The Watsons

by Jane Austen

Free public domain classic — Noveliopdf

The Project Gutenberg eBook of The Watsons: By Jane Austen, Concluded by L. Oulton

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

Title: The Watsons: By Jane Austen, Concluded by L. Oulton

Author: Jane Austen

L. Oulton

Author of introduction, etc.: James Edward Austen-Leigh

Release date: October 28, 2020 [eBook #63569] Most recently updated: October 18, 2024

Language: English

Other information and formats: www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/63569

Credits: Mary Glenn Krause, Martin Pettit and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at https://www.pgdp.net

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE WATSONS: BY JANE AUSTEN, CONCLUDED BY L. OULTON ***

Transcriber's Note: A Table of Contents has been added.

front

spine

THE WATSONS

title page

THE WATSONS

BY

JANE AUSTEN

AUTHOR OF "PRIDE AND PREJUDICE," "SENSE AND SENSIBILITY," ETC.

CONCLUDED

BY

L. OULTON

logo

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY NEW YORK :: :: :: MCMXXIII

COPYRIGHT, 1923, BY D. APPLETON AND COMPANY

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

CONTENTS

PAGE PREFACE v CHAPTER I 1 CHAPTER II 18 CHAPTER III 50 CHAPTER IV 65 CHAPTER V 73 CHAPTER VI 102 CHAPTER VII 113 CHAPTER VIII 122 CHAPTER IX 131 CHAPTER X 137 CHAPTER XI 143 CHAPTER XII 154 CHAPTER XIII 161 CHAPTER XIV 165 CHAPTER XV 175 CHAPTER XVI 184 CHAPTER XVII 195 CHAPTER XVIII 200 CHAPTER XIX 206 CHAPTER XX 206

PREFACE

This work was left by its author, a fragment without a name, in so elementary a state as not even to be divided into chapters, and some obscurities and inaccuracies of expression may be observed in it which the author would probably have corrected. The original manuscript is the property of my sister, Miss Austen, by whose permission it is now published. I have called it The Watsons, for the sake of having a title by which to designate it. Two questions may be asked concerning it. When was it written? And, why was it never finished? I was unable to answer the first question, so long as I had only the internal evidence of the style to guide me. I felt satisfied, indeed, that it did not belong to that early class of her writings which are mentioned at page 46 of the Memoir, but rather bore marks of her more mature style, though it had never been subjected to the filing and polishing process by which she was accustomed to impart a high finish to her published works. At last, on a close inspection of the original manuscript, the water-marks of 1803 and 1804 were found in the paper on which it was written. It is therefore probable that it was composed at Bath, before she ceased to reside there in 1805. This would place the date a few years later than the composition, but earlier than the publication of Sense and Sensibility, and Pride and Prejudice. To the second question, why was it never finished? I can give no satisfactory answer. I think it will be generally admitted that there is much in it which promised well; that some of the characters are drawn with her wonted vigour, and some with a delicate discrimination peculiarly her own; and that it is rich in her especial power of telling the story, and bringing out the characters by conversation rather than by description. It could not have been broken up for the purpose of using the materials in another fabric; for, with the exception of Mrs. Robert Watson, in whom a resemblance to the future Mrs. Elton is very discernible, it would not be easy to trace much resemblance between this and any of her subsequent works. She must have felt some regret at leaving Tom Musgrave's

character incomplete; yet he never appears elsewhere. My own idea is, but it is only a guess, that the author became aware of the evil of having placed her heroine too low, in such a position of poverty and obscurity as, though not necessarily connected with vulgarity, has a sad tendency to degenerate into it; and, therefore, like a singer who has begun on too low a note, she discontinued the strain. It was an error of which she was likely to become more sensible, as she grew older and saw more of Society; certainly she never repeated it by placing the heroine of any subsequent work under circumstances likely to be unfavourable to the refinement of a lady.

J. E. Austen Leigh

THE WATSONS

CHAPTER I

The first winter assembly in the town of D——, in Surrey, was to be held on Tuesday, October 13th, and it was generally expected to be a very good one. A long list of county families was confidently run over as sure of attending, and sanguine hopes were entertained that the Osbornes themselves would be there. The Edwards' invitation to the Watsons followed, as a matter of course. The Edwards were people of fortune, who lived in the town and kept their coach. The Watsons inhabited a village about three miles distant, were poor and had no close carriage; and ever since there had been balls in the place, the former were accustomed to invite the latter to dress, dine, and sleep at their house on every monthly return throughout the winter. On the present occasion, as only two of Mr. Watson's children were at home, and one was always necessary as companion to himself, for he was sickly and had lost his wife, one only could profit by the kindness of their friends. Miss Emma Watson, who was very recently returned to her family from the care of an aunt who had brought her up, was to make her first public appearance in the neighbourhood; and her eldest sister, whose delight in a ball was not lessened by a ten years' enjoyment,

had some merit in cheerfully undertaking to drive her and all her finery in the old chair to D—— on the important morning.

As they splashed along the dirty lane Miss Watson thus instructed and cautioned her inexperienced sister.

"I daresay it will be a very good ball, and among so many officers you will hardly want partners. You will find Mrs. Edwards' maid very willing to help you, and I would advise you to ask Mary Edwards' opinion if you are at all at a loss, for she has a very good taste. If Mr. Edwards does not lose his money at cards you will stay as late as you can wish for; if he does he will hurry you home perhaps—but you are sure of some comfortable soup. I hope you will be in good looks. I should not be surprised if you were to be thought one of the prettiest girls in the room, there is a great deal in novelty. Perhaps Tom Musgrave may take notice of you, but I would advise you by all means not to give him any encouragement. He generally pays attention to every new girl, but he is a great flirt, and never means anything serious."

"I think I have heard you speak of him before," said Emma. "Who is he?"

"A young man of very good fortune, quite independent, and remarkably agreeable, an universal favourite wherever he goes. Most of the girls hereabouts are in love with him, or have been. I believe I am the only one among them that have escaped with a whole heart; and yet I was the first he paid attention to when he came into this country six years ago; and very great attention did he pay me. Some people say that he has never seemed to like any girl so well since, though he is always behaving in a particular way to one or another."

"And how came your heart to be the only cold one?" asked Emma, smiling.

"There was a reason for that," replied Miss Watson, changing colour. "I have not been very well used among them, Emma. I hope you will have better luck."

"Dear sister, I beg your pardon, if I have unthinkingly given you pain."

"When we first knew Tom Musgrave," continued Miss Watson, without seeming to

hear her, "I was very much attached to a young man of the name of Purvis, a particular friend of Robert's, who used to be with us a great deal. Everybody thought it would have been a match."

A sigh accompanied these words, which Emma respected in silence. But her sister, after a short pause, went on.

"You will naturally ask why it did not take place, and why he is married to another woman, while I am still single. But you must ask him—not me—you must ask Penelope. Yes, Emma, Penelope was at the bottom of it all. She thinks everything fair for a husband. I trusted her: she set him against me, with a view of gaining him herself, and it ended in his discontinuing his visits, and, soon after, marrying somebody else. Penelope makes light of her conduct, but I think such treachery very bad. It has been the ruin of my happiness. I shall never love any man as I loved Purvis. I do not think Tom Musgrave should be named with him in the same day."

"You quite shock me by what you say of Penelope," said Emma. "Could a sister do such a thing? Rivalry, treachery between sisters! I shall be afraid of being acquainted with her. But I hope it was not so; appearances were against her."

"You do not know Penelope. There is nothing she would not do to get married. She would as good as tell you so herself. Do not trust her with any secrets of your own, take warning by me, do not trust her; she has her good qualities, but she has no faith, no honour, no scruples, if she can promote her own advantage. I wish with all my heart she was well married. I declare I had rather have her well married than myself."

"Than yourself! Yes, I can suppose so. A heart wounded like yours can have little inclination for matrimony."

"Not much, indeed—but you know we must marry."

"I could do very well single for my own part."

"A little company, and a pleasant ball now and then, would be enough for me, if one

could be young for ever; but my father cannot provide for us, and it is very bad to grow old and be poor and laughed at. I have lost Purvis, it is true; but very few people marry their first loves. I should not refuse a man because he was not Purvis. Not that I can ever quite forgive Penelope."

Emma shook her head in acquiescence.

"Penelope, however, has had her troubles," continued Miss Watson. "She was sadly disappointed in Tom Musgrave, who afterwards transferred his attentions from me to her, and whom she was very fond of, but he never means anything serious, and when he had trifled with her long enough, he began to slight her for Margaret, and poor Penelope was very wretched. And since then she has been trying to make some match at Chichester—she won't tell us with whom, but I believe it is a rich old Dr. Harding, uncle to the friend she goes to see; and she has taken a vast deal of trouble about him, and given up a great deal of time to no purpose as yet. When she went away the other day, she said it should be the last time. I suppose you did not know what her particular business was at Chichester, nor guess at the object which could take her away from Stanton just as you were coming home after so many years' absence."

"No, indeed, I had not the smallest suspicion of it. I considered her engagement to Mrs. Shaw just at that time as very unfortunate for me. I had hoped to find all my sisters at home, to be able to make an immediate friend of each."

"I suspect the Doctor to have had an attack of the asthma, and that she was hurried away on that account. The Shaws are quite on her side—at least I believe so; but she tells me nothing. She professes to keep her own counsel; she says, and truly enough, that 'Too many cooks spoil the broth.'"

"I am sorry for her anxieties," said Emma, "but I do not like her plans or her opinions. I shall be afraid of her. She must have too masculine and bold a temper. To be so bent on marriage—to pursue a man merely for the sake of situation, is a

sort of thing that shocks me; I cannot understand it. Poverty is a great evil; but to a woman of education and feeling it ought not, it cannot be, the greatest. I would rather be teacher at a school—and I can think of nothing worse—than marry a man I did not like."

"I would rather do anything than be teacher at a school," said her sister. "I have been at school, Emma, and know what a life they lead; you never have. I should not like marrying a disagreeable man any more than yourself, but I do not think there are many very disagreeable men; I think I could like any good-humoured man with a comfortable income. I suppose my aunt brought you up to be rather refined."

"Indeed, I do not know. My conduct must tell you how I have been brought up. I am no judge of it myself. I cannot compare my aunt's method with any other person's, because I know no other."

"But I can see in a great many things that you are very refined. I have observed it ever since you came home, and I am afraid it will not be for your happiness. Penelope will laugh at you very much."

"That will not be for my happiness, I am sure. If my opinions are wrong I must correct them; if they are above my situation, I must endeavour to conceal them; but I doubt whether ridicule—has Penelope much wit?"

"Yes, she has great spirit, and never cares what she says."

"Margaret is more gentle, I imagine?"

"Yes, especially in company; she is all gentleness and mildness when anybody is by. But she is a little fretful and perverse among ourselves. Poor creature! She is possessed with the notion of Tom Musgrave's being more seriously in love with her than he ever was with anybody else, and is always expecting him to come to the point. This is the second time within this twelvemonth that she has gone to spend a month with Robert and Jane on purpose to egg him on by her absence; but I am sure she is mistaken, and that he will no more follow her to Croydon now than he did last

March. He will never marry unless he can marry somebody very great; Miss Osborne, perhaps, or somebody in that style."

"Your account of this Tom Musgrave, Elizabeth, gives me very little inclination for his acquaintance."

"You are afraid of him; I do not wonder at you."

"No, indeed, I dislike and despise him."

"Dislike and despise Tom Musgrave! No, that you never can. I defy you not to be delighted with him if he takes notice of you. I hope he will dance with you, and I daresay he will, unless the Osbornes come with a large party, and then he will not speak to anybody else."

"He seems to have most engaging manners!" said Emma. "Well, we shall see how irresistible Mr. Tom Musgrave and I find each other. I suppose I shall know him as soon as I enter the ball-room: he must carry some of his charms in his face."

"You will not find him in the ball-room, I can tell you; you will go early, that Mrs. Edwards may get a good place by the fire, and he never comes till late; if the Osbornes are coming, he will wait in the passage and come in with them. I should like to look in upon you, Emma. If it was but a good day with my father, I would wrap myself up, and James should drive me over as soon as I had made tea for him, and I should be with you by the time the dancing began."

"What! Would you come late at night in this chair?"

"To be sure I would. There, I said you were very refined, and that's an instance of it."

Emma for a moment made no answer. At last she said—

"I wish, Elizabeth, you had not made a point of my going to this ball; I wish you were going instead of me. Your pleasure would be greater than mine. I am a stranger here, and know nobody but the Edwards; my enjoyment, therefore, must be very

doubtful. Yours, among all your acquaintances, would be certain. It is not too late to change. Very little apology would be requisite to the Edwards, who must be more glad of your company than of mine; and I should most readily return to my father, and should not be at all afraid to drive this quiet old creature home. Your clothes I would undertake to find means of sending to you."

"My dearest Emma," cried Elizabeth, warmly. "Do you think I would do such a thing? Not for the universe! But I shall never forget your good-nature in proposing it. You must have a sweet temper indeed! I never met anything like it! And would you really give up the ball that I might be able to go to it? Believe me, Emma, I am not so selfish as that comes to. No; though I am nine years older than you are, I would not be the means of keeping you from being seen. You are very pretty, and it would be very hard that you should not have as fair a chance as we have all had to make your fortune. No, Emma; whoever stays at home this winter, it shan't be you. I am sure I should never have forgiven the person who kept me from a ball at nineteen."

Emma expressed her gratitude, and for a few minutes they jogged on in silence. Elizabeth first spoke—

"You will take notice who Mary Edwards dances with?"

"I will remember her partners, if I can; but you know they will be all strangers to me."

"Only observe whether she dances with Captain Hunter more than once—I have my fears in that quarter. Not that her father or mother like officers; but if she does, you know, it is all over with poor Sam. And I have promised to write him word who she dances with."

"Is Sam attached to Miss Edwards?"

"Did not you know that?"

"How should I know it? How should I know in Shropshire what is passing of that

nature in Surrey? It is not likely that circumstances of such delicacy should have made any part of the scanty communication which passed between you and me for the last fourteen years."

"I wonder I never mentioned it when I wrote. Since you have been at home, I have been so busy with my poor father, and our great wash, that I have had no leisure to tell you anything; but, indeed, I concluded you knew it all. He has been very much in love with her these two years, and it is a great disappointment to him that he cannot always get away to our balls; but Mr. Curtis won't often spare him, and just now it is a sickly time at Guildford."

"Do you suppose Miss Edwards inclined to like him?"

"I am afraid not; you know, she is an only child, and will have at least ten thousand pounds."

"But, still, she may like our brother."

"Oh, no! The Edwards look much higher. Her father and mother would never consent to it. Sam is only a surgeon, you know. Sometimes I think she does like him. But Mary Edwards is rather prim and reserved; I do not always know what she would be at."

"Unless Sam feels on sure grounds with the lady herself, it seems a pity to me that he should be encouraged to think of her at all."

"A young man must think of somebody," said Elizabeth; "and why should not he be as lucky as Robert, who has got a good wife and six thousand pounds?"

"We must not all expect to be individually lucky," replied Emma. "The luck of one member of a family is luck to all."

"Mine is all to come, I am sure," said Elizabeth, giving another sigh to the remembrance of Purvis. "I have been unlucky enough, and I cannot say much for you, as my aunt married again so foolishly. Well, you will have a good ball, I

daresay. The next turning will bring us to the turnpike; you may see the church-tower over the hedge, and the 'White Hart' is close by it. I shall long to know what you think of Tom Musgrave."

Such were the last audible sounds of Miss Watson's voice, before they passed through the turnpike-gate and entered on the pitching of the town, the jumbling and noise of which made further conversation most thoroughly undesirable. The old mare trotted heavily on, wanting no direction of the reins to take a right turning; and making only one blunder, in proposing to stop at the milliner's, before she drew up towards Mr. Edwards' door. Mr. Edwards lived in the best house in the street, and the best in the place; if Mr. Tomlinson, the banker, might be indulged in calling his newly-erected house at the end of the town, with a shrubbery and sweep, in the country.

Mr. Edwards' house was higher than most of its neighbours, with four windows on each side the door; the windows guarded by posts and chains, and the door approached by a flight of stone steps.

"Here we are," said Elizabeth, as the carriage ceased moving, "safely arrived; and by the market clock we have been only five-and-thirty minutes coming; which, I think, is doing pretty well, though it would be nothing for Penelope. Is not it a nice town? The Edwards have a noble house, you see, and they live quite in style. The door will be opened by a man in livery, with a powdered head, I can tell you."

CHAPTER II

Emma had seen the Edwards only one morning at Stanton; they were therefore all but strangers to her, and though her spirits were by no means insensible to the expected joys of the evening, she felt a little uncomfortable in the thought of all that was to precede them. Her conversation with Elizabeth, too, giving her some very unpleasant feelings with respect to her own family, had made her more open to

disagreeable impressions from any other cause, and increased her sense of the awkwardness of rushing into intimacy on so slight an acquaintance.

There was nothing in the manner of Mrs. and Miss Edwards to give immediate change to these ideas. The mother, though a very friendly woman, had a reserved air and a great deal of formal civility; and the daughter, a genteel-looking girl of twenty-two, with her hair in papers, seemed very naturally to have caught something of the style of her mother, who had brought her up. Emma was soon left to know what they could be, by Elizabeth being obliged to hurry away; and some very languid remarks on the probable brilliancy of the ball were all that broke, at intervals, a silence of half-an-hour before they were joined by the master of the house. Mr. Edwards had a much easier and more communicative air than the ladies of the family; he was fresh from the street, and he came ready to tell whatever might interest. After a cordial reception of Emma, he turned to his daughter with—

"Well, Mary, I bring you good news: the Osbornes will certainly be at the ball to-night. Horses for two carriages are ordered from the 'White Hart' to be at Osborne Castle by nine."

"I am glad of it," observed Mrs. Edwards, "because their coming gives a credit to our assembly. The Osbornes being known to have been at the first ball, will dispose a great many people to attend the second. It is more than they deserve, for, in fact, they add nothing to the pleasure of the evening; they come so late and go so early; but great people have always their charm."

Mr. Edwards proceeded to relate many other little articles of news which his morning's lounge had supplied him with, and they chatted with greater briskness till Mrs. Edwards' moment for dressing arrived, and the young ladies were carefully recommended to lose no time. Emma was shown to a very comfortable apartment, and as soon as Mrs. Edwards' civilities could leave her to herself, the happy occupation, the first bliss of a ball, began. The girls, dressing in some measure

together, grew unavoidably better acquainted. Emma found in Miss Edwards the show of good sense, a modest unpretending mind, and a great wish of obliging; and when they returned to the parlour where Mrs. Edwards was sitting, respectably attired in one of the two satin gowns which went through the winter, and a new cap from the milliner's, they entered it with much easier feelings and more natural smiles than they had taken away. Their dress was now to be examined: Mrs. Edwards acknowledged herself too old-fashioned to approve of every modern extravagance, however sanctioned; and though complacently viewing her daughter's good looks, would give but a qualified admiration; and Mr. Edwards, not less satisfied with Mary, paid some compliments of good-humoured gallantry to Emma at her expense.

The discussion led to more intimate remarks, and Miss Edwards gently asked Emma if she was not often reckoned very like her youngest brother. Emma thought she could perceive a faint blush accompany the question, and there seemed something still more suspicious in the manner in which Mr. Edwards took up the subject.

"You are paying Miss Emma no great compliment, I think, Mary," said he hastily. "Mr. Sam Watson is a very good sort of young man, and I daresay a very clever surgeon; but his complexion has been rather too much exposed to all weathers to make a likeness to him very flattering."

Mary apologised, in some confusion—

"She had not thought a strong likeness at all incompatible with very different degrees of beauty. There might be resemblance in countenance, and the complexion, and even the features, be very unlike."

"I know nothing of my brother's beauty," said Emma, "for I have not seen him since he was seven years old; but my father reckons us alike."

"Mr. Watson!" cried Mr. Edwards, "well, you astonish me. There is not the least likeness in the world; your brother's eyes are grey, yours are brown; he has a long face, and a wide mouth. My dear, do you perceive the least resemblance?"

"Not the least; Miss Emma Watson puts me very much in mind of her eldest sister, and sometimes I see a look of Miss Penelope, and once or twice there has been a glance of Mr. Robert; but I cannot perceive any likeness to Mr. Samuel."

"I see the likeness between her and Miss Watson," replied Mr. Edwards, "very strongly, but I am not sensible of the others. I do not much think she is like any of the family but Miss Watson; but I am very sure there is no resemblance between her and Sam."

This matter was settled, and they went to dinner.

"Your father, Miss Emma, is one of my oldest friends," said Mr. Edwards, as he helped her to wine, when they were drawn round the fire to enjoy their dessert. "We must drink to his better health. It is a great concern to me, I assure you, that he should be such an invalid. I know nobody who likes a game of cards, in a social way, better than he does, and very few people who play a fairer rubber. It is a thousand pities that he should be so deprived of the pleasure. For now, we have a quiet little whist club, that meets three times a week at the 'White Hart'; and if he could but have his health, how much he would enjoy it!"

"I daresay he would, sir; and I wish, with all my heart, he were equal to it."

"Your club would be better fitted for an invalid," said Mrs. Edwards, "if you did not keep it up so late." This was an old grievance.

"So late, my dear! What are you talking of?" cried her husband with sturdy pleasantry. "We are always at home before midnight. They would laugh at Osborne Castle to hear you call that late. They are but just rising from dinner at midnight."

"That is nothing to the purpose," retorted the lady calmly. "The Osbornes are to be no rule for us. You had better meet every night and break up two hours sooner."

So far the subject was very often carried; but Mr. and Mrs. Edwards were so wise as never to pass that point; and Mr. Edwards now turned to something else. He had lived long enough in the idleness of a town to become a little of a gossip, and having

some anxiety to know more of the circumstances of his young guest than had yet reached him, he began with—

"I think, Miss Emma, I remember your aunt very well, about thirty years ago; I am pretty sure I danced with her in the old rooms at Bath the year before I married. She was a very fine woman then, but like other people, I suppose, she is grown somewhat older since that time. I hope she is likely to be happy in her second choice."

"I hope so; I believe so, sir," said Emma, in some agitation.

"Mr. Turner had not been dead a great while, I think?"

"About two years, sir."

"I forget what her name is now."

"O'Brien."

"Irish! Ah, I remember; and she is gone to settle in Ireland. I do not wonder that you should not wish to go with her into that country, Miss Emma; but it must be a great deprivation to her, poor lady! after bringing you up like a child of her own."

"I was not so ungrateful, sir," said Emma, warmly, "as to wish to be anywhere but with her. It did not suit Captain O'Brien that I should be of the party."

"Captain!" repeated Mrs. Edwards. "The gentleman is in the army, then?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Aye, there is nothing like your officers for captivating the ladies, young or old. There is no resisting a cockade, my dear."

"I hope there is," said Mrs. Edwards gravely, with a quick glance at her daughter; and Emma had just recovered from her own perturbation in time to see a blush on Miss Edwards' cheek; and, in remembering what Elizabeth had said of Captain Hunter, to wonder and waver between his influence and her brother's.

"Elderly ladies should be careful how they make a second choice," observed Mr.

Edwards.

"Carefulness and discretion should not be confined to elderly ladies, or to a second choice," added his wife. "They are quite as necessary to young ladies in their first."

"Rather more so, my dear," replied he; "because young ladies are likely to feel the effects of it longer. When an old lady plays the fool, it is not in the course of nature that she should suffer from it many years."

Emma drew her hand across her eyes; and Mrs. Edwards, in perceiving it, changed the subject to one of less anxiety to all.

With nothing to do but to expect the hour of setting off, the afternoon was long to the two young ladies; and though Miss Edwards was rather discomposed at the very early hour which her mother always fixed for going, that early hour itself was watched for with some eagerness. The entrance of the tea-things at seven o'clock was some relief; and, luckily, Mr. and Mrs. Edwards always drank a dish extraordinary and ate an additional muffin when they were going to sit up late, which lengthened the ceremony almost to the wished-for moment.

At a little before eight o'clock the Tomlinsons' carriage was heard to go by, which was the constant signal for Mrs. Edwards to order hers to the door; and in a very few minutes the party were transported from the quiet and warmth of a snug parlour to the bustle, noise, and draughts of air of a broad entrance passage of an inn. Mrs. Edwards, carefully guarding her own dress, while she attended to the proper security of her young charges' shoulders and throats, led the way up the wide staircase, while no sound of a ball, but the first scrape of one violin, blessed the ears of her followers; and Miss Edwards, on hazarding the anxious enquiry of whether there were many people come yet, was told by the waiter, as she knew she should be, that Mr. Tomlinson's family were in the room.

In passing along a short gallery to the assembly room, brilliant in lights before them, they were accosted by a young man in a morning dress and boots, who was standing

in the doorway of a bedchamber apparently on purpose to see them go by.

"Ah! Mrs. Edwards, how do you do? How do you do, Miss Edwards?" he cried, with an easy air. "You are determined to be in good time, I see, as usual. The candles are but this moment lit."

"I like to get a good seat by the fire, you know, Mr. Musgrave," replied Mrs. Edwards.

"I am this moment going to dress," said he. "I am waiting for my stupid fellow. We shall have a famous ball. The Osbornes are certainly coming; you may depend upon that, for I was with Lord Osborne this morning."

The party passed on. Mrs. Edwards' satin gown swept along the clean floor of the ball-room to the fireplace at the upper end, where one party only were formally seated, while three or four officers were lounging together, passing in and out from the adjoining card-room. A very stiff meeting between these near neighbours ensued, and as soon as they were all duly placed again, Emma, in a low whisper, which became the solemn scene, said to Miss Edwards—

"The gentleman we passed in the passage was Mr. Musgrave, then; he is reckoned remarkably agreeable, I understand?"

Miss Edwards answered hesitatingly: "Yes, he is very much liked by many people; but we are not very intimate."

"He is rich, is not he?"

"He has about eight or nine hundred a year, I believe. He came into possession of it when he was very young, and my father and mother think it has given him rather an unsettled turn. He is no favourite with them."

The cold and empty appearance of the room, and the demure air of the small cluster of females at one end of it, began soon to give way. The inspiriting sound of other carriages was heard, and continual accessions of portly chaperones, and strings of

smartly dressed girls, were received, with now and then a fresh gentleman straggler, who, if not enough in love to station himself near any fair creature, seemed glad to escape into the card-room.

Among the increasing number of military men, one now made his way to Miss Edwards with an air of empressement which decidedly said to her companion: "I am Captain Hunter"; and Emma, who could not but watch her at such a moment, saw her looking rather distressed, but by no means displeased, and heard an engagement formed for the two first dances, which made her think her brother Sam's a hopeless case.

Emma, in the meanwhile, was not unobserved or unadmired herself. A new face, and a very pretty one, could not be slighted. Her name was whispered from one party to another, and no sooner had the signal been given by the orchestra's striking up a favourite air, which seemed to call the young to their duty, and people the centre of the room, than she found herself engaged to dance with a brother officer, introduced by Captain Hunter.

Emma Watson was not more than of the middle height, well made and plump, with an air of healthy vigour. Her skin was very brown, but clear, smooth, and glowing; which, with a lively eye, a sweet smile, and an open countenance, gave beauty to attract, and expression to make that beauty improve on acquaintance. Having no reason to be dissatisfied with her partner, the evening began very pleasantly to her, and her feelings perfectly coincided with the reiterated observation of others, that it was an excellent ball. The two first dances were not quite over when the returning sound of carriages, after a long interruption, called general notice—"the Osbornes are coming!" was repeated round the room. After some minutes of extraordinary bustle without, and watchful curiosity within, the important party, preceded by the attentive master of the inn to open a door which was never shut, made their appearance. They consisted of Lady Osborne; her son, Lord Osborne; her daughter,

Miss Osborne; Miss Carr, her daughter's friend; Mr. Howard, formerly tutor to Lord Osborne, now clergyman of the parish in which the castle stood; Mrs. Blake, a widow sister, who lived with him; her son, a fine boy of ten years old; and Mr. Tom Musgrave, who probably, imprisoned within his own room, had been listening in bitter impatience to the sound of music for the last half-hour. In their progress up the room they paused almost immediately behind Emma to receive the compliments of some acquaintance, and she heard Lady Osborne observe that they had made a point of coming early for the gratification of Mrs. Blake's little boy, who was uncommonly fond of dancing. Emma looked at them all as they passed, but chiefly and with most interest on Tom Musgrave, who was certainly a genteel, good-looking young man. Of the females, Lady Osborne had by much the finest person; though nearly fifty, she was very handsome, and had all the dignity of rank.

Lord Osborne was a very fine young man; but there was an air of coldness, of carelessness, even of awkwardness about him, which seemed to speak him out of his element in a ball-room. He came, in fact, only because it was judged expedient for him to please the borough; he was not fond of women's company, and he never danced. Mr. Howard was an agreeable-looking man, a little more than thirty.

At the conclusion of the two dances, Emma found herself, she knew not how, seated amongst the Osbornes' set; and she was immediately struck with the fine countenance and animated gestures of the little boy, as he was standing before his mother, considering when they should begin.

"You will not be surprised at Charles's impatience," said Mrs. Blake, a lively, pleasant-looking little woman of five- or six-and-thirty, to a lady who was standing near her, "when you know what a partner he is to have. Miss Osborne has been so very kind as to promise to dance the two first dances with him."

"Oh, yes! we have been engaged this week," cried the boy, "and we are to dance down every couple."

On the other side of Emma, Miss Osborne, Miss Carr, and a party of young men were standing engaged in a very lively consultation; and soon afterwards she saw the smartest officer of the set walking off to the orchestra to order the dance, while Miss Osborne, passing before her to her little expecting partner, hastily said: "Charles, I beg your pardon for not keeping my engagement, but I am going to dance these two dances with Colonel Beresford. I know you will excuse me, and I will certainly dance with you after tea"; and without staying for an answer, she turned again to Miss Carr, and in another minute was led by Colonel Beresford to begin the set. If the poor little boy's face had in its happiness been interesting to Emma, it was infinitely more so under this sudden reverse; he stood the picture of disappointment with crimsoned cheeks, quivering lips, and eyes bent on the floor. His mother, stifling her own mortification, tried to soothe him with the prospect of Miss Osborne's second promise; but, though he contrived to utter with an effort of boyish bravery, "Oh, I do not mind it!" it was very evident by the unceasing agitation of his features that he minded it as much as ever.

Emma did not think or reflect; she felt and acted. "I shall be very happy to dance with you, sir, if you like it," said she, holding out her hand with the most unaffected good-humour. The boy, in one moment restored to all his first delight, looked joyfully at his mother; and stepping forwards with an honest, simple "Thank you, ma'am," was instantly ready to attend his new acquaintance. The thankfulness of Mrs. Blake was more diffuse; with a look most expressive of unexpected pleasure and lively gratitude, she turned to her neighbour with repeated and fervent acknowledgments of so great and condescending a kindness to her boy. Emma, with perfect truth, assured her that she could not be giving greater pleasure than she felt herself; and Charles, being provided with his gloves and charged to keep them on, they joined the set which was now rapidly forming, with nearly equal complacency. It was a partnership which could not be noticed without surprise. It gained her a broad stare from Miss Osborne and Miss Carr, as they passed her in the dance.

"Upon my word, Charles, you are in luck," said the former, as she turned him; "you have got a better partner than me"; to which the happy Charles answered "Yes."

Tom Musgrave, who was dancing with Miss Carr, gave her many inquisitive glances; and after a time Lord Osborne himself came, and under pretence of talking to Charles, stood to look at his partner. Though rather distressed by such observation, Emma could not repent what she had done, so happy had it made both the boy and his mother; the latter of whom was continually making opportunities of addressing her with the warmest civility. Her little partner she found, though bent chiefly on dancing, was not unwilling to speak, when her questions or remarks gave him anything to say; and she learnt, by a sort of inevitable enquiry, that he had two brothers and a sister, that they and their mamma all lived with his uncle at Wickstead, that his uncle taught him Latin, that he was very fond of riding, and had a horse of his own given him by Lord Osborne; and that he had been out once already with Lord Osborne's hounds.

At the end of these dances, Emma found they were to drink tea; Miss Edwards gave her a caution to be at hand, in a manner which convinced her of Mrs. Edwards' holding it very important to have them both close to her when she moved into the tea-room; and Emma was accordingly on the alert to gain her proper station.

It was always the pleasure of the company to have a little bustle and crowd when they adjourned for refreshment. The tea-room was a small room within the card-room; and in passing through the latter, where the passage was straitened by tables, Mrs. Edwards and her party were for a few moments hemmed in. It happened close by Lady Osborne's casino table; Mr. Howard, who belonged to it, spoke to his nephew; and Emma, on perceiving herself the object of attention both to Lady Osborne and him, had just turned away her eyes in time to avoid seeming to hear her young companion exclaim delightedly aloud: "Oh, uncle! do look at my partner, she is so pretty!" As they were immediately in motion again, however, Charles was

hurried off without being able to receive his uncle's suffrage. On entering the tea-room, in which two long tables were prepared, Lord Osborne was to be seen quite alone at the end of one, as if retreating as far as he could from the ball, to enjoy his own thoughts and gape without restraint. Charles instantly pointed him out to Emma. "There's Lord Osborne; let you and I go and sit by him."

"No, no," said Emma laughing, "you must sit with my friends."

Charles was now free enough to hazard a few questions in his turn. "What o'clock was it?"

"Eleven."

"Eleven! and I am not at all sleepy. Mamma said I should be asleep before ten. Do you think Miss Osborne will keep her word with me when tea is over?"

"Oh, yes; I suppose so," though she felt that she had no better reason to give than that Miss Osborne had not kept it before.

"When shall you come to Osborne Castle?"

"Never, probably. I am not acquainted with the family."

"But you may come to Wickstead and see mamma, and she can take you to the castle. There is a monstrous curious stuffed fox there, and a badger; anybody would think they were alive. It is a pity you should not see them."

On rising from tea there was again a scramble for the pleasure of being first out of the room, which happened to be increased by one or two of the card-parties having just broken up, and the players being disposed to move exactly the different way. Among these was Mr. Howard, his sister leaning on his arm; and no sooner were they within reach of Emma, than Mrs. Blake, calling her notice by a friendly touch, said: "Your goodness to Charles, my dear Miss Watson, brings all his family upon you. Give me leave to introduce my brother." Emma curtsied, the gentleman bowed, made a hasty request for the honour of her hand in the two next dances, to which as

hasty an affirmative was given, and they were immediately impelled in opposite directions. Emma was very well pleased with the circumstance; there was a quietly cheerful, gentlemanlike air in Mr. Howard, which suited her; and in a few minutes afterwards the value of her engagement increased when, as she was sitting in the card-room, somewhat screened by a door, she heard Lord Osborne, who was lounging on a vacant table near her, call Tom Musgrave towards him and say: "Why do not you dance with that beautiful Emma Watson? I want you to dance with her, and I will come and stand by you."

"I was determined on it this very moment, my lord; I'll be introduced and dance with her directly."

"Aye, do; and if you find she does not want much talking to, you may introduce me by-and-by."

"Very well, my lord; if she is like her sisters, she will only want to be listened to. I will go this moment. I shall find her in the tea-room. That stiff old Mrs. Edwards has never done tea."

Away he went, Lord Osborne after him; and Emma lost no time in hurrying from her corner exactly the other way, forgetting in her haste that she left Mrs. Edwards behind.

"We had quite lost you," said Mrs. Edwards, who followed in less than five minutes. "If you prefer this room to the other, there is no reason why you should not be here; but we had better all be together."

Emma was saved the trouble of apologising, by their being joined at the moment by Tom Musgrave, who, requesting Mrs. Edwards aloud to do him the honour of presenting him to Miss Emma Watson, left that good lady without any choice in the business, but that of testifying by the coldness of her manner that she did it unwillingly. The honour of dancing with her was solicited without loss of time; and Emma, however she might like to be thought a beautiful girl by lord or commoner,

was so little disposed to favour Tom Musgrave himself, that she had considerable satisfaction in avowing her previous engagement. He was evidently surprised and discomposed. The style of her last partner had probably led him to believe her not overpowered with applications.

"My little friend, Charles Blake," he cried, "must not expect to engross you the whole evening. We can never suffer this. It is against the rules of the assembly, and I am sure it will never be patronised by our good friend here, Mrs. Edwards; she is by much too nice a judge of decorum to give her licence to such a dangerous particularity——"

"I am not going to dance with Master Blake, sir!"

The gentleman, a little disconcerted, could only hope he might be fortunate another time; and seeming unwilling to leave her, though his friend, Lord Osborne, was waiting in the doorway for the result, as Emma with some amusement perceived, he began to make civil enquiries after her family.

"How comes it that we have not the pleasure of seeing your sisters here this evening? Our assemblies have been used to be so well treated by them that we do not know how to take this neglect."

"My eldest sister is the only one at home, and she could not leave my father."

"Miss Watson the only one at home! You astonish me! It seems but the day before yesterday that I saw them all three in the town. But I am afraid I have been a very sad neighbour of late. I hear dreadful complaints of my negligence wherever I go, and I confess it is a shameful length of time since I was at Stanton. But I shall now endeavour to make myself amends for the past."

Emma's calm curtsey in reply must have struck him as very unlike the encouraging warmth he had been used to receive from her sisters; and gave him probably the novel sensation of doubting his own influence, and of wishing for more attention than she bestowed. The dancing now recommenced. Miss Carr being impatient to

call, everybody was required to stand up; and Tom Musgrave's curiosity was appeased on seeing Mr. Howard come forward and claim Emma's hand.

"That will do as well for me," was Lord Osborne's remark, when his friend carried him the news, and he was continually at Howard's elbow during the two dances.

The frequency of his appearance there was the only unpleasant part of the engagement, the only objection she could make to Mr. Howard. In himself, she thought him as agreeable as he looked; though chatting on the commonest topics, he had a sensible, unaffected way of expressing himself, which made whatever he said worth hearing, and she only regretted that he had not been able to make his pupil's manners as unexceptionable as his own. The two dances seemed very short, and she had her partner's authority for considering them so. At their conclusion, the Osbornes and their train were all on the move.

"We are off at last," said his lordship to Tom. "How much longer do you stay in this heavenly place?—till sunrise?"

"No, faith! my lord; I have had quite enough of it, I assure you. I shall not show myself here again when I have had the honour of attending Lady Osborne to her carriage. I shall retreat in as much secrecy as possible to the most remote corner of the house, where I shall order a barrel of oysters, and be famously snug."

"Let me see you soon at the castle, and bring me word how she looks by daylight."

Emma and Mrs. Blake parted as old acquaintance; and Charles shook her by the hand and wished her good-bye at least a dozen times. From Miss Osborne and Miss Carr she received something like a jerking curtsey as they passed her; even Lady Osborne gave her a look of complacency, and his lordship actually came back after the others were out of the room, to "beg her pardon," and look in the window-seat behind her for the gloves which were visibly compressed in his hand. As Tom Musgrave was seen no more, we may suppose his plan to have succeeded, and imagine him mortifying with his barrel of oysters in dreary solitude, or gladly

assisting the landlady in her bar to make fresh negus for the happy dancers above. Emma could not help missing the party by whom she had been, though in some respects unpleasantly, distinguished; and the two dances which followed and concluded the ball were rather flat in comparison with the others. Mr. Edwards having played with good luck, they were some of the last in the room.

"Here we are back again, I declare," said Emma sorrowfully, as she walked into the dining-room, where the table was prepared, and the neat upper maid was lighting the candles.

"My dear Miss Edwards, how soon it is at an end! I wish it could all come over again."

A great deal of kind pleasure was expressed in her having enjoyed the evening so much; and Mr. Edwards was as warm as herself in the praise of the fulness, brilliancy, and spirit of the meeting; though as he had been fixed the whole time at the same table in the same room, with only one change of chairs, it might have seemed a matter scarcely perceived; but he had won four rubbers out of five, and everything went well. His daughter felt the advantage of this gratified state of mind in the course of the remarks and retrospections which now ensued over the welcome soup.

"How came you not to dance with either of the Mr. Tomlinsons, Mary?" said her mother.

"I was always engaged when they asked me."

"I thought you were to have stood up with Mr. James the two last dances; Mrs. Tomlinson told me he was gone to ask you, and I had heard you say two minutes before that you were not engaged?"

"Yes, but there was a mistake; I had misunderstood. I did not know I was engaged. I thought it had been for the two dances after, if we stayed so long; but Captain Hunter assured me it was for those very two."

"So you ended with Captain Hunter, Mary, did you?" said her father. "And whom did you begin with?"

"Captain Hunter," was repeated in a very humble tone.

"Hum! That is being constant, however. But who else did you dance with?"

"Mr. Norton and Mr. Styles."

"And who are they?"

"Mr. Norton is a cousin of Captain Hunter's."

"And who is Mr. Styles?"

"One of his particular friends."

"All in the same regiment," added Mrs. Edwards. "Mary was surrounded by redcoats all the evening. I should have been better pleased to see her dancing with some of our old neighbours, I confess."

"Yes, yes; we must not neglect our old neighbours. But if these soldiers are quicker than other people in a ball-room, what are young ladies to do?"

"I think there is no occasion for their engaging themselves so many dances beforehand, Mr. Edwards."

"No, perhaps not; but I remember, my dear, when you and I did the same."

Mrs. Edwards said no more, and Mary breathed again. A good deal of good-humoured pleasantry followed, and Emma went to bed in charming spirits, her head full of Osbornes, Blakes, and Howards.

CHAPTER III

The next morning brought a great many visitors. It was the way of the place always to call on Mrs. Edwards the morning after a ball, and this neighbourly inclination was increased in the present instance by a general spirit of curiosity on Emma's

account, as everybody wanted to look again at the girl who had been admired the night before by Lord Osborne. Many were the eyes, and various the degrees of approbation, with which she was examined. Some saw no fault, and some no beauty. With some, her brown skin was the annihilation of every grace, and others could never be persuaded that she was half so handsome as Elizabeth Watson had been ten years ago. The morning passed quickly away in discussing the merits of the ball with all this succession of company, and Emma was at once astonished by finding it two o'clock, and considering that she had heard nothing of her father's chair. After this discovery she had walked twice to the window to examine the street, and was on the point of asking leave to ring the bell and make enquiries, when the light sound of a carriage driving up to the door set her heart at ease. She stepped again to the window, but instead of the convenient though very un-smart family equipage, perceived a neat curricle. Mr. Musgrave was shortly afterwards announced, and Mrs. Edwards put on her very stiffest look at the sound. Not at all dismayed, however, by her chilling air, he paid his compliments to each of the ladies with no unbecoming ease, and continuing to address Emma, presented her a note, which "he had the honour of bringing from her sister, but to which, he must observe, a verbal postscript from himself would be requisite."

The note, which Emma was beginning to read rather before Mrs. Edwards had entreated her to use no ceremony, contained a few lines from Elizabeth importing that their father, in consequence of being unusually well, had taken the sudden resolution of attending the visitation that day; and that as his road lay quite wide from D——, it was impossible for her to come home till the following morning; unless the Edwards would send her, which was hardly to be expected, or she could meet with any chance conveyance, or did not mind walking so far. She had scarcely run her eye through the whole, before she found herself obliged to listen to Tom Musgrave's further account.

"I received that note from the fair hands of Miss Watson only ten minutes ago," said

he; "I met her in the village of Stanton, whither my good stars prompted me to run my horses' heads. She was at that moment in quest of a person to employ on the errand, and I was fortunate enough to convince her that she could not find a more willing or speedy messenger than myself. Remember, I say nothing of my disinterestedness. My reward is to be the indulgence of conveying you to Stanton in my curricle. Though they are not written down, I bring your sister's orders for the same."

Emma felt distressed; she did not like the proposal—she did not wish to be on terms of intimacy with the proposer: and yet, fearful of encroaching on the Edwards, as well as wishing to go home herself, she was at a loss how entirely to decline what he offered. Mrs. Edwards continued silent, either not understanding the case, or waiting to see how the young lady's inclination lay. Emma thanked him, but professed herself very unwilling to give him so much trouble. The trouble was of course, honour, pleasure, delight—what had he or his horses to do? Still she hesitated—she believed she must beg leave to decline his assistance; she was rather afraid of the sort of carriage. The distance was not beyond a walk. Mrs. Edwards was silent no longer. She enquired into the particulars, and then said, "We shall be extremely happy, Miss Emma, if you can give us the pleasure of your company till to-morrow; but if you cannot conveniently do so, our carriage is quite at your service, and Mary will be pleased with the opportunity of seeing your sister."

This was precisely what Emma longed for, and she accepted the offer most thankfully; acknowledging that as Elizabeth was entirely alone, it was her wish to return home to dinner. The plan was warmly opposed by their visitor.

"I cannot suffer it, indeed. I must not be deprived of the happiness of escorting you. I assure you there is not a possibility of fear with my horses. You might guide them yourself. Your sisters all know how quiet they are; they have none of them the smallest scruple intrusting themselves with me, even on a racecourse. Believe me,"

added he, lowering his voice, "you are quite safe—the danger is only mine."

Emma was not more disposed to oblige him for all this.

"And as for Mrs. Edwards' carriage being used the day after the ball, it is a thing out of all rule, I assure you—never heard of before. The old coachman will look as black as his horses—won't he, Miss Edwards?"

No notice was taken. The ladies were silently firm, and the gentleman found himself obliged to submit.

"What a famous ball we had last night," he cried, after a short pause. "How long did you keep it up after the Osbornes and I went away?"

"We had two dances more."

"It is making it too much of a fatigue, I think, to stay so late. I suppose your set was not a very full one?"

"Yes, quite as full as ever, except the Osbornes. There seemed no vacancy anywhere; and everybody danced with uncommon spirit to the very last."

Emma said this, though against her conscience.

"Indeed! Perhaps I might have looked in upon you again, if I had been aware of as much; for I am rather fond of dancing than not. Miss Osborne is a charming girl, is not she?"

"I do not think her handsome," replied Emma, to whom all this was chiefly addressed.

"Perhaps she is not critically handsome, but her manners are delightful. And Fanny Carr is a most interesting little creature. You can imagine nothing more naïve or piquante; and what do you think of Lord Osborne, Miss Watson?"

"He would be handsome even though he were not a lord, and perhaps better himself pleased in a right place."

"Upon my word, you are severe upon my friend! I assure you Lord Osborne is a

very good fellow."

"I do not dispute his virtues, but I do not like his careless air."

"If it were not a breach of confidence," replied Tom, with an important look, "perhaps I might be able to win a more favourable opinion of poor Osborne."

Emma gave him no encouragement, and he was obliged to keep his friend's secret. He was also obliged to put an end to his visit, for Mrs. Edwards having ordered her carriage, there was no time to be lost on Emma's side in preparing for it. Miss Edwards accompanied her home; but as it was dinner hour at Stanton, stayed with them only a few minutes.

"Now, my dear Emma," said Miss Watson, as soon as they were alone, "you must talk to me all the rest of the day without stopping, or I shall not be satisfied; but, first of all, Nanny shall bring in the dinner. Poor thing! You will not dine as you did yesterday, for we have nothing but some fried beef. How nice Mary Edwards looks in her new pelisse! And now tell me how you like them all, and what I am to say to Sam. I have begun my letter; Jack Stokes is to call for it to-morrow, for his uncle is going within a mile of Guildford next day."

Nanny brought in the dinner.

"We will wait upon ourselves," continued Elizabeth, "and then we shall lose no time. And so you would not come home with Tom Musgrave?"

"No, you had said so much against him that I could not wish either for the obligation or the intimacy which the use of his carriage must have created. I should not even have liked the appearance of it."

"You did very right, though I wonder at your forbearance, and I do not think I could have done it myself. He seemed so eager to fetch you that I could not say no, though it rather went against me to be throwing you together, so well as I knew his tricks; but I did long to see you, and it was a clever way of getting you home. Besides, it won't do to be too nice. Nobody could have thought of the Edwards letting you have

their coach, after the horses being out so late. But what am I to say to Sam?"

"If you are guided by me you will not encourage him to think of Miss Edwards. The father is decidedly against him, the mother shows him no favour, and I doubt his having any interest with Mary. She danced twice with Captain Hunter, and I think shows him in general as much encouragement as is consistent with her disposition and the circumstances she is placed in. She once mentioned Sam, and certainly with a little confusion; but that was perhaps merely owing to the consciousness of his liking her, which may very probably have come to her knowledge.

"Oh! dear, yes. She has heard enough of that from us all! Poor Sam! he is out of luck as well as other people. For the life of me, Emma, I cannot help feeling for those that are crossed in love. Well, now begin and give me an account of everything as it happened."

Emma obeyed her, and Elizabeth listened with very little interruption till she heard of Mr. Howard as a partner.

"Dance with Mr. Howard. Good heavens! You don't say so! Why, he is quite one of the great and grand ones. Did you not find him very high?"

"His manners are of a kind to give me much more ease and confidence than Tom Musgrave's."

"Well, go on. I should have been frightened out of my wits to have had anything to do with the Osbornes' set."

Emma concluded her narration.

"And so you really did not dance with Tom Musgrave at all, but you must have liked him—you must have been struck with him altogether?"

"I do not like him, Elizabeth. I allow his person and air to be good; and that his manners to a certain point—his address rather—is pleasing. But I see nothing else to admire in him. On the contrary, he seems very vain, very conceited, absurdly

anxious for distinction, and absolutely contemptible in some of the measures he takes for being so. There is a ridiculousness about him that entertains me; but his company gives me no other agreeable emotion."

"My dearest Emma! You are like nobody else in the world. It is well Margaret is not by. You do not offend me, though I hardly know how to believe you; but Margaret would never forgive such words."

"I wish Margaret could have heard him profess his ignorance of her being out of the country; he declared it seemed only two days since he had seen her."

"Aye, that is just like him; and yet this is the man she will fancy so desperately in love with her. He is no favourite of mine, as you well know, Emma; but you must think him agreeable. Can you lay your hand on your heart and say you do not?"

"Indeed I can, both hands; and spread them to their widest extent."

"I should like to know the man you do think agreeable."

"His name is Howard."

"Howard! Dear me, I cannot think of him but as playing cards with Lady Osborne, and looking proud. I must own, however, that it is a relief to me to find you can speak as you do of Tom Musgrave. My heart did misgive me that you would like him too well. You talked so stoutly beforehand, that I was sadly afraid your brag would be punished. I only hope it will last, and that he will not come on to pay you much attention. It is a hard thing for a woman to stand against the flattering ways of a man when he is bent upon pleasing her."

As their quietly sociable little meal concluded, Miss Watson could not help observing how comfortably it had passed.

"It is so delightful to me," said she, "to have things going on in peace and good-humour. Nobody can tell how much I hate quarrelling. Now, though we have had nothing but fried beef, how good it has all seemed. I wish everybody were as

easily satisfied as you; but poor Margaret is very snappish, and Penelope owns she would rather have quarrelling going on than nothing at all."

Mr. Watson returned in the evening not the worse for the exertion of the day and, consequently, pleased with what he had done, and glad to talk of it over his own fireside. Emma had not foreseen any interest to herself in the occurrences of a visitation; but when she heard Mr. Howard spoken of as the preacher, and as having given them an excellent sermon, she could not help listening with a quicker ear.

"I do not know when I have heard a discourse more to my mind," continued Mr. Watson, "or one better delivered. He reads extremely well, with great propriety, and in a very impressive manner; and at the same time without any theatrical grimace or violence. I own I do not like much action in the pulpit; I do not like the studied air and artificial inflexions of voice which your very popular and most admired preachers generally have. A simple delivery is much better calculated to inspire devotion, and shows a much better taste. Mr. Howard read like a scholar and a gentleman."

"And what had you for dinner, sir?" said his eldest daughter.

He related the dishes, and told what he had ate himself.

"Upon the whole," he added, "I have had a very comfortable day. My old friends were quite surprised to see me amongst them, and I must say that everybody paid me great attention, and seemed to feel for me as an invalid. They would make me sit near the fire; and as the partridges were pretty high, Dr. Richards would have them sent away to the other end of the table, 'that they might not offend Mr. Watson,' which I thought very kind of him. But what pleased me as much as anything was Mr. Howard's attention. There is a pretty steep flight of steps up to the room we dine in, which do not agree with my gouty foot, and Mr. Howard walked by me from the bottom to the top, and would make me take his arm. It struck me as very becoming in so young a man, but I am sure I had no claim to expect it, for I never saw him

before in my life. By the by, he enquired after one of my daughters, but I do not know which. I suppose you know among yourselves."

CHAPTER IV

On the third day after the ball, as Nanny at five minutes before three, was beginning to bustle into the parlour with the tray and knife case, she was suddenly called to the front door by the sound of as smart a rap as the end of a riding whip could give; and though charged by Miss Watson to let nobody in, returned in half a minute with a look of awkward dismay to hold the parlour door open for Lord Osborne and Tom Musgrave. The surprise of the young ladies may be imagined. No visitors would have been welcome at such a moment, but such visitors as these—such an one as Lord Osborne at least, a nobleman and a stranger, was really distressing.

He looked a little embarrassed himself, as, on being introduced by his easy voluble friend, he muttered something of doing himself the honour of waiting upon Mr. Watson. Though Emma could not but take the compliment of the visit to herself, she was very far from enjoying it. She felt all the inconsistency of such an acquaintance with the very humble style in which they were obliged to live; and having in her aunt's family been used to many of the elegancies of life, was fully sensible of all that must be open to the ridicule of richer people in her present home. Of the pain of such feelings, Elizabeth knew very little. Her simple mind or juster reason saved her from such mortification; and though shrinking under a general sense of inferiority, she felt no particular shame. Mr. Watson, as the gentlemen had already heard from Nanny, was not well enough to be down stairs. With much concern they took their seats; Lord Osborne near Emma, and the convenient Mr. Musgrave, in high spirits at his own importance, on the other side of the fireplace with Elizabeth. He was at no loss for words; but when Lord Osborne had hoped that Emma had not caught cold at the ball, he had nothing more to say for some time, and could only gratify his eye by

occasional glances at his fair companion. Emma was not inclined to give herself much trouble for his entertainment; and after hard labour of mind, he produced the remark of its being a very fine day; and followed it up with the question of "Have you been walking this morning?"

"No, my lord, we thought it too dirty."

"You should wear half-boots." After another pause: "Nothing sets off a neat ankle more than a half-boot; nankeen, goloshed with black, looks very well. Do not you like half-boots?"

"Yes; but unless they are so stout as to injure their beauty, they are not fit for country walking."

"Ladies should ride in dirty weather. Do you ride?"

"No, my lord."

"I wonder every lady does not; a woman never looks better than on horseback."

"But every woman may not have the inclination or the means."

"If they knew how much it became them, they would all have the inclination; and I fancy, Miss Watson, when once they had the inclination, the means would soon follow."

"Your lordship thinks we always have our own way. That is a point on which ladies and gentlemen have long disagreed; but without pretending to decide it, I may say that there are some circumstances which even women cannot control. Female economy will do a great deal, my lord; but it cannot turn a small income into a large one."

Lord Osborne was silenced. Her manner had been neither sententious nor sarcastic, but there was a something in its mild seriousness, as well as in the words themselves, which made his lordship think; and when he addressed her again, it was with a degree of considerable propriety totally unlike the half-awkward, half-fearless

style of his former remarks. It was a new thing with him to wish to please a woman; it was the first time that he had ever felt what was due to a woman in Emma's situation; but as he was wanting neither in sense nor a good disposition, he did not feel it without effect.

"You have not been long in this country, I understand," said he in the tone of a gentleman. "I hope you are pleased with it."

He was rewarded by a gracious answer and a more liberal full view of her face than she had yet bestowed. Unused to exert himself, and happy in contemplating her, he then sat in silence for some minutes longer, while Tom Musgrave was chattering to Elizabeth, till they were interrupted by Nanny's approach, who, half-opening the door and putting in her head, said—

"Please, ma'am, master wants to know why he be'nt to have his dinner?"

The gentlemen, who had hitherto disregarded every symptom, however positive, of the nearness of that meal, now jumped up with apologies; while Elizabeth called briskly after Nanny to take up the fowls.

"I am sorry it happens so," she added, turning good-humouredly towards Musgrave, "but you know what early hours we keep."

Tom had nothing to say for himself, he knew it very well; and such honest simplicity, such shameless truth, rather bewildered him. Lord Osborne's parting compliments took some time, his inclination for speech seeming to increase with the shortness of the term for indulgence. He recommended exercise in defiance of dirt; spoke again in praise of half-boots; begged that his sister might be allowed to send Emma the name of her shoemaker; and concluded with saying: "My hounds will be hunting this country next week. I believe they will throw off at Stanton Wood on Wednesday at nine o'clock. I mention this in hopes of your being drawn out to see what's going on. If the morning's tolerable, pray do us the honour of giving us your good wishes in person."

The sisters looked on each other with astonishment when their visitors had withdrawn.

"Here's an unaccountable honour!" cried Elizabeth at last. "Who would have thought of Lord Osborne's coming to Stanton? He is very handsome; but Tom Musgrave looks all to nothing the smartest and most fashionable man of the two. I am glad he did not say anything to me; I would not have had to talk to such a great man for the world. Tom was very agreeable, was not he? But did you hear him ask where Miss Penelope and Miss Margaret were, when he first came in? It put me out of patience. I am glad Nanny had not laid the cloth, however, it would have looked so awkward; just the tray did not signify."

To say that Emma was not flattered by Lord Osborne's visit, would be to assert a very unlikely thing, and describe a very odd young lady; but the gratification was by no means unalloyed; his coming was a sort of notice which might please her vanity, but did not suit her pride; and she would rather have known that he wished the visit without presuming to make it, than have seen him at Stanton.

Among other unsatisfactory feelings, it once occurred to her to wonder why Mr. Howard had not taken the same privilege of coming, and accompanied his lordship; but she was willing to suppose that he had either known nothing about it, or had declined any share in a measure which carried quite as much impertinence in form as good breeding. Mr. Watson was very far from being delighted when he heard what had passed; a little peevish under immediate pain, and ill-disposed to be pleased, he only replied—

"Pooh! Pooh! what occasion could there be for Lord Osborne's coming? I have lived here fourteen years without being noticed by any of the family. It is some fooling of that idle fellow, Tom Musgrave. I cannot return the visit. I would not if I could." And when Tom Musgrave was met with again, he was commissioned with a message of excuse to Osborne Castle on the too sufficient plea of Mr. Watson's

infirm state of health.

CHAPTER V

A week or ten days rolled quietly away after this visit before any new bustle arose to interrupt, even for half a day, the tranquil and affectionate intercourse of the two sisters, whose mutual regard was increasing with the intimate knowledge of each other which such intercourse produced. The first circumstance to break in on their security was the receipt of a letter from Croydon, to announce the speedy return of Margaret, and a visit of two or three days from Mr. and Mrs. Robert Watson, who undertook to bring her home, and wished to see their sister Emma.

It was an expectation to fill the thoughts of the sisters at Stanton and to busy the hours of one of them at least; for, as Jane had been a woman of fortune, the preparations for her entertainment were considerable; and as Elizabeth had at all times more goodwill than method in her guidance of the house, she could make no change without a bustle. An absence of fourteen years had made all her brothers and sisters strangers to Emma, but in her expectation of Margaret there was more than the awkwardness of such an alienation; she had heard things which made her dread her return; and the day which brought the party to Stanton, seemed to her the probable conclusion of almost all that had been comfortable in the house.

Robert Watson was an attorney at Croydon in a good way of business, very well satisfied with himself for the same, and for having married the only daughter of the attorney to whom he had been clerk, with a fortune of six thousand pounds. Mrs. Robert was not less pleased with herself for having had that six thousand pounds, and for being now in possession of a very smart house in Croydon, where she gave genteel parties and wore fine clothes. In her person there was nothing remarkable; her manners were pert and conceited. Margaret was not without beauty; she had a slight, pretty figure, and rather wanted countenance than good features; but the sharp

and anxious expression on her face made her beauty in general little felt. On meeting her long-absent sister, as on every occasion of show, her manner was all affection and her voice all gentleness; continual smiles and a very slow articulation being her constant resource when determined on pleasing.

She was now "so delighted to see dear, dear Emma," that she could hardly speak a word in a minute.

"I am sure we shall be great friends," she observed with much sentiment as they were sitting together. Emma scarcely knew how to answer such a proposition, and the manner in which it was spoken she could not attempt to equal. Mrs. Robert Watson eyed her with much familiar curiosity and triumphant compassion; the loss of her aunt's fortune was uppermost in her mind at the moment of meeting, and she could not but feel how much better it was to be the daughter of a gentleman of property in Croydon than the niece of an old woman who threw herself away on an Irish captain. Robert was carelessly kind, as became a prosperous man and a brother; more intent on settling with the post-boy, inveighing against the exorbitant advance in posting, and pondering over a doubtful half-crown, than on welcoming a sister who was no longer likely to have any property for him to get the direction of.

"Your road through the village is infamous, Elizabeth," said he; "worse than ever it was. By heaven! I would indict it if I lived near you. Who is the surveyor now?"

There was a little niece at Croydon to be fondly enquired after by the kind-hearted Elizabeth, who regretted very much her not being of the party.

"You are very good," replied her mother, "and I assure you it went very hard with Augusta to have us come away without her. I was forced to say we were only going to church, and promise to come back for her directly. But you know it would not do to bring her without her maid, and I am as particular as ever in having her properly attended to."

"Sweet little darling," cried Margaret. "It quite broke my heart to leave her."

"Then why was you in such a hurry to run away from her?" cried Mrs. Robert. "You are a sad, shabby girl. I have been quarrelling with you all the way we came, have not I? Such a visit as this I never heard of! You know how glad we are to have any of you with us, if it be for months together; and I am sorry (with a witty smile) we have not been able to make Croydon agreeable this autumn."

"My dearest Jane, do not overpower me with your raillery. You know what inducements I had to bring me home. Spare me, I entreat you. I am no match for your arch sallies."

"Well, I only beg you will not set your neighbours against the place. Perhaps Emma may be tempted to go back with us and stay till Christmas, if you don't put in your word."

Emma was greatly obliged. "I assure you we have very good society at Croydon. I do not much attend the balls, they are rather too mixed; but our parties are very select and good. I had seven tables last week in my drawing-room.

"Are you fond of the country? How do you like Stanton?"

"Very much," replied Emma, who thought a comprehensive answer most to the purpose. She saw that her sister-in-law despised her immediately. Mrs. Robert Watson was indeed wondering what sort of a home Emma could possibly have been used to in Shropshire, and setting it down as certain that the aunt could never have had six thousand pounds.

"How charming Emma is," whispered Margaret to Mrs. Robert in her most languishing tone. Emma was quite distressed by such behaviour, and she did not like it better when she heard Margaret, five minutes afterwards, say to Elizabeth in a sharp, quick accent, totally unlike the first: "Have you heard from Pen since she went to Chichester? I had a letter the other day. I don't find she is likely to make anything of it. I fancy she'll come back 'Miss Penelope,' as she went."

Such she feared would be Margaret's common voice when the novelty of her own

appearance was over; the tone of artificial sensibility was not recommended by the idea. The ladies were invited upstairs to prepare for dinner.

"I hope you will find things tolerably comfortable, Jane," said Elizabeth, as she opened the door of the spare bedchamber.

"My good creature," replied she, "use no ceremony with me, I entreat you. I am one of those who always take things as they find them. I hope I can put up with a small apartment for two or three nights without making a piece of work. I always wish to be treated quite en famille when I come to see you. And now I do hope you have not been getting a great dinner for us. Remember, we never eat suppers."

"I suppose," said Margaret rather quickly to Emma, "you and I are to be together; Elizabeth always takes care to have a room to herself."

"No. Elizabeth gives me half hers."

"Oh!" in a softened voice, and rather mortified to find that she was not ill-used.

"I am sorry I am not to have the pleasure of your company, especially as it makes me nervous to be much alone."

Emma was the first of the females in the parlour again; on entering it, she found her brother alone.

"So, Emma," said he, "you are quite a stranger at home. It must seem odd enough for you to be here. A pretty piece of work your Aunt Turner has made of it! By heaven! A woman should never be trusted with money. I always said she ought to have settled something on you, as soon as her husband died."

"But that would have been trusting me with money," replied Emma; "and I am a woman, too."

"It might have been secured to your future use, without your having any power over it now. What a blow it must have been upon you! To find yourself, instead of heiress of eight thousand pounds or nine thousand pounds, sent back a weight upon your

family, without a sixpence. I hope the old woman will smart for it."

"Do not speak disrespectfully of her; she was very good to me, and if she has made an imprudent choice, she will suffer more from it herself than I can possibly do."

"I do not mean to distress you, but you know everybody must think her an old fool. I thought Turner had been reckoned an extraordinarily sensible, clever man. How the devil came he to make such a will?"

"My uncle's sense is not at all impeached in my opinion by his attachment to my aunt. She had been an excellent wife to him. The most liberal and enlightened minds are always the most confiding. The event has been unfortunate, but my uncle's memory is, if possible, endeared to me by such a proof of tender respect for my aunt."

"That's odd sort of talking. He might have provided decently for his widow, without leaving everything that he had to dispose of, or any part of it, at her mercy."

"My aunt may have erred," said Emma warmly; "she has erred, but my uncle's conduct was faultless; I was her own niece, and he left to her the power of providing for me."

"But unluckily she has left the pleasure of providing for you to your father, and without the power. That's the long and short of the business. After keeping you at a distance from your family for such a length of time as must do away with all natural affection among us, and breeding you up (I suppose) in a superior style, you are returned upon their hands without a sixpence."

"You know," replied Emma, struggling with her tears, "my uncle's melancholy state of health. He was a greater invalid than my father. He could not leave home."

"I do not mean to make you cry," said Robert, rather softened; and after a short silence, by way of changing the subject, he added: "I am just come from my father's room; he seems very indifferent. It will be a sad break up if he dies. Pity you can none of you get married! You must come to Croydon as well as the rest, and see

what you can do there. I believe if Margaret had had a thousand or fifteen hundred pounds, there was a young man who would have thought of her."

Emma was glad when they were joined by the others; it was better to look at her sister-in-law's finery than listen to Robert, who had equally irritated and grieved her. Mrs. Robert, exactly as smart as she had been at her own party, came in with apologies for her dress.

"I would not make you wait," said she, "so I put on the first thing I met with. I am afraid I am a sad figure. My dear Mr. W—— (addressing her husband), you have not put fresh powder in your hair."

"No, I do not intend it. I think there is powder enough in my hair for my wife and sisters."

"Indeed, you ought to make some alteration in your dress before dinner when you are out visiting, though you do not at home."

"Nonsense."

"It is very odd you do not like to do what other gentlemen do. Mr. Marshall and Mr. Hemming change their dress every day of their lives before dinner. And what was the use of my putting up your last new coat, if you are never to wear it?"

"Do be satisfied with being fine yourself and leave your husband alone."

To put an end to this altercation and soften the evident vexation of her sister-in-law, Emma (though in no spirits to make nonsense easy) began to admire her gown. It produced immediate complacency.

"Do you like it?" she said. "I am very happy. It has been excessively admired, but sometimes I think the pattern too large. I shall wear one to-morrow which I think you will prefer to this. Have you seen the one I gave Margaret?"

Dinner came, and except when Mrs. Robert looked at her husband's head, she continued gay and flippant; chiding Elizabeth for the profusion on the table, and

absolutely protesting against the entrance of the roast turkey, which formed the only exception to "you see your dinner." "I do beg and entreat that no turkey may be seen to-day. I am really frightened out of my wits with the number of dishes we have already. Let us have no turkey, I beseech you."

"My dear," replied Elizabeth, "the turkey is roasted, and it may just as well come in as stay in the kitchen. Besides, if it is cut, I am in hopes my father may be tempted to eat a bit, for it is rather a favourite dish."

"You may have it in, then, my dear; but I assure you I shan't touch it."

Mr. Watson had not been well enough to join the party at dinner, but was prevailed on to come down and drink tea with them.

"I wish he may be able to have a game of cards to-night," said Elizabeth to Mrs. Robert, after seeing her father comfortably seated in his arm-chair.

"Not on my account, my dear, I beg. You know I am no card-player. I think a snug chat infinitely better. I always say cards are very well sometimes to break a formal circle, but one never wants them among friends."

"I was thinking of its being something to amuse my father," said Elizabeth, "if it was not disagreeable to you. He says his head won't bear whist, but perhaps if we make a round game he may be tempted to sit down with us."

"By all means, my dear creature; I am quite at your service, only do not oblige me to choose the game, that's all. Speculation is the only round game at Croydon now, but I can play anything. When there is only one or two of you at home, you must be quite at a loss to amuse him. Why do not you get him to play at cribbage? Margaret and I have played at cribbage most nights that we have not been engaged."

A sound like a distant carriage was at this moment caught; everybody listened; it became more decided; it certainly drew nearer. It was an unusual sound for Stanton at any time of the day, for the village was on no very public road, and contained no gentleman's family but the rector's. The wheels rapidly approached, in two minutes

the general expectation was answered; they stopped beyond a doubt at the garden-gate of the parsonage. Who could it be? It was certainly a post-chaise. Penelope was the only creature to be thought of: she might perhaps have met with some unexpected opportunity of returning. A pause of suspense ensued. Steps were distinguished along the paved footway, which led under the window of the house to the front door, and then within the passage. They were the steps of a man. It could not be Penelope. It must be Samuel. The door opened, and displayed Tom Musgrave in the wrap of a traveller. He had been in London and was now on his way home, and he had come half a mile out of his road to call for ten minutes at Stanton. He loved to take people by surprise with sudden visits at extraordinary seasons and, in the present instance, he had the additional motive of being able to tell the Miss Watsons, whom he depended on finding sitting quietly employed after tea, that he was going home to an eight o'clock dinner.

As it happened, he did not give more surprise than he received, when, instead of being shown into the usual little sitting-room, the door of the best parlour (a foot larger each way than the other) was thrown open, and he beheld a circle of smart people, whom he could not immediately recognise, arranged with all the honours of visiting round the fire; and Miss Watson seated at the best Pembroke table, with the best tea-things before her.

He stood a few seconds in silent amazement. "Musgrave," ejaculated Margaret, in a tender voice. He recollected himself, and came forward, delighted to find such a circle of friends, and blessing his good fortune for the unlooked-for indulgence. He shook hands with Robert, bowed and smiled to the ladies, and did everything very prettily; but as to any particularity of address or emotion towards Margaret, Emma, who closely observed him, perceived nothing that did not justify Elizabeth's opinion; though Margaret's modest smiles imported that she meant to take the visit to herself. He was persuaded without much difficulty to throw off his great coat and drink tea with them. For "whether he dined at eight or nine," as he observed, "was a matter of

very little consequence"; and without seeming to seek, he did not turn away from the chair close by Margaret, which she was assiduous in providing him. She had thus secured him from her sisters, but it was not immediately in her power to preserve him from her brother's claims; for as he came avowedly from London, and had left it only four hours ago, the last current report as to public news, and the general opinion of the day, must be understood before Robert could let his attention be yielded to the less rational and important demands of the women. At last, however, he was at liberty to hear Margaret's soft address, as she spoke her fears of his having had a most terrible cold, dark, dreadful journey.

"Indeed, you should not have set out so late."

"I could not be earlier," he replied. "I was detained chatting at the 'Bedford' by a friend. All hours are alike to me. How long have you been in the country, Miss Margaret?"

"We only came this morning; my kind brother and sister brought me home this very morning. 'Tis singular—is not it?"

"You were gone a great while, were not you? A fortnight, I suppose?"

"You may call a fortnight a great while, Mr. Musgrave," said Mrs. Robert, sharply; "but we think a month very little. I assure you we bring her home at the end of a month much against our will."

"A month! Have you really been gone a month? 'Tis amazing how time flies."

"You may imagine," said Margaret, in a sort of whisper, "what are my sensations in finding myself once more at Stanton; you know what a sad visitor I make. And I was so excessively impatient to see Emma; I dreaded the meeting, and at the same time longed for it. Do you not comprehend the sort of feeling?"

"Not at all," cried he, aloud. "I could never dread a meeting with Miss Emma Watson, or any of her sisters."

It was lucky that he added that finish.

"Were you speaking of me?" said Emma, who had caught her own name.

"Not absolutely," he answered; "but I was thinking of you, as many at a greater distance are probably doing at this moment. Fine open weather, Miss Emma—charming season for hunting."

"Emma is delightful, is not she?" whispered Margaret; "I have found her more than answer my warmest hopes. Did you ever see anything more perfectly beautiful? I think even you must be a convert to a brown complexion."

He hesitated. Margaret was fair herself, and he did not particularly want to compliment her; but Miss Osborne and Miss Carr were likewise fair, and his devotion to them carried the day.

"Your sister's complexion," said he, at last, "is as fine as a dark complexion can be; but I still profess my preference of a white skin. You have seen Miss Osborne? She is my model for a truly feminine complexion, and she is very fair."

"Is she fairer than me?"

Tom made no reply. "Upon my honour, ladies," said he, giving a glance over his own person, "I am highly indebted to your condescension for admitting me in such dishabille into your drawing-room. I really did not consider how unfit I was to be here, or I hope I should have kept my distance. Lady Osborne would tell me that I was growing as careless as her son if she saw me in this condition."

The ladies were not wanting in civil returns, and Robert Watson, stealing a view of his own head in an opposite glass, said with equal civility—

"You cannot be more in dishabille than myself. We got here so late that I had not time even to put a little fresh powder into my hair."

Emma could not help entering into what she supposed her sister-in-law's feelings at the moment.

When the tea-things were removed, Tom began to talk of his carriage; but the old card-table being set out, and the fish and counters, with a tolerably clean pack brought forward from the buffet by Miss Watson, the general voice was so urgent with him to join their party, that he agreed to allow himself another quarter of an hour. Even Emma was pleased that he would stay, for she was beginning to feel that a family party might be the worst of all parties; and the others were delighted.

"What's the game?" cried he, as they stood round the table.

"Speculation, I believe," said Elizabeth. "My sister recommends it, and I fancy we all like it. I know you do, Tom."

"It is the only round game played at Croydon now," said Mrs. Robert; "we never think of any other. I am glad it is a favourite with you."

"Oh! me," said Tom. "Whatever you decide on will be a favourite with me. I have had some pleasant hours at speculation in my time; but I have not been in the way of it for a long while. Vingt-un is the game at Osborne Castle. I have played nothing but vingt-un of late. You would be astonished to hear the noise we make there—the fine old lofty drawing-room rings again. Lady Osborne sometimes declares she cannot hear herself speak. Lord Osborne enjoys it famously, and he makes the best dealer without exception that I ever beheld—such quickness and spirit; he lets nobody dream over their cards. I wish you could see him overdraw himself on both his own cards. It is worth anything in the world!"

"Dear me!" cried Margaret, "why should not we play vingt-un? I think it is a much better game than speculation. I cannot say I am very fond of speculation."

Mrs. Robert offered not another word in support of the game. She was quite vanquished, and the fashions of Osborne Castle carried it over the fashions of Croydon.

"Do you see much of the parsonage family at the castle, Mr. Musgrave?" said Emma, as they were taking their seats.

"Oh, yes; they are almost always there. Mrs. Blake is a nice, little, good-humoured woman; she and I are sworn friends; and Howard's a very gentlemanlike sort of fellow. You are not forgotten, I assure you, by any of the party. I fancy you must have a little cheek-glowing now and then, Miss Emma. Were not you rather warm last Saturday about nine or ten o'clock in the evening? I will tell you how it was—I see you are dying to know. Says Howard to Lord Osborne——"

At this interesting moment he was called on by the others to regulate the game and determine some disputable point; and his attention was so totally engaged in the business, and afterwards by the course of the game, as never to revert to what he had been saying before; and Emma, though suffering a good deal from curiosity, dared not remind him.

He proved a very useful addition at their table. Without him it would have been a party of such very near relations as could have felt little interest, and perhaps maintained little complaisance, but his presence gave variety and secured good manners. He was, in fact, excellently qualified to shine at a round game, and few situations made him appear to greater advantage. He played with spirit, and had a great deal to say; and though no wit himself, could sometimes make use of the wit of an absent friend, and had a lively way of retailing a commonplace, or saying a mere nothing, that had great effect at a card-table. The ways and good jokes of Osborne Castle were now added to his ordinary means of entertainment. He repeated the smart sayings of one lady, detailed the oversights of another, and indulged them even with a copy of Lord Osborne's overdrawing himself on both cards.

The clock struck nine while he was thus agreeably occupied; and when Nanny came in with her master's basin of gruel, he had the pleasure of observing to Mr. Watson that he should leave him at supper while he went home to dinner himself. The carriage was ordered to the door, and no entreaties for his staying longer could now avail; for he well knew that if he stayed he would have to sit down to supper in less

than ten minutes, which to a man whose heart has been long fixed on calling his next meal a dinner, was quite insupportable. On finding him determined to go, Margaret began to wink and nod at Elizabeth to ask him to dinner the following day; and Elizabeth at last, not able to resist hints which her own hospitable social temper more than half seconded, gave the invitation: "Would he give Robert the meeting, they would be very happy?"

"With the greatest pleasure," was his first reply. In a moment afterwards: "That is, if I can possibly get here in time; but I shoot with Lord Osborne, and therefore must not engage. You will not think of me unless you see me." And so he departed, delighted in the uncertainty in which he had left it.

Margaret, in the joy of her heart, under circumstances which she chose to consider as peculiarly propitious, would willingly have made a confidante of Emma, when they were alone for a short time the next morning, and had proceeded so far as to say: "The young man who was here last night, my dear Emma, and returns to-day, is more interesting to me than perhaps you may be aware"; but Emma, pretending to understand nothing extraordinary in the words, made some very inapplicable reply, and, jumping up, ran away from a subject which was odious to her. As Margaret would not allow a doubt to be repeated of Musgrave's coming to dinner, preparations were made for his entertainment much exceeding what had been deemed necessary the day before; and taking the office of superintendence entirely from her sister, she was half the morning in the kitchen herself, directing and scolding.

After a great deal of indifferent cooking and anxious suspense, however, they were obliged to sit down without their guest. Tom Musgrave never came; and Margaret was at no pains to conceal her vexation under the disappointment, or repress the peevishness of her temper. The peace of the party for the remainder of that day and the whole of the next, which comprised the length of Robert and Jane's visit, was continually invaded by her fretful displeasure and querulous attacks. Elizabeth was

the usual object of both. Margaret had just respect enough for her brother's and sister's opinion to behave properly by them, but Elizabeth and the maids could never do right; and Emma, whom she seemed no longer to think about, found the continuance of the gentle voice beyond calculation short. Eager to be as little among them as possible, Emma was delighted with the alternative of sitting above with her father, and warmly entreated to be his constant companion each evening; and as Elizabeth loved company of any kind too well not to prefer being below at all risks; as she had rather talk of Croydon with Jane, with every interruption of Margaret's perverseness, than sit with only her father, who frequently could not endure talking at all, the affair was so settled, as soon as she could be persuaded to believe it no sacrifice on her sister's part. To Emma, the change was most acceptable and delightful. Her father, if ill, required little more than gentleness and silence; and being a man of sense and education, was, if able to converse, a welcome companion. In his chamber, Emma was at peace from the dreadful mortifications of unequal society and family discord, and from the immediate endurance of hard-hearted prosperity, low-minded conceit, and wrong-headed folly engrafted on an untoward disposition. She still suffered from them in the contemplation of their existence, in memory and in prospect, but for the moment she ceased to be tortured by their effects. She was at leisure; she could read and think, though her situation was hardly such as to make reflection very soothing. The evils arising from the loss of her uncle were neither trifling nor likely to lessen; and when thought had been freely indulged, in contrasting the past and the present, the employment of mind and dissipation of unpleasant ideas, which only reading could produce, made her thankfully return to a book.

CHAPTER VI

The change in Emma's home society and style of life, in consequence of the death of

one friend and the imprudence of another, had indeed been striking. From being the first object of hope and solicitude to an uncle who had formed her mind with the care of a parent, and of tenderness to an aunt whose amiable temper had delighted to give her every indulgence; from being the life and spirit of a house where all had been comfort and elegance, and the expected heiress of an easy independence, she was become of importance to no one—a burden on those whose affections she could not expect, an addition in a house already overstocked, surrounded by inferior minds, with little chance of domestic comfort, and as little hope of future support. It was well for her that she was naturally cheerful, for the change had been such as might have plunged weak spirits in despondence.

She was very much pressed by Robert and Jane to return with them to Croydon, and had some difficulty in getting a refusal accepted, as they thought too highly of their own kindness and situation to suppose the offer could appear in less advantageous light to anybody else. Elizabeth gave them her interest, though evidently against her own, in privately urging Emma to go.

"You do not know what you refuse, Emma," said she, "nor what you have to bear at home. I would advise you by all means to accept the invitation; there is always something lively going on at Croydon. You will be in company almost every day, and Robert and Jane will be very kind to you. As for me, I shall be no worse off without you than I have been used to be; but poor Margaret's disagreeable ways are new to you, and they would vex you more than you think for, if you stay at home."

Emma was, of course, uninfluenced, except to greater esteem for Elizabeth by such representations; and the visitors departed without her.

On the following day, as Emma and Elizabeth were in the best parlour, setting the sofa before the fire for their father to lie on, for a little change, they heard a carriage stopping at the garden gate; and a minute or two later Nanny showed in Mrs. Blake and her little boy, closely followed by Mr. Howard.

Charles was carrying a beautiful bunch of greenhouse flowers and, on seeing Emma, he ran eagerly forward, saying—

"I have brought you these flowers, ma'am, because you were so good as to dance with me. Lord Osborne gave me anything I liked for you, and cut some for you himself."

Emma blushed as she smiled and curtsied, and blushed again as she advanced to receive her other visitors and present her sister to them.

They had often observed Elizabeth at balls, and had considered her handsome, but they had never before spoken to her, and were at once favourably impressed by her unaffected good-humour and pleasant manner. Before long they were conversing with almost as little formality as though they had been old friends. On questioning Emma, Mrs. Blake easily drew from her some account of her former life and, on learning her aunt's name, recollected having heard it mentioned by friends in a manner entirely agreeable to Emma's feelings.

Presently Mr. Watson came into the room, and although he was a good deal surprised at finding himself in company, as Mr. Howard at once came forward with a show of friendliness, he had not time to lose his temper.

He was a man of considerable information, and finding the present society entirely congenial to him, contributed not a little to the pleasure of the visit, even going so far as to show Charles a volume of coloured prints; and before taking leave, Mr. Howard had persuaded him to join him, with his three daughters, at dinner, on the following Thursday, promising to send the carriage for them, and assuring him of his return at an early hour.

On Margaret's coming in from the village, where she had gone on an errand, she was all amazement on learning the arrangement; and displeased her father by enquiring if Mr. Musgrave and Lord Osborne were to be present.

"Mr. Howard expressly said they were to be by themselves," he replied, with the

importance of an invalid. "He took particular care to assure me that I should suffer as little fatigue as possible."

He was therefore by no means too well pleased when, on the appointed evening, shortly after they had assembled in the drawing-room at Wickstead, Lord Osborne and Mr. Musgrave were ushered in; and before any explanation could be vouchsafed him, dinner was announced.

Turning to Lord Osborne, Mr. Howard said—

"As I cannot very well, my lord, ask Mr. Watson to hand in his daughter, I must ask him to conduct Mrs. Blake; and I will lead with Miss Watson if you will be good enough to give your arm to Miss Emma Watson; while Mr. Musgrave takes in Miss Margaret."

This arrangement was agreeable to all, except Mr. Musgrave, who, had he been of greater sensibility, would have been embarrassed by Margaret's manner towards him; and, as it was, felt not a little irritated by her determination to consider his escort as a personal compliment, rather than as inevitable on his part.

He had long since tired of his fancy for her, which indeed had always been of the slightest; and now in his determination to free himself from her, did not hesitate to go beyond the limits of propriety, openly disregarding her, and entering into conversation with everyone else in preference to her. Greatly mortified, she would have sunk under this neglect but for the kindness of Mrs. Blake, who addressed her as often as possible; and even Lord Osborne, vaguely aware that there was something wanting in ease, observed to her across the table that the roads were monstrous wet when it rained.

In the meantime, his lordship had not been enjoying himself either, to any great extent; for Emma, having perceived a volume on the drawing-room table with which she was familiar, on finding herself placed beside her host at the dinner table, fell to discussing it with him with much sense and spirit; and from this proceeded to

contrast her favourite authors and the merits of their respective works. As Lord Osborne had as little knowledge of literature as well might be, he was compelled, despite the kindly efforts of his host, to sit more or less in silence, trying to look as if he had not less in his head than might reasonably be expected.

Elizabeth was only too glad to share her partner with her sister, as she did not very well know what to say to him; and she enjoyed listening to their conversation, the more so as they repeatedly explained to her the situation, or the point, in question. Moreover, she could not help hoping that another future, far different to what she had feared for her young sister, might possibly be in store for her.

With dessert, Charles arrived on the scene, which created a diversion in Lord Osborne's favour, as he came to place himself between the latter and his dear Miss Emma Watson, and both joined in the endeavour to entertain him.

On the ladies withdrawing, Lord Osborne turned to Mr. Watson and said—

"You have a very beautiful daughter, sir," but he received in reply such a chilling bow that he could find nothing more to say; and Tom Musgrave nearly choked himself over his wine in the effort to control his merriment at his friend's discomfiture. Mr. Howard then placed himself at the other side of Mr. Watson, and speedily restored him to good-humour by discussing the late visitation with him.

They were not long in returning to the drawing-room for tea; and shortly after, Mrs. Blake and Mr. Watson began to play the new game of écarté, proposing to one another with a pleasant air; whilst the others, seating themselves round the larger table, started vingt-un.

They had scarcely commenced, however, when a carriage drove up to the door, and Miss Osborne and Miss Carr were shown in.

"Oh, Mr. Howard! how could you have used us so?" cried Miss Osborne archly. "I protest we are vastly offended with you!—to give a party and leave us out!"

Miss Carr joined in, in the same strain. She had never heard of anything so

perfidious—it was really beyond everything she had ever known in all her life!

Mr. Howard received them with the quiet courtesy that was habitual to him; and when he deemed it possible to make his voice heard, expressed his sense of the honour they had done him; but observed that one family was scarcely a party, adding that Lord Osborne and Mr. Musgrave had been good enough to invite themselves.

Lord Osborne remained silent, looking rather ashamed; but Mr. Tom Musgrave protested vigorously that if Howard were such a sly dog, plotting to cut them out like this, they were bound to look after themselves!

The Miss Watsons and their father having been presented, and tea declined, and Miss Carr, having, further, declared that there was nothing she so doted on as vingt-un, the game was once more started.

Miss Osborne at once took possession of the chair at Mr. Howard's right hand, which had previously been occupied by Emma; and just as he was about to request the latter to accept the one at his left, he found it already secured by Miss Carr. Lord Osborne, therefore, shared Emma with Charles; and Tom Musgrave devoted himself assiduously to Miss Carr. Presently he was heard endeavouring to persuade her to accept him as her cavalier at the next meet. Unfortunately this reminded Charles of the stuffed fox, and again he implored Emma to come and see it, adding—

"Lord Osborne will now ask you himself, ma'am—will you not, Lord Osborne?"

Before he could reply, Emma had hastily excused herself; but Miss Carr, leaning forward, said impertinently—

"It is a pity you should not see the castle, Miss Watson; it is thrown open to the public every Wednesday—all except the private apartments."

Emma coloured and made no reply; but Lord Osborne quite shocked his sister and her friend by saying—

"Lady Osborne will wait on Miss Watson."

Miss Osborne stared at her brother, but there was something in his face that compelled her to lower her eyes. Never before had he so asserted himself, and she had not deemed him capable of it.

At the conclusion of the game, Mr. Watson asked to return home—declining to wait for supper—and took leave with his daughters.

Mr. Howard conducted them to the carriage, and as Emma curtsied in passing him, held out his hand to her, and retaining hers for a moment, thanked her in a low tone for the honour she had done him in coming.

CHAPTER VII

During the drive back, Mr. Watson was in very good humour, speaking several times of the civility and attention he had received from Mr. Howard and his sister; and praising Charles, to whom he had taken a considerable fancy.

"As for Lord Osborne," he continued, "though I do not think very much of him, he is at least preferable to that fellow Musgrave, whom I have never thought a gentleman."

This was cruelly mortifying to Margaret, who was nevertheless forced to constrain her feelings in the presence of her father; but on their return home, as he went directly to his room, she gave way to her agitation—quite shocking Emma by the violence of her passion, as well as by a wholly unexpected attack on her own conduct.

Elizabeth endeavoured in vain to interpose, but Margaret would not be stayed; and Emma stood motionless under a shower of angry accusations. She was running after Lord Osborne—her intentions were plain to everyone, and she would only have herself despised! Lord Osborne would never look at her!

Mr. Musgrave saw through her! No doubt he was in Miss Osborne's confidence, and knew she was coming—that was why he had been so wanting in civility to herself!—he did not want the Osbornes to think he was mixed up with them—but Lord Osborne would never think of her, except to insult her!

At this, Emma, in silent indignation, took up her candlestick and retired to her room.

When she had gone, Elizabeth spoke more seriously to her sister than ever she had done in her life before; and as Margaret at first refused to listen to reason, threatened to appeal to her father should there be any repetition of the scene. Completely overcome, Margaret then burst into tears, and shortly after permitted Elizabeth to lead her upstairs.

A few days later, Lady Osborne and her daughter called on the Miss Watsons. Miss Osborne, supported by her friend Miss Carr, had endeavoured to dissuade her mother from taking this step; but Lady Osborne, seeing that her son's feelings were more deeply engaged than ever she had previously known them to be, was too clever not to be assured that opposition would only serve to fan his flame; and, moreover, she did not choose that he should visit with people whom she would not acknowledge.

She was showed by Nanny into the parlour, and though it was not such a room as she was accustomed to be received in, everything was in order; and Elizabeth, who had become more refined from her intercourse with Emma, received her with greater dignity than she had expected. As for Emma herself, she was not less elegant in her simple house frock than in her ball-dress, and the Osbornes were compelled to acknowledge her beauty. It was not such a marriage as Lady Osborne could possibly countenance for her son; but nevertheless she found herself drawn towards Emma; and placing herself near to her, directed the greater part of her conversation to her; while Margaret sat somewhat aside, white and silent, only able to join in the conversation when directly addressed.

"I understand from Mrs. Blake," said Lady Osborne, "that you have been brought up by a relative at some distance?"

"By my aunt, Mrs. Turner, now Mrs. O'Brien."

"And where has she gone to live?"

"In the South of Ireland, ma'am, where Captain O'Brien has a small property."

"Captain O'Brien? There was an officer of that name in the Royal ——s, my brother's regiment."

"That was his regiment, but he resigned his commission many years ago."

"I am afraid it could scarcely have been a prudent marriage."

Seeing tears gathering in Emma's eyes, Lady Osborne hastened to change the conversation by speaking of other officers in the same regiment; and on mentioning a Colonel Norwood, was interested to hear that he had been a friend of the late Mr. Turner, with whom he had frequently dined.

"It is a pity your aunt did not marry him instead," she observed.

"But he is dead, ma'am. He left me this brooch I am wearing and also a legacy of fifty pounds."

"I did not know you had fifty pounds, Emma," said Elizabeth, surprised. Miss Osborne looked her disdain, but Lady Osborne said kindly—

"It will be very useful to Miss Emma for her trousseau, in a few years; well, do not be in too great a hurry to marry, my dear."

Emma blushed, and Lady Osborne, believing that it was on account of her son, grew more reserved for a few moments. Determined, however, to have fuller proof, she presently mentioned him by name, and was gratified to observe that Emma received it without any embarrassment.

"Perhaps there is someone else," she thought to herself.

But on sharing this surmise with Miss Osborne, during the drive home, she was

surprised to find that her daughter received it with so little favour.

Elizabeth and Emma shortly returned the visit, but Lady Osborne was not at home.

Soon after this event, Lord Osborne sent game for Mr. Watson; Mr. Howard was not less civil with a present of fruit; and Mr. Musgrave, not to be out of the fashion, called with a basket of fish. Poor Mr. Watson was considerably surprised at finding himself become so popular all at once; but when he questioned Emma on the subject, received surprisingly little information in her reply.

In the meantime, Margaret's health was occasioning not a little anxiety to her sisters. She seemed to have no interest in anything, had quite lost her appetite, and went listlessly about the house; before long she was confined to her room with a feverish attack.

Elizabeth and Emma were assiduous in their care of her, and were presently rewarded, not only by her being restored to some measure of health, but also by her being rendered less irritable towards them, from a sense of gratitude for their sympathy.

Just as she was beginning to come down stairs again, the Osbornes issued invitations for a ball; and the Miss Watsons were among the first to receive a card.

Elizabeth had no idea but that they should go with the Edwards, and was considerably put out when she found that not only were they not going, but that Mrs. Edwards was offended at having been ignored, when the Watsons (on whom she had always looked down) had been included.

Mary Edwards was absent at the moment, but, on learning what had transpired, with great good sense pointed out to her mother that as they had never before been taken notice of by the Osbornes, they had now no cause for mortification, generously adding that such beauty as Emma's could not but be distinguished.

Nevertheless there is no young lady who can hear of a ball without desiring to go to it; and the matter occasioned not a little stir in the small country town, where any

subject for gossip was eagerly seized upon. Tom Musgrave, hearing of it, reported it at the Castle as a good joke, believing the Osbornes would be gratified by learning of the disappointment they had unwittingly occasioned.

It had quite a different effect, however, on Lady Osborne, who at once despatched an invitation to Mary Edwards, together with a kind note in which she said she understood that she was a friend of the Miss Watsons, and that it would give her much pleasure if she would accompany them to the dance.

All was now happily settled, as Mrs. Blake had arranged to meet them in the cloakroom at the Castle and act as chaperon.

Miss Osborne, though in some awe of her mother, had done all in her power to prevent her inviting Emma.

"You are encouraging Osborne in every way," she said, "to make this disgraceful marriage—to ask Emma Watson to this house will be to throw her into his arms."

"I think differently," replied Lady Osborne coldly, "and I do not choose that Osborne should give a dance in the Assembly Rooms, which was what he had intended doing."

"It would have been far better, ma'am. You could then have refused to attend."

"I have not the slightest intention of ever inflicting such a slight upon my son."

"It would have put Miss Watson in her place. She will now be more forward and impertinent than ever."

"I find her neither forward nor impertinent."

"You do not know her, ma'am; there is a sort of independence in her which I find insupportable."

"I believe I am the better judge—and it is not a question of her conduct, but of mine."

Miss Osborne, finding nothing to reply, curtsied and left the room.

CHAPTER VIII

During the interval which elapsed, Lord Osborne and Mr. Howard both discovered various pretexts for calling at the Rectory; Mr. Watson's health, for one thing, causing them no inconsiderable anxiety; and on different occasions when the latter was riding by chance in the neighbourhood of Stanton, and had met Emma out walking with Elizabeth, in view of all the perils of a singularly quiet neighbourhood, had believed it incumbent on him to escort her the whole way home, leading his horse by the bridle.

Nor is it to be supposed that Mr. Musgrave permitted himself to be relegated to the background, where a new and pretty woman was concerned; even had she not possessed the additional importance, in his eyes, of having aroused Lord Osborne from his habitual apathy. He addressed himself to her without loss of time, confident of success, and wholly incapable of believing that her indifference was genuine.

But Emma's contempt for him, as can well be imagined, only served to aggravate the mortification from which poor Margaret was constrained to suffer; and she could not be prevailed upon to go to the Osbornes' dance, although her father had expressed his willingness to remain, for once, by himself.

On the night of the ball, Emma and Elizabeth were received with every attention by Lord Osborne, who met them in the hall; and Lady Osborne both curtsied and held out her hand; but Miss Osborne contented herself with a very short curtsey; while Miss Carr found herself obliged to become so engrossed in Colonel Beresford that she could not see them at all.

Lord Osborne was to open the ball with the Countess of X——, but he engaged Emma for the next two dances; and Mr. Howard secured her for the first two, and led her aside.

"This is just your second dance, is it not?"

"Oh, no! I have been out a year."

"Preposterous! A year's licence for breaking hearts in."

"Hearts so easily broken would be scarcely worth considering."

"Do not you, then, preserve them in a glass case?"

"I never preserve what I do not value."

"So young and so untender!"

"'So young, my lord, and true!'"

"I did not know young ladies were students of Shakespeare."

"No doubt they are more intelligent at breaking hearts, and preserving them in a glass case!"

Miss Osborne, who was near to her at the moment, turned and looked at her in cold surprise, then passed on; but Emma's face was at once so arch and sweet that Mr. Howard was wholly charmed, and bending slightly over her, took a white rose from his coat and begged her to honour him by wearing it. Then as the violins were playing, and several couples leaving the room, they followed in their wake.

As Emma entered the ball-room, all eyes were fixed on her—it passed from mouth to mouth that she was the prettiest woman in the room, and she was speedily acclaimed the belle.

Gentlemen flocked round her, begging for introductions; and Tom Musgrave was foremost in presenting himself; but Emma felt so keenly all the misery he had caused her sister, that she declined to give him an engagement for any dance, and without affording him any semblance of excuse.

Never before had he received such treatment at the hands of any lady, and least of all had he expected it from a Miss Watson.

Highly incensed, and with a view to covering his discomfiture, he approached Miss Carr, and solicited her; but as she had witnessed what had transpired, and would

have been the last to accept a rejected suitor, he was promptly dismissed, and retired to the card-room vowing vengeance.

Meanwhile, Elizabeth and Mary Edwards had no lack of partners, as they knew several of the officers present; and Lord Osborne had made a point of introducing other gentlemen to them. Both were in good looks, especially Elizabeth, who was accounted by several to be almost as handsome as her sister.

In the course of the evening the Boulangeries were danced. This had been arranged by Miss Osborne and Miss Carr, with a special view to mortifying Emma; but to their disappointment, it transpired that she was not only conversant with the several figures, but was also accustomed to innovations; and on Lord Osborne requesting her to direct a new movement, conducted it with a simple confidence which proved her to be no novice.

Had Elizabeth been her mother, she could not have taken a greater pride in her performance; and Charles was in ecstasies as she selected him for her cavalier.

Lady Osborne, who had come in with Mrs. Blake to watch the dance, entirely approved her conduct, fully recognizing that she acted in this manner, not only that she might keep her promise to Charles of giving him a dance, but also in order to avoid Lord Osborne, who made not the slightest effort to conceal his admiration of her. Her eyes then fell on her own daughter, and it seemed to her that never had she seen her less in looks. Near to her was Miss Carr, and she could not but note the ill-humour of her countenance. The next moment she was almost startled by its sudden change of expression as she leaned forward to speak to her son, and as she did so her designs on him were betrayed.

In point of fortune and connection there was nothing to be urged; but in that moment Lady Osborne felt that if she were asked to choose between her and Emma Watson for a daughter-in-law, she would be constrained to give her suffrage to the latter—and again her eyes wandered to her.

She was now dancing with Mr. Howard, in a temporary exchange of partners, and it was very evident that he was quite absorbed in her.

At this moment, Miss Osborne passed near to her mother, and her excessive pallor showed beneath her rouge.

Presently Colonel Beresford and his partner paused within a few steps of her, without observing her, and she could not help hearing part of their conversation.

"Osborne must be monstrous hard hit when he gives a dance."

"But you are all in love with this beautiful girl—are not you?—Look at Mr. Howard!—and she is not insensible to his merit!"

"He has no chance against Lord Osborne. No young lady could refuse a title!"

"Why such strictures! Do not you then allow anything for our hearts?"

"Zounds, Madam; I have more respect for your wits! I should form but a mean opinion of any woman's understanding who would reject Lord Osborne for his former tutor!"

Then they passed on; but in the short space that Lady Osborne had stood there, it seemed to her that all the comedy and tragedy of the ball had been revealed to her; no longer could she find any enjoyment in it; and, sick at heart, she would have left the room only for the observation it would have occasioned.

As Lady X—— had been obliged to return home early, Lord Osborne, having danced twice with Emma, took her in to supper. Mr. Howard then danced twice with her. He had admired her very much from the first; and now was in a fair way to be very much in love with her. Casting prudence to the winds, he drew her into the greenhouse and, in accents which betrayed his emotion, endeavoured to thank her for having given him the happiest evening of his life, begging her to favour him by returning him the rose he had presented to her.

Emma was unable to meet the ardour of his eyes, and with fingers which slightly

trembled, she removed it from her dress.

He placed it in his breast and, raising her hand, pressed it to his lips.

"I believe this is our dance, Mr. Howard," Miss Osborne's cold voice broke in on them, and nothing could well have been less opportune. Mr. Howard, however, appeared entirely unembarrassed, and, bowing and smiling, gave her his arm—seeing that Colonel Beresford was claiming Emma; and the latter saw him no more. For almost immediately afterwards, Miss Edwards came to beg her to come home, as she had promised her father to return early; and as Lady X—— had already gone, there could be no impropriety in their doing so.

Lord Osborne attended them to the carriage, but Emma was almost wholly silent, and he was deeply mortified by her reserve.

CHAPTER IX

The next day Mr. Watson was taken seriously ill; and though he lingered for some weeks, his daughters were almost completely cut off from all social intercourse.

Towards Christmas he died.

Everything was overshadowed by the sense of loss; but Emma found that she could be still more lonely, when, on receipt of a kind letter from Mrs. Blake, she learned that she had taken a house in London, in order to put Charles to school; and that Mr. Howard had been called to Cumberland to the bedside of a relative who had had a stroke.

The Osbornes had gone abroad.

The clergyman who had been doing duty for Mr. Watson, had been appointed to the parish; but with great consideration had begged them not to move till the following March; so that they might have sufficient leisure to dispose of their furniture, and to make their arrangements.

Penelope had returned for some time, and Emma had learned to dread the sound of her sharp voice. She and Margaret quarrelled perpetually. There seemed never to be any peace in the house. Her ill-humour was aggravated by her friends, the Shaws, having secured a situation for her as assistant teacher in a private seminary; for not only was she averse to this position, but she felt, even more keenly, that it was a tacit acknowledgment of the fatal obduracy of the heart, she had wasted so much time in endeavouring to subdue.

Margaret had got an engagement as companion to a delicate girl.

Emma's case was the hardest. She was to find her home with Robert and Jane, who openly discussed her prospects of making a good match. In vain she pleaded her desire to take a situation, like her sisters. Robert would not hear of it. She had already received ill-treatment enough from her family, he affirmed, and he would do his best to give her a good chance. Even Elizabeth joined her voice to her brother's.

"You do not know what you would suffer as governess or companion. Your beauty would be for ever making you enemies."

Emma could say no more while her brother was present, but when she found herself alone with Elizabeth, she besought her to aid her in getting a post where she might earn her bread independently.

"My position with Robert and Jane would not be tolerable," she pleaded.

"Do not stand in your own light, dear Emma," Elizabeth replied; "your position would be much worse with strangers. Robert and Jane will both be kind to you if you do not offend them. They were not too well pleased by your refusing to go with them in October; and now that Lord Osborne has admired you, they are all for having you. Believe me, it will be the best thing for you."

"Anyway, I shall stay here until March."

"Yes—Robert has consented to that—and as Penelope and Margaret are to go to their situations in February, we can have a little time in peace to ourselves."

To Elizabeth alone did there come any prospect of happiness.

Mr. Purvis, now a widower, had been engaged by Mr. Howard to do duty for him; and, on learning that Miss Watson was as handsome as ever, considered it to be his duty to call as soon as circumstances permitted.

His earlier feelings for her were very soon revived, and although he could not immediately enter into an engagement with her, on account of his recent bereavement, it was quite evident to all that the old relations between them would be happily restored.

In the meantime it was arranged that Elizabeth should go to his aunt as companion.

His marriage had not been happy, which is scarcely to be wondered at, seeing that he had entered somewhat hastily into it in order to assuage his feelings of disappointment; and as his wife shortly afterwards fell into ill-health, matters had been scarcely brightened by the peevish temper of an invalid.

The more Emma saw of him, the better was she pleased with him. He was good-looking and gentlemanlike, with unaffected manners, and a pleasant countenance. She could not but feel confident that Elizabeth would be happy at his side.

Towards the end of February, Mr. Howard returned, and lost no time in riding over to Stanton. Unfortunately, however, as he drew near to the Rectory gate, he met Tom Musgrave coming out of it, and was instantly hailed by that gentleman.

"Upon my word, Howard, I thought you had taken root in Cumberland. Oh, a sad break up here!—monstrous pleasant girls as ever I met! Miss Emma is going to Croydon with her brother, and I hear is shortly to be married to an old flame. Oh, a famous little flirt, I can assure you!"

So saying, and waving his hand, he took himself off, laughing heartily at his own ingenuity.

In consequence therefore of this unwelcome intelligence, Mr. Howard merely called at the door; and, ignoring Nanny's information that the ladies were in, rode gloomily away.

Emma had watched his approach from an upper window, and blushed and blushed again.

She was pausing before coming down, in the endeavour to quell the beating of her heart, when to her surprise she heard the clattering of his horse's hoofs; and, running back to the window, saw him vanishing round the corner.

At first she was all disappointment, and did not know what to think. Tears gathered thickly in her eyes, and fell on her black dress. But presently she considered that he might perhaps think it right to call at first without coming in, on account of her father's death, and that he would come again.

But he never came again, and about a week later she was carried away to Croydon by her brother, who had returned for her.

CHAPTER X

Emma had now entered on a new chapter of her life, and one which she could not but regard with pain and misgiving. Being in mourning, however, she was for the present saved from any special distress; and she at once found an object for her affection in little Augusta, a very pretty child, with much more natural refinement than either her father or mother. As her health was indifferent, Emma was the more drawn to her, and devoted all the time to her that she could spare from Jane's constant demands on her needle.

All this time she had never seen her brother Sam, as he had been seriously ill when the others had been called to the bedside of their father. During this period he had been attended by Mr. Curtis with the solicitude of a relative; and, on his recovering sufficiently to be removed, he had sent him to Bath at his own charge.

Towards the end of March, he gave him a few days' leave to go and see his brother and sisters at Croydon.

On the day previous to that on which he was expected, as Emma was sitting alone in the drawing-room, the door opened and a young gentleman, with a very open, attractive countenance, entered the room unannounced.

He bowed on seeing her, apologising for his intrusion, and she rose and curtsied—when suddenly he called out——

"As sure as anything, it is little Emma!" and came over to her with both hands stretched out.

"Oh, Sam! Can it be really you?"

"Were not you, then, expecting me?"

"Not until to-morrow. How came you a day sooner?"

"I met Tom Musgrave in Guildford, and he drove me over in his curricle. He will be staying here for a couple of days, and is coming this evening to wait on you and Jane—but let me look at you properly! You have got your nice little brown face still, I see; and I dare say you have that fine little vixenish temper that you used to have—I vow you gave me a famous slap the last time I had the honour of seeing you!"

"No doubt it was the price of you, sir! and I shall give you another, if you do not be careful!"

Before very long, Jane came into the room and affected a great start of surprise on seeing Sam and Emma sitting on the sofa together.

"Good Lord, Sam!" she cried. "I thought you must be one of Emma's lovers come after her!"

"Has she so many as all that?—I protest I must look into this!" he replied, laughing; then seeing a shade on Emma's face, he easily turned the conversation by enquiring

for Robert, and begging that little Augusta might be sent for.

In the course of the evening, Tom Musgrave arrived, and was received with great cordiality by Robert and Jane.

After the usual enquiries and civilities, he threw himself back in the easiest chair in the room, and beamed round at them, saying—

"I vow and declare there are no friends like old friends. Oh, it's monstrous dull since you and the Osbornes left—positively I have half a mind to go after Osborne!"

"Is not he soon coming back?" asked Robert.

"Faith, there's no sign of it! Howard has joined them at Rome. He is very likely to be engaged to Miss Osborne."

Emma was sitting beyond the candles, so that he could not see her face; but by her very stillness he was satisfied that he had wounded her.

"I think it is Miss Carr that he is after," said Jane in an important tone, as though she were intimate.

"Oh, Fanny Carr is all for me! She won't look at anyone else, I can assure you, when I am by!"

"Take care, Tom!" said Sam, laughing. "Out of sight, out of mind! She will have forgotten you months ago, I wager!"

"Why do not you join Lord Osborne?" enquired Jane.

Now, as this was precisely what Tom Musgrave had been straining every nerve to accomplish—giving hints to his lordship of unimaginable breadth, which so far had been entirely ignored—he was by no means too well pleased by the question; and delighted Sam, who saw through him perfectly, by reeling off a string of excuses, each less convincing than the last.

"Does Miss Carr never stay with her own people?" enquired Robert.

"She has been at Castle Carr all winter," said Sam carelessly. "She will be going up

to Berkeley Square next month with Lord and Lady Carr."

Tom Musgrave stared at him.

"How came you to know this?" he asked in a sulky tone.

"Lord Montague told me."

"Lord Montague? How came you to meet with him?"

"I was called in to attend him when Mr. Curtis was away. I had supposed he would consider a surgeon's assistant as little superior to his valet; but he was very civil, and chatted away—told me he had seen my sisters at the Osbornes' dance, and was so obliging as to add they were prodigious pretty! Emma, do not be listening!"

Jane was as surprised as Musgrave, but shrewd enough not to betray it; and, seeing the clouded look on his face, suggested a game of cards.

Robert hesitated a little, but, as Tom caught eagerly at the suggestion, she produced a pack; and, Emma declining to play, whist was selected.

CHAPTER XI

Sam was so little satisfied with Augusta's health that he insisted on her being taken to the sea; and a client of Robert's at once offered to lend him his house, which was in a sheltered bay on the South Coast, for six months. As Jane was unable to go into company, she demurred a good deal less than she might otherwise have done; and, like most wives, was not averse to suffering the mild anguish of a temporary separation from her husband.

Sam himself took charge of them on the journey, as Robert was engaged on an important case; and he had the satisfaction of assuring himself that the climate was suited to his little patient.

She and Emma were delighted with the change, and as the weather was unusually mild, they rambled about the greater part of the day.

It was with sincere regret that Emma parted from Sam; she had found in him a true friend, and one who comprehended the possible evils of her situation with much greater distinctness than had been the case with Elizabeth. They all escorted him to the mail coach at A——, and Emma was constrained to wonder if it were to be for ever her lot to be parted from all to whom she had become attached; while little Augusta, holding her young uncle's hands, danced round with him on the publick road, to the indignation of her mother and the amusement of the other passengers.

At Emma's request, the child's nurse had been dismissed on their leaving Croydon; Emma now taking Augusta under her sole charge, to the great advantage of the little girl, who had been considerably tried by the vagaries of an uncertain temper and an injudicious arrangement of her meals.

As her health rapidly improved, Emma commenced some simple lessons with her, which included instruction in drawing, for which she showed some aptitude. In the course of a few weeks she had copied a little picture so neatly, that Jane enclosed it in a letter to her father, who was so pleased that he sent her down a box of water-colours. This was a great boon to the child during the broken weather, which set in for a short time.

As Jane was really fond of her little daughter, she could not but feel grateful to Emma for her care of her; but she had been not a little offended at finding her indifferent to the petty gossip of Croydon, which occupied half her own time, and had always been willingly listened to by both Elizabeth and Margaret. At once jealous of her, and yet considering her to be wanting in fashion, she was nevertheless gratified by the pretty manners she was instilling into Augusta.

Emma was teaching her to curtsey before leaving the room; but, as she was of a very lively disposition, she would often run out into the hall before she could remember to do so. They would then hear her stopping short, and saying to herself, "Oh, I forgot!" when she would come running back to make her curtsey. It was all done so

prettily, they could not but be delighted with her.

It had been apparent from the first that Jane had derived but little pleasure from the excursions by the sea, or through the country lanes, which delighted Emma and Augusta so much; preferring rather to drive in the pony chaise, which had been left for their use, into the neighbouring town of A——. It was not, however, until the early days of June that Emma began to notice how many hours she was spending there; and presently Jane informed her that a former school friend, a Mrs. Burton, now a widow, had taken rooms in the hotel there, and that she spent the most of her time with her, playing cards. She also confessed that this lady was no favourite of Robert's. This was very unwelcome news to Emma, who knew her brother to be very far from particular.

"I assure you, Emma," Jane continued earnestly, "it is all prejudice; Jemima Burton is of quite superior style, and very well off. You could hardly meet with anyone more agreeable; and she is all anxiety to know you. I hope you will come with me to-morrow—she will not be having company—we shall be quite by ourselves."

Emma was considerably embarrassed.

"I could not leave Augusta," she said.

"Oh! The maids here will take every care of her—she will not be wanting for anything. I cannot very well go without you, when she has made such a point of it."

On the following afternoon, therefore, Emma was constrained to drive with her sister-in-law into A——, and they were shown into the common sitting-room of the hotel, where they were warmly received by a vulgar, over-dressed woman.

"Now, I call this kind," she exclaimed. "And so this is the young lady Lord Osborne admired!"

This was said in such a loud voice that everyone in the room turned and stared at Emma; so that, in spite of her efforts to maintain her countenance, she grew crimson.

"Introduce me, madam, I beg," said a thin, unpleasant-looking man, thrusting himself boldly forward; "I know his Lordship well, and am proud to make the acquaintance of any friend of his."

"Allow me to have the pleasure of introducing Captain Conway, Miss Watson."

Emma's curtsey was of the slightest. They were then joined by two or three other men, all of them desiring to be presented, and each more objectionable than the last.

With a quiet courage which surprised Emma herself, she said—

"I am in mourning for my father and do not desire introductions. I understood, ma'am, that we were to be received by you in your own rooms."

Jane stared at her sister-in-law; but Mrs. Burton at once gave in; and, waving them all aside, declared that they were sad fellows, and that none of them need think to be introduced. With that she led the way to her apartments; but, to Emma's surprise, they were closely followed by Captain Conway.

"Oh! he is my cousin," she said with bold assurance; but Emma was convinced that this was a falsehood; the more so that the gentleman in question laughed immoderately, and repeated the assertion several times over.

He placed himself at her side and, fixing his glass in his eye, ogled her in a manner she had never before been subjected to in the whole course of her life; whilst he did his utmost to draw her into conversation. But she would neither answer him, nor raise her eyes from the ground.

Jane grew uncomfortable and, in order to conceal it and to regain confidence, began to speak in a much louder voice than was her wont. In this she was ably assisted by her friend—one would have thought that there were at least a dozen women in the room.

At first, Emma was too agitated to pay any attention to what they were saying—she was even too confused to arrange her thoughts; but presently, as she grew more

composed, the contrast of her past life with her present position came home to her with such poignancy, that she could scarcely contain her tears. Were it possible, she thought, that her aunt could have seen her in such company, what would not have been her feelings?

Presently, however, her attention was caught by Jane saying—

"Thursday, then; you will both come and have a dish of tea with me on Thursday evening; and we can start a quiet rubber of whist."

During the drive home, Jane was in more ill-humour than Emma could have conceived possible.

"Good heavens! Emma," she said. "How can you give yourself such airs? Your head is completely turned by Lord Osborne having admired you! I could not have imagined anyone could have been so silly!"

Emma remained silent.

"I assure you I am very much offended at the way you have been treating my friends. Mrs. Burton has more style than you; and Captain Conway is quite the gentleman. I never saw anyone of more fashion—and such attentions he paid you! Mrs. Burton told me he was wild to know you; and anyone could see how he was struck with you. Good Lord! Emma, what more do you want—a Captain!—and second cousin to the Marquis of H——!—Mrs. Burton told me so!—Why do not you answer?"

"I cannot permit his attentions."

"You cannot permit his attentions!—did anyone ever hear the like! Well, let me tell you, Miss Emma, you must permit them—You should be only too thankful he should wish to pay them, when you are just nothing!—you are all of you beggars!"

Emma covered her face with her hands.

"There, Emma—I did not mean to make you cry."

* * * * * *

On the evening on which Mrs. Burton and Captain Conway were expected, Augusta was laid up with a feverish cold, and Emma steadily refused to leave her bedside. Jane was at first angry, but, seeing the child's flushed cheeks, was obliged to give way and send for the apothecary, who prescribed a soothing draught.

A few days later, however, Captain Conway called again, and as on this occasion Emma happened to be in the drawing-room with her sister, she was obliged to submit to his company; but she remained almost as silent as before, and would scarcely raise her eyes.

On his departure, Jane again turned on her and vowed that she would soon bring her to her senses by writing to Robert.

"He will send you such a message as you will be bound to obey," she said. "We have done all that could be thought of to fix one of you, and now when there is a chance of your getting settled you are all for throwing it away! You put me quite out of patience with you!"

Robert answered the letter in person; and, to Jane's amazement, declared positively that he was not going to have Emma thrown away on any half-pay officer; and that he had so much information against Captain Conway, he would hunt him out of the neighbourhood.

On the following morning, however, when he drove into A——, he found that that gentleman, having caught sight of him on the stage coach the previous afternoon, had hastily cleared out, taking Mrs. Burton along with him.

It then transpired that the two had been in collusion; and that Mrs. Burton, believing Emma to be the heiress of her aunt, had introduced Captain Conway to her, on the understanding that she was to receive a substantial sum on the consummation of his marriage with her.

Jane was deeply mortified at having allowed herself to be mixed up with such

people; and it was in a very chastened frame of mind that Robert left her, on his return to Croydon, promising to come back in August for a fortnight's holiday.

CHAPTER XII

Mr. Howard had been but a short time with the Osbornes when he was obliged to confess that he had made a mistake in coming.

A man of singular charm of manner, eminently gifted for social success, he had as little vanity as well might be; and his devotion to literature engendered in him a sort of absent-mindedness which rendered him unconscious of things which were sufficiently obvious to others.

He could scarcely himself have said what now opened his eyes in some measure to the nature of Miss Osborne's regard for him; for never before had it occurred to him that she entertained anything beyond an ordinary friendship—the very fact of her occasional efforts to flirt with him only confirming his confidence in her indifference and merely contributing to his amusement.

He had been but little pleased by her incursion into his dinner party; but had attributed it to her lack of variety in a dull neighbourhood and to the influence of Miss Carr, of whom he entertained but a slight opinion. The jealousy of Emma, which she had betrayed at the ball, he believed to be entirely owing to her brother's admiration of her—the connection being such as she could scarcely be expected to advocate.

The knowledge of her feelings occasioned him so much regret, that he would fain have left Italy then and there; but in view of the urgent invitations he had received from Lady Osborne and her son, this was scarcely possible. For the moment at least, he must remain where he was.

He began at once, however, to cast about for some excuse to shorten his stay; and presently urged his desire to prosecute his travels in Spain and Portugal. He had long

desired to journey there, and there was now no impediment to his doing so, as his cousin, whose bedside he had attended, had bequeathed him a large fortune, independently of the handsome property to which he had succeeded as heir-presumptive; but, to his surprise, Lady Osborne withstood him, with flushed cheeks and tears in her eyes.

"Do not desert us the moment you have come," she said; "Osborne has seemed so much more composed since you joined us—I never before knew him to be so disquieted as he has been. I cannot but admire Miss Watson's conduct—had she chosen to accept him, nothing could have prevented the marriage. I had scarcely realised how serious his passion was until the night of the ball—after she had left us. He was quite in despair."

"I understand she is shortly to be married."

"Have you told Osborne?"

"No. He has not mentioned her name to me."

"Am I at liberty to tell him?"

"Certainly, madam; what object could be served in concealing it? Osborne could scarcely conceive the idea of rushing home to present a pistol at her lover's head!"

Later on in the evening, Lord Osborne entered the private sitting-room of his late tutor, and said abruptly—

"My mother has informed me of Miss Watson's engagement. To whom is she to be married?"

"That I cannot tell you."

"How came you to know?"

"Musgrave told me.'

"Musgrave! I would place monstrous little faith in anything he said!"

"He was certainly never my friend, but I understood him to be yours," replied Mr.

Howard, coldly.

"What can a man do in that delectable neighbourhood?—He helps one to get through the time. I dare swear he made the whole thing up!" So saying, Lord Osborne swung out of the room.

He had not been long gone when there was a timid knock, and Miss Osborne entered with a book in her hand.

Mr. Howard rose and placed a chair for her; but did not sit down himself.

"I came to ask you if you would be so very good as to help me with this passage in Dante's Inferno," she said.

He read it at once without any hesitation, as the portion indicated presented no special difficulty that he could see; and he was constrained to wonder wherefore she had selected it—the truth being that she had opened the volume at random.

"I have just heard from Lady Osborne that Miss Watson is about to be married."

In spite of himself, he was obliged to smile.

"I regret that I have nothing to add to this thunderbolt!"

"You are quite sure that she is to be married?"

He was aware that she was watching him narrowly, and both his face and voice were entirely under control as he replied—

"I see no reason to doubt Mr. Musgrave's statement. He was just coming from the Rectory, and I know he was intimate with them."

"He was altogether mad with her for refusing to dance with him at our ball—Fanny Carr told me so."

Mr. Howard looked startled for a moment; and she proceeded—

"Fanny thought it showed a great want of breeding on her part to be so insolent to a guest of ours—she is not in a position to be disdainful of anyone—I should never think of calling her a lady."

She received no answer to this.

"Oh, I know you were vastly in love with her—I was quite expecting to have to congratulate you!"—with an attempt at archness.

Mr. Howard contented himself with bowing.

"I thought her rather handsome myself; but several gentlemen said to me that they did not at all think her anything out of the common."

This again was received in silence; and Julia Osborne, considerably mortified, and perfectly aware of Lady Osborne's displeasure, should she learn of her adventure, thought it best to retire to her room.

A few days later they were joined by Lord Edward Sothern, to whom Miss Osborne turned her attentions, and with much greater prospect of ultimate success.

This, however, was not at all what she desired; but to inflict some gentle damage on an unimpressive heart, which she should presently be called upon to repair. In vain was the snare laid; and she was shortly engaged in a flirtation which obliged Lady Osborne to compel her to accept the proposal which speedily followed, and was urged with insistence.

Julia Osborne was not a little incensed at the turn affairs had taken; and believing Mr. Howard to be the cause of all the mischief, felt that she had been barbarously used. Her resentment grew with reflection; and for a time nothing could appease her, although it was incumbent on her to dissemble her feelings. All this, however, had the salutary effect of estranging her from the first object of her affections; and by degrees the good-humour and attentions of her lover reconciled her to the hardship of her fate.

CHAPTER XIII

As the period for which the Osbornes had engaged a suite of apartments (in an old

palace) had drawn to a close, they proceeded with their guests by easy stages to Florence.

Mr. Howard was now Lady Osborne's constant companion, as they rambled about amongst the old churches, and through the galleries, so rich in the masterpieces of the world. He was much more attached to her than to any member of the family, always finding in her a congenial companion. She was an amiable, intelligent, elegant woman, greatly superior to her son and daughter, as well by nature as cultivation.

Her beauty was wonderfully preserved; her fair hair untouched by time; her eyes undimmed; and a bright colour glowing in her cheeks as she walked along under the perfect blue of the Italian sky. As they turned down the "Way of the Beautiful Ladies," he could not but acknowledge how well she fulfilled the tradition.

"You are very silent, Arthur," she said.

He looked at her with a smile in his eyes, and made some brief answer.

Never before had she addressed him by his christian name, and he was at once gratified by a friendship which was sincere enough to desire the intimacy; and disappointed that the music of his name had not sounded for him on the lips of another, whose image he was as yet unable to banish from his heart.

As though divining something of the trend of his thought, she began to speak of Emma; continuing—

"I thought her a perfect lady—I could find no want of breeding in her. Modest, yet confident, as one used to Society; refined, yet without affectation. When I think of the difference between her and the other members of her family, whom I have noticed at the Assembly balls, I am forced to the conclusion that her father must have married very much beneath him. It must be trying for her, when she has been brought up so differently, to be obliged to live with them now."

"She seems to be attached to her eldest sister."

"She impressed me much more favourably than her other sisters, whose conduct has attracted my attention on different occasions—she is too simple to be accused of vulgarity."

They walked along in silence for a brief space; and then Lady Osborne continued—

"Is it not very much to be deplored that men so seldom ask for anything beyond youth and beauty?—so seldom consider merit, or suitability? How often have not men disregarded every indication of personal qualities that would have assured their happiness, and turned aside after the first pretty face that came in their way? It is a sort of blindness—an absence of penetration—which must bring ultimate regret. Do you remember the Sacristan, in Santa Croce, telling us of the priceless frescoes of Giotto that lay hidden under the whitewash on the walls of the Chapel of the Bardi della Liberta? It made me think of how often so much lies hidden from us by an even slighter veil—a gossamer so slender that we may afterwards come to wonder what obstacle it could have presented to us!"

Her companion looked at her in wonder, not unmixed with sorrow, though the appeal in her voice held no meaning for him; and he was constrained to walk along in silence at her side.

Later on, as she sat beneath Botticelli's Fortitude, with her hand on her parasol, the likeness between them struck him with almost a sense of dismay. Her bright colour had faded, and there was a look of weariness and lassitude on her face. As in the picture, it was the face of one who had suffered, and would yet again suffer, before she had laid her head on the quiet pillow of her grave.

* * * * * *

Towards the end of May, the Osbornes returned to London to prepare for Miss Osborne's wedding, whilst Mr. Howard went on his way to Spain.

CHAPTER XIV

The Watsons returned to Croydon in October; and a few weeks later, Mrs. Watson, finding the resignation of second mourning eminently becoming, sent out invitations for a party.

Emma was very sensible of the want of propriety in having company within a year of her father's death; but Robert welcomed the arrangement, as he was anxious to show attention to some new and important clients.

About a week before the entertainment was to take place, Lord Osborne called. He was shown into the drawing-room where Emma was working at her embroidery; while Jane sat near her, making out a list of the dishes that would be necessary for the supper.

It was with a sinking heart that Emma rose and curtsied to him. She had hoped that he had forgotten her; and his persistence in once more following her could only serve to aggravate the difficulty of her position. Jane was not a little agitated at finding herself, for the first time in her life, in the society of a man of his position; and was also a good deal disconcerted by having thrown her second best tippet round her shoulders, when her best would have been so much more suitable to such an important occasion.

As Emma remained silent, she believed it to be incumbent on her to express her sense of the honour he had done them in calling, enquiring with immense affability for Lady Osborne and Lady Edward Sothern.

Emma then enquired for Mrs. Blake and Charles, and learned that the latter was head of his class at school, and was grown a monstrous fine fellow. Lord Osborne then added that Mr. Howard was not yet returned from Spain.

"How do you like Croydon, Miss Watson?" he continued. "I always thought it famously dull myself."

"There are some pleasant walks towards the country," she began, when she was hastily interrupted by Jane.

"Oh! I assure you, Lord Osborne, there is an immense deal of fashion in Croydon! Many of the families live in the first style—and as for sociability, there are few places to equal it! When not in mourning, we are in company nearly every evening!"

Lord Osborne looked not a little astonished; then, after a short pause, turning to Emma, said—

"I am glad to hear you are taking exercise. Do not you now wear half-boots?"

Emma began to laugh; and believing he must have said something witty, he joined in very heartily.

At this moment, Robert entered the room. He had not expected to find Lord Osborne there; but Emma was gratified by the quiet manner in which he received him. Taking the conversation into his own hands, he discussed the harvest; the French; the incapacity of the Government (that unfailing source of gratification to those who govern not); and a new play, which a friend of his had seen in London. Emma had never before heard him talk so well; and yet she was aware that there was something wanting in cordiality; but Lord Osborne was apparently very well satisfied to be spared the fatigue of exercising his brain.

Jane, however, listened with ill-concealed impatience; and when, at length, Robert paused, she lost no time in striking in, and began—

"We are arranging to have a little company, my lord——"

But Robert was quite equal to playing the husband; and the instant displeasure of his eye froze the invitation which was hovering on her lips.

"Mr. Musgrave mentioned something of the sort to me," replied Lord Osborne, colouring slightly. "I should be very much honoured, madam, if you would be so good as to include me."

The request was made with a sort of simple shyness that made it impossible to be refused; but as Robert returned to the drawing-room, after seeing him out, his face

was clouded.

"I am sure you are too sensible, Emma," he said, "to desire to have Lord Osborne dangling after you. It will not be possible for him to marry you. It will only occasion spiteful gossip; and perhaps prevent your getting fixed."

"I assure you, Robert," replied Emma, blushing, "that not for anything in the world would I encourage him—I sincerely hope that he will not continue to call." With that, she left the room.

Jane had been watching her, with shrewd eyes, in silence.

"I declare I never met a girl like her!" she exclaimed. "I am as certain as anything that she is not wanting to have him! But mark my words, Robert, Lord Osborne is in earnest! He is not for flirting at all. And, unless she is a born fool, Emma will be 'my lady'!"

* * * * * *

On the night of the party, Augusta was allowed to remain up for half-an-hour; Sam had got leave to join them; and Lord Osborne and Mr. Musgrave were amongst the first arrivals.

After the usual civilities, Lord Osborne sat down by Emma; and as the guests began to arrive in quick succession, and were not long in being informed by Jane as to his quality, inquisitive glances were constantly directed towards them. Seeing this, Emma presently excused herself, and went to sit by a lady to whom she had been previously introduced; but in a few moments he had followed her. She then presented him to the lady, who was only too pleased to form the acquaintance; and moved on to speak to a pretty girl who was sitting somewhat apart, and who appeared to know as few people as Emma herself. But again he came after her; and although she did her best to engage the two in conversation, the former was so shy, and the latter so dull, that it appeared to her as though they had simultaneously embarked on a game as to which should limit their observations to the fewest words

of one syllable. In response to an imploring eye, Sam came over, and she introduced them; and shortly afterwards they were joined by little Augusta. Lord Osborne was at once attracted by the pretty child; and, lifting her up on his knee, presented her with his silver comfit-box. It was soon time for her to retire, and Emma took her, herself, up to her room, remaining with her until Sam was sent in search of her.

As she was coming down stairs, with her hand on his arm, she paused and said earnestly—

"Sam—cannot you help me?"

He remained silent, and she continued: "You can have no conception how I have been suffering from Jane's boasting—and now that Lord Osborne has come, it will be worse than ever! Could not you persuade Robert to forbid him the house?"

"Are you quite sure, Emma, that you know your own heart? Should he be sent away, can you be certain that you will not be regretting it?"

"Quite sure and quite certain!" she replied, smiling.

"Is there anyone else, then, that you care for?"

She blushed deeply, and tears gathered in her eyes.

"There—my love!" he said, gently. "I should not have asked you."

When they re-entered the drawing-room, Lord Osborne was at once at her side. The card-table was being set, and he was anxious to arrange a party for whist, which should include Emma and himself.

Robert, however, interposed by coming forward and requesting his sister to be so kind as to sit beside old Lady Brown, and show her how to play speculation. "Did I hear you say 'whist,' my lord?—this way, if you will be good enough."

At supper, Lord Osborne found himself separated by the length of the room from the object of his admiration; and when he endeavoured to engage her afterwards as his partner, Sam had already secured her for another table.

Jane was perfectly aware of the manoeuvres of her husband and brother, and was not a little entertained by them. "It will only serve to inflame Lord Osborne," she thought to herself. "They could not be playing her cards better!"

* * * * * *

Sam was obliged to leave them on the following day; but, before going, he urged Robert to put a stop to Lord Osborne calling.

"It is not so simple as you think, Sam," replied his brother. "I shall certainly not give him any encouragement—still less, allow Emma to be thrown at his head. But Jane will have it that he is violently in love with Emma, and quite determined to marry her. If such should be the case, I would not be justified in standing in her way—it would be a very fine match for her."

"I assure you she does not desire it."

"Emma is a good girl—I am perfectly satisfied with her conduct; but, of course, if Lord Osborne intends to ask her, everything will be quite different—she will not think of him in the same way. She is now afraid of being made to appear foolish."

With this, Sam had perforce to be satisfied; and he was at least confident that Robert would secure his sister from any impertinence.

CHAPTER XV

Mrs. Robert Watson having announced her emancipation from the trammels of woe, invitations poured in, fast and thick, in all of which Emma was specially included.

It was fine, bright weather, with the pleasantest frost; and Emma was able to take out Augusta nearly every morning for a walk. To her dismay, however, she found herself frequently joined by Lord Osborne, who had taken rooms in a neighbouring inn; and she appealed in vain to her sister to accompany them, or to take charge of the child herself.

Matters were brought to a head by Jane, who deliberately informed Lord Osborne one morning when he called, of the direction in which Emma had gone. She herself had sent her some little distance beyond the town, in order to enquire for an old servant who was ill. The result was, that as Emma was turning but the first corner on her return home, she came face to face with Lord Osborne.

She replied to his greeting as coldly as might be; and was endeavouring to proceed on her way, when she was brought to a standstill by his informing her that Mrs. Watson had been so good as to indicate to him where he might find her. "She was particularly kind," he said. "I am very much obliged to her—the more so that I have been missing you for so many mornings."

Emma's eyes had been fixed on the ground, but she now suddenly raised them. His face was slightly flushed, and his whole manner betrayed confidence.

Pale with anger, and holding Augusta's hand tightly, she confronted him.

"Lord Osborne, I am alone and unprotected," she said. "You must surely see that your attentions only cause me distress. Be good enough to let me proceed on my way, without accompanying me."

"Mrs. Watson has given me her permission to escort you home."

"My sister-in-law has no conception of her duty to me."

"Believe me, Miss Watson, my intentions are entirely honourable. You have no reason to treat me with such coldness. My whole desire is to make you my wife—if you will honour me by accepting me."

Emma curtsied.

"I cannot possibly accept you, my lord—I beseech you to accept this answer as final—I can never be your wife!—but, believe me, I am deeply sensible to the honour you have done me."

"What reason can you have for refusing me? Do not be so hasty! You do not perhaps

know me well enough. I will wait—I will be patient—if you will only give me one word of hope!"

"My lord, I cannot!"

"You cannot?—why cannot you?"

Emma remained silent, but she was walking onward, the while he kept at her side.

"Miss Emma! why do not you speak?"

She could find no reply.

"I know I am a dull fellow—but I love you so much! There is not anything I would not do for you! Could not you care for me a little?"

"No, my lord."

"If you were only married to me, you would care for me!—you could not but care for me if we were married—I would love you so much!"

Emma wept.

"Why do you make my aunt cry? Why do not you go away?" asked little Augusta, looking over at him reproachfully.

"It needs a child to point out my obvious duty," he said bitterly; and, turning back, he strode away.

Augusta remained silent for several minutes, and then said—

"Is not a lord nicer than a gentleman?"

Emma was obliged to smile.

"Shall not you marry him after a while?" she continued.

"Would you like to marry him, Augusta?"

"No," replied the child, after a little hesitation; "it always seems a long time when he is there."

On their return home, Jane herself opened the door and, fixing her eyes on Emma,

said—

"Has Lord Osborne asked you?"

Emma admitted it.

"Well, you have accepted him?"

"No."

"You have not accepted him! Good heavens! Emma!—do you tell me you have refused him?—refused Lord Osborne!"

"Yes."

"Wicked, ungrateful girl! How have you the face to stand there and tell me such a thing? Are you mad, Emma? What bewitched you to refuse him?"

Emma remained silent.

"Speak, wretched girl! How dared you to refuse him?"

Emma looked at her haughtily.

"I shall speak to my brother," she replied coldly.

"It is your brother who will speak to you—Minx! Do not look at me like that! You are insufferable with your airs—and you just nothing! Owing every stick on your back to your brother and to me!"

Jane had completely lost all self-control; and little Augusta, terrified, clung to Emma, crying bitterly.

At this moment, Robert came into the hall.

"Here is Emma gone and refused Lord Osborne!" cried his wife.

"Do you consider the servants to be stone deaf!" he demanded angrily. "Come with me into my study, Emma. Go with your mother, Augusta."

Crossing the hall, he opened the door of his room for Emma to enter, and, following her in, closed and locked it.

"What is the meaning of all this?"

Emma was too agitated to reply.

"Is it true that you have refused Lord Osborne?"

"Yes, Robert."

"And why have you refused him?" Emma strove to answer, but no words came.

"I insist on your answering me. Why have you refused him?—you must have some reason."

"I do not love him."

"As far as I am aware, it is not the custom for a nice girl to love a man before he asks her. It will come in time. Listen to me, Emma. I was anything but pleased when Lord Osborne followed you here, but he has shown that his intentions are wholly honourable. Shortly after our party he called on me to obtain my permission to offer himself to you, as soon as he deemed that he might do so with reasonable hope of success. This morning he acquainted your sister with his design in following you. You have nothing to complain of with regard to his conduct; he is a handsome man; and his position is far above that you have any right to expect."

Emma remained silent, with her eyes on the ground and her cheeks burning.

"I stand to you in the light of a father," continued Robert; "I have a right to your obedience; and if you have any natural feelings you will be glad to make me some return for all I have done for you—and I am ready to do much more—by showing some willingness to comply with what I judge to be best for you. I am not saying that I might not have preferred that you had married a man in a simpler rank; but as you are so difficult to suit, I could not run the risk of dismissing him. Our aunt was no friend to you, breeding you up in a different way to us all, making you discontented; and you should be grateful to Lord Osborne for overlooking so much and being willing to marry you. Promise me, Emma, that there will be no more

nonsense, if he should be so good as to forgive you for the insult you have done him, and should come forward again."

"I cannot promise. I can never marry him."

"You can, and will marry him! Obstinate girl! What are you aiming at? Would you prefer to attract the attentions of a royal prince?"

Robert had no sooner uttered these words than he would gladly have recalled them—shrinking from the flash of his sister's eyes. The next moment she had swept past him, unlocked the door, and was gone.

Half-an-hour later she had left the house, and was on her way to Sam at Guildford.

CHAPTER XVI

Early in January Mr. Howard returned from Spain. Had he been able to follow his own inclinations, he would have gone straight to Cumberland in order to look after his property, and confer with his agent on some matters of importance; but he received such an urgent summons from Lady Osborne that he did not like to disregard it, and went down into Surrey.

As he entered the beautiful drawing-room of the Castle, where everything was so familiar to him, and Lady Osborne, so entirely in keeping with her surroundings, came forward to greet him, with a slight flush upon her face, he could not but feel how good it was to be once more at home.

They sat together by the wide hearth, and it seemed to him that in the soft light of the candles she might well pass for ten years less than her age, but as a matter of fact a stranger might well have taken her for but little older than himself; in her beauty there was something so soft and fair.

They had been chatting of one thing and another—principally of Lady Edward Sothern, and the wedding—when suddenly it occurred to him that he had not

enquired for Lord Osborne, and, to his amazement, learned that he was in Paris.

"Upon my word I do not understand him," he said, rising to his feet, and leaning against the mantelpiece. "When we were in Italy he was for ever playing the rôle of lonely exile, and pining for his native land!"

He looked down at Lady Osborne, and she coloured.

"I was particularly anxious to speak to you about him," she replied. "It is on account of his disappointment with Miss Watson. She has definitely refused him."

"But what could have induced him to ask her when she is the betrothed of another?"

"It was all a mistake—Mr. Musgrave confesses to having been misinformed. She continues to live with her brother and sister at Croydon—vulgar impossible people!—though Osborne insists that they have a child who is a perfect little lady!—I cannot understand these Watsons!"

On the plea of his disordered dress, Mr. Howard soon after retired, but, as he crossed the room it was as though something of its beauty had faded. It no longer held the same spell for him. Something of disquiet had wakened in him. An instinct, not unakin to a sense of shrinking, had possessed him—almost as though there were a pitfall at his feet.

As he entered his old apartment, he was again conscious of uneasiness. It had been freshly decorated, and re-furnished, and there was an air of luxury which somehow repelled him, giving him a feeling of oppression. He went over to the casement, and throwing it wide open, regardless of frost and snow, looked out into the quiet night, with its myriad of stars.

On the following day he set out to call on some old parishioners, and had not gone very far on his way when he encountered Tom Musgrave riding along.

"If ever I met such a fellow as you are, Howard! We all thought you'd been eaten by cannibals!"

"Sorry to disappoint you!—but there are no cannibals in Spain!"

"Well, crocodiles!—it's all one!—and here's Osborne gone off to Paris, clean out of his wits over Miss Watson!"

"How came you to make such a mistake with regard to Miss Watson?"

"Faith! I don't know that there was any mistake! Her people are wild with her for not having Osborne—but there seems to be some other fellow in the background—someone she had met at her aunt's—and she seems fully determined to have her own way. She has, absolutely, left them at Croydon, and gone to stay with her younger brother, where there will be nobody to look after her from morning to night!"

This story unfortunately received confirmation during the morning; and on the following day, when he rode over to the Rectory to see Purvis, it received a still more disquieting aspect. Emma had been seen in the company of a Captain Conway at A——, a man who was said to be highly connected, though of this there was no certain proof—but who, on the other hand, was well known to be a profligate. Heavy at heart he returned to the Castle.

As he sat with Lady Osborne over the fire that night, she told him more of her history than ever he had previously known.

He had always deplored the inferiority of her son and daughter to their mother, but hitherto it had never occurred to him that she had been conscious of it herself.

"I have known but little happiness in my life," she said. "My father, Lord Foulke, was a gambler; and, in view of the increasing difficulty of living, my mother believed it to be her duty to marry off all her daughters as soon as they came out. I was the third of five girls, and married when scarcely sixteen—no more than a child. I could not endure Lord Osborne—my every instinct revolted against him—but though I implored my father and mother, with tears, to spare me, they would not listen to me. No one may know the misery of my married life. When I was about

twenty-three, however, my husband died, leaving me with two young children—the boy so backward that I believed him for a time to be deficient; but as I spared no effort to develop him he gradually improved. Not long afterwards my father died from an accident. The shock brought a stroke on my mother, depriving her of the power of speech, which she never afterwards recovered, though she lingered on for several years. My brother, despite the remonstrances of the doctor, insisted on her removal to the Dower House, and short as was the drive, she never recovered from it; so that I dared not attempt to bring her here. As it was seldom possible to leave her, I could see but little of my children, for as the Dower House was small, and indifferently built, she could not endure their noise. But never had I loved her so well. Qualities, that I had never before discerned in her, now showed themselves, and we were drawn together as we never had been before. At her death I returned home, to find my daughter almost a stranger to me. Julia was now fourteen, and her pretty manners, which I had believed to be the expression of her affection for me, had merely served as a mask to her serious defects of character. Perhaps unjustly, I dismissed her governess, believing her to be blamed, and endeavoured myself to correct them, but I had come too late, and it only served to estrange her the further. Osborne, on the other hand, has always held for me the simple affection of his childhood, and his faults are rather of a negative than of a positive character, but he cares for little beyond hunting and fishing—we have almost nothing in common. Until you came, Arthur, I had scarcely known what it was to have a companion."

There was a slight falter in her voice as she uttered the last words, and she looked at her visitor wistfully.

His eyes, half veiled by their lashes, were fixed on the glowing embers, and he remained silent. Once again Emma's soft hand trembled in his own, and he was conscious of the beating of her heart. Why had he not taken her into his arms, then and there, to shelter in his breast for ever?

"Arthur, you are not listening to me!"

There was a note of reproach in the gentle voice at his side.

"I assure you, Lady Osborne, that I am deeply concerned and distressed to hear of all that you have suffered. Perhaps in view of my office it is scarcely orthodox for me to say how very unfair it has all seemed—but from the point of view of a simple human being, it is impossible to think otherwise."

Nothing could have been kinder than the tone in which he pronounced these words; but that she had expected something altogether different was quite evident by the expression of disappointment which overspread her countenance, as she shrank into the shadow.

After a moment's silence he continued:

"The want of sympathy between parents and children is only too common, but there must have been a total absence of all natural feeling on the part of your brother, with regard to Lady Foulke, when he could act in such a manner towards her. The counterpart of it, however, I witnessed at the bedside of my cousin. His son, as you know, broke his neck in the hunting field, as his father lay dying. I was deputed to tell him, and did so in fear and trembling as to the possible effect it might have on him, but he just looked round at me and said: 'And a good thing, too!' Although I had been aware that the relations between them were very unfortunate, I had not believed it possible that there could be such an estrangement between father and son."

After a pause Mr. Howard then announced that he had written to his agent to expect him on the following Saturday.

"Oh, surely not!" exclaimed his hostess, leaning forward in expostulation. "Cumberland will be quite intolerable in this weather—I have heard that the cold there is beyond everything!"

"I have yet to learn that I am in a galloping consumption. I assure you there is no

country more delightful and wonderful than Cumberland in the grasp of winter!"

"I am well aware a Northman will swear anything with respect to his country!"

"Madam! I protest!"

"Oh, protest away! you are all of you alike! I had hoped that you might have been prevailed upon to remain with us until Easter—in which case Osborne would have come back at once."

"Do not you think he had much better remain where he is? In the gay world of Paris he will have everything to distract him, and may possibly find someone to replace Miss Watson?"

"I do not think so."

"Surely you do not believe that Osborne will remain inconsolable for ever?"

There was a gleam of humour in his dark eyes as he turned them towards her. In all his intimate knowledge of his former pupil, it had certainly never occurred to him that he possessed a heart of untold depths!

"No. What I believe is, that he will revert to his former indifference towards women, and never marry at all."

"That would be very much to be deplored."

"I am not so sure of that. He is scarcely fitted to attract a superior mind, and you could not expect me to welcome an inferior one, or to view, without pain, an unwilling bride forced into his arms."

A day or two later Lady Osborne stood beneath the portico, to wish her guest "God-speed."

"Remember I shall be counting on you for an invitation!" she said, smiling.

He bowed low.

"I shall have to secure a fair chatelaine, madam, in order to receive you worthily!"

How little did he realize that his idle words were as a naked sword in her breast.

CHAPTER XVII

Sam was walking along the High Street of Guildford just as the coach drove up to the stage; and, for the moment, thinking less of anything in the world than of Emma, when, to his amazement, she suddenly appeared on the platform. Hastening forward, he lifted her down; but seeing she could scarcely maintain her composure, forbore to question her, and, drawing her hand within his arm, he led her home.

He now lived entirely with Mr. Curtis at his residence, in a quiet suburban road, not far off: a large, red-brick house, standing in its own grounds, and furnished with all the comfort and suitability of wealth and refinement. As soon as they were seated by a comfortable fire in the library, Emma, in a few words, informed her brother of all that had happened. He was much moved by the recital, but deeply gratified that she had come to him at once—indeed his satisfaction at having her would have been without bounds, had it not been for his indignation at the conduct of Robert and Jane, and the shock he had sustained at finding Emma travelling by herself.

Presently Mr. Curtis, who had been out, returned to the house, and entered the room. Sam at once introduced his sister, and while sparing her feelings as much as possible, made him acquainted with a sufficient account of what had occurred, to let him see that it was impossible for Emma to return to Croydon. He then announced his intention of at once seeking for suitable lodgings for his sister and himself, but Mr. Curtis steadily refused to countenance such an arrangement, insisting that as he already regarded Sam as a son, he had some justification in venturing to hope that Miss Emma might come to look on him as her father, and in the meantime his house was as truly at her service. Emma thanked him charmingly, but begged for permission to look for a situation, as governess, or companion. On perceiving, however, the mortification she was occasioning, both to Sam and Mr. Curtis, she

was soon obliged to give way.

Before very long her box was forwarded from Croydon, and both Robert and Jane wrote more suitably than might have been expected, expressing considerable regret that she had left them.

Emma was now more at ease than she had been since her quiet time with Elizabeth, although she daily missed little Augusta; but her health had been injured by all she had gone through. Her cheek, once rounded with perfect health, was now thin and worn, and to Sam's dismay she did not appear to be regaining her vitality as the weeks went by. In view of her half-confession to him, he feared she was suffering from a secret sorrow, and he and Mr. Curtis spared no effort to restore her.

Towards the end of February Elizabeth's marriage was arranged, and Mrs. John Purvis, with whom she had been residing, and from whose house the wedding was to take place, kindly invited the whole family, including Augusta. Emma's embarrassment at meeting Robert and Jane was considerably lessened by this arrangement, and she and the child were inseparable during the few days they spent together. Penelope and Margaret had obtained leave to be present, and both appeared improved by having been provided with occupation, other than hunting for husbands. Mary Edwards had also been invited, and Emma was now able to satisfy herself that she was not wholly indifferent to Sam.

Elizabeth looked very sweet and handsome in her white bonnet and shawl, and the bridegroom distinguished himself not a little by forgetting neither cheque nor ring.

The sisters had been truly happy to have met together again, and their parting was much less sorrowful than before, both bride and bridegroom insisting that Emma should come to them in April to make her home with them.

Poor Sam protested with no little warmth against this arrangement, but Elizabeth was not his elder sister for nothing.

"Cannot you have some sense, Sam!" she said. "Emma is quite too pretty, and has

already been too much talked about, to be left alone with a pair of old bachelors!—the two of you out the half of the time! Oh! I know she can take care of herself better than could have been thought possible—she has told me all about Captain Conway—but she should not be left in such a position—her home is with her sister!"

CHAPTER XVIII

Unfortunately, Emma contracted a chill during the long drive back from the wedding, and in spite of, or perhaps, rather as a result of the various remedies with which she was treated, she was still very far from strong when Sam took her over to Wickstead, and left her in the care of Elizabeth.

With what mingled feelings did not Emma view once more the scene where she had spent one of the happiest evenings of her life. Once again, in fancy, she was received by Mr. Howard with all that particularity which had assured her that the entertainment had been arranged with a sole view to enjoying her society. Once again as she entered the dining-parlour, she saw herself at his side, and heard the raillery of his voice as he combated her cherished opinions—from no personal conviction as she had been well aware, but in order to draw her into friendly combat. In the evening afterwards, perhaps she alone had been conscious of his vexation at Miss Osborne's intrusion; and she had also divined his intention of retaining her as his neighbour at cards. The moment of parting was also present with her.

But more to her than all these memories was that of the fateful moment at the ball, when he had begged her to return him the rose he had given to her. Even now it so moved her that she endeavoured to refrain from dwelling on it. Yet how had she been so vain, so foolish, as to have mistaken an ordinary flirtation of a man of the world, for an emotion of a deeper character? For there could no longer be any doubt in her mind with respect to him. He had simply been amusing himself, he had had no

intentions with regard to her. Nor had he in any way stepped beyond the limits of convention—blame rested solely with herself. Her former experience of life, slight as it had been, should have taught her that all men of breeding and fashion are more or less adepts at flirting—unless indeed they are scarcely to be tolerated.

Sweet and unselfish as was Emma's nature, the perfect happiness of Elizabeth and Henry Purvis, in a setting so pregnant of another—where every article of furniture seemed to speak of that other—could not but make her sensible of a feeling of bereavement; nor could she withhold her wayward fancy from depicting herself, and that other, as playing the part of her sister and brother-in-law, in their daily life.

Lord Osborne had rejoined his regiment, but Lady Osborne, to the surprise of all, continued to remain on at the Castle, instead of going up to the family town house. Tom Musgrave was as much to the fore as ever, and as busily occupied in impressing his own importance wherever he went, and Mary Edwards drove over at once to welcome Emma. Happening by accident to mention Sam, she gave Emma the opportunity of telling her that Mr. Curtis had formally declared him his heir, for which she was rewarded by a quick blush.

A ball was to take place shortly at the Assembly Rooms, and the Edwards were anxious that Emma should come to them for it, but as can readily be supposed it was almost the last entertainment she would have cared to attend. Elizabeth, however, relieved her from all embarrassment by saying that she did not desire her to go out at night till she was recovered from a cough which had troubled her for some time.

It was not till the end of the month that she took her to a party, given by Mrs. Stephenson, of Ashley Park. Emma had no sooner entered the drawing-room, and before ever her eyes had rested on his tall figure, than she was aware of the presence of Mr. Howard.

Following Elizabeth, she was slightly screened by her, and although they passed within no great distance of him, as he appeared to be looking the other way, she was

able to persuade herself, for a short time, that he had not observed her. But it was impossible she should long continue in this belief. The moments were as hours to her, when, presently, as he was conducting a lady into the room beyond, he was obliged to come quite close to her, and recognition was inevitable. He merely bowed and passed on.

Emma had never sought to disguise her feelings from herself, but how deeply her heart was engaged she had not realised until that moment, when she felt that it must break.

A minute or two later Mr. Howard grew aware of a sudden commotion, and then heard it said that a lady had fainted.

Instinctively he knew that it was Emma—and almost immediately, he knew not how, had reached her side. Motioning everyone away, he raised her in his arms, and carried her out to the hall, where there was a couch, but just before he laid her down she opened her eyes, and there was no mistaking the look of deep joy which flashed into them, as she saw him bending over her.

"Emma—my dearest Emma!"

He could say no more, as they were instantly joined by Mrs. Stephenson and Elizabeth; other guests—some impelled by solicitude, and some by curiosity—quickly following.

These, however, were quietly got rid of by their hostess, who at the same time directed the servants to bring restoratives, and soon Emma was able to sit up. She remained so pale and shaken, however, that Mrs. Stephenson begged her to remain all night; but this was steadily opposed by Elizabeth, who was anxious to bring her back with her, and as Emma herself joined in begging to return, the carriage was sent for.

At this moment Henry, who had just heard of Emma's indisposition, came hurrying up, and assisted in conveying her home.

On the following morning Mr. Howard rode over to Wickstead, and, meeting Emma in the shrubbery, declared his passion.

She could not speak, but she laid her trembling hands in his.

CHAPTER XIX

The engagement created not a little stir, and many and various were the comments.

Mr. Curtis composed a pretty speech, for the edification of his patients, to the effect that had he been some forty years younger, when he had had the honour of meeting with Miss Emma, his bachelorhood would have been seriously imperilled.

It is said that when this was reported to Mr. Howard, he vowed he would have imperilled it still further for him.

Mrs. Blake was rejoiced at the news, but it must be confessed that it would be scarcely prudent to record the observations of Charles, who thirsted for his uncle's blood for fully three days after.

Jane still protested that Emma was a fool to have refused a title.

Augusta enquired if she might not be married on the same day?

Lady Edward Sothern's comment was perhaps characteristic—

"There must be something singularly wanting in Arthur Howard to marry a woman of the lower orders."

In a remote room of the Castle Lady Osborne sat, with her head bowed on her hands. No one could have condemned her more severely than she condemned herself. Having missed all hope of romance in her youth, she had endeavoured to secure some measure of it when it was no longer reasonable to expect it; and now she felt that her punishment was almost greater than she well might bear—standing alone, as the slow years went by.

* * * * * *

Emma's wedding morning shone fair, and people flocked from far and near to see her married.

Lady Osborne lent her her own veil, placing it herself on her head.

Penelope and Margaret could not get leave so soon again, but the bride was attended by Charles and Augusta, carrying baskets of flowers; and it was easy to discern that the former, with the charming fickleness of his sex, had wholly transferred his allegiance from the elder to the younger lady.

As Emma came down from the altar on her husband's arm, she looked all loveliness, but the eyes of different among the congregation strayed from her fresh young beauty to the face of Lady Osborne, and rested there. To the mind of more than one there was something, they knew not what, that seemed to elevate it beyond all they could have believed possible.

Sam and Mary Edwards, now happily betrothed (as Mr. and Mrs. Edwards were unable any longer to urge anything against the alliance) were amongst the company, and received the congratulations of all. It had been arranged that they were to live on with Mr. Curtis, as the old gentleman declared that he could not be deserted in his advancing years.

Shortly after Emma's marriage, Captain O'Brien died, and his widow, surviving him but a short time, Emma found herself the recipient of a legacy of twelve thousand pounds. With her husband's cordial approval, she shared it equally with her sisters; and Penelope lost no time in investing hers in a husband.

But Margaret had suffered so deeply through Tom Musgrave, that in spite of anything Robert and Jane could urge, she insisted on keeping her situation. It was only on the death of the young girl, some years later, to whom she had been acting as companion, that she married a naval officer, whom she had frequently met at her house, and to whom she had become attached, finding with him a much greater measure of happiness than could ever have been her lot had she become the wife of

one so worthless as Tom Musgrave.

This gentleman, not long after, fell a prey to a vixen, who lost but little time in reducing him, and on his endeavouring to console himself with strong waters, secured the keys of the cellar, and retained them with a firm hand.

As the Rector of the living, on Mr. Howard's property, shortly resigned it, on account of ill-health, he undertook it himself, appointing Henry Purvis his curate, at a much handsomer figure than he would have received as incumbent, and installing him in the rectory, with its excellent gardens and farm. Emma and Elizabeth's happiness was complete, now that they were settled so near to each other, and as the years went by, there were many merry games between the children of the Rectory and those of the Manor.

Lady Osborne was a frequent visitor at the Howards', some saying that she was fonder of their young people than of her own grandchildren, but this was scarcely the case, as the latter added, in no little degree, to the happiness of her life. Perhaps it might have been nearer the mark had they divined that in Emma she had found the companionship that she had always missed in her own daughter.

She also became very fond of Mrs. Blake, whom Lord Osborne, to the surprise of everyone, married a couple of years later.

If he did not entertain for her the same degree of love that Emma had awakened in him, he was very sincerely attached to her, making an excellent step-father to her children.

Charles entered the Royal Navy.

As he and Augusta spend the greater part of their holidays together at the Howards', and do not find matter for heated argument above seven times in the week, it is confidently believed by several that they will ultimately embark on the more serious argument of life, with all its possibilities for sweetness, or disaster.

FINIS

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE WATSONS: BY JANE AUSTEN, CONCLUDED BY L. OULTON ***

Updated editions will replace the previous one—the old editions will be renamed.

Creating the works from print editions not protected by U.S. copyright law means that no one owns a United States copyright in these works, so the Foundation (and you!) can copy and distribute it in the United States without permission and without paying copyright royalties. Special rules, set forth in the General Terms of Use part of this license, apply to copying and distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works to protect the PROJECT GUTENBERG™ concept and trademark. Project Gutenberg is a registered trademark, and may not be used if you charge for an eBook, except by following the terms of the trademark license, including paying royalties for use of the Project Gutenberg trademark. If you do not charge anything for copies of this eBook, complying with the trademark license is very easy. You may use this eBook for nearly any purpose such as creation of derivative works, reports, performances and research. Project Gutenberg eBooks may be modified and printed and given away—you may do practically ANYTHING in the United States with eBooks not protected by U.S. copyright law. Redistribution is subject to the trademark license, especially commercial redistribution.

START: FULL LICENSE

THE FULL PROJECT GUTENBERG™ LICENSE

PLEASE READ THIS BEFORE YOU DISTRIBUTE OR USE THIS WORK

To protect the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting the free distribution of electronic works, by using or distributing this work (or any other work associated in any way with the phrase “Project Gutenberg”), you agree to comply with all the terms of the Full Project Gutenberg License available with this file or online at www.gutenberg.org/license.

Section 1. General Terms of Use and Redistributing Project Gutenberg electronic works

1.A. By reading or using any part of this Project Gutenberg electronic work, you indicate that you have read, understand, agree to and accept all the terms of this license and intellectual property (trademark/copyright) agreement. If you do not agree to abide by all the terms of this agreement, you must cease using and return or destroy all copies of Project Gutenberg electronic works in your possession. If you paid a fee for obtaining a copy of or access to a Project Gutenberg electronic work and you do not agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement, you may obtain a refund from the person or entity to whom you paid the fee as set forth in paragraph 1.E.8.

1.B. “Project Gutenberg” is a registered trademark. It may only be used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg electronic works even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation (“the Foundation” or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is unprotected by copyright law in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg

mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country other than the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg work (any work on which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” appears, or with which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg electronic work is derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to

anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase “Project Gutenberg” associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg work in a format other than “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg website (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other form. Any

alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg electronic works provided that:

• You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, “Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation.” • You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works. • You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work. • You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you

must obtain permission in writing from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain “Defects,” such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the “Right of Replacement or Refund” described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund

of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you ‘AS-IS’, WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg

Project Gutenberg is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg's goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's business office is located at 41 Watchung Plaza #516, Montclair NJ 07042, USA, +1 (862) 621-9288. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's website and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread public

support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations ($1 to $5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate.

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate.

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg electronic works

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg eBooks with only a loose network of

volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our website which has the main PG search facility: www.gutenberg.org.

This website includes information about Project Gutenberg, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.