

Chapter IX - Briarmains

Messrs Helstone and Sykes began to be extremely jocose and congratulatory with Mr Moore when he returned to them after dismissing the deputation. He was so quiet, however, under their compliments upon his firmness etc., and wore a countenance so like a still, dark day, equally beamless and breezeless, that the rector, after glancing shrewdly into his eyes, buttoned up his felicitations with his coat, and said to Sykes, whose senses were not acute enough to enable him to discover unassisted where his presence and conversation were a nuisance, 'Come, sir; your road and mine lie partly together. Had we not better bear each other company? We'll bid Moore 'good-morning' and leave him to the happy fancies he seems disposed to indulge.'

'And where is Sugden?' demanded Moore, looking up. 'Ah, ha!' cried Helstone. 'I've not been quite idle while you were busy. I've been helping you a little; I flatter myself not injudiciously. I thought it better not to lose time; so, while you were parleying with that down-looking gentleman - Farren I think his name is - I opened this back window, shouted to Murgatroyd, who was in the stable, to bring Mr Sykes's gig round; then I smuggled Sugden and brother Moses - wooden leg and all - through the aperture, and saw them mount the gig (always with our good friend Sykes's permission, of course). Sugden took the reins he drives like Jehu - and in another quarter of an hour Barraclough will be safe in Stilbro' jail.'

'Very good; thank you,' said Moore; 'and good-morning, gentlemen,' he added, and so politely conducted them to the door, and saw them clear of his premises.

He was a taciturn, serious man the rest of the day. He did not even bandy a repartee with Joe Scott, who, for his part, said to his master only just what was absolutely necessary to the progress of business, but looked at him a good deal out of the corners of his eyes, frequently came to poke the counting-house fire for him, and once, as he was locking up for the day (the mill was then working short time, owing to the slackness of trade), observed that it was a grand evening, and he 'could wish Mr Moore to take a bit of a walk up th' Hollow. It would do him good.'

At this recommendation Mr Moore burst into a short laugh, and after demanding of Joe what all this solicitude meant, and whether he took him for a woman or a child, seized the keys from his hand, and shoved him by the shoulders out of his presence. He called him back, however, ere he had reached the yard- gate.

'Joe, do you know those Farrens? They are not well off, I suppose?'

'They cannot be well off, sir, when they've not had work as a three month. Ye'd see yoursel' 'at William's sorely changed - fair pared. They've selled most o' t' stuff out o' th' house.'

'He was not a bad workman?'

'Ye never had a better, sir, sin' ye began trade.'

'And decent people - the whole family?'

'Niver dacent. Th' wife's a raight cant body, and as clean - ye mught eat your porridge off th' house floor. They're sorely comed down. I wish William could get a job as gardener or summat i' that way; he understands gardening weel. He once lived wi' a Scotchman that tached him the mysteries o' that craft, as they say.'

'Now, then, you can go, Joe. You need not stand there staring at me.'

'Ye've no orders to give, sir?'

'None, but for you to take yourself off.' Which Joe did accordingly.

Spring evenings are often cold and raw, and though this had been a fine day, warm even in the morning and meridian sunshine, the air chilled at sunset, the ground crisped, and ere dusk a hoar frost was insidiously stealing over growing grass and unfolding bud. It whitened the pavement in front of Briarmains (Mr Yorke's residence), and made silent havoc among the tender plants in his garden, and on the mossy level of his lawn. As to that great tree, strong-trunked and broad-armed, which guarded the gable nearest the road, it seemed to defy a spring-night frost to harm its still bare boughs; and so did the leafless grove of walnut-trees rising tall behind the house.

In the dusk of the moonless if starry night, lights from window's shone vividly. This was no dark or lonely scene, nor even a silent one. Briarmains stood near the highway. It was rather an old place, and had been built ere that highway was cut, and when a lane winding up through fields was the only path conducting to it. Briarfield lay scarce a mile off; its hum was heard, its glare distinctly seen. Briar Chapel, a large, new, raw Wesleyan place of worship, rose but a hundred yards distant; and as there was even now a prayer-meeting being held within its walls, the illumination of its windows cast a bright reflection on the road, while a hymn of a most extraordinary description, such as a very Quaker might feel himself moved by the Spirit to dance to, roused cheerily all the echoes of the vicinage. The words were distinctly audible by snatches. Here is a quotation or two from different strains; for the singers passed jauntily from hymn to hymn and from tune to tune, with an ease and buoyancy all their own:

'Oh! who can explain
This struggle for life,
This travail and pain,
This trembling, and strife?

'Plague, earthquake, and famine,
And tumult and war,
The wonderful coming
Of Jesus declare!

'For every fight
Is dreadful and loud:
The warrior's delight
Is slaughter and blood,

'His foes overturning,
Till all shall expire,
And this is with burning,
And fuel, and fire!'

Here followed an interval of clamorous prayer, accompanied by fearful groans. A shout of 'I've found liberty!' 'Doad o' Bill's has fun' liberty! rang from the chapel, and out all the assembly broke again.

'What a mercy is this!
What a heaven of bliss!
How unspeakably happy am I!
Gathered into the fold,
With Thy people enrolled
With Thy people to live and to die!

'Oh, the goodness of God
In employing a clod
His tribute of glory to raise;
His standard to bear,
And with Triumph declare
His unspeakable riches of grace!

'Oh, the fathomless love
That has deigned to approve
And prosper the work in my hands.
With my pastoral crook
I went over the brook,
And behold I am spread into bands!

'Who, I ask in amaze,
Hath begotten me these?
And inquire from what quarter they came.

My full heart it replies,
They are born from the skies,
And gives glory to God and the Lamb!

The stanza which followed this, after another and longer interregnum of shouts, yells, ejaculations, frantic cries, agonised groans, seemed to cap the climax of noise and zeal.

'Sleeping on the brink of sin,
Tophet gaped to take us in;
Mercy to our rescue flew,
Broke the snare, and brought us through.

'Here, as in a lion's den,
Undevoured we still remain,
Pass secure the watery flood,
Hanging on the arm of God.

Here - '

(Terrible, most distracting to the ear, was the strained shout in which the last stanza was given.)

'Here we raise our voices higher,
Shout in the refiner's fire
Clap our hands amidst the flame,
Glory give to Jesus' name!

The roof of the chapel did not fly off, which speaks volumes in praise of its solid slating.

But if Briar Chapel seemed alive, so also did Briarmains, though certainly the mansion appeared to enjoy a quieter phase of existence than the temple. Some of its windows too were aglow; the lower casements opened upon the lawn; curtains concealed the interior, and partly obscured the ray of the candles which lit it, but they did not entirely muffle the sound of voice and laughter. We are privileged to enter that front door, and to penetrate to the domestic sanctum.

It is not the presence of company which makes Mr Yorke's habitation lively, for there is none within it save his own family, and they are assembled in that farthest room to the right, the back parlour.

This is the usual sitting-room of an evening. Those windows would be seen by daylight to be of brilliantly-stained glass, purple and amber the predominant hues, glittering round a gravely-tinted medallion in the centre of each, representing the suave head of William Shakespeare, and the serene one of John Milton. Some Canadian

views hung on the walls - green forest and blue water scenery - and in the midst of them blazes a night eruption of Vesuvius; very ardently it glows, contrasted with the cool foam and azure of cataracts, and the dusky depths of woods.

The fire illuminating this room, reader, is such as, if you be a southern, you do not often see burning on the hearth of a private apartment. It is a clear, hot coal fire, heaped high in the ample chimney. Mr Yorke will have such fires even in warm summer weather. He sits beside it with a book in his hand, a little round stand at his elbow supporting a candle; but he is not reading - he is watching his children. Opposite to him sits his lady - a personage whom I might describe minutely, but I feel no vocation to the task. I see her, though, very plainly before me - a large woman of the gravest aspect, care on her front and on her shoulders, but not overwhelming, inevitable care, rather the sort of voluntary, exemplary cloud and burden people ever carry who deem it their duty to be gloomy. Ah, well-a-day! Mrs Yorke had that notion, and grave as Saturn she was, morning, noon, and night; and hard things she thought of any unhappy wight - especially of the female sex - who dared in her presence to show the light of a gay heart on a sunny countenance. In her estimation, to be mirthful was to be profane, to be cheerful was to be frivolous. She drew no distinctions. Yet she was a very good wife, a very careful mother, looked after her children unceasingly, was sincerely attached to her husband; only the worst of it was, if she could have had her will, she would not have permitted him to have any friend in the world beside herself. All his relations were insupportable to her, and she kept them at arm's length.

Mr Yorke and she agreed perfectly well, yet he was naturally a social, hospitable man, in advocate for family unity, and in his youth, as has been said, he liked none but lively, cheerful women. Why he chose her, how they contrived to suit each other, is a problem puzzling enough, but which might soon be solved if one had time to go into the analysis of the case. Suffice it here to say that Yorke had a shadowy side as well as a sunny side to his character, and that his shadowy side found sympathy and affinity in the whole of his wife's uniformly overcast nature. For the rest, she was a strong-minded woman; never said a weak or a trite thing; took stern, democratic views of society, and rather cynical ones of human nature; considered herself perfect and safe, and the rest of the world all wrong. Her main fault was a brooding, eternal, immitigable suspicion of all men, things, creeds, and parties; this suspicion was a mist before her eyes, a false guide in her path, wherever she looked, wherever she turned.

It may be supposed that the children of such a pair were not likely to turn out quite ordinary, commonplace beings; and they were not. You see six of them, reader. The youngest is a baby on the mother's knee.

It is all her own yet, and that one she has not yet begun to doubt, suspect, condemn; it derives its sustenance from her, it hangs on her, it clings to her, it loves her above everything else in the world. She is sure of that, because, as it lives by her, it cannot be otherwise, therefore she loves it.

The two next are girls, Rose and Jessy; they are both now at their father's knee; they seldom go near their mother, except when obliged to do so. Rose, the elder, is twelve years old - she is like her father - the most like him of the whole group - but it is a granite head copied in ivory; all is softened in colour and line. Yorke himself has a harsh face his daughter's is not harsh, neither is it quite pretty; it is simple, childlike in feature; the round cheeks bloom: as to the gray eyes, they are otherwise than childlike - a serious soul lights them - a young soul yet, but it will mature, if the body lives; and neither father nor mother have a spirit to compare with it. Partaking of the essence of each, it will one day be better than either - stronger, much purer, more aspiring. Rose is a still, sometimes a stubborn, girl now. Her mother wants to make of her such a woman as she is herself - a woman of dark and dreary duties; and Rose has a mind full-set, thick-sown with the germs of ideas her mother never knew. It is agony to her often to have these ideas trampled on and repressed. She has never rebelled yet, but if hard driven she will rebel one day, and then it will be once for all. Rose loves her father: her father does not rule her with a rod of iron; he is good to her. He sometimes fears she will not live, so bright are the sparks of intelligence which, at moments, flash from her glance and gleam in her language. This idea makes him often sadly tender to her.

He has no idea that little Jessy will die young, she is so gay and chattering, arch, original even now; passionate when provoked, but most affectionate if caressed; by turns gentle and rattling; exacting, yet generous; fearless of her mother, for instance, whose irrationally hard and strict rule she has often defied - yet reliant on any who will help her. Jessy, with her little piquant face, engaging prattle, and winning ways, is made to be a pet, and her father's pet she accordingly is. It is odd that the doll should resemble her mother feature by feature, as Rose resembles her father, and yet the physiognomy - how different!

Mr Yorke, if a magic mirror were now held before you, and if therein were shown you your two daughters as they will be twenty years from this night, what would you think? The magic mirror is here: you shall learn their destinies - and first that of your little life, Jessy.

Do you know this place? No, you never saw it; but you recognise the nature of these trees, this foliage - the cypress, the willow, the yew. Stone crosses like these are not unfamiliar to you, nor are these dim

garlands of everlasting flowers. Here is the place - green sod and a gray marble headstone. Jessy sleeps below. She lived through an April day; much loved was she, much loving. She often, in her brief life, shed tears, she had frequent sorrows; she smiled between, gladdening whatever saw her. Her death was tranquil and happy in Rose's guardian arms, for Rose had been her stay and defence through many trials. The dying and the watching English girls were at that hour alone in a foreign country, and the soil of that country gave Jessy a grave.

Now, behold Rose two years later. The crosses and garlands looked strange, but the hills and woods of this landscape look still stranger. This, indeed, is far from England: remote must be the shores which wear that wild, luxuriant aspect. This is some virgin solitude. Unknown birds flutter round the skirts of that forest; no European river this, on whose banks Rose sits thinking. The little quiet Yorkshire girl is a lonely emigrant in some region of the southern hemisphere. Will she ever come back? The three eldest of the family are all boys - Matthew, Mark, and Martin. They are seated together in that corner, engaged in some game. Observe their three heads: much alike at a first glance, at a second, different; at a third, contrasted. Dark-haired, dark-eyed, red-cheeked are the whole trio; small, English features they all possess; all own a blended resemblance to sire and mother; and yet a distinctive physiognomy, mark of a separate character, belongs to each.

I shall not say much about Matthew, the first-born of the house, though it is impossible to avoid gazing at him long, and conjecturing what qualities that visage hides or indicates. He is no plain-looking boy: that jet-black hair, white brow, high-coloured cheek, those quick, dark eyes, are good points in their way. How is it that, look as long as you will, there is but one object in the room, and that the most sinister, to which Matthew's face seems to bear an affinity, and of which, ever and anon, it reminds you strangely - the eruption of Vesuvius? Flame and shadow seem the component parts of that lad's soul - no daylight in it, and no sunshine, and no pure, cool moonbeam ever shone there. He has an English frame, but, apparently, not an English mind - you would say, an Italian stiletto in a sheath of British workmanship. He is crossed in the game - look at his scowl. Mr Yorke sees it, and what does he say? In a low voice he pleads, 'Mark and Martin, don't anger your brother.' And this is ever the tone adopted by both parents. Theoretically, they decry partiality - no rights of primogeniture are to be allowed in that house; but Matthew is never to be vexed, never to be opposed; they avert provocation from him as assiduously as they would avert fire from a barrel of gunpowder. 'Concede, conciliate,' is their motto wherever he is concerned. The republicans are fast making a tyrant of their own flesh and blood. This the younger scions know and feel, and at heart

they all rebel against the injustice. They cannot read their parents' motives; they only see the difference of treatment. The dragon's teeth are already sown amongst Mr Yorke's young olive-branches; discord will one day be the harvest.

Mark is a bonny-looking boy, the most regular-featured of the family. He is exceedingly calm; his smile is shrewd; he can say the driest, most cutting things in the quietest of tones. Despite his tranquillity, a somewhat heavy brow speaks temper, and reminds you that the smoothest waters are not always the safest. Besides, he is too still, unmoved, phlegmatic, to be happy. Life will never have much joy in it for Mark: by the time he is five-and-twenty he will wonder why people ever laugh, and think all fools who seem merry. Poetry will not exist for Mark, either in literature or in life; its best effusions will sound to him mere rant and jargon. Enthusiasm will be his aversion and contempt. Mark will have no youth; while he looks juvenile and blooming, he will be already middle-aged in mind. His body is now fourteen years of age, but his soul is already thirty.

Martin, the youngest of the three, owns another nature. Life may, or may not; be brief for him, but it will certainly be brilliant. He will pass through all its illusions, half believe in them, wholly enjoy them, then outlive them. That boy is not handsome - not so handsome as either of his brothers. He is plain; there is a husk upon him, a dry shell, and he will wear it till he is near twenty, then he will put it off. About that period he'll make himself handsome. He will wear uncouth manners till that age, perhaps homely garments; but the chrysalis will retain the power of transfiguring itself into the butterfly, and such transfiguration will, in due season, take place. For a space he will be vain, probably a downright puppy, eager for pleasure and desirous of admiration, athirst, too, for knowledge. He will want all that the world can give him, both of enjoyment and lore - he will perhaps, take deep draughts at each fount. That thirst satisfied, what next? I know not. Martin might be a remarkable man. Whether he will or not, the seer is powerless to predict: on that subject there has been no open vision.

Take Mr Yorke's family in the aggregate: there is as much mental power in those six young heads, as much originality as much activity and vigour of brain, as - divided amongst half a dozen commonplace broods - would give to each rather more than an average amount of sense and capacity. Mr Yorke knows this, and is proud of his race. Yorkshire has such families here and there amongst her hills and wolds - peculiar, racy, vigorous; of good blood and strong brain; turbulent somewhat in the pride of their strength and intractable in the force of their native powers; wanting polish, wanting consideration, wanting docility, but sound, spirited, and true-bred as the eagle on the cliff or the steed in the steppe.

A low tap is heard at the parlour door; the boys have been making such a noise over their game, and little Jessy, besides, has been singing so sweet a Scotch song to her father - who delights in Scotch and Italian songs, and has taught his musical little daughter some of the best - that the ring at the outer door was not observed.

'Come in,' says Mrs Yorke, in that conscientiously constrained and solemnised voice of hers, which ever modulates itself to a funereal dreariness of tone, though the subject it is exercised upon be but to give orders for the making of a pudding in the kitchen, to bid the boys hang up their caps in the hall, or to call the girls to their sewing - 'come in!' And in came Robert Moore.

Moore's habitual gravity, as well as his abstemiousness (for the case of spirit decanters is never ordered up when he pays an evening visit), has so far recommended him to Mrs Yorke that she has not yet made him the subject of private animadversions with her husband; she has not yet found out that he is hampered by a secret intrigue which prevents him from marrying, or that he is a wolf in sheep's clothing - discoveries which she made at an early date after marriage concerning most of her husband's bachelor friends, and excluded them from her board accordingly; which part of her conduct, indeed, might be said to have its just and sensible as well as its harsh side.

'Well, is it you?' she says to Mr Moore, as he comes up to her and gives his hand. 'What are you roving about at this time of night for? You should be at home.'

'Can a single man be said to have a home, madam?' he asks.

'Pooh!' says Mrs Yorke, who despises conventional smoothness quite as much as her husband does, and practises it as little, and whose plain speaking on all occasions is carried to a point calculated, sometimes, to awaken admiration, but oftener alarm - 'pooh! you need not talk nonsense to me; a single man can have a home if he likes. Pray, does not your sister make a home for you?'

'Not she,' joined in Mr Yorke. 'Hortense is an honest lass. But when I was Robert's age I had five or six sisters, all as decent and proper as she is; but you see, Hesther, for all that it did not hinder me from looking out for a wife.'

'And sorely he has repented marrying me,' added Mrs Yorke, who liked occasionally to crack a dry jest against matrimony, even though it should be at her own expense. 'He has repented it in sackcloth and ashes, Robert Moore, as you may well believe when you see his punishment' (here she pointed to her children). 'Who would burden themselves with such a set of great, rough lads as those, if they could

help it? It is not only bringing them into the world, though that is bad enough, but they are all to feed, to clothe, to rear, to settle in life. Young sir, when you feel tempted to marry, think of our four sons and two daughters, and look twice before you leap.'

'I am not tempted now, at any rate. I think these are not times for marrying or giving in marriage.'

A lugubrious sentiment of this sort was sure to obtain Mrs Yorke's approbation. She nodded and groaned acquiescence; but in a minute she said, 'I make little account of the wisdom of a Solomon of your age; it will be upset by the first fancy that crosses you. Meantime, Sit down, sir. You can talk, I suppose, as well sitting as standing?'

This was her way of inviting her guest to take a chair. He had no sooner obeyed her than little Jessy jumped from her father's knee and ran into Mr Moore's arms, which were very promptly held out to receive her.

'You talk of marrying him,' said she to her mother, quite indignantly, as she was lifted lightly to his knee, 'and he is married now, or as good. He promised that I should be his wife last summer, the first time he saw me in my new white frock and blue sash. Didn't he, father?' (These children were not accustomed to say papa and mamma; their mother would allow no such 'namby-pamby'.)

'Ay, my little lassie, he promised; I'll bear witness. But make him say it over again now, Jessy. Such as he are only false loons.'

'He is not false. He is too bonny to be false,' said Jessy, looking up to her tall sweetheart with the fullest confidence in his faith.

'Bonny!' cried Mr Yorke. 'That's the reason that he should be, and proof that he is, a scoundrel'

'But he looks too sorrowful to be false,' here interposed a quiet voice from behind the father's chair. 'If he were always laughing, I should think he forgot promises soon; but Mr Moore never laughs.'

'Your sentimental buck is the greatest cheat of all, Rose,' remarked Mr Yorke.

'He's not sentimental,' said Rose.

Mr Moore turned to her with a little surprise, smiling at the same time.

'How do you know I am not sentimental, Rose?'

'Because I heard a lady say you were not'

'Voilà, qui devient intéressant!' exclaimed Mr Yorke, hitching his chair nearer the fire. 'A lady! That has quite a romantic twang. We must guess who it is . . . Rosy, whisper the name low to your father. after him hear.'

'Rose, don't be too forward to talk,' here interrupted Mrs Yorke, in her usual kill-joy fashion, 'nor Jessy either. It becomes all children, especially girls, to be silent in the presence of their elders.'

'Why have we tongues, then?' asked Jessy pertly; while Rose only looked at her mother with an expression that seemed to say she should take that maxim in and think it over at her leisure. After two minutes' grave deliberation, she asked, 'And why especially girls, mother?'

'Firstly, because I say so; and secondly, because discretion and reserve are a girl's best wisdom.'

'My dear madam,' observed Moore, 'what you say is excellent - it reminds me, indeed, of my dear sister's observations; but really it is not applicable to these little ones. Let Rose and Jessy talk to me freely, or my chief pleasure in coming here is gone. I like their prattle; it does me good.'

'Does it not?' asked Jessy. 'More good than if the rough lads came round you. - You call them rough, mother, yourself.'

'Yes, mignonne, a thousand times more good. I have rough lads enough about me all day long, poulet.'

'There are plenty of people,' continued she, 'who take notice of the boys. All my uncles and aunts seem to think their nephews better than their nieces, and when gentlemen come here to dine, it is always Matthew, and Mark, and Martin that are talked to, and never Rose and me. Mr Moore is our friend, and we'll keep him: but mind, Rose, he's not so much your friend as he is mine. He is my particular acquaintance, remember that!' And she held up her small hand with an admonitory gesture.

Rose was quite accustomed to be admonished by that small hand. Her will daily bent itself to that of the impetuous little Jessy. She was guided, overruled by Jessy in a thousand things. On all occasions of show and pleasure Jessy took the lead, and Rose fell quietly into the background, whereas, when the disagreeables of life its work and privations - were in question, Rose instinctively took upon her, in addition to her own share, what she could of her sister's. Jessy had

already settled it in her mind that she, when she was old enough, was to be married, Rose, she decided, must be an old maid, to live with her, look after her children, keep her house. This state of things is not uncommon between two sisters, where one is plain and the other pretty; but in this case, if there was a difference in external appearance, Rose had the advantage: her face was more regular featured than that of the piquant little Jessy. Jessy, however, was destined to possess, along with sprightly intelligence and vivacious feeling, the gift of fascination, the power to charm when, where, and whom she would. Rose was to have a fine, generous soul, a noble intellect profoundly cultivated, a heart as true as steel, but the manner to attract was not to be hers.

'Now, Rose, tell me the name of this lady who denied that I was sentimental,' urged Mr Moore.

Rose had no idea of tantalisation, or she would have held him a while in doubt. She answered briefly, 'I can't. I don't know her name.'

'Describe her to me. What was she like? Where did you see her?'

'When Jessy and I went to spend the day at Whinbury with Kate and Susan Pearson, who were just come home from school, there was a party at Mrs Pearson's, and some grown-up ladies were sitting in a corner of the drawing-room talking about you.'

'Did you know none of them?'

'Hannah, and Harriet, and Dora, and Mary Sykes.'

'Good. Were they abusing me, Rosy?'

'Some of them were. They called you a misanthrope. I remember the word. I looked for it in the dictionary when I came home. It means a man-hater.'

'What besides?'

'Hannah Sykes said you were a solemn puppy.'

'Better!' cried Mr Yorke, laughing. 'Oh, excellent! Hannah! that's the one with the red hair - a fine girl, but half-witted.'

'She has wit enough for me, it appears,' said Moore: 'A solemn puppy, indeed! Well, Rose, go on.'

'Miss Pearson said she believed there was a good deal of affectation about you, and that with your dark hair and pale face you looked to her like some sort of a sentimental noodle.'

Again Mr Yorke laughed. Mrs Yorke even joined in this time. 'You see in what esteem you are held behind your back,' said she; 'yet I believe that after to catch you. She set her cap at you when you first came into the country, old as she is.'

'And who contradicted her, Rosy?' inquired Moore.

'A lady whom I don't know, because she never visits here, though I see her every Sunday at church. She sits in the pew near the pulpit. I generally look at her instead of looking at my prayer-book, for she is like a picture in our dining-room, that woman with the dove in her hand - at least she has eyes like it, and a nose too, a straight nose, that makes all her face look, somehow, what I call clear.'

'And you don't know her!' exclaimed Jessy, in a tone of exceeding surprise. 'That's so like Rose. Mr Moore, I often wonder in what sort of a world my sister lives. I am sure she does not live all her time in this. One is continually finding out that she is quite ignorant of some little matter which everybody else knows. To think of her going solemnly to church every Sunday, and looking all service-time at one particular person, and never so much as asking that person's name. She means Caroline Helstone, the rector's niece. I remember all about it Miss Helstone was quite angry with Anne Pearson. She said, 'Robert Moore is neither affected nor sentimental; you mistake his character utterly, or rather not one of you here knows anything about it.' Now, shall I tell you what she is like? I can tell what people are like, and how they are dressed, better than Rose can.'

'Let us hear.'

'She is nice; she is fair; she has a pretty white slender throat; she has long curls, not stiff ones - they hang loose and soft, their colour is brown but not dark; she speaks quietly, with a dear tone; she never makes a bustle in moving; she often wears a gray silk dress she is neat all over - her gowns, and her shoes, and her gloves always fit her. She is what I call a lady, and when I am as tall as she is, I mean to be like her. Shall I suit you if I am? Will you really marry me?'

Moore stroked Jessy's hair. For a minute he seemed as if he would draw her nearer to him, but instead he put her a little farther off.

'Oh! you won't have me? You push me away.'

'Why, Jessy, you care nothing about me. You never come to see me now at the Hollow.'

'Because you don't ask me.'

Hereupon Mr Moore gave both the little girls an invitation to pay him a visit next day, promising that, as he was going to Stilbro' in the morning, he would buy them each a present, of what nature he would not then declare, but they must come and see. Jessy was about to reply, when one of the boys unexpectedly broke in, -

'I know that Miss Helstone you have all been palavering about. She's an ugly girl. I hate her. I hate all womenites. I wonder what they were made for.'

'Martin!' said his father, for Martin it was. The lad only answered by turning his cynical young face, half-arch, half-truculent towards the paternal chair. 'Martin, my lad, thou'rt a swaggering whelp now; thou wilt some day be an outrageous puppy. But stick to those sentiments of thine. See, I'll write down the words now i' my pocket-book.' (The senior took out a morocco-covered book, and deliberately wrote therein.) 'Ten years hence, Martin, if thou and I be both alive at that day, I'll remind thee of that speech.'

'I'll say the same then. I mean always to hate women. They're such dolls; they do nothing but dress themselves finely, and go swimming about to be admired. I'll never marry. I'll be a bachelor.'

'Stick to it! stick to it! - Hesther' (addressing his wife), 'I was like him when I was his age - a regular misogamist; and, behold! by the time I was three- and twenty - being then a tourist in France and Italy, and the Lord knows where - I curled my hair every night before I went to bed, and wore a ring i' my ear, and would have worn one i' my nose if it had been the fashion, and all that I might make myself pleasing and charming to the ladies. Martin will do the like.'

'Will I? Never! I've more sense. What a guy you were father! As to dressing, I make this vow: I'll never dress more finely than as you see me at present. - Mr Moore, I'm clad in blue cloth from top to toe, and they laugh at me, and call me sailor at the grammar-school. I laugh louder at them, and say they are all magpies and parrots, with their coats one colour, and their waistcoats another, and their trousers a third. I'll always wear blue cloth, and nothing but blue cloth. It is beneath a human being's dignity to dress himself in parti- coloured garments.'

'Ten years hence, Martin, no tailor's shop will have choice of colours varied enough for thy exacting taste; no perfumer's, stores essences exquisite enough for thy fastidious senses.'

Martin looked disdain, but vouchsafed no further reply. Meantime Mark, who for some minutes had been rummaging amongst a pile of books on a side-table took the word. He spoke in a peculiarly slow, quiet voice, and with an expression of still irony in his face not easy to describe.

'Mr Moore,' said he, 'you think perhaps it was a compliment on Miss Caroline Helstone's part to say you were not sentimental. I thought you appeared confused when my sisters told you the words, as if you felt flattered. You turned red, just like a certain vain little lad at our school, who always thinks proper to blush when he gets a rise in the class. For your benefit, Mr Moore, I've been looking up the word 'sentimental' in the dictionary, and I find it to mean 'tinctured with sentiment.' On examining further, 'sentiment' is explained to be thought, idea, notion. A sentimental man, then, is one who has thoughts, ideas, notions; an unsentimental man is one destitute of thought, idea, or notion.'

And Mark stopped. He did not smile, he did not look round for admiration. He had said his say, and was silent.

'Ma foi! mon ami,' observed Mr Moore to Yorke, 'ce sont vraiment des enfants terribles, que les vôtres!'

Rose, who had been listening attentively to Mark's speech, replied to him, 'There are different kinds of thoughts, ideas, and notions,' said she, 'good and bad: sentimental must refer to the bad, or Miss Helstone must have taken it in that sense, for she was not blaming Mr Moore; she was defending him.'

'That's my kind little advocate!' said Moore, taking Rose's hand.

'She was defending him,' repeated Rose, 'as I should have done had I been in her place, for the other ladies seemed to speak spitefully.'

'Ladies always do speak spitefully,' observed Martin. 'It is the nature of womenites to be spiteful.'

Matthew now, for the first time, opened his lips. 'What a fool Martin is, to be always gabbling about what he does not understand!'

'It is my privilege, as a freeman, to gabble on whatever subject I like,' responded Martin.

'You use it, or rather abuse it, to such an extent,' rejoined the elder brother, 'that you prove you ought to have been a slave.'

'A slave! a slave! That to a Yorke, and from a Yorke! This fellow,' he added, standing up at the table, and pointing across it to Matthew - 'this fellow forgets, what every cottier in Briarfield knows, that all born of our house have that arched instep under which water can flow - proof that there has not been a slave of the blood for three-hundred years.'

'Mountebank!' said Matthew.

'Lads, be silent!' exclaimed Mr Yorke. - 'Martin, you are a mischief-maker. There would have been no disturbance but for you.'

'Indeed! Is that correct? Did I begin, or did Matthew? Had I spoken to him when he accused me of gabbling like a fool?'

'A presumptuous fool!' repeated Matthew.

Here Mrs Yorke commenced rocking herself - rather a portentous movement with her, as it was occasionally followed, especially when Matthew was worsted in a conflict, by a fit of hysterics.

'I don't see why I should bear insolence from Matthew Yorke, or what right he has to use bad language to me,' observed Martin.

'He has no right, my lad; but forgive your brother until seventy-and-seven times,' said Mr Yorke soothingly.

'Always alike, and theory and practice always adverse!' murmured Martin as he turned to leave the room.

'Where art thou going, my son?' asked the father. 'Somewhere where I shall be safe from insult, if in this house I can find any such place.'

Matthew laughed very insolently. Martin threw a strange look at him, and trembled through all his slight lad's frame; but he restrained himself.

'I suppose there is no objection to my withdrawing?' he inquired.

'No. Go, my lad; but remember not to bear malice.'

Martin went, and Matthew sent another insolent laugh after him. Rose, lifting her fair head from Moore's shoulder against which, for a moment, it had been resting, said, as she directed a steady gaze to

Matthew, 'Martin is grieved, and you are glad; but I would rather be Martin than you. I dislike your nature.'

Here Mr Moore, by way of averting, or at least escaping, a scene - which a sob from Mrs Yorke warned him was likely to come on - rose, and putting Jessy off his knee, he kissed her and Rose, reminding them, at the same time, to be sure and come to the Hollow in good time to-morrow afternoon; then, having taken leave of his hostess, he said to Mr Yorke, 'May I speak a word with you?' and was followed by him from the room. Their brief conference took place in the hall.

'Have you employment for a good workman?' asked Moore.

'A nonsense question in these times, when you know that every master has many good workmen to whom he cannot give full employment.'

'You must oblige me by taking on this man, if possible.'

'My lad, I can take on no more hands to oblige all England.'

'It does not signify; I must find him a place somewhere.'

'Who is he?'

'Mr William Farren.'

'I know William. A right-down honest man is William.'

'He has been out of work three months. He has a large family. We are sure they cannot live without wages. He was one of a deputation of cloth-dressers who came to me this morning to complain and threaten. William did not threaten. He only asked me to give them rather more time - to make my changes more slowly. You know I cannot do that: straitened on all sides as I am, I have nothing for it but to push on. I thought it would be idle to palaver long with them. I sent them away, after arresting a rascal amongst them, whom I hope to transport - a fellow who preaches at the chapel yonder sometimes.'

'Not Moses Barraclough?'

'Yes.'

'Ah! you've arrested him? Good! Then out of a scoundrel you're going to make a martyr. You've done a wise thing.'

'I've done a right thing. Well, the short and the long of it is, I'm determined to get Farren a place, and I reckon on you to give him one.'

'This is cool, however!' exclaimed Mr Yorke. 'What right have you to reckon on me to provide for your dismissed workmen? What do I know about your Farrens and your Williams? I've heard he's an honest man, but am I to support all the honest men in Yorkshire? You may say that would be no great charge to undertake; but great or little, I'll none of it'

'Come, Mr Yorke, what can you find for him to do?'

'I find! You afterguage I'm not accustomed to use. I wish you would go home. Here is the door; set off.'

Moore sat down on one of the hall chairs.

'You can't give him work in your mill - good; but you have land. Find him some occupation on your land, Mr Yorke.'

'Bob, I thought you cared nothing about our lourdauds de paysans. I don't understand this change.'

'I do. The fellow spoke to me nothing but truth and sense. I answered him just as roughly as I did the rest, who jabbered mere gibberish. I couldn't make distinctions there and then. His appearance told what he had gone through lately clearer than his words; but where is the use of explaining? Let him have work.'

'Let him have it yourself If you are so very much in earnest, strain a point.'

'If there was a point left in my affairs to strain, I would strain it till it cracked again; but I received letters this morning which show me pretty clearly where I stand, and it is not far off the end of the plank. My foreign market, at any rate, is gorged. If there is no change - if there dawns no prospect of peace - if the Orders in Council are not, at least, suspended, so as to open our way in the West - I do not know where I an' to turn. I see no more light than if I were sealed in a rock, so that for me to pretend to offer a man a livelihood would be to do a dishonest thing.'

'Come, let us take a turn on the front. It is a starlight night,' said Mr Yorke.

They passed out, closing the front door after them, and side by side paced the frost-white pavement to and fro.

'Settle about Farren at once,' urged Mr Moore. 'You have large fruit-gardens at Yorke Mills. He is a good gardener. Give him work there.'

'Well, so be it. I'll send for him to-morrow, and we'll see. And now, my lad, you're concerned about the condition of your affairs?'

'Yes, a second failure - which I may delay, but which, at this moment, I see no way finally to avert - would blight the name of Moore completely; and you are aware I had fine intentions of paying off every debt and re-establishing the old firm on its former basis.'

'You want capital - that's all you want.'

'Yes; but you might as well say that breath is all a dead man wants to live.'

'I know - I know capital is not to be had for the asking; and if you were a married man, and had a family, like me, I should think your case pretty nigh desperate; but the young and unencumbered have chances peculiar to themselves. I hear gossip now and then about your being on the eve of marriage with this miss and that; but I suppose it is none of it true?'

'You may well suppose that. I think I am not in a position to be dreaming of marriage. Marriage! I cannot bear the word: it sounds so silly and utopian. I have settled it decidedly that marriage and love are superfluities, intended only for the rich, who live at ease, and have no need to take thought for the morrow; or desperations - the last and reckless joy of the deeply wretched, who never hope to rise out of the slough of their utter poverty.'

'I should not think so if I were circumstanced as you are. I should think I could very likely get a wife with a few thousands, who would suit both me and my affairs.'

'I wonder where?'

'Would you try if you had a chance?'

'I don't know. It depends on - in short, it depends on many things.'

'Would you take an old woman?'

'I'd rather break stones on the road.'

'So would I. Would you take an ugly one?'

'Bah! I hate ugliness and delight in beauty. My eyes and heart, Yorke, take pleasure in a sweet, young, fair face, as they are repelled by a grim, rugged, meagre one. Soft delicate lines and hues please, harsh ones prejudice me. I won't have an ugly wife.'

'Not if she were rich?'

'Not if she were dressed in gems. I could not love - I could not fancy - I could not endure her. My taste must have satisfaction, or disgust would break; out in despotism, or worse - freeze to utter iciness.'

'What! Bob, if you married an honest good-natured, and wealthy lass, though a little hard-favoured, couldn't you put up with the high cheek-bones, the rather wide mouth, and reddish hair?'

'I'll never try, I tell you. Grace at least I will have, and youth and symmetry - yes, and what I call beauty.'

'And poverty, and a nursery full of bairns you can neither clothe nor feed, and very soon an anxious, faded mother and then bankruptcy, discredit - a life-long struggle.'

'Let me alone, Yorke.'

'If you are romantic, Robert, and especially if you are already in love, it is of no use talking.'

'I am not romantic. I am stripped of romance as bare as the white tenters in that field are of cloth.'

'Always use such figures of speech, lad; I can understand them. And there is no love affair to disturb your judgment)

'I thought I had said enough on that subject before. Love for me? Stuff'

'Well, then, if you are sound both in heart and head, there is no reason why you should not profit by a good chance if it offers; therefore, wait and see.'

'You are quite oracular, Yorke.'

'I think I am a bit i' that line. I promise ye naught and I advise ye naught; but I bid ye keep your heart up, and be guided by circumstances.'

'My namesake the physician's almanac could not speak more guardedly.'

'In the meantime, I care naught about ye, Robert Moore: ye are nothing akin to me or mine, and whether ye lose or find a fortune it makes no difference to me. Go home, now. It has stricken ten. Miss Hortense will be wondering where ye are.'