Chapter XXVI - Old Copy-Books

By the time the Fieldhead party returned to Briarfield, Caroline was nearly well. Miss Keeldar, who had received news by post of her friend's convalescence, hardly suffered an hour to elapse between her arrival at home and her first call at the Rectory.

A shower of rain was falling gently, yet fast, on the late flowers and russet autumn shrubs, when the garden-wicket was heard to swing open, and Shirley's well-known form passed the window. On her entrance, her feelings were evinced in her own peculiar fashion. When deeply moved, by serious fears or joys, she was not garrulous. The strong emotion was rarely suffered to influence her tongue; and even her eye refused it more than a furtive and fitful conquest. She took Caroline in her arms, gave her one look, one kiss, then said - 'You are better.'

And a minute after - 'I see you are safe now, but take care. God grant your health may be called on to sustain no more shocks!'

She proceeded to talk fluently about the journey. In the midst of vivacious discourse, her eye still wandered to Caroline: there spoke in its light a deep solicitude, some trouble, and some amaze.

'She may be better,' it said: 'but how weak she still is! What peril she has come through!'

Suddenly her glance reverted to Mrs Pryor: it pierced her through.

'When will my governess return to me?' she asked.

'May I tell her all?' demanded Caroline of her mother. Leave being signified by a gesture, Shirley was presently enlightened on what had happened in her absence.

'Very good!' was the cool comment. 'Very good! But it is no news to me.'

'What! Did you know?'

'I guessed long since the whole business. I have heard somewhat of Mrs Pryor's history - not from herself, but from others. With every detail of Mr James Helstone's career and character I was acquainted: an afternoon's sitting and conversation with Miss Mann had rendered me familiar therewith; also he is one of Mrs Yorke's warning-examples - one of the bloodred lights she hangs out to scare young ladies from matrimony. I believe I should have been sceptical about the truth of the portrait traced by such fingers - both these ladies take a dark

pleasure in offering to view the dark side of life - but I questioned Mr Yorke on the subject, and he said - 'Shirley, my woman, if you want to know aught about yond' James Helstone, I can only say he was a man-tiger. He was handsome, dissolute, soft, treacherous, courteous, cruel' - - Don't cry, Cary; we'll say no more about it.'

'I am not crying, Shirley; or if I am, it is nothing - go on: you are no friend if you withhold from me the truth: I hate that false plan of disguising, mutilating the truth.'

'Fortunately, I have said pretty nearly all that I have to say, except that your uncle himself confirmed Mr Yorke's words: for he too scorns a lie, and deals in none of those conventional subterfuges that are shabbier than lies.'

'But papa is dead: they should let him alone now.'

'They should - and we will let him alone. Cry away, Cary, it will do you good: it is wrong to check natural tears; besides, I choose to please myself by sharing an idea that at this moment beams in your mother's eye while she looks at you: every drop blots out a sin. Weep - your tears have the virtue which the rivers of Damascus lacked: like Jordan, they can cleanse a leprous memory.'

'Madam,' she continued, addressing Mrs Pryor, 'did you think I could be daily in the habit of seeing you and your daughter together - marking your marvellous similarity in many points - observing, pardon me - your irrepressible emotions in the presence and still more in the absence of your child, and not form my own conjectures? I formed them, and they are literally correct. I shall begin to think myself shrewd.'

'And you said nothing?' observed Caroline, who soon regained the quiet control of her feelings.

'Nothing. I had no warrant to breathe a word on the subject. My business it was not: I abstained from making it such.'

'You guessed so deep a secret, and did not hint that you guessed it?'

'Is that so difficult?'

'It is not like you.'

'How do you know?'

'You are not reserved. You are frankly communicative.'

'I may be communicative, yet know where to stop. In showing my treasure, I may withhold a gem or two - a curious unbought, graven stone - an amulet, of whose mystic glitter I rarely permit even myself a glimpse. Good-day.'

Caroline thus seemed to get a view of Shirley's character under a novel aspect. Erelong, the prospect was renewed: it opened upon her.

No sooner had she regained sufficient strength to bear a change of scene - the excitement of a little society - than Miss Keeldar sued daily for her presence at Fieldhead. Whether Shirley had become wearied of her honoured relatives is not known: she did not say she was; but she claimed and retained Caroline with an eagerness which proved that an addition to that worshipful company was not unwelcome.

The Sympsons were Church people: of course, the Rectors' niece was received by them with courtesy. Mr Sympson proved to be a man of spotless respectability, worrying temper, pious principles, and worldly views; his lady was a very good woman, patient, kind, well-bred. She had been brought up on a narrow system of views - starved on a few prejudices: a mere handful of bitter herbs; a few preferences, soaked till their natural flavour was extracted, and with no seasoning added in the cooking; some excellent principles, made up in a stiff raised-crust of bigotry, difficult to digest: far too submissive was she to complain of this diet, or to ask for a crumb beyond it.

The daughters were an example to their sex. They were tall, with a Roman nose apiece. They had been educated faultlessly. All they did was well done. History, and the most solid books, had cultivated their minds. Principles and opinions they possessed which could not be mended. More exactly-regulated lives, feelings, manners, habits, it would have been difficult to find anywhere. They knew by heart a certain young-ladies'-schoolroom code of laws on language, demeanour, etc.; themselves never deviated from its curious little pragmatical provisions; and they regarded with secret, whispered horror, all deviations in others. The Abomination of Desolation was no mystery to them: they had discovered that unutterable Thing in the characteristic others call Originality. Quick were they to recognise the signs of this evil; and wherever they saw its trace - whether in look, word, or deed; whether they read it in the fresh vigorous style of a book, or listened to it in interesting, unhackneyed, pure, expressive language - they shuddered - they recoiled: danger was above their heads - peril about their steps. What was this strange thing? Being unintelligible, it must be bad. Let it be denounced and chained up.

Henry Sympson - the only son, and youngest child of the family - was a boy of fifteen. He generally kept with his tutor; when he left him, he sought his cousin Shirley. This boy differed from his sisters; he was

little, lame, and pale; his large eyes shone somewhat languidly in a wan orbit: they were, indeed, usually rather dim - but they were capable of illumination: at times, they could not only shine, but blaze: inward emotion could likewise give colour to his cheek and decision to his crippled movements. Henry's mother loved him; she thought his peculiarities were a mark of election: he was not like other children, she allowed; she believed him regenerate - a new Samuel - called of God from his birth: he was to be a clergyman. Mr and the Misses Sympson, not understanding the youth, let him much alone. Shirley made him her pet; and he made Shirley his playmate.

In the midst of this family circle - or rather outside it - moved the tutor - the satellite.

Yes: Louis Moore was a satellite of the house of Sympson: connected, yet apart; ever attendant - ever distant. Each member of that correct family treated him with proper dignity. The father was austerely civil, sometimes irritable; the mother, being a kind woman, was attentive, but formal; the daughters saw in him an abstraction, not a man. It seemed, by their manner, that their brother's tutor did not live for them. They were learned: so was he - but not for them. They were accomplished: he had talents too, imperceptible to their senses. The most spirited sketch from his fingers was a blank to their eyes; the most original observation from his lips fell unheard on their ears. Nothing could exceed the propriety of their behaviour.

I should have said, nothing could have equalled it; but I remember a fact which strangely astonished Caroline Helstone. It was - to discover that her cousin had absolutely no sympathising friend at Fieldhead: that to Miss Keeldar he was as much a mere teacher, as little gentleman, as little a man, as to the estimable Misses Sympson.

What had befallen the kind-hearted Shirley that she should be so indifferent to the dreary position of a fellow-creature thus isolated under her roof? She was not, perhaps, haughty to him, but she never noticed him: she let him alone. He came and went, spoke or was silent, and she rarely recognised his existence.

As to Louis Moore himself, he had the air of a man used to this life, and who had made up his mind to bear it for a time. His faculties seemed walled up in him, and were unmurmuring in their captivity. He never laughed; he seldom smiled; he was uncomplaining. He fulfilled the round of his duties scrupulously. His pupil loved him; he asked nothing more than civility from the rest of the world. It even appeared that he would accept nothing more: in that abode at least; for when his cousin Caroline made gentle overtures of friendship, he did not encourage them; he rather avoided than sought her. One living thing alone, besides his pale, crippled scholar, he fondled in the

house, and that was the ruffianly Tartar; who, sullen and impracticable to others, acquired a singular partiality for him: a partiality so marked that sometimes, when Moore, summoned to a meal, entered the room and sat down unwelcomed, Tartar would rise from his lair at Shirley's feet, and betake himself to the taciturn tutor. Once - but once - she noticed the desertion; and holding out her white hand, and speaking softly, tried to coax him back. Tartar looked, slavered, and sighed, as his manner was, but yet disregarded the invitation, and coolly settled himself on his haunches at Louis Moore's side. That gentleman drew the dog's big, black-muzzled head on to his knee, patted him, and smiled one little smile to himself.

An acute observer might have remarked, in the course of the same evening, that after Tartar had resumed his allegiance to Shirley, and was once more couched near her foot-stool, the audacious tutor by one word and gesture fascinated him again. He pricked up his ears at the word; he started erect at the gesture, and came, with head lovingly depressed, to receive the expected caress: as it was given, the significant smile again rippled across Moore's quiet face.

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'Shirley,' said Caroline one day, as they two were sitting alone in the summer-house, 'did you know that my cousin Louis was tutor in your uncle's family before the Sympsons came down here?'

Shirley's reply was not so prompt as her responses usually were, but at last she answered - 'Yes, - of course: I knew it well.'

'I thought you must have been aware of the circumstance.'

'Well! what then?'

'It puzzles me to guess how it chances that you never mentioned it to me.'

'Why should it puzzle you?'

'It seems odd. I cannot account for it. You talk a great deal, - you talk freely. How was that circumstance never touched on?'

'Because it never was.' and Shirley laughed.

'You are a singular being!' observed her friend: 'I thought I knew you quite well: I begin to find myself mistaken. You were silent as the grave about Mrs Pryor; and now, again, here is another secret. But why you made it a secret is the mystery to me.'

'I never made it a secret: I had no reason for so doing. If you had asked me who Henry's tutor was, I would have told you: besides, I thought you knew.'

'I am puzzled about more things than one in this matter: you don't like poor Louis, - why? Are you impatient at what you perhaps consider his servile position? Do you wish that Robert's brother were more highly placed?'

'Robert's brother, indeed!' was the exclamation, uttered in a tone like the accents of scorn; and, with a movement of proud impatience, Shirley snatched a rose from a branch peeping through the open lattice.

'Yes,' repeated Caroline, with mild firmness; 'Robert's brother. He is thus closely related to Gérard Moore of the Hollow, though nature has not given him features so handsome, or an air so noble as his kinsman; but his blood is as good, and he is as much a gentleman, were he free.'

'Wise, humble, pious Caroline!' exclaimed Shirley ironically. 'Men and angels, hear her! We should not despise plain features, nor a laborious yet honest occupation, should we? Look at the subject of your panegyric, - he is there in the garden,' she continued, pointing through an aperture in the clustering creepers; and by that aperture Louis Moore was visible, coming slowly down the walk.

'He is not ugly, Shirley,' pleaded Caroline; 'he is not ignoble; he is sad: silence seals his mind; but I believe him to be intelligent, and be certain, if he had not something very commendable in his disposition, Mr Hall would never seek his society as he does.'

Shirley laughed: she laughed again; each time with a slightly sarcastic sound. 'Well, well,' was her comment. 'On the plea of the man being Cyril Hall's friend and Robert Moore's brother, we'll just tolerate his existence - won't we, Cary? You believe him to be intelligent, do you? Not quite an idiot - eh? Something commendable in his disposition! id est, not an absolute ruffian. Good! Your representations have weight with me; and to prove that they have, should he come this way I will speak to him.'

He approached the summer-house: unconscious that it was tenanted, he sat down on the step. Tartar, now his customary companion, had followed him, and he crouched across his feet.

'Old boy!' said Louis, pulling his tawny ear, or rather the mutilated remains of that organ, torn and chewed in a hundred battles, 'the autumn sun shines as pleasantly on us as on the fairest and richest.

This garden is none of ours, but we enjoy its greenness and perfume, don't we?'

He sat silent, still caressing Tartar, who slobbered with exceeding affection. A faint twittering commenced among the trees round: something fluttered down as light as leaves: they were little birds, which, lighting on the sward at shy distance, hopped as if expectant.

'The small brown elves actually remember that I fed them the other day,' again soliloquised Louis. 'They want some more biscuit: to-day, I forgot to save a fragment. Eager little sprites, I have not a crumb for you.'

He put his hand in his pocket and drew it out empty.

'A want easily supplied,' whispered the listening Miss Keeldar.

She took from her reticule a morsel of sweet-cake: for that repository was never destitute of something available to throw to the chickens, young ducks, or sparrows; she crumbled it, and bending over his shoulder, put the crumbs into his hand.

'There,' said she; 'there is a Providence for the improvident.'

'This September afternoon is pleasant,' observed Louis Moore, as - not at all discomposed - he calmly cast the crumbs on to the grass.

'Even for you?'

'As pleasant for me as for any monarch.'

'You take a sort of harsh, solitary triumph in drawing pleasure out of the elements, and the inanimate and lower animate creation.'

'Solitary, but not harsh. With animals I feel I am Adam's son: the heir of him to whom dominion was given over 'every living thing that moveth upon the earth.' Your dog likes and follows me; when I go into that yard, the pigeons from your dove-cot flutter at my feet; your mare in the stable knows me as well as it knows you, and obeys me better.'

'And my roses smell sweet to you, and my trees give you shade.'

'And,' continued Louis, 'no caprice can withdraw these pleasures from me: they are mine.'

He walked off: Tartar followed him, as if in duty and affection bound, and Shirley remained standing on the summer-house step. Caroline

saw her face as she looked after the rude tutor: it was pale, as if her pride bled inwardly.

'You see,' remarked Caroline apologetically, 'his feelings are so often hurt, it makes him morose.'

'You see,' returned Shirley, with ire, 'he is a topic on which you and I shall quarrel if we discuss it often; so drop it henceforward and for ever.'

'I suppose he has more than once behaved in this way,' thought Caroline to herself; 'and that renders Shirley so distant to him: yet I wonder she cannot make allowance for character and circumstances: I wonder the general modesty, manliness, sincerity of his nature, do not plead with her in his behalf. She is not often so inconsiderate - so irritable.'

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The verbal testimony of two friends of Caroline's to her cousin's character augmented her favourable opinion of him. William Farren, whose cottage he had visited in company with Mr Hall, pronounced him a 'real gentleman': there was not such another in Briarfield: he - William - 'could do aught for that man. And then to see how t' bairns liked him, and how t' wife took to him first minute she saw him: he never went into a house but t' childer wor about him directly: them little things wor like as if they'd a keener sense nor grown-up folks i' finding out folk's natures.'

Mr Hall, in answer to a question of Miss Helstone's, as to what he thought of Louis Moore, replied promptly that he was the best fellow he had met with since he left Cambridge

'But he is so grave,' objected Caroline.

'Grave! The finest company in the world! Full of odd, quiet, out of the way humour. Never enjoyed an excursion so much in my life as the one I took with him to the Lakes. His understanding and tastes are so superior, it does a man good to be within their influence; and as to his temper and nature, I call them fine.'

'At Fieldhead he looks gloomy, and, I believe, has the character of being misanthropical.'

'Oh! I fancy he is rather out of place there - in a false position. The Sympsons are most estimable people, but not the folks to comprehend him: they think a great deal about form and ceremony, which are quite out of Louis's way.'

'I don't think Miss Keeldar likes him.'

'She doesn't know him - she doesn't know him; otherwise, she has sense enough to do justice to his merits.'

'Well, I suppose she doesn't know him,' mused Caroline to herself, and by this hypothesis she endeavoured to account for what seemed else unaccountable. But such simple solution of the difficulty was not left her long: she was obliged to refuse Miss Keeldar even this negative excuse for her prejudice.

One day she chanced to be in the schoolroom with Henry Sympson, whose amiable and affectionate disposition had quickly recommended him to her regard. The boy was busied about some mechanical contrivance: his lameness made him fond of sedentary occupation: he began to ransack his tutor's desk for a piece of wax, or twine, necessary to his work. Moore happened to be absent. Mr Hall, indeed, had called for him to take a long walk. Henry could not immediately find the object of his search: he rummaged compartment after compartment; and, at last opening an inner drawer, he came upon - not a ball of cord, or a lump of bees' wax - but a little bundle of small marble-coloured cahiers, tied with tape. Henry looked at them - 'What rubbish Mr Moore stores up in his desk!' he said: 'I hope he won't keep my old exercises so carefully.'

'What is it?'

'Old copy-books.'

He threw the bundle to Caroline. The packet looked so neat externally, her curiosity was excited to see its contents.

'If they are only copy-books, I suppose I may open them?'

'Oh! yes; quite freely. Mr Moore's desk is half mine - for he lets me keep all sorts of things in it - and I give you leave.'

On scrutiny they proved to be French compositions, written in a hand peculiar but compact, and exquisitely clean and clear. The writing was recognisable: she scarcely needed the further evidence of the name signed at the close of each theme to tell her whose they were. Yet that name astonished her: 'Shirley Keeldar, Sympson Grove, - - shire' (a southern county), and a date four years back.

She tied up the packet, and held it in her hand, meditating over it. She half felt as if, in opening it, she had violated a confidence.

'They are Shirley's, you see,' said Henry carelessly.

'Did you give them to Mr Moore? She wrote them with Mrs Pryor, I suppose?'

'She wrote them in my schoolroom at Sympson Grove, when she lived with us there. Mr Moore taught her French; it is his native language.'

'I know. . . . Was she a good pupil, Henry?'

'She was a wild, laughing thing, but pleasant to have in the room: she made lesson-time charming. She learned fast - you could hardly tell when or how. French was nothing to her: she spoke it quick - quick; as quick as Mr Moore himself.'

'Was she obedient? Did she give trouble?'

'She gave plenty of trouble in a way: she was giddy, but I liked her. I'm desperately fond of Shirley.'

'Desperately fond - you small simpleton: you don't know what you say.'

'I am desperately fond of her; she is the light of my eyes: I said so to Mr Moore last night.'

'He would reprove you for speaking with exaggeration.'

'He didn't. He never reproves and reproves, as girls' governesses do. He was reading, and he only smiled into his book, and said that if Miss Keeldar was no more than that, she was less than he took her to be; for I was but a dim-eyed, shortsighted little chap. I'm afraid I am a poor unfortunate, Miss Caroline Helstone. I am a cripple, you know.'

'Never mind, Henry, you are a very nice little fellow; and if God has not given you health and strength, He has given you a good disposition, and an excellent heart and brain.'

'I shall be despised. I sometimes think both Shirley and you despise me.'

'Listen, Henry. Generally, I don't like schoolboys: I have a great horror of them. They seem to me little ruffians, who take an unnatural delight in killing and tormenting birds, and insects, and kittens, and whatever is weaker than themselves; but you are so different, I am quite fond of you. You have almost as much sense as a man (far more, God wot,' she muttered to herself, 'than many men); you are fond of reading, and you can talk sensibly about what you read.'

'I am fond of reading. I know I have sense, and I know I have feeling.'

Miss Keeldar here entered.

'Henry,' she said, 'I have brought your lunch here: I shall prepare it for you myself.'

She placed on the table a glass of new milk, a plate of something which looked not unlike leather, and a utensil which resembled a toasting-fork.

'What are you two about,' she continued, 'ransacking Mr Moore's desk?'

'Looking at your old copy-books,' returned Caroline.

'My old copy-books?'

'French exercise-books. Look here! They must be held precious: they are kept carefully.'

She showed the bundle. Shirley snatched it up: 'Did not know one was in existence,' she said. 'I thought the whole lot had long since lit the kitchen- fire, or curled the maid's hair at Sympson Grove. What made you keep them, Henry?'

'It is not my doing: I should not have thought of it: it never entered my head to suppose copy-books of value. Mr Moore put them by in the inner drawer of his desk: perhaps he forgot them.'

'C'est cela: he forgot them, no doubt,' echoed Shirley. 'They are extremely well written,' she observed complacently.

'What a giddy girl you were, Shirley, in those days! I remember you so well: a slim, light creature whom, though you were so tall, I could lift off the floor. I see you with your long, countless curls on your shoulders, and your streaming sash. You used to make Mr Moore lively, that is, at first: I believe you grieved him after a while.'

Shirley turned the closely-written pages and said nothing. Presently she observed, 'That was written one winter afternoon. It was a description of a snow-scene.'

'I remember,' said Hanry; 'Mr Moore, when he read it, cried 'Voilà le Français gagné!' He said it was well done. Afterwards, you made him draw, in sepia, the landscape you described.'

'You have not forgotten then, Hal?'

'Not at all. We were all scolded that day for not coming down to tea when called. I can remember my tutor sitting at his easel, and you standing behind him, holding the candle, and watching him draw the snowy cliff, the pine, the deer couched under it, and the half-moon hung above.'

'Where are his drawings, Henry? Caroline should see them.'

'In his portfolio: but it is padlocked: he has the key.'

'Ask him for it when he comes in.'

'You should ask him, Shirley; you are shy of him now: you are grown a proud lady to him, I noticed that.'

'Shirley, you are a real enigma,' whispered Caroline in her ear. 'What queer discoveries I make day by day now! I, who thought I had your confidence. Inexplicable creature! even this boy reproves you.'

'I have forgotten' Auld lang syne, 'you see, Harry,' said Miss Keeldar, answering young Sympson, and not heeding Caroline.

'Which you never should have done. You don't deserve to be a man's morning star, if you have so short a memory.'

'A man's morning star, indeed! and by 'a man' is meant your worshipful self, I suppose? Come, drink your new milk while it is warm.'

The young cripple rose and limped towards the fire; he had left his crutch near the mantelpiece.

'My poor lame darling!' murmured Shirley, in her softest voice, aiding him.

'Whether do you like me or Mr Sam Wynne best, Shirley?' inquired the boy, as she settled him in an arm-chair.

'Oh Harry! Sam Wynne is my aversion! you are my pet.'

'Me or Mr Malone?'

'You again, a thousand times.'

'Yet they are great whiskered fellows, six feet high each.'

'Whereas, as long as you live, Harry, you will never be anything more than a little pale lameter.'

'Yes, I know.'

'You need not be sorrowful. Have I not often told you who was almost as little, as pale, as suffering as you, and yet potent as a giant, and brave as a lion?'

'Admiral Horatio?'

'Admiral Horatio, Viscount Nelson, and Duke of Bronti; great at heart as a Titan; gallant and heroic as all the world and age of chivalry; leader of the might of England; commander of her strength on the deep; hurler of her thunder over the flood.'

'A great man: but I am not warlike, Shirley: and yet my mind is so restless, I burn day and night - for what - I can hardly tell - to be - to do - to suffer, I think.'

'Harry, it is your mind, which is stronger and older than your frame, that troubles you. It is a captive. It lies in physical bondage. But it will work its own redemption yet. Study carefully, not only books but the world. You love nature; love her without fear. Be patient - wait the course of time. You will not be a soldier or a sailor, Henry: but, if you live, you will be - listen to my prophecy - you will be an author - perhaps, a poet.'

'An author! It is a flash - a flash of light to me! I will - I will! I'll write a book that I may dedicate it to you.'

'You will write it, that you may give your soul its natural release. Bless me! what am I saying? more than I understand, I believe, or can make good. Here, Hal; here is your toasted oat-cake - eat and live!'

'Willingly!' here cried a voice outside the open window; 'I know that fragrance of meal bread. Miss Keeldar, may I come in and partake?'

'Mr Hall' (it was Mr Hall, and with him was Louis Moore, returned from their walk), 'there is a proper luncheon laid out in the dining-room, and there are proper people seated round it: you may join that society and share that fare if you please; but if your ill-regulated tastes lead you to prefer ill-regulated proceedings, step in here, and do as we do.'

'I approve the perfume, and therefore shall suffer myself to be led by the nose,' returned Mr Hall, who presently entered, accompanied by Louis Moore. That gentleman's eye fell on his desk, pillaged.

'Burglars!' said he. 'Henry, you merit the ferule.'

'Give it to Shirley and Caroline - they did it,' was alleged with more attention to effect than truth.

'Traitor and false witness!' cried both the girls. 'We never laid hands on a thing, except in the spirit of laudable inquiry!'

'Exactly so,' said Moore, with his rare smile. 'And what have you ferreted out, in your 'spirit of laudable inquiry'?'

He perceived the inner drawer open.

'This is empty,' said he. 'Who has taken - - '

'Here! here!' Caroline hastened to say; and she restored the little packet to its place. He shut it up; he locked it in with a small key attached to his watch-guard; he restored the other papers to order, closed the repository, and sat down without further remark.

'I thought you would have scolded much more, sir,' said Henry. 'The girls deserve reprimand.'

'I leave them to their own consciences.'

'It accuses them of crimes intended as well as perpetrated, sir. If I had not been here, they would have treated your portfolio as they have done your desk; but I told them it was padlocked.'

'And will you have lunch with us?' here interposed Shirley, addressing Moore, and desirous, as it seemed, to turn the conversation.

'Certainly, if I may.'

'You will be restricted to new milk and Yorkshire oat-cake.'

'Va - pour le lait frais!' said Louis. 'But for your oat-cake!' - and he made a grimace.

'He cannot eat it,' said Henry: 'he thinks it is like bran, raised with sour yeast.'

'Come, then, by special dispensation, we will allow him a few cracknels; but nothing less homely.'

The hostess rang the bell and gave her frugal orders, which were presently executed. She herself measured out the milk, and distributed the bread round the cosy circle now enclosing the bright little schoolroom fire. She then took the post of toaster-general; and kneeling on the rug, fork in hand, fulfilled her office with dexterity. Mr

Hall, who relished any homely innovation on ordinary usages, and to whom the husky oat cake was from custom suave as manna - seemed in his best spirits. He talked and laughed gleefully - now with Caroline, whom he had fixed by his side, now with Shirley, and again with Louis Moore. And Louis met him in congenial spirit: he did not laugh much, but he uttered in the quietest tone the wittiest things. Gravely spoken sentences, marked by unexpected turns and a quite fresh flavour and poignancy, fell easily from his lips. He proved himself to be - what Mr Hall had said he was - excellent company. Caroline marvelled at his humour, but still more at his entire self-possession. Nobody there present seemed to impose on him a sensation of unpleasant restraint: nobody seemed a bore - a check - a chill to him; and yet there was the cool and lofty Miss Keeldar kneeling before the fire, almost at his feet.

But Shirley was cool and lofty no longer - at least not at this moment. She appeared unconscious of the humility of her present position - or if conscious, it was only to taste a charm in its lowliness. It did not revolt her pride that the group to whom she voluntarily officiated as handmaid should include her cousin's tutor: it did not scare her that while she handed the bread and milk to the rest, she had to offer it to him also; and Moore took his portion from her hand as calmly as if he had been her equal.

'You are overheated now,' he said, when she had retained the fork for some time: 'let me relieve you.'

And he took it from her with a sort of quiet authority, to which she submitted passively - neither resisting him nor thanking him.

'I should like to see your pictures, Louis,' said Caroline, when the sumptuous luncheon was discussed. 'Would not you, Mr Hall?'

'To please you, I should; but, for my own part, I have cut him as an artist. I had enough of him in that capacity in Cumberland and Westmoreland. Many a wetting we got amongst the mountains because he would persist in sitting on a camp-stool, catching effects of rain-clouds, gathering mists, fitful sunbeams, and what not.'

'Here is the portfolio,' said Henry, bringing it in one hand, and leaning on his crutch with the other.

Louis took it, but he still sat as if he wanted another to speak. It seemed as if he would not open it unless the proud Shirley deigned to show herself interested in the exhibition.

'He makes us wait to whet our curiosity,' she said.

'You understand opening it,' observed Louis, giving her the key. 'You spoiled the lock for me once - try now.'

He held it: she opened it; and, monopolising the contents, had the first view of every sketch herself. She enjoyed the treat - if treat it were - in silence, without a single comment. Moore stood behind her chair and looked over her shoulder, and when she had done, and the others were still gazing, he left his post and paced through the room.

A carriage was heard in the lane - the gate-bell rang; Shirley started.

'There are callers,' she said, 'and I shall be summoned to the room. A pretty figure - as they say - I am to receive company: I and Henry have been in the garden gathering fruit half the morning. Oh, for rest under my own vine and my own fig-tree! Happy is the slave-wife of the Indian chief, in that she has no drawing-room duty to perform, but can sit at ease weaving mats, and stringing beads, and peacefully flattening her picaninny's head in an unmolested corner of her wigwam. I'll emigrate to the western woods.'

Louis Moore laughed.

'To marry a White Cloud or a Big Buffalo; and after wedlock to devote yourself to the tender task of digging your lord's maize-field, while he smokes his pipe or drinks fire-water.'

Shirley seemed about to reply, but here the schoolroom door unclosed, admitting Mr Sympson. That personage stood aghast when he saw the group around the fire.

'I thought you alone, Miss Keeldar,' he said. 'I find quite a party.'

And evidently from his shocked, scandalised air - had he not recognised in one of the party a clergyman - he would have delivered an extempore philippic on the extraordinary habits of his niece: respect for the cloth arrested him.

'I merely wished to announce,' he proceeded coldly, 'that the family from De Walden Hall, Mr, Mrs, the Misses, and Mr Sam Wynne, are in the drawing-room.' And he bowed and withdrew.

'The family from De Walden Hall! Couldn't be a worse set,' murmured Shirley.

She sat still, looking a little contumacious, and very much indisposed to stir. She was flushed with the fire: her dark hair had been more than once dishevelled by the morning wind that day; her attire was a light, neatly- fitting, but amply flowing dress of muslin; the shawl she

had worn in the garden was still draped in a careless fold round her. Indolent, wilful, picturesque, and singularly pretty was her aspect - prettier than usual, as if some soft inward emotion - stirred who knows how? - had given new bloom and expression to her features.

'Shirley, Shirley, you ought to go,' whispered Caroline.

'I wonder why?'

She lifted her eyes, and saw in the glass over the fireplace both Mr Hall and Louis Moore gazing at her gravely.

'If,' she said, with a yielding smile - 'if a majority of the present company maintain that the De Walden Hall people have claims on my civility, I will subdue my inclinations to my duty. Let those who think I ought to go, hold up their hands.'

Again consulting the mirror, it reflected an unanimous vote against her.

'You must go,' said Mr Hall, 'and behave courteously, too. You owe many duties to society. It is not permitted you to please only yourself.'

Louis Moore assented with a low 'Hear! hear!'

Caroline, approaching her, smoothed her wavy curls, gave to her attire a less artistic and more domestic grace, and Shirley was put out of the room, protesting still, by a pouting lip, against her dismissal.

'There is a curious charm about her,' observed Mr Hall, when she was gone. 'And now,' he added, 'I must away, for Sweeting is off to see his mother, and there are two funerals.'

'Henry, get your books; it is lesson-time,' said Moore, sitting down to his desk.

'A curious charm!' repeated the pupil, when he and his master were left alone. 'True. Is she not a kind of white witch?' he asked.

'Of whom are you speaking, sir?'

'Of my cousin Shirley.'

'No irrelevant questions. Study in silence.'

Mr Moore looked and spoke sternly - sourly. Henry knew this mood: it was a rare one with his tutor; but when it came he had an awe of it: he obeyed.