with Percy's assistance.

It was the first time that Violet had left her chamber, and, as the drawing-room door opened, she was seen sitting, pale and delicate, in her low chair by the fire, her babe on her lap, and the other three at her feet, Johnnie presiding over his sisters, as they looked at a book of prints.

She started up in alarm as Arthur entered, leaning on Mr. Fotheringham, and at once seized by a paroxysm of severe cough. Percy tried to assume a reassuring tone. 'Here, you see, I have brought him home with one of his bad colds. He will speak for himself presently.'

In a second she had placed the infant on the sofa, signed to Johnnie to watch him, and drawn the arm-chair to the fire. Arthur sank into it, throwing his arm round her for support, and resting his weary head against her, as if he had found his refuge. Percy relieved her from the two little girls, unclasping their frightened grasp on her dress so gently and firmly, that, stranger though he was, Anna did not cry on being taken in his arms, nor Helen resist his leading her out of the room, and desiring her to take her sister up-stairs and to call their nurse.

Returning, he found that necessity had brought strength and presence of mind to their mother. She did not even tremble, though Arthur's only words were, 'We are undone. If I die, forgive me.' Indeed, she hardly took in the sense of what he said; she only caressed, and tried to relieve him, assisted by Percy, who did not leave them till he had seen Arthur safely in charge of Mr. Harding.

He then walked away to his old lodgings in Piccadilly, where he was recognized with ecstasy by the quondam ragged-school boy, and was gladly welcomed by his

landlady, who could not rejoice enough at the sight of his good-humoured face.

He divided his time between friendly gossip on her family affairs as she bustled in and out, in civility to the cat, and in railing at himself for thinking twice of such a selfish, ne'er-do-well as Arthur Martindale. The image of that pale young mother and her little ones pursued him, and with it the thought of the complicated distresses awaiting her; the knowledge of the debts that would almost beggar her, coming in the midst of her husband's dangerous illness.

Percy muttered to himself lines of 'Who comes here—a Grenadier,' made a face, stretched himself, and called on himself to look on reasonableness and justice. Arthur deserved no favour, because he had encumbered himself with a helpless family, and then cruelly disregarded them.

'What does a man deserve who leaves his wife with a child of a week old, to run after a swindler in foreign parts—eh, puss?' said he aloud, viciously tweaking the old cat's whiskers; then, as she shook her ears and drew back, too dignified to be offended, 'Ay, ay, while wheat and tares grow together, the innocent must suffer for the guilty. The better for both. One is refined, the other softened. I am the innocent sufferer now,' added he; 'condole with me, pussy! That essay would have been worth eighty pounds if it was worth a sixpence; and there's a loss for a striving young man! I cannot go on to Worthbourne without recovering it; and who knows how Jane will interpret my delay? While I live I'll never carry another manuscript anywhere but in my pocket, and then we should all go to the bottom together, according to poor Arthur's friendly wish. Ha! that's not it sticking out of my great-coat pocket? No such good luck-only those absurd papers of poor Arthur's. I remember I loaded my coat on him when we were going to land. What a business it is! Let us overhaul them a bit.'

He became absorbed in the contemplation, only now and then giving vent to some vituperative epithet, till he suddenly dashed his hand on the table with a force that

startled the cat from her doze.

‘Never mind, puss; you know of old

‘I care for nobody, and nobody cares for me.’

So now, good night, and there’s an end of the matter.’

The first thing he did, next morning, was to walk to Cadogan-place, to return the papers. He had long to wait before the door was opened; and when James at length came, it was almost crying that he said that Colonel Martindale was very ill; he had ruptured a blood-vessel that morning, and was in the most imminent danger.

Mr. Fotheringham could see no one—could not be of any service. He walked across the street, looked up at the windows, mused, then exclaimed, ‘That being the case, I had better go at once to Folkestone, and rescue my bag from the jaws of the Custom-house.’

CHAPTER 9

She left the gleam-lit fire-place, She came to the bedside, Her look was like a sad embrace, The gaze of one who can divine A grief, and sympathize. Sweet flower, thy children’s eyes Are not more innocent than thine. —M. ARNOLD—Tristram and Yseulte.

At last there was a respite. The choking, stifling flow of blood, that, with brief intervals, had for the last two hours threatened momentary death, had been at length checked; the eyes were closed that had roamed in helpless affright and agony from Violet to the doctors; and the sufferer was lying, in what his wife would fain have deemed a slumber, but the gasping respiration and looks of distress made it but too evident that it was the stillness of exhaustion, enhanced by dread of renewing the bleeding by word or motion.

There could be no concealment of the exceeding danger. His lungs had never been

strong; and the slight cough, which, contrary to his usual habits, he had neglected all the summer, had been the token of mischief, which his recent expedition had aggravated to a fearful extent. Even the violent bleeding had not relieved the inflammation on the chest, and Violet had collected from the physician's looks and words that it could be hardly expected that he should survive the day.

Yet, through that dreadful morning, she had not failed in resolution or composure: never once had her husband seen in her look, or heard in her tone, aught but what might cheer and sustain him—never had her fortitude or steadiness given way. She had not time to think of consolation and support; but her habit of prayer and trust came to her aid, and brought strength and support around her "in these great waterfloods" of trouble. She was not forsaken in her hour of need. Hitherto there had been no space for reflection; now his quiescent state, though for the present so great a relief, brought the opportunity of realizing his situation; but therewith arose thankfulness for the space thus granted, and the power of praying that it might be blessed to him whether for life or death.

In watchfulness and supplication, she sat beside him, with her babe, much afraid that it should disturb him, and be unwelcome. However, when some little sound made him aware of its presence, he opened his eyes, moved his hand, as if to put back the covering that hid its face from him, and presently signed to have it placed on the bed by his side. It was a fine large dark boy, already so like him as to make the contrast the more striking and painful, between the unconscious serenity of the babe and the restless misery of the face of the father, laid low in the strength of manhood, and with a look of wretched uneasiness, as if the load on the mind was a worse torment than the weight on the labouring breath. He, who usually hardly deigned a glance at his infants, now lay gazing with inexpressible softness and sadness at the little sleeping face; and Violet, while gratified by that look of affection, could not help having it the more borne in on her mind, that death must be very near. Were the well-springs of love, so long closed up, only opening when he was about to leave his

children for ever? If she could only have heard him speak!

Presently, as if there was some sting of reproach in the impassive features, he turned his head away abruptly, with a deep groan, and hid his face. She took away the child, and there was another silence, which she ventured to break now and then, by a few sentences of faith and prayer, but without being able to perceive whether he attended. Suddenly he started, as if thrilled in every vein, and glanced around with terrified anxiety, of which she could not at first perceive the cause, till she found it was the postman's knock. He held out his hand for the letters, and cast a hurried look at their directions. None were for him, but there was one in his sister's hand-writing. Violet did not feel herself able to read it, and was laying it aside, when she saw his looks following it. Her present world was so entirely in that room that she had forgotten all beyond; and it only now occurred to her to say, 'Your father? Do you wish for him? I will write.'

'Telegraph.' Even this whisper brought back the cough that was anguish and terror.

It was already so late in the day, that though thus summoned, there was no chance of Lord Martindale's arriving till the following evening; and Violet's heart sank at reckoning up the space that must elapse, more especially when she saw the perturbed eye, the startings at each sound, the determination to know the business of every one who came to speak to her—evident indications that there was some anxiety on his mind which she could not comprehend.

Thus passed the day—between visits from desponding doctors and vain measures for reducing the inflammation. At night Mr. Harding would have prevailed on her to go to rest, promising to keep watch in her stead; but she only shook her head, and said she could not. She had not seen, and had scarcely thought of, the elder children all day; but at about eleven o'clock at night she was startled by a sound of lamentable crying,—Johnnie's voice in the nursery. The poor little boy's nerves had been so much shaken by the fire at Martindale, that he had become subject to night

alarms, which sometimes showed their effect for the whole subsequent day; and his mother stole away on hearing his cry, leaving Arthur in Mr. Harding's charge, and hoping not to be missed.

Sarah was standing over Johnnie, half-coaxing, half-scolding while he sat up in his little crib, shivering and sobbing, with chattering teeth, and terrified exclamations about papa all over blood, lying dead under the burning windows.

'There now, you have brought your poor mamma up!' said Sarah, indignantly.

'Mamma, mamma!' and the cold trembling little creature clasped itself upon her neck and bosom, still repeating the dreadful words. She carried him to the fire, warmed him on her lap, caressed and soothed him, as his understanding awoke, telling him that papa was safe in his own room,—he was ill, very ill, and Johnnie must pray for him; but oh! he was alive, safe in his own bed. But as Johnnie nestled to her, repeating, 'Say it again, mamma, I was so frightened! I can't get it out of my head. Oh! is papa safe?' there would come the thought that, with morning, the child might have to hear that he was fatherless.

This dread, and the desire to efface the impression of the terrible dream, induced her, when he had obediently struggled for composure, to tell him that, on condition of perfect stillness, he might come down with her, and have a little glimpse of papa. Wrapping him up, she took him in by the open dressing-room door, to which Arthur's back was turned, trusting to escape observation. But nothing eluded those fever-lighted eyes, and they instantly fell upon the little trembling figure, the quivering face and earnest gaze.

'I hope we have not disturbed you,' apologized Violet; 'we hoped you would not hear us. Poor Johnnie woke up crying so much at your being ill, that I ventured to bring him to have one look at you, for fear he should not go to sleep again.'

She need not have feared. Even while she spoke Arthur held out his hands, with a countenance that caused Johnnie, with a stifled exclamation of 'Papa! papa!' to

spring on the bed, and there he lay, folded closely to his father's breast.

It was but for a moment. Violet had to lift the child hastily away, to be carried off by Sarah, that he might not witness the terrible suffering caused by the exertion and emotion; and yet, when this was passed, she could not repent of what she had done, for one great grief had thus been spared to herself and her boy.

She knew that to discover his son's ardent affection must be a poignant reproach for his neglect and jealousy, and she grieved at once for him and with him; but she could not understand half the feelings of bitter anguish that she perceived in his countenance and gestures. She did not know of his expectation that each ring of the bell might bring the creditors' claims to heap disgrace upon him, nor how painful were the thoughts of her and of the children, totally unprovided for, without claim during his father's lifetime, even on his own scanty portion as a younger son. He could only cast them on the mercy of his father and brother; and what right had he to expect anything from them, after his abuse of their kindness and forbearance? He thought of his neglect of his patient devoted wife, whom he was leaving, with her little ones, to struggle with poverty and dependence; he thought of his children growing up to know him only as the improvident selfish father, who had doomed them to difficulties, and without one tender word or kind look to grace his memory. No wonder he turned, unable to brook the sight of his unconscious babe; and that, when with morning little steps and voices sounded above, such a look of misery came over his face, that Violet hastened to order the children down to the dining-room, out of hearing.

Ere long, however, from the other room, appropriated to the baby, a face peeped in, and Johnnie sprang to her side with earnest whispers: 'Mamma, may I not say my prayers with you! I will not wake papa, but I can't bear it without!' and the tears were in his eyes.

Violet's glance convinced her that this would be anything but disturbing, and she

consented. Johnnie thought his father asleep, but she saw him watching the boy, as he stood with clasped hands, and eyes in fixed steadfast gaze, repeating the Creed, so gravely and distinctly, that not one of the whispering accents was lost. Looking upwards, as if pursuing some thought far away, Johnnie said, ‘Amen’; and then knelt, breathing forth his innocent petitions, with their mention of father, mother, sisters, and little brother; and therewith a large teardrop gathered in the eyes fixed on him—but she would not seem to notice, and bent her head over the boy, who, when his daily form was finished, knelt on, and pressed her arm. ‘Mamma,’ he whispered, very low indeed, ‘may I say something for papa?’ and on her assent, ‘O God! make dear, dear papa better, if it be Thy heavenly will, and let it be Thy heavenly will.’

Arthur’s face was hidden; she only saw his fingers holding up the covering with a quivering grasp. Johnnie rose up quite simply, and letting him continue in the belief that his father slept, she allowed him to go noiselessly away, after she had held him fast in her arms, able to feel, even now, the comfort and blessing of her child.

Some little time had passed before Arthur looked up; then gazing round, as if seeking something, he said, ‘Where is he?’

‘Johnnie? He is gone, he did not know you were awake. Shall I send for him?’

‘For all.’

They came; but he was made to feel that he had disregarded them too long. They had never been familiarized with him; seldom saw him, and were kept under restraint in his presence; and there was no intimacy to counteract the fright inspired by his present appearance. Ghastly pale, with a hectic spot on each cheek, with eyes unnaturally bright and dilated, and a quantity of black hair and whiskers, he was indeed a formidable object to the little girls; and Violet was more grieved than surprised when Annie screamed with affright, and had to be carried away instantly; and Helen backed, with her hands behind her, resisting all entreaties and remonstrance, and unheeding his outstretched hand. The child was of so determined

and wilful a nature, that Violet dreaded an outbreak if she were too much pressed, and was forced to let her go—though much grieved, both for the distress that it gave Arthur, and for the thought of how his daughter might remember it by and by.

They supposed that Johnnie had gone with his sisters, but at the end of half an hour became aware that he had ever since been standing, almost hidden by the curtain, satisfied with merely being in the room. The fair face, so delicately tinted, the dark shady eyes, lovingly and pensively fixed on his father, and the expression, half mournful, half awe-struck, were a touching sight in so young a child, and Arthur seemed so to feel it. He signed to him to come near; and with a flush, between joy and fear, the little boy was instantly at his side. One hot hand enfolded the small soft cool one, the other pressed fondly on the light silken waves of hair. After thus holding him for some moments, he tried to speak, in whispering breathless gasps of a word at a time.

‘You’ll comfort her!’ and he looked towards his mother, ‘You’ll take care of the others—will you?’

‘If I can. God takes care of us,’ said Johnnie, wistfully, as if striving to understand, as he felt the pressure redoubled on hand and head, as if to burn in what was uttered with such difficulty and danger.

‘Tell your grandfather I trust you all to him. He must forgive. Say so to him. You’ll be a better son to him than I. When you know all, don’t remember it against me.’

He could say no more, it had brought on a fit of coughing and breathlessness, through which he scarcely struggled. Silence was more than ever enforced; but throughout the day the oppression was on the increase, especially towards the evening, when he became excited by the expectation of his father’s arrival. He sat, pillowed high up, each respiration an effort that spread a burning crimson over his face, while eye and ear were nervously alert.

‘Arthur is very ill, and begs to see you,’ was the telegraphic message that filled the

cottage at Brogden with consternation. Lady Martindale was too unwell to leave home, but Theodora was thankful to her father for deciding that her presence was necessary for Violet's sake; indeed, as they travelled in doubt and suspense, and she was continually reminded of that hurried journey when her unchastened temper had been the torment of herself and of her brother, she felt it an undeserved privilege to be allowed to go to him at all. Instead of schemes of being important, there was a crashing sense of an impending blow; she hardly had the power to think or speculate in what form, or how heavily it might fall. She had only room for anxiety to get forward.

They arrived; she hurried up the stairs, only catching James's words, declaring his master no better.

She saw in the twilight a slight bending form, coming down, holding by the balusters. Violet was in her arms, clasping her with a trembling, almost convulsive tightness, without speaking.

'O, Violet, what is it? Is he so very ill?'

Lord Martindale hastened up at the same moment, and Violet recovering, in a few words, spoken very low, but clearly, told of his condition, adding, 'He has been watching for you all this time, he heard you come, and wants you directly, but don't let him speak.'

She hung on Theodora's arm, and guided them up, as if hardly able to stand. She opened the outer room door, and there (while the nurse had taken her place) sat Johnnie on the rug, with the baby lying across his lap, and his arms clasped tenderly round it. It was restless, and he looked up to his mother, who bent down and took it in her arms, while Lord Martindale passed on. Theodora stood appalled and overawed. This was beyond even her fears.

'Thank you for coming,' said Violet, who had sunk into a chair.

'O, Violet, when?—how!—'

But a look of horror came over Violet; she started up, almost threw the infant into Theodora's arms, and vanished into the other room. 'Oh! what is it! What is the matter?' exclaimed Theodora.

'The cough, the blood,' said Johnnie, in a low voice; and turning away with a suppressed sob he threw himself down, and hid his face on a chair. She was in an agony to pass that closed door, but the baby was fretting and kept her prisoner.

After some minutes had thus passed, her father appeared, and would have gone on without seeing her, but she detained him by an imploring cry and gasp, and entreated to hear what had happened.

'The blood-vessel again—I must send for Harding.'

'Shall I tell James to go?' inquired a little quiet voice, as Johnnie lifted up his flushed face.

'Do so, my dear;' and as the little boy left the room, his grandfather added, with the calmness of hopelessness, 'Poor child! it is of no use, it must soon be over now;' and he was returning, when Theodora again held him fast—'Papa! papa! I must see him, let me come!'

'Not yet,' said her father; 'the sight of a fresh person might hasten it. If there is any chance, we must do nothing hazardous. I will call you when they give up hope.'

Theodora was forced to relinquish her hold, for the baby screamed outright, and required all her efforts to hush its cries that they might not add fresh distress to the sick room. It seemed to make her own misery of suspense beyond measure unendurable, to be obliged to control herself so as to quiet the little creature by gentle movements, and to have its ever-renewed wailings filling her ears, when her whole soul hung on the sounds she could catch from the inner room. No one came to relieve her; only Johnnie returned, listened for a moment at the door, and dropped into his former position, and presently Mr. Harding passed rapidly through the room.

Long, long she waited ere the door once more opened. Her father came forth. Was it

the summons? But he stopped her move towards the room. ‘Not yet; the bleeding is checked.’

Then as Mr. Harding followed, they went out of the room in consultation, and almost the next moment Violet herself glided in, touched Johnnie’s head, and said, ‘Papa is better, darling;’ then took the baby from Theodora, saying, ‘Thank you, you shall see him soon; she was again gone, Johnnie creeping after, whither Theodora would have given worlds to follow.

After another interval, he returned with a message that mamma begged Aunt Theodora to be so kind as to go and make tea for grandpapa; she thought dear papa was breathing a little more easily, but he must be quite quiet now.

Obeying the sentence of banishment, she found her father sending off a hasty express to give more positive information at home. ‘We must leave them to themselves a little while,’ he said. ‘There must be no excitement till he has had time to rally. I thought he had better not see me at first.’

‘Is he worse than John has been?’

‘Far worse. I never saw John in this immediate danger.’

‘Did this attack begin directly after you came?’

‘It was the effort of speaking. He WOULD try to say something about racing debts—Gardner, papers in his coat-pocket, and there broke down, coughed, and the bleeding came on. There is something on his mind, poor—’

Theodora made a sign to remind him of Johnnie’s presence; but the child came forward. ‘Grandpapa, he told me to tell you something,’ and, with eyes bent on the ground, the little fellow repeated the words like a lesson by rote.

Lord Martindale was much overcome; he took his grandson on his knee, and pressed him to his breast without being able to speak, then, as if to recover composure by proceeding to business, he sent him to ask James for the coat last worn by his papa,

and bring the papers in the pocket. Then with more agitation he continued, ‘Yes, yes, that was what poor Arthur’s eyes were saying all the time. I could only promise to settle everything and take care of her; and there was she, poor thing, with a face like a martyr, supporting his head, never giving way, speaking now and then so calmly and soothingly, when I could not have said a word. I do believe she is almost an angel!’ said Lord Martindale, with a burst of strong emotion. ‘Take care of her! She will not want that long! at this rate. Harding tells me he is very anxious about her: she is not by any means recovered, yet he was forced to let her sit up all last night, and she has been on her feet this whole day! What is to become of her and these poor children? It is enough to break one’s heart!’

Here Johnnie came back. ‘Grandpapa, we cannot find any papers. James has looked in all the clothes papa wore when he came home, and he did not bring home his portmanteau.’

‘Come home! Where had he been?’

‘I don’t know. He was away a long time.’

Lord Martindale started, and repeated the words in amaze. Theodora better judged of a child’s ‘long time,’ and asked whether it meant a day or a week. ‘Was it since the baby was born that he went?’

‘Baby was a week old. He was gone one—two Sundays, and he came back all on a sudden the day before yesterday, coughing so much that he could not speak, and the gentleman told mamma all about it.’

‘What gentleman, Johnnie? Was it Mr. Gardner?’

‘O no; this was a good-natured gentleman.’

‘Mr. Herries, or Captain Fitzhugh?’

‘No, it was a long name, and some one I never saw before; but I think it was the man that belongs to the owl.’

‘What can the child mean?’ asked Lord Martindale.

Johnnie mounted a chair, and embraced his little stuffed owl.

‘The man that gave me this.’

‘Percy’s Athenian owl!’ cried Theodora.

‘Was Fotheringham the name?’ said Lord Martindale.

‘Yes, it was the name like Aunt Helen’s,’ said Johnnie.

‘Has he been here since?’

‘He called to inquire yesterday morning. I am not sure,’ said the exact little boy, ‘but I think he said he met papa in the steamer.’

It seemed mystery on mystery, and James could only confirm his young master’s statement. After the little boy had answered all the questions in his power he slid down from his grandfather’s knee, saying that it was bed-time, and wished them good night in a grave, sorrowful, yet childlike manner, that went to their hearts. He returned, in a short time, with a message that mamma thought papa a little better and ready to see them. Theodora went up first; Johnnie led her to the door, and then went away, while Violet said, almost inaudibly,

‘Here is Theodora come to see you.’

Prepared as Theodora was, she was startled by the bloodlessness of the face, and the hand that lay without movement on the coverlet, while the gaze of the great black eyes met her with an almost spectral effect; and the stillness was only broken by the painful heaving of the chest, which seemed to shake even the bed-curtains. But for Violet’s looks and gesture, Theodora would not have dared to go up to him, take his hand, and, on finding it feebly return her pressure, bend over and kiss his forehead.

‘His breath is certainly relieved, and there is less fever,’ repeated Violet; but to Theodora this seemed to make it only more shocking. If this was better, what must it not have been? Her tongue positively refused to speak, and she only stood looking

from her brother to his wife, who reclined, sunk back in her chair beside him, looking utterly spent and worn out, her cheeks perfectly white, her eyes half-closed, her whole frame as if all strength and energy were gone. That terrible hour had completely exhausted her powers; and when Theodora had recollected herself, and summoned Lord Martindale, who undertook the night watch, Violet had not voice to speak; she only hoarsely whispered a few directions, and gave a sickly submissive smile as her thanks.

For one moment she revived, as she smoothed Arthur's bed, moistened his lips, and pressed her face to his; then she allowed Theodora almost to lift her away, and support her into the next room, where Sarah was waiting. Even thought and anxiety seemed to be gone; she sat where they placed her, and when they began to undress her, put her hand mechanically to her dress, missed the fastening, and let it drop with a vacant smile that almost overcame Theodora. They laid her in bed, and she dropped asleep, like an infant, the instant her head was on the pillow. Theodora thought it cruel to arouse her to take nourishment; but Sarah was peremptory, and vigorously administered the spoonfuls, which she swallowed in the same unconscious manner. She was only roused a little by a sound from the baby: 'Give him to me, he will be quieter so;' and Sarah held him to her, she took him in her arms, and was instantly sunk in the same dead slumber.

'My pretty lamb!' mourned the cold stern servant, as she arranged her coverings; 'this is the sorest brash we have had together yet, and I doubt whether ye'll win through with it. May He temper the blast that sends it.'

Gazing at her for a few seconds, she raised her hand to dry some large tears; and as if only now conscious of Miss Martindale's presence, curtsied, saying, in her usual manner, 'I beg your pardon, ma'am. There is the room next the nursery made ready for you.'

'I could not go, Sarah, thank you. Go to your children; I will take care of her. Pray

go.’

‘I will, thank you, ma’am. We will have need of all our strength before we have done.’

‘How has she been before this?’

‘About as well as usual at first, ma’am, till he threw her back with going off into they foreign parts, where he has been and as good as catched his death, and would have died if Mr. Fotheringham had not brought him home.’

‘What! has he been abroad, Sarah?’

‘Yes, ma’am. I was holding the baby when he says to Missus he was going to Bully, or Boulong—’

‘Boulogne—’

‘Yes, Bullying, or some such place; and bullied him they have; stripped him even of his very portmanteau, with his eight new shirts in it, that they have! Well, Missus, she says his cold would be worse, and he said it only wanted a change, and she need never fret, for he meant to get quit of the whole concern. But for that, I would have up and told him he didn’t ought to go, and that he must stay at home and mind her, but then I thought, if he did get rid of them nasty horses, and that there Mr. Gardner, with his great nasturtions on his face, it would be a blessed day. But I ought to have known how it would be: he is too innocent for them; and they have never been content till they have been and got his very clothes, and given him his death, and broke the heart of the bestest and most loving-heartedest lady as ever lived. That they have!’

Having eased her mind by this tirade, Sarah mended the fire, put every comfort in Miss Martindale’s reach, advised her to lie down by her mistress, and walked off.

Theodora felt giddy and confounded with the shocks of that day. It was not till she had stretched herself beside Violet that she could collect her perceptions of the state

of affairs; and oh! what wretchedness! Her darling brother, round whom the old passionate ardour of affection now clung again, lying at death's door; his wife sinking under her exertions;—these were the least of the sorrows, though each cough seemed to rend her heart, and that sleeping mother was like a part of her life. The misery was in that mystery—nay, in the certainty, that up to the last moment of health Arthur had been engaged in his reckless, selfish courses! If he were repentant, there was neither space nor power to express it, far less for reparation. He was snatched at once from thoughtless pleasure and disregard of religion—nay, even of the common charities of home! And to fasten the guilt to herself were those few half-uttered words—races, debts, Gardner!

'If you once loosen the tie of home, he will go back to courses and companions that have done him harm enough already.' 'Beware of Mark Gardner!' 'Whatever comes of these races, it is your doing, not mine.' Those warnings flashed before her eyes like letters of fire, and she turned her face to the pillow as it were to hide from them, as well as to stifle the groans that could not have been wrung from her by bodily pain. 'Oh, my sin has found me out! I thought I had been punished, but these are the very dregs! His blood is on my head! My brother! my brother! whom I loved above all! He was learning to love his home and children; she was weaning him from those pursuits! What might he not have been? I led him away! When he shrank from the temptation, I dragged him to it! I gave him back to the tempter! I, who thought I loved him—I did the devil's work! Oh! this is the heavier weight! Why should it crush others with the only guilty one? Oh! have mercy, have mercy on him! Let me bear all! Take me instead! Let me not have slain his soul!'

It was anguish beyond the power of words. She could not lie still; she knelt on the floor, and there the flood of despair fell on her more overwhelmingly; and crouching, almost cast on the ground, she poured out incoherent entreaties for mercy, for space for his repentance, for his forgiveness. That agony of distracted prayer must have lasted a long time. Some sound in her brother's room alarmed her,

and in starting she shook the table. Her father came to ask if anything was the matter; told her that Arthur was quiet, and begged her to lie down. It was a relief to have something to obey, and she moved back. The light gleamed on something bright. It was the setting of Helen's cross! 'Ah! I was not worthy to save it; that was for Johnnie's innocent hand! I may not call this my cross, but my rod!' Then came one thought: 'I came not for the righteous, but to call sinners to repentance.' Therewith hot tears rose up. 'With Him there is infinite mercy and redemption.' Some power of hope revived, that Mercy might give time to repent, accept the heartfelt grief that might exist, though not manifested to man! The hope, the motive, and comfort in praying, had gleamed across her again; and not with utter despair could she beseech that the sins she had almost caused might be so repented of as to receive the pardon sufficient for all iniquity.

CHAPTER 10

Thus have I seen a temper wild In yokes of strong affection bound Unto a spirit meek and mild, Till chains of good were on him found. He, struggling in his deep distress, As in some dream of loneliness, Hath found it was an angel guest. —Thoughts in Past Years

Five days had passed, and no material change had taken place. There was no serious recurrence of bleeding, but the inflammation did not abate, and the suffering was grievous, though Arthur was so much enfeebled that he could not struggle under it. His extreme debility made his body passive, but it was painfully evident that his mind was as anxious and ill at ease as ever. There was the same distrustful watch to see every letter, and know all that passed; the constant strain of every faculty, all in absolute silence, so that his nurses, especially Theodora, felt as if it would be a positive personal relief to them if those eyes would be closed for one minute.

What would they have given to know what passed in that sleepless mind? But

anything that could lead to speaking or agitation was forbidden; even, to the great grief of Theodora, the admission of the clergyman of the parish. Lord Martindale agreed with the doctors that it was too great a risk, and Violet allowed them to decide, whispering to Theodora that she thought he heeded Johnnie's prayers more than anything read with a direct view to himself. The cause of his anxiety remained in doubt. Lord Martindale had consulted Violet, but she knew nothing of any papers. She was aware that his accounts were mixed up with Mr. Gardner's, and believed he had gone to Boulogne to settle them; and she conjectured that he had found himself more deeply involved than he had expected. She remembered his having said something of being undone, and his words to Johnnie seemed to bear the same interpretation.

Mr. Fotheringham's apparition was also a mystery; so strange was it that, after bringing Arthur home in such a state, he should offer no further assistance. James was desired to ask him to come in, if he should call to inquire; but he did not appear, and the father and sister began to have vague apprehensions, which they would not for the world have avowed to each other, that there must be worse than folly, for what save disgrace would have kept Percy from aiding John's brother in his distress? Each morning rose on them with dread of what the day might bring forth, not merely from the disease within, but from the world without; each postman's knock was listened to with alarm, caught from poor Arthur.

His wife was of course spared much of this. That worst fear could not occur to her; she had no room for any thought but for him as he was in the sight of Heaven, and each hour that his life was prolonged was to her a boon and a blessing. She trusted that there was true sorrow for the past—not merely dread of the consequences, as she traced the shades upon his face, while he listened to the hymns that she encouraged Johnnie to repeat. In that clear, sweet enunciation, and simple, reverent manner, they evidently had a great effect. He listened for the first time with his heart, and the caresses, at which Johnnie glowed with pleasure as a high favour,

were, she knew, given with a species of wondering veneration. It was Johnnie's presence that most soothed him; his distressing, careworn expression passed away at the first sight of the innocent, pensive face, and returned not while the child was before him, bending over a book, or watching the baby, or delighted at having some small service to perform. Johnnie, on his side, was never so well satisfied as in the room, and nothing but Violet's fears for his health prevented the chief part of his time from being spent there.

Her own strength was just sufficient for the day. She could sit by Arthur's side, comprehend his wishes by his face, and do more to relieve and sustain him than all the rest; and, though she looked wretchedly weak and worn, her power of doing all that was needed, and looking upon him with comforting refreshing smiles, did not desert her. The night watch she was forced to leave to be divided between his father and sister, with the assistance alternately of Sarah and the regular nurse, and she was too much exhausted when she went to bed, for Theodora to venture on disturbing her by an unnecessary word.

Theodora's longing was to be continually with her brother, but this could only be for a few hours at night; and then the sight of his suffering, and the difficulty of understanding his restlessness of mind, made her so wretched, that it took all the force of her strong resolution to conceal her unhappiness; and she marvelled the more at the calmness with which the feeble frame of Violet endured the same scene. The day was still more trying to her, for her task was the care of the children, and little Helen was so entirely a copy of her own untamed self, as to be a burdensome charge for a desponding heart and sinking spirits.

On the fifth morning the doctors perceived a shade of improvement; but to his attendants Arthur appeared worse, from being less passive and returning more to the struggle and manifestation of oppression and suffering. He made attempts at questions, insisting on being assured that no letter nor call had been kept from him;

he even sent for the cards that had been left, and examined them, and he wanted to renew the conversation with his father; but Lord Martindale silenced him at once, and left the room. He looked so much disappointed that Violet was grieved, and thought, in spite of the doctors, that it might have been better to have run the risk of letting him speak, for the sake of setting his mind at rest.

Lord Martindale, however, saw so much peril in permitting a word to be uttered, that he deemed it safer to absent himself, and went out to try to trace out Mr. Fotheringham, and ask whether he could throw any light on Arthur's trouble.

The children were out of doors, and Theodora was profiting by the interval of quiet to write to her mother, when she heard James announce, 'Mr. Fotheringham.'

She looked up, then down. Her first thought was of her brother; the next brought the whole flood of remembrances, and she could not meet his eye.

He advanced, but there was no friendly greeting. As to a stranger, he said, 'I hope Colonel Martindale is better?'

Could it be himself? She gave a hasty glance. It was; he chose to disown her; to meet her without even a hand held out! Rallying her fortitude, she made answer, 'Thank you; we hope—'

She got no further—her hand was grasped. 'Theodora! I did not know you.'

She had forgotten her altered looks! Relieved, she smiled, and said, 'Yes, I am a strange figure. They think Arthur a little better to-day, thank you.'

'How has it been?'

He listened to the details with eagerness, that dismissed from her mind the sickening apprehension of his knowing of any hidden evil; then, saying he was pressed for time, begged her to ask Mrs. Martindale to let him speak to her on a matter of such importance that he must venture on disturbing her.

Theodora beckoned to Violet at the door, hoping to elude Arthur's notice; but any

attempt at secrecy made him more distrustful, and the name had hardly been whispered before she was startled by hearing—'Bring him here.'

Much frightened, the wife and sister expostulated, thus making him more determined; he almost rose on his elbow to enforce his wishes, and at last said, 'You do me more harm by preventing it.'

Violet felt the same; and in fear and trembling begged Theodora to call Percy. She knew herself to be responsible for the danger, but saw the impossibility of preventing the interview without still greater risk. Indeed, while Theodora delayed Percy with cautions, impatience, and the fear of being disappointed, were colouring each sunken cheek with a spot of burning red, the hands were shaking uncontrollably, and the breath was shorter than ever, so that she was on the point of going to hasten the visitor, when he knocked at the door.

She signed to him at once to turn to Arthur, who held out his hand, and met his greeting with an anxious, imploring gaze, as if to ask whether, after all, he brought him hope.

'Well,' said Percy, cheerfully, 'I think it is settled.'

Arthur relaxed that painful tension of feature, and lay back on his pillows, with a relieved though inquiring look.

'Begging your pardon for being meddlesome,' continued Percy, 'I thought I saw a way of being even with that scoundrel. Your papers had got into my pocket, and, as I had nothing else to do, I looked them over after parting with you, and saw a way out of the difficulty. I was coming in the morning to return them and propound my plan, but finding that you could not be seen, I ventured to take it on myself at once, for fear he should get out of reach.'

He paused, but Arthur's eyes asked on.

'I had reason to think him gone to Paris. I followed him thither, and found he was making up to Mrs. Finch. I let him know that I was aware of this villainy, and of a

good deal more of the same kind, and threatened that, unless he came in to my terms, I would expose the whole to his cousin, and let her know that he is at this moment engaged to Miss Brandon. She is ready to swallow a good deal, but that would have been too much, and he knew it. He yielded, and gave me his authority to break up the affair.'

As Arthur was still attentive and anxious, Percy went on to explain that he had next gone to the man who kept the horses, and by offers of ready money and careful inspection of his bills, had reduced his charge to a less immoderate amount. The money had been advanced for a portion of Arthur's share of the debts, and a purchaser was ready for the horses, whose price would clear off the rest; so that nothing more was wanted but Arthur's authority for the completion of the sale, which would free him from all present danger of pressure upon that score.

'Supposing you do not disavow me, said Percy, 'I must ask pardon for going such lengths without permission.'

A clutch of the hand was the answer, and Percy then showed him the accounts only waiting for his signature.

The money advanced was nearer five thousand pounds than four; and Arthur, pointing to the amount, inquired, by look and gesture, 'Where does it come from?'

'Never mind; it was honestly come by. It is a lot that has accumulated out of publishing money, and was always bothering me with railway shares. It will do as well in your keeping.'

'It is throwing it into a gulf.'

'In your father's, then. I will take care of myself, and speak when I want it. Don't trouble your father about it till he sees his way.'

'I must give you my bond.'

'As you please, but there is no hurry.'

Arthur, however, was bent on giving his signature at once, and, as he looked towards his wife and child, said, ‘For their sakes, thank you.’

‘I did it for their sakes,’ said Percy, gruffly, perhaps to check Arthur’s agitation; but as if repenting of what sounded harsh, he took the infant in his arms, saying to Violet, ‘You have a fine fellow here! Eyes and forehead—his father all over!’

Arthur held out his hand eagerly. ‘Let him be your godson—make him like any one but me.’

Percy took two turns in the room before he could answer. ‘My godson, by all means, and thank you; but you will have the making of him yourself. You are much better than I expected.’

Arthur shook his head; but Violet, with a look, sufficient reward for anything, said, ‘It is you that are making him better.’

He replied by inquiries about the christening. The baby was a day less than four weeks old, and Violet was anxious to have him baptized; so that it was arranged that it should take place immediately on Percy’s return from Worthbourne, whither he was to proceed that same afternoon, having hitherto been delayed by Arthur’s affairs. This settled, he took leave. Arthur fervently pressed his hand, and, as Violet adjusted the pillows, sank his head among them as if courting rest, raising his eyes once more to his ‘friend in need,’ and saying, ‘I shall sleep now.’

Violet only hoped that Mr. Fotheringham understood what inexpressible gratitude was conveyed in those words, only to be appreciated after watching those six wakeful, straining days and nights.

Meantime, Theodora waited in fear, too great at first to leave space for other thoughts; but as time past, other memories returned. On coming to summon Percy she had found him standing before the little stuffed owl, and she could not but wonder what thoughts it might have excited, until suddenly the recollection of Jane dissipated her visions with so violent a revulsion that she was shocked at herself,

and perceived that there was a victory to be achieved.

‘It shall be at once,’ said she. ‘I WILL mention her. To be silent would show consciousness. Once done, it is over. It is easier with my altered looks. I am another woman now.’

She heard him coming down, and almost hoped to be spared the meeting, but, after a moment’s pause, he entered.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘I hope I have done him no harm. I think better of him now than when I came home. He looks to me as if the worst was over.’

They were the first words of hope, and spoken in that hearty, cheery voice, they almost overset her weakened spirits, and the struggle with tears would not let her answer.

‘You have had a most trying time,’ said he, in the kind way that stirred up every old association; but that other thought made her guarded, and she coldly hurried out the words—

‘Yes; this is the first time my father has been out. He went in search of you, to ask how you met poor Arthur, who has been able to give no account of himself.’

‘We met on board the steamer. He had been obliged to leave Boulogne without finishing his business there, and I went back to settle it for him.’

‘And the papers he had lost?’

‘I had them: it is all right.’

‘And his mind relieved?’

‘I hope it is.’

‘Oh! then, we may dare to hope!’ cried she, breathing freely.

‘I trust so; but I must go. Perhaps I may meet Lord Martindale.’

With a great effort, and a ‘now-or-never’ feeling, she abruptly said, ‘I hope Jane is well.’

He did not seem to understand; and confused, as if she had committed an over familiarity of title, she added, ‘Mrs. Fotheringham.’

She was startled and hurt at his unconstrained manner.

‘Very well, I believe. I shall see her this evening at Worthbourne.’

‘Has she been staying there long?’ said Theodora, going on valiantly after the first plunge.

‘Ever since the summer. They went home very soon after the marriage.’

A new light broke in on Theodora. She was tingling in every limb, but she kept her own counsel, and he proceeded. ‘I saw them at Paris, and thought it did very well. She is very kind to him, keeps him in capital order, and has cured him of some of his ungainly tricks.’

‘How did it happen? I have heard no particulars.’

‘After his mother’s death poor Pelham was less easily controlled: he grew restless and discontented, and both he and my uncle fell under the influence of an underbred idle youth in the neighbourhood, who contrived at last to get Sir Antony’s consent to his taking Pelham abroad with him as his pupil. At Florence they met with these ladies, who made much of their cousin, and cajoled the tutor, till this marriage was effected.’

‘She must be nearly double his age.’

‘She will manage him the better for it. There was great excuse for her. The life she was obliged to lead was almost an apology for any way of escape. If only it had been done openly, and with my uncle’s consent, no one could have had any right to object, and I honestly believe it is a very good thing for all parties.’

‘Would Sir Antony have consented?’

‘I have little doubt of it. He was hurt at first, but he was always fond of Jane. She is very attentive to him, and I hope makes him quite comfortable. He wrote to ask me

to come and see them at Worthbourne, and I am on my way. I see it is getting late. Good-bye.'

Theodora's heart had been bounding all this time. Her first impulse was to rush up to tell Violet; but as this could not be, she snatched up a bulky red volume, and throwing over the leaves till she came to F.—Fotheringham, Sir Antony, of Worthbourne, looked down the list of his children's names, and beheld that the only one not followed by the fatal word "died" was Antony Pelham.

What had they all been doing not to have thought of this before? However, she recollected that it would have seemed as impossible that the half-witted youth should marry as that he should be on the Continent. The escape from the certainty that had so long weighed on her, taught her what the pain had been; and yet, when she came to analyze her gladness, it seemed to melt away.

She dwelt on her period of madness—her wilful, repeated rejection of warning; she thought of the unhappy Derby day—of her own cold 'Very well'—her flirtation with Lord St. Erme. She recollected the passage with Annette Moss: and then, for her present person, it was changed beyond recognition, as had just been proved; nor could she wonder, as, turning to the mirror, she surveyed the figure in black silk and plain cap, beyond which the hair scarcely yet peeped out—the clearness and delicacy of skin destroyed, the face haggard with care and sorrow, the eyelids swollen by watchful nights. She almost smiled at the contrast to the brilliant, flashing-eyed, nut-brown maid in the scarlet-wreathed coronal of raven hair, whom she had seen the last time she cared to cast a look in that glass.

'I am glad I am altered,' said she, sternly. 'It is well that I should not remind him of her on whom he wasted his hope and affection. It is plain that I shall never marry, and this is a mask under which I can meet him with indifference like his own. Yes, it was absolute indifference—nothing but his ordinary kindliness and humanity; neither embarrassment nor confusion—just as he would have met any old woman at

Brogden.

If he remembers that time at all, it is as a past delusion, and there is nothing in me to recall what he once liked. He did not know me! Nonsense! I thought I was content only to know him safe from Jane—still his real self. I am. That is joy! All the rest is folly and selfishness. That marriage! How disgusting—and what crooked ways! But what is that to me? Jane may marry the whole world, so that Percy is Percy!'

The children were heard on the stairs, and Helen rushed in, shouting, in spite of the silencing finger, 'Aunt, it is the owl man!' and Johnnie himself, eager and joyous, 'It is the man who came with papa.'

'He met us,' said Helen. 'He knew my name, and he asked Annie's, and carried her to our door.'

'He said he had been into papa's room,' said Johnnie, 'and had seen baby. He is a very good-natured gentleman. Don't you like him, Aunt Theodora?'

'And oh! aunt, he asked me whether we ever went to Brogden; and when he heard that we had been at the parsonage, he said he lived there when he was a little boy, and our nursery was his;' chattered on Helen. 'He asked if we were in the fire; and you know Johnnie can't bear to hear of that; so I told him how funny it was when you came and pulled me out of bed, and we went down the garden with no shoes. And he asked whether that was the way you had grown so ugly, Aunt Theodora.'

'No, Helen, he did not say that; for he was a gentleman,' interposed Johnnie; 'he only said he was afraid our aunt had been a sufferer, and Sarah told—'

'And I told,' again broke in Helen, 'how Cousin Hugh said it was an honour and a glory to be burnt like you; and I told him how I got the water and should have put out the fire, if that horrid Simmonds had not carried me away, and I wish he had not. So long as I had not my curls burnt off,' said Miss Helen, pulling one of the glossy chestnut rings into her sight, like a conscious beauty as she was.

'He asked Sarah all about it,' said Johnnie; 'and he said we had a very good aunt;

and, indeed, we have!' climbing carelessly into her lap. 'Then he met grandpapa, and they are walking in the square together.'

So Mr. Fotheringham could be in no real haste to be gone, and had only hurried away to avoid Theodora. However, there was no more musing time, the children's dinner was ready, and she was going down with the little girls, when her father entered. 'How is Arthur?'

It was answered by Johnnie, who was flying down-stairs with joyous though noiseless bounds, his whole person radiant with good tidings. 'Papa is asleep! grandpapa. Papa is fast asleep!'

'Have you been in the room?'

'No; mamma came to the door and told me. Baby is gone up to our nursery, and nobody is to make the least noise, for papa is gone to sleep so comfortably!'

The boy had caught so much gladness from his mother's look, that he almost seemed to understand the importance of that first rest. His grandfather stroked his hair, and in the same breath with Theodora, exclaimed, 'It is owing to Percy!'

'Has he told you about it?' said Theodora.

'So much as that there is a final break with that fellow Gardner—a comfort at least. Percy said they had got their affairs into a mess; Arthur had been trying to free himself, but Gardner had taken advantage of him, and used him shamefully, and his illness had forced him to come away, leaving things more complicated than ever. There was a feeling of revenge, it seems, at Arthur not having consented to some disgraceful scheme of his; but Percy did not give me the particulars. Meeting him in the steamer, ill and desperate—poor fellow—Percy heard the story, took care of him, and saw him home; then, finding next morning what a state he was in, and thinking there might be immediate demands—'

'Oh! that was the terrible dread and anxiety!'

‘He did what not one man in a million would have done. He went off, and on his own responsibility adjusted the matter, and brought Gardner to consent. He said it had been a great liberty, and that he was glad to find he had not gone too far, and that Arthur approved.’

‘Do you know what it was?’

‘No; he assured me all was right, and that there was no occasion to trouble me with the detail. I asked if any advance was needed, and he said no, which is lucky, for I cannot tell how I could have raised it. For the rest, I could ask him no questions. No doubt it is the old story, and, as Arthur’s friend, he could not be willing to explain it to me. I am only glad it is in such safe hands. As to its being a liberty, I told him it was one which only a brave thorough-going friend would have taken. I feel as if it might be the saving of his life.’

Theodora bent down to help little Anna, and said, ‘You know it is Sir Antony Fotheringham’s son that Miss Gardner married?’

‘Ay!’ said Lord Martindale, so much absorbed in his son as to forget his daughter’s interest in Percival Fotheringham. ‘He says Arthur’s cough did not seem so painful as when he saw him before, and that he even spoke several times. I am frightened to think what the risk has been of letting him in.’

‘Arthur insisted,’ said Theodora, between disappointment at the want of sympathy, and shame for having expected it, and she explained how the interview had been unavoidable.

‘Well, it is well over, and no harm done,’ said Lord Martindale, not able to absolve the sister from imprudence. After a space, he added, ‘What did you say? The deficient young Fotheringham married?’

‘Yes, to Jane Gardner.’

‘Why, surely some one said it was Percy himself!’

‘So Violet was told at Rickworth.’

Lord Martindale here suddenly recollected all, as his daughter perceived by his beginning to reprove Helen for stirring about the salt. Presently he said, ‘Have you heard that the other sister, the widow—what is her name?’

‘Mrs. Finch—’

‘Is going to be foolish enough to marry that Gardner. She was your friend, was not she?’

‘Yes, poor thing. Did you hear much about her?’

‘Percy says that she was kind and attentive to the old man, as long as he lived, though she went out a great deal while they lived abroad, and got into a very disreputable style of society there. Old Finch has left everything in her power; and from some words overheard on the quay at Boulogne, Percy understood that Gardner was on his way to pay his court to her at Paris. There was a former attachment it seems, and she is actually engaged to him. One can hardly pity her. She must do it with her eyes open.’

Theodora felt much pity. She had grieved at the entire cessation of intercourse, even by letter, which had ensued when the Finches went to the Continent; and she thought Georgina deserved credit for not having again seen Mark, when, as it now appeared, there had lurked in her heart affection sufficient to induce her to bestow herself, and all her wealth, upon him, spendthrift and profligate as she must know him to be. Miserable must be her future life; and Theodora’s heart ached as she thought of wretchedness unaided by that which can alone give support through the trials of life, and bring light out of darkness. She could only pray that the once gay companion of her girlhood, whose thoughtlessness she had encouraged, might yet, even by affliction, be led into the thorny path which Theodora was learning to feel was the way of peace.

Arthur was wakened by the recurring cough, and the look of distress and anxiety

returned; but the first word, by which Violet reminded him of Percy's call, brought back the air of relief and tranquillity. Mr. Harding, at his evening visit, was amazed at the amendment; and Johnnie amused his grandfather by asking if the owl man was really a doctor, or whether Sarah was right when she said he had rescued papa and his portmanteau out of a den of thieves.

When Violet left the room at night, the patient resignation of her face was brightening into thankfulness; and while preparing for rest, she could ask questions about the little girls. Theodora knew that she might tell her tale; and sitting in her favourite place on Violet's footstool, with her head bent down, she explained the error between the two cousins.

'How glad I am!' said the soft voice, ever ready to rejoice with her. 'Somehow, I had never recollected it, he is so like what he used to be. I am very glad.'

'Don't treat it as if it was to concern me,' said Theodora. 'I care only as he remains the noblest of men.'

'That he is.'

'Don't wish any more, nor think I do,' said Theodora. 'I never liked stories of young ladies who reform on having the small-pox. It is time nonsense should be out of my head when a man does not know me again.'

'Oh! surely—did he not?'

'Not till I spoke. No wonder, and it is better it should be so. I am unworthy any way. O, Violet, now will you not let me ask your forgiveness?'

'What do you mean, dearest?'

'Those races.'

Violet did not shrink from the mention; she kissed Theodora's brow, while the tears, reserved for the time of respite, dropped fast and bright.

'Poor dear,' she said; 'how much you have suffered!'

There was silence for some moments. Theodora striving to keep her tears as quiet as her sister's.

'I think,' said Violet, low and simply, 'that we shall be happy now.'

Then, after another silence, 'Come, if we go on in this way, we shall not be fit for to-morrow, and you have only half a night. Dearest, I wish I could save you the sitting up! If he is better to-morrow, Johnnie shall take you for a walk.'

He was better, though the doctors, dismayed at yesterday's imprudence, preached strenuously on his highly precarious state, and enforced silence and absence of excitement. Indeed, his condition was still such that the improvement could only be seen in occasional gleams; and as the relief from mental anxiety left him more attention to bestow on the suffering from the disorder, he was extremely depressed and desponding, never believing himself at all better.

The experiment of a visit from the little girls was renewed, but without better success; for the last week had increased the horrors of his appearance; and Theodora reported that Johnnie had confided to her, as a shocking secret, that the reason why Helen could not bear to go near papa was, that he looked exactly like Red Ridinghood's wolf.

Violet was grateful for the saying, for it was the first thing that drew a smile from Arthur, and to court the child became a sort of interest and occupation that distracted his thoughts from himself. It was touching to see him watching her, as she ran in and out, trying to catch her eye, stretching out his hand invitingly, holding up fruit to allure her, and looking with fond, proud, yet mournful eyes, on her fresh healthful beauty. She used to try not to see him, and would race past at full speed, and speak to her mamma with her back to him; but gradually some mysterious attraction in that silent figure won sidelong glances from her, and she began to pause, each time with a longer and fuller tip-toe gaze, both hands pressed down on the top of her head, and a look like a wild fawn, till all at once, the wehr-wolf feeling would seize her, and

she would turn and dash off as if for her life, while his eager, pleased face relaxed into disappointment, and her mother still said that time would bring her round.

At last, she took them completely by surprise, suddenly launching herself on the bed, and plunging her face into the midst of the black bristles; then, leaping down, and rushing to the door as if expecting to be caught. So violent a proceeding was almost more than Arthur could bear, and Violet, rising to smooth the coverings, began to preach gentleness; but shaken as he was, he was too much gratified to permit the reproof, smiled, and held up a bunch of grapes to invite the little maid back. But this was an offence; she put her hands behind her, and, with a dignified gesture, announced, 'I do not give kisses for grapes. I did it because Johnnie will not let me alone, and said I was unkind.'

'Theodora all over!' said her father, much entertained. It was a great step that he had discovered that the children could afford him diversion, especially now, when nothing else could have served to wile away the tedious hours. He could bear no reading aloud from any one but Johnnie, whom he would not refuse; and to whom he listened with pride in a performance he fancied wonderful, while the little books cost no effort of attention, and yet their simple lessons floated on his thoughts, and perchance sank into his heart. Or when he lay panting and wearied out with oppression, the babe's movements would attract his eye, and the prattlings of the little girls at their mamma's side would excite a languid curiosity that drew him out of himself. Sometimes that childish talk left food for thought. One day when the children had been sent into the next room to share some fruit from the plate by his bed-side, Helen's voice was overheard saying, 'I wish papa would never get well!'

'Helen! Helen, how can you?' pleaded her brother's shocked voice.

'He is so much more good-natured when he is ill,' was Helen's defence. 'I like him now; I don't like him at all when he is well, because then he is always cross. Don't you think so, Johnnie?'

‘That is not kind of you when he lies there, and it hurts him so sadly to breathe. You should wish him to be well, Helen.’

‘If he would be kind to me.’

‘O, you don’t know what it feels like to be ill,’ said Johnnie. ‘I do want to see him strong and able to ride, and go out to his soldiers again. I hope he will be kind still, and not go away and make mamma unhappy—’

‘If he would ever lead me by the hand, like the little girl’s papa at the house with the parrot, I should like that sort of papa, if he was not a little thin short ugly man. Should not you, Johnnie?’

‘No! I never shall like anything so well as my own papa. I do love him with my whole, whole heart! I am so glad he will let us love him now! It seems to come over me in the morning, and make me so glad when I remember it.’

Violet had been on the point of stopping this conversation, but Arthur would not permit her, and listened with his eyes filling with tears.

‘What have you done to that boy?’ he murmured.

‘It is his own loving self,’ said Violet.

Arthur pressed her hand to his lips. ‘My poor children! If papa ever were to get well—’

And Violet regretted that he had heard, for his emotion threw him back for the rest of the evening.

CHAPTER 11

Then weep not o’er the hour of pain, As those who lose their all; Gather the fragments that remain, They’ll prove nor few nor small. —M. L. DUNCAN

In the meantime Theodora and her father had been brought into contact with visitors from the external world. One morning James brought in a card and message of

inquiry from Lord St. Erme, and Lord Martindale desired that he should be admitted. Theodora had just time to think how ridiculous it was of her to consider how she should appear to another old lover, before he came in, colouring deeply, and bending his head low, not prepared to shake hands; but when hers was held out, taking it with an eager yet bashful promptitude.

After a cordial greeting between him and her father, it was explained that he had not entirely recovered what he called his accident, and had come to London for advice; he had brought a parcel from Wrangerton for Mrs. Martindale, and had promised to carry the Moss family the latest news of the Colonel. While this was passing, and Lord Martindale was talking about Arthur, Theodora had time to observe him. The foreign dress and arrangement of hair were entirely done away with, and he looked like an Englishman, or rather an English boy, for the youthfulness of feature and figure was the same; the only difference was that there was a greater briskness of eye, and firmness of mouth, and that now that the blush on entering had faded, his complexion showed the traces of recent illness, and his cheeks and hands were very thin. When Theodora thought of the heroism he had shown, of her own usage of him, and of his remembrance of her in the midst of his worst danger, she could not see him without more emotion than she desired. He was like a witness against her, and his consciousness WOULD infect her! She longed for some of the cool manner that had come so readily with Percy, and with some difficulty brought out a composed inquiry for Lady Lucy; but he disconcerted her again by the rapid eager way in which he turned round at her voice.

‘Lucy is very well, thank you; I left her staying with my cousins, the Delavals. It is very hard to get her away from home, and she threatens not to stay a day after my return.’ He spoke in a hasty confused way, as if trying to spin everything out of the answer, so as to remain conversing with Theodora as long as possible.

‘How long shall you be in town?’ she asked, trying to find something she could say

without awkwardness.

‘I can hardly tell. I have a good deal to do. Pray’—turning to Lord Martindale—‘can you tell me which is the best shop to go to for agricultural implements?’

Speed the plough! Farming is a happy sedative for English noblemen of the nineteenth century, thought Theodora, as she heard them discussing subsoil and rocks, and thought of the poet turned high farmer, and forgetting even love and embarrassment! However, she had the satisfaction of hearing, ‘No, we cannot carry it out thoroughly there without blowing up the rocks, and I cannot have the responsibility of defacing nature.’

‘Then you cannot be a thorough-going farmer.’

‘I cannot afford it, and would not if I could. It is only for the sake of showing the tenants that I am not devoid of the spirit of the age.’

Country gentlemen being happier in agricultural implement shops than anywhere else, Lord Martindale offered to accompany his friend and give his counsel. He would go up-stairs to see how Arthur was, and carry the parcel to Violet.

‘Pray tell Mrs. Martindale that her mother and sisters sent all manner of kind messages. Very pleasing people they are,’ said Lord St. Erme; ‘and Mrs. Moss was so very kind to my poor little sister that we hardly know how to be sufficiently grateful.’

‘I never saw any of the family but the brother,’ said Theodora.

‘And he is not the best specimen,’ said Lord St. Erme. ‘Some of the young ladies are remarkably nice people, very sensible, and Lucy is continually discovering some kindness of theirs among the poor people. Ah! that reminds me, perhaps you could tell me whether you know anything of a school in your neighbourhood, from which a master has been recommended to me—St. Mary’s, Whiteford.’

‘I don’t know much of it; I believe the clergyman takes pains about it.’

‘Do you think they would have a superior man there! Our funds are low, and we must not look for great attainments at present. It is easy to cram a man if he is intelligent; I only want a person who can keep up what is taught, and manage the reading-room on nights when we are not there.’

‘Have you a reading-room?’

‘Only at Wrangerton as yet; I want to set up another at Coalworth.’

‘Then you find it answer? How do you arrange?’

‘Two nights in the week we read to them, teach singing, or get up a sort of lecture. The other days there are books, prints, newspapers; and you will be surprised to see how much they appreciate them. There’s a lad now learning to draw, whose taste is quite wonderful! And if you could have seen their faces when I read them King Henry IV! I want to have the same thing at Coalworth for the winter—not in summer. I could not ask them to spend a minute, they can help, out of the free air and light; but in winter I cannot see those fine young men and boys dozing themselves into stolidity.’

Was this the man who contemned the whole English peasantry, colliers especially? Theodora rejoiced that his hobby had saved her a world of embarrassment, and still more that their tete-a-tete was interrupted. Lady Elizabeth Brandon begged to know whether Miss Martindale could see her.

She was on her way through London; and having just heard of Colonel Martindale’s illness, had come to inquire, and offer to be useful. Emma remained at the hotel. After Lord Martindale’s cheerful answer and warm thanks, the gentlemen set off together, and Theodora sat down with her good old friend to give the particulars, with all the fulness belonging to the first relief after imminent peril.

After the first, however, Lady Elizabeth’s attention wandered; and before the retrograding story had gone quite back to the original Brogden cough, she suddenly asked if Percival Fotheringham was in England.

‘Yes, at Worthbourne. You know it was his cousin—’

‘I know—it was a mistake,’ said Lady Elizabeth, hurrying over the subject, as by no means suited its importance in Theodora’s eyes. ‘Can you tell me whether he has seen or heard anything of Mr. Mark Gardner?’

‘Yes,’ said Theodora, surprised.

‘I suppose you have not heard him say how he is conducting himself?’

‘Have you heard that he is going to be married to Mrs. Finch?’

Theodora was astonished at the effect of this communication on her sober staid old friend. She started, made an incredulous outcry, caused it to be repeated, with its authority, then rose up, exclaiming, ‘The wretch! My poor Emma! I never was more rejoiced. But Emma!’

The sight of Theodora’s surprise recalled her to herself. ‘Ah! you do not know?’ she said; and having gone so far, was obliged to explain, with expressions of gratitude to Arthur and Violet for having so well guarded a secret that now might continue hidden for ever.

Theodora was slow in comprehending, so monstrous was the idea of Emma Brandon engaged to Mark Gardner! She put her hands before her eyes, and said she must be dreaming—she could not credit it. When convinced, there was something in her manner that pleased and comforted Lady Elizabeth by the kind feeling and high esteem it showed.

‘Let me ask you one question, my dear,’ she said, ‘just to set my mind at rest. I was told that your brother’s affairs were involved with those of that unhappy man. I trust it is no longer so.’

Theodora explained, as far as she understood, how Percy had extricated him.

‘Ah!’ said Lady Elizabeth, ‘I fear we are in some degree the cause. My poor Emma was imprudent enough to quote Colonel Martindale; and she has told me that she

was frightened by a pale look of anger that crossed his face, and something which he muttered between his teeth. But he made her believe Arthur his seducer!'

'Poor Arthur! If you knew all!' said Theodora; 'and who—' then breaking off, 'Percy did tell papa that it was all Mr. Gardner's revenge for Arthur's not consenting to some nefarious transaction. Depend upon it, that was it! You asked Violet, you say. Percy said that, among the sentences he overheard on the quay, there was something about a wife who had crossed him, and who should suffer for it. He said it was spoken with a hard-hearted wickedness that, even when he did not know who it was, made him long to crush him like a reptile; and when he had seen Violet and the children, though it might be interference, he said he could as soon have left them in the folds of a serpent!'

'Ah! my poor girl!'

'But this frees her. Oh! she cannot grieve for such a wretch!'

'I fear her attachment is so strong that she will not see it in this light.'

'When he gives her up without a word, she ought to be too angry to grieve.'

'I do not think that is in her nature.'

'So much the better. Anger and comfort cannot go together. Oh, one so good and gentle must be helped! How I wish I could do anything for her; but she will be better at home. It is lucky there are no associations with him there.'

'I wish she was at home. Theresa Marstone is staying with her brother in London, and I left her with Emma at the hotel.'

'Fortunately there cannot be two ways of thinking on this matter,' said Theodora.

Lady Elizabeth was too anxious to break the tidings to her daughter to wait at that time to see Violet; and went, promising to come to-morrow to report how the blow should have been borne.

Theodora was glad when she had a little space in which to think over the events of

the day.

Ever since she had embraced the lesson of humility, the once despised Emma Brandon had been rising in her estimation. The lowliness of her manners, and the heart-whole consistency of her self-devotion, had far outweighed her little follies, and, together with remorse for having depreciated and neglected her, had established her claim to respect and admiration.

And now to find the old prediction verified, and Emma led away by so absurd a delusion, might have seemed a triumph, had not Theodora been thoroughly humbled. She only saw a humiliating contrast between the true pure heart that blindly gave its full affections, and that which could pretend to have given itself away, and then, out of mere impatience of restraint, play with and torture the love it had excited, and, still worse, foster an attachment it never meant to requite!

She was the more sensible of this latter delinquency now that Lord St. Erme had just been brought before her, deserving all that man could deserve; having more than achieved all to which she had incited him, and showing a constancy unchecked by the loss of her personal attractions. His blushing homage came almost as a compensating contrast after her severe mortification at Percy’s surprise and subsequent cool composure.

While reproaching herself for this feeling, her father came home, and with him the Earl. They had been occupied all the afternoon, and had fallen into conversation on county business. Lord Martindale, finding his young friend was alone at his hotel, thought he had better dine with them, since Violet need not be troubled about it. Theodora wondered whether it had occurred to her father that some one else might be troubled, and that it might seem like a renewal of encouragement; but the fact was, that after ten days of the sick-room, his society was a positive treat to Lord Martindale, and in advising him on magistrate’s business, he forgot everything else.

The dinner went off without embarrassment. Lord St. Erme did indeed blush when

he offered his arm to her; but with consideration that seemed to understand her, he kept up the conversation chiefly with Lord Martindale on rates, police, and committees.

She thought of the horror he had been wont to express of the English squirearchy, ‘whose arena is the quarter sessions;’ and she remembered standing up for them, and declaring there was far more honest, sturdy, chivalrous maintenance of right and freedom in their history than in all his beloved Lombardic republics. And now, what was he but a thorough-going country gentleman, full of plans of usefulness, sparing neither thought, time, nor means; and though some of his views were treated by Lord Martindale as wild and theoretical, yet, at any rate, they proved that he had found living men a more interesting study than the Apollo Belvedere.

Theodora was resolved that Violet should see him, and now that the dinner was eaten and beyond anxiety, went up to disclose his presence, and persuade her to go down to tea and leave her with the patient. She found it was well she had kept her counsel; Violet took it quietly enough; but Arthur chose to concern himself as to what wine had been produced, and would have sent a message to James if his sister had not assured him that it was too late.

He insisted on Violet’s going down to the drawing-room, and would not hear of Theodora’s remaining with him. The nurse was in the outer room, and Johnnie was made supremely happy by being allowed to sit up an hour longer to be his companion; and thus with Lord Martindale and Theodora making frequent expeditions to visit him, Violet was sufficiently tranquil to remain as long in the drawing-room as was worth the fatigue of the transit.

She could enjoy her talk with the Earl; and, indeed, since Annette’s visit, she had heard no tidings so full and satisfactory. He knew the name of every one at Wrangerton; he seemed to have learnt to love Helvellyn; he spoke very highly of Olivia’s husband, Mr. Hunt, declaring that he liked nothing better than a visit to his

most beautiful place, Lassonthwayte, a farm fit for the poets, and had learnt a great deal from him; and of Mrs. Moss he talked with affectionate gratitude that brought the tears into Violet's eyes, especially when he promised to go and call on her immediately on his return, to tell her how Colonel Martindale was going on, and describe to her her grandchildren. He repeated to Violet how kind her mother had been to his sister, and how beautifully she had nursed him. Lord Martindale began to ask questions, which brought out a narration of his adventures in the coal-pit, given very simply, as if his being there had been a mere chance.

He allowed that he knew it to be dangerous, but added, that it was impossible to get things done by deputy, and that he had no choice but to see about it himself, and he dwelt much on the behaviour of the men.

'Did you give up hope?' asked Lord Martindale.

'For myself I did. The confined air oppressed me so much, even before the sense of hunger came on, that it seemed to take away all power of thought and action.'

'Yet you did think?' said Violet.

'I was obliged, for the men were more confounded and helpless at first, though, when once directed, nothing could be more resolute and persevering! Brave fellows! I would not but have had it happen! One seldom has such a chance of seeing the Englishman's gallant heart of obedient endurance. It was curious to observe the instinctive submission. Some were men who would not for worlds have touched their hats to me above ground; yet, as soon as I tried to take the lead, and make them think what could yet be done, they obeyed instantly, though I knew almost nothing compared to them, and while they worked like giants, I could hardly move.'

'Was it very acute suffering?'

'For the last two days it was, but it was worse for those who had to work. I was generally faint and drowsy, and could hardly rouse myself to speak a word of encouragement, which was what they wanted. They fancied it was vain to work

towards the old shaft, but I was sure none of them could live to be dug out from above, and that it would be wrong to let them cease. I think, as well as I recollect, that speaking was the worst pain of all. But it is no harm to know what the poor undergo.'

'Hardly to such extremity,' said Violet.

'Well, I know I shall never turn indifferently away again when I hear, "We are starving." A man feels little for what he has not experienced.'

'I suppose,' said Lord Martindale, 'that it has put an extinguisher on Chartism?'

'There are some determined village Hampdens still, but I think the fellow-feeling it has excited has done good. I have not been able to go among them since, but they have indefatigably come to inquire for me. The first Sunday I was able to come down-stairs, I found the hall door beset with them in their best, looking like a synod of Methodist preachers. Poor Lucy shocked my aunt by running about crying, and shaking hands with their great horny fists. I fancy "our young lady," as they call her, is the strongest anti-chartist argument.'

Though talking in this animated manner he was far from strong, and went away early, looking thoroughly tired. Theodora had stitched away throughout the conversation in silence; but Violet knew, by the very fixity of her eye, that she was feeling it deeply and there was consciousness in the absence of word or look, with which she let the Earl bid her good night. It was a strange thing to have been in part the means of forming so noble a character, and yet to regard her share in it with nothing but shame.

Self-reproachful and unhappy, Theodora went to take her turn of watching her brother for the first part of the night. She could not have borne to be told, what was in fact the case, that he was generally more uncomfortable under her care than that of any one else, chiefly because there was not the restraint either of consideration for his wife, or of the authority of his father. Besides, she was too visibly anxious, too

grave and sad, to find anything cheerful with which to divert his attention; and he was sure to become restless and exacting, or else depressed, either as to his illness or his affairs.

To-night he had discovered Lady Elizabeth's visit, and was anxious to know whether Gardner had broken with Miss Brandon. Theodora would not encourage his talking; and this teased him, only making him say more till she had told all, adding, 'O Arthur! what a comfort it must be that this is brought upon you by your having tried to save Emma!'

'Not much of that. It was Violet. I would have stopped her writing if I could.'

Perhaps this downfall of the heroism with which she had been endowing his resistance, was one of the most cruel blows of all.

'If he marries Mrs. Finch, he must at least pay off what he owes me;' and he began perplexing himself with reckonings. Theodora saw his brow drawn together, and his lips moving, and begged him to desist and try to sleep.

'You have interrupted me—I have lost it!' and he tried again. 'No, I can't get it right. There is a lot of papers in my writing-case. You'll see to it. It will be something for Violet and the children. Mind the claim is sent in;' and again he strove to explain, while she entreated him to put such things out of his mind; and it ended in such violent coughing, that Lord Martindale heard, came in, and with a look that told her how ill she managed, sent her to bed, where she vexed herself for hours at Arthur's seeming to dwell only on his gaming debts, instead of on what she longed to see occupying his mind. Her elasticity seemed to have been destroyed by her illness, and she had lost the vigour which once would have made her rise against depression. The reappearance of Percy and of Lord St. Erme seemed only to have wearied and perplexed her; and she lay awake, feeling worn, confused, and harassed, and only wishing to hide her head and be at rest.

Arthur had a bad night, and was not so well in the morning, and while Lord

Martindale was wondering why Theodora could not have been more cautious, the letters came in—one from Brogden—making it evident that Lady Martindale was so unwell and dispirited, that she ought not to be left alone any longer. Lord Martindale, therefore, decreed that Theodora should return, taking with her the three eldest children. And she could make no objection; she ought to submit to be passively disposed of; and, grievous as it was to leave her brother and Violet, there was compensation in avoiding her former suitors.

Lady Elizabeth came in almost at the same time as Lord Martindale went out, after breakfast. She was in great distress. Poor Emma treated the whole as a calumny; and when shown the absolute certainty that Mark was at Paris, daily calling on Mrs. Finch, remained persuaded that his cousin had perverted him from the first, and was now trying to revive her pernicious influence when he might have been saved; or that perhaps he was driven to an immediate wealthy marriage by his honourable feeling and his necessities. It was all her own fault for not having taken him at once. Lady Elizabeth had hardly been able to prevent her from writing to revoke the year's probation, and offer him all that was needed to satisfy his creditors.

Theodora could not help exclaiming, that she thought Emma would have had more dignity.

'So I told her, my dear; but it seemed to be no consolation. I do not feel secure that, though she has promised me not to write, Theresa Marstone may not.'

'Is Miss Marstone still in his favour?'

'I can still less understand her view,' said Lady Elizabeth, with a grave, sad simplicity, almost like satire; 'she says it only convinces her that the Church of England does not know how to treat penitents.'

Theodora could not help laughing, and Lady Elizabeth nearly joined her, though sighing and saying that such talk gave her other fears for Emma. She dreaded that Miss Marstone was unsettled in her allegiance to her Church, and that her power

over Emma was infusing into her her own doubts.

‘It is very sad—very strange! I cannot understand it,’ said Theodora. ‘I had always believed that such innocence and lowliness as Emma and Violet have was a guard against all snares; yet here is Emma led astray by these very excellences!’

‘My dear,’ said Lady Elizabeth, ‘I think it is the want of that lowliness that is at the root with my poor child. It is a dangerous thing for a girl to throw herself into an exclusive friendship, especially when the disapproval of her own family is felt. I tried, but I never could like Theresa Marstone; and now I see that she liked to govern Emma, and depreciated my judgment—very justly, perhaps; but still I was her mother, and it was not kind to teach her to think doing as I wished a condescension.’

‘So Emma sold all her senses to her friend?’

‘Yes, and Miss Marstone keeps them still. Theresa taught her to think herself wiser than all, and their own way of talking the proof of goodness.’

‘Ay! their passwords.’

‘Just so, and I do believe it was that kind of vanity that took from her her power of discerning and the instinctive shrinking from evil.’

‘It is very easy to make simplicity silliness,’ said Theodora. ‘I beg your pardon, Lady Elizabeth, I did not mean to blame her, but I was thinking how truly you spoke.’

‘And now, may I ask to see Mrs. Martindale; or will it be too much for her?’

‘She will be glad, but she was tired with coming down to Lord St. Erme. And now, Arthur’s bad night! Oh! Lady Elizabeth, you come from your griefs to ours. It is a shame to make you share them!’

‘I do not think so,’ said Lady Elizabeth. ‘There is a tract of Hannah More’s showing that to bear another’s burden lightens our own; and all old people will tell you that

many troubles together weigh less heavily than a single one.’

Theodora could not think so; each of her cares seemed to make the others worse, till the mere toil and vexation of Helen’s lessons became serious; and yet, when the children were dismissed for their walk, she felt unable to profit by her leisure, otherwise than by sighing at the prospect of missing the power of looking in at Arthur from hour to hour. She had not roused herself to occupation, when, to her dismay, Lord St. Erme was admitted. She began to say her father was not at home.

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘I met him.’

He means mischief! thought Theodora.

‘He tells me that you are going away!’

‘I believe so,’ said Theodora. ‘My mother is not well, and we cannot both be spared from home.’

‘Will you forgive me?’ said the Earl, still standing, and with downcast eyes, and heightened complexion. ‘I know this is no fit time, but I could not part without one allusion. I would not harass you for worlds. A word from you, and I drop the subject.’

‘Oh! pray, then, say no more!’ was her breathless entreaty.

He turned in silence, with a mournful gesture of farewell, and laid his hand on the door. She perceived her unkindness to one who had every claim to honour and consideration—one who had remembered her in well-nigh the hour of death.

‘Stay,’ she said; ‘I did not speak as I ought.’

‘I know I presumed too far,’ said Lord St. Erme, pausing; ‘I ask your pardon for disturbing you. It was selfish; but I could not let you go without once adverting to the subject—’

There was a tremor of voice, an eager look, that made her fear that the crushed hope was reviving, and she hastened to say, ‘The best thing would be that you should

think no more about me.’

‘Impossible!’ he vehemently cried; then, catching himself up, and speaking in the same deferential tone as at first, ‘I owe you far too much to cease to think of you.’

‘It is a great pity,’ said Theodora; ‘I never deserved such feelings, and they make me wish more and more that all could be undone.’

‘No! no!’ exclaimed Lord St. Erme, his eyes lighting and his cheek glowing, while his fair young features wore a look that was all poet and knight. ‘Would I see what is past undone? It was the turning-point of my life—the call to arms. Hitherto, life had been to me a dream in an enchanted garden, with the same secret weariness and dissatisfaction! I dread the thought of the time and means I lavished away, fancying because it was not vice it was not dissipation. It was then that I became unworthy of you. It was you who taught me where lies modern chivalry, and made my folly and conceit cease to despise the practical; showed me—may I quote German to you once more?—that “Das Leben ist keine Lustfahrt sondern theils eine kampfes, theils eine Pilger-weise.” I took up my staff, at first, I own, in hopes of winning you—’

‘You did not persevere merely for that reason?’

‘No; when my eyes were once opened to the festering sin and misery around, when I saw the evil nourished at my own door by my neglect, and perceived that those dependent on me were doomed to degradation and oppression that I might gratify my craving for art,—then, indeed, I was appalled! Those paintings and statues seemed to cry out to me that human souls had been sacrificed to them! The toil and devotion of a life would be too little to atone! Oh! that it were more able and effective. Means and judgment go but a little way!’

‘Your heart and happiness are in the work,’ said Theodora, seeing how he was carried away by his feelings.

‘Yes. There is a sense like the labourer’s at his daily task, and though there is the mountain of things undone, there is the hope that all are not wilfully neglected. It is

for this that I longed to thank you. When I was in danger, I knew what it would have been to wait for death before I thought of—of the way of peace. I blessed you in my heart then—I thank you now.'

'Thank Him who has brought good out of evil, was all Theodora could say.

He bowed his head gravely, and continued: 'Now, thank you again for having listened. It has been a great satisfaction to me to acknowledge my obligations. Do not suppose I came to London intending to distress you with my pertinacity, or with any idea of having earned your favour. I was obliged to come; and when once near you, I could not bear to separate without, at least, entreating to know whether the former obstacle exists.'

'It does,' said Theodora, looking down; 'I believe it always will. I lament more than I can express, my conduct towards you; and what you have told me grieves me more in one way, though in another it is most consoling. You have the true secret of peace, and I know all must be well with you. If you had done otherwise, it would have been far worse for me. Tell Lucy I have not forgotten her. I am sure she has the true light-hearted sort of happiness.'

'She has, indeed,' said Lord St. Erme; and he entered into a description of his sister's doings; her perfect content with their seclusion, and her influence over the dependants. So eager did he grow in his favourite subject, the welfare of his people, that he seemed to have forgotten what had brought him to Cadogan-place, and Theodora was convinced that though the being brought into contact with her had for the time renewed the former attachment, it was in reality by no means the prominent thought of his life. His duties and the benefit of his colliers were what engrossed his mind; and with his sister to render his home happy, everything else was secondary. When it did occur to him to think of love, it was for Theodora; but he had no more time for such thoughts than most other busy practical men.

He discoursed upon his schools and reading-rooms till the children came in, and

then bade her good-bye, quite as if he had talked himself back into an every-day state of feeling.

Was Theodora mortified? She went to her own room to analyze her sensations, but was almost immediately followed by Johnnie, coming to tell her that the owl-man was in the drawing-room.

‘Another who is consoled!’ thought she. ‘Humiliating, indeed, it is to see such complete cures. There is no need to be absurd and conscious at this meeting! But here I do, indeed, need forgiveness—how my heart aches to ask it—his mere pardon for my offences! If I could only have it out with him without compromising womanly proprieties! That can’t be; I must bear it!’

On the stairs she heard Helen’s voice. ‘He came yesterday, to the evening dinner, but I don’t like him.’

‘Why not?’ asked Percy.

‘Because he says I am just like Aunt Theodora, and I am not.’

Theodora knew whom she meant. Lord St. Erme had been much struck by her little niece’s resemblance, and Helen resented the comparison as an indignity to her beauty. She felt extremely annoyed at Percy’s hearing this; then recollected it did not signify to him, and entered just as he was telling little Miss Vanity that she was the silliest child he had ever the honour of meeting.

There was some constraint, on her part, in the short conversation on Arthur’s health that ensued, before he went up; and he only returned to the drawing-room for a moment, to assure her that he thought Arthur much better than when he had last seen him.

‘He avoids me! he cannot endure me!’ she thought, and yet she felt doubly averse to the idea of returning to Brogden.

Lord Martindale came in with a look of expectation on his face which grieved

Theodora, for she knew her refusal would be a disappointment to him. He sent the children away, paused for her to begin, and at last asked: ‘Well, my dear, has Lord St. Erme been here?’

‘Yes papa;’ and it was plain enough how it had been. Lord Martindale sighed. The rest being equal, it was not in human nature not to prefer an Earl to an almost penniless author. ‘I would not urge you on any account,’ he said; ‘but I wish it could have been otherwise.’

‘So do I, most heartily,’ said Theodora.

‘It is very different now,’ said Lord Martindale. Four years ago I could hardly have wished it. Now, I think most highly of him, and I should have been rejoiced to have seen his constancy rewarded.’

‘I am ashamed and grieved,’ said Theodora. ‘He did, indeed, deserve better things. He is a noble character; and I cannot honour or esteem him enough, nor sufficiently regret the way I treated him. But, indeed, papa, it would not be right. I cannot help it.’

‘Well, there is no more to be said,’ sighed Lord Martindale. ‘I know you will do right.’

Something was won since her former dismissal of the Earl! Her father gave her a look full of confidence and affection; and made happy by it, she rallied her spirits and said, ‘Besides, what a pair it would be! We should be taken for a pretty little under-graduate and his mother!’

‘That will not last, my dear,’ said Lord Martindale, vexed though smiling at her droll manner. ‘You are younger than he.’

‘In years, but not in mind,’ said Theodora. ‘No, no, papa; you have me for life, and it is hard you should be so anxious to get rid of me!’

‘I only wish to consult your happiness, my dear child.’

‘And that always was in fancying myself necessary,’ said Theodora, gaily, though there was a trembling in her voice; and when she went up to her own room, she hid her face in her hands, and felt as if life was very dreary and uninteresting, and as if it was a miserable exile to be sent into the country just now, to have to force cheerful conversation for her mother, and to be wearied with Helen’s wild spirits. ‘But have I not deserved everything? And after my brother has been spared so far, how can I repine at any selfish trouble?’

CHAPTER 12

Herself, almost heartbroken now, Was bent to take the vestal vow, And shroud, within St. Hilda’s gloom, Her wasted hopes and withered bloom. —SCOTT

Violet, when called to consult with her father-in-law in the outer room, felt a sort of blank apprehension and consternation at the idea of being separated from her children; and a moment’s reflection satisfied her that in one case at least she might rightly follow the dictates of her own heart. She said that she thought Johnnie could not be spared by his papa.

Lord Martindale’s eye followed hers, and through the half-closed door saw Johnnie, sitting on the bed, reading to his father, who listened with amused, though languid attention.

‘I believe you are right,’ he said; ‘though I wish I had the boy in the country doing no lessons. He puts me more in mind of his uncle every day.’

‘One of the highest compliments Johnnie has ever had,’ said Violet, colouring with pleasure; ‘but I am afraid to trust him away from me and Mr. Harding in the winter because of his croup.’

‘Ah! then it cannot be,’ he answered; ‘and I do not think I would take him from his father now, but his sisters must come; they would be too much for you without Theodora.’

Violet could only be mournfully thankful, and the project was in time laid before Arthur.

‘Send my little girls away!’ said he, looking discomfited. ‘Oh! if you wish to keep them’—joyfully exclaimed Violet.

‘I thought that if Theodora went home, Violet would hardly be able to manage them,’ said Lord Martindale.

‘If they are in her way,’ said Arthur, and his eyes smiled at her, knowing what her decision would be.

‘Oh! no, no! It was their grandpapa’s kindness.’ Johnnie and Helen here peeped into the room; Arthur beckoned to them, and said, ‘How should you like to go into the country with Aunt Theodora?’

‘To see grandmamma and the peacock?’ said Lord Martindale. Johnnie clung to his mother’s hand, piteously whispering, ‘Oh! don’t send me away, mamma—I would try to bear it if I ought.’

Helen climbed the bed, and sturdily seated herself close to her papa. ‘I shall not desert my father and mother,’ said she, with great dignity, drawing up her head.

‘No more you shall, my little heroine!’ said Arthur, throwing his arm round her, while she glanced with saucy triumph at her grandfather.

In the silence of night, when Arthur was alone with his father, he said, ‘If those little girls go away now, they will never remember me.’

To this plea there could be no reply; for though the danger was no longer imminent, it was still extremely doubtful whether he would ever leave his room again.

His wish to keep the children made Lord Martindale reconsider of sending Theodora home, and he desired Violet to choose between her and himself. She thought Theodora the most effective, and Arthur seemed to prefer her remaining, so that she found herself disposed of according to her wishes, her father only stipulating that

she should not neglect rest, air, or exercise, of which she stood in evident need.

Every one observed her haggard looks on the day when they met for the baptism of ‘Arthur Fotheringham.’ It was a melancholy christening, without the presence of either parent; and so all the little party felt it, and yet, if they could have seen into the recesses of the mother’s heart, they would have found there were causes which made this baptism day better to her than any of the former ones.

The godfather came afterwards to see Arthur, who believed him more than all the doctors when he assured him he was making progress. Arthur began to speak of the debt; he wished before his father went to have a settlement of accounts, take steps for selling his commission, and repaying Percy.

‘No,’ said Percy, ‘wait till you are better and can look about you. Sell your commission indeed, and take the bread out of your children’s mouths! No, if you did choose to do that, it must in honour and justice be divided among all your creditors.’

Arthur was forced to give up.

Emma Brandon had not joined the christening party. Miss Marstone had actually written to Mark Gardner, and had in reply received an acknowledgment of her ‘good offices, which had gone far to enable him to justify the bets that before Christmas he would have a wife with ten thousand pounds a year!’ He did not quite venture to insult Miss Brandon, but sent her a cool message of farewell. The rest of the letter, the friends declared, was evidently by Mrs. Finch’s dictation. They shut themselves up together; Lady Elizabeth was not allowed to help her daughter, and came to Cadogan-place chiefly that she might talk over her troubles with Theodora, who put her into communication with Percy, and from him she heard a brief sketch of Mr. Gardner’s life and adventures, still less disposing her to desire him as a son-in-law.

She was certainly safe from this danger, but her cares were not thus ended. If Emma would have shared her griefs with her, and admitted her attempts at consolation, she would have been more at ease, but as it was, Emma was reserved with her, and

attached herself solely to Theresa Marstone, whom she even made a sort of interpreter between her and her mother, so that Lady Elizabeth only knew as much of her mind as her confidante chose to communicate.

Not only was this most painful to her feelings as a mother, but she had serious doubts of the safety of such a companion. The extreme silliness of Theresa's vanity and exclusiveness had long been visible, and as it was the young lady's fashion to imagine the defect anywhere but in her own judgment, there were symptoms of the mischief having been by her attributed to the Church of England. As if to console herself for the shock she had sustained, she was turning to a new fancy, for when a woman once begins to live upon excitement, she will seek for the intoxication anywhere.

This perception made Lady Elizabeth resolve that as long as she was mistress of Rickworth, she would not again invite Miss Marstone thither; while Emma was equally determined not to go home without her only friend. Thus the mother and daughter lingered on in London, Theresa often coming to spend the day with Emma, and Lady Elizabeth having recourse to the Martindale family, and trying to make herself of use by amusing the children, sitting in Arthur's room, or taking Theodora for a walk or drive.

One morning she came in to say that Emma was going to drive to Islington to call upon Miss Marstone, who had gone two days previously to stay with some friends there, and to beg that Theodora would accompany her. Aware that it would be as great a penance to Emma as to herself, Theodora would fain have been excused, but let herself be overruled on Lady Elizabeth's promise to supply her place at home, and assurance that it would be a positive relief that she should be of the party, even if she did not get out of the carriage, as a check upon the length of time Emma would spend with her friend.

The two unwilling companions set forth, each in her own comer of the carriage,

Emma leaning back, her thick blue veil hiding her face; Theodora, who always repudiated veils, sitting upright, her face turned, so as to catch the breeze on her hot temples, wishing she could turn herself into Violet, and possess her power of sweet persuasion and consolation. She could think of nothing to say, and began at last to fear that her silence might appear unkind. She tried to interest Emma by speaking of Johnnie, but she only obtained brief replies, and the conversation had dropped before they left the streets and entered on suburban scenery. Theodora exclaimed at a gorgeous Virginian creeper—

‘Almost as fine as the one at the Priory,’ said she.

Emma looked and sighed.

‘Rickworth must be in high glory. I know nothing prettier than the many-coloured woods sloping into the meadow, with the soft mist rising. You will find home beautiful.’

‘I cannot bear the thought of it,’ said Emma, in an under-tone.

‘How glad your little orphans will be! How many have you?’

‘There are five.’

Theodora saw she hated the subject, but thought it good for her, and went on to tell her of a case at Whitford, cramming the subject into her ear at first against the stomach of her sense, but it could not but exact attention, a widow sinking in a decline after sorrows which, by comparison, made all young lady troubles shrink into atoms. Emma became interested, and began to ask questions.

‘You will go to see the mother? Poor thing, I hope she may be alive to hear of the prospect for her child. I am sorry to be unable to go and see her, and should be so glad to know you near and able to attend to her.’

‘We will write to the housekeeper,’ said Emma.

‘Are you not going back yourself?’

‘I don’t know; I have no heart to think of it.’

‘Emma,’ said Theodora, ‘we need not go on as if we did not understand each other. Violet can attend to you now; I wish you would talk to her. No one can comfort as she can.’

‘I do not wish to tease her with my—’

‘She knows, she longs to help you. Don’t you know how fond of you she always was? You two appreciated each other from the first.’

‘It is of no use. She never entered into my views. She does not understand. It is her situation I blame, not herself. She is a dear creature, and I once had a strong girlish enthusiasm for her.’

‘Once!’ cried Theodora; ‘what has she ever done to lessen enthusiasm for all that is good and lovely?’

Emma hung her head, alarmed; and Theodora more gently insisted, till, by the power which in childhood she had exerted over Emma, she forced out an answer. ‘Forgive me, if I must tell you. I have thought her too fond of going out. It was no wonder, so very young as she was. I do not find fault, but it seemed to dispel an illusion that she was superior to other people. Don’t you remember one party she would go to against warning, that one where she fainted? I could never feel the same for her afterwards.’

Theodora was silent for a few seconds, then exclaimed, ‘O Violet, is there no end to the injuries I have done you? Emma, never judge without seeing behind the curtain. It was my fault. It was when I was crazed with wilfulness. Your mother offered to chaperon me, I was set on going with Mrs. Finch, and as the only means of preventing that, Violet sacrificed herself. I did not know she likewise sacrificed the friendship of the only person, except John, who had been kind to her.’

‘I wish Theresa had known this,’ said Emma.

‘Now YOU know it, will you not turn to Violet for advice and comfort? I know

what she can be. If you could guess what she saved me from, you would fly at once to her.'

'I cannot begin now, I cannot look anywhere that recalls past happiness!' said Emma, murmuring low, as though the words, in spite of herself, broke from her oppressed heart. 'Would that I could hide my head! Oh! that I had wings like a dove!'

'Emma, you have them. They may carry you into what seems to be a wilderness, but go bravely on, and you will be at rest at last.'

'What do you mean?'

'The wings of duty.'

'If I only knew where it was.'

'Your mother, your dependants, your orphans, your beautiful old plan.

Emma only groaned, and held up her hand in deprecation.

'I have felt it,' continued Theodora. 'I know how vain, and vapid, and weary everything seems, as if the sap of life was gone, but if we are content to remain in the wilderness, it begins to blossom at last, indeed it does.'

'I thought you had had no troubles,' said Emma, with more interest. 'They could not have been such as mine.'

'In one respect they were worse, for they were entirely my own fault.'

'May I ask, is there no hope for you?'

'No, said Theodora, 'I believe there is none. But a certain peaceful feeling, independent of that, came after the desolateness, and has never gone utterly away, though I have had to reap the harvest of the evil that I sowed. Oh! depend upon it, there is nothing like resolutely facing the day's work.'

Emma made no answer; they had come to the gate of a villa, and Theodora thought she might as well have held her peace, since Theresa would undo the whole.

Miss Marstone was not within, but she had left a note for Miss Brandon. Emma, after reading it, timidly said that Theresa had gone to spend the day with a friend, who was boarding in a convent not far off, and that she wished her to come and make her visit to her there. Then timidly glancing towards her companion, she desired to be driven thither, but Theodora, leaning forward, said, in an authoritative manner, 'Drive on two miles on the road. We will say where next when we come back.'

'I beg your pardon,' she said to Emma, 'but this is not a step to be taken inconsiderately.'

Emma did not reply; Theodora perceived that her decided manner had terrified her. 'I am sorry if I was rude,' she said; 'I did not mean it, but I thought you were acting precipitately, and that you would be glad to have time to reflect before going to this place without your mother's knowledge.'

'It is not precipitately,' said Emma, faintly.

'You don't mean that this was a pre-concerted scheme. If so, pray let me out, and I will go home alone.'

'No, no, I did not mean exactly—don't use such words, Theodora. Only sister Mary Angela—Theresa's great friend—had joined the Roman communion. Theresa wished me to see her and the convent, and said that perhaps I might find her there. If I had told mamma, she would have fancied I should be kidnapped like young ladies in books. I believe you expect it yourself,' said Emma, giggling hysterically.

'I think, and she thinks nothing but what is rational,' said Theodora, coldly, 'that it is a sad thing to see you taught to resort to subterfuges, and that they can lead into no safe course.'

'You do not know Theresa, or you would not accuse her of what she would detest.'

'I speak from what I see. She has arranged in secret that, without your mother's knowledge, you should by stealth go to a place where you both know Lady

Elizabeth would be shocked to hear of you.'

'I thought you understood the true Catholic spirit,' said Emma, 'and were interested in these things.'

'The Catholic spirit is anything but such treatment of a mother,' said Theodora. 'Once for all, do you mean to go to this place, or do you not? I see a cab, and if you go I return home in that.'

'Of course then I must give it up.'

'Now, and for ever, unless with your mother's consent, I hope,' said Theodora.

Emma did not answer, and they proceeded for some distance, Theodora wondering what could be her companion's frame of mind, and what she ought to do next. So far, it was the sort of compulsion she had been wont to employ in the unscrupulous hours of childhood; but this was no gain—Emma's reason ought to be convinced, and of this she had little hope. Miss Brandon was the first to break silence. That word subterfuge rankled, as it must in any honourable mind, and she began—'I wish you would do Theresa justice. No one can have a greater contempt than she for anything underhand.'

Theodora tried not to laugh, and could not help pitying the fond affections that were blind to every fault in the beloved object.

'Ah!' said Emma, in answer to her silence, 'you think this bears the appearance of it; but you may be certain that Theresa is absolutely sure to act conscientiously.'

'Some people follow their conscience—some drive it.'

'Now, do let me explain it,' entreated Emma, and talking eagerly and rather mistily, she told in many more words than were needful how Theresa had serious doubts as to what she termed Anglicanism, reckoning against it every laxity in doctrine or in discipline that came to her knowledge, and admiring everything in other branches of the Church. Emma, taking all for granted that Theresa said, was strongly of the same

mind, and while both made high professions of attachment to their own communion, they were in a course of dwelling on all the allurements held out in other quarters. By some astonishing train of reasoning, frequent in persons in a state of excitement and self-deception, they had persuaded themselves that Mark Gardner's return to his evil courses had been for want of a monastery to receive him; and their tendency to romance about conventual institutions had been exaggerated by the present state of Emma's spirits, which gave her a desire to retire from the world, as well as a distaste to the projects in which she had lately given her false lover but too large a share. 'Peace dwells in the cloister,' she sighed.

'You have the essentials of such a life in your power,' said Theodora.

'Not the fixed rule—the obedience.'

'Oh! Emma! your mother!'

'I want discipline—Church discipline as in primitive times,' said Emma, impatiently.

'The most primitive discipline of all is, "honour thy father and mother,"' returned Theodora.

There was a silence. Theodora resumed—'I know how one would rather do anything than what is required. Violet taught me then that we must not choose our cross.'

Another space, then Emma said, 'And you call it a subterfuge?'

'Can you honestly call it otherwise? Don't bewilder us with explanations, but simply say what you would have thought of it six years ago.'

For Emma not to send forth a vapour of words was impossible, but they did not satisfy even herself. Those short terse sentences of Theodora's told upon her, and at last she did not deny that she should not have thought it right if Theresa had not prompted it.

'Is she more likely to be right, or is the Catechism?'

‘The Catechism?’

‘To be TRUE and just in all my dealings.’

‘She did not think it wrong.’

‘No, of course not, but if it is wrong, and she does not think it so, does that make her a safe guide?’

‘You want to set me against her!’

‘I want you to cease to give her a power over you, which is unsafe for any human being.’

‘You have been talking to mamma.’

‘I have been seeing how unhappy she is about you; but since I have talked to yourself I have seen far more danger.’

‘Poor mamma!’

‘May I tell you how your history appears to a looker-on? I know it will be painful, but I think it will be good for you.’

‘Well!’

‘You began beautifully. It was delightful to see how you and your mother went on in perfect confidence, ready to work at everything good together, and she sympathizing in all your projects, only bringing wise caution to restrain your ardour.’

‘Yes, we were very happy then,’ sighed Emma; ‘but mamma wished me to go into society.’

‘And wisely. Remember, in the conventual system, a girl cannot be a novice till she has had six months in which to see the world. It was right that you should count the cost. Besides, society in moderation is the best way to keep one’s mind from growing narrow. Well, then, you met Miss Marstone, and she excited your imagination. She is really clever and good, and I don’t wonder at your liking her; but I cannot think that she has done right in cultivating your exclusive preference till she

has detached you from your mother.'

'She did not always think with her.'

'No, but a sound friend would always place the duty to your mother foremost. You made a Pope of her, believed all she said, did as she pleased, and she was flattered, and absorbed you more and more, till really you both came to treating Lady Elizabeth's opinion as a nonentity. Can you deny it?'

'No.'

More would have been said, but Theodora would not hear, and went on. 'See the consequence. She made a fearful mistake, and but for your mother and your remaining regard to her authority, where should you have been now? All this misery could not have been if you had been safe under Lady Elizabeth's wing.'

'No!' faintly said Emma.

'And now, when your mother has saved you, and her heart is aching to comfort you, and take you back to the safe old nest where all your duties and schemes lie, Miss Marstone tries to keep you from her; and fancies she is doing the best and most conscientious thing by teaching you to elude her, and go where, to one in your state of mind, is temptation indeed. Oh! Emma, she may think it right; but are you acting kindly by the mother who has only you?'

Theodora was very glad to see tears. 'I cannot bear to go home!' presently said Emma.

'Have you thought how badly all the poor people must be getting on without you? All your children—it is half a year since you saw them!'

Emma groaned.

'Yes, it is bad enough at first. You have had a heavy trial indeed, poor Emma; but what is a trial but something to try us? Would it not be more manful to face the pain of going home, and to take up your allotted work? Then you would be submitting,

not to a self-made rule, but to Heaven's own appointment.'

Was Emma's mind disengaged enough for curiosity, or did she want to quit the subject! She said—'You have had a trial of this kind yourself?'

Theodora had a struggle. To tell the whole seemed to her as uncalled for as painful; and yet there must be reciprocity if there is to be confidence, and she could not bear to advise like one who had never erred. She therefore confessed how her happiness had been wrecked by her own fault, and related the subsequent misery; how Violet had repelled the disposition to exalt her rather than her parents, and had well-nigh forced her abroad, and how there in the dreary waste a well of peace had sprung up, and had been with her ever since.

Short as Theodora tried to make the story she so much disliked, it lasted till they were almost at home. It had its effect. To be thrown over upon Lady Martindale and Mrs. Nesbit at Baden could not but appear to Emma a worse lot than to be left to her own mother and Rickworth, which, after all, she loved so well; and the promise of peace to be won by following appointed paths was a refreshing sound.

She had, this whole time, never thought of her mother's feelings, and the real affection she entertained was once more awake. Besides, to see how Theodora represented their scheme, not only shook her faith in Theresa, but alarmed her sense of right on her own account. In short, though she said no word, there was a warmth in her meeting with Lady Elizabeth, on their return, that gave Theodora hopes.

Next morning came a note.

'My Dear Theodora,—I have decided to go home at once. I could not rest without Theresa's explanation, so I have written to her, and I had rather have it by letter than in person. I talked till two o'clock last night with mamma, and we go home at twelve to-day. Tell Violet we will come in for a few moments to take leave.

'Your affectionate,

'E. E. B.'

‘There is one thing to be thankful for!’ said Theodora. The visit was very short; Emma hardly spoke or raised her eyes, and Theodora hoped that some of her timidity arose from repentance for her false judgment of Violet. To Theodora, she said—‘You shall see Theresa’s explanation,’ and Theodora deserved credit for not saying it would be a curiosity.

Lady Elizabeth did as she had not done since Theodora was a little child; she put her arm round her neck and kissed her affectionately, murmuring, ‘Thank you, my dear.’

This little scene seemed to brace Theodora for the trial of the evening. Percy had offered to sit up that night with Arthur, and she had to receive him, and wait with him in the drawing-room till he should be summoned. It was a hard thing to see him so distant and reserved, and the mere awkwardness was unpleasant enough. She could devise nothing to say that did not touch on old times, and he sat engrossed with a book the reviewal of which was to be his night’s employment.

CHAPTER 13

Should this new-blossomed hope be coldly nipped, Then were I desolate indeed. —Philip van Artevelde—H. TAYLOR

The night was apt to be the worst time with Arthur; and Violet generally found him in the morning in a state of feverish discomfort and despondency that was not easily soothed. Anxious to know how he had fared with his new attendant, she came in as early as possible, and was rejoiced to find that he had passed an unusually comfortable night, had been interested and cheered by Percy’s conversation, and had slept some hours.

Percy’s occupation, in the meantime, was shown by some sheets of manuscript on the table near the fire.

‘I see you have not been losing time,’ said Violet.

‘I fear—I fear I have,’ he answered, as rather nervously he began to gather up some abortive commencements and throw them into the fire.

‘Take care, that is mine,’ exclaimed she, seeing the words ‘Mrs. Martindale,’ and thinking he had seized upon a letter which he had written to her from Worthbourne on Arthur’s business. She held out her hand for it, and he yielded it, but the next moment she saw it was freshly written; before she could speak she heard the door closed, and Arthur sleepily muttered, ‘Gone already.’ Dreading some new branch of the Boulogne affair, she sat down, and with a beating heart read by the firelight:—

‘I can bear it no longer! Long ago I committed one great folly, and should have been guilty of a greater, if you had not judged more wisely for me than I for myself. You did, indeed, act “kindly as ever”; and I have thanked you for it a thousand times, since I came to my senses in the dismal altitude of my “sixieme etage” at Paris.

‘No disrespect to your sister, to whom I did greater injustice than I knew, in asking her to seal my mistake. I threw away a rough diamond because its sharp edges scratched my fingers, and, in my fit of passion, tried to fill up its place with another jewel. Happily you and she knew better! Now I see the diamond sparkling, refined, transcendent, with such chastened lustre as even I scarce dared to expect!

‘These solitary years of disappointment have brought me to a sense of the harshness and arrogance of my dealings with the high nature that had so generously intrusted itself to me. There was presumption from the first in undertaking to mould her, rudeness in my attempts to control her, and precipitate passion and jealousy in resenting the displeasure I had provoked; and all was crowned by the absurd notion that pique with her was love of your sister!

‘I see it all now, or rather I have seen it ever since it was too late; I have brooded over it till I have been half distracted, night after night! And now I can hardly speak, or raise my head in her presence. I must have her pardon, whether I dare or not to ask one thing more. I never was sure that her heart was mine; my conduct did not

deserve it, whatever my feelings did. If she accepted me from romance, I did enough to open her eyes! I am told she accepts Lord St. Erme—fit retribution on me, who used to look down on him in my arrogant folly, and have to own that he has merited her, while I—

‘But, at least, I trust to your goodness to obtain some word of forgiveness for me without disturbing her peace of mind. I would not expose her to one distressing scene! She has gone through a great deal, and the traces of grief and care on that noble countenance almost break my heart. I would not give her the useless pain of having to reject me, and of perceiving the pain I should not be able to conceal.

‘I commit myself to your kindness, then, and entreat of you, if the feeling for me was a delusion, or if it is extinct, to let me know in the manner least painful to you; and, when she can endure the subject, to tell her how bitterly I have repented of having tried to force humility on her, when I stood in still greater need of the lesson, and of having flown off in anger when she revolted at my dictation. One word of forgiveness would be solace in a life of deserved loneliness and disappointment.’

Trembling with gladness, Violet could hardly refrain from rousing Arthur to hear the good news! She hastily wrote the word ‘Try!’ twisted it into a note, and sent it down in case Mr. Fotheringham should still be in the house. The missive returned not, and she sat down to enjoy her gladness as a Sunday morning’s gift.

For Violet, though weak, anxious, and overworked, was capable of receiving and being cheered by each sunbeam that shone on herself or on her loved ones. Perhaps it was the reward of her resignation and trust, that even the participation (as it might almost be called) of her husband’s suffering, and the constantly hearing his despondence, could not deprive her of her hopefulness. Ever since the first two days she had been buoyed up by a persuasion of his recovery, which found food in each token of improvement; and, above all, there was something in Arthur that relieved the secret burden that had so long oppressed her.

She was free to receive solace and rejoice in the joy of others; and when Theodora met her in the morning, eye and lip were beaming with a suppressed smile of congratulation, that hardly suited with the thin, white face.

‘Arthur’s comfortable night has done you both good,’ said Theodora. ‘Percy is a better nurse than I.’

‘Oh, yes! it is all Percy’s doing!’ said Violet, there checking herself; but laughing and blushing, so that for a moment she looked quite girlishly pretty.

No more was heard of Mr. Fotheringham till Johnnie came home from the afternoon’s service, and reported that the owl-man was in the drawing-room with Aunt Theodora.

At church Johnnie had seen his papa’s good-natured friend in the aisle, and with his hand on the door of the seat and his engaging face lifted up, had invited him in.

Innocent Johnnie! he little knew what tumultuous thoughts were set whirling through his aunt’s mind. The last time Percy had joined her at church, the whole time of the service had been spent in the conflict between pride and affection. Now there was shame for this fresh swarm of long-forgotten sins, and as the recollection saddened her voice in the confession, foremost was the sense of sacrilege in having there cherished them, and turned her prayer into sin. No wonder she had been for a time yielded up to her pride and self-will!

As silently as usual they walked home from church, and she would at once have gone up-stairs, but he said, in a low, hoarse voice, as her foot was on the step, ‘May I speak to you?’

She turned. It was so strangely like that former occasion that she had a curious bewildered feeling of having passed through the same before; and perhaps she had, in her dreams. Scarcely conscious, she walked towards the fire.

‘Can you forgive me?’ said the same husky voice.

She raised her eyes to his face. ‘Oh, Percy!’—but she could say no more, cut short by rising sobs; and she could only hide her face, and burst into tears.

He was perfectly overwhelmed. ‘Theodora, dearest! do not! I have been too hasty,’ he exclaimed, almost beside himself with distress, and calling her by every affectionate name.

‘Never mind! It is only because I have become such a poor creature!’ said she, looking up with a smile, lost the next moment in the uncontrollable weeping.

‘It is my fault!—my want of consideration! I will go—I will call Mrs. Martindale.’

‘No, no, don’t, don’t go!’ said Theodora, eagerly—her tears driven back. ‘It was only that I am so foolish now.’

‘It was very wrong to be so abrupt—’

‘No! Oh! it was the relief!’ said Theodora, throwing off her shawl, as if to free herself from oppression. Percy took it from her, placed her in the arm-chair, and rendered her all the little attentions in his power with a sort of trembling eagerness, still silent; for she was very much exhausted,—not so much from present agitation as from the previous strain on mind and body.

It seemed to give a softness and tenderness to their reunion, such as there never had been between them before, as she leant back on the cushions he placed for her, and gazed up in his face as he stood by her, while she rested, as if unwilling to disturb the peace and tranquillity.

At last she said, ‘Did I hear you say you had forgiven me?’

‘I asked if you could forgive me?’

‘I!’ she exclaimed, rousing herself and sitting up,—‘I have nothing to forgive! What are you thinking of?’

‘And is it thus you overlook the presumption and harshness that—’

‘Hush!’ said Theodora; ‘I was unbearable. No man of sense or spirit could be

expected to endure such treatment. But, Percy, I have been very unhappy about it, and I do hope I am tamer at last, if you will try me again.'

'Theodora!' cried Percy, hardly knowing what he said. 'Can you mean it? After all that is past, may I believe what I dared not feel assured of even in former days?'

'Did you not?' said Theodora, sorrowfully. 'Then my pride must have been even worse than I supposed.'

'Only let me hear the word from you. You do not know what it would be to me!'

'And did you really think I did not care for you? I, whose affection for you has been a part of my very self! I am more grieved than ever. I would never have tormented you if I had not thought you knew my heart was right all the time.'

'It was my fault; my anger and impatience! And you let me hope that this—this undeserved feeling has survived even my usage!'

'Nay, it was that which taught me its power. Your rejection was the making of me; thanks to Violet, who would not let me harden myself, and ruin all.'

'Violet! I could almost call her our presiding spirit, sent to save us from ourselves!'

'Dear Violet! how glad she will be.'

'Then,' said Percy, as if he had only room for one thought, 'are we indeed to begin anew?'

'I will try to be less unbearable,' was the stifled answer.

'We have both had lessons enough to teach us to be more humble and forbearing,' said Percy, now first venturing to take her hand. 'Let us hope that since this blessing has been granted us, that we shall be aided in our endeavours to help each other.'

There was a grave and chastened tone about the meeting of these two lovers: Theodora almost terrified at realizing that the bliss she had once forfeited was restored to her, and Percy peculiarly respectful—almost diffident in manner, feeling even more guilty towards her than she did towards him. Neither could be content

without a full confession of their wrongs towards each other, and the unjust impressions that had actuated them; and in the retrospect time passed so quickly away, that they were taken by surprise when the candles came in.

‘I need not go?’ entreated Percy.

‘No, indeed; but you have had no dinner.’

‘Never mind—I want nothing.’

Theodora ran up-stairs. Violet understood the suppressed call in the dressing-room, and met her with outstretched arms.

The children never forgot that evening, so delightful did the owl-man make himself. Helen even offered him a kiss, and wished him good night, saucily calling him Percy; and Johnnie set his aunt’s cheeks in a glow by saying, ‘It ought to be Uncle Percy, if he belonged to Aunt Helen.’

‘What do you know of Aunt Helen?’ said Percy, lifting him on his knee, with a sudden change of manner.

Johnnie’s face was deeply tinged; he bent down his head and did not answer, till, when the inquiry was repeated, he whispered, ‘Mamma said Aunt Helen was so very good. Mamma read to me about the dew-drops, in her written book. She told me about her when I had the blister on, because, she said, her thoughts helped one to be patient and good.’

Percy put his arm round him, and his sigh or movement surprised Johnnie, who uneasily looked at his aunt. ‘Ought I not to have said it?’

‘Yes, indeed, Johnnie, boy. There is nothing so pleasant to me to hear,’ said Percy. ‘Good night; I shall like you all the better for caring for my dear sister Helen.’

‘Being dead, she yet speaketh,’ murmured he, as the children went. ‘Strange how one such tranquil, hidden life, which seemed lost and wasted, has told and is telling on so many!’

Even the peace and happiness of that evening could not remove the effects of over-fatigue, and Percy insisted on Theodora's going early to rest, undertaking again to watch by Arthur. She objected, that he had been up all last night.

'I cannot go home to bed. If you sent me away, I should wander in the Square, apostrophizing the gas-lamps, and be found to-morrow in the station, as a disorderly character. You had better make my superfluous energies available in Arthur's service. Ask if I may come in.'

Theodora thought the sick-room had acquired quite a new aspect. A Sunday air pervaded the whole, seeming to radiate from Violet, as she sat by the fire; the baby asleep, in his little pink-lined cradle, by her side. The patient himself partook of the freshened appearance, as the bright glow of firelight played over his white pillows, his hair smooth and shining, and his face where repose and cheerfulness had taken the place of the worn, harassed expression of suffering. Of the welcome there could be no doubt. Arthur's hands were both held out, and did not let her go, after they had drawn her down to kiss him and sit beside him on the bed.

'Well done! Theodora,' he said; 'I am glad it is made up. He is the best fellow living, and well you deserve—'

'O, don't say so!'

'Not that he is the best?' said Arthur, squeezing hard both her hands, as he used to do in fond, teasing schoolboy days. 'I shall not say one without the other. Such a pair is not to be found in a hurry. You only wanted breaking-in to be first-rate, and now you have done it.'

'No, it was your own dear little wife!' was whispered in his ear. He pinched her again, and, still holding her fast, said, 'Is Percy there? Come in,' and, as he entered, 'Percy, I once warned you to kill the cat on the wedding-day. I testify that she is dead. This sister of mine is a good girl now. Ask Violet.'

'Violet—or, rather, our Heartsease'—said Percy, as his grasp nearly crushed

Violet's soft fingers: 'thank you; yours was the most admirable note ever composed! Never was more perfect "eloquence du billet!"'

'Eh! what was it?'

Percy held up the little note before Arthur's eyes: he laughed. 'Ay! Violet is the only woman I ever knew who never said more than was to the purpose. But now, Mrs. Heartsease, if that is your name, go and put Theodora to bed; Percy will stay with me.'

'The baby,' objected Violet.

'Never mind, I want you very much,' said Theodora; 'and as Percy says he has so much superfluous energy, he can take care of two Arthurs at once. I am only afraid of his making the great one talk.'

'The great one' was at first as silent as the little one; his countenance became very grave and thoughtful; and at last he said, 'Now, Percy, you must consent to my selling out and paying you.'

'If you do, it must be share and share alike with the rest of the creditors.'

'And that would be no good,' said Arthur, 'with all the harpies to share. I wish you would consent, Percy. Think what it is to me to lie here, feeling that I have ruined not only myself, but all my sister's hopes of happiness!'

'Nay, you have been the means of bringing us together again. And as to your wife—'

'I must not have her good deeds reckoned to me,' said Arthur, sadly. 'But what can you do? My father cannot pay down Theodora's fortune.'

'We must wait,' interrupted Percy, cheerfully.

Arthur proceeded. 'Wait! what for? Now you are cut out of Worthbourne, and my aunt's money might as well be at the bottom of the sea, and—'

'I can hear no croaking on such a day as this,' broke in Percy. 'As to Worthbourne,

it is ill waiting for dead men's shoon. I always thought Pelham's as good a life as my own, and I never fancied Mrs. Nesbit's hoards. If I made three thousand pounds in five years, why may I not do so again? I'll turn rapacious—give away no more articles to benighted editors on their last legs. I can finish off my Byzantine history, and coin it into bezants.'

'And these were your hard-earned savings, that should have forwarded your marriage!'

'They have,' said Percy, smiling. 'They will come back some way or other. I shall work with a will now! I am twice the man I was yesterday. It was heartless work before. Now, "some achieve greatness," you know.'

Arthur would have said more, but Percy stopped him. 'If you gave it me to-morrow, we could not marry on it. Let things alone till you are about again, and John comes home. Meantime, trust her and me for being happy. A fico for the world and worldlings base.'

He attained his object in making Arthur smile; and Violet presently returning, they sat on opposite sides of the fire, and held one of the happiest conversations of their lives. Violet told the whole story of the fire, which seemed as new to Arthur as to Percy.

'Why did I never hear this before?' he asked.

'You heard it at the time,' said Violet.

Recollections came across Arthur, and he turned away his head, self-convicted of having thought the women made a tedious history, and that he could not be bored by attending. Percy's way of listening, meanwhile, was with his foot on the fender, his elbow on his knee, his chin resting on his hand, his bright gray eyes fixed full on Violet, with a beaming look of gladness, and now and then a nod of assent, as if no heroism on Theodora's part could surpass his expectations, for he could have told it all beforehand. However, his turn came, when Violet described her last expedition

after the chess-board, and the injury it had entailed.

‘Now, now, you don’t say so!’ said he, stammering with eagerness, and starting up.

‘Poor dear, she hardly knew what she did,’ said Violet.

‘I remember,’ said Arthur. ‘That was the time of the delusion that Percy had taken up with his present cousin-in-law.’

Violet blushed. She was too much ashamed of ever having had the idea to bear to recall it; and when Arthur explained, Percy shuddered, and exclaimed, ‘No, I thank you, Violet! you knew enough against me; but you need not have thought me quite come to that!’

On the morrow, Percy came in as the children’s lessons were concluded. He studied Theodora’s face tenderly, and hoped that she had rested. She laughed, and called herself perfectly well; and, indeed, her eyes were as large and as bright as they ought to me, and she had discovered, that morning, that her black locks would make a much more respectable show if properly managed. He would not have mistaken her if she had looked as she did now three weeks ago.

After they had talked for some time, Theodora said, ‘We must not talk away the whole morning; I must write to papa.’

‘Yes,’ said Percy, ‘I came to speak of that. Theodora, perhaps it was wrong to say what I did last night.’

‘How?’ said she, frightened.

‘You ought to have been told how much worse my position is than before.’

‘Oh! is that all?’

‘It is a very serious all,’ he answered. ‘When I spoke before, and was cool enough to treat it as if I was conferring a favour on you, it was wonderful that your father consented. Now, you see, Worthbourne is gone—’

‘How can you care for that?’

‘I did not, till I began to look at it from your father’s point of view. Besides, I ought to tell you, that there is no chance even of a legacy. I find that Mrs. Fotheringham rules the house, and has tried to prejudice my uncle against me. On the marriage, there were fresh arrangements; my uncle was to alter his will, and it was on that occasion that Sir Antony sent for me to keep up the balance, and save him from her influence. Mrs. Martindale was right about her. What a mischief-maker she is! My delay gave great offence.’

‘Your delay on Arthur’s account?’

‘Yes, she managed to turn it against me. Imagine her having persuaded them that I reckoned on Pelham’s being set aside to make room for me. She says it was named in this house!’

‘Yes, by Jane herself.’

‘She represented me as so disgusted at the marriage that I would pay no attention to Sir Antony. I saw how it was when she received me, purring and coaxing, and seeming to be making my peace with my uncle. By and by, Pelham, when we grew intimate again, blundered out the whole,—that his father wished to have settled something on me; but that Jane had persuaded him that the whole might be wanted as a provision for their family. I cared not one rush then, but it makes a difference now. As for my former line, I am forgotten or worse. I have said blunt things that there was no call for me to say. No one chooses to have me for an underling, and there is no more chance of my getting an appointment than of being made Khan of Tartary. Authorship is all that is left to me.’

‘You have done great things in that way,’ said Theodora.

‘I had made something, but I was obliged to advance it the other day to get Arthur out of this scrape, and there is no chance of his being able to pay it, poor fellow!’

‘Oh, Percy! thank you more for this than for all. If the pressure had come, I believe it would have killed him. If you had seen the misery of those days!’

‘And now,’ continued Percy, ‘poor Arthur is most anxious it should be paid; but I ought not to consent. If he were to sell out now, he would be almost destitute. I have persuaded him to let all rest in silence till John comes.’

‘I am glad you have,’ said Theodora. ‘I am afraid papa is a good deal pressed for money. The rents have had to be reduced; and John wants all the Barbuda income to spend on the estate there. Even before the fire, papa talked of bringing John home to cut off the entail, and sell some land; and the house was insured far short of its value. He wants to get rid of Armstrong and all the finery of the garden; but he is afraid of vexing mamma, and in the meantime he is very glad that we are living more cheaply in the cottage. I really do not think he could conveniently pay such a sum; and just at present, too, I had rather poor Arthur’s faults were not brought before him.’

‘It comes to this, then;—Is it for your happiness to enter upon an indefinite engagement, and wait for the chance of my working myself up into such a competency as may make our marriage not too imprudent? It cannot, as far as I can see, be for years; it may be never.’

‘When I thought you would not have me, I meant to be an old maid,’ said Theodora; ‘and, Percy, this time you shall not think I do not care for you. If we have to wait for our whole lives, let it be with the knowledge that we belong to each other. I could not give up that now, and’—as he pressed her hand—‘mind, I am old enough to be trusted to choose poverty. I know I can live on a little: I trust to you to tell me whenever there is enough.’

‘And your father?’

‘He will not object—he will rejoice. The way I regarded that dear father was one of the worst sins of that time! It is better it should be as it is. Mamma could not well do without me now; I should be in doubt about leaving her, even if the rest were plain. So that is trouble saved,’ she added with a smile.

‘If they will see it in the same light! If they will forgive as readily as you do one of the greatest injuries to a young lady.’

‘Hush—nonsense. Papa always considered that it served me right. And really this is such perfect content, that I do not know how to understand it. You had always the power of reconciliation in your hands; but, you know, I had not; and, apart from all other feelings, the mere craving for pardon was so painful! It was only yesterday morning that I was thinking it might, at least, come in the other world.’

‘The pardon I was begging Violet to seek for me!—I trusted to obtain that, though I little hoped—’

‘But indeed, Percy, we must write our letters, or the children will be upon us again.’

Her letter was more easily written than Percy’s. He wrote, and tore up, and considered, and talked to her, and wished John was at home, and said that Lord Martindale would be perfectly justified in withdrawing his consent, and declaring him a presumptuous wretch.

‘What! when you have rescued his son? No, indeed, papa knows you too well! I have no fears: for though he is not aware of the cost of what you did for Arthur, he is most grateful for what he does know of; he thinks you saved his life, and even without that, he is too kind to me to do what—I could not bear.’

‘I will try to believe you.’

‘I was thinking that this is just retribution on me, that whereas I led Arthur into temptation, this debt should be the obstacle.’

Perhaps nothing gratified him more than to hear her speak of the loan as if she participated in the loss, not as if she viewed it from the Martindale side of the question, and felt it too much of an obligation.

His letter was not written till just in time for the post, and it travelled in the same cover with hers. Till the answer arrived he was very anxious, came little to the

house, and only put on his cheerful air before Arthur, whose spirits could not afford to be lowered. Theodora was secure. She knew that she deserved that there should be difficulties; but at the same time she had the sense that the tide had turned. Pardon had come, and with it hope; and though she tried to school herself to submit to disappointment, she could not expect it. She knew she might trust to her father's kind unworldly temper and sense of justice, now that he was left to himself. And when the letter came, Percy brought it in triumph under the shade of the old green umbrella, which hitherto he had not dared to produce.

Lord Martindale said everything affectionate and cordial. If he grieved at the unpromising prospect, he was wise enough to know it was too late to try to thwart an attachment which had survived such shocks; and he only dwelt on his rejoicing that, after all her trials, his daughter should have merited the restoration of the affection of one whom he esteemed so highly.

He fully forgave the former rejection, and declared that it was with far more hope and confidence of their happiness that he now accorded his sanction than when last it had been asked; and the terms in which he spoke of his daughter seemed to deepen her humility by the strength of their commendation.

Happy days succeeded; the lodgings in Piccadilly were nearly deserted, Percy was always either nursing Arthur, playing with the children, or bringing sheets of Byzantine history for revision; and he was much slower in looking over Theodora's copies of them than in writing them himself. There was much grave quiet talk between the lovers when alone together. They were much altered since the time when their chief satisfaction seemed to lie in teasing and triumphing over one another; past troubles and vague prospects had a sobering influence; and they felt that while they enjoyed their present union as an unlooked-for blessing, it might be only a resting point before a long period of trial, separation, and disappointment. It gave a resigned tone to their happiness, even while its uncertainty rendered it more

precious.

All mirthfulness, except what the children called forth, was reserved for Arthur's room; but he thought Percy as gay and light-hearted as ever, and his sister not much less so. Percy would not bring their anxieties to depress the fluctuating spirits, which, wearied with the sameness of a sick-room, varied with every change of weather, every sensation of the hour.

Theodora almost wondered at Percy's talking away every desponding fit of Arthur's, whether about his health, his money matters, or their hopes. She said, though it was most trying to hear him talk of never coming down again, of not living to see the children grow up, and never allowing that he felt better, that she thought, considering how much depended on the impression now made, it might be false kindness to talk away his low spirits. Were they not repentance? Perhaps Percy was right, but she should not have dared to do so.

'Theodora, you do not know the difference between reflection and dejection. Arthur's repentance is too deep a thing for surface talk. It does not depend on my making him laugh or not.'

'If anxiety about himself keeps it up—'

'If I let him believe that I do not think he will recover, for the sake of encouraging his repentance, I should be leaving him in a delusion, and that I have no right to do. Better let him feel himself repenting as having to redeem what is past, than merely out of terror, thinking the temptations have given him up, not that he gives them up. Why, when he told me to sell his saddle-horses the other day, and that he should never ride again, it was nothing, and I only roused him up to hope to be out in the spring. Then he began to lament over his beautiful mare,—but when it came to his saying he had sacrificed Violet's drives for her, and that he had been a selfish wretch, who never deserved to mount a horse again, and ending with a deep sigh, and "Let her go, I ought to give her up," there was reality and sincerity, and I acted

on it. No, if Arthur comes out of his room a changed character, it must be by strengthening his resolution, not by weakening his mind, by letting him give way to the mere depression of illness.'

'You believe the change real? Oh, you don't know what the doubt is to me! after my share in the evil, the anxiety is doubly intense! and I cannot see much demonstration except in his sadness, which you call bodily weakness.'

'We cannot pry into hidden things,' Percy answered. 'Watch his wife, and you will see that she is satisfied. You may trust him to her, and to Him in whose hands he is. Of this I am sure, that there is a patient consideration for others, and readiness to make sacrifices that are not like what he used to be. You are not satisfied? It is not as you would repent; but you must remember that Arthur's is after all a boy's character; he has felt his errors as acutely as I think he can feel them, and if he is turning from them, that is all we can justly expect. They were more weakness than wilfulness.'

'Not like mine!' said Theodora; 'but one thing more, Percy—can it be right for him to see no clergyman?'

'Wait,' said Percy again. 'Violet can judge and influence him better than you or I. Depend upon it, she will do the right thing at the right time. Letting him alone to learn from his children seems to me the safest course.'

Theodora acquiesced, somewhat comforted by the conversation, though it was one of those matters in which the most loving heart must submit to uncertainty, in patient hope and prayer.

Just before Christmas, Theodora was summoned home; for her mother was too unwell and dispirited to do without her any longer. Her father offered to come and take her place, but Arthur and Violet decided that it would be a pity to unsettle him from home again. Arthur was now able to sit up for some hours each day, and Percy undertook to be always at hand. He was invited to Brogden for Christmas; but it was

agreed between him and Theodora that they must deny themselves the pleasure of spending it together; they thought it unfit to leave Violet even for a few days entirely unassisted.

Mr. Hugh Martindale came to fetch Theodora home. He brought a more satisfactory account of poor Emma, who had never forwarded the promised explanation to Theodora. Lady Elizabeth had applied to him to clear Emma's mind from some of the doubts and difficulties inspired by her friend, and at present, though her spirits were very low, they considered that one great step had been gained, for she had ceased every day to write to Miss Marstone.

Theodora had fixed many hopes on her cousin's interview with Arthur, but they only talked of Brogden news; however, she heard afterwards that Hugh was well satisfied with what he had seen of him, and that he thought Percy's view the safest. It was better to force nothing upon him. It was a sad struggle to resolve to depart, but it was made in thankfulness, when Theodora remembered the feelings with which she had entered that house. She went up in the early morning to wish Arthur good-bye. He raised himself and embraced her fondly.

'Thank you, Theodora,' he said; 'you have been a good sister to me.'

'Oh, Arthur, Arthur!' as the dark remembrance came, but he did not perceive it.

'I have been an ungrateful wretch, but I never understood it till lately,' said he again. 'The fire,—those children—'

'Hush, hush! you are hurting yourself,' for he was choked with excess of feeling.

'I can't say more;—but, oh! if I could help keeping you from happiness!' and he was here overpowered by cough and emotion so much as to alarm her, and she was forced to keep silence, and only kiss him again. He returned it with a squeeze of the hand and a look of affection. He had never given her such an one in the days when she deemed his love a thing exclusively her own, she had now gained something far better than his heart had then to offer. The best spot in it then had nothing half so

deep, fond, and unselfish as what he gave her now.

She had ceased her wilful struggle, and besides all the rest, even this was added unto her.

CHAPTER 14

A calm stream flowing with a muddy one, Till, in its onward current, it absorbs With swifter movement and in purer light The vexed eddies of its wayward brother, A leaning and upbearing parasite, Clothing the stem, which else had fallen quite. Shadow forth thee; the world hath not another Of such refined and chastened purity. —TENNYSON

Patience and prayer brought their fruit in due season.

‘Violet, you will not be able to go to church on Christmas-day.’

‘No, I am not strong enough, even if you could spare me.’

‘Do you think Mr. Rivers could come to us?’

‘O, thank you!’

Those were the words, but the flush that gave colour to Arthur’s face showed the effort which they cost, and his wife’s brief answer was cut short by the sweetest tears she had ever shed.

She wrote a note to the clergyman, which was answered by a call the same afternoon. It took Arthur by surprise; but his mind was made up, and colouring deeply, he desired that Mr. Rivers should be shown up. Violet left them alone together, her heart throbbing with grateful hope and supplication.

Arthur’s honest though faltering avowal, ‘I have never thought enough of these things,’ was his whole history.

It had been grace missed and neglected, rather than wilfully abused. There had of course been opportunities, but there had been little culture or guidance in his early

days; his confirmation had taken place as a matter of form, and he had never been a communicant, withheld at once by ignorance and dread of strictness, as well as by a species of awe. Even his better and more conscientious feelings had been aroused merely by his affections instead of by the higher sense of duty; and now it was through these that the true voice had at length reached him.

He had learnt more from his little boy's devotions than all the years of his life had taught him. The ever-present influence under which his wife and that child lived and acted, impressed itself on him as a truth and reality, and the consciousness of his full responsibility dawned upon him. In the early part of his illness, his despair had been at the thought of his failures as husband, father, and son. Now there came on him the perception that not merely in his human relations had he transgressed, but that far more had he slighted the Almighty and Long-suffering Father. He looked back on his life of disregard, his dire offences—

Thus awakened, he watched each word from his little unconscious teacher, to gather from them clearer hopes of mercy and pardon. Happily, Johnnie, in his daily lessons, was going through the ground-work, and those words of mighty signification conveyed meanings to the father, which the innocent child had as yet no need to unfold. The long silent hours gave time for thought, and often when the watchers deemed that the stifled groan or restless movement arose from pain or oppression, it was in fact drawn forth by the weight on his mind.

So it had gone on; while mingled feelings of shame, reserve, and reluctance to show himself in a new light, kept his lips closed, and days and weeks passed before he brought himself to speak the word even to his wife. When it was spoken, her silent intense gladness was at once a reward and a rebuke. Though she scarcely spoke, he knew her well enough to perceive more perfect joy than even at the moment when she first made him smile on their first-born son.

He raised his eyes to meet that look again, when, after his interview with the

clergyman, she came back to join in fixing the hour. Contrition, dread, shame, penitence, all seemed to be soothed, and yet rendered deeper, by meeting those eyes of serene and perfect content and thankfulness.

That evening Johnnie was turning over prints by his side.

‘There is the Good Shepherd, papa. Do you see the poor sheep, who wandered out of the fold, away into the wilderness among the rocks and deserts—that is doing wrong, you know, papa. And it lost its way, and the wolf was watching to tear it to pieces, that is Satan; but the Good Shepherd,’ and the child bent his head reverently, ‘He went after it. Mamma said that means that He touches our hearts and makes us sorry, and it looked up and was ready—as we pray to be made good again. So then He laid it on His shoulders, and carried it safe home to be happy in the fold again. Is He not very good, papa? And only think! There is joy among the Holy Angels in Heaven when one sinner grieves and comes back.’

Johnnie was wont to go on in this dreamy way without expecting an answer; but he was startled to see his father’s face hidden by the shadowy fingers that propped his forehead.

‘Has it made your head ache, papa? Must I go away?’

‘Say that again, Johnnie.’

‘I cannot say it quite right,’ answered the boy; ‘I only know it says that the Angels in Heaven rejoice and are glad over one sinner that repenteth. I thought about it that night after I had been naughty.’

‘You, Johnnie?’ Arthur could hardly believe that child capable of a fault.

‘Yes,’ said Johnnie, with a trembling lip; ‘I was cross at doing my lessons with Aunt Theodora instead of mamma, and I was so sorry. But at night, something seemed to bring that verse, and I thought the Angels must have faces like mamma.’

Certainly his father thought so too.

Theodora's Christmas morning was cheered by a letter from Percy, to tell her that he was to be with Arthur and Violet on this occasion. It was greater happiness to her than it would even have been to have had him at Brogden.

It was a very quiet day in Cadogan-place. The full freshness of awe and reverence was upon Arthur, and though he hardly spoke, and made almost no demonstration, the strength of his feeling was attested by the fatigue that ensued, partly, perhaps, from the unwonted effort of fixing his attention. All the rest of the day he lay on the sofa, silent and dozing, till in the evening, when left alone with Johnnie, he only roused himself to ask to have a Bible placed within his reach, and there losing his way in searching for the parable of the strayed sheep, he wandered about in the sayings of St. John's Gospel.

Johnnie's delight had been the dressing the cathedral cup with a spray of holly sent to him from Brogden by his aunt, and now he sat conning the hymns he had heard in church, and musing over his prints in silence, till his brow caught an expression that strangely blended with those dreamy impressions of his father.

'Poor children! they have had a dull Christmas-day!' said Arthur, as they came to bid him good night.

'No, no, papa; the owl-man has had such a game at play with us in the dining-room!' cried Helen.

'Yes,' said Johnnie; 'and you know, papa, I never said my hymn to you on a Christmas-day before. I like to-day the best of all I remember.'

The next day he was glad to find that Johnnie would, after all, have his share of the festivities of the season. Colonel Harrington came to see Arthur, and begged to have his little godson at a New Year's party at his house.

Violet was perplexed. She could not send her little, shy boy alone, yet she did not like to let his father know that it had been a mistake to accept the invitation. Percy came to her aid. 'There is no such fun as a children's party. I wish you would

smuggle me in as Johnnie's nursery governess.'

'You know, Mrs. Harrington, don't you?' said Arthur; 'as a general rule, you know every one, and every one knows you.'

'Yes, I know her. Come, Violet, can't you get me in, in Johnnie's train? If you will let me take charge or him, I will keep an eye over the cake, and you shall see how I will muffle him up to come home.'

It was too good an offer to be refused, though Violet had doubts whether it would be perfect happiness, for Johnnie was apt to shrink from strange children, and was unusually shy and timid. However, his spirits had risen of late. Ever since he had found his place in his father's heart, the drooping unchild-like sadness had passed away, and though still grave and thoughtful, there was a life and animation about him at times that cheered and delighted her.

There was a great friendship between him and 'Uncle Percy'; they took walks together, fed the ducks in St. James's Park, had many interesting conversations on Brogden affairs, and Johnnie had been several times at the rooms over the toy-shop, and was on intimate terms with old Puss. Violet knew that he would be safe, and was willing to think it right he should be made more of a man.

She felt her Johnnie's value more than ever that evening, when she saw how his father missed him. After the pleasure of seeing him ready to set off, looking so fair and bright and delicate, Arthur flagged very much.

It had been a trying day. The experiment of a more strengthening diet had resulted in heightened pulse and increased cough, and the medical men had been obliged to own that though the acute inflammation had been subdued, the original evil still remained, and that he was farther from complete recovery than they had lately been hoping. Besides, he had sent in his claim on Mr. Gardner, on hearing of his marriage, and the answer, now due, did not come.

Nothing but the company of the children seemed likely to divert his thoughts, and

Helen was too much for him. She was exalted at her own magnanimity in rejoicing that Johnnie should have the treat without her, and was in a boisterous state that led to an edict of banishment, vehemently resisted. It was the first time that anything had gone wrong in Arthur's presence, and Violet was much concerned, and fearful of the effect, when, after the conquest had been achieved, she left Helen sobbing in the nursery, and came down to his room.

There was not the annoyance she had dreaded; but the dejection had been deepened, and he did not respond to the somewhat forced cheerfulness with which she tried to speak of the generosity united in Helen with a hasty temper. It seemed to hurt and pain him so much to have the little girl punished, that there was nothing to be done but to try to turn away his attention.

Those weary times were perhaps harder to bear than periods of more evident trial and excitement. Violet, as she strove to rally her spirits and sustain his, could not help so feeling it—and then she thought of Helen Fotheringham, and recollected that she had been intending to read to Arthur an affectionate letter she had received from his brother on hearing of his illness. Arthur was greatly touched by the tone in which he was mentioned in it, and began eagerly to talk over John's many proofs of affection, among which he now ranked his disregarded warnings.

'I have not forgotten his saying I must make you happy. I little understood him then!'

There was happiness enough in the caress that would fain have silenced him.

'Well! I have been thinking! Our marriage was the best and worst thing I ever did. It was unjust to you, and as bad as possible towards them; but that is what I can't be as sorry for as it deserves,' and he looked up with a sweet smile, fading at once—'except when I look at you and the children, and think what is to become of you.'

'Oh, don't, dear Arthur! Why look forward! There has been great mercy so far. Let

us rest in it.'

'You may; it was not your fault,' said Arthur; 'but how can I? I took you in your ignorance; I let your father deceive himself about my expectations, then, when my own people were far kinder to me than I deserved, and I ought to have done everything myself to make up for my imprudence, I go and let you pinch yourself, while I squander everything on my own abominable follies! And now, here am I leaving you with all these poor children, and nothing on earth—nothing but a huge debt? What are you to do, I say?'

He was almost angry that she did not partake his apprehension for her welfare.

'This is only a casual drawback. Dr. L—— said so!'

'That's nothing to the purpose. My health is done for. There is nothing before me but decline. I have felt that all along, whatever doctors may say. And how can you expect me not to feel what I have brought on you?'

'I am sure you need not be afraid for us. Is it not unkind to doubt your father and John?'

'Suppose they should die before Johnnie comes of age—suppose John should marry!'

Oh, Arthur, I cannot suppose anything! I am only quite sure that there is a Father who will take care of our children. I do not know how, but I am certain we shall not be forsaken. Do not grieve for us. I am not afraid.'

'Not of poverty, even for the children?'

'No!' said Violet. 'I know it will not come, unless it is the best thing for them.'

He did not entirely comprehend her, but he liked to watch her face, it looked so beautiful in its perfect trust. He could not share that peaceful confidence for the future, the harvest of his past recklessness was present poignant dread and anxiety for the innocent ones on whom the penalty must fall. He relapsed into silence, and

perhaps his meditations were as much perplexed by the nine Arabic figures as those of Violet's convalescence had once been, only where hers were units, his were hundreds.

She interrupted him with more of John's letters, and the amusing detail of the West Indian life stood her in good stead till the sounds of return brightened his face; and Johnnie sprang into the room loaded with treasures from a Christmas tree. Never had she seen the little fellow's face so merry, or heard his tongue go so fast, as he threw everything into her lap, and then sprang about from her to his papa, showing his prizes and presenting them. Here were some lemon-drops for papa, and here a beautiful box for mamma, and a gutta-percha frog for Helen, and a flag for Annie, and bon-bons for both, and for Sarah too, and a delightful story about a little Arthur, that nobody could have but the baby—Johnnie would keep it for him till he could read it.

'And what have you got for yourself, Johnnie!' said his father.

'I have the giving it!' said Johnnie.

'You are your mother's own boy, Johnnie,' said Arthur, with a sort of fond deep sadness, as the child mounted his footstool to put one of the lemon-drops into his mouth, watching to be told that it was good.

He went off to the nursery to feed Sarah on sugar-plums, and dispose the frog and banner on his sisters' beds to delight them in the morning; while Percy, coming in, declared that this had been the little boy's happiest time. He had been far too shy for enjoyment, perfectly well behaved, but not stirring a step from his protector, only holding his hand, and looking piteously at him if invited away; and Percy declared, he was as much courted as a young lady in her teens. Sitting down with him at a table surrounded by small elves, Percy had of course kept them in a roar of laughter, throughout which Johnnie had preserved his gravity, only once volunteering a whisper, that he wished Helen was there; but Percy thought that when unmolested

by attention, he had seemed quietly amused. When admitted to the Christmas tree in its glory, he had been slightly afraid of it at first, as of an unexpected phenomenon, and had squeezed his friend's hand very tight; but as he perceived how things were going, his alarm had given place to silent joyous whispers, appropriating his gifts to those at home. He had no idea of keeping anything for himself; and Percy had distressed him by a doubt whether the book, as a godfather's gift, ought to be transferred. On this Johnnie was scrupulous, and Percy had been obliged to relieve his mind by repeating the question for him to Colonel Harrington, whether he might give the book to his little brother. This settled, Johnnie's happiness had been complete, and his ecstasy during their return, at having a present for everybody, was, said Percy, the prettiest comment he had ever known on the blessedness of giving.

It evidently struck Arthur. At night, Violet, from her sofa, heard him murmur to himself, 'My boy! my unselfish boy, what will you think of your father?' and then stifle a groan.

The next afternoon, Johnnie, having as a preliminary inscribed his brother's unwieldy name all over the fly-leaf, was proceeding most happily to read the book aloud, lying on the hearth-rug, with his heels in the air. He read his mamma into a slumber, his papa into a deep reverie, which resulted in his dragging himself up from his chair, by the help of the chimney-piece, and reaching pen and writing-case from Violet's table.

'Oh! papa!' whispered Johnnie, in an injured tone, at not having been asked to do the little service.

'I thought it would disturb mamma less,' returned Arthur, sinking back; 'but you may give me the ink. And now, my dear, go on to yourself.'

'Are you going to write, papa? That is being much better.'

'I am going to try to write to your uncle. Johnnie, supposing you lose me, I look to your uncle and you for care of the little ones.'

Johnnie gave a great sigh, and looked at his father, but made no answer. Papa's writing was a matter of curiosity, and he stood watching in silence.

'You must not watch me, Johnnie,' said Arthur, presently, for whether his son could read his writing or not, he could not bear his eyes upon it. The boy had dropped into his place on the carpet in a moment.

It was a full confession and outpouring of his troubles. It cost him much, for there was shame at his own folly and selfishness, and he had to disclose extravagance that he well knew to be, in John's eyes, especially inexcusable. So painful was the effort, that even his fears for his family would not alone have determined him on making it, if it had not been for his new resolution to face the worst, and to have no more shufflings or concealments. He could bear to tell John better than his father, and Percy had bound him to silence towards Lord Martindale. The whole was explained to the best of his powers, which were not at present great. His debts, including that to Percy, he believed to exceed ten thousand, his resources were limited to the sale of his commission, and the improbable recovery of the debt from Gardner—his wife and children were entirely unprovided for. 'I can only trust to your kindness,' he wrote. 'If I could see you, I could die in peace. I know that while you live, you will never see Violet distressed. I have no right to ask anything, but this much I will and must beg may be looked on as my last wish. Never let the children be taken from their mother's charge. If they are to be better than I, it must be her doing. And though this is more than I should dare to ask, if you can help me, do not, when I am gone, let my boys grow up to find their father's memory loaded with these hateful debts, hanging round their necks like a burden. I know Johnnie's sense of honour would never let him rest till they were cleared; but I cannot look at his face and think of his hearing how I have served his mother. He does love me now, Heaven knows, undeservedly enough. I cannot bear to think of a cloud on his remembrance of me.'

CHAPTER 15

Either grief will not come, or if it must, Do not forecast. And while it cometh, it is almost past. Away distrust, My God hath promised, He is just. —G. HERBERT

‘Arthur, the landlady has been to ask how much longer we shall want the rooms!’

‘How long have we been here?’

‘We came on the 20th of April, and this is the 3rd of June. What a difference it has made in you!’

‘And in you; Ventnor is a grand doctor.’

‘And Johnnie is really beginning to have a colour. How pleased his grandpapa will be to see him so much stronger and more spirited. I do not think Lord Martindale could have done anything kinder by us than sending us here.’

‘How does the purse hold out?’

‘I have been reckoning that we could stay on three weeks more before going to Brogden; and, if you like it, I should wish to spend our wedding-day here,’ said Violet, in the shy diffident way in which she was wont to proffer any request for her own gratification.

‘I had another scheme for our wedding-day. What do you say to spending it at Wrangerton?’

She looked up in his face as if to see if he really meant it, then the glad flush darted into her cheeks, and with a cry of joy like a child, she almost sobbed out, ‘Oh, Arthur, Arthur! thank you.’

He looked at her, amused, and enjoying her ecstasy. ‘So you approve, Mrs. Martindale?’

‘O, to go to mamma! to show mamma the children! Annette! home!—Johnnie to see Helvellyn!—my sisters!—Olivia’s baby!’ cried Violet, in incoherent exclamations,

almost choked with joy.

‘My poor Violet,’ said Arthur, surprised and almost remorseful; ‘I did not know you wished it so very much.’

‘I believe I had left off thinking about it,’ said Violet; ‘but I am so very much obliged to you, dear Arthur—how very kind it is.’

It never occurred to her, as it did to him, that the kindness might have come sooner. ‘I only hope you like it,’ she added, after a pause.

‘Don’t I like what makes you look as you do now?’ said he, smiling. ‘I shall enjoy looking up our old quarters. Besides,’ he added, more gravely, ‘it is your turn now; and liking apart, I know I have not used Mrs. Moss well, in keeping you so long from her. You must let her know it was not your fault.’

‘May I write, then? Oh, Arthur, dearest! if I could but find words to tell you how happy you have made me!’

It was no sudden determination, for he brought a ‘Bradshaw’ out of his pocket, with all the various railways and trains underscored in pencil in a most knowing way, and a calculation of expenses on the cover, all wrong—for Arthur had never done an addition sum right in his life.

Violet was to write as soon as she pleased, and fix the day and hour.

Perhaps Violet had never been so happy in her life as when, in the afternoon, she wandered a little apart on the beach, to realize and feed on her new treasure of delight. Arthur and the children were felicitously dabbling in sand and sea-water, reducing the frocks to a condition that would have been Sarah’s daily distraction, if she had not reconciled herself to it by observing, ‘it did her heart good to see the Colonel take to the children, though he was no more to be trusted with them than a sea-mew; and if it was not for Master John, she believed they would all come home some day drownded.’

As soon as the spring was sufficiently advanced, Lord Martindale had sent the whole party to recruit by the sea-side, at their own dear Ventnor, and there the last six weeks had been spent in the daily joy of watching Arthur's progress in recovery;—until now a slight degree of weakness and languor, an occasional cough, and his greatly altered appearance, were the only evident remains of his illness; and though she could not feel that his health was absolutely re-established, there was such abundant cause for hope and thankfulness, as filled her heart to overflowing, especially when she was rejoiced by tokens of that more blessed change within.

His spirits had returned with his health. Perhaps it was part of his boyish nature, that his sorrow for his errors, though sincere and earnest, did not permanently depress him, when not brought before his mind; but rather the sense of behaving well added to his brightness. There was nothing to conceal; the guilty consciousness was gone, and the fear for the future was distant. His manners had a sweetness more engaging than ever. To his wife, who had, as he recovered, suffered from the effects of her exertions, he was most affectionately attentive, and his children were his delight, while little Johnnie throve and expanded into spirit and mirth, like a plant reviving in sunshine.

He had gone over Violet's old haunts with her, and she had enjoyed making him enter into the feelings associated with the scenes she had visited with his brother. John was expected to return in the summer, but even this anticipation paled in comparison with the present felicity. That longing for her own home had been forced into such a remote cell, that she had had no idea of its strength till now, when it was allowed to spring up and colour everything.

She walked along the shore within sight of the cottage, where she had been with John, too small and expensive for their present numbers and means, and looking up at its bowery wicket, gathered up the remembrances associated with it.

She had come thither a mere child, a wife and mother, before strength, spirits, or

judgment were equal to her tasks,—terrified at her responsibility, perceiving her failures, sinking under the load too early laid on her. There had she been guided to comfort,—there had her hand been taught to clasp the rod and staff, that had led her safe through the shadow, well-nigh of death. How would her heart have fainted if she could have guessed what had awaited her! But these things were past, and their memory was sweetened by thankfulness. And now, where once stood the self-torturing, pining girl, was now the calm trustful woman,—serene beneath the overshadowing Wings, resting on the everlasting Arms,—relying, least of all, upon herself. Further trouble might be in store; the clouds might return after the rain; but her peace was not mere freedom from storms, it was the security that there was One who would be with her and her loved ones through all, and thus could she freely rejoice in present sunshine, without scanning each distant cloud, or marring present bliss by future dread.

It was complete gladness. There was not a misgiving whether home might be exactly as it stood in her memory, or in Johnnie’s imagination; and she filled the children’s heads so much with what they were to see, that their papa declared he had found Annie under the belief that Helvellyn was her grandfather.

Arthur was so much charmed with seeing his wife so happy, that, forgetting all his fears of tediousness, he partook the enjoyment of her anticipations. He was the first, when they came in sight of a mountain, to lift Johnnie on his knee and tell him it was Helvellyn; and mamma’s resentment at the grievous error was one of the prettiest and merriest things imaginable.

However, when Helvellyn actually appeared, and she felt herself really coming home, she was silent, in anxiety and doubt. She must be very different from the Violet who had gone away. Would her mother and Matilda think she had improved according to her opportunities?

She could hardly reply when Arthur recognized the High-street, so much wider in

her imagination, and her heart beat as the garden wall and the lawn were before her. At the door—yes!—it was, it was the mother for whose embrace, she had so often longed! Timidly affectionate and hastily nervous, she could hardly afford one moment to her daughter in her frightened haste to greet her son-in-law, before he was ready, as he was lifting the children out. Here, too, were Annette and Mr. Moss, the young ladies were in the drawing-room, detained by etiquettes of Matilda's; but Violet hardly knew who spoke to her, the joy was to see a baby of hers at last in her mothers arms.

She could hardly see any one but the slight worn-looking mother, whose low, sad-toned voice awoke such endless recollections, and made her realize that she was once more beside mamma. To look at her sisters almost disturbed her; and it well-nigh struck her as unnatural to find the children hanging on her.

Still more unnatural was it to be conducted up-stairs, like company, to the best room, and to find her mother in distress and solicitude lest things should not be comfortable, and such as they were used to. And oh! the strangeness of seeing her little ones in her own old nursery, waited upon by the sisters she had left as children—and by Sarah, settled in there as if she had never been away. One part of her life or the other must be a dream.

Dear as all the faces were, it was a relief to be silent for a little while, as Arthur, half-asleep, rested in the large old armchair, and she unpacked, too happy for weariness; and the clear pure mountain air breathing in at the open window, infusing life into every vein, as she paused to look at the purple head above the St. Erme woods, and to gaze on the fragrant garden beneath; then turned away to call to mind the childish faces which she had not yet learnt to trace in those fine-looking young women.

'Ha!' said Arthur, rousing himself; 'are all the pretty plaits and braids come out again? A welcome sight.'

‘Mamma thought me altered,’ said Violet; ‘and I thought I would not look more old than I could help; so I would not put on my cap for fear it should distress her.’

‘Old! altered!’ said Arthur. ‘How dare you talk of such things!’

‘I can’t help it,’ said Violet, meekly.

‘Well! I believe I see what you mean,’ he said, studying her with a gravity that was amusing. ‘There’s your youngest sister, Octavia, is not she?’

‘Oh, is not she pretty?’

‘Whish! don’t praise yourself; she is the image of you at sixteen. Now that I have seen her, I see you are changed; but somehow—the word that always suited you best was lovely; and you have more of that style of thing than even when your cheeks were pink. Not your oval face and white skin, you know, but that—that look that is my Violet—my heart’s-ease, that used to keep my heart up last winter. Ay! you are more to my mind!’

That little episode was the special charm of Violet’s evening—a happy one, though there were some anxieties, and a few fond little illusions dispelled.

It might be the dread of Arthur’s being annoyed, as she watched him looking very pale and spiritless from fatigue, which made her perceive that all dinner-time Matilda was overwhelming him with a torrent of affected nonsense—or at least what Violet would have thought so in any one but her highly-respected eldest sister; and she feared, too, that he could not admire the girlish airs and graces which did not become that sharpened figure and features. She had not known how much more Matilda talked than any one else; even her father only put in a caustic remark here and there, when Matilda WOULD know all Lord St. Erme’s and Lady Lucy’s views and habits. Mrs. Moss was silenced whenever her low voice tried to utter a sentence. Annette, quiet and gentle as ever, looked drooping and subdued, and scarcely spoke, while the two fine blooming girls, who seemed like new acquaintance, were still as mice in awe and shyness. Caroline, the second sister, was married and settled in

Canada; and the three blanks that weddings had made only now impressed themselves on her mind as a novelty.

After dinner, Violet felt as if she must rescue Arthur from Matilda at any cost, and succeeded in setting her down to the piano; and to secure his quiet, though feeling it a very presumptuous venture, she drew her chair near her father, and set herself to talk to him. Mr. Moss was quite amazed to find a woman—a daughter—capable of rational conversation. She went on with the more spirit, from her pleasure in seeing Arthur, instead of dozing under cover of the music, going to sit by Mrs. Moss and talk to her, and though nothing was heard, their countenances were proof enough of their interest—Mrs. Moss's thin mild face quite colouring up at the unwonted attention, and her eyes glistening. In fact they were talking about Violet, and in such a strain that Mrs. Moss that night confided to Annette, that she should never again believe a word against Colonel Martindale.

But if the fortnight was to be like this, how was Arthur to bear it? Violet dreaded it for him the more because he was so very good and forbearing, not making one remark on what she knew must have struck him. She could almost have reproached herself with selfishness in never having thought of his want of companionship and amusement.

The night's rest, however, made a great difference in his capacity for entertainment, beginning from his laugh at Helen's inquiry, 'What was the use of so many aunts?' He lay on the grass in the sunshine, playing with the children, and fast making friends with the younger aunts, who heartily relished his fun, though they were a good deal afraid of him; while Violet sat under the verandah, feasting her eyes upon Helvellyn, and enjoying the talk with her sisters as much as she could, while uneasy at the lengthened housekeeping labours that her mother was undergoing. They were to retrace one of their memorable walks by the river-side in the afternoon, but were prevented by the visit expected all the morning, but deferred to that fashionable

hour, of Mrs. Albert Moss, who sailed in, resolved that the Honourable Mrs. Martindale should find one real companion in the family.

Those fluttering silks and fringes seemed somewhat to stand on end at finding themselves presented to a slight, simply dressed figure in a plain straw bonnet; and the bare-legged, broad-sashed splendours of Miss Albertine Louisa stood aghast at the brown holland gardening suits of the London cousins.

‘In training for the Highlanders?’ was Arthur’s mischievous aside to Octavia, setting her off into the silent frightened laugh that was his special diversion; and he continued, as they stood half in and half out of the window, ‘There’s Helen patronizing her! I hope she will take her down to the sand-heap, where the children have been luxuriating all the morning.’

‘Oh! how can you—’

‘It is my father’s great principle of education,’ said Arthur, solemnly, ‘to let them grope in the dirt. I never rested till I had seen my boy up to the ears in mud.—But ha! what a magnificent horse! Why,’ as he started forward to look at it, ‘I declare it is stopping here!’

‘Olivia and Mr. Hunt in the gig!’ cried Octavia. Oh, she has the baby in her lap!’

Matilda and Mrs. Albert Moss looked at each other, shocked.

‘What will Mr. Hunt make her do next?’

‘Poor Olivia!’ said Mrs. Albert. ‘We regret the connection; but Mr. Hunt will have his own way. You must excuse—’

It was lost. Seeing the new-comers in difficulties between baby, horse, and gate, Arthur had sped out to open the last for them; and Violet had sprung after him, and received the child in her arms while her sister alighted. Here was the mesalliance of the family, too wealthy to have been rejected, but openly disdained by Matilda, while the gentle Mrs. Moss and Annette hardly ventured to say a good word for him.

Violet's apprehensions had chiefly centred on him, lest his want of refinement should make him very disagreeable to Arthur; and she almost feared to look up as she held out her hand to him.

In a moment her mind was relieved; voice, look, and manner, all showed that the knightly soul was in him, and that he had every quality of the gentleman, especially the hatred of pretension, which made him retain the title of English yeoman as an honourable distinction.

It was a pretty group of contrasts; the soldierly, high-bred, easy grace of the pallid black-haired Colonel, with the native nobleness of bearing of the stalwart farmer, equally tall, and his handsome ruddy face glowing with health; and the two sisters, the one fresh, plump, and rosy, the picture of a happy young mother, and the other slender and dignified, with the slightly worn countenance, which, even in her most gladsome moods, retained that pensive calmness of expression.

The baby occupied the ladies, the horse their husbands; and on hearing what guests were in the drawing-room, Mr. Hunt, with a tell-tale 'then,' said he would drive on to his business at Coalworth, inviting the Colonel to take the vacant seat.

With Arthur off her mind, Violet was free to enjoy, and soon found that the only flaw in Olivia's felicity was the Wrangerton fashion of sneering at her husband, and trying to keep her up to Matilda's measure of gentility. Proud as she was of her 'George,' he had not made her bold enough to set those censures at nought; but when she found Violet of his way of thinking, she joyfully declared that she would never allow herself to be again tormented by Matilda's proprieties. How glad she was that George had insisted; for, as she confided to Violet and Annette, she knew that bringing the baby without a maid would be thought so vulgar that she would have stayed at home, in spite of her desire to see Violet; but her husband had laughed at her scruples, declaring that if her sister could be offended by her coming in this manner, she must be a fine lady not worth pleasing.

Perhaps Mr. Hunt so expected to find her. He was a breeder of horses on an extensive scale, and had knowledge enough of the transactions of Mark Gardner and his set, not to be very solicitous of the acquaintance of Colonel Martindale, while he dreaded that the London beauty would irretrievably fill his little wife's head with nonsense.

One look swept away his distrust of Mrs. Martindale; and the charm of the Colonel's manner had gained his heart before the drive was over. The next day he was to send a horse for Arthur to ride to Lassonthwayte to see his whole establishment; and Violet found she might dismiss her fears of want of amusement for her husband.

He had sold off all his own horses, and had not ridden since his illness, and the thought seemed to excite him like a boy. His eyes sparkled at the sight of the noble hunter sent for him; and Violet had seldom felt happier than as she stood with the children on the grass-plat, hearing her sisters say how well he looked on horseback, as he turned back to wave her an adieu, with so lover-like a gesture, and so youthful an air, that it seemed to bring back the earliest days of their marriage.

This quiet day, only diversified by a call from Lord St. Erme and Lady Lucy, and by accompanying Mrs. Moss to make some visits to old friends in the town, brought Violet to a fuller comprehension of her own family.

Her mother was what she herself might have become but for John. She was an excellent person, very sensible, and completely a lady; but her spirit had been broken by a caustic, sharp-tempered, neglectful husband, and she had dragged through the world bending under her trials, not rising above them. Her eldest daughter had been sent to a fashionable school, and had ever since domineered over the whole family, while the mother sank into a sort of bonne to the little ones, and a slave to her husband. There was much love for her among her fine handsome girls, but little honour for the patient devotion and the unfailing good sense that judged aright, but could not act.

Annette, her chief comfort, tried to bring up her pupil Octavia to the same esteem for her; but family example was stronger than precept, and Annette had no weight; while even Mr. Hunt's determination that Olivia should show due regard to her mother, was looked on as one of his rusticities. Poor Mrs. Moss was so unused to be treated as a person of importance, that she could hardly understand the attention paid her, not only by Violet, but by the Colonel; while the two young sisters, who regarded Violet and her husband as the first of human beings, began to discover that 'O, it is only mamma!' was not the most appropriate way of speaking of her; and that when they let her go on errands, and wait on every one, Violet usually took the office on herself.

So busy was Mrs. Moss, that Violet had very few minutes of conversation with her, but she saw more of Annette, in whom the same meek character was repeated, with the tendency to plaintiveness that prevented its real superiority from taking effect. She drooped under the general disregard, saw things amiss, but was hopeless of mending them; and for want of the spirit of cheerfulness, had become faded, worn, and weary. Violet tried to talk encouragingly, but she only gave melancholy smiles, and returned to speak of the influences that were hurting Octavia.

'Do not let us dwell on what we cannot help,' said Violet; 'let us do our best, and then leave it in the best Hands, and He will bring out good. You cannot think how much happier I have been since I knew it was wrong to be faint-hearted.'

Before the end of the day she had seen her mother and Annette look so much more cheerful, that the wish crossed her that she could often be at hand.

By and by Arthur came home in the highest spirits, tossing Annie in the air, as he met her in the passage, and declaring himself so far from tired that he had not felt so well for a year, and that the mountain breezes had taken the weight off his chest for good and all. He was in perfect raptures with Lassonthwayte and with its master, had made an engagement to bring Violet, her mother, and the children, to stay there a

week, and—‘What more do you think?’ said he.

‘Everything delightful, I see by your face,’ said Violet.

‘Why, Hunt has as pretty a little house as ever I saw in the village of Lassonthwayte, to be let for a mere nothing, just big enough to hold us, and the garden all over roses, and that style of thing. Now, I reckon our allowance would go three times as far here as in London; and if I were to sell out, the money invested in these concerns of Hunt’s would be doubled in a year or two—at any rate, before the boys will want schooling. If I do know anything it is of horses, you see, and we should pay off Percy and all the rest of them, and be free again.’

‘Live near mamma and Olivia!’

‘Ah! I knew you would like it. The mountain air will bring back your colour, and make a Hercules of Johnnie yet. I longed to have him there to-day! We may live cheaply, you know, not get into all this town lot; only have the girls staying with us, and give your mother a holiday now and then. Don’t you fancy it, Mrs. Martindale?’

‘It is too delightful! I suppose we must not settle it without your father, though.’

‘He can’t object to our living at half the cost, and getting out of debt; I’ll talk him over when we go home. Hunt is as fine a fellow as I ever saw, and as steady as old time.’

CHAPTER 16

And oft when in my heart I heard Thy timely mandate, I deferred The task, in smoother paths to stray, But thee I now would serve more strictly, if I may. —Ode to Duty—WORDSWORTH

Lassonthwaite lost none of its charms on closer acquaintance. Mr. Hunt’s farm stood on the slope of a hill, commanding a view of the mountains, rising like purple clouds above the moorland, richly carpeted with the varied colours of heath, fern, and furze,

and scattered with flocks of the white bleached mountain sheep, and herds of sturdy little black cattle; while the valley, nearer at hand, was fringed with woods, sheltering verdant pasture land, watered by the same clear frolicsome stream that danced through the garden—Olivia's garden—brilliant with roses and other beauties, such as the great Harrison himself would hardly have disdained.

Lord St. Erme might well call it a farm of the poets, so well did everything accord with the hearty yeoman, and his pretty, shepherdess-looking wife. The house was of the fine old order, large and lofty, full of wonders in the way of gables, porches, and oriels, carved doors and panels, in preservation that did them honour due, and the furniture betokening that best of taste which perceives the fitness of things. All had the free homely air of plenty and hospitality—the open doors, the numerous well-fed men and maids, the hosts of live creatures—horses, cows, dogs, pigs, poultry, each looking like a prize animal boasting of its own size and beauty—and a dreadful terror to Johnnie. He, poor little boy, was the only person to whom Lassonthwayte was not a paradise. Helen and Annie had no fears, and were wild with glee, embracing the dogs, climbing into dangerous places, and watching the meals of every creature in the yard; but poor Johnnie imagined each cow that looked at him to be a mad bull, trembled at each prancing dog, and was miserable at the neighbourhood of the turkey-cock; while Mr. Hunt's attempts to force manliness on him only increased his distress to such a degree as to make it haunt him at night. However, even this became a source of pleasant feeling; Arthur, once so rough with him, now understood the secret of his delicacy of nerves, and reverenced him too much to allow him to be tormented. Even in the worst of Johnnie's panics at night would come smiles, as he told how papa would not let him be forced to pat the dreadful dog, and had carried him in his arms through the herd of cattle, though it did tire him, for, after putting him down, he had to lean on the gate and pant. So next time the little boy would not ask to be carried, and by the help of holding his hand, so bravely passed the savage beasts, that his uncle pronounced that they should

make a man of him yet.

Arthur, always happier when the little fingers were in his, was constantly talking of the good that Johnnie was to gain in the life in the open air; and this project continually occupied them. The cottage was a very pretty one, and most joyously did Olivia show it off to Violet and Mrs. Moss, planning the improvements that Mr. Hunt was to make in it, and helping Violet fix on the rooms. It seemed like the beginning of rural felicity; and Arthur talked confidently to his wife of so rapidly doubling his capital, that he should pay off his debts without troubling his father, who need never be aware of their extent.

Violet did not quite like this, but Arthur argued, ‘They are my own concerns, not his, and if I can extricate myself without help, why should he be further plagued about me?’

She did not contest the point; it would be time enough when they were at Brogden, but it made her rather uneasy; the concealment was a little too like a return to former habits, and she could not but fear the very name of horses and races. Still, in the way of business, and with George Hunt, a man so thoroughly to be relied on, it was a different thing; and Arthur’s mind was so changed in other matters, that she could not dream of distrust. The scheme was present pleasure enough in itself, and they all fed on it, though Mr. Hunt always declared that the Colonel must not consider himself pledged till he had consulted his own family, and that he should do nothing to the house till he had heard from him again.

Violet could not satisfy herself that Lord and Lady Martindale would give ready consent, and when talking it over alone with her mother, expressed her fears.

‘Well, my dear,’ said Mrs. Moss, ‘perhaps it will be all for the best. We cannot tell whether it might turn out well for you to be settled near us. Colonel Martindale is used to something different, and your children are born to another rank of life.’

‘O mamma, that could make no difference.’

‘Not, perhaps, while they were young, but by and by you would not wish to have them feeling that we are not like their other relations. My dear child, you need not blush to that degree!’

‘They will never feel that you are not equal to—to the grandest—the dearest!’ said Violet, tearfully.

‘You would try not to let them, dearest, but the truth would be too strong,’ said Mrs. Moss, smiling. ‘You know we had been content to think poor Louisa our model of manners till you came among us again.’

‘O, mamma! at least there was Lady Lucy.’

‘And now we see you fit company for Lady Lucy, and that we are not. No, my dear, don’t deny it; I see it in your ease with her, and it is quite right.’

‘I don’t like to think so!’

‘I understand better now,’ said Mrs. Moss. ‘Perhaps it would have been more advisable if there had been no intermingling of ranks, yet I can hardly regret, when I see you, my Violet. It has raised your whole tone of mind, but it has cut you off from us, and we cannot conceal it from ourselves. If you do come here, you must make up your mind beforehand not to be too intimate even with Olivia and George.’

‘I am very glad I am not to settle it,’ said Violet, with a sigh. ‘I should be much disappointed to give it up, and yet sometimes—it will be some consolation at least to find that you have not set your heart on it, mamma?’

‘I have left off setting my heart on anything, my dear child, said Mrs. Moss, with a sigh, telling of many and many a disappointment. Sincerely religious as she was, it was out of sight, and scarcely a word was ever breathed to her daughter of her true spring of action.

There was a feeling that she was not mistaken in thinking that too much intercourse was not desirable. Arthur was apt to call the distance from Wrangerton to

Lassonthwayte seven miles, instead of five, and soon it grew to nine, with a bad road and a shocking hill. This was after he had discovered from Mr. Hunt that Lord St. Erme's affairs had fallen into a most unsatisfactory state, while the Messrs. Moss had been amassing a comfortable fortune; and that every one knew that the colliery accident was chiefly owing to Albert's negligence, cowardice, and contempt of orders; so that it was the general marvel that the Earl did not expose them, and remove his affairs from their hands.

Arthur could suppose that the cause of this forbearance might be the connection between Theodora and the Moss family; and the idea made him feel almost guilty when in company with the Earl. Matilda, and indeed the others, were surprised at his declining the invitations to stay at the park; but Violet, as well as he, thought it better to lay themselves under no further obligations; though they could not avoid receiving many attentions. Lady Lucy feted the children, and Violet accomplished her wish of showing Johnnie the little Madonna of Ghirlandajo.

The first sight of the rooms made Violet somewhat melancholy, as she missed the beautiful works of art that had been a kind of education to her eye and taste, and over which she had so often dreamt and speculated with Annette. However, there was something nobler in the very emptiness of their niches, and there was more appropriateness in the little picture of the Holy Child embracing His Cross, now that it hung as the solo ornament of the library, than when it was vis-a-vis to Venus blindfolding Cupid, and surrounded by a bewildering variety of subjects, profane and sacred, profanely treated. She could not help feeling that there was a following in those steps when she saw how many luxuries had been laid aside, and how the brother and sister, once living in an atmosphere of morbid refinement, were now toiling away, solely thoughtful of what might best serve their people, mind or body, and thinking no service beneath them.

Lord St. Erme's talent and accomplishment were no longer conducive only to

amusement or vanity, though they still were exercised; and it was curious to see his masterly drawings hung round the schools and reading-room, and his ready pencil illustrating his instructions, and to hear him reading great authors to the rude audience whom he awakened into interest. There might be more done than sober judgments appreciated, and there were crotchets that it was easy to ridicule, but all was on a sound footing, the work was thoroughly carried out, and the effects were manifest. The beautiful little church rising at Coalworth would find a glad congregation prepared to value it, both by the Earl and by the zealous curate.

Violet wished Theodora could but see, and wondered whether she would ever venture to make a visit at Lassonthwayte; hardly, she supposed, before her marriage.

Lady Lucy one day asked when Miss Martindale was to be married, and on hearing that no period could be fixed, said she was grieved to find it so; it would be better for her brother that it should be over. Violet ventured to express her hopes that he had at last found peace and happiness.

‘Yes,’ said Lucy, ‘he is very busy and happy. I do not think it dwells on his spirits, but it is the disappointment of his life, and he will never get over it.’

‘I hope he will find some one to make him forget it.’

‘I do not think he will. No one can ever be like Miss Martindale, and I believe he had rather cling to the former vision, though not repining. He is quite content, and says it is a good thing to meet with a great disappointment early in life.’

Violet doubted not of his contentment when she had looked into his adult school, and seen how happily he was teaching a class of great boys to write; nor when she heard him discussing prices, rents, and wages with Mr. Hunt.

Lord St. Erme and Lady Lucy had come to an early dinner at Lassonthwayte, thus causing great jealousy on the part of Mrs. Albert Moss, and despair on Matilda’s, lest Olivia should do something extremely amiss without her supervision. Little did she guess that Lucy had been reckoning on the pleasure of meeting her dear Mrs.

Moss for once without those daughters.

After dinner, all the party were on the lawn, watching the tints on the mountains, when Lord St. Erme, coming to walk with Mrs. Martindale, asked her, with a smile, if she remembered that she had been the first person who ever hinted that the Westmoreland hills might be more to him than the Alps.

‘I have not forgotten that evening,’ he said. ‘It was then that I first saw Mr. Fotheringham;’ and he proceeded to ask many questions about Percy’s former appointment at Constantinople, his length of service, and reason for giving it up, which she much enjoyed telling. He spoke too of his books, praising them highly, and guessing which were his articles in reviews, coming at last to that in which, as he said, he had had the honour of being dissected.

‘Poor Lucy has hardly yet forgiven it,’ he said; ‘but it was one of the best things that ever befell me.’

‘I wonder it did not make you too angry to heed it.’

‘Perhaps I was at first, but it was too candid to be offensive. The arrow had no venom, and was the first independent criticism I had met with. Nobody had cared for me enough to take me to task for my absurdities. I am obliged to Mr. Fotheringham.’

Violet treasured this up for Percy’s benefit.

This festivity was their last in the north. Their visit at Lassonthwayte had been lengthened from a week to a fortnight, and Lady Martindale wrote piteous letters, entreating them to come to Brogden, where she had made every arrangement for their comfort, even relinquishing her own dressing-room. They bade farewell to Wrangerton, Arthur assuring Mrs. Moss that he would soon bring Violet back again; and Mrs. Moss and Violet agreeing that they were grateful for their happy meeting, and would not be too sorry were the delightful vision not to be fulfilled.

At the beginning of their journey, Arthur’s talk was all of the horses at Lassonthwayte and the friendship that would soon be struck up between Percy and

Mr. Hunt. The railway passed by the village of Worthbourne, and he called Violet to look out at what might yet be Theodora's home.

'For the sake of John and Helen too,' said Violet; while the children, eager for anything approaching to a sight, peeped out at the window, and exclaimed that there was a flag flying on the top of the church steeple.

'The village wake, I suppose,' said Arthur. 'Ha! Helen, we will surprise Uncle Percy by knowing all about it!'

At the halt at the Worthbourne station, he accordingly put out his head to ask the meaning of the flag.

'It is for the son and heir, sir. Old Sir Antony's grandson.'

Arthur drew in his head faster than he had put it out, making mutterings to himself that a good deal surprised the children. After their long pleasuring, Cadogan-place looked dingy, and Violet as she went up to the drawing-room in the gray twilight, could not help being glad that only three months of Arthur's sick leave had expired, and that they were to be there for no more than one night. In spite of many precious associations, she could not love a London house, and the Lassonthwayte cottage seemed the prettier in remembrance.

Arthur had fetched his papers, and had been sitting thoughtful for some time after Johnnie had gone to bed, when he suddenly looked up and said, 'Violet, would it be a great vexation to you if we gave up this scheme?'

'Don't think of me. I always thought you might view it differently from a distance.'

'It is not that,' said Arthur; 'I never liked any one better than Hunt, and it is nine if not ten miles from the town. But, Violet, I find we are in worse plight than I thought. Here are bills that must be renewed, and one or two things I had forgotten, and while I owe the money and more too, I could hardly in honesty speculate with the price of my commission.'

‘No!—oh! You could never be comfortable in doing so.’

‘If it was only Percy that was concerned, I might get him to risk it, and then double it, and set him and Theodora going handsomely; but—No, it is of no use to think about it. I wish it could be—’

‘You are quite right, I am sure.’

‘The thing that settles it with me is this,’ continued Arthur. ‘It is a way of business that would throw me with the old set, and there is no safety but in keeping clear of them. I might have been saved all this if I had not been ass enough to put my neck into Gardner’s noose that unlucky Derby-day. I had promised never to bet again after I married, and this is the end of it! So I think I have no right to run into temptation again, even for the chance of getting clear. Do you?’

‘You are quite right,’ she repeated. ‘If the money is not our own, it would only be another sort—’

‘Of gambling. Ay! And though in those days I did not see things as I do now, and Hunt is another sort of fellow, I fancy you had rather not trust me, mamma?’ said he, looking with a rather sad though arch smile into her face.

‘Dear Arthur, you know—’

‘I know I won’t trust myself,’ he answered, trying to laugh it off. ‘And you’ll be a good child, and not cry for the cottage?’

‘Oh, no! Mamma and I both thought there might possibly be considerations against it, especially as the girls grow up.’

‘That’s right. I could not bear giving up what you seemed to fancy. but we will visit them when we want a mouthful of air, and Annette and Octavia shall come and stay with us. I should like to show Octavia a little of the world.’

‘Then, we shall go on as we are?’

‘Yes; spend as little as may be, and pay off so much a year. If we keep no horses,

that is so much clear gain.’

‘That seems the best way; but I almost fear your being well without riding.’

‘No fear of that! I don’t want to go out, and you never do. We will take our long walks, and, as Percy says, I will read and be rational. I mean to begin Johnnie’s Latin as soon as we are settled in. Why, I quite look forward to it.’

‘How delighted Johnnie will be!’

‘We shall do famously!’ repeated Arthur. ‘Nothing like home, after all.’

Violet did not think he quite knew what he undertook, and her heart sank at the idea of a London winter, with his health and spirits failing for want of his usual resources. He imagined himself perfectly recovered; but when he went the next day to show himself to the doctor, the stethoscope revealed that the damage was not so entirely removed but that the greatest care would be necessary for some time to come. It sat lightly on him; his spirits depended on his sensations, and he had no fears but that a few months would remove all danger; and Violet would say no word of misgiving. She would have felt that to remonstrate would have been to draw him back, after his first step in the path of resolute self-denial.

CHAPTER 17

On Sunday, Heaven’s gate stands ope, Blessings are plentiful and rife, More plentiful than hope. —G. HERBERT

‘Five years! How little can letters convey the true state of affairs! They can but record events—not their effects nor the insensible changes that may have taken place. My aunt’s death I know, but not what my mother is without her. I have heard of my father’s cares, but I have yet to see whether he is aged or broken. And Theodora, she has had many trials, but what can she be—tamed and refined as they tell me she is? I wish I could have gone through London to see Arthur and Violet.

There again is the anxious question, whether his repentance is really such as his touching letter led me to hope. One at least I trust to see unchanged—my sweet sister, my best correspondent! Foolish it is to cling to the hope of meeting her again, as that vision of loveliness—that creature of affection and simplicity, that first awoke me to a return of cheerfulness! The boy, too—my godson, my child! he has been the dream of my solitude. At last, here is the village. How bright its welcome, this summer evening! Old faces!—may those at home be as unchanged. Alteration enough here! Even at this distance I see the ruin; but how richly green the park! How fresh the trees, and the shade of the avenue! This is home, thanks to Him who has led me safely back. Whom do I see yonder in the avenue? A gentleman leading a pony, and a little boy on it! Can it be?—impossible! Yet the step and manner are just as he used to lead Violet's horse, Surely, it must be he! I must meet him and hear all before going up to the house, it will prepare them. Stop here.

He was out of the carriage in a moment, and walking down the avenue, feeling as if he only now was in the right way home; but a misgiving crossing him as he came nearer the two figures that had attracted him—there was less resemblance on a nearer view than in the general air when further off.

A shout—'Hollo, John!' settled all doubts.

'Arthur! is it you?' and the brothers' hands were locked together.

'Here is a gentleman you know something of, and who has thought very much of you,' continued Arthur, proudly. 'There, is not he like her?' as he tried to give a cock-up to the limp, flapping straw hat, under shade of which Johnnie was glowing up to his curls.

'Her very look!' said John. 'How is she, Arthur, and all of them?'

'All well. Have you not been at home yet!'

'No; I saw you here, and I could not help coming to meet you, that I might know if all was right.'

‘You would have found no one at home, unless my mother and Violet are come in. They are always creeping about together.’

‘Where is my father?’

‘Looking after the workmen at the farm. We left him there because it was Johnnie’s supper-time. Why, John, what a hale, middle-aged looking subject you are grown! Was it not wonderful sagacity in me to know you?’

‘Greater than mine,’ said John. ‘My instinct was failing as I came near. Are you really well?’

‘Never better. Johnnie and his mamma nursed me well again, and Helvellyn breezes blew away the remainder. When did you land?’

‘This morning. We put in at Liverpool, and I came on at once. How is my mother? She had not been well.’

‘She was ailing all the winter, but a house full of grandchildren seems to have cured her completely. You will stare to see her a perfect slave to—our eldest girl,’ said Arthur, checking himself as he was about to speak the name, and John turned to the child.

‘Well, Johnnie, and are you fond of riding?’

‘With papa holding the rein,’ and Johnnie edged closer to his father.

‘Ay! I hope your uncle did not expect a godson like your dear Coeur de Lion, whom you have been romancing about all the way home. What is the country your uncle has seen, and you want to see, Johnnie?’

‘Please, don’t now, papa,’ whispered Johnnie, colouring deeply.

‘Yes, yes, you shall have it out when you are better acquainted,’ said Arthur, patting both boy and pony. ‘Well, John, is this the fellow you expected?’

John smiled, but before he could answer, a voice from behind, shouting to them to wait, caused him to turn, exclaiming, ‘Percy! I did not know he was here! And

Theodora!'

'He came a day or two ago—'

Theodora blushed crimson, and all the glad words of welcome were spoken by Percy; but he then fell into the background, taking charge of Johnnie, while the other three walked on together, Theodora's arm within that of her eldest brother.

'Thank you for your letter,' said Arthur. 'It did me great good.'

'My impulse was to have set out at once on receiving yours, but I was obliged to wait to get things into train for going on without me; and since that there have been delays of steamers.'

'You could not have come at a better time. We only wanted you to make us complete—'

Arthur was interrupted by a joyous outcry of 'Papa! papa!' from a little group on the other side of the road into which they were emerging.

'Ay! and who else! Look at this fellow!' cried he, catching from Sarah's arm, and holding aloft an elf, whose round mouth and eyes were all laughter, and sturdy limbs all movement, the moment he appeared. 'There! have we not improved in babies since your time! And here is a round dumpling that calls itself Anna. And that piece of mischief is grandmamma's girl, Aunt Theodora's double.'

Those flashing black eyes were not the ideal John had attached to the name which Arthur had paused to speak; but it would have been hard to be disappointed by the bright creature, who stood on the raised foot-path, pretending to hide her face with a bunch of tall foxgloves, and peeping out behind them to see whether she was noticed.

'The introduction is all on one side,' said Percy. 'Do you know who it is, Helen?'

Helen stuck her chin into her neck. She would tell her surmise to no one but Johnnie, who had persuaded Mr. Fotheringham to lift him from horseback, where he was

never at ease with any one but papa. He looked up smiling: ‘Helen thinks it must be Uncle Martindale, because papa is so glad.’

Helen ran away, but returned for a ride; and when the party, that had gathered like a snow-ball, came in front of the cottage, Percy was holding both little sisters on the pony at once, Theodora still leaning on her eldest brother’s arm, Johnnie gravely walking on the foot-path, studying his uncle, and Arthur, with the young Arthur pulling his whiskers all the time, was walking forwards and backwards, round and about his brother, somewhat in the ecstatic aimless fashion of a dog who meets his master.

He was the first to exclaim, ‘There she is! Run on, Johnnie, tell mamma and grandmamma whom we have here.’

The first greeting was left exclusively to Lady Martindale. When John’s attention was again at liberty, Violet was standing by her husband, saying, with a sweet smile of playful complaint, ‘And you have shown him all the children and I was not there!’

‘Never mind. They will show off much better with you, you jealous woman. What does John think to hear you scolding?’

‘Has he seen all the children?’ said Lady Martindale, taking up the note. ‘Oh! what is Mr. Fotheringham doing with Helen and Annie? It is very dangerous!’

And Lady Martindale hastened to watch over the little girls, who, of course, were anything but grateful for her care, while Violet was asking John about his voyage, and inquiring after the interests he had left in Barbuda.

The first sight of her was a shock. The fragile roses that had dwelt on his imagination had faded away, and she was now, indeed, a beautiful woman,—but not the creature of smiles and tears whom he remembered. The pensive expression, the stamp of anxiety, and the traces of long-continued over-exertion, were visible enough to prove to him that his fears had been fulfilled, and that she had suffered

too deeply ever to return to what she had once been.

Yet never had John so enjoyed an arrival, nor felt so thoroughly at home, as when his father had joined them, full of quiet and heartfelt gladness. Stiffness and formality seemed to have vanished with the state rooms; and there was no longer the circle on company terms, for Lady Martindale herself was almost easy, and Theodora's words, though few, were devoid of the sullen dignity of old times. Violet's timidity, too, was gone, and the agitated wistful glances she used to steal towards her husband, had now become looks of perfect, confiding, yet fostering affection. John saw her appealed to, consulted, and put forward as important to each and all of the family party, as if every one of them depended on her as he had been wont to do, while she still looked as retiring as ever, and taken up by watching that the children behaved well.

The occupation of the evening was the looking over plans for the new house. Lord Martindale had them all ready, and John soon perceived that his father's wishes were that he should prefer those which most nearly reproduced the original building, pulled down to please Mrs. Nesbit. Lady Martindale had surprised them by making from memory a beautiful sketch of the former house; and her husband, to whom each line produced a fresh hoard of reminiscences, was almost disappointed that John's recollection did not go back far enough to recognize the likeness, though he was obliged to confess that not a wall of it was standing when he was two years old.

The general vote was, of course, that Old Martindale should be renewed,—and it was to be begun—when?

'When ways and means are found,' said Lord Martindale. 'We must talk over that another time, John.'

John, as he bade Theodora good night, murmured thanks for the safety of all the properties which he had been surprised to find in the room prepared for him. Her eyes were liquid as she faltered her answer.

‘O, John, it was such a pleasure! How much you have to forgive! How right you were, and how wrong I was!’

‘Hush! not now,’ said John, kindly.

‘Yes, now, I cannot look at you till I have said it. I have felt the truth of every word you said, and I beg your pardon for all that has passed.’

He pressed her hand in answer, saying, ‘It was my fault. But all is well now, and you know how I rejoice.’

‘Everything is everybody’s fault,’ said Percy, joining him; ‘but we must not stop to battle the point, or Mr. Hugh Martindale’s housekeeper will be irate. Good night, Theodora.’

Percy and John were quartered at the Vicarage, and walked thither, at first in silence, till the former said, ‘Well, what do you think of it?’

‘The best coming home I ever had, and the most surprising. I have seen so much that is unexpected, that I don’t know how to realize it.’

‘Heartsease,’ was Percy’s brief reply.

‘Violet? You don’t mean it!’

‘The history of these years is this,’ said Percy, making an emphatic mark on the gravel with his stick. ‘Every one else has acted, more or less, idiotically. She has gone about softening, healing, guarding, stirring up the saving part of each one’s disposition. If, as she avers, you and Helen formed her, you gave a blessing to all of us.’

‘How can this be? No one has spoken of her power.’

‘It is too feminine to be recognized. When you talk to the others you will see I am right. I will speak for myself. I verily believe that but for her I should have been by this time an unbearable disappointed misanthrope.’

‘A likely subject,’ said John, laughing.

‘You cannot estimate the shock our rupture gave me, nor tell how I tried to say “don’t care,” and never saw my savage spite till her gentle rebuke showed it to me. Her rectitude and unselfishness kept up my faith in woman, and saved me from souring and hardening. On the other hand, her firmness won Theodora’s respect, her softness, her affection. She led where I drove, acted the sun where I acted Boreas; and it is she who has restored us to each other.’

‘Highly as I esteemed Violet, I little thought to hear this! My father wrote that he regretted Theodora’s having been left to one so little capable of controlling her.’

‘Lord Martindale is a very good man, but he has no more discrimination of character than my old cat!’ cried Percy. ‘I beg your pardon, John, but the fact was patent. Mrs. Martindale is the only person who has ever been a match for Theodora. She conquered her, made her proud to submit, and then handed her over to the lawful authorities. If Lord Martindale has an unrivalled daughter, he ought to know whom to thank for it.’

‘I hope he appreciates Violet.’

‘In a sort he does. He fully appreciates her in her primary vocation, as who would not, who had watched her last winter, and who sees what she has made her husband.’

‘Then you are satisfied about Arthur?’

‘Better than I ever thought to be.’

‘And, Percy, what is this that he tells me of your having rescued him at your own expense?’

‘Has he told you all that?’ exclaimed Percy.

‘He wished me to know it in case of his death.’

‘I could not help it, John,’ said Percy, in apology. ‘If you had seen her and her babies, and had to leave him in that condition on her hands, you would have seen

there was nothing for it but to throw a sop to the hounds, so that at least they might leave him to die in peace.'

'It saved him! But why did you object to my father's hearing of it?'

'Because I knew he would dislike any sense of obligation, and that he could not conveniently pay it off. Besides, we had to keep Arthur's mouth shut out of consideration for the blood-vessel, so I told him to let it rest till you should come. I fancy we have all been watching for you as a sort of "Deus ex Machina" to clear up the last act of the drama, though how you are to do so, I cannot conceive.'

The next day was Sunday, almost the first truly homelike Sunday of John's life. Not only was there the churchgoing among friends and kindred after long separation, but the whole family walked thither together, as John had never known them do before; and with his mother on his arm, his little godson holding Lord Martindale's hand, Helen skipping between her father and mother, Theodora gentle and subdued, it seemed as if now, for the first time, they had become a household of the same mind.

It was one of the most brilliant days of summer—a cloudless sky of deep blue sunshine, in which the trees seemed to bask, and the air, though too fresh to be sultry, disposing to inaction. After the second service, there was a lingering on the lawn, and desultory talk about the contrast to the West Indian Sundays, and the black woolly-headed congregation responding and singing so heartily, and so uncontrollably gay and merry.

At length, when Johnnie and Helen, who had an insatiable appetite for picaninny stories, had been summoned to supper, John and Violet found that the rest of their companions had dispersed, and that they were alone.

'I told you that Fanshawe came home with me,' said John. 'The new arrangements have increased his income;' then, as Violet looked up eagerly and hopefully,—'he made me a confidence, at which I see you guess.'

'I only hope mamma will not be anxious about the climate. I must tell her how well

it has agreed with you.’

‘I am glad that you think there are hopes for him. It has been a long attachment, but he thought it wrong to engage her affections while he had no prospect of being able to marry.’

‘It is what we guessed!’ said Violet. ‘Dear Annette! If he is what I remember him, she must be happy.’

‘I can hardly speak highly enough of him. I have found him a most valuable friend, and am sincerely glad to be connected with him; but, tell me, is not this the sister about whom Percy made a slight mistake!’

‘Oh! do you know that story? Yes, it was dear Annette! Otherwise I should never have known about Mr. Fanshawe. It was only a vague preference, but it was very fortunate that it prevented any attachment to Percy, or it would have been hard to decide what would be right.’

‘Percy was much obliged to you.’

‘He was very kind not to be angry. I could have wished it exceedingly, but I am so glad that I did not persuade Annette, and particularly glad of this, for she has been out of spirits, and rather wasting her bloom at home, without much definite employment.’

‘I understand. And did you never wish that you had influenced her otherwise?’

‘If Percy and Theodora had not been reconciled, I thought I might have done so. It did seem a long time to go on in doubt whether I had acted for her happiness.’

‘But you acted in faith that the straightforward path was the safest.’

‘And now I am so thankful.’ She paused, they were passing the drawing-room, and saw Arthur lying asleep on the sofa. She stepped in at the French window, threw a light shawl over him, and closed the door. ‘He did not sleep till daylight this morning,’ she said, returning to John. ‘Any excitement gives him restless nights.’

‘So I feared when I saw those two red spots on his cheeks in the evening. I know them well! But how white and thin he looks! I want to hear what you think of him. My father considers him fully recovered. Do you?’

Violet shook her head. ‘He is as well as could be hoped after such an illness,’ she said; ‘and Dr. L. tells him there is no confirmed disease, but that his chest is in a very tender state, and he must take the utmost care. That delightful mountain air at Lassonthwayte entirely took away his cough, and it has not returned, though he is more languid and tired than he was in the north, but he will not allow it, his spirits are so high.’

‘I should like you to spend the winter abroad.’

‘That cannot be. If he is able in October, he must join, and the regiment is likely to be in London all the winter,’ said Violet, with a sigh.

‘Then he does not mean to sell out?’

‘No, we cannot afford it. We must live as little expensively as we can, to get clear of the difficulties. Indeed, now the horses are gone, it is such a saving that we have paid off some bills already.’

‘Has Arthur really parted with his horses?’

‘With all of them, even that beautiful mare. I am afraid he will miss her very much, but I cannot say a word against it, for I am sure it is right.’

‘ALL the horses?’ repeated John. ‘What are you to do without a carriage horse?’

‘Oh! that is nothing new. We have not had one fit for me to use, since the old bay fell lame three years ago. That does not signify at all, for walking with the children suits me much better.’

John was confounded. He had little notion of existence without carriages and horses.

‘I shall have Arthur to walk with now. He promises Johnnie and me delightful walks in the park,’ said Violet, cheerfully, ‘if he is but well.’

‘Ah! I see you dread that winter.’

‘I do!’ came from the bottom of Violet’s heart, spoken under her breath; then, as if regretting her admission, she smiled and said, ‘Perhaps there is no need! He has no fears, and it will be only too pleasant to have him at home. I don’t think about it,’ added she, replying to the anxious eyes that sought to read her fears. ‘This summer is too happy to be spoilt with what may be only fancies, and after the great mercies we have received, it would be too bad to distrust and grieve over the future. I have so often thanked you for teaching me the lesson of the lilies.’

‘I fear you have had too much occasion to practise it.’

‘It could not be too much!’ said Violet. ‘But often I do not know what would have become of me, if I had not been obliged, as a duty, to put aside fretting thoughts, and been allowed to cast the shadow of the cross on my vexations.’

His eye fell on a few bright links of gold peeping out round her neck—‘You have THAT still. May I see it?’

She took off the chain and placed it in his hand. ‘Thanks for it, more than ever!’ she said. ‘My friend and preacher in time of need it has often been, and Johnnie’s too.’

‘Johnnie?’

‘Yes, you know the poor little man has had a great deal of illness. This is the first spring he has been free from croup; and you would hardly believe what a comfort that cross has been to him. He always feels for the chain, that he may squeeze Aunt Helen’s cross. At one time I was almost afraid that it was a superstition, he was such a very little fellow; but when I talked to him, he said, “I like it because of our Blessed Saviour. It makes me not mind the pain so much, because you said that was like Him, and would help to make me good if I was patient.” Then I remembered what I little understood, when you told me that the cross was his baptismal gift to sweeten his heritage of pain.’

John was much affected. ‘Helen’s cross has indeed borne abundant fruit!’ said he.

‘I told you how even I forgot it at first in the fire, and how it was saved by Johnnie’s habit of grasping it in his troubles.’

‘I am glad it was he!’

‘Theodora said that he alone was worthy. But I am afraid to hear such things said of him; I am too ready without them to think too much of my boy.’

‘It would be difficult,’ began John; then smiling, ‘perhaps I ought to take to myself the same caution; the thought of Johnnie has been so much to me, and now I see him he is so unlike my expectations, and yet so far beyond them. I feel as if I wanted a larger share of him than you and his father can afford me.’

‘I don’t think we shall be jealous,’ was the happy answer. ‘Arthur is very proud of your admiration of Master Johnnie. You know we have always felt as if you had a right in him.’

Percy and Theodora here returned from the park, rejoicing to find others as tardy in going in as themselves; Arthur, awakened by the voices, came out, and as the others hurried in, asked John what they had been talking about.

‘Of many things,’ said John; ‘much of my godson.’

‘Ay!’ said Arthur; ‘did you not wonder how anything so good can belong to me?’

John smiled, and said, ‘His goodness belongs to nothing here.’

‘Nay, it is no time to say that after talking to his mother,’ said Arthur; ‘though I know what you mean, and she would not let me say so. Well, I am glad you are come, for talks with you are the greatest treat to her. She seemed to be gathering them up again at Ventnor, and was always telling me of them. She declares they taught her everything good; though that, of course, I don’t believe, you know,’ he added, smiling.

‘No; there was much in which she needed no teaching, and a few hints here and there do not deserve what she ascribes to them.’

‘John,’ said Arthur, coming nearer to him, and speaking low, ‘she and her boy are more perfect creatures than you can guess, without knowing the worst of me. You warned me that I must make her happy, and you saw how it was the first year. It has been worse since that. I have neglected them, let them deny themselves, ruined them, been positively harsh to that angel of a boy; and how they could love me, and be patient with me throughout, is what I cannot understand, though—though I can feel it.’

‘Truly,’ thought John, as Arthur hastily quitted him, ashamed of his emotion, ‘if Violet be my scholar, she has far surpassed her teacher! Strange that so much should have arisen apparently from my attempt to help and cheer the poor dispirited girl, in that one visit to Ventnor, which I deemed so rash a venture of my own comfort—useless, self-indulgent wretch that I was. She has done the very deeds that I had neglected. My brother and sister, even my mother and Helen’s brother, all have come under her power of firm meekness—all, with one voice, are ready to “rise up and call her blessed!” Nay, are not these what Helen would have most wished to effect, and is it not her memorials that have been the instruments of infusing that spirit into Violet? These are among the works that follow her, or, as they sung this evening—

“For seeds are sown of glorious light, A future harvest for the just, And gladness for the heart that’s right To recompense its pious trust.”’

And in gladness did he stand before the house that had been destined as the scene of his married life, and look forth on the churchyard where Helen slept. He was no longer solitary, since he had begun to bear the burdens of others; for no sooner did he begin to work, than he felt that he worked with her.

CHAPTER 18

That we, whose work commenced in tears, May see our labours thrive, Till finished

with success, to make Our drooping hearts revive. Though he despond that sows his grain, Yet, doubtless, he shall come To bind his full-ear'd sheaves, and bring The joyful harvest home. —Psalm 126. New Version

Business cares soon began. Arthur consented to allow his brother to lay his embarrassments before his father. 'Do as you please,' he said; 'but make him understand that I am not asking him to help me out of the scrape. He does all he can for me, and cannot afford more; or, if he could, Theodora ought to be thought of first. All I wish is, that something should be secured to Violet and the children, and that, if I don't get clear in my lifetime, these debts may not be left for Johnnie.

'That you may rely on,' said John. 'I wish I could help you; but there were many things at Barbuda that seemed so like fancies of my own, that I could not ask my father to pay for them, and I have not much at my disposal just now.'

'It is a good one to hear you apologizing to me!' said Arthur, laughing, but rather sadly, as John carried off the ominous pocket-book to the study, hoping to effect great things for his brother; and, as the best introduction, he began by producing the letter written at Christmas. Lord Martindale was touched by the commencement, but was presently lost in surprise on discovering Percy's advance.

'Why could he not have written to me? Did he think I was not ready to help my own son?'

'It was necessary to act without loss of time.'

'If it were necessary to pay down the sum, why not tell me of it, instead of letting poor Arthur give him a bond that is worth nothing?'

'I fancy, if he had any notion of regaining Theodora, he was unwilling you or she should know the extent of the obligation.'

'It is well I do know it. I thought it unsatisfactory to hear of no profit, after all the talk there has been about his books. I feared it was an empty trade: but this is something like. Five thousand! He is a clever fellow after all!'

‘I hope he may soon double it,’ said John, amused at this way of estimating Percy’s powers.

‘Well, it was a friendly act,’ continued Lord Martindale. ‘A little misjudged in the manner, perhaps; but if you had seen the state Arthur was in—’

‘I should have forgiven Percy?’ said John, with a slightly ironical smile, that made his father laugh.

‘Not that I am blaming him,’ he said; ‘but it shall be paid him at once if it comes to selling Wyelands. You know one cannot be under an obligation of this sort to a lad whom one has seen grow up in the village.’

‘Perhaps he wishes it to be considered as all in the family.’

‘So it is. That is the worst of it. It is so much out of what he would have had with Theodora, and little enough there is for her. A dead loss! Could not Arthur have had more sense, at his age, and with all those children! What’s all this?’ reading on in dismay. ‘Seven thousand more at least! I’ll have nothing to do with it!’

An hour after, John came out into the verandah, where Percy was reading, and asked if he knew where Arthur was.

‘He got into a ferment of anxiety, and Violet persuaded him to walk it off. He is gone out with Johnnie and Helen. Well, how has he fared?’

‘Not as well as I could wish. My father will not do more towards the debts than paying you.’

‘Ho! I hope he does not think I acted very impertinently towards him?’ John laughed, and Percy continued,

‘Seriously, I believe it is the impertinence hardest to forgive, and I shall be glad when the subject is done with. That will be so much off Arthur’s mind.’

‘I wish more was; but I had no idea that there was so little available money amongst us. All I can gain in his favour is, that the estate is to be charged with five hundred

pounds a year for Violet in case of his death; and there's his five thousand pounds for the children; but, for the present debts, my father will only say that, perhaps he may help, if he sees that Arthur is exerting himself to economize and pay them off.'

'Quite as much as could reasonably be expected. The discipline will be very good for him.'

'If it does not kill him,' said John, sighing. 'My father does not realize the shock to his health. He is in the state now that I was in when we went abroad, and—'

'And I firmly believe that if you had had anything to do but nurse your cough, you would have been in much better health.'

'But it is not only for Arthur that I am troubled. What can be worse than economizing in London, in their position? What is to become of Violet, without carriage, without—'

Percy laughed. 'Without court-dresses and powdered footmen? No, no, John. Depend upon it, as long as Violet has her husband safe at home, she wants much fewer necessaries of life than you do.'

'Well, I will try to believe it right. I see it cannot be otherwise.'

Arthur was not of this mind. He was grateful for his father's forgiveness and assistance, and doubly so for the provision for his wife, hailing it as an unexpected and undeserved kindness. Lord Martindale was more pleased by his manner in their interview than ever he had been before. Still there were many difficulties: money was to be raised; and the choice between selling, mortgaging, or cutting down timber, seemed to go to Lord Martindale's heart. He had taken such pride in the well-doing of his estate! He wished to make further retrenchments in the stable and garden arrangements; but, as he told John, he knew not how to reduce the enormous expense of the latter without giving more pain to Lady Martindale than he could bear to inflict.

John offered to sound her, and discover whether the notion of dismissing Armstrong

and his crew would be really so dreadful. He found that she winced at the mention of her orchids and ferns, they recalled the thought of her aunt's love for them, and she had not been in the conservatories for months. John said a word or two on the cost of keeping them up, and the need of prudence, with a view to providing for Arthur's children. It was the right chord. She looked up, puzzled: her mathematical knowledge had never descended to £.s.d.

'Is there a difficulty? I thought my dear aunt had settled all her property on dear little Johnnie.'

'Yes, but only when he comes to the title; and for the others there is absolutely nothing but Arthur's five thousand pounds to be divided among them all.'

'You don't say so, John? Poor little dears! there is scarcely more than a thousand a-piece. Surely, there is my own property—'

'I am sorry to say it was settled so as to go with the title. The only chance for them is what can be saved—'

'Save everything, then,' exclaimed Lady Martindale. 'I am sure I would give up anything, if I did but know what. We have not had leaders for a long time past, and Theodora's dumb boy does as well as the second footman; Standaloft left me because she could not bear to live in a cottage; Grimes suits me very well; and I do not think I could do quite without a maid.'

'No, indeed, my dear mother,' said John, smiling; 'that is the last thing to be thought of. All my father wished to know was, whether it would grieve you if we gave the care of the gardens to somewhat less of a first-rate genius?'

'Not in the least,' said Lady Martindale, emphatically. 'I shall never bear to return to those botanical pursuits. It was for her sake. Dear little Helen and the rest must be the first consideration. Look here! she really has a very good notion of drawing.'

John perceived that his mother was happier than she had ever been, in waiting upon the children, and enjoying the company of Violet, whose softness exactly suited her;

while her decision was a comfortable support to one who had all her life been trained round a stake. They drove and walked together; and Lady Martindale, for the first time, was on foot in the pretty lanes of her own village; she had even stopped at cottage doors, when Violet had undertaken a message while Theodora was out with Percy, and one evening she appeared busy with a small lilac frock that Helen imagined herself to be making. Lady Martindale was much too busy with the four black-eyed living blossoms to set her heart on any griffin-headed or monkey-faced orchids; and her lord found that she was one of those who would least be sensible of his reductions. Theodora was continually surprised to see how much more successful than herself Violet was in interesting her, and keeping her cheerful. Perhaps it was owing to her own vehemence; but with the best intentions she had failed in producing anything like the present contentment. And, somehow, Lord and Lady Martindale seemed so much more at ease together, and to have so much more to say to each other, that their Cousin Hugh one day observed, it was their honeymoon.

‘I say, John,’ said Percy, one night, as they were walking to the vicarage, ‘I wish you could find me something to do in the West Indies.’

‘I should be very sorry to export you—’

‘I must do something!’ exclaimed Percy. ‘I was thinking of emigration; but your sister could not go in the present state of things here; and she will not hear of my going and returning when I have built a nest for her.’

‘No, indeed!’ said John. ‘Your powers were not given for the hewing down of forests.’

‘Were not they?’ said Percy, stretching and clenching a hard muscular wrist and hand.

‘“A man’s a man for a’ that!”

I tell you, John, I am wearying for want of work—hard, downright, substantial

work!’

‘Well, you have it, have you not?’

‘Pshaw! Pegasus won’t let himself out on hire. I can’t turn my sport into my trade. When I find myself writing for the lucre of gain, the whole spirit leaves me.’

‘That is what you have been doing for some time.’

‘No such thing. Literature was my holiday friend at first; and if she put a gold piece or two into my pocket, it was not what I sought her for. Then she came to my help to beguile what I thought was an interval of waiting for the serious task of life. I wrote what I thought was wanted. I sent it forth as my way of trying what service I could do in my generation. But now, when I call it my profession, when I think avowedly, what am I to get by it?—Faugh! the Muse is disgusted; and when I go to church, I hang my head at “Lay not up to yourselves treasures upon earth—“’

‘A fine way you found of laying them up!’

‘It proved the way to get them back.’

‘I do not understand your objection. You had laid up that sum—your fair earning.’

‘There it was: it had accumulated without positive intention on my part; I mean that I had of course taken my due, and not found occasion to spend it. It is the writing solely for gain, with malice prepense to save it,—that is the stumbling-block. I don’t feel as if I was justified in it, nay, I cannot do it; my ideas do not flow even on matters wont to interest me most. It was all very well when waiting on Arthur was an object; but after he was gone, I found it out. I could not turn to writing, and if I did, out came things I was ashamed of. No! an able-bodied man of five-and-thirty is meant for tougher work than review and history-mongering! I have been teaching a ragged school, helping at any charities that needed a hand; but it seems amateur work, and I want to be in the stream of life again!’

‘I will not say what most would—it was a pity you resigned your former post.’

‘No pity at all. That has made a pair of good folks very happy. If I had kept certain hasty judgments to myself, I should not have been laid on the shelf. It is no more than I deserve, and no doubt it is good for me to be humbled and set aside; but work I will get of some kind! I looked in at a great factory the other day, and longed to apply for a superintendent’s place, only I thought it might not be congruous with an Honourable for a wife.’

‘You don’t mean to give up writing?’

‘No, to make it my play. I feel like little Annie, when she called herself puss without a corner. I have serious thoughts of the law. Heigh ho! Good night.’

John grieved over the disappointed tone so unusual in the buoyant Percy, and revolved various devices for finding employment for him; but was obliged to own that a man of his age, whatever his powers, when once set aside from the active world, finds it difficult to make for himself another career. It accounted to John for the degree of depression which he detected in Theodora’s manner, which, at all times rather grave, did not often light up into animation, and never into her quaint moods of eccentric determination; she was helpful and kind, but submissive and indifferent to what passed around her.

In fact, Theodora felt the disappointment of which Percy complained, more uniformly than he did himself. He thought no more of it when conversation was going on, when a service was to be done to any living creature, or when he was playing with the children; but the sense of his vexation always hung upon her; perhaps the more because she felt that her own former conduct deserved no happiness, and that his future was involved in hers. She tried to be patient, but she could not be gay.

Her scheme had been for Percy to take a farm, but he answered that he had lived too much abroad, and in towns, to make agriculture succeed in England. In the colonies perhaps,—but her involuntary exclamation of dismay at the idea of letting him go

alone, had made him at once abandon the project. When, however, she saw how enforced idleness preyed on him, and with how little spirit he turned to his literary pursuits, she began to think it her duty to persuade him to go; and to this she had on this very night, with a great effort, made up her mind.

‘There is space in his composition for more happiness than depends on me,’ said she to Violet. ‘Exertion, hope, trust in me will make him happy; and he shall not waste his life in loitering here for my sake.’

‘Dear Theodora, I fear it will cost you a great deal.’

‘Never mind,’ said Theodora; ‘I am more at peace than I have been for years. Percy has suffered enough through me already.’

Violet looked up affectionately at her fine countenance, and gave one of the mute caresses that Theodora liked from her, though she could have borne them from no one else.

Theodora smiled, sighed, and then, shaking off the dejected tone, said, ‘Well, I suppose you will have a letter from Wrangerton to tell you it is settled. I wonder if you will go to the wedding. Oh! Violet, if you had had one particle of selfishness or pettiness, how many unhappy people you would have made!’

Violet’s last letter from home had announced that Mr. Fanshawe had come to stay with Mr. Jones, and she was watching eagerly for the next news. She went down-stairs quickly, in the morning, to seek for her own letters among the array spread on the sideboard.

Percy was alone in the room, standing by the window. He started at her entrance, and hardly gave time for a good morning, before he asked where Theodora was.

‘I think she is not come in. I have not seen her.’

He made a step to the door as if to go and meet her.

‘There is nothing wrong, I hope.’

‘I hope not! I hope there is no mistake. Look here.’

He held up, with an agitated grasp, a long envelope with the mighty words, ‘On her Majesty’s service;’ and before Violet’s eyes he laid a letter offering him a diplomatic appointment in Italy.

‘The very thing above all others I would have chosen. Capital salary! Excellent house! I was staying there a week with the fellow who had it before. A garden of gardens. Orange walks,—fountains,—a view of the Apennines and Mediterranean at once. It is perfection. But what can have led any one to pitch upon me?’

Arthur had come down in the midst, and leant over his rejoicing wife to read the letter, while Percy vehemently shook his hand, exclaiming, ‘There! See! There’s the good time come! Did you ever see the like, Arthur! But how on earth could they have chosen me? I know nothing of this man—he knows nothing of me.’

‘Such compliments to your abilities and classical discoveries,’ said Violet.

‘Much good they would do without interest! I would give twenty pounds to know who has got me this.’

‘Ha! said Arthur, looking at the signature. ‘Did not he marry some of the Delaval connection?’

‘Yes,’ said Violet; ‘Lady Mary—Lord St. Erme’s aunt. He was Lord St. Erme’s guardian.’

‘Then that is what it is,’ said Arthur, sententiously. ‘Did you not tell me that St. Erme had been examining you about Percy?’

‘Yes, he asked me about his writings, and how long he had been at Constantinople,’ said Violet, rather shyly, almost sorry that her surprise had penetrated and proclaimed what the Earl no doubt meant to be a secret, especially when she saw that Percy’s exultation was completely damped. There was no time for answer, for others were entering, and with a gesture to enforce silence, he pocketed the papers,

and said nothing on the subject all breakfast-time. Even while Violet regaled herself with Annette's happy letter, she had anxious eyes and thoughts for the other sister, now scarcely less to her than Annette.

She called off the children from dancing round Uncle Percy after breakfast, and watched him walk off with Theodora to the side arcade in the avenue that always had especial charms for them.

'Theodora, here is something for you to decide.'

'Why, Percy!' as she read, 'this is the very thing! What! Is it not a good appointment? Why do you hesitate?'

'It is an excellent appointment, but this is the doubt. Do you see that name? There can be no question that this is owing to Lord St. Erme.'

'I see!' said Theodora, blushing deeply.

'I wish to be guided entirely by your feeling.'

They walked the whole length of the avenue and turned again before she spoke. At last she said—'Lord St. Erme is a generous person, and should be dealt with generously. I have given him pain by my pride and caprice, and I had rather give him no more. No doubt it is his greatest pleasure to make us happy, and I think he ought to be allowed to have it. But let it be as you please.'

'I expected you to speak in this way. You think that he does not deserve to be wounded by my refusing this because it comes from him.'

'That is my feeling, but if you do not like—I believe you do not. Refuse it, then.'

'To say I like the obligation would not be true; but I know it is right that I should conquer the foolish feeling. After all, it is public work that I am to do, and it would be wrong and absurd to refuse it, because it is he who has brought my name forward.'

'You take it, then?'

‘Yes, standing reproved, and I might almost say punished, for my past disdain of this generous man.’

‘If you say so, what must I?’

Percy resolved that, after consulting Lord Martindale, he would at once set off for London, to signify his acceptance, and make the necessary inquiries. Theodora asked whether he meant to appear conscious of the influence exerted in his favour. ‘I will see whether it was directly employed; if so, it would be paltry to seem to appear unconscious. I had rather show that I appreciate his feeling, and if I feel an obligation, acknowledge it.

‘I wonder, Theodora,’ said Arthur, ‘that you allow him to go. He is so fond of giving away whatever any one cries for, that you will find yourself made over to St. Erme.’

In three days’ time Percy returned; Theodora went with Arthur and Violet to meet him at the station.

‘Well!’ said he, as they drove off, ‘he is a very fine fellow, after all! I don’t know what is to be done for him! I wish we could find a Theodora for him.’

‘I told you so, Theodora!’ cried Arthur. ‘He has presented you.’

‘There were two words to that bargain!’ said Percy. ‘He must be content to wait for Helen.’

‘So instead of my sister, you dispose of my daughter,’ said Arthur.

‘Poor little Helen!’ said Violet. ‘Imagine the age he will be when she is eighteen!’

‘He will never grow old!’ said Percy. ‘He has the poet’s gift of perpetual youth, the spring of life and fancy that keeps men young. He has not grown a day older since this time five years. I found he had taken a great deal of trouble about me, recommended me strenuously, brought forward my papers on foreign policy, and been at much pains to confute that report that was afloat against me. He treated my appointment as a personal favour; and he is a man of weight now. You were right,

Theodora; it would have been abominable to sulk in our corner, because we had behaved ill ourselves, and to meet such noble-spirited kindness as an offence.'

'I am very glad that you feel it so,' returned Theodora.

'Now that I have seen him I do so completely. And another thing I have to thank you for, Violet, that you saved me from laying it on any thicker in that criticism of his poetry.'

'I told you how he said that you had done him a great deal of good.'

'A signal instance—almost a single instance of candour. But there is a nobility of mind in him above small resentments and jealousies. Ay! there never will be anybody fit for him but Helen!'

'And Helen brought up to be much better than her aunt,' said Theodora.

'It won't be my mother's fault if she is,' said Arthur. 'I was determined yesterday to see what she would succeed in making her do, and I declare the sprite drove her about like a slave—"Grandmamma, fetch me this," "grandmamma, you must do that," till at last she brought my poor mother down on her knees, stooping under the table to personate an old cow in the stall.'

'Oh! Arthur! Arthur, how could you?' exclaimed Violet. 'What were you about to let it go on?'

'Lying on the sofa, setting a good example,' said Percy.

'No, no, I did not go that length,' said Arthur. 'I was incog. in the next room; but it was too good to interrupt. Besides, Helen has succeeded to my aunt's vacant throne, and my mother is never so hurt as when Violet interferes with any of her vagaries. The other day, when Violet carried her off roaring at not being allowed to turn grandmamma's work-box inside out, her ladyship made a formal remonstrance to me on letting the poor child's spirit be broken by strictness.'

'I hope you told her that some spirits would be glad to have been broken long ago,'

said Theodora.

‘I only told her I had perfect faith in Violet’s management.’

Percy was wanted speedily to set off for his new situation, and the question of the marriage became difficult. His income was fully sufficient, but Theodora had many scruples about leaving her mother, whom the last winter had proved to be unfit to be left without companionship. They doubted and consulted, and agreed that they must be self-denying; but John came to their relief. He shrank with a sort of horror from permitting such a sacrifice as his own had been; held that it would be positively wrong to let their union be delayed any longer, and found his father of the same opinion, though not knowing how Lady Martindale would bear the loss. Perhaps his habit of flinching from saying to her what he expected her to dislike, had been one cause of Mrs. Nesbit’s supremacy.

John, therefore, undertook to open her eyes to the necessity of relinquishing her daughter, intending to offer himself as her companion and attendant, ready henceforth to devote himself to her comfort, as the means of setting free those who still had a fair prospect.

As usual, Lady Martindale’s reluctance had been overrated. John found that she had never calculated on anything but Theodora’s marrying at once; she only observed that she supposed it could not be helped, and she was glad her dear aunt was spared the sight.

‘And you will not miss her so much when I am at home.’

‘You, my dear; I am never so happy as when you are here; but I do not depend on you. I should like you to spend this winter abroad, and then we must have you in Parliament again.’

‘If I were sure that you would be comfortable,’ said John; ‘but otherwise I could not think of leaving you.’

‘I was thinking,’ said Lady Martindale, with the slowness of one little wont to

originate a scheme, ‘how pleasant it would be, if we could keep Arthur and Violet always with us. I cannot bear to part with the dear children, and I am sure they will all be ill again if they go back to London.’

‘To live with us! exclaimed John. ‘Really, mother, you have found the best plan of all. Nothing could be better!’

‘Do you think your father would approve?’ said Lady Martindale, eagerly.

‘Let us propose it to him,’ said John, and without further delay he begged him to join the conference. The plan was so excellent that it only seemed strange that it had occurred to no one before, combining the advantages of giving Arthur’s health a better chance; of country air for the children, and of economy. Lord Martindale looked very well pleased, though still a little doubtful, as he pondered, whether there might not be some unseen objection, and to give himself time to think, repeated, in answer to their solicitations, that it was a most important step.

‘For instance,’ said he, as if glad to have recollected one argument on the side of caution, ‘you see, if they live here, we are in a manner treating Johnnie as the acknowledged heir.’

‘Exactly so,’ replied John; ‘and it will be the better for him, and for the people. For my part—’

They were interrupted by Arthur’s walking in from the garden. Lady Martindale, too eager to heed that her lord would fain not broach the question till his deliberations were mature, rose up at once, exclaiming, ‘Arthur my dear, I am glad you are come. We wish, when Theodora leaves us, that you and your dear wife and children should come and live at home always with us. Will you, my dear?’ Arthur looked from one to the other in amaze.

‘It is a subject for consideration,’ began Lord Martindale. ‘I would not act hastily, without knowing the sentiments of all concerned.’

‘If you mean mine,’ said John, ‘I will finish what I was saying,—that, for my part, a

home is all that I can ever want; and that for Arthur to afford me a share in his, and in his children's hearts, would be the greatest earthly happiness that I can desire.'

'I am sure'—said Arthur, in a voice which, to their surprise, was broken by a sob—'I am sure, John—you have every right. You have made my home what it is.'

'Then he consents!' exclaimed Lady Martindale; 'I shall have Violet always with me, and Helen.'

'Thank you, thank you, mother; but—' His eye was on his father.

'Your mother does not know what she is asking of you, Arthur,' said Lord Martindale. 'I would not have you engage yourself without consideration. Such arrangements as these must not be made to be broken. For myself, it is only the extreme pleasure the project gives me that makes me balance, lest I should overlook any objection. To have your dear Violet for the daughter of our old age, and your children round us, would, as John says, leave us nothing to wish.'

Arthur could only tremulously repeat his 'Thank you,' but there was a hesitation that alarmed his mother. 'Your father wishes it, too,' she eagerly entreated.

'Do not press him, Anna,' said Lord Martindale. 'I would not have him decide hastily. It is asking a great deal of him to propose his giving up his profession and his establishment.'

'It is not that,' said Arthur, turning gratefully to his father. 'I should be glad to give up the army and live at home—there is nothing I should like better; but the point is, that I must know what Violet thinks of it.'

'Right! Of course, she must be consulted,' said Lord Martindale.

'You see,' said Arthur, speaking fast, as if conscious that he appeared ungracious, 'it seems hard that she should have no house of her own, to receive her family in. I had promised she should have her sisters with her this winter, and I do not quite like to ask her to give it up.'

‘When the house is finished, and we have room,’ began Lady Martindale, ‘the Miss Mosses shall be most welcome.’

‘Thank you, thank you,’ repeated Arthur. ‘But besides, I do not know how she will feel about the children. If we are to be here, it must be on condition that she has the entire management of them to herself.’

‘Certainly,’ again said his father. She has them in excellent training, and it would be entirely contrary to my principles to interfere.’

‘Then, you see how it is,’ said Arthur. ‘I am quite willing. I know it is what I do not deserve, and I am more obliged than I can say; but all must depend upon Violet.’

He was going in quest of her, when the Rickworth carriage stopped at the gate and prevented him. Poor Lady Martindale, when she had sent her note of invitation to Lady Elizabeth and Emma to spend a long day at Brogden, she little imagined how long the day would be to her suspense. She could not even talk it over with any one but John, and he did not feel secure of Violet’s willingness. He said that, at one time, she had been very shy and uncomfortable at Martindale, and that he feared there was reason in what Arthur said about the children. He suspected that Arthur thought that she would not like the scheme, and supposed that he knew best.

‘Cannot you try to prevail with her, dear John? You have great influence.’

‘I should not think it proper to persuade her. I trust to her judgment to see what is best, and should be sorry to distress her by putting forward my own wishes.’

This conversation took place while the younger ladies were walking in the garden with Lady Elizabeth and her daughter. It was the first time that Emma had been persuaded to come from home, and though she could not be more quiet than formerly, there was less peculiarity in her manner. She positively entered into the general conversation, and showed interest in the farming talk between her mother and Lord Martindale; but the children were her chief resource. And, though affectionate and almost craving pardon from Violet,—drawing out from her every

particular about the little ones, and asking much about Arthur's health, and Theodora's prospects,—she left a veil over the matters that had so deeply concerned herself.

It was from Lady Elizabeth that the sisters heard what they wished to know; and Theodora, on her side, imparted the information which Percy had brought from London. He had been trying whether it were possible to obtain payment of Mr. Gardner's heavy debts to Arthur, but had been forced to relinquish the hope. So many creditors had claims on him that, ample as was the fortune which Mrs. Finch's affection had placed entirely in his power, there was little probability that he would ever venture to return to England. No notice had been taken of the demands repeatedly sent in, and Percy had learnt that he was dissipating his wife's property very fast upon the Continent; so that it was likely that, in a few years, Mr. Finch's hoards would be completely gone. Report also spoke of his rewarding his wife's affection with neglect and unkindness; and her sister, Mrs. Fotheringham, declared that, having acted against warning, Georgina must take the consequences, and could expect no assistance from Worthbourne.

Mournfully Theodora spoke. It was a saddening thought in the midst of her happiness, and it pressed the more heavily upon her from the consciousness, that she had been looked up to by Georgina, and had, in her pride and self-will, forfeited the chance of exerting any beneficial influence. She perceived the contrast between the effect of her own character on others, and that of Violet, and could by no means feel herself guiltless of her poor playmate's sad history. Still she cherished a secret hope that it might yet be permitted to her to meet her again, and in the time of trouble to be of service to her.

This, of course, was not for Lady Elizabeth's ears, but enough was told her to make her again marvel over her daughter's past infatuation, and express her thankfulness for the escape.

Emma's mind was gradually becoming tranquillized, though it had suffered another severe shock from the tidings, that Theresa Marstone had actually become a member of the Roman Catholic Church. A few months ago, such intelligence might have unsettled Emma's principles, as well as caused her deep grief; but the conviction of the undutiful and uncandid part which Miss Marstone had led her to act, had shaken her belief in her friend's infallibility; and in the safe and wholesome atmosphere of her home, there had been a gradual disenchantment. She saw Sarah Theresa in a true light, as a person of excellent intentions, and of many right principles, but entirely unconscious of her own foibles, namely, an overweening estimate of self and of her own opinions, and a love of excitement and dominion. These, growing more confirmed with her years, had resulted in the desertion of her mother-church, under the expectation that elsewhere she might find that ideal which existed only in her own imagination; and Emma had been obliged to acknowledge, that had her work at the Priory been hastily begun, according to her wishes, four years ago, little could have resulted but mischief from such a coadjutor.

Emma's sense of folly and instability made her ready to submit to another five years' probation; but to her surprise, her mother, whom Miss Marstone had taught her to imagine averse to anything out of the ordinary routine, was quite ready to promote her plans, and in fact did much to turn her mind into that channel.

The orphans were doubled in numbers, and Emma spent much time in attending to them, an old woman had been rescued from the Union, and lodged in an adjoining room, as a 'granny' to the little girls, giving the whole quite a family air; a homeless governess, in feeble health, was on a visit, which Emma hoped would be prolonged indefinitely, if she could be persuaded to believe herself useful to the orphans. The inhabitants of the house were fast outstripping their space in the parish church, and might soon be numerous enough to necessitate the restoration of the ruin for their lodging. An architect had been commissioned to prepare plans for the rebuilding of the chapel at once, and Lady Elizabeth was on the watch for a chaplain. Thus

matters were actually in train for the fulfilment of Emma's aspiration, spoken so long ago, that 'Sunday might come back to Rickworth Priory.' Little had she then imagined that she should see its accomplishment commence with so heavy a heart, and enter on her own share of the toil with so little of hope and joy. Alas! they had been wasted in the dreamy wanderings whither she had been led by blind confidence in her self-chosen guide; and youthfulness and mirth had been lost in her rude awakening and recall, lost never to return. Yet in time the calmer joy of 'patient continuance in well-doing' would surely arise upon her, and while working for her Master, His hand would lighten her load.

So Violet felt comforted with regard to Emma; and as she stood at the garden-gate with her sister-in-law in the clear, lovely summer night, watching the carriage drive off, smiled as she said, 'How well all has turned out! How strange to remember last time I parted with Lady Elizabeth at Brogden, when I was almost equally anxious about Emma, about you and Percy, and about our own affairs—to say nothing of the dreariness for Annette!'

'When the sky is darkest the stars come out,' said Theodora. 'Yes, the tide in the affairs of men has set most happily in our favour of late; though I don't see our own way yet. John and my father both say, that our marriage must be at once; and I have not made out which is the worst, to desert my mother or to have my own way.'

'Which is your own way?' said Violet, archly.

'That is what provokes me! I don't know.'

'And which is Percy's?'

'Whichever mine is, which makes it all the worse. Violet! I wish Helen could be put into the hot-house, and made a woman of at once. Only, then, if Lord St. Erme is to have her, it would be equally troublesome.'

'My dears, pray come in!' said Lady Martindale, in the porch. 'You do not know how late it is.'

Her ladyship was in an unusual hurry to make them wish good night, and come up-stairs. She followed Violet to her room, and in one moment had begun:

‘Violet, my dear, has Arthur told you?’

‘He has told me nothing. What is it?’

‘We all think, now Theodora is going to leave us, that it would be the best way for you all to come and live at home with us. Lord Martindale wishes it, and John, and every one. Will you, my dear?’

‘How very kind!’ exclaimed Violet. ‘What does Arthur say?’

‘Arthur says he is willing, but that it must depend on what you like.’ Then, perhaps taking Violet’s bewildered looks for reluctance, ‘I am afraid, my dear, I have not always been as affectionate as you deserved, and have not always tried to make you comfortable.’

‘Oh! no, no! Don’t say so!’

‘It was before I rightly knew you; and indeed it shall never be so again. We are so comfortable now together; do not let us break it up again, and take the poor dear children away to grow pale in London. You shall have all you wish; I will never do anything you don’t like with the children; and all your family shall come and stay whenever you please; only don’t go away, dear Violet—I cannot spare you.’

‘Oh! don’t, dear grandmamma! This is too much,’ said Violet, almost crying. ‘You are so very kind. Oh! I should be so glad for Arthur to be spared the London winter! How happy the children will be! Thank you, indeed.’

‘You do consent, then!’ cried Lady Martindale, triumphantly. ‘John thought we had not made you happy enough!’

‘John should know better! It is the greatest relief—if Arthur likes it, I mean.’

‘Then you do stay. You will be, as Lord Martindale says, the daughter of our old age—our own dear child!’

‘Will I?’ Violet threw her arms round Lady Martindale’s neck, and shed tears of joy.

Lady Martindale held her in her arms, and murmured caressing words. Arthur’s step approached. His mother opened the door and met him. ‘She consents! Dear, dear Violet consents! Now we shall be happy.’

Arthur smiled, looked at his wife, understood her face, and replied to his mother with a warm kiss, a thank you, and good night. She went away in perfect satisfaction.

Your last, greatest victory, Violet,’ said he. ‘You have got at her heart at last, and taught her to use it. But, do you like this plan?’

‘Like it? It is too delightful! If you knew how I have been dreading that winter in London for your chest!’

‘And saying nothing?’

‘Because I thought there was nothing else to be done; but this—’

‘Ay! I have told my father that, if we stay here, I hope he will lessen my allowance. Even then, I can pay off something every year of the debts that will be left after what would be cleared by the price of my commission.’

‘Oh, yes; we shall have scarcely any expense at all.’

‘Don’t agree to it, though, because you think I like it, if you do not. Consider how you will get on with grandmamma and the children. She makes promises; but as to trusting her not to spoil Helen—’

‘She does not spoil her half as much as her papa does,’ said Violet, with a saucy smile. ‘I’m not afraid. It is all love, you know, and grandmamma is very kind to me, even when Helen is in disgrace. If we can only be steady with her, I am sure another person to love her can do her no harm in the end. And, oh! think of the children growing up in the free happy country.’

‘Ay, my father and John spoke of that,’ said Arthur. ‘John wishes it very much. He

says that all he could desire in this world is a share in our home and in our children's hearts.'

'I don't know how it is that every one is so kind. Oh! it is too much! it overflows!' Violet leant against her husband, shedding tears of happiness.

'You silly little thing!' he said, fondling her: 'don't you know why? You have won all their hearts.'

'I never meant to'—half sobbed Violet.

'No, you only meant to go on in your own sweet, modest way of kindness and goodness; but you have done it, you see. You have won every one of them over; and what is more, gained pardon for me, for your sake. No, don't struggle against my saying so, for it is only the truth. It was bad enough in me to marry you, innocent, unknowing child as you were; but you turned it all to good. When I heard that lesson on Sunday, about the husband and the believing wife, I thought it was meant for you and me; for if ever now I do come to good, it is owing to no one but you and that boy.'

'O, Arthur, I cannot bear such sayings. Would you—would you dislike only just kneeling down with me, that we may give thanks for all this happiness! Oh! what seemed like thorns and crosses have all turned into blessings!'

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