# The Tenant Of Wild fell Hall

## VOL.II

**By**

## Anne Brontë

# THE TENANT OF WILD FELL HALL VOL.II

## 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 to 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!

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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.

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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 herself 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 further 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 anybody 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.

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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 sha'n'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, moreover, 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.

## CHAPTER XXV

On the eighth of April we went to London, on the eighth of May I returned, in obedience to Arthur's wish; very much against my own, because I left him behind. If he had come with me, I should have been very glad to get home again, for he led me such a round of restless dissipation while there, that, in that short space of time, I was quite tired out. He seemed bent upon displaying me to his friends and acquaintances in particular, and the public in general, on every possible occasion, and to the greatest possible advantage. It was something to feel that he considered me a worthy object of pride; but I paid dear for the gratification: for, in the first place, to please him I had to violate my cherished predilections, my almost rooted principles in favour of a plain, dark, sober style of dress—I must sparkle in costly jewels and deck myself out like a painted butterfly, just as I had, long since, determined I would never do—and this was no trifling sacrifice; in the second place, I was continually straining to satisfy his sanguine expectations and do honour to his choice by my general conduct and deportment, and fearing to disappoint him by some awkward misdemeanour, or some trait of inexperienced ignorance about the customs of society, especially when I acted the part of hostess, which I was not unfrequently called upon to do; and, in the third place, as I intimated before, I was wearied of the throng and bustle, the restless hurry and ceaseless change of a life so alien to all my previous habits. At last, he suddenly discovered that the London air did not agree with me, and I was languishing for my country home, and must immediately return to Grassdale.

I laughingly assured him that the case was not so urgent as he appeared to think it, but I was quite willing to go home if he was. He replied that he should be obliged to remain a week or two longer, as he had business that required his presence.

'Then I will stay with you,' said I.

'But I can't do with you, Helen,' was his answer: 'as long as you stay I shall attend to you and neglect my business.'

'But I won't let you,' I returned; 'now that I know you have business to attend to, I shall insist upon your attending to it, and letting me alone; and, to tell the truth, I shall be glad of a little rest. I can take my rides and walks in the Park as usual; and your business cannot occupy all your time: I shall see you at meal-times, and in the evenings at least, and that will be better than being leagues away and never seeing you at all.'

‘But, my love, I cannot let you stay. How can I settle my affairs when I know that you are here, neglected—?’

‘I shall not feel myself neglected: while you are doing your duty, Arthur, I shall never complain of neglect. If you had told me before, that you had anything to do, it would have been half done before this; and now you must make up for lost time by redoubled exertions. Tell me what it is; and I will be your taskmaster, instead of being a hindrance.’

‘No, no,’ persisted the impracticable creature; ‘you must go home, Helen; I must have the satisfaction of knowing that you are safe and well, though far away. Your bright eyes are faded, and that tender, delicate bloom has quite deserted your cheek.’

‘That is only with too much gaiety and fatigue.’

‘It is not, I tell you; it is the London air: you are pining for the fresh breezes of your country home, and you shall feel them before you are two days older. And remember your situation, dearest Helen; on your health, you know, depends the health, if not the life, of our future hope.’

‘Then you really wish to get rid of me?’

‘Positively, I do; and I will take you down myself to Grassdale, and then return. I shall not be absent above a week or fortnight at most.’

‘But if I must go, I will go alone: if you must stay, it is needless to waste your time in the journey there and back.’

But he did not like the idea of sending me alone.

‘Why, what helpless creature do you take me for,’ I replied, ‘that you cannot trust me to go a hundred miles in our own carriage, with our own footman and a maid to attend me? If you come with me I shall assuredly keep you. But tell me, Arthur, what is this tiresome business; and why did you never mention it before?’

‘It is only a little business with my lawyer,’ said he; and he told me something about a piece of property he wanted to sell, in order to pay off a part of the incumbrances on his estate; but either the account was a little confused, or I was rather dull of comprehension, for I could not clearly understand how that should keep him in town a fortnight after me. Still less can I now comprehend how it should keep him a month, for it is nearly that time since I left him, and no signs of his return as yet. In every letter he

promises to be with me in a few days, and every time deceives me, or deceives himself. His excuses are vague and insufficient. I cannot doubt that he has got among his former companions again. Oh, why did I leave him! I wish—I do intensely wish he would return!

June 29th.—No Arthur yet; and for many days I have been looking and longing in vain for a letter. His letters, when they come, are kind, if fair words and endearing epithets can give them a claim to the title—but very short, and full of trivial excuses and promises that I cannot trust; and yet how anxiously I look forward to them! how eagerly I open and devour one of those little, hastily-scribbled returns for the three or four long letters, hitherto unanswered, he has had from me!

Oh, it is cruel to leave me so long alone! He knows I have no one but Rachel to speak to, for we have no neighbours here, except the Hargraves, whose residence I can dimly descry from these upper windows embosomed among those low, woody hills beyond the Dale. I was glad when I learnt that Milicent was so near us; and her company would be a soothing solace to me now; but she is still in town with her mother; there is no one at the Grove but little Esther and her French governess, for Walter is always away. I saw that paragon of manly perfections in London: he seemed scarcely to merit the eulogiums of his mother and sister, though he certainly appeared more conversable and agreeable than Lord Lowborough, more candid and high-minded than Mr. Grimsby, and more polished and gentlemanly than Mr. Hattersley, Arthur's only other friend whom he judged fit to introduce to me.—Oh, Arthur, why won't you come? why won't you write to me at least? You talked about my health: how can you expect me to gather bloom and vigour here, pining in solitude and restless anxiety from day to day?—It would serve you right to come back and find my good looks entirely wasted away. I would beg my uncle and aunt, or my brother, to come and see me, but I do not like to complain of my loneliness to them, and indeed loneliness is the least of my sufferings. But what is he, doing—what is it that keeps him away? It is this ever-recurring question, and the horrible suggestions it raises, that distract me.

July 3rd.—My last bitter letter has wrung from him an answer at last, and a rather longer one than usual; but still I don't know what to make of it. He playfully abuses me for the gall and vinegar of my latest effusion, tells me I can have no conception of the multitudinous engagements that keep him away, but avers that, in spite of them all, he will assuredly be with me before the close of next week; though it is impossible for a man so circumstanced as he is to fix the precise day of his return: meantime he exhorts me to the exercise of patience, 'that first of woman's virtues,' and desires me to remember the saying, 'Absence makes the heart grow fonder,' and comfort myself with the assurance that the longer he stays away the better he shall love me when he returns; and till he does return, he begs I will continue to write to him constantly, for, though he

is sometimes too idle and often too busy to answer my letters as they come, he likes to receive them daily; and if I fulfil my threat of punishing his seeming neglect by ceasing to write, he shall be so angry that he will do his utmost to forget me. He adds this piece of intelligence respecting poor Milicent Hargrave:

'Your little friend Milicent is likely, before long, to follow your example, and take upon her the yoke of matrimony in conjunction with a friend of mine. Hattersley, you know, has not yet fulfilled his direful threat of throwing his precious person away on the first old maid that chose to evince a tenderness for him; but he still preserves a resolute determination to see himself a married man before the year is out. "Only," said he to me, "I must have somebody that will let me have my own way in everything—not like your wife, Huntingdon: she is a charming creature, but she looks as if she had a will of her own, and could play the vixen upon occasion" (I thought "you're right there, man," but I didn't say so). "I must have some good, quiet soul that will let me just do what I like and go where I like, keep at home or stay away, without a word of reproach or complaint; for I can't do with being bothered." "Well," said I, "I know somebody that will suit you to a tee, if you don't care for money, and that's Hargrave's sister, Milicent." He desired to be introduced to her forthwith, for he said he had plenty of the needful himself, or should have when his old governor chose to quit the stage. So you see, Helen, I have managed pretty well, both for your friend and mine.'

Poor Milicent! But I cannot imagine she will ever be led to accept such a suitor—one so repugnant to all her ideas of a man to be honoured and loved.

5th.—Alas! I was mistaken. I have got a long letter from her this morning, telling me she is already engaged, and expects to be married before the close of the month.

'I hardly know what to say about it,' she writes, 'or what to think. To tell you the truth, Helen, I don't like the thoughts of it at all. If I am to be Mr. Hattersley's wife, I must try to love him; and I do try with all my might; but I have made very little progress yet; and the worst symptom of the case is, that the further he is from me the better I like him: he frightens me with his abrupt manners and strange hectoring ways, and I dread the thoughts of marrying him. "Then why have you accepted him?" you will ask; and I didn't know I had accepted him; but mamma tells me I have, and he seems to think so too. I certainly didn't mean to do so; but I did not like to give him a flat refusal, for fear mamma should be grieved and angry (for I knew she wished me to marry him), and I wanted to talk to her first about it: so I gave him what I thought was an evasive, half negative answer; but she says it was as good as an acceptance, and he would think me very capricious if I were to attempt to draw back—and indeed I was so confused and frightened at the moment, I can hardly tell what I said. And next time I saw him, he accosted me in all confidence as his affianced bride, and immediately began to settle

matters with mamma. I had not courage to contradict them then, and how can I do it now? I cannot; they would think me mad. Besides, mamma is so delighted with the idea of the match; she thinks she has managed so well for me; and I cannot bear to disappoint her. I do object sometimes, and tell her what I feel, but you don't know how she talks. Mr. Hattersley, you know, is the son of a rich banker, and as Esther and I have no fortunes, and Walter very little, our dear mamma is very anxious to see us all well married, that is, united to rich partners. It is not my idea of being well married, but she means it all for the best. She says when I am safe off her hands it will be such a relief to her mind; and she assures me it will be a good thing for the family as well as for me. Even Walter is pleased at the prospect, and when I confessed my reluctance to him, he said it was all childish nonsense. Do you think it nonsense, Helen? I should not care if I could see any prospect of being able to love and admire him, but I can't. There is nothing about him to hang one's esteem and affection upon; he is so diametrically opposite to what I imagined my husband should be. Do write to me, and say all you can to encourage me. Don't attempt to dissuade me, for my fate is fixed: preparations for the important event are already going on around me; and don't say a word against Mr. Hattersley, for I want to think well of him; and though I have spoken against him myself, it is for the last time: hereafter, I shall never permit myself to utter a word in his dispraise, however he may seem to deserve it; and whoever ventures to speak slightingly of the man I have promised to love, to honour, and obey, must expect my serious displeasure. After all, I think he is quite as good as Mr. Huntingdon, if not better; and yet you love him, and seem to be happy and contented; and perhaps I may manage as well. You must tell me, if you can, that Mr. Hattersley is better than he seems—that he is upright, honourable, and open-hearted—in fact, a perfect diamond in the rough. He may be all this, but I don't know him. I know only the exterior, and what, I trust, is the worst part of him.'

She concludes with 'Good-by, dear Helen. I am waiting anxiously for your advice—but mind you let it be all on the right side.'

Alas! poor Milicent, what encouragement can I give you? or what advice—except that it is better to make a bold stand now, though at the expense of disappointing and angering both mother and brother and lover, than to devote your whole life, hereafter, to misery and vain regret?

Saturday, 13th.—The week is over, and he is not come. All the sweet summer is passing away without one breath of pleasure to me or benefit to him. And I had all along been looking forward to this season with the fond, delusive hope that we should enjoy it so sweetly together; and that, with God's help and my exertions, it would be the means of elevating his mind, and refining his taste to a due appreciation of the salutary and pure delights of nature, and peace, and holy love. But now—at evening, when I see the round

red sun sink quietly down behind those woody hills, leaving them sleeping in a warm, red, golden haze, I only think another lovely day is lost to him and me; and at morning, when roused by the flutter and chirp of the sparrows, and the gleeful twitter of the swallows—all intent upon feeding their young, and full of life and joy in their own little frames—I open the window to inhale the balmy, soul-reviving air, and look out upon the lovely landscape, laughing in dew and sunshine—I too often shame that glorious scene with tears of thankless misery, because he cannot feel its freshening influence; and when I wander in the ancient woods, and meet the little wild flowers smiling in my path, or sit in the shadow of our noble ash-trees by the water-side, with their branches gently swaying in the light summer breeze that murmurs through their feathery foliage—my ears full of that low music mingled with the dreamy hum of insects, my eyes abstractedly gazing on the glassy surface of the little lake before me, with the trees that crowd about its bank, some gracefully bending to kiss its waters, some rearing their stately heads high above, but stretching their wide arms over its margin, all faithfully mirrored far, far down in its glassy depth—though sometimes the images are partially broken by the sport of aquatic insects, and sometimes, for a moment, the whole is shivered into trembling fragments by a transient breeze that sweeps the surface too roughly—still I have no pleasure; for the greater the happiness that nature sets before me, the more I lament that he is not here to taste it: the greater the bliss we might enjoy together, the more I feel our present wretchedness apart (yes, ours; he must be wretched, though he may not know it); and the more my senses are pleased, the more my heart is oppressed; for he keeps it with him confined amid the dust and smoke of London—perhaps shut up within the walls of his own abominable club.

But most of all, at night, when I enter my lonely chamber, and look out upon the summer moon, 'sweet regent of the sky,' floating above me in the 'black blue vault of heaven,' shedding a flood of silver radiance over park, and wood, and water, so pure, so peaceful, so divine—and think, Where is he now?—what is he doing at this moment? wholly unconscious of this heavenly scene—perhaps revelling with his boon companions, perhaps—God help me, it is too—too much!

23rd.—Thank heaven, he is come at last! But how altered! flushed and feverish, listless and languid, his beauty strangely diminished, his vigour and vivacity quite departed. I have not upbraided him by word or look; I have not even asked him what he has been doing. I have not the heart to do it, for I think he is ashamed of himself-he must be so indeed, and such inquiries could not fail to be painful to both. My forbearance pleases him—touches him even, I am inclined to think. He says he is glad to be home again, and God knows how glad I am to get him back, even as he is. He lies on the sofa, nearly all day long; and I play and sing to him for hours together. I write his letters for him, and get him everything he wants; and sometimes I read to him, and sometimes I talk, and sometimes only sit by him and soothe him with silent caresses. I know he does not

deserve it; and I fear I am spoiling him; but this once, I will forgive him, freely and entirely. I will shame him into virtue if I can, and I will never let him leave me again.

He is pleased with my attentions—it may be, grateful for them. He likes to have me near him: and though he is peevish and testy with his servants and his dogs, he is gentle and kind to me. What he would be, if I did not so watchfully anticipate his wants, and so carefully avoid, or immediately desist from doing anything that has a tendency to irritate or disturb him, with however little reason, I cannot tell. How intensely I wish he were worthy of all this care! Last night, as I sat beside him, with his head in my lap, passing my fingers through his beautiful curls, this thought made my eyes overflow with sorrowful tears—as it often does; but this time, a tear fell on his face and made him look up. He smiled, but not insultingly.

'Dear Helen!' he said—'why do you cry? you know that I love you' (and he pressed my hand to his feverish lips), 'and what more could you desire?'

'Only, Arthur, that you would love yourself as truly and as faithfully as you are loved by me.'

'That would be hard, indeed!' he replied, tenderly squeezing my hand.

August 24th.—Arthur is himself again, as lusty and reckless, as light of heart and head as ever, and as restless and hard to amuse as a spoilt child, and almost as full of mischief too, especially when wet weather keeps him within doors. I wish he had something to do, some useful trade, or profession, or employment—anything to occupy his head or his hands for a few hours a day, and give him something besides his own pleasure to think about. If he would play the country gentleman and attend to the farm—but that he knows nothing about, and won't give his mind to consider,—or if he would take up with some literary study, or learn to draw or to play—as he is so fond of music, I often try to persuade him to learn the piano, but he is far too idle for such an undertaking: he has no more idea of exerting himself to overcome obstacles than he has of restraining his natural appetites; and these two things are the ruin of him. I lay them both to the charge of his harsh yet careless father, and his madly indulgent mother.—If ever I am a mother I will zealously strive against this crime of over-indulgence. I can hardly give it a milder name when I think of the evils it brings.

Happily, it will soon be the shooting season, and then, if the weather permit, he will find occupation enough in the pursuit and destruction of the partridges and pheasants: we have no grouse, or he might have been similarly occupied at this moment, instead of lying under the acacia-tree pulling poor Dash's ears. But he says it is dull work shooting alone; he must have a friend or two to help him.

‘Let them be tolerably decent then, Arthur,’ said I. The word ‘friend’ in his mouth makes me shudder: I know it was some of his ‘friends’ that induced him to stay behind me in London, and kept him away so long: indeed, from what he has unguardedly told me, or hinted from time to time, I cannot doubt that he frequently showed them my letters, to let them see how fondly his wife watched over his interests, and how keenly she regretted his absence; and that they induced him to remain week after week, and to plunge into all manner of excesses, to avoid being laughed at for a wife-ridden fool, and, perhaps, to show how far he could venture to go without danger of shaking the fond creature’s devoted attachment. It is a hateful idea, but I cannot believe it is a false one.

‘Well,’ replied he, ‘I thought of Lord Lowborough for one; but there is no possibility of getting him without his better half, our mutual friend, Annabella; so we must ask them both. You’re not afraid of her, are you, Helen?’ he asked, with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes.

‘Of course not,’ I answered: ‘why should I? And who besides?’

‘Hargrave for one. He will be glad to come, though his own place is so near, for he has little enough land of his own to shoot over, and we can extend our depredations into it, if we like; and he is thoroughly respectable, you know, Helen—quite a lady’s man: and I think, Grimsby for another: he’s a decent, quiet fellow enough. You’ll not object to Grimsby?’

‘I hate him: but, however, if you wish it, I’ll try to endure his presence for a while.’

‘All a prejudice, Helen, a mere woman’s antipathy.’

‘No; I have solid grounds for my dislike. And is that all?’

‘Why, yes, I think so. Hattersley will be too busy billing and cooing, with his bride to have much time to spare for guns and dogs at present,’ he replied. And that reminds me, that I have had several letters from Milicent since her marriage, and that she either is, or pretends to be, quite reconciled to her lot. She professes to have discovered numberless virtues and perfections in her husband, some of which, I fear, less partial eyes would fail to distinguish, though they sought them carefully with tears; and now that she is accustomed to his loud voice, and abrupt, uncourteous manners, she affirms she finds no difficulty in loving him as a wife should do, and begs I will burn that letter wherein she spoke so unadvisedly against him. So that I trust she may yet be happy; but, if she is, it will be entirely the reward of her own goodness of heart; for had she chosen to consider herself the victim of fate, or of her mother’s worldly wisdom, she

might have been thoroughly miserable; and if, for duty's sake, she had not made every effort to love her husband, she would, doubtless, have hated him to the end of her days.

## CHAPTER XXVI

Sept. 23rd.—Our guests arrived about three weeks ago. Lord and Lady Lowborough have now been married above eight months; and I will do the lady the credit to say that her husband is quite an altered man; his looks, his spirits, and his temper, are all perceptibly changed for the better since I last saw him. But there is room for improvement still. He is not always cheerful, nor always contented, and she often complains of his ill-humour, which, however, of all persons, she ought to be the last to accuse him of, as he never displays it against her, except for such conduct as would provoke a saint. He adores her still, and would go to the world's end to please her. She knows her power, and she uses it too; but well knowing that to wheedle and coax is safer than to command, she judiciously tempers her despotism with flattery and blandishments enough to make him deem himself a favoured and a happy man.

But she has a way of tormenting him, in which I am a fellow-sufferer, or might be, if I chose to regard myself as such. This is by openly, but not too glaringly, coquetting with Mr. Huntingdon, who is quite willing to be her partner in the game; but I don't care for it, because, with him, I know there is nothing but personal vanity, and a mischievous desire to excite my jealousy, and, perhaps, to torment his friend; and she, no doubt, is actuated by much the same motives; only, there is more of malice and less of playfulness in her manoeuvres. It is obviously, therefore, my interest to disappoint them both, as far as I am concerned, by preserving a cheerful, undisturbed serenity throughout; and, accordingly, I endeavour to show the fullest confidence in my husband, and the greatest indifference to the arts of my attractive guest. I have never reproached the former but once, and that was for laughing at Lord Lowborough's depressed and anxious countenance one evening, when they had both been particularly provoking; and then, indeed, I said a good deal on the subject, and rebuked him sternly enough; but he only laughed, and said,—'You can feel for him, Helen, can't you?'

'I can feel for anyone that is unjustly treated,' I replied, 'and I can feel for those that injure them too.'

'Why, Helen, you are as jealous as he is!' cried he, laughing still more; and I found it impossible to convince him of his mistake. So, from that time, I have carefully refrained from any notice of the subject whatever, and left Lord Lowborough to take care of himself. He either has not the sense or the power to follow my example, though he does try to conceal his uneasiness as well as he can; but still, it will appear in his face, and his ill-humour will peep out at intervals, though not in the expression of open resentment—they never go far enough for that. But I confess I do feel jealous at times, most painfully, bitterly so; when she sings and plays to him, and he hangs over the instrument, and dwells upon her voice with no affected interest; for then I know he is really delighted,

and I have no power to awaken similar fervour. I can amuse and please him with my simple songs, but not delight him thus.

28th.—Yesterday, we all went to the Grove, Mr. Hargrave's much-neglected home. His mother frequently asks us over, that she may have the pleasure of her dear Walter's company; and this time she had invited us to a dinner-party, and got together as many of the country gentry as were within reach to meet us. The entertainment was very well got up; but I could not help thinking about the cost of it all the time. I don't like Mrs. Hargrave; she is a hard, pretentious, worldly-minded woman. She has money enough to live very comfortably, if she only knew how to use it judiciously, and had taught her son to do the same; but she is ever straining to keep up appearances, with that despicable pride that shuns the semblance of poverty as of a shameful crime. She grinds her dependents, pinches her servants, and deprives even her daughters and herself of the real comforts of life, because she will not consent to yield the palm in outward show to those who have three times her wealth; and, above all, because she is determined her cherished son shall be enabled to 'hold up his head with the highest gentlemen in the land.' This same son, I imagine, is a man of expensive habits, no reckless spendthrift and no abandoned sensualist, but one who likes to have 'everything handsome about him,' and to go to a certain length in youthful indulgences, not so much to gratify his own tastes as to maintain his reputation as a man of fashion in the world, and a respectable fellow among his own lawless companions; while he is too selfish to consider how many comforts might be obtained for his fond mother and sisters with the money he thus wastes upon himself: as long as they can contrive to make a respectable appearance once a year, when they come to town, he gives himself little concern about their private stintings and struggles at home. This is a harsh judgment to form of 'dear, noble-minded, generous-hearted Walter,' but I fear it is too just.

Mrs. Hargrave's anxiety to make good matches for her daughters is partly the cause, and partly the result, of these errors: by making a figure in the world, and showing them off to advantage, she hopes to obtain better chances for them; and by thus living beyond her legitimate means, and lavishing so much on their brother, she renders them portionless, and makes them burdens on her hands. Poor Milicent, I fear, has already fallen a sacrifice to the manoeuvrings of this mistaken mother, who congratulates herself on having so satisfactorily discharged her maternal duty, and hopes to do as well for Esther. But Esther is a child as yet, a little merry romp of fourteen: as honest-hearted, and as guileless and simple as her sister, but with a fearless spirit of her own, that I fancy her mother will find some difficulty in bending to her purposes.

## CHAPTER XXVII

October 9th.—It was on the night of the 4th, a little after tea, that Annabella had been singing and playing, with Arthur as usual at her side: she had ended her song, but still she sat at the instrument; and he stood leaning on the back of her chair, conversing in scarcely audible tones, with his face in very close proximity with hers. I looked at Lord Lowborough. He was at the other end of the room, talking with Messrs. Hargrave and Grimsby; but I saw him dart towards his lady and his host a quick, impatient glance, expressive of intense disquietude, at which Grimsby smiled. Determined to interrupt the tête-à-tête, I rose, and, selecting a piece of music from the music stand, stepped up to the piano, intending to ask the lady to play it; but I stood transfixed and speechless on seeing her seated there, listening, with what seemed an exultant smile on her flushed face to his soft murmurings, with her hand quietly surrendered to his clasp. The blood rushed first to my heart, and then to my head; for there was more than this: almost at the moment of my approach, he cast a hurried glance over his shoulder towards the other occupants of the room, and then ardently pressed the unresisting hand to his lips. On raising his eyes, he beheld me, and dropped them again, confounded and dismayed. She saw me too, and confronted me with a look of hard defiance. I laid the music on the piano, and retired. I felt ill; but I did not leave the room: happily, it was getting late, and could not be long before the company dispersed.

I went to the fire, and leant my head against the chimney-piece. In a minute or two, some one asked me if I felt unwell. I did not answer; indeed, at the time, I knew not what was said; but I mechanically looked up, and saw Mr. Hargrave standing beside me on the rug.

'Shall I get you a glass of wine?' said he.

'No, thank you,' I replied; and, turning from him, I looked round. Lady Lowborough was beside her husband, bending over him as he sat, with her hand on his shoulder, softly talking and smiling in his face; and Arthur was at the table, turning over a book of engravings. I seated myself in the nearest chair; and Mr. Hargrave, finding his services were not desired, judiciously withdrew. Shortly after, the company broke up, and, as the guests were retiring to their rooms, Arthur approached me, smiling with the utmost assurance.

'Are you very angry, Helen?' murmured he.

'This is no jest, Arthur,' said I, seriously, but as calmly as I could—'unless you think it a jest to lose my affection for ever.'

‘What! so bitter?’ he exclaimed, laughingly, clasping my hand between both his; but I snatched it away, in indignation—almost in disgust, for he was obviously affected with wine.

‘Then I must go down on my knees,’ said he; and kneeling before me, with clasped hands, uplifted in mock humiliation, he continued imploringly—‘Forgive me, Helen—dear Helen, forgive me, and I’ll never do it again!’ and, burying his face in his handkerchief, he affected to sob aloud.

Leaving him thus employed, I took my candle, and, slipping quietly from the room, hastened up-stairs as fast as I could. But he soon discovered that I had left him, and, rushing up after me, caught me in his arms, just as I had entered the chamber, and was about to shut the door in his face.

‘No, no, by heaven, you sha’n’t escape me so!’ he cried. Then, alarmed at my agitation, he begged me not to put myself in such a passion, telling me I was white in the face, and should kill myself if I did so.

‘Let me go, then,’ I murmured; and immediately he released me—and it was well he did, for I was really in a passion. I sank into the easy-chair and endeavoured to compose myself, for I wanted to speak to him calmly. He stood beside me, but did not venture to touch me or to speak for a few seconds; then, approaching a little nearer, he dropped on one knee—not in mock humility, but to bring himself nearer my level, and leaning his hand on the arm of the chair, he began in a low voice: ‘It is all nonsense, Helen—a jest, a mere nothing—not worth a thought. Will you never learn,’ he continued more boldly, ‘that you have nothing to fear from me? that I love you wholly and entirely?—or if,’ he added with a lurking smile, ‘I ever give a thought to another, you may well spare it, for those fancies are here and gone like a flash of lightning, while my love for you burns on steadily, and for ever, like the sun. You little exorbitant tyrant, will not that—?’

‘Be quiet a moment, will you, Arthur?’ said I, ‘and listen to me—and don’t think I’m in a jealous fury: I am perfectly calm. Feel my hand.’ And I gravely extended it towards him—but closed it upon his with an energy that seemed to disprove the assertion, and made him smile. ‘You needn’t smile, sir,’ said I, still tightening my grasp, and looking steadfastly on him till he almost quailed before me. ‘You may think it all very fine, Mr. Huntingdon, to amuse yourself with rousing my jealousy; but take care you don’t rouse my hate instead. And when you have once extinguished my love, you will find it no easy matter to kindle it again.’

‘Well, Helen, I won’t repeat the offence. But I meant nothing by it, I assure you. I had taken too much wine, and I was scarcely myself at the time.’

‘You often take too much; and that is another practice I detest.’ He looked up astonished at my warmth. ‘Yes,’ I continued; ‘I never mentioned it before, because I was ashamed to do so; but now I’ll tell you that it distresses me, and may disgust me, if you go on and suffer the habit to grow upon you, as it will if you don’t check it in time. But the whole system of your conduct to Lady Lowborough is not referable to wine; and this night you knew perfectly well what you were doing.’

‘Well, I’m sorry for it,’ replied he, with more of sulkiness than contrition: ‘what more would you have?’

‘You are sorry that I saw you, no doubt,’ I answered coldly.

‘If you had not seen me,’ he muttered, fixing his eyes on the carpet, ‘it would have done no harm.’

My heart felt ready to burst; but I resolutely swallowed back my emotion, and answered calmly,

‘You think not?’

‘No,’ replied he, boldly. ‘After all, what have I done? It’s nothing—except as you choose to make it a subject of accusation and distress.’

‘What would Lord Lowborough, your friend, think, if he knew all? or what would you yourself think, if he or any other had acted the same part to me, throughout, as you have to Annabella?’

‘I would blow his brains out.’

‘Well, then, Arthur, how can you call it nothing—an offence for which you would think yourself justified in blowing another man’s brains out? Is it nothing to trifle with your friend’s feelings and mine—to endeavour to steal a woman’s affections from her husband—what he values more than his gold, and therefore what it is more dishonest to take? Are the marriage vows a jest; and is it nothing to make it your sport to break them, and to tempt another to do the same? Can I love a man that does such things, and coolly maintains it is nothing?’

‘You are breaking your marriage vows yourself,’ said he, indignantly rising and pacing to and fro. ‘You promised to honour and obey me, and now you attempt to hector over me, and threaten and accuse me, and call me worse than a highwayman. If it were not for

your situation, Helen, I would not submit to it so tamely. I won't be dictated to by a woman, though she be my wife.'

'What will you do then? Will you go on till I hate you, and then accuse me of breaking my vows?'

He was silent a moment, and then replied: 'You never will hate me.' Returning and resuming his former position at my feet, he repeated more vehemently—'You cannot hate me as long as I love you.'

'But how can I believe that you love me, if you continue to act in this way? Just imagine yourself in my place: would you think I loved you, if I did so? Would you believe my protestations, and honour and trust me under such circumstances?'

'The cases are different,' he replied. 'It is a woman's nature to be constant—to love one and one only, blindly, tenderly, and for ever—bless them, dear creatures! and you above them all; but you must have some commiseration for us, Helen; you must give us a little more licence, for, as Shakespeare has it—

However we do praise ourselves,
Our fancies are more giddy and unfirm,
More longing, wavering, sooner lost and won
Than women's are.'

'Do you mean by that, that your fancies are lost to me, and won by Lady Lowborough?'

'No! heaven is my witness that I think her mere dust and ashes in comparison with you, and shall continue to think so, unless you drive me from you by too much severity. She is a daughter of earth; you are an angel of heaven; only be not too austere in your divinity, and remember that I am a poor, fallible mortal. Come now, Helen; won't you forgive me?' he said, gently taking my hand, and looking up with an innocent smile.

'If I do, you will repeat the offence.'

'I swear by—'

'Don't swear; I'll believe your word as well as your oath. I wish I could have confidence in either.'

'Try me, then, Helen: only trust and pardon me this once, and you shall see! Come, I am in hell's torments till you speak the word.'

I did not speak it, but I put my hand on his shoulder and kissed his forehead, and then burst into tears. He embraced me tenderly; and we have been good friends ever since. He has been decently temperate at table, and well-conducted towards Lady Lowborough. The first day he held himself aloof from her, as far as he could without any flagrant breach of hospitality: since that he has been friendly and civil, but nothing more—in my presence, at least, nor, I think, at any other time; for she seems haughty and displeased, and Lord Lowborough is manifestly more cheerful, and more cordial towards his host than before. But I shall be glad when they are gone, for I have so little love for Annabella that it is quite a task to be civil to her, and as she is the only woman here besides myself, we are necessarily thrown so much together. Next time Mrs. Hargrave calls I shall hail her advent as quite a relief. I have a good mind to ask Arthur's leave to invite the old lady to stay with us till our guests depart. I think I will. She will take it as a kind attention, and, though I have little relish for her society, she will be truly welcome as a third to stand between Lady Lowborough and me.

The first time the latter and I were alone together, after that unhappy evening, was an hour or two after breakfast on the following day, when the gentlemen were gone out, after the usual time spent in the writing of letters, the reading of newspapers, and desultory conversation. We sat silent for two or three minutes. She was busy with her work, and I was running over the columns of a paper from which I had extracted all the pith some twenty minutes before. It was a moment of painful embarrassment to me, and I thought it must be infinitely more so to her; but it seems I was mistaken. She was the first to speak; and, smiling with the coolest assurance, she began,—

'Your husband was merry last night, Helen: is he often so?'

My blood boiled in my face; but it was better she should seem to attribute his conduct to this than to anything else.

'No,' replied I, 'and never will be so again, I trust.'

'You gave him a curtain lecture, did you?'

'No! but I told him I disliked such conduct, and he promised me not to repeat it.'

'I thought he looked rather subdued this morning,' she continued; 'and you, Helen? you've been weeping, I see—that's our grand resource, you know. But doesn't it make your eyes smart? and do you always find it to answer?'

'I never cry for effect; nor can I conceive how any one can.'

‘Well, I don’t know: I never had occasion to try it; but I think if Lowborough were to commit such improprieties, I’d make him cry. I don’t wonder at your being angry, for I’m sure I’d give my husband a lesson he would not soon forget for a lighter offence than that. But then he never will do anything of the kind; for I keep him in too good order for that.’

‘Are you sure you don’t arrogate too much of the credit to yourself. Lord Lowborough was quite as remarkable for his abstemiousness for some time before you married him, as he is now, I have heard.’

‘Oh, about the wine you mean—yes, he’s safe enough for that. And as to looking askance to another woman, he’s safe enough for that too, while I live, for he worships the very ground I tread on.’

‘Indeed! and are you sure you deserve it?’

‘Why, as to that, I can’t say: you know we’re all fallible creatures, Helen; we none of us deserve to be worshipped. But are you sure your darling Huntingdon deserves all the love you give to him?’

I knew not what to answer to this. I was burning with anger; but I suppressed all outward manifestations of it, and only bit my lip and pretended to arrange my work.

‘At any rate,’ resumed she, pursuing her advantage, ‘you can console yourself with the assurance that you are worthy of all the love he gives to you.’

‘You flatter me,’ said I; ‘but, at least, I can try to be worthy of it.’ And then I turned the conversation.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

December 25th.—Last Christmas I was a bride, with a heart overflowing with present bliss, and full of ardent hopes for the future, though not unmingled with foreboding fears. Now I am a wife: my bliss is sobered, but not destroyed; my hopes diminished, but not departed; my fears increased, but not yet thoroughly confirmed; and, thank heaven, I am a mother too. God has sent me a soul to educate for heaven, and give me a new and calmer bliss, and stronger hopes to comfort me.

Dec. 25th, 1823.—Another year is gone. My little Arthur lives and thrives. He is healthy, but not robust, full of gentle playfulness and vivacity, already affectionate, and susceptible of passions and emotions it will be long ere he can find words to express. He has won his father's heart at last; and now my constant terror is, lest he should be ruined by that father's thoughtless indulgence. But I must beware of my own weakness too, for I never knew till now how strong are a parent's temptations to spoil an only child.

I have need of consolation in my son, for (to this silent paper I may confess it) I have but little in my husband. I love him still; and he loves me, in his own way—but oh, how different from the love I could have given, and once had hoped to receive! How little real sympathy there exists between us; how many of my thoughts and feelings are gloomily cloistered within my own mind; how much of my higher and better self is indeed unmarried—doomed either to harden and sour in the sunless shade of solitude, or to quite degenerate and fall away for lack of nutriment in this unwholesome soil! But, I repeat, I have no right to complain; only let me state the truth—some of the truth, at least,—and see hereafter if any darker truths will blot these pages. We have now been full two years united; the 'romance' of our attachment must be worn away. Surely I have now got down to the lowest gradation in Arthur's affection, and discovered all the evils of his nature: if there be any further change, it must be for the better, as we become still more accustomed to each other; surely we shall find no lower depth than this. And, if so, I can bear it well—as well, at least, as I have borne it hitherto.

Arthur is not what is commonly called a bad man: he has many good qualities; but he is a man without self-restraint or lofty aspirations, a lover of pleasure, given up to animal enjoyments: he is not a bad husband, but his notions of matrimonial duties and comforts are not my notions. Judging from appearances, his idea of a wife is a thing to love one devotedly, and to stay at home to wait upon her husband, and amuse him and minister to his comfort in every possible way, while he chooses to stay with her; and, when he is absent, to attend to his interests, domestic or otherwise, and patiently wait his return, no matter how he may be occupied in the meantime.

Early in spring he announced his intention of going to London: his affairs there demanded his attendance, he said, and he could refuse it no longer. He expressed his regret at having to leave me, but hoped I would amuse myself with the baby till he returned.

'But why leave me?' I said. 'I can go with you: I can be ready at any time.'

'You would not take that child to town?'

'Yes; why not?'

The thing was absurd: the air of the town would be certain to disagree with him, and with me as a nurse; the late hours and London habits would not suit me under such circumstances; and altogether he assured me that it would be excessively troublesome, injurious, and unsafe. I over-ruled his objections as well as I could, for I trembled at the thoughts of his going alone, and would sacrifice almost anything for myself, much even for my child, to prevent it; but at length he told me, plainly, and somewhat testily, that he could not do with me: he was worn out with the baby's restless nights, and must have some repose. I proposed separate apartments; but it would not do.

'The truth is, Arthur,' I said at last, 'you are weary of my company, and determined not to have me with you. You might as well have said so at once.'

He denied it; but I immediately left the room, and flew to the nursery, to hide my feelings, if I could not soothe them, there.

I was too much hurt to express any further dissatisfaction with his plans, or at all to refer to the subject again, except for the necessary arrangements concerning his departure and the conduct of affairs during his absence, till the day before he went, when I earnestly exhorted him to take care of himself and keep out of the way of temptation. He laughed at my anxiety, but assured me there was no cause for it, and promised to attend to my advice.

'I suppose it is no use asking you to fix a day for your return?' said I.

'Why, no; I hardly can, under the circumstances; but be assured, love, I shall not be long away.'

'I don't wish to keep you a prisoner at home,' I replied; 'I should not grumble at your staying whole months away—if you can be happy so long without me—provided I knew

you were safe; but I don't like the idea of your being there among your friends, as you call them.'

'Pooh, pooh, you silly girl!  Do you think I can't take care of myself?'

'You didn't last time.  But this time, Arthur,' I added, earnestly, 'show me that you can, and teach me that I need not fear to trust you!'

He promised fair, but in such a manner as we seek to soothe a child.  And did he keep his promise?  No; and henceforth I can never trust his word.  Bitter, bitter confession! Tears blind me while I write.  It was early in March that he went, and he did not return till July.  This time he did not trouble himself to make excuses as before, and his letters were less frequent, and shorter and less affectionate, especially after the first few weeks: they came slower and slower, and more terse and careless every time.  But still, when I omitted writing, he complained of my neglect.  When I wrote sternly and coldly, as I confess I frequently did at the last, he blamed my harshness, and said it was enough to scare him from his home: when I tried mild persuasion, he was a little more gentle in his replies, and promised to return; but I had learnt, at last, to disregard his promises.

## CHAPTER XXIX

Those were four miserable months, alternating between intense anxiety, despair, and indignation, pity for him and pity for myself. And yet, through all, I was not wholly comfortless: I had my darling, sinless, inoffensive little one to console me; but even this consolation was embittered by the constantly-recurring thought, 'How shall I teach him hereafter to respect his father, and yet to avoid his example?'

But I remembered that I had brought all these afflictions, in a manner wilfully, upon myself; and I determined to bear them without a murmur. At the same time I resolved not to give myself up to misery for the transgressions of another, and endeavoured to divert myself as much as I could; and besides the companionship of my child, and my dear, faithful Rachel, who evidently guessed my sorrows and felt for them, though she was too discreet to allude to them, I had my books and pencil, my domestic affairs, and the welfare and comfort of Arthur's poor tenants and labourers to attend to: and I sometimes sought and obtained amusement in the company of my young friend Esther Hargrave: occasionally I rode over to see her, and once or twice I had her to spend the day with me at the Manor. Mrs. Hargrave did not visit London that season: having no daughter to marry, she thought it as well to stay at home and economise; and, for a wonder, Walter came down to join her in the beginning of June, and stayed till near the close of August.

The first time I saw him was on a sweet, warm evening, when I was sauntering in the park with little Arthur and Rachel, who is head-nurse and lady's-maid in one—for, with my secluded life and tolerably active habits, I require but little attendance, and as she had nursed me and coveted to nurse my child, and was moreover so very trustworthy, I preferred committing the important charge to her, with a young nursery-maid under her directions, to engaging any one else: besides, it saves money; and since I have made acquaintance with Arthur's affairs, I have learnt to regard that as no trifling recommendation; for, by my own desire, nearly the whole of the income of my fortune is devoted, for years to come, to the paying off of his debts, and the money he contrives to squander away in London is incomprehensible. But to return to Mr. Hargrave. I was standing with Rachel beside the water, amusing the laughing baby in her arms with a twig of willow laden with golden catkins, when, greatly to my surprise, he entered the park, mounted on his costly black hunter, and crossed over the grass to meet me. He saluted me with a very fine compliment, delicately worded, and modestly delivered withal, which he had doubtless concocted as he rode along. He told me he had brought a message from his mother, who, as he was riding that way, had desired him to call at the Manor and beg the pleasure of my company to a friendly family dinner to-morrow.

‘There is no one to meet but ourselves,’ said he; ‘but Esther is very anxious to see you; and my mother fears you will feel solitary in this great house so much alone, and wishes she could persuade you to give her the pleasure of your company more frequently, and make yourself at home in our more humble dwelling, till Mr. Huntingdon’s return shall render this a little more conducive to your comfort.’

‘She is very kind,’ I answered, ‘but I am not alone, you see;—and those whose time is fully occupied seldom complain of solitude.’

‘Will you not come to-morrow, then? She will be sadly disappointed if you refuse.’

I did not relish being thus compassionated for my loneliness; but, however, I promised to come.

‘What a sweet evening this is!’ observed he, looking round upon the sunny park, with its imposing swell and slope, its placid water, and majestic clumps of trees. ‘And what a paradise you live in!’

‘It is a lovely evening,’ answered I; and I sighed to think how little I had felt its loveliness, and how little of a paradise sweet Grassdale was to me—how still less to the voluntary exile from its scenes. Whether Mr. Hargrave divined my thoughts, I cannot tell, but, with a half-hesitating, sympathising seriousness of tone and manner, he asked if I had lately heard from Mr. Huntingdon.

‘Not lately,’ I replied.

‘I thought not,’ he muttered, as if to himself, looking thoughtfully on the ground.

‘Are you not lately returned from London?’ I asked.

‘Only yesterday.’

‘And did you see him there?’

‘Yes—I saw him.’

‘Was he well?’

‘Yes—that is,’ said he, with increasing hesitation and an appearance of suppressed indignation, ‘he was as well as—as he deserved to be, but under circumstances I should

have deemed incredible for a man so favoured as he is.' He here looked up and pointed the sentence with a serious bow to me. I suppose my face was crimson.

'Pardon me, Mrs. Huntingdon,' he continued, 'but I cannot suppress my indignation when I behold such infatuated blindness and perversion of taste;—but, perhaps, you are not aware—' He paused.

'I am aware of nothing, sir—except that he delays his coming longer than I expected; and if, at present, he prefers the society of his friends to that of his wife, and the dissipations of the town to the quiet of country life, I suppose I have those friends to thank for it. Their tastes and occupations are similar to his, and I don't see why his conduct should awaken either their indignation or surprise.'

'You wrong me cruelly,' answered he. 'I have shared but little of Mr. Huntingdon's society for the last few weeks; and as for his tastes and occupations, they are quite beyond me—lonely wanderer as I am. Where I have but sipped and tasted, he drains the cup to the dregs; and if ever for a moment I have sought to drown the voice of reflection in madness and folly, or if I have wasted too much of my time and talents among reckless and dissipated companions, God knows I would gladly renounce them entirely and for ever, if I had but half the blessings that man so thanklessly casts behind his back—but half the inducements to virtue and domestic, orderly habits that he despises—but such a home, and such a partner to share it! It is infamous!' he muttered, between his teeth. 'And don't think, Mrs. Huntingdon,' he added aloud, 'that I could be guilty of inciting him to persevere in his present pursuits: on the contrary, I have remonstrated with him again and again; I have frequently expressed my surprise at his conduct, and reminded him of his duties and his privileges—but to no purpose; he only—'

'Enough, Mr. Hargrave; you ought to be aware that whatever my husband's faults may be, it can only aggravate the evil for me to hear them from a stranger's lips.'

'Am I then a stranger?' said he in a sorrowful tone. 'I am your nearest neighbour, your son's godfather, and your husband's friend; may I not be yours also?'

'Intimate acquaintance must precede real friendship; I know but little of you, Mr. Hargrave, except from report.'

'Have you then forgotten the six or seven weeks I spent under your roof last autumn? I have not forgotten them. And I know enough of you, Mrs. Huntingdon, to think that your husband is the most enviable man in the world, and I should be the next if you would deem me worthy of your friendship.'

‘If you knew more of me, you would not think it, or if you did you would not say it, and expect me to be flattered by the compliment.’

I stepped backward as I spoke. He saw that I wished the conversation to end; and immediately taking the hint, he gravely bowed, wished me good-evening, and turned his horse towards the road. He appeared grieved and hurt at my unkind reception of his sympathising overtures. I was not sure that I had done right in speaking so harshly to him; but, at the time, I had felt irritated—almost insulted by his conduct; it seemed as if he was presuming upon the absence and neglect of my husband, and insinuating even more than the truth against him.

Rachel had moved on, during our conversation, to some yards’ distance. He rode up to her, and asked to see the child. He took it carefully into his arms, looked upon it with an almost paternal smile, and I heard him say, as I approached,—

‘And this, too, he has forsaken!’

He then tenderly kissed it, and restored it to the gratified nurse.

‘Are you fond of children, Mr. Hargrave?’ said I, a little softened towards him.

‘Not in general,’ he replied, ‘but that is such a sweet child, and so like its mother,’ he added in a lower tone.

‘You are mistaken there; it is its father it resembles.’

‘Am I not right, nurse?’ said he, appealing to Rachel.

‘I think, sir, there’s a bit of both,’ she replied.

He departed; and Rachel pronounced him a very nice gentleman. I had still my doubts on the subject.

In the course of the following six weeks I met him several times, but always, save once, in company with his mother, or his sister, or both. When I called on them, he always happened to be at home, and, when they called on me, it was always he that drove them over in the phaeton. His mother, evidently, was quite delighted with his dutiful attentions and newly-acquired domestic habits.

The time that I met him alone was on a bright, but not oppressively hot day, in the beginning of July: I had taken little Arthur into the wood that skirts the park, and there

seated him on the moss-cushioned roots of an old oak; and, having gathered a handful of bluebells and wild-roses, I was kneeling before him, and presenting them, one by one, to the grasp of his tiny fingers; enjoying the heavenly beauty of the flowers, through the medium of his smiling eyes: forgetting, for the moment, all my cares, laughing at his gleeful laughter, and delighting myself with his delight,—when a shadow suddenly eclipsed the little space of sunshine on the grass before us; and looking up, I beheld Walter Hargrave standing and gazing upon us.

'Excuse me, Mrs. Huntingdon,' said he, 'but I was spell-bound; I had neither the power to come forward and interrupt you, nor to withdraw from the contemplation of such a scene. How vigorous my little godson grows! and how merry he is this morning!' He approached the child, and stooped to take his hand; but, on seeing that his caresses were likely to produce tears and lamentations, instead of a reciprocation of friendly demonstrations, he prudently drew back.

'What a pleasure and comfort that little creature must be to you, Mrs. Huntingdon!' he observed, with a touch of sadness in his intonation, as he admiringly contemplated the infant.

'It is,' replied I; and then I asked after his mother and sister.

He politely answered my inquiries, and then returned again to the subject I wished to avoid; though with a degree of timidity that witnessed his fear to offend.

'You have not heard from Huntingdon lately?' he said.

'Not this week,' I replied. Not these three weeks, I might have said.

'I had a letter from him this morning. I wish it were such a one as I could show to his lady.' He half drew from his waistcoat-pocket a letter with Arthur's still beloved hand on the address, scowled at it, and put it back again, adding—'But he tells me he is about to return next week.'

'He tells me so every time he writes.'

'Indeed! well, it is like him. But to me he always avowed it his intention to stay till the present month.'

It struck me like a blow, this proof of premeditated transgression and systematic disregard of truth.

‘It is only of a piece with the rest of his conduct,’ observed Mr. Hargrave, thoughtfully regarding me, and reading, I suppose, my feelings in my face.

‘Then he is really coming next week?’ said I, after a pause.

‘You may rely upon it, if the assurance can give you any pleasure. And is it possible, Mrs. Huntingdon, that you can rejoice at his return?’ he exclaimed, attentively perusing my features again.

‘Of course, Mr. Hargrave; is he not my husband?’

‘Oh, Huntingdon; you know not what you slight!’ he passionately murmured.

I took up my baby, and, wishing him good-morning, departed, to indulge my thoughts unscrutinized, within the sanctum of my home.

And was I glad? Yes, delighted; though I was angered by Arthur’s conduct, and though I felt that he had wronged me, and was determined he should feel it too.

## CHAPTER XXX

On the following morning I received a few lines from him myself, confirming Hargrave's intimations respecting his approaching return. And he did come next week, but in a condition of body and mind even worse than before. I did not, however, intend to pass over his derelictions this time without a remark; I found it would not do. But the first day he was weary with his journey, and I was glad to get him back: I would not upbraid him then; I would wait till to-morrow. Next morning he was weary still: I would wait a little longer. But at dinner, when, after breakfasting at twelve o'clock on a bottle of soda-water and a cup of strong coffee, and lunching at two on another bottle of soda-water mingled with brandy, he was finding fault with everything on the table, and declaring we must change our cook, I thought the time was come.

'It is the same cook as we had before you went, Arthur,' said I. 'You were generally pretty well satisfied with her then.'

'You must have been letting her get into slovenly habits, then, while I was away. It is enough to poison one, eating such a disgusting mess!' And he pettishly pushed away his plate, and leant back despairingly in his chair.

'I think it is you that are changed, not she,' said I, but with the utmost gentleness, for I did not wish to irritate him.

'It may be so,' he replied carelessly, as he seized a tumbler of wine and water, adding, when he had tossed it off, 'for I have an infernal fire in my veins, that all the waters of the ocean cannot quench!'

'What kindled it?' I was about to ask, but at that moment the butler entered and began to take away the things.

'Be quick, Benson; do have done with that infernal clatter!' cried his master. 'And don't bring the cheese, unless you want to make me sick outright!'

Benson, in some surprise, removed the cheese, and did his best to effect a quiet and speedy clearance of the rest; but, unfortunately, there was a rumple in the carpet, caused by the hasty pushing back of his master's chair, at which he tripped and stumbled, causing a rather alarming concussion with the trayful of crockery in his hands, but no positive damage, save the fall and breaking of a sauce tureen; but, to my unspeakable shame and dismay, Arthur turned furiously around upon him, and swore at him with savage coarseness. The poor man turned pale, and visibly trembled as he stooped to pick up the fragments.

‘He couldn’t help it, Arthur,’ said I; ‘the carpet caught his foot, and there’s no great harm done. Never mind the pieces now, Benson; you can clear them away afterwards.’

Glad to be released, Benson expeditiously set out the dessert and withdrew.

‘What could you mean, Helen, by taking the servant’s part against me,’ said Arthur, as soon as the door was closed, ‘when you knew I was distracted?’

‘I did not know you were distracted, Arthur: and the poor man was quite frightened and hurt at your sudden explosion.’

‘Poor man, indeed! and do you think I could stop to consider the feelings of an insensate brute like that, when my own nerves were racked and torn to pieces by his confounded blunders?’

‘I never heard you complain of your nerves before.’

‘And why shouldn’t I have nerves as well as you?’

‘Oh, I don’t dispute your claim to their possession, but I never complain of mine.’

‘No, how should you, when you never do anything to try them?’

‘Then why do you try yours, Arthur?’

‘Do you think I have nothing to do but to stay at home and take care of myself like a woman?’

‘Is it impossible, then, to take care of yourself like a man when you go abroad? You told me that you could, and would too; and you promised—’

‘Come, come, Helen, don’t begin with that nonsense now; I can’t bear it.’

‘Can’t bear what?—to be reminded of the promises you have broken?’

‘Helen, you are cruel. If you knew how my heart throbbed, and how every nerve thrilled through me while you spoke, you would spare me. You can pity a dolt of a servant for breaking a dish; but you have no compassion for me when my head is split in two and all on fire with this consuming fever.’

He leant his head on his hand, and sighed. I went to him and put my hand on his forehead. It was burning indeed.

'Then come with me into the drawing-room, Arthur; and don't take any more wine: you have taken several glasses since dinner, and eaten next to nothing all the day. How can that make you better?'

With some coaxing and persuasion, I got him to leave the table. When the baby was brought I tried to amuse him with that; but poor little Arthur was cutting his teeth, and his father could not bear his complaints: sentence of immediate banishment was passed upon him on the first indication of fretfulness; and because, in the course of the evening, I went to share his exile for a little while, I was reproached, on my return, for preferring my child to my husband. I found the latter reclining on the sofa just as I had left him.

'Well!' exclaimed the injured man, in a tone of pseudo-resignation. 'I thought I wouldn't send for you; I thought I'd just see how long it would please you to leave me alone.'

'I have not been very long, have I, Arthur? I have not been an hour, I'm sure.'

'Oh, of course, an hour is nothing to you, so pleasantly employed; but to me—'

'It has not been pleasantly employed,' interrupted I. 'I have been nursing our poor little baby, who is very far from well, and I could not leave him till I got him to sleep.'

'Oh, to be sure, you're overflowing with kindness and pity for everything but me.'

'And why should I pity you? What is the matter with you?'

'Well! that passes everything! After all the wear and tear that I've had, when I come home sick and weary, longing for comfort, and expecting to find attention and kindness, at least from my wife, she calmly asks what is the matter with me!'

'There is nothing the matter with you,' returned I, 'except what you have wilfully brought upon yourself, against my earnest exhortation and entreaty.'

'Now, Helen,' said he emphatically, half rising from his recumbent posture, 'if you bother me with another word, I'll ring the bell and order six bottles of wine, and, by heaven, I'll drink them dry before I stir from this place!'

I said no more, but sat down before the table and drew a book towards me.

‘Do let me have quietness at least!’ continued he, ‘if you deny me every other comfort;’ and sinking back into his former position, with an impatient expiration between a sigh and a groan, he languidly closed his eyes, as if to sleep.

What the book was that lay open on the table before me, I cannot tell, for I never looked at it. With an elbow on each side of it, and my hands clasped before my eyes, I delivered myself up to silent weeping. But Arthur was not asleep: at the first slight sob, he raised his head and looked round, impatiently exclaiming, ‘What are you crying for, Helen? What the deuce is the matter now?’

‘I’m crying for you, Arthur,’ I replied, speedily drying my tears; and starting up, I threw myself on my knees before him, and clasping his nerveless hand between my own, continued: ‘Don’t you know that you are a part of myself? And do you think you can injure and degrade yourself, and I not feel it?’

‘Degrade myself, Helen?’

‘Yes, degrade! What have you been doing all this time?’

‘You’d better not ask,’ said he, with a faint smile.

‘And you had better not tell; but you cannot deny that you have degraded yourself miserably. You have shamefully wronged yourself, body and soul, and me too; and I can’t endure it quietly, and I won’t!’

‘Well, don’t squeeze my hand so frantically, and don’t agitate me so, for heaven’s sake! Oh, Hattersley! you were right: this woman will be the death of me, with her keen feelings and her interesting force of character. There, there, do spare me a little.’

‘Arthur, you must repent!’ cried I, in a frenzy of desperation, throwing my arms around him and burying my face in his bosom. ‘You shall say you are sorry for what you have done!’

‘Well, well, I am.’

‘You are not! you’ll do it again.’

‘I shall never live to do it again if you treat me so savagely,’ replied he, pushing me from him. ‘You’ve nearly squeezed the breath out of my body.’ He pressed his hand to his heart, and looked really agitated and ill.

‘Now get me a glass of wine,’ said he, ‘to remedy what you’ve done, you she tiger! I’m almost ready to faint.’

I flew to get the required remedy. It seemed to revive him considerably.

‘What a shame it is,’ said I, as I took the empty glass from his hand, ‘for a strong young man like you to reduce yourself to such a state!’

‘If you knew all, my girl, you’d say rather, “What a wonder it is you can bear it so well as you do!” I’ve lived more in these four months, Helen, than you have in the whole course of your existence, or will to the end of your days, if they numbered a hundred years; so I must expect to pay for it in some shape.’

‘You will have to pay a higher price than you anticipate, if you don’t take care: there will be the total loss of your own health, and of my affection too, if that is of any value to you.’

‘What! you’re at that game of threatening me with the loss of your affection again, are you? I think it couldn’t have been very genuine stuff to begin with, if it’s so easily demolished. If you don’t mind, my pretty tyrant, you’ll make me regret my choice in good earnest, and envy my friend Hattersley his meek little wife: she’s quite a pattern to her sex, Helen. He had her with him in London all the season, and she was no trouble at all. He might amuse himself just as he pleased, in regular bachelor style, and she never complained of neglect; he might come home at any hour of the night or morning, or not come home at all; be sullen, sober, or glorious drunk; and play the fool or the madman to his own heart’s desire, without any fear or botheration. She never gives him a word of reproach or complaint, do what he will. He says there’s not such a jewel in all England, and swears he wouldn’t take a kingdom for her.’

‘But he makes her life a curse to her.’

‘Not he! She has no will but his, and is always contented and happy as long as he is enjoying himself.’

‘In that case she is as great a fool as he is; but it is not so. I have several letters from her, expressing the greatest anxiety about his proceedings, and complaining that you incite him to commit those extravagances—one especially, in which she implores me to use my influence with you to get you away from London, and affirms that her husband never did such things before you came, and would certainly discontinue them as soon as you departed and left him to the guidance of his own good sense.’

‘The detestable little traitor! Give me the letter, and he shall see it as sure as I’m a living man.’

‘No, he shall not see it without her consent; but if he did, there is nothing there to anger him, nor in any of the others. She never speaks a word against him: it is only anxiety for him that she expresses. She only alludes to his conduct in the most delicate terms, and makes every excuse for him that she can possibly think of; and as for her own misery, I rather feel it than see it expressed in her letters.’

‘But she abuses me; and no doubt you helped her.’

‘No; I told her she over-rated my influence with you, that I would gladly draw you away from the temptations of the town if I could, but had little hope of success, and that I thought she was wrong in supposing that you enticed Mr. Hattersley or any one else into error. I had myself held the contrary opinion at one time, but I now believed that you mutually corrupted each other; and, perhaps, if she used a little gentle but serious remonstrance with her husband, it might be of some service; as, though he was more rough-hewn than mine, I believed he was of a less impenetrable material.’

‘And so that is the way you go on—heartening each other up to mutiny, and abusing each other’s partners, and throwing out implications against your own, to the mutual gratification of both!’

‘According to your own account,’ said I, ‘my evil counsel has had but little effect upon her. And as to abuse and aspersions, we are both of us far too deeply ashamed of the errors and vices of our other halves, to make them the common subject of our correspondence. Friends as we are, we would willingly keep your failings to ourselves—even from ourselves if we could, unless by knowing them we could deliver you from them.’

‘Well, well! don’t worry me about them: you’ll never effect any good by that. Have patience with me, and bear with my languor and crossness a little while, till I get this cursed low fever out of my veins, and then you’ll find me cheerful and kind as ever. Why can’t you be gentle and good, as you were last time?—I’m sure I was very grateful for it.’

‘And what good did your gratitude do? I deluded myself with the idea that you were ashamed of your transgressions, and hoped you would never repeat them again; but now you have left me nothing to hope!’

‘My case is quite desperate, is it? A very blessed consideration, if it will only secure me from the pain and worry of my dear anxious wife’s efforts to convert me, and her from

the toil and trouble of such exertions, and her sweet face and silver accents from the ruinous effects of the same. A burst of passion is a fine rousing thing upon occasion, Helen, and a flood of tears is marvellously affecting, but, when indulged too often, they are both deuced plaguy things for spoiling one's beauty and tiring out one's friends.'

Thenceforth I restrained my tears and passions as much as I could. I spared him my exhortations and fruitless efforts at conversion too, for I saw it was all in vain: God might awaken that heart, supine and stupefied with self-indulgence, and remove the film of sensual darkness from his eyes, but I could not. His injustice and ill-humour towards his inferiors, who could not defend themselves, I still resented and withstood; but when I alone was their object, as was frequently the case, I endured it with calm forbearance, except at times, when my temper, worn out by repeated annoyances, or stung to distraction by some new instance of irrationality, gave way in spite of myself, and exposed me to the imputations of fierceness, cruelty, and impatience. I attended carefully to his wants and amusements, but not, I own, with the same devoted fondness as before, because I could not feel it; besides, I had now another claimant on my time and care—my ailing infant, for whose sake I frequently braved and suffered the reproaches and complaints of his unreasonably exacting father.

But Arthur is not naturally a peevish or irritable man; so far from it, that there was something almost ludicrous in the incongruity of this adventitious fretfulness and nervous irritability, rather calculated to excite laughter than anger, if it were not for the intensely painful considerations attendant upon those symptoms of a disordered frame, and his temper gradually improved as his bodily health was restored, which was much sooner than would have been the case but for my strenuous exertions; for there was still one thing about him that I did not give up in despair, and one effort for his preservation that I would not remit. His appetite for the stimulus of wine had increased upon him, as I had too well foreseen. It was now something more to him than an accessory to social enjoyment: it was an important source of enjoyment in itself. In this time of weakness and depression he would have made it his medicine and support, his comforter, his recreation, and his friend, and thereby sunk deeper and deeper, and bound himself down for ever in the bathos whereinto he had fallen. But I determined this should never be, as long as I had any influence left; and though I could not prevent him from taking more than was good for him, still, by incessant perseverance, by kindness, and firmness, and vigilance, by coaxing, and daring, and determination, I succeeded in preserving him from absolute bondage to that detestable propensity, so insidious in its advances, so inexorable in its tyranny, so disastrous in its effects.

And here I must not forget that I am not a little indebted to his friend Mr. Hargrave. About that time he frequently called at Grassdale, and often dined with us, on which occasions I fear Arthur would willingly have cast prudence and decorum to the winds,

and made ‘a night of it,’ as often as his friend would have consented to join him in that exalted pastime; and if the latter had chosen to comply, he might, in a night or two, have ruined the labour of weeks, and overthrown with a touch the frail bulwark it had cost me such trouble and toil to construct. I was so fearful of this at first, that I humbled myself to intimate to him, in private, my apprehensions of Arthur’s proneness to these excesses, and to express a hope that he would not encourage it. He was pleased with this mark of confidence, and certainly did not betray it. On that and every subsequent occasion his presence served rather as a check upon his host, than an incitement to further acts of intemperance; and he always succeeded in bringing him from the dining-room in good time, and in tolerably good condition; for if Arthur disregarded such intimations as ‘Well, I must not detain you from your lady,’ or ‘We must not forget that Mrs. Huntingdon is alone,’ he would insist upon leaving the table himself, to join me, and his host, however unwillingly, was obliged to follow.

Hence I learned to welcome Mr. Hargrave as a real friend to the family, a harmless companion for Arthur, to cheer his spirits and preserve him from the tedium of absolute idleness and a total isolation from all society but mine, and a useful ally to me. I could not but feel grateful to him under such circumstances; and I did not scruple to acknowledge my obligation on the first convenient opportunity; yet, as I did so, my heart whispered all was not right, and brought a glow to my face, which he heightened by his steady, serious gaze, while, by his manner of receiving those acknowledgments, he more than doubled my misgivings. His high delight at being able to serve me was chastened by sympathy for me and commiseration for himself—about, I know not what, for I would not stay to inquire, or suffer him to unburden his sorrows to me. His sighs and intimations of suppressed affliction seemed to come from a full heart; but either he must contrive to retain them within it, or breathe them forth in other ears than mine: there was enough of confidence between us already. It seemed wrong that there should exist a secret understanding between my husband’s friend and me, unknown to him, of which he was the object. But my after-thought was, ‘If it is wrong, surely Arthur’s is the fault, not mine.’

And indeed I know not whether, at the time, it was not for him rather than myself that I blushed; for, since he and I are one, I so identify myself with him, that I feel his degradation, his failings, and transgressions as my own: I blush for him, I fear for him; I repent for him, weep, pray, and feel for him as for myself; but I cannot act for him; and hence I must be, and I am, debased, contaminated by the union, both in my own eyes and in the actual truth. I am so determined to love him, so intensely anxious to excuse his errors, that I am continually dwelling upon them, and labouring to extenuate the loosest of his principles and the worst of his practices, till I am familiarised with vice, and almost a partaker in his sins. Things that formerly shocked and disgusted me, now seem only natural. I know them to be wrong, because reason and God’s word declare

them to be so; but I am gradually losing that instinctive horror and repulsion which were given me by nature, or instilled into me by the precepts and example of my aunt. Perhaps then I was too severe in my judgments, for I abhorred the sinner as well as the sin; now I flatter myself I am more charitable and considerate; but am I not becoming more indifferent and insensate too? Fool that I was, to dream that I had strength and purity enough to save myself and him! Such vain presumption would be rightly served, if I should perish with him in the gulf from which I sought to save him! Yet, God preserve me from it, and him too! Yes, poor Arthur, I will still hope and pray for you; and though I write as if you were some abandoned wretch, past hope and past reprieve, it is only my anxious fears, my strong desires that make me do so; one who loved you less would be less bitter, less dissatisfied.

His conduct has, of late, been what the world calls irreproachable; but then I know his heart is still unchanged; and I know that spring is approaching, and deeply dread the consequences.

As he began to recover the tone and vigour of his exhausted frame, and with it something of his former impatience of retirement and repose, I suggested a short residence by the sea-side, for his recreation and further restoration, and for the benefit of our little one as well. But no: watering-places were so intolerably dull; besides, he had been invited by one of his friends to spend a month or two in Scotland for the better recreation of grouse-shooting and deer-stalking, and had promise to go.

'Then you will leave me again, Arthur?' said I.

'Yes, dearest, but only to love you the better when I come back, and make up for all past offences and short-comings; and you needn't fear me this time: there are no temptations on the mountains. And during my absence you may pay a visit to Staningley, if you like: your uncle and aunt have long been wanting us to go there, you know; but somehow there's such a repulsion between the good lady and me, that I never could bring myself up to the scratch.'

About the third week in August, Arthur set out for Scotland, and Mr. Hargrave accompanied him thither, to my private satisfaction. Shortly after, I, with little Arthur and Rachel, went to Staningley, my dear old home, which, as well as my dear old friends its inhabitants, I saw again with mingled feelings of pleasure and pain so intimately blended that I could scarcely distinguish the one from the other, or tell to which to attribute the various tears, and smiles, and sighs awakened by those old familiar scenes, and tones, and faces.

Arthur did not come home till several weeks after my return to Grassdale; but I did not feel so anxious about him now; to think of him engaged in active sports among the wild hills of Scotland, was very different from knowing him to be immersed amid the corruptions and temptations of London. His letters now; though neither long nor loverlike, were more regular than ever they had been before; and when he did return, to my great joy, instead of being worse than when he went, he was more cheerful and vigorous, and better in every respect. Since that time I have had little cause to complain. He still has an unfortunate predilection for the pleasures of the table, against which I have to struggle and watch; but he has begun to notice his boy, and that is an increasing source of amusement to him within-doors, while his fox-hunting and coursing are a sufficient occupation for him without, when the ground is not hardened by frost; so that he is not wholly dependent on me for entertainment. But it is now January; spring is approaching; and, I repeat, I dread the consequences of its arrival. That sweet season, I once so joyously welcomed as the time of hope and gladness, awakens now far other anticipations by its return.

## CHAPTER XXXI

March 20th, 1824. The dreaded time is come, and Arthur is gone, as I expected. This time he announced it his intention to make but a short stay in London, and pass over to the Continent, where he should probably stay a few weeks; but I shall not expect him till after the lapse of many weeks: I now know that, with him, days signify weeks, and weeks months.

July 30th.—He returned about three weeks ago, rather better in health, certainly, than before, but still worse in temper. And yet, perhaps, I am wrong: it is I that am less patient and forbearing. I am tired out with his injustice, his selfishness and hopeless depravity. I wish a milder word would do; I am no angel, and my corruption rises against it. My poor father died last week: Arthur was vexed to hear of it, because he saw that I was shocked and grieved, and he feared the circumstance would mar his comfort. When I spoke of ordering my mourning, he exclaimed,—'Oh, I hate black! But, however, I suppose you must wear it awhile, for form's sake; but I hope, Helen, you won't think it your bounden duty to compose your face and manners into conformity with your funereal garb. Why should you sigh and groan, and I be made uncomfortable, because an old gentleman in —shire, a perfect stranger to us both, has thought proper to drink himself to death? There, now, I declare you're crying! Well, it must be affectation.'

He would not hear of my attending the funeral, or going for a day or two, to cheer poor Frederick's solitude. It was quite unnecessary, he said, and I was unreasonable to wish it. What was my father to me? I had never seen him but once since I was a baby, and I well knew he had never cared a stiver about me; and my brother, too, was little better than a stranger. 'Besides, dear Helen,' said he, embracing me with flattering fondness, 'I cannot spare you for a single day.'

'Then how have you managed without me these many days?' said I.

'Ah! then I was knocking about the world, now I am at home, and home without you, my household deity, would be intolerable.'

'Yes, as long as I am necessary to your comfort; but you did not say so before, when you urged me to leave you, in order that you might get away from your home without me,' retorted I; but before the words were well out of my mouth, I regretted having uttered them. It seemed so heavy a charge: if false, too gross an insult; if true, too humiliating a fact to be thus openly cast in his teeth. But I might have spared myself that momentary pang of self-reproach. The accusation awoke neither shame nor indignation in him: he attempted neither denial nor excuse, but only answered with a long, low, chuckling

laugh, as if he viewed the whole transaction as a clever, merry jest from beginning to end. Surely that man will make me dislike him at last!

Sine as ye brew, my maiden fair,
Keep mind that ye maun drink the yill.

Yes; and I will drink it to the very dregs: and none but myself shall know how bitter I find it!

August 20th.—We are shaken down again to about our usual position. Arthur has returned to nearly his former condition and habits; and I have found it my wisest plan to shut my eyes against the past and future, as far as he, at least, is concerned, and live only for the present: to love him when I can; to smile (if possible) when he smiles, be cheerful when he is cheerful, and pleased when he is agreeable; and when he is not, to try to make him so; and if that won't answer, to bear with him, to excuse him, and forgive him as well as I can, and restrain my own evil passions from aggravating his; and yet, while I thus yield and minister to his more harmless propensities to self-indulgence, to do all in my power to save him from the worse.

But we shall not be long alone together. I shall shortly be called upon to entertain the same select body of friends as we had the autumn before last, with the addition of Mr. Hattersley and, at my special request, his wife and child. I long to see Milicent, and her little girl too. The latter is now above a year old; she will be a charming playmate for my little Arthur.

September 30th.—Our guests have been here a week or two; but I have had no leisure to pass any comments upon them till now. I cannot get over my dislike to Lady Lowborough. It is not founded on mere personal pique; it is the woman herself that I dislike, because I so thoroughly disapprove of her. I always avoid her company as much as I can without violating the laws of hospitality; but when we do speak or converse together, it is with the utmost civility, even apparent cordiality on her part; but preserve me from such cordiality! It is like handling brier-roses and may-blossoms, bright enough to the eye, and outwardly soft to the touch, but you know there are thorns beneath, and every now and then you feel them too; and perhaps resent the injury by crushing them in till you have destroyed their power, though somewhat to the detriment of your own fingers.

Of late, however, I have seen nothing in her conduct towards Arthur to anger or alarm me. During the first few days I thought she seemed very solicitous to win his admiration. Her efforts were not unnoticed by him: I frequently saw him smiling to himself at her artful manoeuvres: but, to his praise be it spoken, her shafts fell powerless

by his side. Her most bewitching smiles, her haughtiest frowns were ever received with the same immutable, careless good-humour; till, finding he was indeed impenetrable, she suddenly remitted her efforts, and became, to all appearance, as perfectly indifferent as himself. Nor have I since witnessed any symptom of pique on his part, or renewed attempts at conquest upon hers.

This is as it should be; but Arthur never will let me be satisfied with him. I have never, for a single hour since I married him, known what it is to realise that sweet idea, 'In quietness and confidence shall be your rest.' Those two detestable men, Grimsby and Hattersley, have destroyed all my labour against his love of wine. They encourage him daily to overstep the bounds of moderation, and not unfrequently to disgrace himself by positive excess. I shall not soon forget the second night after their arrival. Just as I had retired from the dining-room with the ladies, before the door was closed upon us, Arthur exclaimed,—'Now then, my lads, what say you to a regular jollification?'

Milicent glanced at me with a half-reproachful look, as if I could hinder it; but her countenance changed when she heard Hattersley's voice, shouting through door and wall,—'I'm your man! Send for more wine: here isn't half enough!'

We had scarcely entered the drawing-room before we were joined by Lord Lowborough.

'What can induce you to come so soon?' exclaimed his lady, with a most ungracious air of dissatisfaction.

'You know I never drink, Annabella,' replied he seriously.

'Well, but you might stay with them a little: it looks so silly to be always dangling after the women; I wonder you can!'

He reproached her with a look of mingled bitterness and surprise, and, sinking into a chair, suppressed a heavy sigh, bit his pale lips, and fixed his eyes upon the floor.

'You did right to leave them, Lord Lowborough,' said I. 'I trust you will always continue to honour us so early with your company. And if Annabella knew the value of true wisdom, and the misery of folly and—and intemperance, she would not talk such nonsense—even in jest.'

He raised his eyes while I spoke, and gravely turned them upon me, with a half-surprised, half-abstracted look, and then bent them on his wife.

'At least,' said she, 'I know the value of a warm heart and a bold, manly spirit.'

‘Well, Annabella,’ said he, in a deep and hollow tone, ‘since my presence is disagreeable to you, I will relieve you of it.’

‘Are you going back to them, then?’ said she, carelessly.

‘No,’ exclaimed he, with harsh and startling emphasis. ‘I will not go back to them! And I will never stay with them one moment longer than I think right, for you or any other tempter! But you needn’t mind that; I shall never trouble you again by intruding my company upon you so unseasonably.’

He left the room: I heard the hall-door open and shut, and immediately after, on putting aside the curtain, I saw him pacing down the park, in the comfortless gloom of the damp, cloudy twilight.

‘It would serve you right, Annabella,’ said I, at length, ‘if Lord Lowborough were to return to his old habits, which had so nearly effected his ruin, and which it cost him such an effort to break: you would then see cause to repent such conduct as this.’

‘Not at all, my dear! I should not mind if his lordship were to see fit to intoxicate himself every day: I should only the sooner be rid of him.’

‘Oh, Annabella!’ cried Milicent. ‘How can you say such wicked things! It would, indeed, be a just punishment, as far as you are concerned, if Providence should take you at your word, and make you feel what others feel, that—‘ She paused as a sudden burst of loud talking and laughter reached us from the dining-room, in which the voice of Hattersley was pre-eminently conspicuous, even to my unpractised ear.

‘What you feel at this moment, I suppose?’ said Lady Lowborough, with a malicious smile, fixing her eyes upon her cousin’s distressed countenance.

The latter offered no reply, but averted her face and brushed away a tear. At that moment the door opened and admitted Mr. Hargrave, just a little flushed, his dark eyes sparkling with unwonted vivacity.

‘Oh, I’m so glad you’re come, Walter?’ cried his sister. ‘But I wish you could have got Ralph to come too.’

‘Utterly impossible, dear Milicent,’ replied he, gaily. ‘I had much ado to get away myself. Ralph attempted to keep me by violence; Huntingdon threatened me with the eternal

loss of his friendship; and Grimsby, worse than all, endeavoured to make me ashamed of my virtue, by such galling sarcasms and innuendoes as he knew would wound me the most. So you see, ladies, you ought to make me welcome when I have braved and suffered so much for the favour of your sweet society.' He smilingly turned to me and bowed as he finished the sentence.

'Isn't he handsome now, Helen!' whispered Milicent, her sisterly pride overcoming, for the moment, all other considerations.

'He would be,' I returned, 'if that brilliance of eye, and lip, and cheek were natural to him; but look again, a few hours hence.'

Here the gentleman took a seat near me at the table, and petitioned for a cup of coffee.

'I consider this an apt illustration of heaven taken by storm,' said he, as I handed one to him. 'I am in paradise, now; but I have fought my way through flood and fire to win it. Ralph Hattersley's last resource was to set his back against the door, and swear I should find no passage but through his body (a pretty substantial one too). Happily, however, that was not the only door, and I effected my escape by the side entrance through the butler's pantry, to the infinite amazement of Benson, who was cleaning the plate.'

Mr. Hargrave laughed, and so did his cousin; but his sister and I remained silent and grave.

'Pardon my levity, Mrs. Huntingdon,' murmured he, more seriously, as he raised his eyes to my face. 'You are not used to these things: you suffer them to affect your delicate mind too sensibly. But I thought of you in the midst of those lawless roysterers; and I endeavoured to persuade Mr. Huntingdon to think of you too; but to no purpose: I fear he is fully determined to enjoy himself this night; and it will be no use keeping the coffee waiting for him or his companions; it will be much if they join us at tea. Meantime, I earnestly wish I could banish the thoughts of them from your mind—and my own too, for I hate to think of them—yes—even of my dear friend Huntingdon, when I consider the power he possesses over the happiness of one so immeasurably superior to himself, and the use he makes of it—I positively detest the man!'

'You had better not say so to me, then,' said I; 'for, bad as he is, he is part of myself, and you cannot abuse him without offending me.'

'Pardon me, then, for I would sooner die than offend you. But let us say no more of him for the present, if you please.'

At last they came; but not till after ten, when tea, which had been delayed for more than half an hour, was nearly over. Much as I had longed for their coming, my heart failed me at the riotous uproar of their approach; and Milicent turned pale, and almost started from her seat, as Mr. Hattersley burst into the room with a clamorous volley of oaths in his mouth, which Hargrave endeavoured to check by entreating him to remember the ladies.

'Ah! you do well to remind me of the ladies, you dastardly deserter,' cried he, shaking his formidable fist at his brother-in-law. 'If it were not for them, you well know, I'd demolish you in the twinkling of an eye, and give your body to the fowls of heaven and the lilies of the fields!' Then, planting a chair by Lady Lowborough's side, he stationed himself in it, and began to talk to her with a mixture of absurdity and impudence that seemed rather to amuse than to offend her; though she affected to resent his insolence, and to keep him at bay with sallies of smart and spirited repartee.

Meantime Mr. Grimsby seated himself by me, in the chair vacated by Hargrave as they entered, and gravely stated that he would thank me for a cup of tea: and Arthur placed himself beside poor Milicent, confidentially pushing his head into her face, and drawing in closer to her as she shrank away from him. He was not so noisy as Hattersley, but his face was exceedingly flushed: he laughed incessantly, and while I blushed for all I saw and heard of him, I was glad that he chose to talk to his companion in so low a tone that no one could hear what he said but herself.

'What fools they are!' drawled Mr. Grimsby, who had been talking away, at my elbow, with sententious gravity all the time; but I had been too much absorbed in contemplating the deplorable state of the other two—especially Arthur—to attend to him.

'Did you ever hear such nonsense as they talk, Mrs. Huntingdon?' he continued. 'I'm quite ashamed of them for my part: they can't take so much as a bottle between them without its getting into their heads—'

'You are pouring the cream into your saucer, Mr. Grimsby.'

'Ah! yes, I see, but we're almost in darkness here. Hargrave, snuff those candles, will you?'

'They're wax; they don't require snuffing,' said I.

'"The light of the body is the eye,"' observed Hargrave, with a sarcastic smile. '"If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light."'

Grimsby repulsed him with a solemn wave of the hand, and then turning to me, continued, with the same drawling tones and strange uncertainty of utterance and heavy gravity of aspect as before: 'But as I was saying, Mrs. Huntingdon, they have no head at all: they can't take half a bottle without being affected some way; whereas I—well, I've taken three times as much as they have to-night, and you see I'm perfectly steady. Now that may strike you as very singular, but I think I can explain it: you see their brains—I mention no names, but you'll understand to whom I allude—their brains are light to begin with, and the fumes of the fermented liquor render them lighter still, and produce an entire light-headedness, or giddiness, resulting in intoxication; whereas my brains, being composed of more solid materials, will absorb a considerable quantity of this alcoholic vapour without the production of any sensible result—'

'I think you will find a sensible result produced on that tea,' interrupted Mr. Hargrave, 'by the quantity of sugar you have put into it. Instead of your usual complement of one lump, you have put in six.'

'Have I so?' replied the philosopher, diving with his spoon into the cup, and bringing up several half-dissolved pieces in confirmation of the assertion. 'Hum! I perceive. Thus, Madam, you see the evil of absence of mind—of thinking too much while engaged in the common concerns of life. Now, if I had had my wits about me, like ordinary men, instead of within me like a philosopher, I should not have spoiled this cup of tea, and been constrained to trouble you for another.'

'That is the sugar-basin, Mr. Grimsby. Now you have spoiled the sugar too; and I'll thank you to ring for some more, for here is Lord Lowborough at last; and I hope his lordship will condescend to sit down with us, such as we are, and allow me to give him some tea.'

His lordship gravely bowed in answer to my appeal, but said nothing. Meantime, Hargrave volunteered to ring for the sugar, while Grimsby lamented his mistake, and attempted to prove that it was owing to the shadow of the urn and the badness of the lights.

Lord Lowborough had entered a minute or two before, unobserved by anyone but me, and had been standing before the door, grimly surveying the company. He now stepped up to Annabella, who sat with her back towards him, with Hattersley still beside her, though not now attending to her, being occupied in vociferously abusing and bullying his host.

‘Well, Annabella,’ said her husband, as he leant over the back of her chair, ‘which of these three “bold, manly spirits” would you have me to resemble?’

‘By heaven and earth, you shall resemble us all!’ cried Hattersley, starting up and rudely seizing him by the arm. ‘Hallo, Huntingdon!’ he shouted—‘I’ve got him! Come, man, and help me! And d—n me, if I don’t make him drunk before I let him go! He shall make up for all past delinquencies as sure as I’m a living soul!’

There followed a disgraceful contest: Lord Lowborough, in desperate earnest, and pale with anger, silently struggling to release himself from the powerful madman that was striving to drag him from the room. I attempted to urge Arthur to interfere in behalf of his outraged guest, but he could do nothing but laugh.

‘Huntingdon, you fool, come and help me, can’t you!’ cried Hattersley, himself somewhat weakened by his excesses.

‘I’m wishing you God-speed, Hattersley,’ cried Arthur, ‘and aiding you with my prayers: I can’t do anything else if my life depended on it! I’m quite used up. Oh—oh!’ and leaning back in his seat, he clapped his hands on his sides and groaned aloud.

‘Annabella, give me a candle!’ said Lowborough, whose antagonist had now got him round the waist and was endeavouring to root him from the door-post, to which he madly clung with all the energy of desperation.

‘I shall take no part in your rude sports!’ replied the lady coldly drawing back. ‘I wonder you can expect it.’ But I snatched up a candle and brought it to him. He took it and held the flame to Hattersley’s hands, till, roaring like a wild beast, the latter unclasped them and let him go. He vanished, I suppose to his own apartment, for nothing more was seen of him till the morning. Swearing and cursing like a maniac, Hattersley threw himself on to the ottoman beside the window. The door being now free, Milicent attempted to make her escape from the scene of her husband’s disgrace; but he called her back, and insisted upon her coming to him.

‘What do you want, Ralph?’ murmured she, reluctantly approaching him.

‘I want to know what’s the matter with you,’ said he, pulling her on to his knee like a child. ‘What are you crying for, Milicent?—Tell me!’

‘I’m not crying.’

‘You are,’ persisted he, rudely pulling her hands from her face. ‘How dare you tell such a lie!’

‘I’m not crying now,’ pleaded she.

‘But you have been, and just this minute too; and I will know what for. Come, now, you shall tell me!’

‘Do let me alone, Ralph! Remember, we are not at home.’

‘No matter: you shall answer my question!’ exclaimed her tormentor; and he attempted to extort the confession by shaking her, and remorselessly crushing her slight arms in the gripe of his powerful fingers.

‘Don’t let him treat your sister in that way,’ said I to Mr. Hargrave.

‘Come now, Hattersley, I can’t allow that,’ said that gentleman, stepping up to the ill-assorted couple. ‘Let my sister alone, if you please.’

And he made an effort to unclasp the ruffian’s fingers from her arm, but was suddenly driven backward, and nearly laid upon the floor by a violent blow on the chest, accompanied with the admonition, ‘Take that for your insolence! and learn to interfere between me and mine again.’

‘If you were not drunk, I’d have satisfaction for that!’ gasped Hargrave, white and breathless as much from passion as from the immediate effects of the blow.

‘Go to the devil!’ responded his brother-in-law. ‘Now, Milicent, tell me what you were crying for.’

‘I’ll tell you some other time,’ murmured she, ‘when we are alone.’

‘Tell me now!’ said he, with another shake and a squeeze that made her draw in her breath and bite her lip to suppress a cry of pain.

‘I’ll tell you, Mr. Hattersley,’ said I. ‘She was crying from pure shame and humiliation for you; because she could not bear to see you conduct yourself so disgracefully.’

‘Confound you, Madam!’ muttered he, with a stare of stupid amazement at my ‘impudence.’ ‘It was not that—was it, Milicent?’

She was silent.

‘Come, speak up, child!’

‘I can’t tell now,’ sobbed she.

‘But you can say “yes” or “no” as well as “I can’t tell.”—Come!’

‘Yes,’ she whispered, hanging her head, and blushing at the awful acknowledgment.

‘Curse you for an impertinent hussy, then!’ cried he, throwing her from him with such violence that she fell on her side; but she was up again before either I or her brother could come to her assistance, and made the best of her way out of the room, and, I suppose, up-stairs, without loss of time.

The next object of assault was Arthur, who sat opposite, and had, no doubt, richly enjoyed the whole scene.

‘Now, Huntingdon,’ exclaimed his irascible friend, ‘I will not have you sitting there and laughing like an idiot!’

‘Oh, Hattersley,’ cried he, wiping his swimming eyes—‘you’ll be the death of me.’

‘Yes, I will, but not as you suppose: I’ll have the heart out of your body, man, if you irritate me with any more of that imbecile laughter!—What! are you at it yet?—There! see if that’ll settle you!’ cried Hattersley, snatching up a footstool and hurting it at the head of his host; but he as well as missed his aim, and the latter still sat collapsed and quaking with feeble laughter, with tears running down his face: a deplorable spectacle indeed.

Hattersley tried cursing and swearing, but it would not do: he then took a number of books from the table beside him, and threw them, one by one, at the object of his wrath; but Arthur only laughed the more; and, finally, Hattersley rushed upon him in a frenzy and seizing him by the shoulders, gave him a violent shaking, under which he laughed and shrieked alarmingly. But I saw no more: I thought I had witnessed enough of my husband’s degradation; and leaving Annabella and the rest to follow when they pleased, I withdrew, but not to bed. Dismissing Rachel to her rest, I walked up and down my room, in an agony of misery for what had been done, and suspense, not knowing what might further happen, or how or when that unhappy creature would come up to bed.

At last he came, slowly and stumblingly ascending the stairs, supported by Grimsby and Hattersley, who neither of them walked quite steadily themselves, but were both laughing and joking at him, and making noise enough for all the servants to hear. He himself was no longer laughing now, but sick and stupid. I will write no more about that.

Such disgraceful scenes (or nearly such) have been repeated more than once. I don't say much to Arthur about it, for, if I did, it would do more harm than good; but I let him know that I intensely dislike such exhibitions; and each time he has promised they should never again be repeated. But I fear he is losing the little self-command and self-respect he once possessed: formerly, he would have been ashamed to act thus—at least, before any other witnesses than his boon companions, or such as they. His friend Hargrave, with a prudence and self-government that I envy for him, never disgraces himself by taking more than sufficient to render him a little 'elevated,' and is always the first to leave the table after Lord Lowborough, who, wiser still, perseveres in vacating the dining-room immediately after us: but never once, since Annabella offended him so deeply, has he entered the drawing-room before the rest; always spending the interim in the library, which I take care to have lighted for his accommodation; or, on fine moonlight nights, in roaming about the grounds. But I think she regrets her misconduct, for she has never repeated it since, and of late she has comported herself with wonderful propriety towards him, treating him with more uniform kindness and consideration than ever I have observed her to do before. I date the time of this improvement from the period when she ceased to hope and strive for Arthur's admiration.

## CHAPTER XXXII

October 5th.—Esther Hargrave is getting a fine girl. She is not out of the school-room yet, but her mother frequently brings her over to call in the mornings when the gentlemen are out, and sometimes she spends an hour or two in company with her sister and me, and the children; and when we go to the Grove, I always contrive to see her, and talk more to her than to any one else, for I am very much attached to my little friend, and so is she to me. I wonder what she can see to like in me though, for I am no longer the happy, lively girl I used to be; but she has no other society, save that of her uncongenial mother, and her governess (as artificial and conventional a person as that prudent mother could procure to rectify the pupil's natural qualities), and, now and then, her subdued, quiet sister. I often wonder what will be her lot in life, and so does she; but her speculations on the future are full of buoyant hope; so were mine once. I shudder to think of her being awakened, like me, to a sense of their delusive vanity. It seems as if I should feel her disappointment, even more deeply than my own. I feel almost as if I were born for such a fate, but she is so joyous and fresh, so light of heart and free of spirit, and so guileless and unsuspecting too. Oh, it would be cruel to make her feel as I feel now, and know what I have known!

Her sister trembles for her too. Yesterday morning, one of October's brightest, loveliest days, Milicent and I were in the garden enjoying a brief half-hour together with our children, while Annabella was lying on the drawing-room sofa, deep in the last new novel. We had been romping with the little creatures, almost as merry and wild as themselves, and now paused in the shade of the tall copper beech, to recover breath and rectify our hair, disordered by the rough play and the frolicsome breeze, while they toddled together along the broad, sunny walk; my Arthur supporting the feebler steps of her little Helen, and sagaciously pointing out to her the brightest beauties of the border as they passed, with semi-articulate prattle, that did as well for her as any other mode of discourse. From laughing at the pretty sight, we began to talk of the children's future life; and that made us thoughtful. We both relapsed into silent musing as we slowly proceeded up the walk; and I suppose Milicent, by a train of associations, was led to think of her sister.

'Helen,' said she, 'you often see Esther, don't you?'

'Not very often.'

'But you have more frequent opportunities of meeting her than I have; and she loves you, I know, and reverences you too: there is nobody's opinion she thinks so much of; and she says you have more sense than mamma.'

‘That is because she is self-willed, and my opinions more generally coincide with her own than your mamma’s. But what then, Milicent?’

‘Well, since you have so much influence with her, I wish you would seriously impress it upon her, never, on any account, or for anybody’s persuasion, to marry for the sake of money, or rank, or establishment, or any earthly thing, but true affection and well-grounded esteem.’

‘There is no necessity for that,’ said I, ‘for we have had some discourse on that subject already, and I assure you her ideas of love and matrimony are as romantic as any one could desire.’

‘But romantic notions will not do: I want her to have true notions.’

‘Very right: but in my judgment, what the world stigmatises as romantic, is often more nearly allied to the truth than is commonly supposed; for, if the generous ideas of youth are too often over-clouded by the sordid views of after-life, that scarcely proves them to be false.’

‘Well, but if you think her ideas are what they ought to be, strengthen them, will you? and confirm them, as far as you can; for I had romantic notions once, and—I don’t mean to say that I regret my lot, for I am quite sure I don’t, but—’

‘I understand you,’ said I; ‘you are contented for yourself, but you would not have your sister to suffer the same as you.’

‘No—or worse. She might have far worse to suffer than I, for I am really contented, Helen, though you mayn’t think it: I speak the solemn truth in saying that I would not exchange my husband for any man on earth, if I might do it by the plucking of this leaf.’

‘Well, I believe you: now that you have him, you would not exchange him for another; but then you would gladly exchange some of his qualities for those of better men.’

‘Yes: just as I would gladly exchange some of my own qualities for those of better women; for neither he nor I are perfect, and I desire his improvement as earnestly as my own. And he will improve, don’t you think so, Helen? he’s only six-and-twenty yet.’

‘He may,’ I answered,

‘He will, he will!’ repeated she.

‘Excuse the faintness of my acquiescence, Milicent, I would not discourage your hopes for the world, but mine have been so often disappointed, that I am become as cold and doubtful in my expectations as the flattest of octogenarians.’

‘And yet you do hope, still, even for Mr. Huntingdon?’

‘I do, I confess, “even” for him; for it seems as if life and hope must cease together. And is he so much worse, Milicent, than Mr. Hattersley?’

‘Well, to give you my candid opinion, I think there is no comparison between them. But you mustn’t be offended, Helen, for you know I always speak my mind, and you may speak yours too. I sha’n’t care.’

‘I am not offended, love; and my opinion is, that if there be a comparison made between the two, the difference, for the most part, is certainly in Hattersley’s favour.’

Milicent’s own heart told her how much it cost me to make this acknowledgment; and, with a childlike impulse, she expressed her sympathy by suddenly kissing my cheek, without a word of reply, and then turning quickly away, caught up her baby, and hid her face in its frock. How odd it is that we so often weep for each other’s distresses, when we shed not a tear for our own! Her heart had been full enough of her own sorrows, but it overflowed at the idea of mine; and I, too, shed tears at the sight of her sympathetic emotion, though I had not wept for myself for many a week.

It was one rainy day last week; most of the company were killing time in the billiard-room, but Milicent and I were with little Arthur and Helen in the library, and between our books, our children, and each other, we expected to make out a very agreeable morning. We had not been thus secluded above two hours, however, when Mr. Hattersley came in, attracted, I suppose, by the voice of his child, as he was crossing the hall, for he is prodigiously fond of her, and she of him.

He was redolent of the stables, where he had been regaling himself with the company of his fellow-creatures the horses ever since breakfast. But that was no matter to my little namesake; as soon as the colossal person of her father darkened the door, she uttered a shrill scream of delight, and, quitting her mother’s side, ran crowing towards him, balancing her course with outstretched arms, and embracing his knee, threw back her head and laughed in his face. He might well look smilingly down upon those small, fair features, radiant with innocent mirth, those clear blue shining eyes, and that soft flaxen hair cast back upon the little ivory neck and shoulders. Did he not think how unworthy

he was of such a possession? I fear no such idea crossed his mind. He caught her up, and there followed some minutes of very rough play, during which it is difficult to say whether the father or the daughter laughed and shouted the loudest. At length, however, the boisterous pastime terminated, suddenly, as might be expected: the little one was hurt, and began to cry; and the ungentle play-fellow tossed it into its mother's lap, bidding her 'make all straight.' As happy to return to that gentle comforter as it had been to leave her, the child nestled in her arms, and hushed its cries in a moment; and sinking its little weary head on her bosom, soon dropped asleep.

Meantime Mr. Hattersley strode up to the fire, and interposing his height and breadth between us and it, stood with arms akimbo, expanding his chest, and gazing round him as if the house and all its appurtenances and contents were his own undisputed possessions.

'Deuced bad weather this!' he began. 'There'll be no shooting to-day, I guess.' Then, suddenly lifting up his voice, he regaled us with a few bars of a rollicking song, which abruptly ceasing, he finished the tune with a whistle, and then continued:—'I say, Mrs. Huntingdon, what a fine stud your husband has! not large, but good. I've been looking at them a bit this morning; and upon my word, Black Boss, and Grey Tom, and that young Nimrod are the finest animals I've seen for many a day!' Then followed a particular discussion of their various merits, succeeded by a sketch of the great things he intended to do in the horse-jockey line, when his old governor thought proper to quit the stage. 'Not that I wish him to close his accounts,' added he: 'the old Trojan is welcome to keep his books open as long as he pleases for me.'

'I hope so, indeed, Mr. Hattersley.'

'Oh, yes! It's only my way of talking. The event must come some time, and so I look to the bright side of it: that's the right plan—isn't it, Mrs. H.? What are you two doing here? By-the-by, where's Lady Lowborough?'

'In the billiard-room.'

'What a splendid creature she is!' continued he, fixing his eyes on his wife, who changed colour, and looked more and more disconcerted as he proceeded. 'What a noble figure she has; and what magnificent black eyes; and what a fine spirit of her own; and what a tongue of her own, too, when she likes to use it. I perfectly adore her! But never mind, Milicent: I wouldn't have her for my wife, not if she'd a kingdom for her dowry! I'm better satisfied with the one I have. Now then! what do you look so sulky for? don't you believe me?'

‘Yes, I believe you,’ murmured she, in a tone of half sad, half sullen resignation, as she turned away to stroke the hair of her sleeping infant, that she had laid on the sofa beside her.

‘Well, then, what makes you so cross? Come here, Milly, and tell me why you can’t be satisfied with my assurance.’

She went, and putting her little hand within his arm, looked up in his face, and said softly,—

‘What does it amount to, Ralph? Only to this, that though you admire Annabella so much, and for qualities that I don’t possess, you would still rather have me than her for your wife, which merely proves that you don’t think it necessary to love your wife; you are satisfied if she can keep your house, and take care of your child. But I’m not cross; I’m only sorry; for,’ added she, in a low, tremulous accent, withdrawing her hand from his arm, and bending her looks on the rug, ‘if you don’t love me, you don’t, and it can’t be helped.’

‘Very true; but who told you I didn’t? Did I say I loved Annabella?’

‘You said you adored her.’

‘True, but adoration isn’t love. I adore Annabella, but I don’t love her; and I love thee, Milicent, but I don’t adore thee.’ In proof of his affection, he clutched a handful of her light brown ringlets, and appeared to twist them unmercifully.

‘Do you really, Ralph?’ murmured she, with a faint smile beaming through her tears, just putting up her hand to his, in token that he pulled rather too hard.

‘To be sure I do,’ responded he: ‘only you bother me rather, sometimes.’

‘I bother you!’ cried she, in very natural surprise.

‘Yes, you—but only by your exceeding goodness. When a boy has been eating raisins and sugar-plums all day, he longs for a squeeze of sour orange by way of a change. And did you never, Milly, observe the sands on the sea-shore; how nice and smooth they look, and how soft and easy they feel to the foot? But if you plod along, for half an hour, over this soft, easy carpet—giving way at every step, yielding the more the harder you press,—you’ll find it rather wearisome work, and be glad enough to come to a bit of good, firm rock, that won’t budge an inch whether you stand, walk, or stamp upon it; and, though it be hard as the nether millstone, you’ll find it the easier footing after all.’

‘I know what you mean, Ralph,’ said she, nervously playing with her watchguard and tracing the figure on the rug with the point of her tiny foot—‘I know what you mean: but I thought you always liked to be yielded to, and I can’t alter now.’

‘I do like it,’ replied he, bringing her to him by another tug at her hair. ‘You mustn’t mind my talk, Milly. A man must have something to grumble about; and if he can’t complain that his wife harries him to death with her perversity and ill-humour, he must complain that she wears him out with her kindness and gentleness.’

‘But why complain at all, unless because you are tired and dissatisfied?’

‘To excuse my own failings, to be sure. Do you think I’ll bear all the burden of my sins on my own shoulders, as long as there’s another ready to help me, with none of her own to carry?’

‘There is no such one on earth,’ said she seriously; and then, taking his hand from her head, she kissed it with an air of genuine devotion, and tripped away to the door.

‘What now?’ said he. ‘Where are you going?’

‘To tidy my hair,’ she answered, smiling through her disordered locks; ‘you’ve made it all come down.’

‘Off with you then!—An excellent little woman,’ he remarked when she was gone, ‘but a thought too soft—she almost melts in one’s hands. I positively think I ill-use her sometimes, when I’ve taken too much—but I can’t help it, for she never complains, either at the time or after. I suppose she doesn’t mind it.’

‘I can enlighten you on that subject, Mr. Hattersley,’ said I: ‘she does mind it; and some other things she minds still more, which yet you may never hear her complain of.’

‘How do you know?—does she complain to you?’ demanded he, with a sudden spark of fury ready to burst into a flame if I should answer “yes.”

‘No,’ I replied; ‘but I have known her longer and studied her more closely than you have done.—And I can tell you, Mr. Hattersley, that Milicent loves you more than you deserve, and that you have it in your power to make her very happy, instead of which you are her evil genius, and, I will venture to say, there is not a single day passes in which you do not inflict upon her some pang that you might spare her if you would.’

‘Well—it’s not my fault,’ said he, gazing carelessly up at the ceiling and plunging his hands into his pockets: ‘if my ongoings don’t suit her, she should tell me so.’

‘Is she not exactly the wife you wanted? Did you not tell Mr. Huntingdon you must have one that would submit to anything without a murmur, and never blame you, whatever you did?’

‘True, but we shouldn’t always have what we want: it spoils the best of us, doesn’t it? How can I help playing the deuce when I see it’s all one to her whether I behave like a Christian or like a scoundrel, such as nature made me? and how can I help teasing her when she’s so invitingly meek and mim, when she lies down like a spaniel at my feet and never so much as squeaks to tell me that’s enough?’

‘If you are a tyrant by nature, the temptation is strong, I allow; but no generous mind delights to oppress the weak, but rather to cherish and protect.’

‘I don’t oppress her; but it’s so confounded flat to be always cherishing and protecting; and then, how can I tell that I am oppressing her when she “melts away and makes no sign”? I sometimes think she has no feeling at all; and then I go on till she cries, and that satisfies me.’

‘Then you do delight to oppress her?’

‘I don’t, I tell you! only when I’m in a bad humour, or a particularly good one, and want to afflict for the pleasure of comforting; or when she looks flat and wants shaking up a bit. And sometimes she provokes me by crying for nothing, and won’t tell me what it’s for; and then, I allow, it enrages me past bearing, especially when I’m not my own man.’

‘As is no doubt generally the case on such occasions,’ said I. ‘But in future, Mr. Hattersley, when you see her looking flat, or crying for “nothing” (as you call it), ascribe it all to yourself: be assured it is something you have done amiss, or your general misconduct, that distresses her.’

‘I don’t believe it. If it were, she should tell me so: I don’t like that way of moping and fretting in silence, and saying nothing: it’s not honest. How can she expect me to mend my ways at that rate?’

‘Perhaps she gives you credit for having more sense than you possess, and deludes herself with the hope that you will one day see your own errors and repair them, if left to your own reflection.’

‘None of your sneers, Mrs. Huntingdon. I have the sense to see that I’m not always quite correct, but sometimes I think that’s no great matter, as long as I injure nobody but myself—’

‘It is a great matter,’ interrupted I, ‘both to yourself (as you will hereafter find to your cost) and to all connected with you, most especially your wife. But, indeed, it is nonsense to talk about injuring no one but yourself: it is impossible to injure yourself, especially by such acts as we allude to, without injuring hundreds, if not thousands, besides, in a greater or less, degree, either by the evil you do or the good you leave undone.’ ‘And as I was saying,’ continued he, ‘or would have said if you hadn’t taken me up so short, I sometimes think I should do better if I were joined to one that would always remind me when I was wrong, and give me a motive for doing good and eschewing evil, by decidedly showing her approval of the one and disapproval of the other.’

‘If you had no higher motive than the approval of your fellow-mortal, it would do you little good.’

‘Well, but if I had a mate that would not always be yielding, and always equally kind, but that would have the spirit to stand at bay now and then, and honestly tell me her mind at all times, such a one as yourself for instance. Now, if I went on with you as I do with her when I’m in London, you’d make the house too hot to hold me at times, I’ll be sworn.’

‘You mistake me: I’m no termagant.’

‘Well, all the better for that, for I can’t stand contradiction, in a general way, and I’m as fond of my own will as another; only I think too much of it doesn’t answer for any man.’

‘Well, I would never contradict you without a cause, but certainly I would always let you know what I thought of your conduct; and if you oppressed me, in body, mind, or estate, you should at least have no reason to suppose “I didn’t mind it.”’

‘I know that, my lady; and I think if my little wife were to follow the same plan, it would be better for us both.’

‘I’ll tell her.’

‘No, no, let her be; there’s much to be said on both sides, and, now I think upon it, Huntingdon often regrets that you are not more like her, scoundrelly dog that he is, and

you see, after all, you can't reform him: he's ten times worse than I. He's afraid of you, to be sure; that is, he's always on his best behaviour in your presence—but—'

'I wonder what his worst behaviour is like, then?' I could not forbear observing.

'Why, to tell you the truth, it's very bad indeed—isn't it, Hargrave?' said he, addressing that gentleman, who had entered the room unperceived by me, for I was now standing near the fire, with my back to the door. 'Isn't Huntingdon,' he continued, 'as great a reprobate as ever was d—d?'

'His lady will not hear him censured with impunity,' replied Mr. Hargrave, coming forward; 'but I must say, I thank God I am not such another.'

'Perhaps it would become you better,' said I, 'to look at what you are, and say, "God be merciful to me a sinner."'

'You are severe,' returned he, bowing slightly and drawing himself up with a proud yet injured air. Hattersley laughed, and clapped him on the shoulder. Moving from under his hand with a gesture of insulted dignity, Mr. Hargrave took himself away to the other end of the rug.

'Isn't it a shame, Mrs. Huntingdon?' cried his brother-in-law; 'I struck Walter Hargrave when I was drunk, the second night after we came, and he's turned a cold shoulder on me ever since; though I asked his pardon the very morning after it was done!'

'Your manner of asking it,' returned the other, 'and the clearness with which you remembered the whole transaction, showed you were not too drunk to be fully conscious of what you were about, and quite responsible for the deed.'

'You wanted to interfere between me and my wife,' grumbled Hattersley, 'and that is enough to provoke any man.'

'You justify it, then?' said his opponent, darting upon him a most vindictive glance.

'No, I tell you I wouldn't have done it if I hadn't been under excitement; and if you choose to bear malice for it after all the handsome things I've said, do so and be d—d!'

'I would refrain from such language in a lady's presence, at least,' said Mr. Hargrave, hiding his anger under a mask of disgust.

‘What have I said?’ returned Hattersley: ‘nothing but heaven’s truth. He will be damned, won’t he, Mrs. Huntingdon, if he doesn’t forgive his brother’s trespasses?’

‘You ought to forgive him, Mr. Hargrave, since he asks you,’ said I.

‘Do you say so? Then I will!’ And, smiling almost frankly, he stepped forward and offered his hand. It was immediately clasped in that of his relative, and the reconciliation was apparently cordial on both sides.

‘The affront,’ continued Hargrave, turning to me, ‘owed half its bitterness to the fact of its being offered in your presence; and since you bid me forgive it, I will, and forget it too.’

‘I guess the best return I can make will be to take myself off,’ muttered Hattersley, with a broad grin. His companion smiled, and he left the room. This put me on my guard. Mr. Hargrave turned seriously to me, and earnestly began,—

‘Dear Mrs. Huntingdon, how I have longed for, yet dreaded, this hour! Do not be alarmed,’ he added, for my face was crimson with anger: ‘I am not about to offend you with any useless entreaties or complaints. I am not going to presume to trouble you with the mention of my own feelings or your perfections, but I have something to reveal to you which you ought to know, and which, yet, it pains me inexpressibly—’

‘Then don’t trouble yourself to reveal it!’

‘But it is of importance—’

‘If so I shall hear it soon enough, especially if it is bad news, as you seem to consider it. At present I am going to take the children to the nursery.’

‘But can’t you ring and send them?’

‘No; I want the exercise of a run to the top of the house. Come, Arthur.’

‘But you will return?’

‘Not yet; don’t wait.’

‘Then when may I see you again?’

‘At lunch,’ said I, departing with little Helen in one arm and leading Arthur by the hand.

He turned away, muttering some sentence of impatient censure or complaint, in which ‘heartless’ was the only distinguishable word.

‘What nonsense is this, Mr. Hargrave?’ said I, pausing in the doorway. ‘What do you mean?’

‘Oh, nothing; I did not intend you should hear my soliloquy. But the fact is, Mrs. Huntingdon, I have a disclosure to make, painful for me to offer as for you to hear; and I want you to give me a few minutes of your attention in private at any time and place you like to appoint. It is from no selfish motive that I ask it, and not for any cause that could alarm your superhuman purity: therefore you need not kill me with that look of cold and pitiless disdain. I know too well the feelings with which the bearers of bad tidings are commonly regarded not to—’

‘What is this wonderful piece of intelligence?’ said I, impatiently interrupting him. ‘If it is anything of real importance, speak it in three words before I go.’

‘In three words I cannot. Send those children away and stay with me.’

‘No; keep your bad tidings to yourself. I know it is something I don’t want to hear, and something you would displease me by telling.’

‘You have divined too truly, I fear; but still, since I know it, I feel it my duty to disclose it to you.’

‘Oh, spare us both the infliction, and I will exonerate you from the duty. You have offered to tell; I have refused to hear: my ignorance will not be charged on you.’

‘Be it so: you shall not hear it from me. But if the blow fall too suddenly upon you when it comes, remember I wished to soften it!’

I left him. I was determined his words should not alarm me. What could he, of all men, have to reveal that was of importance for me to hear? It was no doubt some exaggerated tale about my unfortunate husband that he wished to make the most of to serve his own bad purposes.

6th.—He has not alluded to this momentous mystery since, and I have seen no reason to repent of my unwillingness to hear it. The threatened blow has not been struck yet, and I do not greatly fear it. At present I am pleased with Arthur: he has not positively disgraced himself for upwards of a fortnight, and all this last week has been so very

moderate in his indulgence at table that I can perceive a marked difference in his general temper and appearance. Dare I hope this will continue?

## CHAPTER XXXIII

Seventh.—Yes, I will hope! To-night I heard Grimsby and Hattersley grumbling together about the inhospitality of their host. They did not know I was near, for I happened to be standing behind the curtain in the bow of the window, watching the moon rising over the clump of tall dark elm-trees below the lawn, and wondering why Arthur was so sentimental as to stand without, leaning against the outer pillar of the portico, apparently watching it too.

'So, I suppose we've seen the last of our merry carousals in this house,' said Mr. Hattersley; 'I thought his good-fellowship wouldn't last long. But,' added he, laughing, 'I didn't expect it would meet its end this way. I rather thought our pretty hostess would be setting up her porcupine quills, and threatening to turn us out of the house if we didn't mind our manners.'

'You didn't foresee this, then?' answered Grimsby, with a guttural chuckle. 'But he'll change again when he's sick of her. If we come here a year or two hence, we shall have all our own way, you'll see.'

'I don't know,' replied the other: 'she's not the style of woman you soon tire of. But be that as it may, it's devilish provoking now that we can't be jolly, because he chooses to be on his good behaviour.'

'It's all these cursed women!' muttered Grimsby: 'they're the very bane of the world! They bring trouble and discomfort wherever they come, with their false, fair faces and their deceitful tongues.'

At this juncture I issued from my retreat, and smiling on Mr. Grimsby as I passed, left the room and went out in search of Arthur. Having seen him bend his course towards the shrubbery, I followed him thither, and found him just entering the shadowy walk. I was so light of heart, so overflowing with affection, that I sprang upon him and clasped him in my arms. This startling conduct had a singular effect upon him: first, he murmured, 'Bless you, darling!' and returned my close embrace with a fervour like old times, and then he started, and, in a tone of absolute terror, exclaimed, 'Helen! what the devil is this?' and I saw, by the faint light gleaming through the overshadowing tree, that he was positively pale with the shock.

How strange that the instinctive impulse of affection should come first, and then the shock of the surprise! It shows, at least, that the affection is genuine: he is not sick of me yet.

‘I startled you, Arthur,’ said I, laughing in my glee. ‘How nervous you are!’

‘What the deuce did you do it for?’ cried he, quite testily, extricating himself from my arms, and wiping his forehead with his handkerchief. ‘Go back, Helen—go back directly! You’ll get your death of cold!’

‘I won’t, till I’ve told you what I came for. They are blaming you, Arthur, for your temperance and sobriety, and I’m come to thank you for it. They say it is all “these cursed women,” and that we are the bane of the world; but don’t let them laugh or grumble you out of your good resolutions, or your affection for me.’

He laughed. I squeezed him in my arms again, and cried in tearful earnest, ‘Do, do persevere! and I’ll love you better than ever I did before!’

‘Well, well, I will!’ said he, hastily kissing me. ‘There, now, go. You mad creature, how could you come out in your light evening dress this chill autumn night?’

‘It is a glorious night,’ said I.

‘It is a night that will give you your death, in another minute. Run away, do!’

‘Do you see my death among those trees, Arthur?’ said I, for he was gazing intently at the shrubs, as if he saw it coming, and I was reluctant to leave him, in my new-found happiness and revival of hope and love. But he grew angry at my delay, so I kissed him and ran back to the house.

I was in such a good humour that night: Milicent told me I was the life of the party, and whispered she had never seen me so brilliant. Certainly, I talked enough for twenty, and smiled upon them all. Grimsby, Hattersley, Hargrave, Lady Lowborough, all shared my sisterly kindness. Grimsby stared and wondered; Hattersley laughed and jested (in spite of the little wine he had been suffered to imbibe), but still behaved as well as he knew how. Hargrave and Annabella, from different motives and in different ways, emulated me, and doubtless both surpassed me, the former in his discursive versatility and eloquence, the latter in boldness and animation at least. Milicent, delighted to see her husband, her brother, and her over-estimated friend acquitting themselves so well, was lively and gay too, in her quiet way. Even Lord Lowborough caught the general contagion: his dark greenish eyes were lighted up beneath their moody brows; his sombre countenance was beautified by smiles; all traces of gloom and proud or cold reserve had vanished for the time; and he astonished us all, not only by his general cheerfulness and animation, but by the positive flashes of true force and brilliance he emitted from time to time. Arthur did not talk much, but he laughed, and listened to the

rest, and was in perfect good-humour, though not excited by wine. So that, altogether, we made a very merry, innocent, and entertaining party.

9th.—Yesterday, when Rachel came to dress me for dinner, I saw that she had been crying. I wanted to know the cause of it, but she seemed reluctant to tell. Was she unwell? No. Had she heard bad news from her friends? No. Had any of the servants vexed her?

'Oh, no, ma'am!' she answered; 'it's not for myself.'

'What then, Rachel? Have you been reading novels?'

'Bless you, no!' said she, with a sorrowful shake of the head; and then she sighed and continued: 'But to tell you the truth, ma'am, I don't like master's ways of going on.'

'What do you mean, Rachel? He's going on very properly at present.'

'Well, ma'am, if you think so, it's right.'

And she went on dressing my hair, in a hurried way, quite unlike her usual calm, collected manner, murmuring, half to herself, she was sure it was beautiful hair: she 'could like to see 'em match it.' When it was done, she fondly stroked it, and gently patted my head.

'Is that affectionate ebullition intended for my hair, or myself, nurse?' said I, laughingly turning round upon her; but a tear was even now in her eye.

'What do you mean, Rachel?' I exclaimed.

'Well, ma'am, I don't know; but if—'

'If what?'

'Well, if I was you, I wouldn't have that Lady Lowborough in the house another minute—not another minute I wouldn't!

I was thunderstruck; but before I could recover from the shock sufficiently to demand an explanation, Milicent entered my room, as she frequently does when she is dressed before me; and she stayed with me till it was time to go down. She must have found me a very unsociable companion this time, for Rachel's last words rang in my ears. But still I hoped, I trusted they had no foundation but in some idle rumour of the servants from

what they had seen in Lady Lowborough's manner last month; or perhaps from something that had passed between their master and her during her former visit. At dinner I narrowly observed both her and Arthur, and saw nothing extraordinary in the conduct of either, nothing calculated to excite suspicion, except in distrustful minds, which mine was not, and therefore I would not suspect.

Almost immediately after dinner Annabella went out with her husband to share his moonlight ramble, for it was a splendid evening like the last. Mr. Hargrave entered the drawing-room a little before the others, and challenged me to a game of chess. He did it without any of that sad but proud humility he usually assumes in addressing me, unless he is excited with wine. I looked at his face to see if that was the case now. His eye met mine keenly, but steadily: there was something about him I did not understand, but he seemed sober enough. Not choosing to engage with him, I referred him to Milicent.

'She plays badly,' said he, 'I want to match my skill with yours. Come now! you can't pretend you are reluctant to lay down your work. I know you never take it up except to pass an idle hour, when there is nothing better you can do.'

'But chess-players are so unsociable,' I objected; 'they are no company for any but themselves.'

'There is no one here but Milicent, and she—'

'Oh, I shall be delighted to watch you!' cried our mutual friend. 'Two such players—it will be quite a treat! I wonder which will conquer.'

I consented.

'Now, Mrs. Huntingdon,' said Hargrave, as he arranged the men on the board, speaking distinctly, and with a peculiar emphasis, as if he had a double meaning to all his words, 'you are a good player, but I am a better: we shall have a long game, and you will give me some trouble; but I can be as patient as you, and in the end I shall certainly win.' He fixed his eyes upon me with a glance I did not like, keen, crafty, bold, and almost impudent;—already half triumphant in his anticipated success.

'I hope not, Mr. Hargrave!' returned I, with vehemence that must have startled Milicent at least; but he only smiled and murmured, 'Time will show.'

We set to work: he sufficiently interested in the game, but calm and fearless in the consciousness of superior skill: I, intensely eager to disappoint his expectations, for I considered this the type of a more serious contest, as I imagined he did, and I felt an

almost superstitious dread of being beaten: at all events, I could ill endure that present success should add one tittle to his conscious power (his insolent self-confidence I ought to say), or encourage for a moment his dream of future conquest. His play was cautious and deep, but I struggled hard against him. For some time the combat was doubtful: at length, to my joy, the victory seemed inclining to my side: I had taken several of his best pieces, and manifestly baffled his projects. He put his hand to his brow and paused, in evident perplexity. I rejoiced in my advantage, but dared not glory in it yet. At length, he lifted his head, and quietly making his move, looked at me and said, calmly, 'Now you think you will win, don't you?'

'I hope so,' replied I, taking his pawn that he had pushed into the way of my bishop with so careless an air that I thought it was an oversight, but was not generous enough, under the circumstances, to direct his attention to it, and too heedless, at the moment, to foresee the after-consequences of my move. 'It is those bishops that trouble me,' said he; 'but the bold knight can overleap the reverend gentlemen,' taking my last bishop with his knight; 'and now, those sacred persons once removed, I shall carry all before me.'

'Oh, Walter, how you talk!' cried Milicent; 'she has far more pieces than you still.'

'I intend to give you some trouble yet,' said I; 'and perhaps, sir, you will find yourself checkmated before you are aware. Look to your queen.'

The combat deepened. The game was a long one, and I did give him some trouble: but he was a better player than I.

'What keen gamesters you are!' said Mr. Hattersley, who had now entered, and been watching us for some time. 'Why, Mrs. Huntingdon, your hand trembles as if you had staked your all upon it! and, Walter, you dog, you look as deep and cool as if you were certain of success, and as keen and cruel as if you would drain her heart's blood! But if I were you, I wouldn't beat her, for very fear: she'll hate you if you do—she will, by heaven! I see it in her eye.'

'Hold your tongue, will you?' said I: his talk distracted me, for I was driven to extremities. A few more moves, and I was inextricably entangled in the snare of my antagonist.

'Check,' cried he: I sought in agony some means of escape. 'Mate!' he added, quietly, but with evident delight. He had suspended the utterance of that last fatal syllable the better to enjoy my dismay. I was foolishly disconcerted by the event. Hattersley laughed; Milicent was troubled to see me so disturbed. Hargrave placed his hand on

mine that rested on the table, and squeezing it with a firm but gentle pressure, murmured, 'Beaten, beaten!' and gazed into my face with a look where exultation was blended with an expression of ardour and tenderness yet more insulting.

'No, never, Mr. Hargrave!' exclaimed I, quickly withdrawing my hand.

'Do you deny?' replied he, smilingly pointing to the board. 'No, no,' I answered, recollecting how strange my conduct must appear: 'you have beaten me in that game.'

'Will you try another, then?'

'No.'

'You acknowledge my superiority?'

'Yes, as a chess-player.'

I rose to resume my work.

'Where is Annabella?' said Hargrave, gravely, after glancing round the room.

'Gone out with Lord Lowborough,' answered I, for he looked at me for a reply.

'And not yet returned!' he said, seriously.

'I suppose not.'

'Where is Huntingdon?' looking round again.

'Gone out with Grimsby, as you know,' said Hattersley, suppressing a laugh, which broke forth as he concluded the sentence. Why did he laugh? Why did Hargrave connect them thus together? Was it true, then? And was this the dreadful secret he had wished to reveal to me? I must know, and that quickly. I instantly rose and left the room to go in search of Rachel and demand an explanation of her words; but Mr. Hargrave followed me into the anteroom, and before I could open its outer door, gently laid his hand upon the lock. 'May I tell you something, Mrs. Huntingdon?' said he, in a subdued tone, with serious, downcast eyes.

'If it be anything worth hearing,' replied I, struggling to be composed, for I trembled in every limb.

He quietly pushed a chair towards me. I merely leant my hand upon it, and bid him go on.

'Do not be alarmed,' said he: 'what I wish to say is nothing in itself; and I will leave you to draw your own inferences from it. You say that Annabella is not yet returned?'

'Yes, yes—go on!' said I, impatiently; for I feared my forced calmness would leave me before the end of his disclosure, whatever it might be.

'And you hear,' continued he, 'that Huntingdon is gone out with Grimsby?'

'Well?'

'I heard the latter say to your husband—or the man who calls himself so—'

'Go on, sir!'

He bowed submissively, and continued: 'I heard him say,—"I shall manage it, you'll see! They're gone down by the water; I shall meet them there, and tell him I want a bit of talk with him about some things that we needn't trouble the lady with; and she'll say she can be walking back to the house; and then I shall apologise, you know, and all that, and tip her a wink to take the way of the shrubbery. I'll keep him talking there, about those matters I mentioned, and anything else I can think of, as long as I can, and then bring him round the other way, stopping to look at the trees, the fields, and anything else I can find to discourse of."' Mr. Hargrave paused, and looked at me.

Without a word of comment or further questioning, I rose, and darted from the room and out of the house. The torment of suspense was not to be endured: I would not suspect my husband falsely, on this man's accusation, and I would not trust him unworthily—I must know the truth at once. I flew to the shrubbery. Scarcely had I reached it, when a sound of voices arrested my breathless speed.

'We have lingered too long; he will be back,' said Lady Lowborough's voice.

'Surely not, dearest!' was his reply; 'but you can run across the lawn, and get in as quietly as you can; I'll follow in a while.'

My knees trembled under me; my brain swam round. I was ready to faint. She must not see me thus. I shrunk among the bushes, and leant against the trunk of a tree to let her pass.

‘Ah, Huntingdon!’ said she reproachfully, pausing where I had stood with him the night before—‘it was here you kissed that woman!’ she looked back into the leafy shade. Advancing thence, he answered, with a careless laugh,—

‘Well, dearest, I couldn’t help it. You know I must keep straight with her as long as I can. Haven’t I seen you kiss your dolt of a husband scores of times?—and do I ever complain?’

‘But tell me, don’t you love her still—a little?’ said she, placing her hand on his arm, looking earnestly in his face—for I could see them, plainly, the moon shining full upon them from between the branches of the tree that sheltered me.

‘Not one bit, by all that’s sacred!’ he replied, kissing her glowing cheek.

‘Good heavens, I must be gone!’ cried she, suddenly breaking from him, and away she flew.

There he stood before me; but I had not strength to confront him now: my tongue cleaved to the roof of my mouth; I was well-nigh sinking to the earth, and I almost wondered he did not hear the beating of my heart above the low sighing of the wind and the fitful rustle of the falling leaves. My senses seemed to fail me, but still I saw his shadowy form pass before me, and through the rushing sound in my ears I distinctly heard him say, as he stood looking up the lawn,—‘There goes the fool! Run, Annabella, run! There—in with you! Ah,—he didn’t see! That’s right, Grimsby, keep him back!’ And even his low laugh reached me as he walked away.

‘God help me now!’ I murmured, sinking on my knees among the damp weeds and brushwood that surrounded me, and looking up at the moonlit sky, through the scant foliage above. It seemed all dim and quivering now to my darkened sight. My burning, bursting heart strove to pour forth its agony to God, but could not frame its anguish into prayer; until a gust of wind swept over me, which, while it scattered the dead leaves, like blighted hopes, around, cooled my forehead, and seemed a little to revive my sinking frame. Then, while I lifted up my soul in speechless, earnest supplication, some heavenly influence seemed to strengthen me within: I breathed more freely; my vision cleared; I saw distinctly the pure moon shining on, and the light clouds skimming the clear, dark sky; and then I saw the eternal stars twinkling down upon me; I knew their God was mine, and He was strong to save and swift to hear. ‘I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,’ seemed whispered from above their myriad orbs. No, no; I felt He would not leave me comfortless: in spite of earth and hell I should have strength for all my trials, and win a glorious rest at last!

Refreshed, invigorated, if not composed, I rose and returned to the house. Much of my new-born strength and courage forsook me, I confess, as I entered it, and shut out the fresh wind and the glorious sky: everything I saw and heard seemed to sicken my heart—the hall, the lamp, the staircase, the doors of the different apartments, the social sound of talk and laughter from the drawing-room. How could I bear my future life! In this house, among those people—oh, how could I endure to live! John just then entered the hall, and seeing me, told me he had been sent in search of me, adding that he had taken in the tea, and master wished to know if I were coming.

'Ask Mrs. Hattersley to be so kind as to make the tea, John,' said I. 'Say I am not well to-night, and wish to be excused.'

I retired into the large, empty dining-room, where all was silence and darkness, but for the soft sighing of the wind without, and the faint gleam of moonlight that pierced the blinds and curtains; and there I walked rapidly up and down, thinking of my bitter thoughts alone. How different was this from the evening of yesterday! That, it seems, was the last expiring flash of my life's happiness. Poor, blinded fool that I was to be so happy! I could now see the reason of Arthur's strange reception of me in the shrubbery; the burst of kindness was for his paramour, the start of horror for his wife. Now, too, I could better understand the conversation between Hattersley and Grimsby; it was doubtless of his love for her they spoke, not for me.

I heard the drawing-room door open: a light quick step came out of the ante-room, crossed the hall, and ascended the stairs. It was Milicent, poor Milicent, gone to see how I was—no one else cared for me; but she still was kind. I shed no tears before, but now they came, fast and free. Thus she did me good, without approaching me. Disappointed in her search, I heard her come down, more slowly than she had ascended. Would she come in there, and find me out? No, she turned in the opposite direction and re-entered the drawing-room. I was glad, for I knew not how to meet her, or what to say. I wanted no confidante in my distress. I deserved none, and I wanted none. I had taken the burden upon myself; let me bear it alone.

As the usual hour of retirement approached I dried my eyes, and tried to clear my voice and calm my mind. I must see Arthur to-night, and speak to him; but I would do it calmly: there should be no scene—nothing to complain or to boast of to his companions—nothing to laugh at with his lady-love. When the company were retiring to their chambers I gently opened the door, and just as he passed, beckoned him in.

'What's to do with you, Helen?' said he. 'Why couldn't you come to make tea for us? and what the deuce are you here for, in the dark? What ails you, young woman: you look like a ghost!' he continued, surveying me by the light of his candle.

‘No matter,’ I answered, ‘to you; you have no longer any regard for me it appears; and I have no longer any for you.’

‘Hal-lo! what the devil is this?’ he muttered. ‘I would leave you to-morrow,’ continued I, ‘and never again come under this roof, but for my child’—I paused a moment to steady, my voice.

‘What in the devil’s name is this, Helen?’ cried he. ‘What can you be driving at?’

‘You know perfectly well. Let us waste no time in useless explanation, but tell me, will you—?’

He vehemently swore he knew nothing about it, and insisted upon hearing what poisonous old woman had been blackening his name, and what infamous lies I had been fool enough to believe.

‘Spare yourself the trouble of forswearing yourself and racking your brains to stifle truth with falsehood,’ I coldly replied. ‘I have trusted to the testimony of no third person. I was in the shrubbery this evening, and I saw and heard for myself.’

This was enough. He uttered a suppressed exclamation of consternation and dismay, and muttering, ‘I shall catch it now!’ set down his candle on the nearest chair, and rearing his back against the wall, stood confronting me with folded arms.

‘Well, what then?’ said he, with the calm insolence of mingled shamelessness and desperation.

‘Only this,’ returned I; ‘will you let me take our child and what remains of my fortune, and go?’

‘Go where?’

‘Anywhere, where he will be safe from your contaminating influence, and I shall be delivered from your presence, and you from mine.’

‘No.’

‘Will you let me have the child then, without the money?’

‘No, nor yourself without the child. Do you think I’m going to be made the talk of the country for your fastidious caprices?’

‘Then I must stay here, to be hated and despised. But henceforth we are husband and wife only in the name.’

‘Very good.’

‘I am your child’s mother, and your housekeeper, nothing more. So you need not trouble yourself any longer to feign the love you cannot feel: I will exact no more heartless caresses from you, nor offer nor endure them either. I will not be mocked with the empty husk of conjugal endearments, when you have given the substance to another!’

‘Very good, if you please. We shall see who will tire first, my lady.’

‘If I tire, it will be of living in the world with you: not of living without your mockery of love. When you tire of your sinful ways, and show yourself truly repentant, I will forgive you, and, perhaps, try to love you again, though that will be hard indeed.’

‘Humph! and meantime you will go and talk me over to Mrs. Hargrave, and write long letters to aunt Maxwell to complain of the wicked wretch you have married?’

‘I shall complain to no one. Hitherto I have struggled hard to hide your vices from every eye, and invest you with virtues you never possessed; but now you must look to yourself.’

I left him muttering bad language to himself, and went up-stairs.

‘You are poorly, ma’am,’ said Rachel, surveying me with deep anxiety.

‘It is too true, Rachel,’ said I, answering her sad looks rather than her words.

‘I knew it, or I wouldn’t have mentioned such a thing.’

‘But don’t you trouble yourself about it,’ said I, kissing her pale, time-wasted cheek. ‘I can bear it better than you imagine.’

‘Yes, you were always for “bearing.” But if I was you I wouldn’t bear it; I’d give way to it, and cry right hard! and I’d talk too, I just would—I’d let him know what it was to—’

‘I have talked,’ said I; ‘I’ve said enough.’

‘Then I’d cry,’ persisted she. ‘I wouldn’t look so white and so calm, and burst my heart with keeping it in.’

‘I have cried,’ said I, smiling, in spite of my misery; ‘and I am calm now, really: so don’t discompose me again, nurse: let us say no more about it, and don’t mention it to the servants. There, you may go now. Good-night; and don’t disturb your rest for me: I shall sleep well—if I can.’

Notwithstanding this resolution, I found my bed so intolerable that, before two o’clock, I rose, and lighting my candle by the rushlight that was still burning, I got my desk and sat down in my dressing-gown to recount the events of the past evening. It was better to be so occupied than to be lying in bed torturing my brain with recollections of the far past and anticipations of the dreadful future. I have found relief in describing the very circumstances that have destroyed my peace, as well as the little trivial details attendant upon their discovery. No sleep I could have got this night would have done so much towards composing my mind, and preparing me to meet the trials of the day. I fancy so, at least; and yet, when I cease writing, I find my head aches terribly; and when I look into the glass, I am startled at my haggard, worn appearance.

Rachel has been to dress me, and says I have had a sad night of it, she can see. Milicent has just looked in to ask me how I was. I told her I was better, but to excuse my appearance admitted I had had a restless night. I wish this day were over! I shudder at the thoughts of going down to breakfast. How shall I encounter them all? Yet let me remember it is not I that am guilty: I have no cause to fear; and if they scorn me as a victim of their guilt, I can pity their folly and despise their scorn.