## CHAPTER XIII

"My dear Gilbert, I wish you *would* try to be a little more amiable," said my mother one morning after some display of unjustifiable ill-humour on my part. "You say there is nothing the matter with you, and nothing has happened to grieve you, and yet I never *saw* anyone so altered as you within these last few days. You haven't a good word for anybody—friends and strangers, equals and inferiors—it's all the same. I do wish you'd try to check it."

"Check what?"

"Why, your strange temper. You don't know *how* it spoils you. I'm sure a finer disposition than yours by nature could not be, if you'd let it have fair play: so you've no excuse *that* way."

While she thus remonstrated, I took up a book, and laying it open on the table before me, pretended to be deeply absorbed in its perusal, for I was equally unable to justify myself and unwilling to acknowledge my errors; and I wished to have nothing to say on the matter. But my excellent parent went on lecturing, and then came to coaxing, and began to stroke my hair; and I was getting to feel quite a good boy, but my mischievous brother, who was idling about the room, revived my corruption by suddenly calling out,—

"Don't touch him, mother! he'll bite! He's a very tiger in human form. *I've* given him up for my part—fairly disowned him—cast him off, root and branch. It's as much as my life is worth to come within six yards of him. The other day he nearly fractured my skull for singing a pretty, inoffensive love-song, on purpose to amuse him."

"Oh, Gilbert! how could you?" exclaimed my mother.

"I told you to hold your noise first, you know, Fergus," said I.

"Yes, but when I assured you it was no trouble and went on with the next verse, thinking you might like it better, you clutched me by the shoulder and dashed me away, right against the wall there, with such force that I thought I had bitten my tongue in two, and expected to see the place plastered with my brains; and when I put my hand to my head, and found my skull not broken, I thought it was a miracle, and no mistake. But, poor fellow!" added he, with a sentimental sigh—"his heart's broken—that's the truth of it—and his head's—"

"Will you be silent NOW?" cried I, starting up, and eyeing the fellow so fiercely that my mother, thinking I meant to inflict some grievous bodily injury, laid her hand on my

arm, and besought me to let him alone, and he walked leisurely out, with his hands in his pockets, singing provokingly—"Shall I, because a woman's fair," &c.

"I'm not going to defile my fingers with him," said I, in answer to the maternal intercession. "I wouldn't touch him with the tongs."

I now recollected that I had business with Robert Wilson, concerning the purchase of a certain field adjoining my farm—a business I had been putting off from day to day; for I had no interest in anything now; and besides, I was misanthropically inclined, and, moreover, had a particular objection to meeting Jane Wilson or her mother; for though I had too good reason, now, to credit their reports concerning Mrs. Graham, I did not *like* them a bit the better for it—or Eliza Millward either—and the thought of meeting them was the more repugnant to me that I could not, now, defy their seeming calumnies and triumph in my own convictions as before. But to-day I determined to make an effort to return to my duty. Though I found no pleasure in it, it would be less irksome than idleness—at all events it would be more profitable. If life promised no enjoyment within my vocation, at least it offered no allurements out of it; and henceforth I would put my shoulder to the wheel and toil away, like any poor drudge of a cart-horse that was fairly broken in to its labour, and plod through life, not wholly useless if not agreeable, and uncomplaining if not contented with my lot.

Thus resolving, with a kind of sullen resignation, if such a term may be allowed, I wended my way to Ryecote Farm, scarcely expecting to find its owner within at this time of day, but hoping to learn in what part of the premises he was most likely to be found.

Absent he was, but expected home in a few minutes; and I was desired to step into the parlour and wait. Mrs. Wilson was busy in the kitchen, but the room was not empty; and I scarcely checked an involuntary recoil as I entered it; for there sat Miss Wilson chattering with Eliza Millward. However, I determined to be cool and civil. Eliza seemed to have made the same resolution on her part. We had not met since the evening of the tea-party; but there was no visible emotion either of pleasure or pain, no attempt at pathos, no display of injured pride: she was cool in temper, civil in demeanour. There was even an ease and cheerfulness about her air and manner that I made no pretension to; but there was a depth of malice in her too expressive eye that plainly told me I was not forgiven; for, though she no longer hoped to win me to herself, she still hated her rival, and evidently delighted to wreak her spite on me. On the other hand, Miss Wilson was as affable and courteous as heart could wish, and though I was in no very conversable humour myself, the two ladies between them managed to keep up a pretty continuous fire of small talk. But Eliza took advantage of

the first convenient pause to ask if I had lately seen Mrs. Graham, in a tone of merely casual inquiry, but with a sidelong glance—intended to be playfully mischievous—really, brimful and running over with malice.

“Not lately,” I replied, in a careless tone, but sternly repelling her odious glances with my eyes; for I was vexed to feel the colour mounting to my forehead, despite my strenuous efforts to appear unmoved.

“What! are you beginning to tire already? I thought so noble a creature would have power to attach you for a year at least!”

“I would rather not speak of her now.”

“Ah! then you are convinced, at last, of your mistake—you have at length discovered that your divinity is not quite the immaculate—”

“I desired you not to speak of her, Miss Eliza.”

“Oh, I beg your pardon! I perceive Cupid’s arrows have been too sharp for you: the wounds, being more than skin-deep, are not yet healed, and bleed afresh at every mention of the loved one’s name.”

“Say, rather,” interposed Miss Wilson, “that Mr. Markham feels that name is unworthy to be mentioned in the presence of right-minded females. I wonder, Eliza, you should think of referring to that unfortunate person—you might know the mention of her would be anything but agreeable to any one here present.”

How could this be borne? I rose and was about to clap my hat upon my head and burst away, in wrathful indignation from the house; but recollecting—just in time to save my dignity—the folly of such a proceeding, and how it would only give my fair tormentors a merry laugh at my expense, for the sake of one I acknowledged in my own heart to be unworthy of the slightest sacrifice—though the ghost of my former reverence and love so hung about me still, that I could not bear to hear her name aspersed by others—I merely walked to the window, and having spent a few seconds in vengibly biting my lips and sternly repressing the passionate heavings of my chest, I observed to Miss Wilson, that I could see nothing of her brother, and added that, as my time was precious, it would perhaps be better to call again to-morrow, at some time when I should be sure to find him at home.

“Oh, no!” said she; “if you wait a minute, he will be sure to come; for he has business at L——” (that was our market-town), “and will require a little refreshment before he goes.”

I submitted accordingly, with the best grace I could; and, happily, I had not long to wait. Mr. Wilson soon arrived, and, indisposed for business as I was at that moment, and little as I cared for the field or its owner, I forced my attention to the matter in hand, with very creditable determination, and quickly concluded the bargain—perhaps more to the thrifty farmer's satisfaction than he cared to acknowledge. Then, leaving him to the discussion of his substantial "refreshment," I gladly quitted the house, and went to look after my reapers.

Leaving them busy at work on the side of the valley, I ascended the hill, intending to visit a corn-field in the more elevated regions, and see when it would be ripe for the sickle. But I did *not* visit it that day; for, as I approached, I beheld, at no great distance, Mrs. Graham and her son coming down in the opposite direction. They saw me; and Arthur already was running to meet me; but I immediately turned back and walked steadily homeward; for I had fully determined never to encounter his mother again; and regardless of the shrill voice in my ear, calling upon me to "wait a moment," I pursued the even tenor of my way; and he soon relinquished the pursuit as hopeless, or was called away by his mother. At all events, when I looked back, five minutes after, not a trace of either was to be seen.

This incident agitated and disturbed me most unaccountably—unless you would account for it by saying that Cupid's arrows not only had been too sharp for me, but they were barbed and deeply rooted, and I had not yet been able to wrench them from my heart. However that be, I was rendered doubly miserable for the remainder of the day.

## CHAPTER XIV

Next morning, I bethought me, I, too, had business at L——; so I mounted my horse, and set forth on the expedition soon after breakfast. It was a dull, drizzly day; but that was no matter: it was all the more suitable to my frame of mind. It was likely to be a lonely journey; for it was no market-day, and the road I traversed was little frequented at any other time; but that suited me all the better too.

As I trotted along, however, chewing the cud of—*bitter* fancies, I heard another horse at no great distance behind me; but I never conjectured who the rider might be, or troubled my head about him, till, on slackening my pace to ascend a gentle acclivity, or rather, suffering my horse to slacken his pace into a lazy walk—for, rapt in my own reflections, I was letting it jog on as leisurely as it thought proper—I lost ground, and my fellow-traveller overtook me. He accosted me by name, for it was no stranger—it was Mr. Lawrence! Instinctively the fingers of my whip-hand tingled, and grasped their charge with convulsive energy; but I restrained the impulse, and answering his

salutation with a nod, attempted to push on; but he pushed on beside me, and began to talk about the weather and the crops. I gave the briefest possible answers to his queries and observations, and fell back. He fell back too, and asked if my horse was lame. I replied with a *look*, at which he placidly smiled.

I was as much astonished as exasperated at this singular pertinacity and imperturbable assurance on his part. I had thought the circumstances of our last meeting would have left such an impression on his mind as to render him cold and distant ever after: instead of that, he appeared not only to have forgotten all former offences, but to be impenetrable to all present incivilities. Formerly, the slightest hint, or mere fancied coldness in tone or glance, had sufficed to repulse him: now, positive rudeness could not drive him away. Had he heard of my disappointment; and was he come to witness the result, and triumph in my despair? I grasped my whip with more determined energy than before—but still forbore to raise it, and rode on in silence, waiting for some more tangible cause of offence, before I opened the floodgates of my soul and poured out the dammed-up fury that was foaming and swelling within.

"Markham," said he, in his usual quiet tone, "why do you quarrel with your friends, because you have been disappointed in one quarter? You have found your hopes defeated; but how am *I* to blame for it? I warned you beforehand, you know, but you would not—"

He said no more; for, impelled by some fiend at my elbow, I had seized my whip by the small end, and—swift and sudden as a flash of lightning—brought the other down upon his head. It was not without a feeling of savage satisfaction that I beheld the instant, deadly pallor that overspread his face, and the few red drops that trickled down his forehead, while he reeled a moment in his saddle, and then fell backward to the ground. The pony, surprised to be so strangely relieved of its burden, started and capered, and kicked a little, and then made use of its freedom to go and crop the grass of the hedge-bank: while its master lay as still and silent as a corpse. Had I killed him?—an icy hand seemed to grasp my heart and check its pulsation, as I bent over him, gazing with breathless intensity upon the ghastly, upturned face. But no; he moved his eyelids and uttered a slight groan. I breathed again—he was only stunned by the fall. It served him right—it would teach him better manners in future. Should I help him to his horse? No. For any other combination of offences I would; but his were too unpardonable. He might mount it himself, if he liked—in a while: already he was beginning to stir and look about him—and there it was for him, quietly browsing on the road-side.

So with a muttered execration I left the fellow to his fate, and clapping spurs to my own horse, galloped away, excited by a combination of feelings it would not be easy to analyse; and perhaps, if I did so, the result would not be very creditable to my disposition; for I am not sure that a species of exultation in what I had done was not one principal concomitant.

Shortly, however, the effervescence began to abate, and not many minutes elapsed before I had turned and gone back to look after the fate of my victim. It was no generous impulse—no kind relentings that led me to this—nor even the fear of what might be the consequences to myself, if I finished my assault upon the squire by leaving him thus neglected, and exposed to further injury; it was, simply, the voice of conscience; and I took great credit to myself for attending so promptly to its dictates—and judging the merit of the deed by the sacrifice it cost, I was not far wrong.

Mr. Lawrence and his pony had both altered their positions in some degree. The pony had wandered eight or ten yards further away; and he had managed, somehow, to remove himself from the middle of the road: I found him seated in a recumbent position on the bank,—looking very white and sickly still, and holding his cambric handkerchief (now more red than white) to his head. It must have been a powerful blow; but half the credit—or the blame of it (which you please) must be attributed to the whip, which was garnished with a massive horse's head of plated metal. The grass, being sodden with rain, afforded the young gentleman a rather inhospitable couch; his clothes were considerably bemired; and his hat was rolling in the mud on the other side of the road. But his thoughts seemed chiefly bent upon his pony, on which he was wistfully gazing—half in helpless anxiety, and half in hopeless abandonment to his fate.

I dismounted, however, and having fastened my own animal to the nearest tree, first picked up his hat, intending to clap it on his head; but either he considered his head unfit for a hat, or the hat, in its present condition, unfit for his head; for shrinking away the one, he took the other from my hand, and scornfully cast it aside.

"It's good enough for *you*," I muttered.

My next good office was to catch his pony and bring it to him, which was soon accomplished; for the beast was quiet enough in the main, and only winced and flirted a trifle till I got hold of the bridle—but then, I must see him in the saddle.

"Here, you fellow—scoundrel—dog—give me your hand, and I'll help you to mount."

No; he turned from me in disgust. I attempted to take him by the arm. He shrank away as if there had been contamination in my touch.

“What, you won’t! Well! you may sit there till doomsday, for what I care. But I suppose you don’t want to lose all the blood in your body—I’ll just condescend to bind that up for you.”

“Let me alone, if you please.”

“Humph; with all my heart. You may go to the d—l, if you choose—and say I sent you.”

But before I abandoned him to his fate I flung his pony’s bridle over a stake in the hedge, and threw him my handkerchief, as his own was now saturated with blood. He took it and cast it back to me in abhorrence and contempt, with all the strength he could muster. It wanted but this to fill the measure of his offences. With execrations not loud but deep I left him to live or die as he could, well satisfied that I had done *my* duty in attempting to save him—but forgetting how I had erred in bringing him into such a condition, and how insultingly my after-services had been offered—and sullenly prepared to meet the consequences if he should choose to say I had attempted to murder him—which I thought not unlikely, as it seemed probable he was actuated by such spiteful motives in so perseveringly refusing my assistance.

Having remounted my horse, I just looked back to see how he was getting on, before I rode away. He had risen from the ground, and grasping his pony’s mane, was attempting to resume his seat in the saddle; but scarcely had he put his foot in the stirrup, when a sickness or dizziness seemed to overpower him: he leant forward a moment, with his head drooped on the animal’s back, and then made one more effort, which proving ineffectual, he sank back on the bank, where I left him, reposing his head on the oozy turf, and to all appearance, as calmly reclining as if he had been taking his rest on his sofa at home.

I ought to have helped him in spite of himself—to have bound up the wound he was unable to staunch, and insisted upon getting him on his horse and seeing him safe home; but, besides my bitter indignation against himself, there was the question what to say to his servants—and what to my own family. Either I should have to acknowledge the deed, which would set me down as a madman, unless I acknowledged the motive too—and that seemed impossible—or I must get up a lie, which seemed equally out of the question—especially as Mr. Lawrence would probably reveal the whole truth, and thereby bring me to tenfold disgrace—unless I were villain enough, presuming on the absence of witnesses, to persist in my own version of the case, and make him out a still greater scoundrel than he was. No; he

had only received a cut above the temple, and perhaps a few bruises from the fall, or the hoofs of his own pony: that could not kill him if he lay there half the day; and, if he could not help himself, surely some one would be coming by: it would be impossible that a whole day should pass and no one traverse the road but ourselves. As for what he might choose to say hereafter, I would take my chance about it: if he told lies, I would contradict him; if he told the truth, I would bear it as best I could. I was not *obliged* to enter into explanations further than I thought proper. Perhaps he might choose to be silent on the subject, for fear of raising inquiries as to the cause of the quarrel, and drawing the public attention to his connection with Mrs. Graham, which, whether for her sake or his own, he seemed so very desirous to conceal.

Thus reasoning, I trotted away to the town, where I duly transacted my business, and performed various little commissions for my mother and Rose, with very laudable exactitude, considering the different circumstances of the case. In returning home, I was troubled with sundry misgivings about the unfortunate Lawrence. The question, What if I should find him lying still on the damp earth, fairly dying of cold and exhaustion—or already stark and chill? thrust itself most unpleasantly upon my mind, and the appalling possibility pictured itself with painful vividness to my imagination as I approached the spot where I had left him. But no, thank heaven, both man and horse were gone, and nothing was left to witness against me but two objects—unpleasant enough in themselves to be sure, and presenting a very ugly, not to say murderous appearance—in one place, the hat saturated with rain and coated with mud, indented and broken above the brim by that villainous whip-handle; in another, the crimson handkerchief, soaking in a deeply tinctured pool of water—for much rain had fallen in the interim.

Bad news flies fast: it was hardly four o'clock when I got home, but my mother gravely accosted me with—"Oh, Gilbert!—*Such* an accident! Rose has been shopping in the village, and she's heard that Mr. Lawrence has been thrown from his horse and brought home dying!"

This shocked me a trifle, as you may suppose; but I was comforted to hear that he had frightfully fractured his skull and broken a leg; for, assured of the falsehood of this, I trusted the rest of the story was equally exaggerated; and when I heard my mother and sister so feelingly deploring his condition, I had considerable difficulty in preventing myself from telling them the real extent of the injuries, as far as I knew them.

"You must go and see him to-morrow," said my mother.

"Or to-day," suggested Rose: "there's plenty of time; and you can have the pony, as your horse is tired. Won't you, Gilbert—as soon as you've had something to eat?"

“No, no—how can we tell that it isn’t all a false report? It’s highly im-”

“Oh, I’m sure it isn’t; for the village is all alive about it; and I saw two people that had seen others that had seen the man that found him. That sounds far-fetched; but it isn’t so when you think of it.”

“Well, but Lawrence is a good rider; it is not likely he would fall from his horse at all; and if he did, it is highly improbable he would break his bones in that way. It must be a gross exaggeration at least.”

“No; but the horse kicked him—or something.”

“What, his quiet little pony?”

“How do you know it was that?”

“He seldom rides any other.”

“At any rate,” said my mother, “you will call to-morrow. Whether it be true or false, exaggerated or otherwise, we shall like to know how he is.”

“Fergus may go.”

“Why not you?”

“He has more time. I am busy just now.”

“Oh! but, Gilbert, how can you be so composed about it? You won’t mind business for an hour or two in a case of this sort, when your friend is at the point of death.”

“He is *not*, I tell you.”

“For anything you know, he *may* be: you can’t tell till you have seen him. At all events, he must have met with some terrible accident, and you ought to see him: he’ll take it very unkind if you don’t.”

“Confound it! I can’t. He and I have not been on good terms of late.”

“Oh, my *dear* boy! Surely, surely you are not so unforgiving as to carry your little differences to such a length as—”

“Little differences, indeed!” I muttered.

“Well, but only remember the occasion. Think how—”

“Well, well, don’t bother me now—I’ll see about it,” I replied.

And my seeing about it was to send Fergus next morning, with my mother's compliments, to make the requisite inquiries; for, of course, my going was out of the question—or sending a message either. He brought back intelligence that the young squire was laid up with the complicated evils of a broken head and certain contusions (occasioned by a fall—of which he did not trouble himself to relate the particulars—and the subsequent misconduct of his horse), and a severe cold, the consequence of lying on the wet ground in the rain; but there were no broken bones, and no immediate prospects of dissolution.

It was evident, then, that for Mrs. Graham's sake it was not his intention to criminate me.

## CHAPTER XV

That day was rainy like its predecessor; but towards evening it began to clear up a little, and the next morning was fair and promising. I was out on the hill with the reapers. A light wind swept over the corn, and all nature laughed in the sunshine. The lark was rejoicing among the silvery floating clouds. The late rain had so sweetly freshened and cleared the air, and washed the sky, and left such glittering gems on branch and blade, that not even the farmers could have the heart to blame it. But no ray of sunshine could reach my heart, no breeze could freshen it; nothing could fill the void my faith, and hope, and joy in Helen Graham had left, or drive away the keen regrets and bitter dregs of lingering love that still oppressed it.

While I stood with folded arms abstractedly gazing on the undulating swell of the corn, not yet disturbed by the reapers, something gently pulled my skirts, and a small voice, no longer welcome to my ears, aroused me with the startling words,—"Mr. Markham, mamma wants you."

"Wants *me*, Arthur?"

"Yes. Why do you look so queer?" said he, half laughing, half frightened at the unexpected aspect of my face in suddenly turning towards him,—"and why have you kept so long away? Come! Won't you come?"

"I'm busy just now," I replied, scarce knowing what to answer.

He looked up in childish bewilderment; but before I could speak again the lady herself was at my side.

"Gilbert, I *must* speak with you!" said she, in a tone of suppressed vehemence.

I looked at her pale cheek and glittering eye, but answered nothing.

“Only for a moment,” pleaded she. “Just step aside into this other field.” She glanced at the reapers, some of whom were directing looks of impertinent curiosity towards her. “I won’t keep you a minute.”

I accompanied her through the gap.

“Arthur, darling, run and gather those bluebells,” said she, pointing to some that were gleaming at some distance under the hedge along which we walked. The child hesitated, as if unwilling to quit my side. “Go, love!” repeated she more urgently, and in a tone which, though not unkind, demanded prompt obedience, and obtained it.

“Well, Mrs. Graham?” said I, calmly and coldly; for, though I saw she was miserable, and pitied her, I felt glad to have it in my power to torment her.

She fixed her eyes upon me with a look that pierced me to the heart; and yet it made me smile.

“I don’t ask the reason of this change, Gilbert,” said she, with bitter calmness: “I know it too well; but though I could see myself suspected and condemned by every one else, and bear it with calmness, I cannot endure it from you.—Why did you not come to hear my explanation on the day I appointed to give it?”

“Because I happened, in the interim, to learn all you would have told me—and a trifle more, I imagine.”

“Impossible, for I would have told you all!” cried she, passionately—“but I won’t now, for I see you are not worthy of it!”

And her pale lips quivered with agitation.

“Why not, may I ask?”

She repelled my mocking smile with a glance of scornful indignation.

“Because you never understood me, or you would not soon have listened to my traducers—my confidence would be misplaced in you—you are not the man I thought you. Go! I won’t care *what* you think of me.”

She turned away, and I went; for I thought that would torment her as much as anything; and I believe I was right; for, looking back a minute after, I saw her turn half round, as if hoping or expecting to find me still beside her; and then she stood still, and cast one look behind. It was a look less expressive of anger than of bitter anguish and despair; but I immediately assumed an aspect of indifference, and affected to be gazing carelessly around me, and I suppose she went on; for after lingering awhile to

see if she would come back or call, I ventured one more glance, and saw her a good way off, moving rapidly up the field, with little Arthur running by her side and apparently talking as he went; but she kept her face averted from him, as if to hide some uncontrollable emotion. And I returned to my business.

But I soon began to regret my precipitancy in leaving her so soon. It was evident she loved me—probably she was tired of Mr. Lawrence, and wished to exchange him for me; and if I had loved and reverenced her less to begin with, the preference might have gratified and amused me; but now the contrast between her outward seeming and her inward mind, as I supposed,—between my former and my present opinion of her, was so harrowing—so distressing to my feelings, that it swallowed up every lighter consideration.

But still I was curious to know what sort of an explanation she would have given me—or would give now, if I pressed her for it—how much she would confess, and how she would endeavour to excuse herself. I longed to know what to despise, and what to admire in her; how much to pity, and how much to hate;—and, what was more, I *would* know. I would see her once more, and fairly satisfy myself in what light to regard her, before we parted. Lost to me she was, for ever, of course; but still I could not bear to think that we had parted, for the last time, with so much unkindness and misery on both sides. That last look of hers had sunk into my heart; I could not forget it. But what a fool I was! Had she not deceived me, injured me—blighted my happiness for life? "Well, I'll see her, however," was my concluding resolve, "but not to-day: to-day and to-night she may think upon her sins, and be as miserable as she will: to-morrow I will see her once again, and know something more about her. The interview may be serviceable to her, or it may not. At any rate, it will give a breath of excitement to the life she has doomed to stagnation, and may calm with certainty some agitating thoughts."

I did go on the morrow, but not till towards evening, after the business of the day was concluded, that is, between six and seven; and the westering sun was gleaming redly on the old Hall, and flaming in the latticed windows, as I reached it, imparting to the place a cheerfulness not its own. I need not dilate upon the feelings with which I approached the shrine of my former divinity—that spot teeming with a thousand delightful recollections and glorious dreams—all darkened now by one disastrous truth.

Rachel admitted me into the parlour, and went to call her mistress, for she was not there: but there was her desk left open on the little round table beside the high-backed chair, with a book laid upon it. Her limited but choice collection of books was

almost as familiar to me as my own; but this volume I had not seen before. I took it up. It was Sir Humphry Davy's "Last Days of a Philosopher," and on the first leaf was written, "Frederick Lawrence." I closed the book, but kept it in my hand, and stood facing the door, with my back to the fire-place, calmly waiting her arrival; for I did not doubt she would come. And soon I heard her step in the hall. My heart was beginning to throb, but I checked it with an internal rebuke, and maintained my composure—outwardly at least. She entered, calm, pale, collected.

"To what am I indebted for this favour, Mr. Markham?" said she, with such severe but quiet dignity as almost disconcerted me; but I answered with a smile, and impudently enough,—

"Well, I am come to hear your explanation."

"I told you I would not give it," said she. "I said you were unworthy of my confidence."

"Oh, very well," replied I, moving to the door.

"Stay a moment," said she. "This is the last time I shall see you: don't go just yet."

I remained, awaiting her further commands.

"Tell me," resumed she, "on what grounds you believe these things against me; who told you; and what did they say?"

I paused a moment. She met my eye as unflinchingly as if her bosom had been steeled with conscious innocence. She was resolved to know the worst, and determined to dare it too. "I can crush that bold spirit," thought I. But while I secretly exulted in my power, I felt disposed to dally with my victim like a cat. Showing her the book that I still held, in my hand, and pointing to the name on the fly-leaf, but fixing my eye upon her face, I asked,—"Do you know that gentleman?"

"Of course I do," replied she; and a sudden flush suffused her features—whether of shame or anger I could not tell: it rather resembled the latter. "What next, sir?"

"How long is it since you saw him?"

"Who gave you the right to catechize me on this or any other subject?"

"Oh, no one!—it's quite at your option whether to answer or not. And now, let me ask—have you heard what has lately befallen this friend of yours?—because, if you have not—"

"I will not be insulted, Mr. Markham!" cried she, almost infuriated at my manner. "So you had better leave the house at once, if you came only for that."

“I did not come to insult you: I came to hear your explanation.”

“And I tell you I won’t give it!” retorted she, pacing the room in a state of strong excitement, with her hands clasped tightly together, breathing short, and flashing fires of indignation from her eyes. “I will not condescend to explain myself to one that can make a jest of such horrible suspicions, and be so easily led to entertain them.”

“I do not make a jest of them, Mrs. Graham,” returned I, dropping at once my tone of taunting sarcasm. “I heartily wish I could find them a jesting matter. And as to being easily led to suspect, God only knows what a blind, incredulous fool I have hitherto been, perseveringly shutting my eyes and stopping my ears against everything that threatened to shake my confidence in you, till proof itself confounded my infatuation!”

“What proof, sir?”

“Well, I’ll tell you. You remember that evening when I was here last?”

“I do.”

“Even then you dropped some hints that might have opened the eyes of a wiser man; but they had no such effect upon me: I went on trusting and believing, hoping against hope, and adoring where I could not comprehend. It so happened, however, that after I left you I turned back—drawn by pure depth of sympathy and ardour of affection—not daring to intrude my presence openly upon you, but unable to resist the temptation of catching one glimpse through the window, just to see how you were: for I had left you apparently in great affliction, and I partly blamed my own want of forbearance and discretion as the cause of it. If I did wrong, love alone was my incentive, and the punishment was severe enough; for it was just as I had reached that tree, that you came out into the garden with your friend. Not choosing to show myself, under the circumstances, I stood still, in the shadow, till you had both passed by.”

“And how much of our conversation did you hear?”

“I heard quite enough, Helen. And it was well for me that I did hear it; for nothing less could have cured my infatuation. I always said and thought, that I would never believe a word against you, unless I heard it from your own lips. All the hints and affirmations of others I treated as malignant, baseless slanders; your own self-accusations I believed to be overstrained; and all that seemed unaccountable in your position I trusted that you could account for if you chose.”

Mrs. Graham had discontinued her walk. She leant against one end of the chimney-piece, opposite that near which I was standing, with her chin resting on her closed hand, her eyes—no longer burning with anger, but gleaming with restless

excitement—sometimes glancing at me while I spoke, then coursing the opposite wall, or fixed upon the carpet.

“You should have come to me after all,” said she, “and heard what I had to say in my own justification. It was ungenerous and wrong to withdraw yourself so secretly and suddenly, immediately after such ardent protestations of attachment, without ever assigning a reason for the change. You should have told me all—no matter *how* bitterly. It would have been better than this silence.”

“To what end should I have done so? You could not have enlightened me further, on the subject which alone concerned me; nor could you have made me discredit the evidence of my senses. I desired our intimacy to be discontinued at once, as you yourself had acknowledged would probably be the case if I knew all; but I did not wish to upbraid you,—though (as you also acknowledged) you had deeply wronged me. Yes, you have done me an injury you can never repair—or any other either—you have blighted the freshness and promise of youth, and made my life a wilderness! I might live a hundred years, but I could never recover from the effects of this withering blow—and never forget it! Hereafter—You smile, Mrs. Graham,” said I, suddenly stopping short, checked in my passionate declamation by unutterable feelings to behold her actually *smiling* at the picture of the ruin she had wrought.

“Did I?” replied she, looking seriously up; “I was not aware of it. If I did, it was not for pleasure at the thoughts of the harm I had done you. Heaven knows I have had torment enough at the bare possibility of that; it was for joy to find that you had some depth of soul and feeling after all, and to hope that I had not been utterly mistaken in your worth. But smiles and tears are so alike with me, they are neither of them confined to any particular feelings: I often cry when I am happy, and smile when I am sad.”

She looked at me again, and seemed to expect a reply; but I continued silent.

“Would you be *very* glad,” resumed she, “to find that you were mistaken in your conclusions?”

“How can you ask it, Helen?”

“I don’t say I can clear myself altogether,” said she, speaking low and fast, while her heart beat visibly and her bosom heaved with excitement,—“but would you be glad to discover I was better than you think me?”

“Anything that could in the least degree tend to restore my former opinion of you, to excuse the regard I still feel for you, and alleviate the pangs of unutterable regret that

accompany it, would be only too gladly, too eagerly received!" Her cheeks burned, and her whole frame trembled, now, with excess of agitation. She did not speak, but flew to her desk, and snatching thence what seemed a thick album or manuscript volume, hastily tore away a few leaves from the end, and thrust the rest into my hand, saying, "You needn't read it all; but take it home with you," and hurried from the room. But when I had left the house, and was proceeding down the walk, she opened the window and called me back. It was only to say,—"Bring it back when you have read it; and don't breathe a word of what it tells you to any living being. I trust to your honour."

Before I could answer she had closed the casement and turned away. I saw her cast herself back in the old oak chair, and cover her face with her hands. Her feelings had been wrought to a pitch that rendered it necessary to seek relief in tears.

Panting with eagerness, and struggling to suppress my hopes, I hurried home, and rushed up-stairs to my room, having first provided myself with a candle, though it was scarcely twilight yet—then, shut and bolted the door, determined to tolerate no interruption; and sitting down before the table, opened out my prize and delivered myself up to its perusal—first hastily turning over the leaves and snatching a sentence here and there, and then setting myself steadily to read it through.

I have it now before me; and though you could not, of course, peruse it with half the interest that I did, I know you would not be satisfied with an abbreviation of its contents, and you shall have the whole, save, perhaps, a few passages here and there of merely temporary interest to the writer, or such as would serve to encumber the story rather than elucidate it. It begins somewhat abruptly, thus—but we will reserve its commencement for another chapter.

## CHAPTER XVI

June 1st, 1821.—We have just returned to Staningley—that is, we returned some days ago, and I am not yet settled, and feel as if I never should be. We left town sooner than was intended, in consequence of my uncle's indisposition;—I wonder what would have been the result if we had stayed the full time. I am quite ashamed of my new-sprung distaste for country life. All my former occupations seem so tedious and dull, my former amusements so insipid and unprofitable. I cannot enjoy my music, because there is no one to hear it. I cannot enjoy my walks, because there is no one to meet. I cannot enjoy my books, because they have not power to arrest my attention: my head is so haunted with the recollections of the last few weeks, that I cannot attend to them. My drawing suits me best, for I can draw and think at the same time; and if my productions cannot now be seen by any one but myself, and those who do not care about them, they, possibly, may be, hereafter. But, then, there is one face I

am always trying to paint or to sketch, and always without success; and that vexes me. As for the owner of that face, I cannot get him out of my mind—and, indeed, I never try. I wonder whether he ever thinks of me; and I wonder whether I shall ever see him again. And then might follow a train of other wonderments—questions for time and fate to answer—concluding with—Supposing all the rest be answered in the affirmative, I wonder whether I shall ever repent it? as my aunt would tell me I should, if she knew what I was thinking about.

How distinctly I remember our conversation that evening before our departure for town, when we were sitting together over the fire, my uncle having gone to bed with a slight attack of the gout.

"Helen," said she, after a thoughtful silence, "do you ever think about marriage?"

"Yes, aunt, often."

"And do you ever contemplate the possibility of being married yourself, or engaged, before the season is over?"

"Sometimes; but I don't think it at all likely that I *ever* shall."

"Why so?"

"Because, I imagine, there must be only a very, very few men in the world that I should like to marry; and of those few, it is ten to one I may never be acquainted with one; or if I should, it is twenty to one he may not happen to be single, or to take a fancy to me."

"That is no argument at all. It may be very true—and I hope is true, that there are very few men whom you would choose to marry, of yourself. It is not, indeed, to be supposed that you would *wish* to marry *any* one till you were asked: a girl's affections should never be won unsought. But when they *are* sought—when the citadel of the heart is fairly besieged—it is apt to surrender sooner than the owner is aware of, and often against her better judgment, and in opposition to all her preconceived ideas of what she could have loved, unless she be extremely careful and discreet. Now, I want to warn you, Helen, of these things, and to exhort you to be watchful and circumspect from the very commencement of your career, and not to suffer your heart to be stolen from you by the first foolish or unprincipled person that covets the possession of it.—You know, my dear, you are only just eighteen; there is plenty of time before you, and neither your uncle nor I are in any hurry to get you off our hands, and I may venture to say, there will be no lack of suitors; for you can boast a good family, a pretty considerable fortune and expectations, and, I may as well tell you likewise—for, if I

don't, others will—that you have a fair share of beauty besides—and I hope you may never have cause to regret it!"

"I hope not, aunt; but why should you fear it?"

"Because, my dear, beauty is that quality which, next to money, is generally the most attractive to the worst kinds of men; and, therefore, it is likely to entail a great deal of trouble on the possessor."

"Have *you* been troubled in that way, aunt?"

"No, Helen," said she, with reproachful gravity, "but I know many that have; and some, through carelessness, have been the wretched victims of deceit; and some, through weakness, have fallen into snares and temptations terrible to relate."

"Well, I shall be neither careless nor weak."

"Remember Peter, Helen! Don't boast, but *watch*. Keep a guard over your eyes and ears as the inlets of your heart, and over your lips as the outlet, lest they betray you in a moment of unwariness. Receive, coldly and dispassionately, every attention, till you have ascertained and duly considered the worth of the aspirant; and let your affections be consequent upon approbation alone. First study; then approve; then love. Let your eyes be blind to all external attractions, your ears deaf to all the fascinations of flattery and light discourse.—These are nothing—and worse than nothing—snares and wiles of the tempter, to lure the thoughtless to their own destruction. Principle is the first thing, after all; and next to that, good sense, respectability, and moderate wealth. If you should marry the handsomest, and most accomplished and superficially agreeable man in the world, you little know the misery that would overwhelm you if, after all, you should find him to be a worthless reprobate, or even an impracticable fool."

"But what are all the poor fools and reprobates to do, aunt? If everybody followed your advice, the world would soon come to an end."

"Never fear, my dear! the male fools and reprobates will never want for partners, while there are so many of the other sex to match them; but do *you* follow my advice. And this is no subject for jesting, Helen—I am sorry to see you treat the matter in that light way. Believe me, *matrimony is a serious thing*." And she spoke it *so* seriously, that one might have fancied she had known it to her cost; but I asked no more impertinent questions, and merely answered,—

"I know it is; and I know there is truth and sense in what you say; but you need not fear me, for I not only should think it *wrong* to marry a man that was deficient in sense or in

principle, but I should never be *tempted* to do it; for I could not like him, if he were ever so handsome, and ever so charming, in other respects; I should hate him—despise him—pity him—anything but love him. My affections not only *ought* to be founded on approbation, but they will and must be so: for, without approving, I cannot love. It is needless to say, I ought to be able to respect and honour the man I marry, as *well* as love him, for I cannot love him without. So set your mind at rest."

"I hope it may be so," answered she.

"I *know* it *is* so," persisted I.

"You have not been tried yet, Helen—we can but hope," said she in her cold, cautious way.

"I was vexed at her incredulity; but I am not sure her doubts were entirely without sagacity; I fear I have found it much easier to remember her advice than to profit by it;—indeed, I have sometimes been led to question the soundness of her doctrines on those subjects. Her counsels may be good, as far as they go—in the main points at least;—but there are some things she has overlooked in her calculations. I wonder if *she* was ever in love.

I commenced my career—or my first campaign, as my uncle calls it—kindling with bright hopes and fancies—chiefly raised by this conversation—and full of confidence in my own discretion. At first, I was delighted with the novelty and excitement of our London life; but soon I began to weary of its mingled turbulence and constraint, and sigh for the freshness and freedom of home. My new acquaintances, both male and female, disappointed my expectations, and vexed and depressed me by turns; for I soon grew tired of studying their peculiarities, and laughing at their foibles—particularly as I was obliged to keep my criticisms to myself, for my aunt would not hear them—and they—the ladies especially—appeared so provokingly mindless, and heartless, and artificial. The gentlemen seemed better, but, perhaps, it was because I knew them less—perhaps, because they flattered me; but I did not fall in love with any of them; and, if their attentions pleased me one moment, they provoked me the next, because they put me out of humour with myself, by revealing my vanity and making me fear I was becoming like some of the ladies I so heartily despised.

There was one elderly gentleman that annoyed me very much; a rich old friend of my uncle's, who, I believe, thought I could not do better than marry him; but, besides being old, he was ugly and disagreeable,—and wicked, I am sure, though my aunt scolded me for saying so; but she allowed he was no saint. And there was another, less hateful, but still *more* tiresome, because she favoured him, and was always

thrusting him upon me, and sounding his praises in my ears—Mr. Boarham by name, Bore'em, as I prefer spelling it, for a terrible bore he was: I shudder still at the remembrance of his voice—drone, drone, drone, in my ear—while he sat beside me, prosing away by the half-hour together, and beguiling himself with the notion that he was improving my mind by useful information, or impressing his dogmas upon me and reforming my errors of judgment, or perhaps that he was talking down to my level, and amusing me with entertaining discourse. Yet he was a decent man enough in the main, I daresay; and if he had kept his distance, I never would have hated him. As it was, it was almost impossible to help it, for he not only bothered me with the infliction of his own presence, but he kept me from the enjoyment of more agreeable society.

One night, however, at a ball, he had been more than usually tormenting, and my patience was quite exhausted. It appeared as if the whole evening was fated to be insupportable: I had just had one dance with an empty-headed coxcomb, and then Mr. Boarham had come upon me and seemed determined to cling to me for the rest of the night. He never danced himself, and there he sat, poking his head in my face, and impressing all beholders with the idea that he was a confirmed, acknowledged lover; my aunt looking complacently on all the time, and wishing him God-speed. In vain I attempted to drive him away by giving a loose to my exasperated feelings, even to positive rudeness: nothing could convince him that his presence was disagreeable. Sullen silence was taken for rapt attention, and gave him greater room to talk; sharp answers were received as smart sallies of girlish vivacity, that only required an indulgent rebuke; and flat contradictions were but as oil to the flames, calling forth new strains of argument to support his dogmas, and bringing down upon me endless floods of reasoning to overwhelm me with conviction.

But there was one present who seemed to have a better appreciation of my frame of mind. A gentleman stood by, who had been watching our conference for some time, evidently much amused at my companion's remorseless pertinacity and my manifest annoyance, and laughing to himself at the asperity and uncompromising spirit of my replies. At length, however, he withdrew, and went to the lady of the house, apparently for the purpose of asking an introduction to me, for, shortly after, they both came up, and she introduced him as Mr. Huntingdon, the son of a late friend of my uncle's. He asked me to dance. I gladly consented, of course; and he was my companion during the remainder of my stay, which was not long, for my aunt, as usual, insisted upon an early departure.

I was sorry to go, for I had found my new acquaintance a very lively and entertaining companion. There was a certain graceful ease and freedom about all he said and did, that gave a sense of repose and expansion to the mind, after so much constraint and

formality as I had been doomed to suffer. There might be, it is true, a little too much careless boldness in his manner and address, but I was in so good a humour, and so grateful for my late deliverance from Mr. Boarham, that it did not anger me.

“Well, Helen, how do you like Mr. Boarham now?” said my aunt, as we took our seats in the carriage and drove away.

“Worse than ever,” I replied.

She looked displeased, but said no more on that subject.

“Who was the gentleman you danced with last,” resumed she, after a pause—“that was so officious in helping you on with your shawl?”

“He was not officious at all, aunt: he never *attempted* to help me, till he saw Mr. Boarham coming to do so; and then he stepped laughingly forward and said, ‘Come, I’ll preserve you from that infliction.’”

“Who was it, I ask?” said she, with frigid gravity.

“It was Mr. Huntingdon, the son of uncle’s old friend.”

“I have heard your uncle speak of young Mr. Huntingdon. I’ve heard him say, ‘He’s a fine lad, that young Huntingdon, but a bit wildish, I fancy.’ So I’d have you beware.”

“What does ‘a bit wildish’ mean?” I inquired.

“It means destitute of principle, and prone to every vice that is common to youth.”

“But I’ve heard uncle say he was a sad wild fellow himself, when he was young.”

She sternly shook her head.

“He was jesting then, I suppose,” said I, “and here he was speaking at random—at least, I cannot believe there is any harm in those laughing blue eyes.”

“False reasoning, Helen!” said she, with a sigh.

“Well, we ought to be charitable, you know, aunt—besides, I don’t think it *is* false: I am an excellent physiognomist, and I always judge of people’s characters by their looks—not by whether they are handsome or ugly, but by the general cast of the countenance. For instance, I should know by your countenance that you were not of a cheerful, sanguine disposition; and I should know by Mr. Wilmot’s, that he was a worthless old reprobate; and by Mr. Boarham’s, that he was not an agreeable companion; and by Mr. Huntingdon’s, that he was neither a fool nor a knave, though, possibly, neither a sage

nor a saint—but that is no matter to me, as I am not likely to meet him again—unless as an occasional partner in the ball-room."

It was not so, however, for I met him again next morning. He came to call upon my uncle, apologising for not having done so before, by saying he was only lately returned from the Continent, and had not heard, till the previous night, of my uncle's arrival in town; and after that I often met him; sometimes in public, sometimes at home; for he was very assiduous in paying his respects to his old friend, who did not, however, consider himself greatly obliged by the attention.

"I wonder what the deuce the lad means by coming so often," he would say,—"can *you* tell, Helen?—Hey? He wants none o' my company, nor I his—that's certain."

"I wish you'd tell him so, then," said my aunt.

"Why, what for? If I don't want him, somebody does, mayhap" (winking at me). "Besides, he's a pretty tidy fortune, Peggy, you know—not such a catch as Wilmot; but then Helen won't hear of that match: for, somehow, these old chaps don't go down with the girls—with *all* their money, and their experience to boot. I'll bet anything she'd rather have this young fellow without a penny, than Wilmot with his house full of gold. Wouldn't you, Nell?"

"Yes, uncle; but that's not saying much for Mr. Huntingdon; for I'd rather be an old maid and a pauper than Mrs. Wilmot."

"And Mrs. Huntingdon? What would you rather be than Mrs. Huntingdon—eh?"

"I'll tell you when I've considered the matter."

"Ah! it needs consideration, then? But come, now—would you rather be an old maid—let alone the pauper?"

"I can't tell till I'm asked."

And I left the room immediately, to escape further examination. But five minutes after, in looking from my window, I beheld Mr. Boarham coming up to the door. I waited nearly half-an-hour in uncomfortable suspense, expecting every minute to be called, and vainly longing to hear him go. Then footsteps were heard on the stairs, and my aunt entered the room with a solemn countenance, and closed the door behind her.

"Here is Mr. Boarham, Helen," said she. "He wishes to see you."

"Oh, aunt!—Can't you tell him I'm indisposed?—I'm sure I am—to see *him*."

“Nonsense, my dear! this is no trifling matter. He is come on a very important errand—to ask your hand in marriage of your uncle and me.”

“I hope my uncle and you told him it was not in your power to give it. What right had he to ask *any* one before me?”

“Helen!”

“What did my uncle say?”

“He said he would not interfere in the matter; if you liked to accept Mr. Boarham’s obliging offer, you—”

“Did he say obliging offer?”

“No; he said if you liked to take him you might; and if not, you might please yourself.”

“He said right; and what did you say?”

“It is no matter what I said. What will *you* say?—that is the question. He is now waiting to ask you himself; but consider well before you go; and if you intend to refuse him, give me your reasons.”

“I *shall* refuse him, of course; but you must tell me how, for I want to be civil and yet decided—and when I’ve got rid of him, I’ll give you my reasons afterwards.”

“But stay, Helen; sit down a little and compose yourself. Mr. Boarham is in no particular hurry, for he has little doubt of your acceptance; and I want to speak with you. Tell me, my dear, what are your objections to him? Do you deny that he is an upright, honourable man?”

“No.”

“Do you deny that he is sensible, sober, respectable?”

“No; he may be all this, but—”

“*But* Helen! How many such men do you expect to meet with in the world? Upright, honourable, sensible, sober, respectable! Is *this* such an every-day character that you should reject the possessor of such noble qualities without a moment’s hesitation? Yes, *noble* I may call them; for think of the full meaning of each, and how many inestimable virtues they include (and I might add many more to the list), and consider that all this is laid at your feet. It is in your power to secure this inestimable blessing for life—a worthy and excellent husband, who loves you tenderly, but not too fondly so

as to blind him to your faults, and will be your guide throughout life's pilgrimage, and your partner in eternal bliss. Think how—"

"But I hate him, aunt," said I, interrupting this unusual flow of eloquence.

"Hate him, Helen! Is this a Christian spirit?—*you hate him?* and he so good a man!"

"I don't hate him as a man, but as a husband. As a man, I love him so much that I wish him a better wife than I—one as good as himself, or better—if you think that possible—provided she could like him; but I never could, and therefore—"

"But why not? What objection do you find?"

"Firstly, he is at least forty years old—considerably more, I should think—and I am but eighteen; secondly, he is narrow-minded and bigoted in the extreme; thirdly, his tastes and feelings are wholly dissimilar to mine; fourthly, his looks, voice, and manner are particularly displeasing to me; and, finally, I have an aversion to his whole person that I never can surmount."

"Then you ought to surmount it. And please to compare him for a moment with Mr. Huntingdon, and, good looks apart (which contribute nothing to the merit of the man, or to the happiness of married life, and which you have so often professed to hold in light esteem), tell me which is the better man."

"I have no doubt Mr. Huntingdon is a much better man than you think him; but we are not talking about him now, but about Mr. Boarham; and as I would rather grow, live, and die in single blessedness—than be his wife, it is but right that I should tell him so at once, and put him out of suspense—so let me go."

"But don't give him a flat denial; he has no idea of such a thing, and it would offend him greatly: say you have no thoughts of matrimony at present—"

"But I *have* thoughts of it."

"Or that you desire a further acquaintance."

"But I don't desire a further acquaintance—quite the contrary."

And without waiting for further admonitions I left the room and went to seek Mr. Boarham. He was walking up and down the drawing-room, humming snatches of tunes and nibbling the end of his cane.

"My dear young lady," said he, bowing and smirking with great complacency, "I have your kind guardian's permission—"

“I know, sir,” said I, wishing to shorten the scene as much as possible, “and I am greatly obliged for your preference, but must beg to decline the honour you wish to confer, for I think we were not made for each other, as you yourself would shortly discover if the experiment were tried.”

My aunt was right. It was quite evident he had had little doubt of my acceptance, and no idea of a positive denial. He was amazed, astounded at such an answer, but too incredulous to be much offended; and after a little humming and hawing, he returned to the attack.

“I know, my dear, that there exists a considerable disparity between us in years, in temperament, and perhaps some other things; but let me assure you, I shall not be severe to mark the faults and foibles of a young and ardent nature such as yours, and while I acknowledge them to myself, and even rebuke them with all a father’s care, believe me, no youthful lover could be more tenderly indulgent towards the object of his affections than I to you; and, on the other hand, let me hope that my more experienced years and graver habits of reflection will be no disparagement in your eyes, as I shall endeavour to make them all conducive to your happiness. Come, now! What do you say? Let us have no young lady’s affectations and caprices, but speak out at once.”

“I will, but only to repeat what I said before, that I am certain we were not made for each other.”

“You really think so?”

“I do.”

“But you don’t know me—you wish for a further acquaintance—a longer time to—”

“No, I don’t. I know you as well as I ever shall, and better than you know me, or you would never dream of uniting yourself to one so incongruous—so utterly unsuitable to you in every way.”

“But, my dear young lady, I don’t look for perfection; I can excuse—”

“Thank you, Mr. Boarham, but I won’t trespass upon your goodness. You may save your indulgence and consideration for some more worthy object, that won’t tax them so heavily.”

“But let me beg you to consult your aunt; that excellent lady, I am sure, will—”

“I have consulted her; and I know her wishes coincide with yours; but in such important matters, I take the liberty of judging for myself; and no persuasion can alter

my inclinations, or induce me to believe that such a step would be conducive to my happiness or yours—and I wonder that a man of your experience and discretion should think of choosing such a wife."

"Ah, well!" said he, "I have sometimes wondered at that myself. I have sometimes said to myself, 'Now Boarham, what is this you're after? Take care, man—look before you leap! This is a sweet, bewitching creature, but remember, the brightest attractions to the lover too often prove the husband's greatest torments!' I assure you my choice has not been made without much reasoning and reflection. The seeming imprudence of the match has cost me many an anxious thought by day, and many a sleepless hour by night; but at length I satisfied myself that it was not, in very deed, imprudent. I saw my sweet girl was not without her faults, but of these her youth, I trusted, was not one, but rather an earnest of virtues yet unblown—a strong ground of presumption that her little defects of temper and errors of judgment, opinion, or manner were not irremediable, but might easily be removed or mitigated by the patient efforts of a watchful and judicious adviser, and where I failed to enlighten and control, I thought I might safely undertake to pardon, for the sake of her many excellences. Therefore, my dearest girl, since *I* am satisfied, why should *you* object—on my account, at least?"

"But to tell you the truth, Mr. Boarham, it is on my own account I principally object; so let us—drop the subject," I would have said, "for it is worse than useless to pursue it any further," but he pertinaciously interrupted me with,—"But why so? I would love you, cherish you, protect you," &c., &c.

I shall not trouble myself to put down all that passed between us. Suffice it to say, that I found him very troublesome, and very hard to convince that I really meant what I said, and really *was* so obstinate and blind to my own interests, that there was no shadow of a chance that either he or my aunt would ever be able to overcome my objections. Indeed, I am not sure that I succeeded after all; though wearied with his so pertinaciously returning to the same point and repeating the same arguments over and over again, forcing me to reiterate the same replies, I at length turned short and sharp upon him, and my last words were,—"I tell you plainly, that it cannot be. No consideration can induce me to marry against my inclinations. I respect you—at least, I would respect you, if you would behave like a sensible man—but I cannot love you, and never could—and the more you talk the further you repel me; so pray don't say any more about it."

Whereupon he wished me a good-morning, and withdrew, disconcerted and offended, no doubt; but surely it was not my fault.

## CHAPTER XVII

The next day I accompanied my uncle and aunt to a dinner-party at Mr. Wilmot's. He had two ladies staying with him: his niece Annabella, a fine dashing girl, or rather young woman,—of some five-and-twenty, too great a flirt to be married, according to her own assertion, but greatly admired by the gentlemen, who universally pronounced her a splendid woman; and her gentle cousin, Milicent Hargrave, who had taken a violent fancy to me, mistaking me for something vastly better than I was. And I, in return, was very fond of her. I should entirely exclude poor Milicent in my general animadversions against the ladies of my acquaintance. But it was not on her account, or her cousin's, that I have mentioned the party: it was for the sake of another of Mr. Wilmot's guests, to wit Mr. Huntingdon. I have good reason to remember his presence there, for this was the last time I saw him.

He did not sit near me at dinner; for it was his fate to hand in a capacious old dowager, and mine to be handed in by Mr. Grimsby, a friend of his, but a man I very greatly disliked: there was a sinister cast in his countenance, and a mixture of lurking ferocity and fulsome insincerity in his demeanour, that I could not away with. What a tiresome custom that is, by-the-by—one among the many sources of factitious annoyance of this ultra-civilised life. If the gentlemen *must* lead the ladies into the dining-room, why cannot they take those they like best?

I am not sure, however, that Mr. Huntingdon would have taken me, if he *had* been at liberty to make his own selection. It is quite possible he might have chosen Miss Wilmot; for she seemed bent upon engrossing his attention to herself, and he seemed nothing loth to pay the homage she demanded. I thought so, at least, when I saw how they talked and laughed, and glanced across the table, to the neglect and evident umbrage of their respective neighbours—and afterwards, as the gentlemen joined us in the drawing-room, when she, immediately upon his entrance, loudly called upon him to be the arbiter of a dispute between herself and another lady, and he answered the summons with alacrity, and decided the question without a moment's hesitation in her favour—though, to my thinking, she was obviously in the wrong—and then stood chatting familiarly with her and a group of other ladies; while I sat with Milicent Hargrave at the opposite end of the room, looking over the latter's drawings, and aiding her with my critical observations and advice, at her particular desire. But in spite of my efforts to remain composed, my attention wandered from the drawings to the merry group, and against my better judgment my wrath rose, and doubtless my countenance lowered; for Milicent, observing that I must be tired of her daubs and scratches, begged I would join the company now, and defer the examination of the remainder to another opportunity. But while I was assuring her that I had no wish to

join them, and was not tired, Mr. Huntingdon himself came up to the little round table at which we sat.

“Are these yours?” said he, carelessly taking up one of the drawings.

“No, they are Miss Hargrave’s.”

“Oh! well, let’s have a look at them.”

And, regardless of Miss Hargrave’s protestations that they were not worth looking at, he drew a chair to my side, and receiving the drawings, one by one from my hand, successively scanned them over, and threw them on the table, but said not a word about them, though he was talking all the time. I don’t know what Milicent Hargrave thought of such conduct, but *I* found his conversation extremely interesting; though, as I afterwards discovered, when I came to analyse it, it was chiefly confined to quizzing the different members of the company present; and albeit he made some clever remarks, and some excessively droll ones, I do not think the whole would appear anything very particular, if written here, without the adventitious aids of look, and tone, and gesture, and that ineffable but indefinite charm, which cast a halo over all he did and said, and which would have made it a delight to look in his face, and hear the music of his voice, if he had been talking positive nonsense—and which, moreover, made me feel so bitter against my aunt when she put a stop to this enjoyment, by coming composedly forward, under pretence of wishing to see the drawings, that she cared and knew nothing about, and while making believe to examine them, addressing herself to Mr. Huntingdon, with one of her coldest and most repellent aspects, and beginning a series of the most common-place and formidably formal questions and observations, on purpose to wrest his attention from me—on purpose to vex me, as I thought: and having now looked through the portfolio, I left them to their *tête-à-tête*, and seated myself on a sofa, quite apart from the company—never thinking how strange such conduct would appear, but merely to indulge, at first, the vexation of the moment, and subsequently to enjoy my private thoughts.

But I was not left long alone, for Mr. Wilmot, of all men the least welcome, took advantage of my isolated position to come and plant himself beside me. I had flattered myself that I had so effectually repulsed his advances on all former occasions, that I had nothing more to apprehend from his unfortunate predilection; but it seems I was mistaken: so great was his confidence, either in his wealth or his remaining powers of attraction, and so firm his conviction of feminine weakness, that he thought himself warranted to return to the siege, which he did with renovated ardour, enkindled by the quantity of wine he had drunk—a circumstance that rendered

him infinitely the more disgusting; but greatly as I abhorred him at that moment, I did not like to treat him with rudeness, as I was now his guest, and had just been enjoying his hospitality; and I was no hand at a polite but determined rejection, nor would it have greatly availed me if I had, for he was too coarse-minded to take any repulse that was not as plain and positive as his own effrontery. The consequence was, that he waxed more fulsomely tender, and more repulsively warm, and I was driven to the very verge of desperation, and about to say I know not what, when I felt my hand, that hung over the arm of the sofa, suddenly taken by another and gently but fervently pressed. Instinctively, I guessed who it was, and, on looking up, was less surprised than delighted to see Mr. Huntingdon smiling upon me. It was like turning from some purgatorial fiend to an angel of light, come to announce that the season of torment was past.

"Helen," said he (he frequently called me Helen, and I never resented the freedom), "I want you to look at this picture. Mr. Wilmot will excuse you a moment, I'm sure."

I rose with alacrity. He drew my arm within his, and led me across the room to a splendid painting of Vandyke's that I had noticed before, but not sufficiently examined. After a moment of silent contemplation, I was beginning to comment on its beauties and peculiarities, when, playfully pressing the hand he still retained within his arm, he interrupted me with,—"Never mind the picture: it was not for that I brought you here; it was to get you away from that scoundrelly old profligate yonder, who is looking as if he would like to challenge me for the affront."

"I am very much obliged to you," said I. "This is twice you have delivered me from such unpleasant companionship."

"Don't be too thankful," he answered: "it is not all kindness to you; it is partly from a feeling of spite to your tormentors that makes me delighted to do the old fellows a bad turn, though I don't think I have any great reason to dread them as rivals. Have I, Helen?"

"You know I detest them both."

"And me?"

"I have no reason to detest *you*."

"But what are your sentiments towards me? Helen—Speak! How do you regard me?"

And again he pressed my hand; but I feared there was more of conscious power than tenderness in his demeanour, and I felt he had no right to extort a confession of

attachment from me when he had made no correspondent avowal himself, and knew not what to answer. At last I said,—

“How do *you* regard *me?*”

“Sweet angel, I adore you! I—”

“Helen, I want you a moment,” said the distinct, low voice of my aunt, close beside us. And I left him, muttering maledictions against his evil angel.

“Well, aunt, what is it? What do you want?” said I, following her to the embrasure of the window.

“I want you to join the company, when you are fit to be seen,” returned she, severely regarding me; “but please to stay here a little, till that shocking colour is somewhat abated, and your eyes have recovered something of their natural expression. I should be ashamed for anyone to see you in your present state.”

Of course, such a remark had no effect in reducing the “shocking colour”; on the contrary, I felt my face glow with redoubled fires kindled by a complication of emotions, of which indignant, swelling anger was the chief. I offered no reply, however, but pushed aside the curtain and looked into the night—or rather into the lamp-lit square.

“Was Mr. Huntingdon proposing to you, Helen?” inquired my too watchful relative.

“No.”

“What was he saying then? I heard something very like it.”

“I don’t know what he would have said, if you hadn’t interrupted him.”

“And would you have accepted him, Helen, if he had proposed?”

“Of course not—without consulting uncle and you.”

“Oh! I’m glad, my dear, you have so much prudence left. Well, now,” she added, after a moment’s pause, “you have made yourself conspicuous enough for one evening. The ladies are directing inquiring glances towards us at this moment, I see: I shall join them. Do you come too, when you are sufficiently composed to appear as usual.”

“I am so now.”

“Speak gently then, and don’t look so malicious,” said my calm, but provoking aunt. “We shall return home shortly, and then,” she added with solemn significance, “I have much to say to you.”

So I went home prepared for a formidable lecture. Little was said by either party in the carriage during our short transit homewards; but when I had entered my room and thrown myself into an easy-chair, to reflect on the events of the day, my aunt followed me thither, and having dismissed Rachel, who was carefully stowing away my ornaments, closed the door; and placing a chair beside me, or rather at right angles with mine, sat down. With due deference I offered her my more commodious seat. She declined it, and thus opened the conference: "Do you remember, Helen, our conversation the night but one before we left Staningley?"

"Yes, aunt."

"And do you remember how I warned you against letting your heart be stolen from you by those unworthy of its possession, and fixing your affections where approbation did not go before, and where reason and judgment withheld their sanction?"

"Yes; but *my* reason—"

"Pardon me—and do you remember assuring me that there was no occasion for uneasiness on your account; for you should never be *tempted* to marry a man who was deficient in sense or principle, however handsome or charming in other respects he might be, for you could not love him; you should hate—despise—pity—anything but love him—were not those your words?"

"Yes; but—"

"And did you not say that your affection *must* be founded on approbation; and that, unless you could approve and honour and respect, you could not love?"

"Yes; but I do approve, and honour, and respect—"

"How so, my dear? Is Mr. Huntingdon a good man?"

"He is a much better man than you think him."

"That is nothing to the purpose. Is he a *good* man?"

"Yes—in some respects. He has a good disposition."

"Is he a man of *principle?*"

"Perhaps not, exactly; but it is only for want of thought. If he had some one to advise him, and remind him of what is right—"

“He would soon learn, you think—and you yourself would willingly undertake to be his teacher? But, my dear, he is, I believe, full ten years older than you—how is it that you are so beforehand in moral acquirements?”

“Thanks to you, aunt, I have been well brought up, and had good examples always before me, which he, most likely, has not; and, besides, he is of a sanguine temperament, and a gay, thoughtless temper, and I am naturally inclined to reflection.”

“Well, now you have made him out to be deficient in both sense and principle, by your own confession—”

“Then, my sense and my principle are at his service.”

“That sounds presumptuous, Helen. Do you think you have enough for both; and do you imagine your merry, thoughtless profligate would allow himself to be guided by a young girl like you?”

“No; I should not wish to guide him; but I think I might have influence sufficient to save him from some errors, and I should think my life well spent in the effort to preserve so noble a nature from destruction. He always listens attentively now when I speak seriously to him (and I often venture to reprove his random way of talking), and sometimes he says that if he had me always by his side he should never do or say a wicked thing, and that a little daily talk with me would make him quite a saint. It may he partly jest and partly flattery, but still—”

“But still you think it may be truth?”

“If I do think there is any mixture of truth in it, it is not from confidence in my own powers, but in *his* natural goodness. And you have no right to call him a profligate, aunt; he is nothing of the kind.”

“Who told you so, my dear? What was that story about his intrigue with a married lady—Lady who was it?—Miss Wilmot herself was telling you the other day?”

“It was false—false!” I cried. “I don’t believe a word of it.”

“You think, then, that he is a virtuous, well-conducted young man?”

“I know nothing positive respecting his character. I only know that I have heard nothing definite against it—nothing that could be proved, at least; and till people can prove their slanderous accusations, I will not believe them. And I know this, that if he has committed errors, they are only such as are common to youth, and such as nobody thinks anything about; for I see that everybody likes him, and all the mammas smile

upon him, and their daughters—and Miss Wilmot herself—are only too glad to attract his attention."

"Helen, the world *may* look upon such offences as venial; a few unprincipled mothers may be anxious to catch a young man of fortune without reference *may* his character; and thoughtless girls *may* be glad to win the smiles of so handsome a gentleman, without seeking to penetrate beyond the surface; but *you*, I trusted, were better informed than to see with their eyes, and judge with their perverted judgment. I did not think *you* would call these venial errors!"

"Nor do I, aunt; but if I hate the sins, I love the sinner, and would do much for his salvation, even supposing your suspicions to be mainly true, which I do not and will not believe."

"Well, my dear, ask your uncle what sort of company he keeps, and if he is not banded with a set of loose, profligate young men, whom he calls his friends, his jolly companions, and whose chief delight is to wallow in vice, and vie with each other who can run fastest and furthest down the headlong road to the place prepared for the devil and his angels."

"Then I will save him from them."

"Oh, Helen, Helen! you little know the misery of uniting your fortunes to such a man!"

"I have such confidence in him, aunt, notwithstanding all you say, that I would willingly risk my happiness for the chance of securing his. I will leave better men to those who only consider their own advantage. If he has done amiss, I shall consider my life well spent in saving him from the consequences of his early errors, and striving to recall him to the path of virtue. God grant me success!"

Here the conversation ended, for at this juncture my uncle's voice was heard from his chamber, loudly calling upon my aunt to come to bed. He was in a bad humour that night; for his gout was worse. It had been gradually increasing upon him ever since we came to town; and my aunt took advantage of the circumstance next morning to persuade him to return to the country immediately, without waiting for the close of the season. His physician supported and enforced her arguments; and contrary to her usual habits, she so hurried the preparations for removal (as much for my sake as my uncle's, I think), that in a very few days we departed; and I saw no more of Mr. Huntingdon. My aunt flatters herself I shall soon forget him—perhaps she thinks I have forgotten him already, for I never mention his name; and she may continue to think so, till we meet again—if ever that should be. I wonder if it will?

## CHAPTER XVIII

August 25th.—I am now quite settled down to my usual routine of steady occupations and quiet amusements—tolerably contented and cheerful, but still looking forward to spring with the hope of returning to town, not for its gaieties and dissipations, but for the chance of meeting Mr. Huntingdon once again; for still he is always in my thoughts and in my dreams. In all my employments, whatever I do, or see, or hear, has an ultimate reference to him; whatever skill or knowledge I acquire is some day to be turned to his advantage or amusement; whatever new beauties in nature or art I discover are to be depicted to meet his eye, or stored in my memory to be told him at some future period. This, at least, is the hope that I cherish, the fancy that lights me on my lonely way. It may be only an ignis fatuus, after all, but it can do no harm to follow it with my eyes and rejoice in its lustre, as long as it does not lure me from the path I ought to keep; and I think it will not, for I have thought deeply on my aunt's advice, and I see clearly, now, the folly of throwing myself away on one that is unworthy of all the love I have to give, and incapable of responding to the best and deepest feelings of my inmost heart—*so* clearly, that even if I should see him again, and if he should remember me and love me still (which, alas! is too little probable, considering how he is situated, and by whom surrounded), and if he should ask me to marry him—I am determined not to consent until I know for certain whether my aunt's opinion of him or mine is nearest the truth; for if mine is altogether wrong, it is not he that I love; it is a creature of my own imagination. But I think it is not wrong—no, no—there is a secret something—an inward instinct that assures me I am right. There is essential goodness in him;—and what delight to unfold it! If he has wandered, what bliss to recall him! If he is now exposed to the baneful influence of corrupting and wicked companions, what glory to deliver him from them! Oh! if I could but believe that Heaven has designed me for this!

* * * * *

To-day is the first of September; but my uncle has ordered the gamekeeper to spare the partridges till the gentlemen come. "What gentlemen?" I asked when I heard it. A small party he had invited to shoot. His friend Mr. Wilmot was one, and my aunt's friend, Mr. Boarham, another. This struck me as terrible news at the moment; but all regret and apprehension vanished like a dream when I heard that Mr. Huntingdon was actually to be a third! My aunt is greatly against his coming, of course: she earnestly endeavoured to dissuade my uncle from asking him; but he, laughing at her objections, told her it was no use talking, for the mischief was already done: he had invited Huntingdon and his friend Lord Lowborough before we left London, and nothing now remained but to fix the day for their coming. So he is safe, and I am sure

of seeing him. I cannot express my joy. I find it very difficult to conceal it from my aunt; but I don't wish to trouble her with my feelings till I know whether I ought to indulge them or not. If I find it my absolute duty to suppress them, they shall trouble no one but myself; and if I can really feel myself justified in indulging this attachment, I can dare anything, even the anger and grief of my best friend, for its object—surely, I shall soon know. But they are not coming till about the middle of the month.

We are to have two lady visitors also: Mr. Wilmot is to bring his niece and her cousin Milicent. I suppose my aunt thinks the latter will benefit me by her society, and the salutary example of her gentle deportment and lowly and tractable spirit; and the former I suspect she intends as a species of counter-attraction to win Mr. Huntingdon's attention from me. I don't thank her for this; but I shall be glad of Milicent's company: she is a sweet, good girl, and I wish I were like her—*more* like her, at least, than I am.

* * * * *

19th.—They are come. They came the day before yesterday. The gentlemen are all gone out to shoot, and the ladies are with my aunt, at work in the drawing-room. I have retired to the library, for I am very unhappy, and I want to be alone. Books cannot divert me; so having opened my desk, I will try what may be done by detailing the cause of my uneasiness. This paper will serve instead of a confidential friend into whose ear I might pour forth the overflowings of my heart. It will not sympathise with my distresses, but then it will not laugh at them, and, if I keep it close, it cannot tell again; so it is, perhaps, the best friend I could have for the purpose.

First, let me speak of his arrival—how I sat at my window, and watched for nearly two hours, before his carriage entered the park-gates—for they all came before him,—and how deeply I was disappointed at every arrival, because it was not his. First came Mr. Wilmot and the ladies. When Milicent had got into her room, I quitted my post a few minutes to look in upon her and have a little private conversation, for she was now my intimate friend, several long epistles having passed between us since our parting. On returning to my window, I beheld another carriage at the door. Was it his? No; it was Mr. Boarham's plain dark chariot; and there stood he upon the steps, carefully superintending the dislodging of his various boxes and packages. What a collection! One would have thought he projected a visit of six months at least. A considerable time after, came Lord Lowborough in his barouche. Is he one of the profligate friends, I wonder? I should think not; for no one could call *him* a jolly companion, I'm sure,—and, besides, he appears too sober and gentlemanly in his demeanour to merit such

suspicions. He is a tall, thin, gloomy-looking man, apparently between thirty and forty, and of a somewhat sickly, careworn aspect.

At last, Mr. Huntingdon's light phaeton came bowling merrily up the lawn. I had but a transient glimpse of him: for the moment it stopped, he sprang out over the side on to the portico steps, and disappeared into the house.

I now submitted to be dressed for dinner—a duty which Rachel had been urging upon me for the last twenty minutes; and when that important business was completed, I repaired to the drawing-room, where I found Mr. and Miss Wilmot and Milicent Hargrave already assembled. Shortly after, Lord Lowborough entered, and then Mr. Boarham, who seemed quite willing to forget and forgive my former conduct, and to hope that a little conciliation and steady perseverance on his part might yet succeed in bringing me to reason. While I stood at the window, conversing with Milicent, he came up to me, and was beginning to talk in nearly his usual strain, when Mr. Huntingdon entered the room.

"How will he greet me, I wonder?" said my bounding heart; and, instead of advancing to meet him, I turned to the window to hide or subdue my emotion. But having saluted his host and hostess, and the rest of the company, he came to me, ardently squeezed my hand, and murmured he was glad to see me once again. At that moment dinner was announced: my aunt desired him to take Miss Hargrave into the dining-room, and odious Mr. Wilmot, with unspeakable grimaces, offered his arm to me; and I was condemned to sit between himself and Mr. Boarham. But afterwards, when we were all again assembled in the drawing-room, I was indemnified for so much suffering by a few delightful minutes of conversation with Mr. Huntingdon.

In the course of the evening, Miss Wilmot was called upon to sing and play for the amusement of the company, and I to exhibit my drawings, and, though he likes music, and she is an accomplished musician, I think I am right in affirming, that he paid more attention to my drawings than to her music.

So far so good;—but hearing him pronounce, sotto voce, but with peculiar emphasis, concerning one of the pieces, "THIS is better than all!"—I looked up, curious to see which it was, and, to my horror, beheld him complacently gazing at the *back* of the picture:—it was his own face that I had sketched there and forgotten to rub out! To make matters worse, in the agony of the moment, I attempted to snatch it from his hand; but he prevented me, and exclaiming, "No—by George, I'll keep it!" placed it against his waistcoat and buttoned his coat upon it with a delighted chuckle.

Then, drawing a candle close to his elbow, he gathered all the drawings to himself, as well what he had seen as the others, and muttering, "I must look at *both* sides now," he eagerly commenced an examination, which I watched, at first, with tolerable composure, in the confidence that his vanity would not be gratified by any further discoveries; for, though I must plead guilty to having disfigured the backs of several with abortive attempts to delineate that too fascinating physiognomy, I was sure that, with that one unfortunate exception, I had carefully obliterated all such witnesses of my infatuation. But the pencil frequently leaves an impression upon cardboard that no amount of rubbing can efface. Such, it seems, was the case with most of these; and, I confess, I trembled when I saw him holding them so close to the candle, and poring so intently over the seeming blanks; but still, I trusted, he would not be able to make out these dim traces to his own satisfaction. I was mistaken, however. Having ended his scrutiny, he quietly remarked,—"I perceive the backs of young ladies' drawings, like the postscripts of their letters, are the most important and interesting part of the concern."

Then, leaning back in his chair, he reflected a few minutes in silence, complacently smiling to himself, and while I was concocting some cutting speech wherewith to check his gratification, he rose, and passing over to where Annabella Wilmot sat vehemently coquetting with Lord Lowborough, seated himself on the sofa beside her, and attached himself to her for the rest of the evening.

"So then," thought I, "he despises me, because he knows I love him."

And the reflection made me so miserable I knew not what to do. Milicent came and began to admire my drawings, and make remarks upon them; but I could not talk to her—I could talk to no one, and, upon the introduction of tea, I took advantage of the open door and the slight diversion caused by its entrance to slip out—for I was sure I could not take any—and take refuge in the library. My aunt sent Thomas in quest of me, to ask if I were not coming to tea; but I bade him say I should not take any to-night, and, happily, she was too much occupied with her guests to make any further inquiries at the time.

As most of the company had travelled far that day, they retired early to rest; and having heard them all, as I thought, go up-stairs, I ventured out, to get my candlestick from the drawing-room sideboard. But Mr. Huntingdon had lingered behind the rest. He was just at the foot of the stairs when I opened the door, and hearing my step in the hall—though I could hardly hear it myself—he instantly turned back.

"Helen, is that you?" said he. "Why did you run away from us?"

“Good-night, Mr. Huntingdon,” said I, coldly, not choosing to answer the question. And I turned away to enter the drawing-room.

“But you’ll shake hands, won’t you?” said he, placing himself in the doorway before me. And he seized my hand and held it, much against my will.

“Let me go, Mr. Huntingdon,” said I. “I want to get a candle.”

“The candle will keep,” returned he.

I made a desperate effort to free my hand from his grasp.

“Why are you in such a hurry to leave me, Helen?” he said, with a smile of the most provoking self-sufficiency. “You don’t hate me, you *know*.”

“Yes, I do—at this moment.”

“Not you. It is Annabella Wilmot you hate, not me.”

“I have nothing to do with Annabella Wilmot,” said I, burning with indignation.

“But *I* have, you know,” returned he, with peculiar emphasis.

“That is nothing to me, sir,” I retorted.

“*Is* it nothing to you, Helen? Will you swear it? Will you?”

“No I won’t, Mr. Huntingdon! and I *will* go,” cried I, not knowing whether to laugh, or to cry, or to break out into a tempest of fury.

“Go, then, you vixen!” he said; but the instant he released my hand he had the audacity to put his arm round my neck, and kiss me.

Trembling with anger and agitation, and I don’t know what besides, I broke away, and got my candle, and rushed up-stairs to my room. He would not have done so but for that hateful picture. And there he had it still in his possession, an eternal monument to his pride and my humiliation.

It was but little sleep I got that night, and in the morning I rose perplexed and troubled with the thoughts of meeting him at breakfast. I knew not how it was to be done. An assumption of dignified, cold indifference would hardly do, after what he knew of my devotion—to his face, at least. Yet something must be done to check his presumption—I would not submit to be tyrannised over by those bright, laughing eyes. And, accordingly, I received his cheerful morning salutation as calmly and coldly as my aunt could have wished, and defeated with brief answers his one or two attempts to draw me into conversation, while I comported myself with unusual cheerfulness

and complaisance towards every other member of the party, especially Annabella Wilmot, and even her uncle and Mr. Boarham were treated with an extra amount of civility on the occasion, not from any motives of coquetry, but just to show him that my particular coolness and reserve arose from no general ill-humour or depression of spirits.

He was not, however, to be repelled by such acting as this. He did not talk much to me, but when he did speak it was with a degree of freedom and openness, and *kindliness* too, that plainly seemed to intimate he knew his words were music to my ears; and when his looks met mine it was with a smile—presumptuous, it might be—but oh! so sweet, so bright, so genial, that I could not possibly retain my anger; every vestige of displeasure soon melted away beneath it like morning clouds before the summer sun.

Soon after breakfast all the gentlemen save one, with boyish eagerness, set out on their expedition against the hapless partridges; my uncle and Mr. Wilmot on their shooting ponies, Mr. Huntingdon and Lord Lowborough on their legs: the one exception being Mr. Boarham, who, in consideration of the rain that had fallen during the night, thought it prudent to remain behind a little and join them in a while when the sun had dried the grass. And he favoured us all with a long and minute disquisition upon the evils and dangers attendant upon damp feet, delivered with the most imperturbable gravity, amid the jeers and laughter of Mr. Huntingdon and my uncle, who, leaving the prudent sportsman to entertain the ladies with his medical discussions, sallied forth with their guns, bending their steps to the stables first, to have a look at the horses and let out the dogs.

Not desirous of sharing Mr. Boarham's company for the whole of the morning, I betook myself to the library, and there brought forth my easel and began to paint. The easel and the painting apparatus would serve as an excuse for abandoning the drawing-room if my aunt should come to complain of the desertion, and besides I wanted to finish the picture. It was one I had taken great pains with, and I intended it to be my masterpiece, though it was somewhat presumptuous in the design. By the bright azure of the sky, and by the warm and brilliant lights and deep long shadows, I had endeavoured to convey the idea of a sunny morning. I had ventured to give more of the bright verdure of spring or early summer to the grass and foliage than is commonly attempted in painting. The scene represented was an open glade in a wood. A group of dark Scotch firs was introduced in the middle distance to relieve the prevailing freshness of the rest; but in the foreground was part of the gnarled trunk and of the spreading boughs of a large forest-tree, whose foliage was of a brilliant golden green—not golden from autumnal mellowness, but from the sunshine and the very immaturity

of the scarce expanded leaves. Upon this bough, that stood out in bold relief against the sombre firs, were seated an amorous pair of turtle doves, whose soft sad-coloured plumage afforded a contrast of another nature; and beneath it a young girl was kneeling on the daisy-spangled turf, with head thrown back and masses of fair hair falling on her shoulders, her hands clasped, lips parted, and eyes intently gazing upward in pleased yet earnest contemplation of those feathered lovers—too deeply absorbed in each other to notice her.

I had scarcely settled to my work, which, however, wanted but a few touches to the finishing, when the sportsmen passed the window on their return from the stables. It was partly open, and Mr. Huntingdon must have seen me as he went by, for in half a minute he came back, and setting his gun against the wall, threw up the sash and sprang in, and set himself before my picture.

"Very pretty, i'faith," said he, after attentively regarding it for a few seconds; "and a very fitting study for a young lady. Spring just opening into summer—morning just approaching noon—girlhood just ripening into womanhood, and hope just verging on fruition. She's a sweet creature! but why didn't you make her black hair?"

"I thought light hair would suit her better. You see I have made her blue-eyed and plump, and fair and rosy."

"Upon my word—a very Hebe! I should fall in love with her if I hadn't the artist before me. Sweet innocent! she's thinking there will come a time when she will be wooed and won like that pretty hen-dove by as fond and fervent a lover; and she's thinking how pleasant it will be, and how tender and faithful he will find her."

"And perhaps," suggested I, "how tender and faithful she shall find him."

"Perhaps, for there is no limit to the wild extravagance of Hope's imaginings at such an age."

"Do you call *that*, then, one of her wild, extravagant delusions?"

"No; my heart tells me it is not. I might have thought so once, but now, I say, give me the girl I love, and I will swear eternal constancy to her and her alone, through summer and winter, through youth and age, and life and death! if age and death *must* come."

He spoke this in such serious earnest that my heart bounded with delight; but the minute after he changed his tone, and asked, with a significant smile, if I had "any more portraits."

"No," replied I, reddening with confusion and wrath.

But my portfolio was on the table: he took it up, and coolly sat down to examine its contents.

“Mr. Huntingdon, those are my unfinished sketches,” cried I, “and I never let any one see them.”

And I placed my hand on the portfolio to wrest it from him, but he maintained his hold, assuring me that he “liked unfinished sketches of all things.”

“But I hate them to be seen,” returned I. “I can’t let you have it, indeed!”

“Let me have its bowels then,” said he; and just as I wrenched the portfolio from his hand, he deftly abstracted the greater part of its contents, and after turning them over a moment he cried out,—“Bless my stars, here’s another;” and slipped a small oval of ivory paper into his waistcoat pocket—a complete miniature portrait that I had sketched with such tolerable success as to be induced to colour it with great pains and care. But I was determined he should not keep it.

“Mr. Huntingdon,” cried I, “I *insist* upon having that back! It is mine, and you have no *right* to take it. Give it me directly—I’ll never forgive you if you don’t!”

But the more vehemently I insisted, the more he aggravated my distress by his insulting, gleeful laugh. At length, however, he restored it to me, saying,—“Well, well, since you value it so much, I’ll not deprive you of it.”

To show him how I valued it, I tore it in two and threw it into the fire. He was not prepared for this. His merriment suddenly ceasing, he stared in mute amazement at the consuming treasure; and then, with a careless “Humph! I’ll go and shoot now,” he turned on his heel and vacated the apartment by the window as he came, and setting on his hat with an air, took up his gun and walked away, whistling as he went—and leaving me not too much agitated to finish my picture, for I was glad, at the moment, that I had vexed him.

When I returned to the drawing-room, I found Mr. Boarham had ventured to follow his comrades to the field; and shortly after lunch, to which they did not think of returning, I volunteered to accompany the ladies in a walk, and show Annabella and Milicent the beauties of the country. We took a long ramble, and re-entered the park just as the sportsmen were returning from their expedition. Toil-spent and travel-stained, the main body of them crossed over the grass to avoid us, but Mr. Huntingdon, all spattered and splashed as he was, and stained with the blood of his prey—to the no small offence of my aunt’s strict sense of propriety—came out of his way to meet us, with cheerful smiles and words for all but me, and placing himself between Annabella

Wilmot and myself, walked up the road and began to relate the various exploits and disasters of the day, in a manner that would have convulsed me with laughter if I had been on good terms with him; but he addressed himself entirely to Annabella, and I, of course, left all the laughter and all the badinage to her, and affecting the utmost indifference to whatever passed between them, walked along a few paces apart, and looking every way but theirs, while my aunt and Milicent went before, linked arm in arm and gravely discoursing together. At length Mr. Huntingdon turned to me, and addressing me in a confidential whisper, said,—"Helen, why did you burn my picture?"

"Because I wished to destroy it," I answered, with an asperity it is useless now to lament.

"Oh, very good!" was the reply; "if *you* don't value me, I must turn to somebody that will."

I thought it was partly in jest—a half-playful mixture of mock resignation and pretended indifference: but immediately he resumed his place beside Miss Wilmot, and from that hour to this—during all that evening, and all the next day, and the next, and the next, and all this morning (the 22nd), he has never given me one kind word or one pleasant look—never spoken to me, but from pure necessity—never glanced towards me but with a cold, unfriendly look I thought him quite incapable of assuming.

My aunt observes the change, and though she has not inquired the cause or made any remark to me on the subject, I see it gives her pleasure. Miss Wilmot observes it, too, and triumphantly ascribes it to her own superior charms and blandishments; but I am truly miserable—more so than I like to acknowledge to myself. Pride refuses to aid me. It has brought me into the scrape, and will not help me out of it.

He meant no harm—it was only his joyous, playful spirit; and I, by my acrimonious resentment—so serious, so disproportioned to the offence—have so wounded his feelings, so deeply offended him, that I fear he will never forgive me—and all for a mere jest! He thinks I dislike him, and he must continue to think so. I must lose him for ever, and Annabella may win him, and triumph as she will.

But it is not my loss nor her triumph that I deplore so greatly as the wreck of my fond hopes for his advantage, and her unworthiness of his affection, and the injury he will do himself by trusting his happiness to her. *She* does not love him: she thinks only of herself. She cannot appreciate the good that is in him: she will neither see it, nor value it, nor cherish it. She will neither deplore his faults nor attempt their amendment, but

rather aggravate them by her own. And I doubt whether she will not deceive him after all. I see she is playing double between him and Lord Lowborough, and while she amuses herself with the lively Huntingdon, she tries her utmost to enslave his moody friend; and should she succeed in bringing both to her feet, the fascinating commoner will have but little chance against the lordly peer. If he observes her artful by-play, it gives him no uneasiness, but rather adds new zest to his diversion by opposing a stimulating check to his otherwise too easy conquest.

Messrs. Wilmot and Boarham have severally taken occasion by his neglect of me to renew their advances; and if I were like Annabella and some others I should take advantage of their perseverance to endeavour to pique him into a revival of affection; but, justice and honesty apart, I could not *bear* to do it. I am annoyed enough by their present persecutions without encouraging them further; and even if I did it would have precious little effect upon him. He sees me suffering under the condescending attentions and prosaic discourses of the one, and the repulsive obtrusions of the other, without so much as a shadow of commiseration for me, or resentment against my tormentors. He never could have loved me, or he would not have resigned me so willingly, and he would not go on talking to everybody else so cheerfully as he does—laughing and jesting with Lord Lowborough and my uncle, teasing Milicent Hargrave, and flirting with Annabella Wilmot—as if nothing were on his mind. Oh! why can't I hate him? I must be infatuated, or I should scorn to regret him as I do. But I must rally all the powers I have remaining, and try to tear him from my heart. There goes the dinner-bell, and here comes my aunt to scold me for sitting here at my desk all day, instead of staying with the company: wish the company were—gone.

## CHAPTER XIX

Twenty-Second: Night.—What have I done? and what will be the end of it? I cannot calmly reflect upon it; I cannot sleep. I must have recourse to my diary again; I will commit it to paper to-night, and see what I shall think of it to-morrow.

I went down to dinner resolving to be cheerful and well-conducted, and kept my resolution very creditably, considering how my head ached and how internally wretched I felt. I don't know what is come over me of late; my very energies, both mental and physical, must be strangely impaired, or I should not have acted so weakly in many respects as I have done; but I have not been well this last day or two. I suppose it is with sleeping and eating so little, and thinking so much, and being so continually out of humour. But to return. I was exerting myself to sing and play for the amusement, and at the request, of my aunt and Milicent, before the gentlemen came into the drawing-room (Miss Wilmot never likes to waste her musical efforts on ladies'

ears alone). Milicent had asked for a little Scotch song, and I was just in the middle of it when they entered. The first thing Mr. Huntingdon did was to walk up to Annabella.

"Now, Miss Wilmot, won't *you* give us some music to-night?" said he. "Do now! I know you will, when I tell you that I have been hungering and thirsting all day for the sound of your voice. Come! the piano's vacant."

It was, for I had quitted it immediately upon hearing his petition. Had I been endowed with a proper degree of self-possession, I should have turned to the lady myself, and cheerfully joined my entreaties to his, whereby I should have disappointed his expectations, if the affront had been purposely given, or made him sensible of the wrong, if it had only arisen from thoughtlessness; but I felt it too deeply to do anything but rise from the music-stool, and throw myself back on the sofa, suppressing with difficulty the audible expression of the bitterness I felt within. I knew Annabella's musical talents were superior to mine, but that was no reason why I should be treated as a perfect nonentity. The time and the manner of his asking her appeared like a gratuitous insult to me; and I could have wept with pure vexation.

Meantime, she exultingly seated herself at the piano, and favoured him with two of his favourite songs, in such superior style that even I soon lost my anger in admiration, and listened with a sort of gloomy pleasure to the skilful modulations of her full-toned and powerful voice, so judiciously aided by her rounded and spirited touch; and while my ears drank in the sound, my eyes rested on the face of her principal auditor, and derived an equal or superior delight from the contemplation of his speaking countenance, as he stood beside her—that eye and brow lighted up with keen enthusiasm, and that sweet smile passing and appearing like gleams of sunshine on an April day. No wonder he should hunger and thirst to hear her sing. I now forgave him from my heart his reckless slight of me, and I felt ashamed at my pettish resentment of such a trifle—ashamed too of those bitter envious pangs that gnawed my inmost heart, in spite of all this admiration and delight.

"There now," said she, playfully running her fingers over the keys when she had concluded the second song. "What shall I give you next?"

But in saying this she looked back at Lord Lowborough, who was standing a little behind, leaning against the back of a chair, an attentive listener, too, experiencing, to judge by his countenance, much the same feelings of mingled pleasure and sadness as I did. But the look she gave him plainly said, "Do you choose for me now: I have done enough for him, and will gladly exert myself to gratify you;" and thus encouraged, his lordship came forward, and turning over the music, presently set before her a little song that I had noticed before, and read more than once, with an interest arising from

the circumstance of my connecting it in my mind with the reigning tyrant of my thoughts. And now, with my nerves already excited and half unstrung, I could not hear those words so sweetly warbled forth without some symptoms of emotion I was not able to suppress. Tears rose unbidden to my eyes, and I buried my face in the sofa-pillow that they might flow unseen while I listened. The air was simple, sweet, and sad. It is still running in my head, and so are the words:—

Farewell to thee! but not farewell
  To all my fondest thoughts of thee:
Within my heart they still shall dwell;
  And they shall cheer and comfort me.

O beautiful, and full of grace!
  If thou hadst never met mine eye,
I had not dreamed a living face
  Could fancied charms so far outvie.

If I may ne'er behold again
  That form and face so dear to me,
Nor hear thy voice, still would I fain
  Preserve, for aye, their memory.

That voice, the magic of whose tone
  Can wake an echo in my breast,
Creating feelings that, alone,
  Can make my tranced spirit blest.

That laughing eye, whose sunny beam
  My memory would not cherish less;—
And oh, that smile! I whose joyous gleam
  No mortal languish can express.

Adieu! but let me cherish, still,
  The hope with which I cannot part.
Contempt may wound, and coldness chill,
  But still it lingers in my heart.

And who can tell but Heaven, at last,

May answer all my thousand prayers,
And bid the future pay the past
With joy for anguish, smiles for tears.

When it ceased, I longed for nothing so much as to be out of the room. The sofa was not far from the door, but I did not dare to raise my head, for I knew Mr. Huntingdon was standing near me, and I knew by the sound of his voice, as he spoke in answer to some remark of Lord Lowborough's, that his face was turned towards me. Perhaps a half-suppressed sob had caught his ear, and caused him to look round—heaven forbid! But with a violent effort, I checked all further signs of weakness, dried my tears, and, when I thought he had turned away again, rose, and instantly left the apartment, taking refuge in my favourite resort, the library.

There was no light there but the faint red glow of the neglected fire;—but I did not want a light; I only wanted to indulge my thoughts, unnoticed and undisturbed; and sitting down on a low stool before the easy-chair, I sunk my head upon its cushioned seat, and thought, and thought, until the tears gushed out again, and I wept like any child. Presently, however, the door was gently opened and someone entered the room. I trusted it was only a servant, and did not stir. The door was closed again—but I was not alone; a hand gently touched my shoulder, and a voice said, softly,—"Helen, what is the matter?"

I could not answer at the moment.

"You must, and shall tell me," was added, more vehemently, and the speaker threw himself on his knees beside me on the rug, and forcibly possessed himself of my hand; but I hastily caught it away, and replied,—"It is nothing to you, Mr. Huntingdon."

"Are you sure it is nothing to me?" he returned; "can you swear that you were not thinking of me while you wept?" This was unendurable. I made an effort to rise, but he was kneeling on my dress.

"Tell me," continued he—"I want to know,—because if you were, I have something to say to you,—and if not, I'll go."

"Go then!" I cried; but, fearing he would obey too well, and never come again, I hastily added—"Or say what you have to say, and have done with it!"

"But which?" said he—"for I shall only say it if you really were thinking of me. So tell me, Helen."

"You're excessively impertinent, Mr. Huntingdon!"

“Not at all—too pertinent, you mean. So you won’t tell me?—Well, I’ll spare your woman’s pride, and, construing your silence into ‘Yes,’ I’ll take it for granted that I was the subject of your thoughts, and the cause of your affliction—”

“Indeed, sir—”

“If you deny it, I won’t tell you my secret,” threatened he; and I did not interrupt him again, or even attempt to repulse him: though he had taken my hand once more, and half embraced me with his other arm, I was scarcely conscious of it at the time.

“It is this,” resumed he: “that Annabella Wilmot, in comparison with you, is like a flaunting peony compared with a sweet, wild rosebud gemmed with dew—and I love you to distraction!—Now, tell me if that intelligence gives you any pleasure. Silence again? That means yes. Then let me add, that I cannot live without you, and if you answer No to this last question, you will drive me mad.—Will you bestow yourself upon me?—you will!” he cried, nearly squeezing me to death in his arms.

“No, no!” I exclaimed, struggling to free myself from him—“you must ask my uncle and aunt.”

“They won’t refuse me, if you don’t.”

“I’m not so sure of that—my aunt dislikes you.”

“But *you* don’t, Helen—say you love me, and I’ll go.”

“I wish you *would* go!” I replied.

“I will, this instant,—if you’ll only say you love me.”

“You know I do,” I answered. And again he caught me in his arms, and smothered me with kisses.

At that moment my aunt opened wide the door, and stood before us, candle in hand, in shocked and horrified amazement, gazing alternately at Mr. Huntingdon and me—for we had both started up, and now stood wide enough asunder. But *his* confusion was only for a moment. Rallying in an instant, with the most enviable assurance, he began,—“I beg ten thousand pardons, Mrs. Maxwell! Don’t be too severe upon me. I’ve been asking your sweet niece to take me for better, for worse; and she, like a good girl, informs me she cannot think of it without her uncle’s and aunt’s consent. So let me implore you not to condemn me to eternal wretchedness: if *you* favour my cause, I am safe; for Mr. Maxwell, I am certain, can refuse you nothing.”

“We will talk of this to-morrow, sir,” said my aunt, coldly. “It is a subject that demands mature and serious deliberation. At present, you had better return to the drawing-room.”

“But meantime,” pleaded he, “let me commend my cause to your most indulgent—”

“No indulgence for you, Mr. Huntingdon, must come between me and the consideration of my niece’s happiness.”

“Ah, true! I know she is an angel, and I am a presumptuous dog to dream of possessing such a treasure; but, nevertheless, I would sooner die than relinquish her in favour of the best man that ever went to heaven—and as for her happiness, I would sacrifice my body and soul—”

“Body and *soul*, Mr. Huntingdon—sacrifice your *soul?*”

“Well, I would lay down life—”

“You would not be required to lay it down.”

“I would spend it, then—devote my life—and all its powers to the promotion and preservation—”

“Another time, sir, we will talk of this—and I should have felt disposed to judge more favourably of your pretensions, if you too had chosen another time and place, and let me add—another *manner* for your declaration.”

“Why, you see, Mrs. Maxwell,” he began—

“Pardon me, sir,” said she, with dignity—“The company are inquiring for you in the other room.” And she turned to me.

“Then *you* must plead for me, Helen,” said he, and at length withdrew.

“You had better retire to your room, Helen,” said my aunt, gravely. “I will discuss this matter with you, too, to-morrow.”

“Don’t be angry, aunt,” said I.

“My dear, I am not angry,” she replied: “I am *surprised*. If it is true that you told him you could not accept his offer without our consent—”

“It *is* true,” interrupted I.

“Then how could you permit—?”

“I couldn’t help it, aunt,” I cried, bursting into tears. They were not altogether the tears of sorrow, or of fear for her displeasure, but rather the outbreak of the general tumultuous excitement of my feelings. But my good aunt was touched at my agitation. In a softer tone, she repeated her recommendation to retire, and, gently kissing my forehead, bade me good-night, and put her candle in my hand; and I went; but my brain worked so, I could not think of sleeping. I feel calmer now that I have written all this; and I will go to bed, and try to win tired nature’s sweet restorer.

## CHAPTER XX

September 24th.—In the morning I rose, light and cheerful—nay, intensely happy. The hovering cloud cast over me by my aunt’s views, and by the fear of not obtaining her consent, was lost in the bright effulgence of my own hopes, and the too delightful consciousness of requited love. It was a splendid morning; and I went out to enjoy it, in a quiet ramble, in company with my own blissful thoughts. The dew was on the grass, and ten thousand gossamers were waving in the breeze; the happy red-breast was pouring out its little soul in song, and my heart overflowed with silent hymns of gratitude and praise to heaven.

But I had not wandered far before my solitude was interrupted by the only person that could have disturbed my musings, at that moment, without being looked upon as an unwelcome intruder: Mr. Huntingdon came suddenly upon me. So unexpected was the apparition, that I might have thought it the creation of an over-excited imagination, had the sense of sight alone borne witness to his presence; but immediately I felt his strong arm round my waist and his warm kiss on my cheek, while his keen and gleeful salutation, “My own Helen!” was ringing in my ear.

“Not yours yet!” said I, hastily swerving aside from this too presumptuous greeting. “Remember my guardians. You will not easily obtain my aunt’s consent. Don’t you see she is prejudiced against you?”

“I do, dearest; and you must tell me why, that I may best know how to combat her objections. I suppose she thinks I am a prodigal,” pursued he, observing that I was unwilling to reply, “and concludes that I shall have but little worldly goods wherewith to endow my better half? If so, you must tell her that my property is mostly entailed, and I cannot get rid of it. There may be a few mortgages on the rest—a few trifling debts and incumbrances here and there, but nothing to speak of; and though I acknowledge I am not so rich as I might be—or have been—still, I think, we could manage pretty comfortably on what’s left. My father, you know, was something of a miser, and in his latter days especially saw no pleasure in life but to amass riches; and so it is no wonder that his son should make it his chief delight to spend them, which

was accordingly the case, until my acquaintance with you, dear Helen, taught me other views and nobler aims. And the very idea of having you to care for under my roof would force me to moderate my expenses and live like a Christian—not to speak of all the prudence and virtue you would instil into my mind by your wise counsels and sweet, attractive goodness."

"But it is not that," said I; "it is not money my aunt thinks about. She knows better than to value worldly wealth above its price."

"What is it, then?"

"She wishes me to—to marry none but a really good man."

"What, a man of 'decided piety'?—ahem!—Well, come, I'll manage that too! It's Sunday to-day, isn't it? I'll go to church morning, afternoon, and evening, and comport myself in such a godly sort that she shall regard me with admiration and sisterly love, as a brand plucked from the burning. I'll come home sighing like a furnace, and full of the savour and unction of dear Mr. Blatant's discourse—"

"Mr. Leighton," said I, dryly.

"Is Mr. Leighton a 'sweet preacher,' Helen—a 'dear, delightful, heavenly-minded man'?"

"He is a *good* man, Mr. Huntingdon. I wish I could say half as much for you."

"Oh, I forgot, you are a saint, too. I crave your pardon, dearest—but don't call me Mr. Huntingdon; my name is Arthur."

"I'll call you nothing—for I'll have nothing at all to do with you if you talk in that way any more. If you really mean to deceive my aunt as you say, you are very wicked; and if not, you are very wrong to jest on such a subject."

"I stand corrected," said he, concluding his laugh with a sorrowful sigh. "Now," resumed he, after a momentary pause, "let us talk about something else. And come nearer to me, Helen, and take my arm; and then I'll let you alone. I can't be quiet while I see you walking there."

I complied; but said we must soon return to the house.

"No one will be down to breakfast yet, for long enough," he answered. "You spoke of your guardians just now, Helen, but is not your father still living?"

"Yes, but I always look upon my uncle and aunt as my guardians, for they are so in deed, though not in name. My father has entirely given me up to their care. I have

never seen him since dear mamma died, when I was a very little girl, and my aunt, at her request, offered to take charge of me, and took me away to Staningley, where I have remained ever since; and I don't think he would object to anything for me that she thought proper to sanction."

"But would he sanction anything to which she thought proper to object?"

"No, I don't think he cares enough about me."

"He is very much to blame—but he doesn't know what an angel he has for his daughter—which is all the better for me, as, if he did, he would not be willing to part with such a treasure."

"And Mr. Huntingdon," said I, "I suppose you *know* I am not an heiress?"

He protested he had never given it a thought, and begged I would not disturb his present enjoyment by the mention of such uninteresting subjects. I was glad of this proof of disinterested affection; for Annabella Wilmot is the probable heiress to all her uncle's wealth, in addition to her late father's property, which she has already in possession.

I now insisted upon retracing our steps to the house; but we walked slowly, and went on talking as we proceeded. I need not repeat all we said: let me rather refer to what passed between my aunt and me, after breakfast, when Mr. Huntingdon called my uncle aside, no doubt to make his proposals, and she beckoned me into another room, where she once more commenced a solemn remonstrance, which, however, entirely failed to convince me that her view of the case was preferable to my own.

"You judge him uncharitably, aunt, I know," said I. "His very friends are not half so bad as you represent them. There is Walter Hargrave, Milicent's brother, for one: he is but a little lower than the angels, if half she says of him is true. She is continually talking to me about him, and lauding his many virtues to the skies."

"You will form a very inadequate estimate of a man's character," replied she, "if you judge by what a fond sister says of him. The worst of them generally know how to hide their misdeeds from their sisters' eyes, and their mother's, too."

"And there is Lord Lowborough," continued I, "quite a decent man."

"Who told you so? Lord Lowborough is a *desperate* man. He has dissipated his fortune in gambling and other things, and is now seeking an heiress to retrieve it. I told Miss Wilmot so; but you're all alike: she haughtily answered she was very much obliged to me, but she believed *she* knew when a man was seeking her for her fortune, and when

for herself; she flattered herself she had had experience enough in those matters to be justified in trusting to her own judgment—and as for his lordship's lack of fortune, she cared nothing about that, as she hoped her own would suffice for both; and as for his wildness, she supposed he was no worse than others—besides, he was reformed now. Yes, they can all play the hypocrite when they want to take in a fond, misguided woman!"

"Well, I think he's about as good as she is," said I. "But when Mr. Huntingdon is married, he won't have many opportunities of consorting with his bachelor friends;—and the worse they are, the more I long to deliver him from them."

"To be sure, my dear; and the worse *he* is, I suppose, the more you long to deliver him from himself."

"Yes, provided he is not incorrigible—that is, the more I long to deliver him from his faults—to give him an opportunity of shaking off the adventitious evil got from contact with others worse than himself, and shining out in the unclouded light of his own genuine goodness—to do my utmost to help his better self against his worse, and make him what he would have been if he had not, from the beginning, had a bad, selfish, miserly father, who, to gratify his own sordid passions, restricted him in the most innocent enjoyments of childhood and youth, and so disgusted him with every kind of restraint;—and a foolish mother who indulged him to the top of his bent, deceiving her husband for him, and doing her utmost to encourage those germs of folly and vice it was her duty to suppress,—and then, such a set of companions as you represent his friends to be—"

"Poor man!" said she, sarcastically, "his kind have greatly wronged him!"

"They have!" cried I—"and they shall wrong him no more—his wife shall undo what his mother did!"

"Well," said she, after a short pause, "I must say, Helen, I thought better of your judgment than this—and your taste too. How you can love such a man I cannot tell, or what pleasure you can find in his company; for 'what fellowship hath light with darkness; or he that believeth with an infidel?'"

"He is not an infidel;—and I am not light, and he is not darkness; his worst and only vice is thoughtlessness."

"And thoughtlessness," pursued my aunt, "may lead to every crime, and will but poorly excuse our errors in the sight of God. Mr. Huntingdon, I suppose, is not without the common faculties of men: he is not so light-headed as to be irresponsible: his Maker

has endowed him with reason and conscience as well as the rest of us; the Scriptures are open to him as well as to others;—and 'if he hear not them, neither will he hear though one rose from the dead.' And remember, Helen," continued she, solemnly, "'the wicked shall be turned into hell, and they that *forget* God!'" And suppose, even, that he should continue to love you, and you him, and that you should pass through life together with tolerable comfort—how will it be in the end, when you see yourselves parted for ever; you, perhaps, taken into eternal bliss, and he cast into the lake that burneth with unquenchable fire—there for ever to—"

"Not for ever," I exclaimed, "'only till he has paid the uttermost farthing;' for 'if any man's work abide not the fire, he shall suffer loss, yet himself shall be saved, but so as by fire;' and He that 'is able to subdue all things to Himself will have all men to be saved,' and 'will, in the fulness of time, gather together in one all things in Christ Jesus, who tasted death for every man, and in whom God will reconcile all things to Himself, whether they be things in earth or things in heaven.'"

"Oh, Helen! where did you learn all this?"

"In the Bible, aunt. I have searched it through, and found nearly thirty passages, all tending to support the same theory."

"And is *that* the use you make of your Bible? And did you find no passages tending to prove the danger and the falsity of such a belief?"

"No: I found, indeed, some passages that, taken by themselves, might seem to contradict that opinion; but they will all bear a different construction to that which is commonly given, and in most the only difficulty is in the word which we translate 'everlasting' or 'eternal.' I don't know the Greek, but I believe it strictly means for ages, and might signify either endless or long-enduring. And as for the danger of the belief, I would not publish it abroad if I thought any poor wretch would be likely to presume upon it to his own destruction, but it is a glorious thought to cherish in one's own heart, and I would not part with it for all the world can give!"

Here our conference ended, for it was now high time to prepare for church. Every one attended the morning service, except my uncle, who hardly ever goes, and Mr. Wilmot, who stayed at home with him to enjoy a quiet game of cribbage. In the afternoon Miss Wilmot and Lord Lowborough likewise excused themselves from attending; but Mr. Huntingdon vouchsafed to accompany us again. Whether it was to ingratiate himself with my aunt I cannot tell, but, if so, he certainly should have behaved better. I must confess, I did not like his conduct during service at all. Holding his prayer-book upside down, or open at any place but the right, he did nothing but stare about him, unless he

happened to catch my aunt's eye or mine, and then he would drop his own on his book, with a puritanical air of mock solemnity that would have been ludicrous, if it had not been too provoking. Once, during the sermon, after attentively regarding Mr. Leighton for a few minutes, he suddenly produced his gold pencil-case and snatched up a Bible. Perceiving that I observed the movement, he whispered that he was going to make a note of the sermon; but instead of that, as I sat next him, I could not help seeing that he was making a caricature of the preacher, giving to the respectable, pious, elderly gentleman, the air and aspect of a most absurd old hypocrite. And yet, upon his return, he talked to my aunt about the sermon with a degree of modest, serious discrimination that tempted me to believe he had really attended to and profited by the discourse.

Just before dinner my uncle called me into the library for the discussion of a very important matter, which was dismissed in few words.

"Now, Nell," said he, "this young Huntingdon has been asking for you: what must I say about it? Your aunt would answer 'no'—but what say you?"

"I say yes, uncle," replied I, without a moment's hesitation; for I had thoroughly made up my mind on the subject.

"Very good!" cried he. "Now that's a good honest answer—wonderful for a girl!—Well, I'll write to your father to-morrow. He's sure to give his consent; so you may look on the matter as settled. You'd have done a deal better if you'd taken Wilmot, I can tell you; but that you won't believe. At your time of life, it's love that rules the roast: at mine, it's solid, serviceable gold. I suppose now, you'd never dream of looking into the state of your husband's finances, or troubling your head about settlements, or anything of that sort?"

"I don't think I should."

"Well, be thankful, then, that you've wiser heads to think for you. I haven't had time, yet, to examine thoroughly into this young rascal's affairs, but I see that a great part of his father's fine property has been squandered away;—but still, I think, there's a pretty fair share of it left, and a little careful nursing may make a handsome thing of it yet; and then we must persuade your father to give you a decent fortune, as he has only one besides yourself to care for;—and, if you behave well, who knows but what I may be induced to remember you in my will!" continued he, putting his fingers to his nose, with a knowing wink.

"Thanks, uncle, for that and all your kindness," replied I.

“Well, and I questioned this young spark on the matter of settlements,” continued he; “and he seemed disposed to be generous enough on that point—”

“I knew he would!” said I. “But pray don’t trouble your head—or his, or mine about that; for all I have will be his, and all he has will be mine; and what more could either of us require?” And I was about to make my exit, but he called me back.

“Stop, stop!” cried he; “we haven’t mentioned the time yet. When must it be? Your aunt would put it off till the Lord knows when, but he is anxious to be bound as soon as may be: he won’t hear of waiting beyond next month; and you, I guess, will be of the same mind, so—”

“Not at all, uncle; on the contrary, I should like to wait till after Christmas, at least.”

“Oh! pooh, pooh! never tell me that tale—I know better,” cried he; and he persisted in his incredulity. Nevertheless, it is quite true. I am in no hurry at all. How can I be, when I think of the momentous change that awaits me, and of all I have to leave? It is happiness enough to know that we *are* to be united; and that he really loves me, and I may love *him* as devotedly, and think of him as often as I please. However, I insisted upon consulting my aunt about the *time* of the wedding, for I determined her counsels should not be utterly disregarded; and no conclusions on that particular are come to yet.

## CHAPTER XXI

October 1st.—All is settled now. My father has given his consent, and the time is fixed for Christmas, by a sort of compromise between the respective advocates for hurry and delay. Milicent Hargrave is to be one bridesmaid and Annabella Wilmot the other—not that I am particularly fond of the latter, but she is an intimate of the family, and I have not another friend.

When I told Milicent of my engagement, she rather provoked me by her manner of taking it. After staring a moment in mute surprise, she said,—

“Well, Helen, I suppose I ought to congratulate you—and I *am* glad to see you so happy; but I did not think you would take him; and I can’t help feeling surprised that you should like him so much.”

“Why so?”

“Because you are so superior to him in every way, and there’s something so bold and reckless about him—so, I don’t know how—but I always feel a wish to get out of his way when I see him approach.”

“You are timid, Milicent; but that’s no fault of his.”

“And then his look,” continued she. “People say he’s handsome, and of course he is; but *I* don’t *like* that kind of beauty, and I wonder that you should.”

“Why so, pray?”

“Well, you know, I think there’s nothing noble or lofty in his appearance.”

“In fact, you wonder that I can like any one so unlike the stilted heroes of romance. Well, give me my flesh and blood lover, and I’ll leave all the Sir Herberts and Valentines to you—if you can find them.”

“I don’t want them,” said she. “I’ll be satisfied with flesh and blood too—only the spirit must shine through and predominate. But don’t you think Mr. Huntingdon’s face is too red?”

“No!” cried I, indignantly. “It is not red at all. There is just a pleasant glow, a healthy freshness in his complexion—the warm, pinky tint of the whole harmonising with the deeper colour of the cheeks, exactly as it ought to do. I hate a man to be red and white, like a painted doll, or all sickly white, or smoky black, or cadaverous yellow.”

“Well, tastes differ—but *I* like pale or dark,” replied she. “But, to tell you the truth, Helen, I had been deluding myself with the hope that you would one day be my sister. I expected Walter would be introduced to you next season; and I thought you would like him, and was certain he would like you; and I flattered myself I should thus have the felicity of seeing the two persons I like best in the world—except mamma—united in one. He mayn’t be exactly what you would call handsome, but he’s far more distinguished-looking, and nicer and better than Mr. Huntingdon;—and I’m sure you would say so, if you knew him.”

“Impossible, Milicent! You think so, because you’re his sister; and, on that account, I’ll forgive you; but nobody else should so disparage Arthur Huntingdon to me with impunity.”

Miss Wilmot expressed her feelings on the subject almost as openly.

“And so, Helen,” said she, coming up to me with a smile of no amiable import, “you are to be Mrs. Huntingdon, I suppose?”

“Yes,” replied I. “Don’t you envy me?”

“Oh, *dear*, no!” she exclaimed. “I shall probably be Lady Lowborough some day, and then you know, dear, I shall be in a capacity to inquire, ‘Don’t you envy *me?*’”

“Henceforth I shall envy no one,” returned I.

“Indeed! Are you so happy then?” said she, thoughtfully; and something very like a cloud of disappointment shadowed her face. “And does he love you—I mean, does he idolise you as much as you do him?” she added, fixing her eyes upon me with ill-disguised anxiety for the reply.

“I don’t want to be idolised,” I answered; “but I am well assured that he *loves* me more than anybody else in the world—as I do him.”

“Exactly,” said she, with a nod. “I wish—” she paused.

“What do you wish?” asked I, annoyed at the vindictive expression of her countenance.

“I wish,” returned, she, with a short laugh, “that all the attractive points and desirable qualifications of the two gentlemen were united in one—that Lord Lowborough had Huntingdon’s handsome face and good temper, and all his wit, and mirth and charm, or else that Huntingdon had Lowborough’s pedigree, and title, and delightful old family seat, and I had him; and you might have the other and welcome.”

“Thank you, dear Annabella: I am better satisfied with things as they are, for my own part; and for you, I wish you were as well content with your intended as I am with mine,” said I; and it was true enough; for, though vexed at first at her unamiable spirit, her frankness touched me, and the contrast between our situations was such, that I could well afford to pity her and wish her well.

Mr. Huntingdon’s acquaintances appear to be no better pleased with our approaching union than mine. This morning’s post brought him letters from several of his friends, during the perusal of which, at the breakfast-table, he excited the attention of the company by the singular variety of his grimaces. But he crushed them all into his pocket, with a private laugh, and said nothing till the meal was concluded. Then, while the company were hanging over the fire or loitering through the room, previous to settling to their various morning avocations, he came and leant over the back of my chair, with his face in contact with my curls, and commencing with a quiet little kiss, poured forth the following complaints into my ear:—

“Helen, you witch, do you know that you’ve entailed upon me the curses of all my friends? I wrote to them the other day, to tell them of my happy prospects, and now, instead of a bundle of congratulations, I’ve got a pocketful of bitter execrations and reproaches. There’s not one kind wish for me, or one good word for you, among them all. They say there’ll be no more fun now, no more merry days and glorious nights—

and all my fault—I am the first to break up the jovial band, and others, in pure despair, will follow my example. I was the very life and prop of the community, they do me the honour to say, and I have shamefully betrayed my trust—"

"You may join them again, if you like," said I, somewhat piqued at the sorrowful tone of his discourse. "I should be sorry to stand between any man—or body of men, and so much happiness; and perhaps I can manage to do without you, as well as your poor deserted friends."

"Bless you, no," murmured he. "It's 'all for love or the world well lost,' with me. Let them go to—where they belong, to speak politely. But if you saw how they abuse me, Helen, you would love me all the more for having ventured so much for your sake."

He pulled out his crumpled letters. I thought he was going to show them to me, and told him I did not wish to see them.

"I'm not going to show them to you, love," said he. "They're hardly fit for a lady's eyes—the most part of them. But look here. This is Grimsby's scrawl—only three lines, the sulky dog! He doesn't say much, to be sure, but his very silence implies more than all the others' words, and the less he says, the more he thinks—and this is Hargrave's missive. He is particularly grieved at me, because, forsooth he had fallen in love with you from his sister's reports, and meant to have married you himself, as soon as he had sown his wild oats."

"I'm vastly obliged to him," observed I.

"And so am I," said he. "And look at this. This is Hattersley's—every page stuffed full of railing accusations, bitter curses, and lamentable complaints, ending up with swearing that he'll get married himself in revenge: he'll throw himself away on the first old maid that chooses to set her cap at him,—as if *I* cared what he did with himself."

"Well," said I, "if you do give up your intimacy with these men, I don't think you will have much cause to regret the loss of their society; for it's my belief they never did you much good."

"Maybe not; but we'd a merry time of it, too, though mingled with sorrow and pain, as Lowborough knows to his cost—Ha, ha!" and while he was laughing at the recollection of Lowborough's troubles, my uncle came and slapped him on the shoulder.

"Come, my lad!" said he. "Are you too busy making love to my niece to make war with the pheasants?—First of October, remember! Sun shines out—rain ceased—even Boarham's not afraid to venture in his waterproof boots; and Wilmot and I are going to beat you all. I declare, we old 'uns are the keenest sportsmen of the lot!"

“I’ll show you what I can do to-day, however,” said my companion. “I’ll murder your birds by wholesale, just for keeping me away from better company than either you or them.”

And so saying he departed; and I saw no more of him till dinner. It seemed a weary time; I wonder what I shall do without him.

It is very true that the three elder gentlemen have proved themselves much keener sportsmen than the two younger ones; for both Lord Lowborough and Arthur Huntingdon have of late almost daily neglected the shooting excursions to accompany us in our various rides and rambles. But these merry times are fast drawing to a close. In less than a fortnight the party break up, much to my sorrow, for every day I enjoy it more and more—now that Messrs. Boarham and Wilmot have ceased to tease me, and my aunt has ceased to lecture me, and I have ceased to be jealous of Annabella—and even to dislike her—and now that Mr. Huntingdon is become *my* Arthur, and I may enjoy his society without restraint. What *shall* I do without him, I repeat?

## CHAPTER XXII

October 5th.—My cup of sweets is not unmingled: it is dashed with a bitterness that I cannot hide from myself, disguise it as I will. I may try to persuade myself that the sweetness overpowers it; I may call it a pleasant aromatic flavour; but say what I will, it is still there, and I cannot but taste it. I cannot shut my eyes to Arthur’s faults; and the more I love him the more they trouble me. His very heart, that I trusted so, is, I fear, less warm and generous than I thought it. At least, he gave me a specimen of his character to-day that seemed to merit a harder name than thoughtlessness. He and Lord Lowborough were accompanying Annabella and me in a long, delightful ride; he was riding by my side, as usual, and Annabella and Lord Lowborough were a little before us, the latter bending towards his companion as if in tender and confidential discourse.

“Those two will get the start of us, Helen, if we don’t look sharp,” observed Huntingdon. “They’ll make a match of it, as sure as can be. That Lowborough’s fairly besotted. But he’ll find himself in a fix when he’s got her, I doubt.”

“And she’ll find *her*self in a fix when she’s got *him*,” said I, “if what I’ve heard of him is true.”

“Not a bit of it. She knows what she’s about; but he, poor fool, deludes himself with the notion that she’ll make him a good wife, and because she has amused him with some rodomontade about despising rank and wealth in matters of love and marriage,

he flatters himself that she's devotedly attached to him; that she will not refuse him for his poverty, and does not court him for his rank, but loves him for himself alone."

"But is not *he* courting *her* for her fortune?"

"No, not he. That was the first attraction, certainly; but now he has quite lost sight of it: it never enters his calculations, except merely as an essential without which, for the lady's own sake, he could not think of marrying her. No; he's fairly in love. He thought he never could be again, but he's in for it once more. He was to have been married before, some two or three years ago; but he lost his bride by losing his fortune. He got into a bad way among us in London: he had an unfortunate taste for gambling; and surely the fellow was born under an unlucky star, for he always lost thrice where he gained once. That's a mode of self-torment I never was much addicted to. When I spend my money I like to enjoy the full value of it: I see no fun in wasting it on thieves and blacklegs; and as for *gaining* money, hitherto I have always had sufficient; it's time enough to be clutching for more, I think, when you begin to see the end of what you have. But I have sometimes frequented the gaming-houses just to watch the on-goings of those mad votaries of chance—a very interesting study, I assure you, Helen, and sometimes very diverting: I've had many a laugh at the boobies and bedlamites. Lowborough was quite infatuated—not willingly, but of necessity,—he was always resolving to give it up, and always breaking his resolutions. Every venture was the "just once more:" if he gained a little, he hoped to gain a little more next time, and if he lost, it would not do to leave off at that juncture; he must go on till he had retrieved that last misfortune, at least: bad luck could not last for ever; and every lucky hit was looked upon as the dawn of better times, till experience proved the contrary. At length he grew desperate, and we were daily on the look-out for a case of *felo-de-se*—no great matter, some of us whispered, as his existence had ceased to be an acquisition to our club. At last, however, he came to a check. He made a large stake, which he determined should be the last, whether he lost or won. He had often so determined before, to be sure, and as often broken his determination; and so it was this time. He lost; and while his antagonist smilingly swept away the stakes, he turned chalky white, drew back in silence, and wiped his forehead. I was present at the time; and while he stood with folded arms and eyes fixed on the ground, I knew well enough what was passing in his mind.

"'Is it to be the last, Lowborough?' said I, stepping up to him.

"'The last but ONE,' he answered, with a grim smile; and then, rushing back to the table, he struck his hand upon it, and, raising his voice high above all the confusion of jingling coins and muttered oaths and curses in the room, he swore a deep and

solemn oath that, come what would, THIS trial *should* be the last, and imprecated unspeakable curses on his head if ever he should shuffle a card or rattle a dice-box again. He then doubled his former stake, and challenged any one present to play against him. Grimsby instantly presented himself. Lowborough glared fiercely at him, for Grimsby was almost as celebrated for his luck as *he* was for his ill-fortune. However, they fell to work. But Grimsby had much skill and little scruple, and whether he took advantage of the other's trembling, blinded eagerness to deal unfairly by him, I cannot undertake to say; but Lowborough lost again, and fell dead sick.

"'You'd better try once more,' said Grimsby, leaning across the table. And then he winked at me.

"'I've nothing to try with,' said the poor devil, with a ghastly smile.

"'Oh, Huntingdon will lend you what you want,' said the other.

"'No; you heard my oath,' answered Lowborough, turning away in quiet despair. And I took him by the arm and led him out.

"'Is it to be the last, Lowborough?' I asked, when I got him into the street.

"'The last,' he answered, somewhat against my expectation. And I took him home—that is, to our club—for he was as submissive as a child—and plied him with brandy-and-water till he began to look rather brighter—rather more alive, at least.

"'Huntingdon, I'm ruined!' said he, taking the third glass from my hand—he had drunk the others in dead silence.

"'Not you,' said I. 'You'll find a man can live without his money as merrily as a tortoise without its head, or a wasp without its body.'

"'But I'm in debt,' said he—'deep in debt. And I can never, *never* get out of it.'

"'Well, what of that? Many a better man than you has lived and died in debt; and they can't put you in prison, you know, because you're a peer.' And I handed him his fourth tumbler.

"'But I hate to be in debt!' he shouted. 'I wasn't born for it, and I cannot *bear* it.'

"'What can't be cured must be endured,' said I, beginning to mix the fifth.

"'And then, I've lost my Caroline.' And he began to snivel then, for the brandy had softened his heart.

"'No matter,' I answered, 'there are more Carolines in the world than one.'

“‘There’s only one for me,’ he replied, with a dolorous sigh. ‘And if there were fifty more, who’s to get them, I wonder, without money?’

“‘Oh, somebody will take you for your title; and then you’ve your family estate yet; that’s entailed, you know.’

“‘I wish to God I could sell it to pay my debts,’ he muttered.

“‘And then,’ said Grimsby, who had just come in, ‘you can *try again*, you know. I *would* have more than one chance, if I were you. I’d never stop here.’

“‘I *won’t*, I tell you!’ shouted he. And he started up, and left the room—walking rather unsteadily, for the liquor had got into his head. He was not so much used to it then, but after that he took to it kindly to solace his cares.

“He kept his oath about gambling (not a little to the surprise of us all), though Grimsby did his utmost to tempt him to break it, but now he had got hold of another habit that bothered him nearly as much, for he soon discovered that the demon of drink was as black as the demon of play, and nearly as hard to get rid of—especially as his kind friends did all they could to second the promptings of his own insatiable cravings.”

“Then, they were demons themselves,” cried I, unable to contain my indignation. “And you, Mr. Huntingdon, it seems, were the first to tempt him.”

“Well, what could we do?” replied he, deprecatingly.—“We meant it in kindness—we couldn’t bear to see the poor fellow so miserable:—and besides, he was such a damper upon us, sitting there silent and glum, when he was under the threefold influence—of the loss of his sweetheart, the loss of his fortune, and the reaction of the lost night’s debauch; whereas, when he had something in him, if he was not merry himself, he was an unfailing source of merriment to us. Even Grimsby could chuckle over his odd sayings: they delighted him far more than my merry jests, or Hattersley’s riotous mirth. But one evening, when we were sitting over our wine, after one of our club dinners, and all had been hearty together,—Lowborough giving us mad toasts, and hearing our wild songs, and bearing a hand in the applause, if he did not help us to sing them himself,—he suddenly relapsed into silence, sinking his head on his hand, and never lifting his glass to his lips;—but this was nothing new; so we let him alone, and went on with our jollification, till, suddenly raising his head, he interrupted us in the middle of a roar of laughter by exclaiming,—

“Gentlemen, where is all this to end?—Will you just tell me *that* now?—Where is it all to end?” He rose.

“‘A speech, a speech!’ shouted we. ‘Hear, hear! Lowborough’s going to give us a speech!’

“He waited calmly till the thunders of applause and jingling of glasses had ceased, and then proceeded,—‘It’s only this, gentlemen,—that I think we’d better go no further. We’d better stop while we can.’

“‘Just so!’ cried Hattersley—

‘Stop poor sinner, stop and think
  Before you farther go,
No longer sport upon the brink
  Of everlasting woe.’

“‘Exactly!’ replied his lordship, with the utmost gravity. ‘And if *you* choose to visit the bottomless pit, I won’t go with you—we must part company, for I swear I’ll not move another step towards it!—What’s this?’ he said, taking up his glass of wine.

“‘Taste it,’ suggested I.

“‘This is hell broth!’ he exclaimed. ‘I renounce it for ever!’ And he threw it out into the middle of the table.

“‘Fill again!’ said I, handing him the bottle—‘and let us drink to your renunciation.’

“‘It’s rank poison,’ said he, grasping the bottle by the neck, ‘and I forswear it! I’ve given up gambling, and I’ll give up this too.’ He was on the point of deliberately pouring the whole contents of the bottle on to the table, but Hargrave wrested it from him. ‘On you be the curse, then!’ said he. And, backing from the room, he shouted, ‘Farewell, ye tempters!’ and vanished amid shouts of laughter and applause.

“We expected him back among us the next day; but, to our surprise, the place remained vacant: we saw nothing of him for a whole week; and we really began to think he was going to keep his word. At last, one evening, when we were most of us assembled together again, he entered, silent and grim as a ghost, and would have quietly slipped into his usual seat at my elbow, but we all rose to welcome him, and several voices were raised to ask what he would have, and several hands were busy with bottle and glass to serve him; but I knew a smoking tumbler of brandy-and-water would comfort him best, and had nearly prepared it, when he peevishly pushed it away, saying,—

“‘Do let me alone, Huntingdon! Do be quiet, all of you! I’m not come to join you: I’m only come to be with you awhile, because I can’t bear my own thoughts.’ And he

folded his arms, and leant back in his chair; so we let him be. But I left the glass by him; and, after awhile, Grimsby directed my attention towards it, by a significant wink; and, on turning my head, I saw it was drained to the bottom. He made me a sign to replenish, and quietly pushed up the bottle. I willingly complied; but Lowborough detected the pantomime, and, nettled at the intelligent grins that were passing between us, snatched the glass from my hand, dashed the contents of it in Grimsby's face, threw the empty tumbler at me, and then bolted from the room."

"I hope he broke your head," said I.

"No, love," replied he, laughing immoderately at the recollection of the whole affair; "he would have done so,—and perhaps, spoilt my face, too, but, providentially, this forest of curls" (taking off his hat, and showing his luxuriant chestnut locks) "saved my skull, and prevented the glass from breaking, till it reached the table."

"After that," he continued, "Lowborough kept aloof from us a week or two longer. I used to meet him occasionally in the town; and then, as I was too good-natured to resent his unmannerly conduct, and he bore no malice against me,—he was never unwilling to talk to me; on the contrary, he would cling to me, and follow me anywhere but to the club, and the gaming-houses, and such-like dangerous places of resort—he was so weary of his own moping, melancholy mind. At last, I got him to come in with me to the club, on condition that I would not tempt him to drink; and, for some time, he continued to look in upon us pretty regularly of an evening,—still abstaining, with wonderful perseverance, from the 'rank poison' he had so bravely forsworn. But some of our members protested against this conduct. They did not like to have him sitting there like a skeleton at a feast, instead of contributing his quota to the general amusement, casting a cloud over all, and watching, with greedy eyes, every drop they carried to their lips—they vowed it was not fair; and some of them maintained that he should either be compelled to do as others did, or expelled from the society; and swore that, next time he showed himself, they would tell him as much, and, if he did not take the warning, proceed to active measures. However, I befriended him on this occasion, and recommended them to let him be for a while, intimating that, with a little patience on our parts, he would soon come round again. But, to be sure, it *was* rather provoking; for, though he refused to drink like an honest Christian, it was well known to me that he kept a private bottle of laudanum about him, which he was continually soaking at—or rather, holding off and on with, abstaining one day and exceeding the next—just like the spirits.

"One night, however, during one of our orgies—one of our high festivals, I mean—he glided in, like the ghost in 'Macbeth,' and seated himself, as usual, a little back from

the table, in the chair we always placed for 'the spectre,' whether it chose to fill it or not. I saw by his face that he was suffering from the effects of an overdose of his insidious comforter; but nobody spoke to him, and he spoke to nobody. A few sidelong glances, and a whispered observation, that 'the ghost was come,' was all the notice he drew by his appearance, and we went on with our merry carousals as before, till he startled us all by suddenly drawing in his chair, and leaning forward with his elbows on the table, and exclaiming with portentous solemnity,—

'Well! it puzzles me what you can find to be so merry about. What *you* see in life I don't know—*I* see only the blackness of darkness, and a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation!'

"All the company simultaneously pushed up their glasses to him, and I set them before him in a semicircle, and, tenderly patting him on the back, bid him drink, and he would soon see as bright a prospect as any of us; but he pushed them back, muttering,—

"'Take them away! I won't taste it, I tell you. I won't—I won't!' So I handed them down again to the owners; but I saw that he followed them with a glare of hungry regret as they departed. Then he clasped his hands before his eyes to shut out the sight, and two minutes after lifted his head again, and said, in a hoarse but vehement whisper,—

"'And yet I must! Huntingdon, get me a glass!'

"'Take the bottle, man!' said I, thrusting the brandy-bottle into his hand—but stop, I'm telling too much," muttered the narrator, startled at the look I turned upon him. "But no matter," he recklessly added, and thus continued his relation: "In his desperate eagerness, he seized the bottle and sucked away, till he suddenly dropped from his chair, disappearing under the table amid a tempest of applause. The consequence of this imprudence was something like an apoplectic fit, followed by a rather severe brain fever—"

"And what did you think of *yourself*, sir?" said I, quickly.

"Of course, I was very penitent," he replied. "I went to see him once or twice—nay, twice or thrice—or by'r lady, some four times—and when he got better, I tenderly brought him back to the fold."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, I restored him to the bosom of the club, and compassionating the feebleness of his health and extreme lowness of his spirits, I recommended him to 'take a little wine for his stomach's sake,' and, when he was sufficiently re-established, to

embrace the media-via, ni-jamais-ni-toujours plan—not to kill himself like a fool, and not to abstain like a ninny—in a word, to enjoy himself like a rational creature, and do as I did; for, don't think, Helen, that I'm a tippler; I'm nothing at all of the kind, and never was, and never shall be. I value my comfort far too much. I see that a man cannot give himself up to drinking without being miserable one-half his days and mad the other; besides, I like to enjoy my life at all sides and ends, which cannot be done by one that suffers himself to be the slave of a single propensity—and, moreover, drinking spoils one's good looks," he concluded, with a most conceited smile that ought to have provoked me more than it did.

"And did Lord Lowborough profit by your advice?" I asked.

"Why, yes, in a manner. For a while he managed very well; indeed, he was a model of moderation and prudence—something too much so for the tastes of our wild community; but, somehow, Lowborough had not the gift of moderation: if he stumbled a little to one side, he must go down before he could right himself: if he overshot the mark one night, the effects of it rendered him so miserable the next day that he must repeat the offence to mend it; and so on from day to day, till his clamorous conscience brought him to a stand. And then, in his sober moments, he so bothered his friends with his remorse, and his terrors and woes, that they were obliged, in self-defence, to get him to drown his sorrows in wine, or any more potent beverage that came to hand; and when his first scruples of conscience were overcome, he would need no more persuading, he would often grow desperate, and be as great a blackguard as any of them could desire—but only to lament his own unutterable wickedness and degradation the more when the fit was over.

"At last, one day when he and I were alone together, after pondering awhile in one of his gloomy, abstracted moods, with his arms folded and his head sunk on his breast, he suddenly woke up, and vehemently grasping my arm, said,—

"'Huntingdon, this won't do! I'm resolved to have done with it.'

"'What, are you going to shoot yourself?' said I.

"'No; I'm going to reform.'

"'Oh, *that's* nothing new! You've been going to reform these twelve months and more.'

"'Yes, but you wouldn't let me; and I was such a fool I couldn't live without you. But now I see what it is that keeps me back, and what's wanted to save me; and I'd compass sea and land to get it—only I'm afraid there's no chance.' And he sighed as if his heart would break.

“‘What is it, Lowborough?’ said I, thinking he was fairly cracked at last.

“‘A wife,’ he answered; ‘for I can’t live alone, because my own mind distracts me, and I can’t live with you, because you take the devil’s part against me.’

“‘Who—I?’

“‘Yes—all of you do—and you more than any of them, you know. But if I could get a wife, with fortune enough to pay off my debts and set me straight in the world—’

“‘To be sure,’ said I.

“‘And sweetness and goodness enough,’ he continued, ‘to make home tolerable, and to reconcile me to myself, I think I should do yet. I shall never be in love again, that’s certain; but perhaps that would be no great matter, it would enable me to choose with my eyes open—and I should make a good husband in spite of it; but could any one be in love with *me?*—that’s the question. With *your* good looks and powers of fascination’ (he was pleased to say), ‘I might hope; but as it is, Huntingdon, do you think *any*body would take me—ruined and wretched as I am?’

“‘Yes, certainly.’

“‘Who?’

“‘Why, any neglected old maid, fast sinking in despair, would be delighted to—’

“‘No, no,’ said he—‘it must be somebody that I can love.’

“‘Why, you just said you never could be in love again!’

“‘Well, love is not the word—but somebody that I can like. I’ll search all England through, at all events!’ he cried, with a sudden burst of hope, or desperation. ‘Succeed or fail, it will be better than rushing headlong to destruction at that d—d club: so farewell to it and you. Whenever I meet you on honest ground or under a Christian roof, I shall be glad to see you; but never more shall you entice me to that *devil’s den!*’

“This was shameful language, but I shook hands with him, and we parted. He kept his word; and from that time forward he has been a pattern of propriety, as far as I can tell; but till lately I have not had very much to do with him. He occasionally sought my company, but as frequently shrunk from it, fearing lest I should wile him back to destruction, and I found his not very entertaining, especially as he sometimes attempted to awaken my conscience and draw me from the perdition he considered himself to have escaped; but when I did happen to meet him, I seldom failed to ask after the progress of his matrimonial efforts and researches, and, in general, he could

give me but a poor account. The mothers were repelled by his empty coffers and his reputation for gambling, and the daughters by his cloudy brow and melancholy temper—besides, he didn't understand them; he wanted the spirit and assurance to carry his point.

"I left him at it when I went to the continent; and on my return, at the year's end, I found him still a disconsolate bachelor—though, certainly, looking somewhat less like an unblest exile from the tomb than before. The young ladies had ceased to be afraid of him, and were beginning to think him quite interesting; but the mammas were still unrelenting. It was about this time, Helen, that my good angel brought me into conjunction with you; and then I had eyes and ears for nobody else. But, meantime, Lowborough became acquainted with our charming friend, Miss Wilmot—through the intervention of *his* good angel, no doubt he would tell you, though he did not dare to fix his hopes on one so courted and admired, till after they were brought into closer contact here at Staningley, and she, in the absence of her other admirers, indubitably courted his notice and held out every encouragement to his timid advances. Then, indeed, he began to hope for a dawn of brighter days; and if, for a while, I darkened his prospects by standing between him and his sun—and so nearly plunged him again into the abyss of despair—it only intensified his ardour and strengthened his hopes when I chose to abandon the field in the pursuit of a brighter treasure. In a word, as I told you, he is fairly besotted. At first, he could dimly perceive her faults, and they gave him considerable uneasiness; but now his passion and her art together have blinded him to everything but her perfections and his amazing good fortune. Last night he came to me brimful of his new-found felicity:

"'Huntingdon, I am not a castaway!' said he, seizing my hand and squeezing it like a vice. 'There is happiness in store for me yet—even in this life—she loves me!'

"'Indeed!' said I. 'Has she told you so?'

"'No, but I can no longer doubt it. Do you not see how pointedly kind and affectionate she is? And she knows the utmost extent of my poverty, and cares nothing about it! She knows all the folly and all the wickedness of my former life, and is not afraid to trust me—and my rank and title are no allurements to her; for them she utterly disregards. She is the most generous, high-minded being that can be conceived of. She will save me, body and soul, from destruction. Already, she has ennobled me in my own estimation, and made me three times better, wiser, greater than I was. Oh! if I had but known her before, how much degradation and misery I should have been spared! But what have I done to deserve so magnificent a creature?'

“And the cream of the jest,” continued Mr. Huntingdon, laughing, “is, that the artful minx loves nothing about him but his title and pedigree, and ‘that delightful old family seat.’”

“How do you know?” said I.

“She told me so herself; she said, ‘As for the man himself, I thoroughly despise him; but then, I suppose, it is time to be making my choice, and if I waited for some one capable of eliciting my esteem and affection, I should have to pass my life in single blessedness, for I detest you all!’ Ha, ha! I suspect she was wrong there; but, however, it is evident she has no love for *him*, poor fellow.”

“Then you ought to tell him so.”

“What! and spoil all her plans and prospects, poor girl? No, no: that would be a breach of confidence, wouldn’t it, Helen? Ha, ha! Besides, it would break his heart.” And he laughed again.

“Well, Mr. Huntingdon, I don’t know what you see so amazingly diverting in the matter; I see nothing to laugh at.”

“I’m laughing at *you*, just now, love,” said he, redoubling his machinations.

And leaving him to enjoy his merriment alone, I touched Ruby with the whip, and cantered on to rejoin our companions; for we had been walking our horses all this time, and were consequently a long way behind. Arthur was soon at my side again; but not disposed to talk to him, I broke into a gallop. He did the same; and we did not slacken our pace till we came up with Miss Wilmot and Lord Lowborough, which was within half a mile of the park-gates. I avoided all further conversation with him till we came to the end of our ride, when I meant to jump off my horse and vanish into the house, before he could offer his assistance; but while I was disengaging my habit from the crutch, he lifted me off, and held me by both hands, asserting that he would not let me go till I had forgiven him.

“I have nothing to forgive,” said I. “You have not injured *me*.”

“No, darling—God forbid that I should! but you are angry because it was to me that Annabella confessed her lack of esteem for her lover.”

“No, Arthur, it is not *that* that displeases me: it is the whole system of your conduct towards your friend, and if you wish me to forget it, go now, and tell him what sort of a woman it is that he adores so madly, and on whom he has hung his hopes of future happiness.”

“I tell you, Helen, it would break his heart—it would be the death of him—besides being a scandalous trick to poor Annabella. There is no help for him now; he is past praying for. Besides, she may keep up the deception to the end of the chapter; and then he will be just as happy in the illusion as if it were reality; or perhaps he will only discover his mistake when he has ceased to love her; and if not, it is much better that the truth should dawn gradually upon him. So now, my angel, I hope I have made out a clear case, and fully convinced you that I cannot make the atonement you require. What other requisition have you to make? Speak, and I will gladly obey.”

“I have none but this,” said I, as gravely as before: “that, in future, you will never make a jest of the sufferings of others, and always use your influence with your friends for their own advantage against their evil propensities, instead of seconding their evil propensities against themselves.”

“I will do my utmost,” said he, “to remember and perform the injunctions of my angel monitress;” and after kissing both my gloved hands, he let me go.

When I entered my room, I was surprised to see Annabella Wilmot standing before my toilet-table, composedly surveying her features in the glass, with one hand flirting her gold-mounted whip, and the other holding up her long habit.

“She certainly *is* a magnificent creature!” thought I, as I beheld that tall, finely developed figure, and the reflection of the handsome face in the mirror before me, with the glossy dark hair, slightly and not ungracefully disordered by the breezy ride, the rich brown complexion glowing with exercise, and the black eyes sparkling with unwonted brilliance. On perceiving me, she turned round, exclaiming, with a laugh that savoured more of malice than of mirth,—

“Why, Helen! what *have* you been doing so long? I came to tell you my good fortune,” she continued, regardless of Rachel’s presence. “Lord Lowborough has proposed, and I have been graciously pleased to accept him. Don’t you envy me, dear?”

“No, love,” said I—“or him either,” I mentally added. “And do you like him, Annabella?”

“Like him! yes, to be sure—over head and ears in love!”

“Well, I hope you’ll make him a good wife.”

“Thank you, my dear! And what besides do you hope?”

“I hope you will both love each other, and both be happy.”

“Thanks; and I hope you will make a *very* good wife to Mr. Huntingdon!” said she, with a queenly bow, and retired.

“Oh, Miss! how could you say so to her!” cried Rachel.

“Say what?” replied I.

“Why, that you hoped she would make him a good wife. I never heard such a thing!”

“Because I do hope it, or rather, I wish it; she’s almost past hope.”

“Well,” said she, “I’m sure I hope he’ll make *her* a good husband. They tell queer things about him downstairs. They were saying—”

“I know, Rachel. I’ve heard all about him; but he’s reformed now. And they have no business to tell tales about their masters.”

“No, mum—or else, they *have* said some things about Mr. Huntingdon too.”

“I won’t hear them, Rachel; they tell lies.”

“Yes, mum,” said she, quietly, as she went on arranging my hair.

“Do *you* believe them, Rachel?” I asked, after a short pause.

“No, Miss, not all. You know when a lot of servants gets together they like to talk about their betters; and some, for a bit of swagger, likes to make it appear as though they knew more than they do, and to throw out hints and things just to astonish the others. But I think, if I was you, Miss Helen, I’d look *very* well before I leaped. I do believe a young lady can’t be too careful who she marries.”

“Of course not,” said I; “but be quick, will you, Rachel? I want to be dressed.”

And, indeed, I was anxious to be rid of the good woman, for I was in such a melancholy frame I could hardly keep the tears out of my eyes while she dressed me. It was not for Lord Lowborough—it was not for Annabella—it was not for myself—it was for Arthur Huntingdon that they rose.

* * * * *

13th.—They are gone, and he is gone. We are to be parted for more than two months, above ten weeks! a long, long time to live and not to see him. But he has promised to write often, and made me promise to write still oftener, because he will be busy settling his affairs, and I shall have nothing better to do. Well, I think I shall always have plenty to say. But oh! for the time when we shall be always together, and can exchange our thoughts without the intervention of these cold go-betweens, pen, ink, and paper!

* * * * *

22nd.—I have had several letters from Arthur already. They are not long, but passing sweet, and just like himself, full of ardent affection, and playful lively humour; but there is always a *but* in this imperfect world, and I do wish he would *sometimes* be serious. I cannot get him to write or speak in real, solid earnest. I don't much mind it now, but if it be always so, what shall I do with the serious part of myself?

## CHAPTER XXIII

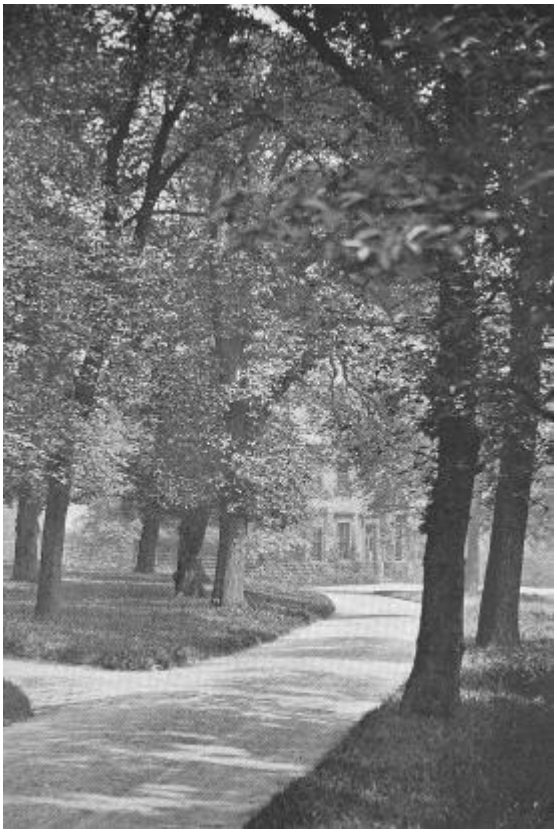
Feb. 18, 1822.—Early this morning Arthur mounted his hunter and set off in high glee to meet the —— hounds. He will be away all day, and so I will amuse myself with my neglected diary, if I can give that name to such an irregular composition. It is exactly four months since I opened it last.

I am married now, and settled down as Mrs. Huntingdon of Grassdale Manor. I have had eight weeks' experience of matrimony. And do I regret the step I have taken? No, though I must confess, in my secret heart, that Arthur is not what I thought him at first, and if I had known him in the beginning as thoroughly as I do now, I probably never should have loved him, and if I loved him first, and then made the discovery, I fear I should have thought it my duty not to have married him. To be sure I might have known him, for every one was willing enough to tell me about him, and he himself was no accomplished hypocrite, but I was wilfully blind; and now, instead of regretting that I did not discern his full character before I was indissolubly bound to him, I am *glad*, for it has saved me a great deal of battling with my conscience, and a great deal of consequent trouble and pain; and, whatever I *ought* to have done, my duty now is plainly to love him and to cleave to him, and this just tallies with my inclination.

He is very fond of me, almost *too* fond. I could do with less caressing and more rationality. I should like to be less of a pet and more of a friend, if I might choose; but I won't complain of that: I am only afraid his affection loses in depth where it gains in ardour. I sometimes liken it to a fire of dry twigs and branches compared with one of solid coal, very bright and hot; but if it should burn itself out and leave nothing but ashes behind, what shall I do? But it won't, it *shan*'t, I am determined; and surely I have power to keep it alive. So let me dismiss *that* thought at once. But Arthur is selfish; I am constrained to acknowledge that; and, indeed, the admission gives me less pain than might be expected, for, since *I* love him so much, I can easily forgive him for loving himself: he likes to be pleased, and it is my delight to please him; and when I regret this tendency of his, it is for his own sake, not for mine.

The first instance he gave was on the occasion of our bridal tour. He wanted to hurry it over, for all the continental scenes were already familiar to him: many had lost their interest in his eyes, and others had never had anything to lose. The consequence was,

that after a flying transit through part of France and part of Italy, I came back nearly as ignorant as I went, having made no acquaintance with persons and manners, and very little with things, my head swarming with a motley confusion of objects and scenes; some, it is true, leaving a deeper and more pleasing impression than others, but these embittered by the recollection that my emotions had not been shared by my companion, but that, on the contrary, when I had expressed a particular interest in anything that I saw or desired to see, it had been displeasing to him, inasmuch as it proved that I could take delight in anything disconnected with himself.



As for Paris, we only just touched at that, and he would not give me time to see one-tenth of the beauties and interesting objects of Rome. He wanted to get me home, he said, to have me all to himself, and to see me safely installed as the mistress of Grassdale Manor, just as single-minded, as naïve, and piquante as I was; and as if I had been some frail butterfly, he expressed himself fearful of rubbing the silver off my wings by bringing me into contact with society, especially that of Paris and Rome; and, more-over, he did not scruple to tell me that there were ladies in both places that would tear his eyes out if they happened to meet him with me.

Of course I was vexed at all this; but still it was less the disappointment to myself that annoyed me, than the disappointment *in him*, and the trouble I was at to frame

excuses to my friends for having seen and observed so little, without imputing one particle of blame to my companion. But when we got home—to my new, delightful home—I was so happy and he was so kind that I freely forgave him all; and I was beginning to think my lot *too* happy, and my husband actually too good for me, if not too good for this world, when, on the second Sunday after our arrival, he shocked and horrified me by another instance of his unreasonable exaction. We were walking home from the morning service, for it was a fine frosty day, and as we are so near the church, I had requested the carriage should not be used.

"Helen," said he, with unusual gravity, "I am not quite satisfied with you."

I desired to know what was wrong.

"But will you promise to reform if I tell you?"

"Yes, if I can, and without offending a higher authority."

"Ah! there it is, you see: you don't love me with all your heart."

"I don't understand you, Arthur (at least I hope I don't): pray tell me what I have done or said amiss."

"It is nothing you have done or said; it is something that you *are:* you are too religious. Now I like a woman to be religious, and I think your piety one of your greatest charms; but then, like all other good things, it may be carried too far. To my thinking, a woman's religion ought not to lessen her devotion to her earthly lord. She should have enough to purify and etherealise her soul, but not enough to refine away her heart, and raise her above all human sympathies."

"And am *I* above all human sympathies?" said I.

"No, darling; but you are making more progress towards that saintly condition than I like; for all these two hours I have been thinking of you and wanting to catch your eye, and you were so absorbed in your devotions that you had not even a glance to spare for me—I declare it is enough to make one jealous of one's Maker—which is very wrong, you know; so don't excite such wicked passions again, for my soul's sake."

"I will give my whole heart and soul to my Maker if I can," I answered, "and not one atom more of it to you than He allows. What are *you*, sir, that you should set yourself up as a god, and presume to dispute possession of my heart with Him to whom I owe all I have and all I am, every blessing I ever did or ever can enjoy—and yourself among the rest—if you *are* a blessing, which I am half inclined to doubt."

“Don’t be so hard upon me, Helen; and don’t pinch my arm so: you are squeezing your fingers into the bone.”

“Arthur,” continued I, relaxing my hold of his arm, “you don’t love me half as much as I do you; and yet, if you loved me far less than you do, I would not complain, provided you loved your Maker more. I should *rejoice* to see you at any time so deeply absorbed in your devotions that you had not a single thought to spare for me. But, indeed, I should lose nothing by the change, for the more you loved your God the more deep and pure and true would be your love to me.”

At this he only laughed and kissed my hand, calling me a sweet enthusiast. Then taking off his hat, he added: “But look here, Helen—what can a man do with such a head as this?”

The head looked right enough, but when he placed my hand on the top of it, it sunk in a bed of curls, rather alarmingly low, especially in the middle.

“You see I was not made to be a saint,” said he, laughing, “If God meant me to be religious, why didn’t He give me a proper organ of veneration?”

“You are like the servant,” I replied, “who, instead of employing his one talent in his master’s service, restored it to him unimproved, alleging, as an excuse, that he knew him ‘to be a hard man, reaping where he had not sown, and gathering where he had not strawed.’ Of him to whom less is given, less will be required, but our utmost exertions are required of us all. You are not without the capacity of veneration, and faith and hope, and conscience and reason, and every other requisite to a Christian’s character, if you choose to employ them; but all our talents increase in the using, and every faculty, both good and bad, strengthens by exercise: therefore, if you choose to use the bad, or those which tend to evil, till they become your masters, and neglect the good till they dwindle away, you have only yourself to blame. But you *have* talents, Arthur—natural endowments both of heart and mind and temper, such as many a better Christian would be glad to possess, if you would only employ them in God’s service. I should never expect to see you a devotee, but it is quite possible to be a good Christian without ceasing to be a happy, merry-hearted man.”

“You speak like an oracle, Helen, and all you say is indisputably true; but listen here: I am hungry, and I see before me a good substantial dinner; I am told that if I abstain from this to-day I shall have a sumptuous feast to-morrow, consisting of all manner of dainties and delicacies. Now, in the first place, I should be loth to wait till to-morrow when I have the means of appeasing my hunger already before me: in the second place, the solid viands of to-day are more to my taste than the dainties that are

promised me; in the third place, I don't *see* to-morrow's banquet, and how can I tell that it is not all a fable, got up by the greasy-faced fellow that is advising me to abstain in order that he may have all the good victuals to himself? in the fourth place, this table must be spread for somebody, and, as Solomon says, 'Who can eat, or who else can hasten hereunto more than I?' and finally, with your leave, I'll sit down and satisfy my cravings of to-day, and leave to-morrow to shift for itself—who knows but what I may secure both this and that?"

"But you are not required to abstain from the substantial dinner of to-day: you are only advised to partake of these coarser viands in such moderation as not to incapacitate you from enjoying the choicer banquet of to-morrow. If, regardless of that counsel, you choose to make a beast of yourself now, and over-eat and over-drink yourself till you turn the good victuals into poison, who is to blame if, hereafter, while you are suffering the torments of yesterday's gluttony and drunkenness, you see more temperate men sitting down to enjoy themselves at that splendid entertainment which you are unable to taste?"

"Most true, my patron saint; but again, our friend Solomon says, 'There is nothing better for a man than to eat and to drink, and to be merry.'"

"And again," returned I, "he says, 'Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.'"

"Well, but, Helen, I'm sure I've been very good these last few weeks. What have you seen amiss in me, and what would you have me to do?"

"Nothing more than you do, Arthur: your actions are all right so far; but I would have your thoughts changed; I would have you to fortify yourself against temptation, and not to call evil good, and good evil; I should wish you to think more deeply, to look further, and aim higher than you do."

## CHAPTER XXIV

March 25th.—Arthur is getting tired—not of me, I trust, but of the idle, quiet life he leads—and no wonder, for he has so few sources of amusement: he never reads anything but newspapers and sporting magazines; and when he sees me occupied with a book, he won't let me rest till I close it. In fine weather he generally manages to get through the time pretty well, but on rainy days, of which we have had a good many of late, it is quite painful to witness his ennui. I do all I can to amuse him, but it is impossible to get him to feel interested in what I most like to talk about, while, on the other hand, he likes to talk about things that cannot interest me—or even that annoy

me—and these please him—the most of all: for his favourite amusement is to sit or loll beside me on the sofa, and tell me stories of his former amours, always turning upon the ruin of some confiding girl or the cozening of some unsuspecting husband; and when I express my horror and indignation, he lays it all to the charge of jealousy, and laughs till the tears run down his cheeks. I used to fly into passions or melt into tears at first, but seeing that his delight increased in proportion to my anger and agitation, I have since endeavoured to suppress my feelings and receive his revelations in the silence of calm contempt; but still he reads the inward struggle in my face, and misconstrues my bitterness of soul for his unworthiness into the pangs of wounded jealousy; and when he has sufficiently diverted himself with that, or fears my displeasure will become too serious for his comfort, he tries to kiss and soothe me into smiles again—never were his caresses so little welcome as then! This is *double* selfishness, displayed to me and to the victims of his former love. There are times when, with a momentary pang—a flash of wild dismay, I ask myself, "Helen, what have you done?" But I rebuke the inward questioner, and repel the obtrusive thoughts that crowd upon me; for were he ten times as sensual and impenetrable to good and lofty thoughts, I well know I have no right to complain. And I don't and won't complain. I do and will love him still; and I do not and will not regret that I have linked my fate with his.

April 4th.—We have had a downright quarrel. The particulars are as follows: Arthur had told me, at different intervals, the whole story of his intrigue with Lady F——, which I would not believe before. It was some consolation, however, to find that in this instance the lady had been more to blame than he, for he was very young at the time, and she had decidedly made the first advances, if what he said was true. I hated her for it, for it seemed as if she had chiefly contributed to his corruption; and when he was beginning to talk about her the other day, I begged he would not mention her, for I detested the very sound of her name.

"Not because you loved her, Arthur, mind, but because she injured you and deceived her husband, and was altogether a very abominable woman, whom you ought to be ashamed to mention."

But he defended her by saying that she had a doting old husband, whom it was impossible to love.

"Then why did she marry him?" said I.

"For his money," was the reply.

“Then that was another crime, and her solemn promise to love and honour him was another, that only increased the enormity of the last.”

“You are too severe upon the poor lady,” laughed he. “But never mind, Helen, I don’t care for her now; and I never loved any of them half as much as I do you, so you needn’t fear to be forsaken like them.”

“If you had told me these things before, Arthur, I never should have given you the chance.”

“*Wouldn’t* you, my darling?”

“Most certainly not!”

He laughed incredulously.

“I wish I could convince you of it now!” cried I, starting up from beside him: and for the first time in my life, and I hope the last, I wished I had not married him.

“Helen,” said he, more gravely, “do you know that if I believed you now I should be very angry? but thank heaven I don’t. Though you stand there with your white face and flashing eyes, looking at me like a very tigress, I know the heart within you perhaps a trifle better than you know it yourself.”

Without another word I left the room and locked myself up in my own chamber. In about half an hour he came to the door, and first he tried the handle, then he knocked.

“Won’t you let me in, Helen?” said he. “No; you have displeased me,” I replied, “and I don’t want to see your face or hear your voice again till the morning.”

He paused a moment as if dumfounded or uncertain how to answer such a speech, and then turned and walked away. This was only an hour after dinner: I knew he would find it very dull to sit alone all the evening; and this considerably softened my resentment, though it did not make me relent. I was determined to show him that my heart was not his slave, and I could live without him if I chose; and I sat down and wrote a long letter to my aunt, of course telling her nothing of all this. Soon after ten o’clock I heard him come up again, but he passed my door and went straight to his own dressing-room, where he shut himself in for the night.

I was rather anxious to see how he would meet me in the morning, and not a little disappointed to behold him enter the breakfast-room with a careless smile.

“Are you cross still, Helen?” said he, approaching as if to salute me. I coldly turned to the table, and began to pour out the coffee, observing that he was rather late.

He uttered a low whistle and sauntered away to the window, where he stood for some minutes looking out upon the pleasing prospect of sullen grey clouds, streaming rain, soaking lawn, and dripping leafless trees, and muttering execrations on the weather, and then sat down to breakfast. While taking his coffee he muttered it was "d—d cold."

"You should not have left it so long," said I.

He made no answer, and the meal was concluded in silence. It was a relief to both when the letter-bag was brought in. It contained upon examination a newspaper and one or two letters for him, and a couple of letters for me, which he tossed across the table without a remark. One was from my brother, the other from Milicent Hargrave, who is now in London with her mother. His, I think, were business letters, and apparently not much to his mind, for he crushed them into his pocket with some muttered expletives that I should have reproved him for at any other time. The paper he set before him, and pretended to be deeply absorbed in its contents during the remainder of breakfast, and a considerable time after.

The reading and answering of my letters, and the direction of household concerns, afforded me ample employment for the morning: after lunch I got my drawing, and from dinner till bed-time I read. Meanwhile, poor Arthur was sadly at a loss for something to amuse him or to occupy his time. He wanted to appear as busy and as unconcerned as I did. Had the weather at all permitted, he would doubtless have ordered his horse and set off to some distant region, no matter where, immediately after breakfast, and not returned till night: had there been a lady anywhere within reach, of any age between fifteen and forty-five, he would have sought revenge and found employment in getting up, or trying to get up, a desperate flirtation with her; but being, to my private satisfaction, entirely cut off from both these sources of diversion, his sufferings were truly deplorable. When he had done yawning over his paper and scribbling short answers to his shorter letters, he spent the remainder of the morning and the whole of the afternoon in fidgeting about from room to room, watching the clouds, cursing the rain, alternately petting and teasing and abusing his dogs, sometimes lounging on the sofa with a book that he could not force himself to read, and very often fixedly gazing at me when he thought I did not perceive it, with the vain hope of detecting some traces of tears, or some tokens of remorseful anguish in my face. But I managed to preserve an undisturbed though grave serenity throughout the day. I was not really angry: I felt for him all the time, and longed to be reconciled; but I determined he should make the first advances, or at least show some signs of an humble and contrite spirit first; for, if I began, it would only minister to his self-conceit, increase his arrogance, and quite destroy the lesson I wanted to give him.

He made a long stay in the dining-room after dinner, and, I fear, took an unusual quantity of wine, but not enough to loosen his tongue: for when he came in and found me quietly occupied with my book, too busy to lift my head on his entrance, he merely murmured an expression of suppressed disapprobation, and, shutting the door with a bang, went and stretched himself at full length on the sofa, and composed himself to sleep. But his favourite cocker, Dash, that had been lying at my feet, took the liberty of jumping upon him and beginning to lick his face. He struck it off with a smart blow, and the poor dog squeaked and ran cowering back to me. When he woke up, about half an hour after, he called it to him again, but Dash only looked sheepish and wagged the tip of his tail. He called again more sharply, but Dash only clung the closer to me, and licked my hand, as if imploring protection. Enraged at this, his master snatched up a heavy book and hurled it at his head. The poor dog set up a piteous outcry, and ran to the door. I let him out, and then quietly took up the book.

"Give that book to me," said Arthur, in no very courteous tone. I gave it to him.

"Why did you let the dog out?" he asked; "you knew I wanted him."

"By what token?" I replied; "by your throwing the book at him? but perhaps it was intended for me?"

"No; but I see you've got a taste of it," said he, looking at my hand, that had also been struck, and was rather severely grazed.

I returned to my reading, and he endeavoured to occupy himself in the same manner; but in a little while, after several portentous yawns, he pronounced *his* book to be "cursed trash," and threw it on the table. Then followed eight or ten minutes of silence, during the greater part of which, I believe, he was staring at me. At last his patience was tired out.

"What *is* that book, Helen?" he exclaimed.

I told him.

"Is it interesting?"

"Yes, very."

I went on reading, or pretending to read, at least—I cannot say there was much communication between my eyes and my brain; for, while the former ran over the pages, the latter was earnestly wondering when Arthur would speak next, and what he would say, and what I should answer. But he did not speak again till I rose to make the tea, and then it was only to say he should not take any. He continued lounging on the

sofa, and alternately closing his eyes and looking at his watch and at me, till bed-time, when I rose, and took my candle and retired.

“Helen!” cried he, the moment I had left the room. I turned back, and stood awaiting his commands.

“What do you want, Arthur?” I said at length.

“Nothing,” replied he. “Go!”

I went, but hearing him mutter something as I was closing the door, I turned again. It sounded very like “confounded slut,” but I was quite willing it should be something else.

“Were you speaking, Arthur?” I asked.

“No,” was the answer, and I shut the door and departed. I saw nothing more of him till the following morning at breakfast, when he came down a full hour after the usual time.

“You’re very late,” was my morning’s salutation.

“You needn’t have waited for me,” was his; and he walked up to the window again. It was just such weather as yesterday.

“Oh, this confounded rain!” he muttered. But, after studiously regarding it for a minute or two, a bright idea, seemed to strike him, for he suddenly exclaimed, “But I know what I’ll do!” and then returned and took his seat at the table. The letter-bag was already there, waiting to be opened. He unlocked it and examined the contents, but said nothing about them.

“Is there anything for me?” I asked.

“No.”

He opened the newspaper and began to read.

“You’d better take your coffee,” suggested I; “it will be cold again.”

“You may go,” said he, “if you’ve done; I don’t want you.”

I rose and withdrew to the next room, wondering if we were to have another such miserable day as yesterday, and wishing intensely for an end of these mutually inflicted torments. Shortly after I heard him ring the bell and give some orders about his wardrobe that sounded as if he meditated a long journey. He then sent for the

coachman, and I heard something about the carriage and the horses, and London, and seven o'clock to-morrow morning, that startled and disturbed me not a little.

"I must not let him go to London, whatever comes of it," said I to myself; "he will run into all kinds of mischief, and I shall be the cause of it. But the question is, How am I to alter his purpose? Well, I will wait awhile, and see if he mentions it."

I waited most anxiously, from hour to hour; but not a word was spoken, on that or any other subject, to me. He whistled and talked to his dogs, and wandered from room to room, much the same as on the previous day. At last I began to think I must introduce the subject myself, and was pondering how to bring it about, when John unwittingly came to my relief with the following message from the coachman:

"Please, sir, Richard says one of the horses has got a very bad cold, and he thinks, sir, if you could make it convenient to go the day after to-morrow, instead of to-morrow, he could physic it to-day, so as—"

"Confound his impudence!" interjected the master.

"Please, sir, he says it would be a deal better if you could," persisted John, "for he hopes there'll be a change in the weather shortly, and he says it's not *likely*, when a horse is so bad with a cold, and physicked and all—"

"Devil take the horse!" cried the gentleman. "Well, tell him I'll think about it," he added, after a moment's reflection. He cast a searching glance at me, as the servant withdrew, expecting to see some token of deep astonishment and alarm; but, being previously prepared, I preserved an aspect of stoical indifference. His countenance fell as he met my steady gaze, and he turned away in very obvious disappointment, and walked up to the fire-place, where he stood in an attitude of undisguised dejection, leaning against the chimney-piece with his forehead sunk upon his arm.

"Where do you want to go, Arthur?" said I.

"To London," replied he, gravely.

"What for?" I asked.

"Because I cannot be happy here."

"Why not?"

"Because my wife doesn't love me."

"She would love you with all her heart, if you deserved it."

“What must I do to deserve it?”

This seemed humble and earnest enough; and I was so much affected, between sorrow and joy, that I was obliged to pause a few seconds before I could steady my voice to reply.

“If she gives you her heart,” said I, “you must take it, thankfully, and use it well, and not pull it in pieces, and laugh in her face, because she cannot snatch it away.”

He now turned round, and stood facing me, with his back to the fire. “Come, then, Helen, are you going to be a good girl?” said he.

This sounded rather too arrogant, and the smile that accompanied it did not please me. I therefore hesitated to reply. Perhaps my former answer had implied too much: he had heard my voice falter, and might have seen me brush away a tear.

“Are you going to forgive me, Helen?” he resumed, more humbly.

“Are *you* penitent?” I replied, stepping up to him and smiling in his face.

“Heart-broken!” he answered, with a rueful countenance, yet with a merry smile just lurking within his eyes and about the corners of his mouth; but this could not repulse me, and I flew into his arms. He fervently embraced me, and though I shed a torrent of tears, I think I never was happier in my life than at that moment.

“Then you won’t go to London, Arthur?” I said, when the first transport of tears and kisses had subsided.

“No, love,—unless you will go with me.”

“I will, gladly,” I answered, “if you think the change will amuse you, and if you will put off the journey till next week.”

He readily consented, but said there was no need of much preparation, as he should not be for staying long, for he did not wish me to be Londonized, and to lose my country freshness and originality by too much intercourse with the ladies of the world. I thought this folly; but I did not wish to contradict him now: I merely said that I was of very domestic habits, as he well knew, and had no particular wish to mingle with the world.

So we are to go to London on Monday, the day after to-morrow. It is now four days since the termination of our quarrel, and I am sure it has done us both good: it has made me like Arthur a great deal better, and made him behave a great deal better to me. He has never once attempted to annoy me since, by the most distant allusion to

Lady F——, or any of those disagreeable reminiscences of his former life. I wish I could blot them from my memory, or else get him to regard such matters in the same light as I do. Well! it is something, however, to have made him see that they are not fit subjects for a conjugal jest. He may see further some time. I will put no limits to my hopes; and, in spite of my aunt's forebodings and my own unspoken fears, I trust we shall be happy yet.