Chapter XIX - A Summer Night

The hour was now that of dusk. A clear air favoured the kindling of the stars.

'There will be just light enough to show me the way home,' said Miss Keeldar, as she prepared to take leave of Caroline at the Rectory garden-door.

'You must not go alone, Shirley. Fanny shall accompany you.'

'That she shall not. Of what need I be afraid in my own parish? I would walk from Fieldhead to the church any fine midsummer night, three hours later than this, for the mere pleasure of seeing the stars, and the chance of meeting a fairy.'

'But just wait till the crowd is cleared away.'

'Agreed. There are the five Misses Armitage streaming by. Here comes Mrs Sykes's phaeton, Mr Wynne's close carriage, Mrs Birtwhistle's car: I don't wish to go through the ceremony of bidding them all good-bye, so we will step into the garden and take shelter amongst the laburnums for an instant.'

The rectors, their curates and their churchwardens, now issued from the church-porch. There was a great confabulation, shaking of hands, congratulation on speeches, recommendation to be careful of the night air, etc. By degrees the throng dispersed; the carriages drove off. Miss Keeldar was just emerging from her flowery refuge, when Mr Helstone entered the garden and met her.

'Oh! I want you!' he said: 'I was afraid you were already gone. Caroline, come here!'

Caroline came, expecting, as Shirley did, a lecture on not having been visible at church. Other subjects, however, occupied the Rector's mind.

'I shall not sleep at home to-night,' he continued. 'I have just met with an old friend, and promised to accompany him. I shall return probably about noon to-morrow. Thomas, the clerk, is engaged, and I cannot get him to sleep in the house, as I usually do when I am absent for a night; now - - '

'Now,' interrupted Shirley, 'you want me as a gentleman - the first gentleman in Briarfield, in short, to supply your place, be master of the Rectory, and guardian of your niece and maids while you are away?'

'Exactly, Captain: I thought the post would suit you. Will you favour Caroline so far as to be her guest for one night? Will you stay here instead of going back to Fieldhead?'

'And what will Mrs Pryor do? She expects me home.'

'I will send her word. Come, make up your mind to stay. It grows late; the dew falls heavily: you and Caroline will enjoy each other's society, I doubt not.'

'I promise you then to stay with Caroline,' replied Shirley. 'As you say, we shall enjoy each other's society: we will not be separated to-night. Now, rejoin your old friend, and fear nothing for us.'

'If there should chance to be any disturbance in the night, Captain - if you should hear the picking of a lock, the cutting out of a pane of glass, a stealthy tread of steps about the house (and I need not fear to tell you, who bear a well-tempered, mettlesome heart under your girl's ribbon-sash, that such little incidents are very possible in the present time), what would you do?'

'Don't know - faint, perhaps - fall down, and have to be picked up again. But, doctor, if you assign me the post of honour, you must give me arms. What weapons are there in your stronghold?'

'You could not wield a sword?'

'No; I could manage the carving-knife better.'

'You will find a good one in the dining-room sideboard: a lady's knife, light to handle, and as sharp-pointed as a poignard.'

'It will suit Caroline; but you must give me a brace of pistols: I know you have pistols.'

'I have two pairs; one pair I can place at your disposal. You will find them suspended over the mantelpiece of my study in cloth cases.'

'Loaded?'

'Yes, but not on the cock. Cock them before you go to bed. It is paying you a great compliment, Captain, to lend you these; were you one of the awkward squad you should not have them.'

'I will take care. You need delay no longer, Mr Helstone: you may go now. He is gracious to me to lend me his pistols,' she remarked, as the rector passed out at the garden-gate. 'But come, Lina,' she continued; 'let us go in and have some supper: I was too much vexed at tea with

the vicinage of Mr Sam Wynne to be able to eat, and now I am really hungry.'

Entering the house, they repaired to the darkened dining-room, through the open windows of which apartment stole the evening air, bearing the perfume of flowers from the garden, the very distant sound of far-retreating steps from the road, and a soft vague murmur; whose origin Caroline explained by the remark, uttered as she stood listening at the casement - Shirley, I hear the beck in the Hollow.'

Then she rung the bell, asked for a candle and some bread and milk - Miss Keeldar's usual supper and her own. Fanny, when she brought in the tray, would have closed the windows and the shutters, but was requested to desist for the present: the twilight was too calm, its breath too balmy to be yet excluded. They took their meal in silence: Caroline rose once, to remove to the window- sill a glass of flowers which stood on the side-board; the exhalation from the blossoms being somewhat too powerful for the sultry room: in returning, she half opened a drawer, and took from it something that glittered clear and keen in her hand.

'You assigned this to me, then, Shirley - did you? It is bright, keen-edged, finely-tapered: it is dangerous-looking, I never yet felt the impulse which could move me to direct this against a fellow-creature. It is difficult to fancy what circumstances could nerve my arm to strike home with this long knife.'

'I should hate to do it,' replied Shirley; 'but I think I could do it, if goaded by certain exigencies which I can imagine.' And Miss Keeldar quietly sipped her glass of new milk, looking somewhat thoughtful, and a little pale: though, indeed, when did she not look pale? She was never florid.

The milk sipped and the bread eaten, Fanny was again summoned: she and Eliza were recommended to go to bed, which they were quite willing to do, being weary of the day's exertions, of much cutting of currant-buns, and filling of urns and teapots, and running backwards and forwards with trays. Erelong the maids' chamber-door was heard to close; Caroline took a candle, and went quietly all over the house, seeing that every window was fast and every door barred. She did not even evade the haunted back-kitchen, nor the vault-like cellars. These visited, she returned.

'There is neither spirit nor flesh in the house at present,' she said, 'which should not be there. It is now near eleven o'clock, fully bed-time, yet I would rather sit up a little longer, if you do not object, Shirley. Here,' she continued, 'I have brought the brace of pistols from my uncle's study: you may examine them at your leisure.'

She placed them on the table before her friend

'Why would you rather sit up longer?' asked Miss Keeldar, taking up the firearms, examining them, and again laying them down.

'Because I have a strange excited feeling in my heart.'

'So have I.'

'Is this state of sleeplessness and restlessness caused by something electrical in the air, I wonder?'

'No: the sky is clear, the stars numberless: it is a fine night.'

'But very still. I hear the water fret over its stony bed in Hollow's Copse as distinctly as if it ran below the churchyard wall.'

'I am glad it is so still a night: a moaning wind or rushing rain would vex me to fever just now.'

'Why, Shirley?'

'Because it would baffle my efforts to listen.'

'Do you listen towards the Hollow?'

'Yes; it is the only quarter whence we can hear a sound just now.'

'The only one, Shirley.'

They both sat near the window, and both leaned their arms on the sill, and both inclined their heads towards the open lattice. They saw each other's young faces by the starlight, and that dim June twilight which does not wholly fade from the west till dawn begins to break in the east.

'Mr Helstone thinks we have no idea which way he is gone,' murmured Miss Keeldar, 'nor on what errand, nor with what expectations, nor how prepared; but I guess much - do not you?'

'I guess something.'

'All those gentlemen - your cousin Moore included - think that you and I are now asleep in our beds, unconscious.'

'Caring nothing about them - hoping and fearing nothing for them,' added Caroline.

Both kept silence for full half-an-hour. The night was silent, too; only the church-clock measured its course by quarters. Some words were interchanged about the chill of the air: they wrapped their scarves closer round them, resumed their bonnets which they had removed, and again watched.

Towards midnight the teasing, monotonous bark of the house-dog disturbed the quietude of their vigil. Caroline rose, and made her way noiselessly through the dark passages to the kitchen, intending to appease him with a piece of bread: she succeeded. On returning to the dining-room, she found it all dark, Miss Keeldar having extinguished the candle: the outline of her shape was visible near the still open window, leaning out. Miss Helstone asked no questions: she stole to her side. The dog recommenced barking furiously; suddenly he stopped, and seemed to listen. The occupants of the dining-room listened too, and not merely now to the flow of the millstream: there was a nearer, though a muffled sound on the road below the churchyard; a measured, beating, approaching sound; a dull tramp of marching feet.

It drew near. Those who listened by degrees comprehended its extent. It was not the tread of two, nor of a dozen, nor of a score of men: it was the tread of hundreds. They could see nothing: the high shrubs of the garden formed a leafy screen between them and the road. To hear, however, was not enough; and this they felt as the troop trod forwards, and seemed actually passing the Rectory. They felt it more when a human voice - though that voice spoke but one word - broke the hush of the night.

'Halt.'

A halt followed: the march was arrested. Then came a low conference, of which no word was distinguishable from the dining-room.

'We must hear this,' said Shirley.

She turned, took her pistols from the table, silently passed out through the middle window of the dining-room, which was, in fact, a glass door, stole down the walk to the garden wall, and stood listening under the lilacs. Caroline would not have quitted the house had she been alone, but where Shirley went she would go. She glanced at the weapon on the side-board, but left it behind her, and presently stood at her friend's side. They dared not look over the wall, for fear of being seen: they were obliged to crouch behind it: they heard these words -

'It looks a rambling old building. Who lives in it besides the damned parson?'

'Only three women: his niece and two servants,'

'Do you know where they sleep?'

'The lasses behind: the niece in a front room.'

'And Helstone?'

'Yonder is his chamber. He uses burning a light: but I see none now.'

'Where would you get in?'

'If I were ordered to do his job - and he desarves it - I'd try yond' long window: it opens to the dining-room: I could grope my way upstairs, and I know his chamber.'

'How would you manage about the women-folk?'

'Let 'em alone except they shrieked, and then I'd soon quieten 'em. I could wish to find the old chap asleep: if he waked, he'd be dangerous.'

'Has he arms?'

'Fire-arms, allus - and allus loadened.'

'Then you're a fool to stop us here; a shot would give the alarm: Moore would be on us before we could turn round. We should miss our main object.'

'You might go on, I tell you. I'd engage Helstone alone.'

A pause. One of the party dropped some weapon, which rang on the stone causeway: at this sound the Rectory dog barked again furiously - fiercely.

'That spoils all!' said the voice; 'he'll awake: a noise like that might rouse the dead. You did not say there was a dog. Damn you! Forward!'

Forward they went, - tramp, tramp, - with mustering manifold, slow-filing tread. They were gone.

Shirley stood erect; looked over the wall, along the road.

'Not a soul remains,' she said.

She stood and mused. 'Thank God!' was the next observation.

Caroline repeated the ejaculation, not in so steady a tone: she was trembling much; her heart was beating fast and thick: her face was cold; her forehead damp.

'Thank God for us!' she reiterated; 'but what will happen elsewhere? They have passed us by that they may make sure of others.'

'They have done well,' returned Shirley with composure: 'the others will defend themselves, - they can do it, - they are prepared for them: with us it is otherwise. My finger was on the trigger of this pistol. I was quite ready to give that man, if he had entered, such a greeting as he little calculated on; but behind him followed three hundred: I had neither three hundred hands nor three hundred weapons. I could not have effectually protected either you, myself, or the two poor women asleep under that roof; therefore I again earnestly thank God for insult and peril escaped.'

After a second pause, she continued - 'What is it my duty and wisdom to do next? Not to stay here inactive, I am glad to say, but of course to walk over to the Hollow,'

'To the Hollow, Shirley?'

'To the Hollow. Will you go with me?'

'Where those men are gone?'

'They have taken the highway: we should not encounter them: the road over the fields is as safe, silent, and solitary as a path through the air would be. Will you go?'

'Yes,' was the answer, given mechanically, not because the speaker wished, or was prepared to go; or, indeed, was otherwise than scared at the prospect of going, but because she felt she could not abandon Shirley.

'Then we must fasten up these windows, and leave all as secure as we can behind us. Do you know what we are going for, Cary?'

'Yes - no - because you wish it.'

'Is that all? And you are so obedient to a mere caprice of mine? What a docile wife you would make to a stern husband. The moon's face is not whiter than yours at this moment; and the aspen at the gate does not tremble more than your busy fingers; and so tractable and terror-struck, and dismayed and devoted, you would follow me into the thick of real danger! Cary, let me give your fidelity a motive: we are going for

Moore's sake; to see if we can be of use to him: to make an effort to warn him of what is coming.'

'To be sure! I am a blind, weak fool, and you are acute and sensible, Shirley! I will go with you! I will gladly go with you!'

'I do not doubt it. You would die blindly and meekly for me, but you would intelligently and gladly die for Moore; but in truth there is no question of death to-night, - we run no risk at all.'

Caroline rapidly closed shutter and lattice. 'Do not fear that I shall not have breath to run as fast as you can possibly run, Shirley. Take my hand: let us go straight across the fields.'

'But you cannot climb walls?'

'To-night I can.'

'You are afraid of hedges, and the beck which we shall be forced to cross.'

'I can cross it.'

They started: they ran. Many a wall checked but did not baffle them. Shirley was sure-footed and agile: she could spring like a deer when she chose. Caroline, more timid and less dexterous, fell once or twice, and bruised herself; but she rose again directly, saying she was not hurt. A quickset hedge bounded the last field: they lost time in seeking a gap in it: the aperture, when found, was narrow, but they worked their way through: the long hair, the tender skin, the silks and the muslins suffered; but what was chiefly regretted was the impediment this difficulty had caused to speed. On the other side they met the beck, flowing deep in a rough bed: at this point a narrow plank formed the only bridge across it. Shirley had trodden the plank successfully and fearlessly many a time before: Caroline had never yet dared to risk the transit.

'I will carry you across,' said Miss Keeldar: 'you are light, and I am not weak: let me try.'

'If I fall in you may fish me out,' was the answer, as a grateful squeeze compressed her hand. Caroline, without pausing, trod forward on the trembling plank as if it were a continuation of the firm turf: Shirley, who followed, did not cross it more resolutely or safely. In their present humour, on their present errand, a strong and foaming channel would have been a barrier to neither. At the moment they were above the control either of fire or water: all Stilbro' Moor, alight and alow with bonfires, would not have stopped them, nor would

Calder or Aire thundering in flood. Yet one sound made them pause. Scarce had they set foot on the solid opposite bank, when a shot split the air from the north. One second elapsed. Further off, burst a like note in the south. Within the space of three minutes, similar signals boomed in the east and west.

'I thought we were dead at the first explosion,' observed Shirley, drawing a long breath. 'I felt myself hit in the temples, and I concluded your heart was pierced; but the reiterated voice was an explanation: those are signals - it is their way - the attack must be near. We should have had wings: our feet have not borne us swiftly enough.'

A portion of the copse was now to clear: when they emerged from it, the mill lay just below them: they could look down upon the buildings, the yard; they could see the road beyond. And the first glance in that direction told Shirley she was right in her conjecture: they were already too late to give warning: it had taken more time than they calculated on to overcome the various obstacles which embarrassed the short cut across the fields.

The road, which should have been white, was dark with a moving mass: the rioters were assembled in front of the closed yard gates, and a single figure stood within, apparently addressing them: the mill itself was perfectly black and still; there was neither life, light, nor motion around it.

'Surely he is prepared: surely that is not Moore meeting them alone? ' whispered Shirley.

'It is - we must go to him! I will go to him.'

'That you will not.'

'Why did I come then? I came only for him. I shall join him.'

'Fortunately, it is out of your power: there is no entrance to the yard.'

'There is a small entrance at the back, besides the gates in front: it opens by a secret method which I know - I will try it.'

'Not with my leave.'

Miss Keeldar clasped her round the waist with both arms and held her back. 'Not one step shall you stir,' she went on authoritatively. 'At this moment, Moore would be both shocked and embarrassed, if he saw either you or me. Men never want women near them in time of real danger.'

'I would not trouble - I would help him,' was the reply.

'How? By inspiring him with heroism? Pooh! These are not the days of chivalry: it is not a tilt at a tournament we are going to behold, but a struggle about money, and food, and life.'

'It is natural that I should be at his side.'

'As queen of his heart? His mill is his lady-love, Cary! Backed by his factory and his frames, he has all the encouragement he wants or can know. It is not for love or beauty, but for ledger and broadcloth, he is going to break a spear. Don't be sentimental Robert is not so.'

'I could help him - I will seek him.'

'Off then - I let you go - seek Moore: you'll not find him.' She loosened her hold. Caroline sped like levelled shaft from bent bow; after her rang a jesting, gibing laugh. 'Look well there is no mistake!' was the warning given.

But there was a mistake. Miss Helstone paused, hesitated, gazed. The figure had suddenly retreated from the gate, and was running back hastily to the mill.

'Make haste, Lina!' cried Shirley: 'meet him before he enters.'

Caroline slowly returned. 'It is not Robert,' she said: 'it has neither his height, form, nor bearing.'

'I saw it was not Robert when I let you go. How could you imagine it? It is a shabby little figure of a private soldier: they have posted him as sentinel. He is safe in the mill now: I saw the door open and admit him. My mind grows easier; Robert is prepared: our warning would have been superfluous, and now I am thankful we came too late to give it: it has saved us the trouble of a scene. How fine to have entered the counting-house 'toute éperdue,' and to have found oneself in presence of Messrs. Armitage and Ramsden smoking, Malone swaggering, your uncle sneering, Mr Sykes sipping a cordial, and Moore himself in his cold man-of-business vein I am glad we missed it all.'

'I wonder if there are many in the mill, Shirley!'

'Plenty to defend it. The soldiers we have twice seen to-day were going there no doubt, and the group we noticed surrounding your cousin in the fields will be with him.'

'What are they doing now, Shirley? What is that noise?'

'Hatchets and crowbars against the yard-gates: they are forcing them. Are you afraid?'

'No; but my heart throbs fast; I have a difficulty in standing: I will sit down. Do you feel unmoved?'

'Hardly that - but I am glad I came: we shall see what transpires with our own eyes: we are here on the spot, and none know it. Instead of amazing the curate, the clothier, and the corn-dealer with a romantic rush on the stage, we stand alone with the friendly night, its mute stars, and these whispering trees, whose report our friends will not come to gather.'

'Shirley - Shirley, the gates are down! That crash was like the felling of great trees. Now they are pouring through. They will break down the mill doors as they have broken the gate: what can Robert do against so many? Would to God I were a little nearer him - could hear him speak - could speak to him! With my will - my longing to serve him - I could not be a useless burden in his way: I could be turned to some account.'

'They come on!' cried Shirley. 'How steadily they march in! There is discipline in their ranks - I will not say there is courage: hundreds against tens are no proof of that quality; but' (she dropped her voice) 'there is suffering and desperation enough amongst them - these goads will urge them forwards.'

'Forwards against Robert - and they hate him. Shirley, is there much danger they will win the day?'

'We shall see. Moore and Helstone are of 'earth's first blood' - no bunglers-no cravens' - -

A crash - smash - shiver - stopped their whispers. A simultaneously-hurled volley of stones had saluted the broad front of the mill, with all its windows; and now every pane of every lattice lay in shattered and pounded fragments. A yell followed this demonstration - a rioters' yell - a North-of-England - a Yorkshire - a West-Riding - a West-Riding-clothing-district-of-Yorkshire rioters' yell. You never heard that sound, perhaps, reader? So much the better for your ears - perhaps for your heart; since, if it rends the air in hate to yourself, or to the men or principles you approve, the interests to which you wish well. Wrath wakens to the cry of Hate: the Lion shakes his mane, and rises to the howl of the Hyena: Caste stands up ireful against Caste; and the indignant, wronged spirit of the Middle Rank bears down in zeal and scorn on the famished and furious mass of the Operative class. It is difficult to be tolerant - difficult to be just - in such moments.

Caroline rose, Shirley put her arm round her: they stood together as still as the straight stems of two trees. That yell was a long one, and when it ceased, the night was yet full of the swaying and murmuring of a crowd.

'What next?' was the question of the listeners. Nothing came yet. The mill remained mute as a mausoleum.

'He cannot be alone!' whispered Caroline.

'I would stake all I have, that he is as little alone as he is alarmed,' responded Shirley.

Shots were discharged by the rioters. Had the defenders waited for this signal? It seemed so. The hitherto inert and passive mill woke: fire flashed from its empty window-frames; a volley of musketry pealed sharp through the Hollow.

'Moore speaks at last!' said Shirley, 'and he seems to have the gift of tongues; that was not a single voice.'

'He has been forbearing; no one can accuse him of rashness,' alleged Caroline: 'their discharge preceded his: they broke his gates and his windows; they fired at his garrison before he repelled them.'

What was going on now? It seemed difficult, in the darkness, to distinguish, but something terrible, a still-renewing tumult, was obvious: fierce attacks, desperate repulses; the mill-yard, the mill itself, was full of battle movements: there was scarcely any cessation now of the discharge of firearms; and there was struggling, rushing, trampling, and shouting between. The aim of the assailants seemed to be to enter the mill, that of the defendants to beat them off. They heard the rebel leader cry, 'To the back, lads!' They heard a voice retort, 'Come round, we will meet you!'

'To the counting-house!' was the order again.

'Welcome! - We shall have you there!' was the response. And accordingly, the fiercest blaze that had yet glowed, the loudest rattle that had yet been heard, burst from the counting-house front, when the mass of rioters rushed up to it.

The voice that had spoken was Moore's own voice. They could tell by its tones that his soul was now warm with the conflict: they could guess that the fighting animal was roused in every one of those men there struggling together, and was for the time quite paramount above the rational human being.

Both the girls felt their faces glow and their pulses throb: both knew they would do no good by rushing down into the mêlée: they desired neither to deal nor to receive blows; but they could not have run away - Caroline no more than Shirley; they could not have fainted; they could not have taken their eyes from the dim, terrible scene - from the mass of cloud, of smoke - the musket-lightning - for the world.

'How and when would it end?' was the demand throbbing in their throbbing pulses. 'Would a juncture arise in which they could be useful?' was what they waited to see; for, though Shirley put off their too-late arrival with a jest, and was ever ready to satirise her own or any other person's enthusiasm, she would have given a farm of her best land for a chance of rendering good service.

The chance was not vouchsafed her; the looked-for juncture never came: it was not likely. Moore had expected this attack for days, perhaps weeks: he was prepared for it at every point. He had fortified and garrisoned his mill, which in itself was a strong building: he was a cool, brave man: he stood to the defence with unflinching firmness; those who were with him caught his spirit, and copied his demeanour. The rioters had never been so met before. At other mills they had attacked, they had found no resistance; an organised, resolute defence was what they never dreamed of encountering. When their leaders saw the steady fire kept up from the mill, witnessed the composure and determination of its owner, heard themselves coolly defied and invited on to death, and beheld their men falling wounded round them, they felt that nothing was to be done here. In haste, they mustered their forces, drew them away from the building: a roll was called over, in which the men answered to figures instead of names: they dispersed wide over the fields, leaving silence and ruin behind them. The attack, from its commencement to its termination, had not occupied an hour.

Day was by this time approaching: the west was dim, the east beginning to gleam. It would have seemed that the girls who had watched this conflict would now wish to hasten to the victors, on whose side all their interest had been enlisted; but they only very cautiously approached the now battered mill, and, when suddenly a number of soldiers and gentlemen appeared at the great door opening into the yard, they quickly stepped aside into a shed, the deposit of old iron and timber, whence they could see without being seen.

It was no cheering spectacle: these premises were now a mere blot of desolation on the fresh front of the summer-dawn. All the copse up the Hollow was shady and dewy, the hill at its head was green; but just here in the centre of the sweet glen, Discord, broken loose in the night from control, had beaten the ground with his stamping hoofs, and left it waste and pulverised. The mill yawned all ruinous with unglazed frames; the yard was thickly bestrewn with stones and

brickbats, and, close under the mill, with the glittering fragments of the shattered windows, muskets and other weapons lay here and there; more than one deep crimson stain was visible on the gravel; a human body lay quiet on its face near the gates; and five or six wounded men writhed and moaned in the bloody dust.

Miss Keeldar's countenance changed at this view: it was the after-taste of the battle, death and pain replacing excitement and exertion: it was the blackness the bright fire leaves when its blaze is sunk, its warmth failed, and its glow faded.

'That is what I wished to prevent,' she said, in a voice whose cadence betrayed the altered impulse of her heart.

'But you could not prevent it; you did your best; it was in vain,' said Caroline comfortingly. 'Don't grieve, Shirley.'

'I am sorry for those poor fellows,' was the answer, while the spark in her glance dissolved to dew. 'Are any within the mill hurt, I wonder? Is that your uncle?'

'It is, and there is Mr Malone, and, oh Shirley! there is Robert!'

'Well' (resuming her former tone), 'don't squeeze your fingers quite into my hand: I see, there is nothing wonderful in that. We knew he, at least, was here, whoever might be absent.'

'He is coming here towards us, Shirley!'

'Towards the pump, that is to say, for the purpose of washing his hands and his forehead, which has got a scratch, I perceive.'

'He bleeds, Shirley: don't hold me; I must go.'

'Not a step.'

'He is hurt, Shirley!'

'Fiddlestick!'

'But I must go to him: I wish to go so much: I cannot bear to be restrained.'

'What for?'

'To speak to him, to ask how he is, and what I can do for him?'

'To tease and annoy him; to make a spectacle of yourself and him before those soldiers, Mr Malone, your uncle, et cetera. Would he like it, think you? Would you like to remember it a week hence?'

'Am I always to be curbed and kept down?' demanded Caroline, a little passionately.

'For his sake, yes. And still more for your own. I tell you, if you showed yourself now, you would repent it an hour hence, and so would Robert.'

'You think he would not like it, Shirley?'

'Far less than he would like our stopping him to say goodnight, which you were so sore about.'

'But that was all play; there was no danger.'

'And this is serious work: he must be unmolested.'

'I only wish to go to him because he is my cousin - you understand?'

'I quite understand. But now, watch him. He has bathed his forehead, and the blood has ceased trickling; his hurt is really a mere graze: I can see it from hence: he is going to look after the wounded men.'

Accordingly Mr Moore and Mr Helstone went round the yard, examining each prostrate form. They then gave directions to have the wounded taken up and carried into the mill. This duty being performed, Joe Scott was ordered to saddle his master's horse and Mr Helstone's pony, and the two gentlemen rode away full gallop, to seek surgical aid in different directions.

Caroline was not yet pacified.

'Shirley, Shirley, I should have liked to speak one word to him before he went,' she murmured, while the tears gathered glittering in her eyes.

'Why do you cry, Lina?' asked Miss Keeldar a little sternly. 'You ought to be glad instead of sorry. Robert has escaped any serious harm; he is victorious; he has been cool and brave in combat; he is now considerate in triumph: is this a time - are these causes for weeping?'

'You do not know what I have in my heart,' pleaded the other: 'what pain, what distraction; nor whence it arises. I can understand that you should exult in Robert's greatness and goodness; so do I, in one sense, but, in another, I feel so miserable. I am too far removed from

him: I used to be nearer. Let me alone, Shirley: do let me cry a few minutes; it relieves me.'

Miss Keeldar, feeling her tremble in every limb, ceased to expostulate with her: she went out of the shed, and left her to weep in peace. It was the best plan: in a few minutes Caroline rejoined her, much calmer: she said with her natural, docile, gentle manner - 'Come, Shirley, we will go home now. I promise not to try to see Robert again till he asks for me. I never will try to push myself on him. I thank you for restraining me just now.'

'I did it with a good intention,' returned Miss Keeldar.

'Now, dear Lina,' she continued, 'let us turn our faces to the cool morning breeze, and walk very quietly back to the Rectory. We will steal in as we stole out; none shall know where we have been, or what we have seen to-night: neither taunt nor misconstruction can consequently molest us. Tomorrow, we will see Robert, and be of good cheer; but I will say no more, lest I should begin to cry too, I seem hard towards you, but I am not so.'