## Chapter XXIII - An Evening Out

One fine summer day that Caroline had spent entirely alone (her uncle being at Whinbury), and whose long, bright, noiseless, breezeless, cloudless hours (how many they seemed since sunrise!) had been to her as desolate as if they had gone over her head in the shadowless and trackless wastes of Sahara, instead of in the blooming garden of an English home, she was sitting in the alcove, - her task of work on her knee, her fingers assiduously plying the needle, her eyes following and regulating their movements, her brain working restlessly, - when Fanny came to the door, looked round over the lawn and borders, and not seeing her whom she sought, called out - 'Miss Caroline!'

A low voice answered - 'Fanny!' It issued from the alcove, and thither Fanny hastened - a note in her hand, which she delivered to fingers that hardly seemed to have nerve to hold it. Miss Helstone did not ask whence it came, and she did not look at it: she let it drop amongst the folds of her work.

'Joe Scott's son, Harry, brought it,' said Fanny.

The girl was no enchantress, and knew no magic-spell, yet what she said took almost magical effect on her young mistress: she lifted her head with the quick motion of revived sensation; she shot - not a languid, but a lifelike, questioning glance at Fanny.

'Harry Scott! Who sent him?'

'He came from the Hollow.'

The dropped note was snatched up eagerly - the seal was broken; it was read in two seconds. An affectionate billet from Hortense, informing her young cousin that she was returned from Wormwood Wells; that she was alone to-day, as Robert was gone to Whinbury market; that nothing would give her greater pleasure than to have Caroline's company to tea; and - the good lady added - she was sure such a change would be most acceptable and beneficial to Caroline, who must be sadly at a loss both for safe guidance and improving society since the misunderstanding between Robert and Mr Helstone had occasioned a separation from her 'meilleure amie, Hortense Gerard Moore.' In a postscript, she was urged to put on her bonnet and run down directly.

Caroline did not need the injunction: glad was she to lay by the child's brown Holland slip she was trimming with braid for the Jew's basket, to hasten upstairs, cover her curls with her straw bonnet, and throw round her shoulders the black silk scarf, whose simple drapery suited

as well her shape as its dark hue set off the purity of her dress and the fairness of her face; glad was she to escape for a few hours the solitude, the sadness, the nightmare of her life; glad to run down the green lane sloping to the Hollow, to scent the fragrance of hedge-flowers sweeter than the perfume of moss-rose or lily. True, she knew Robert was not at the cottage; but it was delight to go where he had lately been: so long, so totally separated from him, merely to see his home, to enter the room where he had that morning sat, felt like a reunion. As such it revived her; and then Illusion was again following her in Peri-mask: the soft agitation of wings caressed her cheek, and the air, breathing from the blue summer sky, bore a voice which whispered - 'Robert may come home while you are in his house; and then, at least, you may look in his face, - at least you may give him your hand: perhaps, for a minute, you may sit beside him.'

'Silence!' was her austere response: but she loved the comforter and the consolation.

Miss Moore probably caught from the window the gleam and flutter of Caroline's white attire through the branchy garden-shrubs, for she advanced from the cottage porch to meet her. Straight, unbending, phlegmatic as usual, she came on: no haste or ecstasy was ever permitted to disorder the dignity of her movements; but she smiled, well pleased to mark the delight of her pupil, to feel her kiss, and the gentle, genial strain of her embrace. She led her tenderly in - half deceived and wholly flattered. Half deceived! had it not been so, she would in all probability have put her to the wicket, and shut her out. Had she known clearly to whose account the chief share of this child-like joy was to be placed, Hortense would most likely have felt both shocked and incensed. Sisters do not like young ladies to fall in love with their brothers: it seems, if not presumptuous, silly, weak, a delusion, an absurd mistake. They do not love these gentlemen - whatever sisterly affection they may cherish towards them - and that others should, repels them with a sense of crude romance. The first movement, in short, excited by such discovery (as with many parents on finding their children to be in love), is one of mixed impatience and contempt. Reason - if they be rational people - corrects the false feeling in time; but if they be irrational, it is never corrected, and the daughter or sister-in-law is disliked to the end.

'You would expect to find me alone, from what I said in my note,' observed Miss Moore, as she conducted Caroline towards the parlour; 'but it was written this morning: since dinner, company has come in.'

And, opening the door, she made visible an ample spread of crimson skirts overflowing the elbow-chair at the fireside, and above them, presiding with dignity, a cap more awful than a crown. That cap had never come to the cottage under a bonnet; no, it had been brought, in

a vast bag, or rather a middle-sized balloon of black silk, held wide with whalebone. The screed, or frill of the cap, stood a quarter of a yard broad round the face of the wearer: the ribbon, flourishing in puffs and bows about the head, was of the sort called love ribbon: there was a good deal of it, - I may say, a very great deal. Mrs Yorke wore the cap - it became her: she wore the gown also - it suited her no less.

That great lady was come in a friendly way to take tea with Miss Moore. It was almost as great and as rare a favour as if the Queen were to go uninvited to share pot-luck with one of her subjects: a higher mark of distinction she could not show, - she who, in general, scorned visiting and tea-drinking, and held cheap and stigmatised as 'gossips' every maid and matron of the vicinage.

There was no mistake, however; Miss Moore was a favourite with her: she had evinced the fact more than once; evinced it by stopping to speak to her in the churchyard on Sundays; by inviting her, almost hospitably, to come to Briarmains; evinced it to-day by the grand condescension of a personal visit. Her reasons for the preference, as assigned by herself, were, that Miss Moore was a woman of steady deportment, without the least levity of conversation or carriage; also, that, being a foreigner, she must feel the want of a friend to countenance her. She might have added, that her plain aspect, homely precise dress, and phlegmatic unattractive manner were to her so many additional recommendations. It is certain, at least, that ladies remarkable for the opposite qualities of beauty, lively bearing, and elegant taste in attire, were not often favoured with her approbation. Whatever gentlemen are apt to admire in women, Mrs Yorke condemned; and what they overlook or despise, she patronised.

Caroline advanced to the mighty matron with some sense of diffidence: she knew little of Mrs Yorke; and, as a parson's niece, was doubtful what sort of a reception she might get. She got a very cool one, and was glad to hide her discomfiture by turning away to take off her bonnet. Nor, upon sitting down, was she displeased to be immediately accosted by a little personage in a blue frock and sash, who started up like some fairy from the side of the great dame's chair, where she had been sitting on a footstool, screened from view by the folds of the wide red gown, and running to Miss Helstone, unceremoniously threw her arms round her neck and demanded a kiss.

'My mother is not civil to you,' said the petitioner, as she received and repaid a smiling salute; 'and Rose, there, takes no notice of you: it is their way. If, instead of you, a white angel, with a crown of stars, had come into the room, mother would nod stiffly, and Rose never lift her head at all: but I will be your friend: I have always liked you!'

'Jessy, curb that tongue of yours, and repress your forwardness!' said Mrs Yorke.

'But, mother, you are so frozen!' expostulated Jessy. 'Miss Helstone has never done you any harm: why can't you be kind to her? You sit so stiff, and look so cold, and speak so dry - what for? That's just the fashion in which you treat Miss Shirley Keeldar, and every other young lady who comes to our house. And Rose, there, is such an aut - aut - - I have forgotten the word, but it means a machine in the shape of a human being. However, between you, you will drive every soul away from Briarmains - Martin often says so!'

'I am an automaton? Good! Let me alone then,' said Rose, speaking from a corner where she was sitting on the carpet at the foot of a bookcase, with a volume spread open on her knee. 'Miss Helstone - how do you do?' she added, directing a brief glance to the person addressed, and then again casting down her grey, remarkable eyes on the book, and returning to the study of its pages.

Caroline stole a quiet gaze towards her, dwelling on her young, absorbed countenance, and observing a certain unconscious movement of the mouth as she read - a movement full of character. Caroline had tact, and she had fine instinct: she felt that Rose Yorke was a peculiar child - one of the unique; she knew how to treat her. Approaching quietly, she knelt on the carpet at her side, and looked over her little shoulder at her book. It was a romance of Mrs Radcliffe's - The Italian.

Caroline read on with her, making no remark: presently Rose showed her the attention of asking, ere she turned a leaf - 'Are you ready?'

Caroline only nodded.

'Do you like it?' inquired Rose, ere long.

'Long since, when I read it as a child, I was wonderfully taken with it.'

'Why?'

'It seemed to open with such promise - such foreboding of a most strange tale to be unfolded.'

'And in reading it, you feel as if you were far away from England - really in Italy - under another sort of sky - that blue sky of the south which travellers describe.'

'You are sensible of that, Rose?'

'It makes me long to travel, Miss Helstone.'

'When you are a woman, perhaps, you may be able to gratify your wish.'

'I mean to make a way to do so, if one is not made for me. I cannot live always in Briarfield. The whole world is not very large compared with creation: I must see the outside of our own round planet at least.'

'How much of its outside?'

'First this hemisphere where we live; then the other. I am resolved that my life shall be a life: not a black trance like the toad's, buried in marble; nor a long, slow death like yours in Briarfield Rectory.'

'Like mine! What can you mean, child?'

'Might you not as well be tediously dying, as for ever shut up in that glebe- house - a place that, when I pass it, always reminds me of a windowed grave? I never see any movement about the door: I never hear a sound from the wall: I believe smoke never issues from the chimneys. What do you do there?'

'I sew, I read, I learn lessons.'

'Are you happy?'

'Should I be happier wandering alone in strange countries as you wish to do?'

'Much happier, even if you did nothing but wander. Remember, however, that I shall have an object in view: but if you only went on and on, like some enchanted lady in a fairy tale, you might be happier than now. In a day's wandering, you would pass many a hill, wood, and watercourse, each perpetually altering in aspect as the sun shone out or was overcast; as the weather was wet or fair, dark or bright. Nothing changes in Briarfield Rectory: the plaster of the parlour-ceilings, the paper on the walls, the curtains, carpets, chairs, are still the same.'

'Is change necessary to happiness?'

'Yes.'

'Is it synonymous with it?'

'I don't know; but I feel monotony and death to be almost the same.'

Here Jessy spoke.

'Isn't she mad?' she asked.

'But, Rose,' pursued Caroline, 'I fear a wanderer's life, for me at least, would end like that tale you are reading - in disappointment, vanity, and vexation of spirit.'

'Does The Italian so end?'

'I thought so when I read it.'

'Better to try all things and find all empty, than to try nothing and leave your life a blank. To do this is to commit the sin of him who buried his talent in a napkin - despicable sluggard!'

'Rose,' observed Mrs Yorke, 'solid satisfaction is only to be realised by doing one's duty.'

'Right, mother! And if my Master has given me ten talents, my duty is to trade with them, and make them ten talents more. Not in the dust of household drawers shall the coin be interred. I will not deposit it in a broken-spouted tea-pot, and shut it up in a china-closet among tea-things. I will not commit it to your work-table to be smothered in piles of woollen hose. I will not prison it in the linen press to find shrouds among the sheets: and least of all, mother' - (she got up from the floor) - 'least of all will I hide it in a tureen of cold potatoes, to be ranged with bread, butter, pastry, and ham on the shelves of the larder.'

She stopped - then went on: - 'Mother, the Lord who gave each of us our talents will come home some day, and will demand from all an account. The tea- pot, the old stocking-foot, the linen rag, the willow-pattern tureen, will yield up their barren deposit in many a house: suffer your daughters, at least, to put their money to the exchangers, that they may be enabled at the Master's coming to pay Him His own with usury.'

'Rose, did you bring your sampler with you, as I told you?'

'Yes, mother.'

'Sit down, and do a line of marking.'

Rose sat down promptly, and wrought according to orders. After a busy pause of ten minutes, her mother asked - 'Do you think yourself oppressed now? A victim?'

'No, mother.'

'Yet, as far as I understood your tirade, it was a protest against all womanly and domestic employment.'

'You misunderstood it, mother. I should be sorry not to learn to sew; you do right to teach me, and to make me work.'

'Even to the mending of your brothers' stockings and the making of sheets?'

'Yes.'

'Where is the use of ranting and spouting about it, then?'

'Am I to do nothing but that? I will do that, and then I will do more. Now, mother, I have said my say. I am twelve years old at present, and not till I am sixteen will I speak again about talents: for four years, I bind myself an industrious apprentice to all you can teach me.'

'You see what my daughters are, Miss Helstone,' observed Mrs Yorke: 'how precociously wise in their own conceits! I would rather this - I prefer that'; such is Jessy's cuckoo-song: while Rose utters the bolder cry, 'I will, and I will not!'

'I render a reason, mother: besides, if my cry is bold, it is only heard once in a twelvemonth. About each birthday, the spirit moves me to deliver one oracle respecting my own instruction and management: I utter it and leave it; it is for you, mother, to listen or not.'

'I would advise all young ladies,' pursued Mrs Yorke, 'to study the characters of such children as they chance to meet with before they marry, and have any of their own; to consider well how they would like the responsibility of guiding the careless, the labour of persuading the stubborn, the constant burden and task of training the best.'

'But with love it need not be so very difficult,' interposed Caroline. 'Mothers love their children most dearly - almost better than they love themselves.'

'Fine talk! Very sentimental! There is the rough, practical part of life yet to come for you, young Miss!'

'But, Mrs Yorke, if I take a little baby into my arms - any poor woman s infant for instance, - I feel that I love that helpless thing quite peculiarly, though I am not its mother. I could do almost anything for it willingly, if it were delivered over entirely to my care - if it were quite dependent on me.'

'You feel! Yes! yes! I daresay, now: you are led a great deal by your feelings, and you think yourself a very sensitive, refined personage, no doubt. Are you aware that, with all these romantic ideas, you have managed to train your features into an habitually lackadaisical expression, better suited to a novel-heroine than to a woman who is to make her way in the real world by dint of common sense?'

'No; I am not at all aware of that, Mrs Yorke.'

'Look in the glass just behind you. Compare the face you see there with that of any early-rising, hard-working milkmaid.'

'My face is a pale one, but it is not sentimental, and most milkmaids, however red and robust they may be, are more stupid and less practically fitted to make their way in the world than I am. I think more and more correctly than milkmaids in general do; consequently, where they would often, for want of reflection, act weakly, I, by dint of reflection, should act judiciously.'

'Oh, no! you would be influenced by your feelings. You would be guided by impulse.'

'Of course, I should often be influenced by my feelings: they were given me to that end. Whom my feelings teach me to love, I must and shall love; and I hope, if ever I have a husband and children, my feelings will induce me to love them. I hope, in that case, all my impulses will be strong in compelling me to love.'

Caroline had a pleasure in saying this with emphasis: she had a pleasure in daring to say it in Mrs Yorke's presence. She did not care what unjust sarcasm might be hurled at her in reply: she flushed, not with anger, but excitement, when the ungenial matron answered coolly - 'Don't waste your dramatic effects. That was well said, - it was quite fine; but it is lost on two women - an old wife and an old maid; there should have been a disengaged gentleman present. Is Mr Robert nowhere hid behind the curtains, do you think, Miss Moore?'

Hortense, who during the chief part of the conversation had been in the kitchen superintending the preparations for tea, did not yet quite comprehend the drift of the discourse She answered with a puzzled air that Robert was at Whinbury. Mrs Yorke laughed her own peculiar short laugh.

'Straightforward Miss Moore!' said she patronisingly. 'It is like you to understand my question so literally, and answer it so simply. Your mind comprehends nothing of intrigue. Strange things might go on around you without your being the wiser: you are not of the class the world calls sharp- witted.'

These equivocal compliments did not seem to please Hortense. She drew herself up, puckered her black eyebrows, but still looked puzzled.

'I have ever been noted for sagacity and discernment from childhood,' she returned: for, indeed, on the possession of these qualities she peculiarly piqued herself.

'You never plotted to win a husband, I'll be bound,' pursued Mrs Yorke; 'and you have not the benefit of previous experience to aid you in discovering when others plot.'

Caroline felt this kind language where the benevolent speaker intended she should feel it - in her very heart. She could not even parry the shafts: she was defenceless for the present: to answer would have been to avow that the cap fitted. Mrs Yorke, looking at her as she sat with troubled downcast eyes, and cheek burning painfully, and figure expressing in its bent attitude and unconscious tremor all the humiliation and chagrin she experienced, felt the sufferer was fair game. The strange woman had a natural antipathy to a shrinking, sensitive character - a nervous temperament: nor was a pretty, delicate, and youthful face a passport to her affections. It was seldom she met with all these obnoxious qualities combined in one individual: still more seldom she found that individual at her mercy, under circumstances in which she could crush her well. She happened, this afternoon, to be specially bilious and morose: as much disposed to gore as any vicious 'mother of the herd': lowering her large head, she made a new charge.

'Your cousin Hortense is an excellent sister, Miss Helstone: such ladies as come to try their life's luck here, at Hollow's Cottage, may, by a very little clever female artifice, cajole the mistress of the house, and have the game all in their own hands. You are fond of your cousin's society, I daresay, Miss?'

'Of which cousin's?'

'Oh, of the lady's, of course.'

'Hortense is, and always has been, most kind to me.'

'Every sister, with an eligible single brother, is considered most kind by her spinster friends.'

'Mrs Yorke,' said Caroline, lifting her eyes slowly, their blue orbs at the same time clearing from trouble, and shining steady and full, while the glow of shame left her cheek, and its hue turned pale and settled: 'Mrs Yorke, may I ask what you mean?'

'To give you a lesson on the cultivation of rectitude: to disgust you with craft and false sentiment.'

'Do I need this lesson?'

'Most young ladies of the present day need it. You are quite a modern young lady - morbid, delicate, professing to like retirement; which implies, I suppose, that you find little worthy of your sympathies in the ordinary world. The ordinary world - every-day, honest folks - are better than you think them: much better than any bookish, romancing chit of a girl can be, who hardly ever puts her nose over her uncle's, the parson's, garden wall.'

'Consequently, of whom you know nothing. Excuse me, - indeed, it does not matter whether you excuse me or not - you have attacked me without provocation: I shall defend myself without apology. Of my relations with my two cousins, you are ignorant: in a fit of ill-humour you have attempted to poison them by gratuitous insinuations, which are far more crafty and false than anything with which you can justly charge me. That I happen to be pale, and sometimes to look diffident, is no business of yours. That I am fond of books, and indisposed for common gossip, is still less your business. That I am a 'romancing chit of a girl' is a mere conjecture on your part: I never romanced to you, nor to anybody you know. That I am the parson's niece is not a crime, though you may be narrow- minded enough to think it so. You dislike me: you have no just reason for disliking me; therefore keep the expression of your aversion to yourself. If at any time, in future, you evince it annoyingly, I shall answer even less scrupulously than I have done now.'

She ceased, and sat in white and still excitement. She had spoken in the clearest of tones, neither fast nor loud; but her silver accent thrilled the ear. The speed of the current in her veins was just then as swift as it was viewless.

Mrs Yorke was not irritated at the reproof, worded with a severity so simple, dictated by a pride so quiet. Turning coolly to Miss Moore, she said, nodding her cap approvingly - 'She has spirit in her, after all. Always speak as honestly as you have done just now,' she continued, 'and you'll do.'

'I repel a recommendation so offensive,' was the answer, delivered in the same pure key, with the same clear look. 'I reject counsel poisoned by insinuation. It is my right to speak as I think proper; nothing binds me to converse as you dictate. So far from always speaking as I have done just now, I shall never address any one in a tone so stern, or in language so harsh, unless in answer to unprovoked insult.'

'Mother, you have found your match,' pronounced little Jessy, whom the scene appeared greatly to edify. Rose had heard the whole with an unmoved face. She now said, 'No: Miss Helstone is not my mother's match - for she allows herself to be vexed: my mother would wear her out in a few weeks. Shirley Keeldar manages better. Mother, you have never hurt Miss Keeldar's feelings yet. She wears armour under her silk dress that you cannot penetrate.'

Mrs Yorke often complained that her children were mutinous. It was strange, that with all her strictness, with all her 'strong-mindedness,' she could gain no command over them: a look from their father had more influence with them than a lecture from her.

Miss Moore - to whom the position of witness to an altercation in which she took no part was highly displeasing, as being an unimportant secondary post - now, rallying her dignity, prepared to utter a discourse which was to prove both parties in the wrong, and to make it clear to each disputant that she had reason to be ashamed of herself, and ought to submit humbly to the superior sense of the individual then addressing her. Fortunately for her audience, she had not harangued above ten minutes, when Sarah's entrance with the tea-tray called her attention, first, to the fact of that damsel having a gilt comb in her hair, and a red necklace round her throat, and secondly, and subsequently to a pointed remonstrance, to the duty of making tea. After the meal, Rose restored her to good humour by bringing her guitar and asking for a song, and afterwards engaging her in an intelligent and sharp cross-examination about guitar-playing and music in general.

Jessy, meantime, directed her assiduities to Caroline. Sitting on a stool at her feet, she talked to her, first about religion and then about politics. Jessy was accustomed at home to drink in a great deal of what her father said on these subjects, and afterwards in company to retail, with more wit and fluency than consistency or discretion, his opinions, antipathies, and preferences. She rated Caroline soundly for being a member of the Established Church, and for having an uncle a clergyman. She informed her that she lived on the country, and ought to work for her living honestly, instead of passing a useless life, and eating the bread of idleness in the shape of tithes. Thence Jessy passed to a review of the Ministry at that time in office, and a consideration of its deserts. She made familiar mention of the names of Lord Castlereagh and Mr Perceval. Each of these personages she adorned with a character that might have separately suited Moloch and Belial. She denounced the war as wholesale murder, and Lord Wellington as a 'hired butcher.'

Her auditress listened with exceeding edification. Jessy had something of the genius of humour in her nature: it was inexpressibly comic to

hear her repeating her sire's denunciations in her nervous northern Doric; as hearty a little Jacobin as ever pent a free mutinous spirit in a muslin frock and sash. Not malignant by nature, her language was not so bitter as it was racy, and the expressive little face gave a piquancy to every phrase which held a beholder's interest captive.

Caroline chid her when she abused Lord Wellington; but she listened delighted to a subsequent tirade against the Prince Regent. Jessy quickly read in the sparkle of her hearer's eye, and the laughter hovering round her lips, that at last she had hit on a topic that pleased. Many a time had she heard the fat 'Adonis of fifty' discussed at her father's breakfast-table, and she now gave Mr Yorke's comments on the theme - genuine as uttered by his Yorkshire lips.

But, Jessy, I will write about you no more. This is an autumn evening, wet and wild. There is only one cloud in the sky; but it curtains it from pole to pole. The wind cannot rest: it hurries sobbing over hills of sullen outline, colourless with twilight and mist. Rain has beat all day on that church tower: it rises dark from the stony enclosure of its graveyard: the nettles, the long grass, and the tombs all drip with wet. This evening reminds me too forcibly of another evening some years ago: a howling, rainy autumn evening too - when certain who had that day performed a pilgrimage to a grave new-made in a heretic cemetery sat near a wood-fire on the hearth of a foreign dwelling. They were merry and social, but they each knew that a gap, never to be filled, had been made in their circle. They knew they had lost something whose absence could never be quite atoned for so long as they lived: and they knew that heavy falling rain was soaking into the wet earth which covered their lost darling; and that the sad, sighing gale was mourning above her buried head. The fire warmed them; Life and Friendship yet blessed them; but Jessy lay cold, coffined, solitary - only the sod screening her from the storm.

. . . . . .

Mrs Yorke folded up her knitting, cut short the music-lesson and the lecture on politics, and concluded her visit to the cottage, at an hour early enough to ensure her return to Briarmains before the blush of sunset should quite have faded in heaven, or the path up the fields have become thoroughly moist with evening dew.

The lady and her daughters being gone, Caroline felt that she also ought to resume her scarf, kiss her cousin's cheek, and trip away homeward. If she lingered much later, dusk would draw on, and Fanny would be put to the trouble of coming to fetch her: it was both baking and ironing day at the Rectory, she remembered - Fanny would be busy. Still, she could not quit her seat at the little parlour-window. From no point of view could the West look so lovely as from

that lattice with the garland of jessamine round it, whose white stars and green leaves seemed now but grey pencil outlines - graceful in form, but colourless in tint - against the gold incarnadined of a summer evening - against the fire-tinged blue of an August sky, at eight o'clock p.m.

Caroline looked at the wicket-gate, beside which holly-oaks spired up tall; she looked at the close hedge of privet and laurel fencing in the garden; her eyes longed to see something more than the shrubs, before they turned from that limited prospect: they longed to see a human figure, of a certain mould and height, pass the hedge and enter the gate. A human figure she at last saw - nay, two: Frederick Murgatroyd went by, carrying a pail of water; Joe Scott followed, dangling on his forefinger the keys of the mill. They were going to lock up mill and stables for the night, and then betake themselves home.

'So must I,' thought Caroline, as she half rose and sighed.

'This is all folly - heart-breaking folly,' she added. 'In the first place, though I should stay till dark, there will be no arrival; because I feel in my heart, Fate has written it down in to-day's page of her eternal book, that I am not to have the pleasure I long for. In the second place, if he stepped in this moment, my presence here would be a chagrin to him, and the consciousness that it must be so would turn half my blood to ice. His hand would, perhaps, be loose and chill, if I put mine into it: his eye would be clouded if I sought its beam. I should look up for that kindling something I have seen in past days, when my face, or my language, or my disposition had at some happy moment pleased him - I should discover only darkness. I had better go home.'

She took her bonnet from the table where it lay, and was just fastening the ribbon, when Hortense, directing her attention to a splendid bouquet of flowers in a glass on the same table, mentioned that Miss Keeldar had sent them that morning from Fieldhead; and went on to comment on the guests that lady was at present entertaining, on the bustling life she had lately been leading; adding divers conjectures that she did not very well like it, and much wonderment that a person who was so fond of her own way as the heiress, did not find some means of sooner getting rid of this cortège of relatives.

'But they say she actually will not let Mr Sympson and his family go,' she added: 'they wanted much to return to the south last week, to be ready for the reception of the only son, who is expected home from a tour. She insists that her cousin Henry shall come and join his friends here in Yorkshire. I daresay she partly does it to oblige Robert and myself.'

'How to oblige Robert and you?' inquired Caroline.

'Why, my child, you are dull. Don't you know - you must often have heard - - '

'Please, ma'am,' said Sarah, opening the door, 'the preserves that you told me to boil in treacle - the congfiters, as you call them - is all burnt to the pan.'

'Les confitures! Elles sont brûlées? Ah, quelle négligence coupable! Coquine de cuisinière - fille insupportable!'

And Mademoiselle, hastily taking from a drawer a large linen apron, and tying it over her black apron, rushed 'éperdue' into the kitchen, whence - to speak truth - exhaled an odour of calcined sweets rather strong than savoury.

The mistress and maid had been in full feud the whole day, on the subject of preserving certain black cherries, hard as marbles, sour as sloes. Sarah held that sugar was the only orthodox condiment to be used in that process; Mademoiselle maintained - and proved it by the practice and experience of her mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother - that treacle, 'mélasse,' was infinitely preferable. She had committed an imprudence in leaving Sarah in charge of the preserving-pan, for her want of sympathy in the nature of its contents had induced a degree of carelessness in watching their confection, whereof the result was - dark and cindery ruin. Hubbub followed: high upbraiding, and sobs rather loud than deep or real.

Caroline, once more turning to the little mirror, was shading her ringlets from her cheek to smooth them under her cottage bonnet, certain that it would not only be useless but unpleasant to stay longer; when, on the sudden opening of the back-door, there fell an abrupt calm in the kitchen: the tongues were checked, pulled up as with bit and bridle. 'Was it - was it - Robert?' He often - almost always - entered by the kitchen-way on his return from market. No: it was only Joe Scott, who, having hemmed significantly thrice - every hem being meant as a lofty rebuke to the squabbling womankind - said, 'Now, I thowt I heerd a crack?'

None answered.

'And,' he continued pragmatically, 'as t' maister's comed, and as he'll enter through this hoyle, I considered it desirable to step in and let ye know. A household o' women is nivver fit to be comed on wi'out warning. Here he is; walk forrard, sir. They war playing up queerly, but I think I've quieted 'em.'

Another person - it was now audible - entered. Joe Scott proceeded with his rebukes.

'What d'ye mean by being all i' darkness? Sarah, thou quean, canst t' not light a candle? It war sundown an hour syne. He'll brak' his shins agean some o' yer pots, and tables, and stuff. Tak' tent o' this baking-bowl, sir, they've set it i' yer way, fair as if they did it i' malice.'

To Joe's observations succeeded a confused sort of pause, which Caroline, though she was listening with both her ears, could not understand. It was very brief: a cry broke it - a sound of surprise, followed by the sound of a kiss: ejaculations, but half articulate, succeeded.

'Mon Dieu! mon Dieu! Est-ce que je m'y attendais?' were the words chiefly to be distinguished.

'Et tu te portes toujours bien, bonne soeur?' inquired another voice - Robert's, certainly.

Caroline was puzzled. Obeying an impulse, the wisdom of which she had not time to question, she escaped from the little parlour, by way of leaving the coast clear, and running upstairs took up a position at the head of the banisters, whence she could make further observations ere presenting herself. It was considerably past sunset now: dusk filled the passage, yet not such deep dusk but that she could presently see Robert and Hortense traverse it.

'Caroline! Caroline!' called Hortense, a moment afterwards, 'venez voir mon frère!'

'Strange!' commented Miss Helstone, 'passing strange! What does this unwonted excitement about such an everyday occurrence as a return from market portend? She has not lost her senses, has she? Surely the burnt treacle has not crazed her?'

She descended in a subdued flutter: yet more was she fluttered when Hortense seized her hand at the parlour-door, and leading her to Robert, who stood in bodily presence, tall and dark against the one window, presented her with a mixture of agitation and formality, as though they had been utter strangers, and this was their first mutual introduction.

Increasing puzzle! He bowed rather awkwardly, and turning from her with a stranger's embarrassment, he met the doubtful light from a window: it fell on his face, and the enigma of the dream (a dream it seemed) was at its height: she saw a visage like and unlike, - Robert, and no Robert.

'What is the matter?' said Caroline. 'Is my sight wrong? Is it my cousin?'

'Certainly, it is your cousin,' asserted Hortense.

Then who was this now coming through the passage, - now entering the room? Caroline, looking round, met a new Robert - the real Robert, as she felt at once.

'Well,' said he, smiling at her questioning, astonished face, which is which?

'Ah! this is you!' was the answer.

He laughed. 'I believe it is me: and do you know who he is? You never saw him before; but you have heard of him.'

She had gathered her senses now.

'It can be only one person: your brother, since it is so like you: my other cousin, Louis.'

'Clever little Oedipus! - you would have baffled the Sphynx! - but now, see us together. Change places. Change again, to confuse her, Louis. Which is the old love now, Lina?'

'As if it were possible to make a mistake when you speak! You should have told Hortense to ask. But you are not so much alike: it is only your height, your figure, and complexion that are so similar.'

'And I am Robert, am I not?' asked the newcomer, making a first effort to overcome what seemed his natural shyness.

Caroline shook her head gently. A soft, expressive ray from her eye beamed on the real Robert: it said much.

She was not permitted to quit her cousins soon: Robert himself was peremptory in obliging her to remain. Glad, simple, and affable in her demeanour (glad for this night, at least), in light, bright spirits for the time, she was too pleasant an addition to the cottage circle to be willingly parted with by any of them. Louis seemed naturally rather a grave, still, retiring man, but the Caroline of this evening, which was not (as you know, reader) the Caroline of every day, thawed his reserve, and cheered his gravity soon. He sat near her, and talked to her. She already knew his vocation was that of tuition; she learned now he had for some years been the tutor of Mr Sympson's son; that he had been travelling with him, and had accompanied him to the north. She inquired if he liked his post, but got a look in reply which

did not invite or license further question. The look woke Caroline's ready sympathy: she thought it a very sad expression to pass over so sensible a face as Louis's: for he had a sensible face, - though not handsome, she considered, when seen near Robert's. She turned to make the comparison. Robert was leaning against the wall, a little behind her, turning over the leaves of a book of engravings, and probably listening, at the same time, to the dialogue between her and Louis.

'How could I think them alike?' she asked herself: 'I see now it is Hortense Louis resembles, not Robert.'

And this was in part true: he had the shorter nose and longer upper-lip of his sister, rather than the fine traits of his brother: he had her mould of mouth and chin - all less decisive, accurate, and clear than those of the young mill-owner. His air, though deliberate and reflective, could scarcely be called prompt and acute. You felt, in sitting near and looking up at him, that a slower and probably a more benignant nature than that of the elder Moore shed calm on your impressions.

Robert - perhaps aware that Caroline's glance had wandered towards and dwelt upon him, though he had neither met nor answered it - put down the book of engravings, and approaching, took a seat at her side. She resumed her conversation with Louis, but, while she talked to him, her thoughts were elsewhere: her heart beat on the side from which her face was half-averted. She acknowledged a steady, manly, kindly air in Louis; but she bent before the secret power of Robert. To be so near him - though he was silent - though he did not touch so much as her scarf-fringe, or the white hem of her dress - affected her like a spell. Had she been obliged to speak to him only, it would have quelled - but, at liberty to address another, it excited her. Her discourse flowed freely: it was gay, playful, eloquent. The indulgent look and placid manner of her auditor encouraged her to ease; the sober pleasure expressed by his smile drew out all that was brilliant in her nature. She felt that this evening she appeared to advantage, and, as Robert was a spectator, the consciousness contented her: had he been called away, collapse would at once have succeeded stimulus.

But her enjoyment was not long to shine full-orbed: a cloud soon crossed it.

Hortense, who for some time had been on the move ordering supper, and was now clearing the little table of some books, etc., to make room for the tray, called Robert's attention to the glass of flowers, the carmine, and snow, and gold of whose petals looked radiant indeed by candlelight.

'They came from Fieldhead,' she. said, 'intended as a gift to you, no doubt: we know who is the favourite there - not I, I'm sure.'

It was a wonder to hear Hortense jest; a sign that her spirits were at high- water mark indeed.

'We are to understand, then, that Robert is the favourite?,' observed Louis.

'Mon cher,' replied Hortense, 'Robert - c'est tout ce qu'il y a de plus précieux au monde: à côté de lui, le reste du genre humain n'est que du rebut. N'ai-je pas raison, mon enfant?' she added, appealing to Caroline.

Caroline was obliged to reply, 'Yes' - and her beacon was quenched: her star withdrew as she spoke.

'Et toi, Robert?' inquired Louis.

'When you shall have an opportunity, ask herself,' was the quiet answer. Whether he reddened or paled Caroline did not examine: she discovered it was late; and she must go home. Home she would go: not even Robert could detain her now.