

Chapter XVIII

1802. - This September I was invited to devastate the moors of a friend in the north, and on my journey to his abode, I unexpectedly came within fifteen miles of Gimmerton. The ostler at a roadside public-house was holding a pail of water to refresh my horses, when a cart of very green oats, newly reaped, passed by, and he remarked, -

'Yon's frough Gimmerton, nah! They're allas three wick' after other folk wi' ther harvest.'

'Gimmerton?' I repeated - my residence in that locality had already grown dim and dreamy. 'Ah! I know. How far is it from this?'

'Happen fourteen mile o'er th' hills; and a rough road,' he answered.

A sudden impulse seized me to visit Thrushcross Grange. It was scarcely noon, and I conceived that I might as well pass the night under my own roof as in an inn. Besides, I could spare a day easily to arrange matters with my landlord, and thus save myself the trouble of invading the neighbourhood again.

Having rested awhile, I directed my servant to inquire the way to the village; and, with great fatigue to our beasts, we managed the distance in some three hours.

I left him there, and proceeded down the valley alone. The grey church looked greyer, and the lonely churchyard lonelier. I distinguished a moor-sheep cropping the short turf on the graves. It was sweet, warm weather - too warm for travelling; but the heat did not hinder me from enjoying the delightful scenery above and below: had I seen it nearer August, I'm sure it would have tempted me to waste a month among its solitudes. In winter nothing more dreary, in summer nothing more divine, than those glens shut in by hills, and those bluff, bold swells of heath.

I reached the Grange before sunset, and knocked for admittance; but the family had retreated into the back premises, I judged, by one thin, blue wreath, curling from the kitchen chimney, and they did not hear.

I rode into the court. Under the porch, a girl of nine or ten sat knitting, and an old woman reclined on the housesteps, smoking a meditative pipe.

'Is Mrs Dean within?' I demanded of the dame.

'Mistress Dean? Nay!' she answered, 'she doesn't bide here: shoo's up at th' Heights.'

'Are you the housekeeper, then?' I continued.

'Eea, aw keep th' hause,' she replied.

'Well, I'm Mr Lockwood, the master. Are there any rooms to lodge me in, I wonder? I wish to stay all night.'

'T' maister!' she cried in astonishment. 'Whet, whoiver knew yah wur coming? Yah sud ha' send word. They's nowt norther dry nor mensful abaht t' place - nowt there isn't!'

She threw down her pipe and bustled in, the girl followed, and I entered too; soon perceiving that her report was true, and, moreover, that I had almost upset her wits by my unwelcome apparition.

I bid her be composed - I would go out for a walk; and, meantime she must try to prepare a corner of a sitting-room for me to sup in, and a bedroom to sleep in - No sweeping and dusting, only good fire and dry sheets were necessary.

She seemed willing to do her best; though she thrust the hearth-brush into the grates in mistake for the poker; and malappropriated several other articles of her craft; but I retired, confiding in her energy for a resting-place against my return.

Wuthering Heights was the goal of my proposed excursion. An afterthought brought me back, when I had quitted the court.

'All well at the Heights?' I inquired of the woman.

'Eea, fr owt ee knaw!' she answered, skurrying away with a pan of hot cinders.

I would have asked why Mrs Dean had deserted the Grange; but it was impossible to delay her at such a crisis, so I turned away and made my exit, rambling leisurely along, with the glow of a sinking sun behind, and the mild glory of a rising moon in front - one fading, and the other brightening - as I quitted the park, and climbed the stony by-road branching off to Mr Heathcliff's dwelling.

Before I arrived in sight of it, all that remained of day was a beamless amber light along the west; but I could see every pebble on the path, and every blade of grass, by that splendid moon.

I had neither to climb the gate nor to knock - it yielded to my hand.

That is an improvement, I thought. And I noticed another, by the aid of my nostrils; a fragrance of stocks and wallflowers wafted on the air from amongst the homely fruit-trees.

Both doors and lattices were open; and yet, as is usually the case in a coal-district, a fine red fire illumined the chimney; the comfort which the eye derives from it renders the extra heat endurable. But the house of Wuthering Heights is so large that the inmates have plenty of space for withdrawing out of its influence; and accordingly what inmates there were had stationed themselves not far from one of the windows. I could both see them and hear them talk before I entered, and looked and listened in consequence; being moved thereto by a mingled sense of curiosity and envy, that grew as I lingered.

'Con-*trary!*' said a voice as sweet as a silver bell. 'That for the third time, you dunce! I'm not going to tell you again. Recollect, or I'll pull your hair!'

'Contrary, then,' answered another, in deep but softened tones. 'And now, kiss me, for minding so well.'

'No, read it over first correctly, without a single mistake.'

The male speaker began to read - he was a young man, respectably dressed and seated at a table, having a book before him. His handsome features glowed with pleasure, and his eyes kept impatiently wandering from the page to a small white hand over his shoulder, which recalled him by a smart slap on the cheek, whenever its owner detected such signs of inattention.

Its owner stood behind; her light, shining ringlets blending, at intervals, with his brown locks, as she bent to superintend his studies; and her face - it was lucky he could not see her face, or he would never have been so steady - I could, and I bit my lip in spite, at having thrown away the chance I might have had of doing something besides staring at its smiting beauty.

The task was done, not free from further blunders; but the pupil claimed a reward, and received at least five kisses; which, however, he generously returned. Then they came to the door, and from their conversation I judged they were about to issue out and have a walk on

the moors. I supposed I should be condemned in Hareton Earnshaw's heart, if not by his mouth, to the lowest pit in the infernal regions if I showed my unfortunate person in his neighbourhood then; and feeling very mean and malignant, I skulked round to seek refuge in the kitchen.

There was unobstructed admittance on that side also; and at the door sat my old friend Nelly Dean, sewing and singing a song; which was often interrupted from within by harsh words of scorn and intolerance, uttered in far from musical accents.

'Aw'd rayther, by th' haulf, hev' 'em swearing i' my lugs fro'h morn to neeght, nor hearken ye hahsiver!' said the tenant of the kitchen, in answer to an unheard speech of Nelly's. 'It's a blazing shame, that I cannot oppen t' blessed Book, but yah set up them glories to sattan, and all t' flaysome wickednesses that iver were born into th' warld! Oh! ye're a raight nowt; and shoo's another; and that poor lad 'll be lost atween ye. Poor lad!' he added, with a groan; 'he's witched: I'm sartin on't. Oh, Lord, judge 'em, for there's norther law nor justice among werrullers!'

'No! or we should be sitting in flaming fagots, I suppose,' retorted the singer. 'But wisht, old man, and read your Bible like a Christian, and never mind me. This is "Fairy Annie's Wedding" - a bonny tune - it goes to a dance.'

Mrs Dean was about to recommence, when I advanced; and recognising me directly, she jumped to her feet, crying –

‘Why, bless you, Mr Lockwood! How could you think of returning in this way? All's shut up at Thrushcross Grange. You should have given us notice!’

‘I've arranged to be accommodated there, for as long as I shall stay,’ I answered. ‘I depart again to-morrow. And how are you transplanted here, Mrs Dean? tell me that.’

‘Zillah left, and Mr Heathcliff wished me to come, soon after you went to London, and stay till you returned. But, step in, pray! Have you walked from Gimmerton this evening?’

‘From the Grange,’ I replied; ‘and while they make me lodging room there, I want to finish my business with your master; because I don't think of having another opportunity in a hurry.’

‘What business, sir?’ said Nelly, conducting me into the house. ‘He's gone out at present, and won't return soon.’

‘About the rent,’ I answered.

‘Oh! then it is with Mrs Heathcliff you must settle,’ she observed; ‘or rather with me. She has not learnt to manage her affairs yet, and I act for her: there's nobody else.’

I looked surprised.

'Ah! you have not heard of Heathcliff's death, I see,' she continued.

'Heathcliff dead!' I exclaimed, astonished. 'How long ago?'

'Three months since - but sit down, and let me take your hat, and I'll tell you all about it. Stop, you have had nothing to eat, have you?'

'I want nothing: I have ordered supper at home. You sit down too. I never dreamt of his dying! Let me hear how it came to pass. You say you don't expect them back for some time - the young people?'

'No - I have to scold them every evening for their late rambles: but they don't care for me. At least, have a drink of our old ale - it will do you good: you seem weary.'

She hastened to fetch it before I could refuse, and I heard Joseph asking whether 'it warn't a crying scandal that she should have followers at her time of life? And then, to get them jocks out o' t' maister's cellar! He fair shaamed to 'bide still and see it.'

She did not stay to retaliate, but re-entered in a minute, bearing a reaming silver pint, whose contents I lauded with becoming earnestness. And afterwards she furnished me with the sequel of Heathcliff's history. He had a 'queer' end, as she expressed it.

I was summoned to Wuthering Heights, within a fortnight of your leaving us, she said; and I obeyed joyfully, for Catherine's sake.

My first interview with her grieved and shocked me: she had altered so much since our separation. Mr Heathcliff did not explain his reasons for taking a new mind about my coming here; he only told me he wanted me, and he was tired of seeing Catherine: I must make the little parlour my sitting-room, and keep her with me. It was enough if he were obliged to see her once or twice a day.

She seemed pleased at this arrangement; and, by degrees, I smuggled over a great number of books, and other articles, that had formed her amusement at the Grange; and flattered myself we should get on in tolerable comfort.

The delusion did not last long. Catherine, contented at first, in a brief space grew irritable and restless. For one thing, she was forbidden to move out of the garden, and it fretted her sadly to be confined to its narrow bounds as spring drew on - for another, in following the house, I was forced to quit her frequently, and she complained of loneliness: she preferred quarrelling with Joseph in the kitchen to sitting at peace in her solitude.

I did not mind their skirmishes; but Hareton was often obliged to seek the kitchen also, when the master wanted to have the house to himself! and though in the beginning she either left it at his approach, or quietly joined in my occupations, and shunned remarking or addressing him - and though he was always as sullen and silent as possible - after a while, she changed her behaviour, and became

incapable of letting him alone: talking at him; commenting on his stupidity and idleness; expressing her wonder how he could endure the life he lived - how he could sit a whole evening staring into the fire, and dozing.

'He's just like a dog, is he not, Ellen?' she once observed, 'or a cart-horse? He does his work, eats his food, and sleeps eternally! What a blank, dreary mind he must have! Do you ever dream, Hareton? And, if you do, what is it about? But you can't speak to me!'

Then she looked at him; but he would neither open his mouth nor look again.

'He's, perhaps, dreaming now,' she continued. 'He twitched his shoulder as Juno twitches hers. Ask him, Ellen.'

'Mr Hareton will ask the master to send you up-stairs, if you don't behave!' I said. He had not only twitched his shoulder but clenched his fist, as if tempted to use it.

'I know why Hareton never speaks, when I am in the kitchen,' she exclaimed, on another occasion. 'He is afraid I shall laugh at him. Ellen, what do you think? He began to teach himself to read once; and, because I laughed, he burned his books, and dropped it: was he not a fool?'

'Were not you naughty?' I said; 'answer me that.'

'Perhaps I was,' she went on; 'but I did not expect him to be so silly. Hareton, if I gave you a book, would you take it now? I'll try!'

She placed one she had been perusing on his hand; he flung it off, and muttered, if she did not give over, he would break her neck.

'Well, I shall put it here,' she said, 'in the table-drawer; and I'm going to bed.'

Then she whispered me to watch whether he touched it, and departed. But he would not come near it; and so I informed her in the morning, to her great disappointment. I saw she was sorry for his persevering sulkiness and indolence - her conscience reproved her for frightening him off improving himself: she had done it effectually; but her ingenuity was at work to remedy the injury: while I ironed, or pursued other such stationary employments as I could not well do in the parlour, she would bring some pleasant volume and read it aloud to me. When Hareton was there, she generally paused in an interesting part, and left the book lying about: that she did repeatedly; but he was as obstinate as a mule, and, instead of snatching at her bait, in wet weather he took to smoking with Joseph; and they sat like automatons, one on each side of the fire, the elder happily too deaf to understand her wicked nonsense, as he would have called it, the younger doing his best to seem to disregard it. On fine evenings the latter followed his shooting expeditions, and Catherine yawned and sighed, and teased me to talk to her, and ran off into the court or

garden the moment I began; and, as a last resource, cried, and said she was tired of living: her life was useless.

Mr Heathcliff, who grew more and more disinclined to society, had almost banished Earnshaw from his apartment. Owing to an accident at the commencement of March, he became for some days a fixture in the kitchen. His gun burst while out on the hills by himself; a splinter cut his arm, and he lost a good deal of blood before he could reach home. The consequence was that, perforce, he was condemned to the fireside and tranquillity, till he made it up again.

It suited Catherine to have him there: at any rate, it made her hate her room up-stairs more than ever: and she would compel me to find out business below, that she might accompany me.

On Easter Monday, Joseph went to Gimmerton fair with some cattle; and, in the afternoon, I was busy getting up linen in the kitchen - Earnshaw sat, morose as usual, at the chimney corner, and my little mistress was beguiling an idle hour with drawing pictures on the window-panes, varying her amusement by smothered bursts of songs, and whispered ejaculations, and quick glances of annoyance and impatience in the direction of her cousin, who steadfastly smoked, and looked into the grate.

At a notice that I could do with her no longer intercepting my light, she removed to the hearthstone. I bestowed little attention on her proceedings, but, presently, I heard her begin -

'I've found out, Hareton, that I want - that I'm glad - that I should like you to be my cousin now, if you had not grown so cross to me, and so rough.'

Hareton returned no answer.

'Hareton, Hareton, Hareton! do you hear?' she continued.

'Get off wi' ye!' he growled, with uncompromising gruffness.

'Let me take that pipe,' she said, cautiously advancing her hand and abstracting it from his mouth.

Before he could attempt to recover it, it was broken, and behind the fire. He swore at her and seized another.

'Stop,' she cried, 'you must listen to me first; and I can't speak while those clouds are floating in my face.'

'Will you go to the devil!' he exclaimed, ferociously, 'and let me be!'

'No,' she persisted, 'I won't: I can't tell what to do to make you talk to me; and you are determined not to understand. When I call you stupid, I don't mean anything - I don't mean that I despise you. Come, you shall take notice of me, Hareton: you are my cousin, and you shall own me.'

'I shall have naught to do wi' you and your mucky pride, and your damned mocking tricks!' he answered. 'I'll go to hell, body and soul,

before I look sideways after you again. Side out o' t' gate, now, this minute!'

Catherine frowned, and retreated to the window-seat chewing her lip, and endeavouring, by humming an eccentric tune, to conceal a growing tendency to sob.

'You should be friends with your cousin, Mr Hareton,' I interrupted, 'since she repents of her sauciness. It would do you a great deal of good: it would make you another man to have her for a companion.'

'A companion!' he cried; 'when she hates me, and does not think me fit to wipe her shoon! Nay, if it made me a king, I'd not be scorned for seeking her good-will any more.'

'It is not I who hate you, it is you who hate me!' wept Cathy, no longer disguising her trouble. 'You hate me as much as Mr Heathcliff does, and more.'

'You're a damned liar,' began Earnshaw: 'why have I made him angry, by taking your part, then, a hundred times? and that when you sneered at and despised me, and - Go on plaguing me, and I'll step in yonder, and say you worried me out of the kitchen!'

'I didn't know you took my part,' she answered, drying her eyes; 'and I was miserable and bitter at everybody; but now I thank you, and beg you to forgive me: what can I do besides?'

She returned to the hearth, and frankly extended her hand. He blackened and scowled like a thunder-cloud, and kept his fists resolutely clenched, and his gaze fixed on the ground.

Catherine, by instinct, must have divined it was obdurate perversity, and not dislike, that prompted this dogged conduct; for, after remaining an instant undecided, she stooped and impressed on his cheek a gentle kiss.

The little rogue thought I had not seen her, and, drawing back, she took her former station by the window, quite demurely.

I shook my head reprovngly, and then she blushed and whispered –

‘Well! what should I have done, Ellen? He wouldn't shake hands, and he wouldn't look: I must show him some way that I like him - that I want to be friends.’

Whether the kiss convinced Hareton, I cannot tell: he was very careful, for some minutes, that his face should not be seen, and when he did raise it, he was sadly puzzled where to turn his eyes.

Catherine employed herself in wrapping a handsome book neatly in white paper, and having tied it with a bit of ribbon, and addressed it to ‘Mr Hareton Earnshaw,’ she desired me to be her ambassadress, and convey the present to its destined recipient.

‘And tell him, if he'll take it, I'll come and teach him to read it right,’ she said; ‘and, if he refuse it, I'll go upstairs, and never tease him again.’

I carried it, and repeated the message; anxiously watched by my employer. Hareton would not open his fingers, so I laid it on his knee. He did not strike it off, either. I returned to my work. Catherine leaned her head and arms on the table, till she heard the slight rustle of the covering being removed; then she stole away, and quietly seated herself beside her cousin. He trembled, and his face glowed: all his rudeness and all his surly harshness had deserted him: he could not summon courage, at first, to utter a syllable in reply to her questioning look, and her murmured petition.

‘Say you forgive me, Hareton, do. You can make me so happy by speaking that little word.’

He muttered something inaudible.

‘And you'll be my friend?’ added Catherine, interrogatively.

‘Nay, you'll be ashamed of me every day of your life,’ he answered; ‘and the more ashamed, the more you know me; and I cannot bide it.’

‘So you won't be my friend?’ she said, smiling as sweet as honey, and creeping close up.

I overheard no further distinguishable talk, but, on looking round again, I perceived two such radiant countenances bent over the page of the accepted book, that I did not doubt the treaty had been ratified on both sides; and the enemies were, thenceforth, sworn allies.

The work they studied was full of costly pictures; and those and their position had charm enough to keep them unmoved till Joseph came home. He, poor man, was perfectly aghast at the spectacle of Catherine seated on the same bench with Hareton Earnshaw, leaning her hand on his shoulder; and confounded at his favourite's endurance of her proximity: it affected him too deeply to allow an observation on the subject that night. His emotion was only revealed by the immense sighs he drew, as he solemnly spread his large Bible on the table, and overlaid it with dirty bank-notes from his pocket-book, the produce of the day's transactions. At length he summoned Hareton from his seat.

'Tak' these in to t' maister, lad,' he said, 'and bide there; Aw's gang up tuh my awn rahm. This hoile's neither mensful nor seemly for us: we mun side out and seearch another.'

'Come, Catherine,' I said, 'we must "side out" too: I've done my ironing. Are you ready to go?'

'It is not eight o'clock!' she answered, rising unwillingly.

'Hareton, I'll leave this book upon the chimney-piece, and I'll bring some more to-morrow.'

'Ony books that yah leave, I shall tak' into th' hahse,' said Joseph, 'and it'll be mitch if yah find 'em agean; soa, yah may plase yerseln!'

Cathy threatened that his library should pay for hers; and, smiling as she passed Hareton, went singing up-stairs: lighter of heart, I venture to say, than ever she had been under that roof before; except, perhaps, during her earliest visits to Linton.

The intimacy thus commenced grew rapidly; though it encountered temporary interruptions. Earnshaw was not to be civilized with a wish, and my young lady was no philosopher, and no paragon of patience; but both their minds tending to the same point - one loving and desiring to esteem, and the other loving and desiring to be esteemed - they contrived in the end to reach it.

You see, Mr Lockwood, it was easy enough to win Mrs Heathcliff's heart. But now, I'm glad you did not try - the crown of all my wishes will be the union of those two. I shall envy no one on their wedding day - there won't be a happier woman than myself in England!