

## Chapter XXXI - Uncle and Niece

The die was cast. Sir Philip Nunnely knew it: Shirley knew it: Mr Sympson knew it. That evening, when all the Fieldhead family dined at Nunnely Priory, decided the business.

Two or three things conduced to bring the Baronet to a point. He had observed that Miss Keeldar looked pensive and delicate. This new phase in her demeanour smote him on his weak or poetic side: a spontaneous sonnet brewed in his brain; and while it was still working there, one of his sisters persuaded his lady-love to sit down to the piano and sing a ballad - one of Sir Philip's own ballads. It was the least elaborate, the least affected - out of all comparison the best of his numerous efforts.

It chanced that Shirley, the moment before, had been gazing from a window down on the park; she had seen that stormy moonlight which 'le Professeur Louis' was perhaps at the same instant contemplating from her own oak-parlour lattice; she had seen the isolated trees of the domain - broad, strong, spreading oaks, and high-towering heroic beeches - wrestling with the gale. Her ear had caught the full roar of the forest lower down; the swift rushing of clouds, the moon, to the eye, hasting swifter still, had crossed her vision: she turned from sight and sound - touched, if not rapt, - wakened, if not inspired.

She sang, as requested. There was much about love in the ballad: faithful love that refused to abandon its object; love that disaster could not shake; love that, in calamity, waxed fonder, in poverty clung closer. The words were set to a fine old air - in themselves they were simple and sweet: perhaps, when read, they wanted force; when well sung, they wanted nothing. Shirley sang them well: she breathed into the feeling, softness; she poured round the passion, force: her voice was fine that evening; its expression dramatic: she impressed all, and charmed one.

On leaving the instrument, she went to the fire, and sat down on a seat - semi-stool, semi-cushion: the ladies were round her - none of them spoke. The Misses Sympson and the Misses Nunnely looked upon her, as quiet poultry might look on an egret, an ibis, or any other strange fowl. What made her sing so? They never sang so. Was it proper to sing with such expression, with such originality - so unlike a school-girl? Decidedly not: it was strange, it was unusual. What was strange must be wrong; what was unusual must be improper. Shirley was judged.

Moreover, old Lady Nunnely eyed her stonily from her great chair by the fireside: her gaze said - 'This woman is not of mine or my daughters' kind: I object to her as my son's wife.'

Her son catching the look, read its meaning: he grew alarmed: what he so wished to win, there was danger he might lose. He must make haste.

The room they were in had once been a picture-gallery. Sir Philip's father - Sir Monckton - had converted it into a saloon; but still it had a shadowy, long- withdrawing look. A deep recess with a window - a recess that held one couch, one table, and a fairy cabinet, formed a room within a room. Two persons standing there might interchange a dialogue, and, so it were neither long nor loud, none be the wiser.

Sir Philip induced two of his sisters to perpetrate a duet; he gave occupation to the Misses Sympson: the elder ladies were conversing together. He was pleased to remark that, meantime, Shirley rose to look at the pictures. He had a tale to tell about one ancestress, whose dark beauty seemed as that of a flower of the south: he joined her, and began to tell it.

There were mementos of the same lady in the cabinet adorning the recess; and while Shirley was stooping to examine the missal and the rosary on the inlaid shelf, and while the Misses Nunnely indulged in a prolonged screech, guiltless of expression, pure of originality, perfectly conventional and absolutely unmeaning, Sir Philip stooped too, and whispered a few hurried sentences. At first, Miss Keeldar was struck so still, you might have fancied that whisper a charm which had changed her to a statue; but she presently looked up and answered. They parted. Miss Keeldar returned to the fire, and resumed her seat: the Baronet gazed after her, then went and stood behind his sisters. Mr Sympson - Mr Sympson only - had marked the pantomime.

That gentleman drew his own conclusions. Had he been as acute as he was meddling, as profound as he was prying, he might have found that in Sir Philip's face whereby to correct his inference. Ever shallow, hasty, and positive, he went home quite cock-a-hoop.

He was not a man that kept secrets well: when elate on a subject, he could not avoid talking about it. The next morning, having occasion to employ his son's tutor as his secretary, he must needs announce to him, in mouthing accents, and with much flimsy pomp of manner, that he had better hold himself prepared for a return to the south, at an early day, as the important business which had detained him (Mr Sympson) so long in Yorkshire, was now on the eve of fortunate completion: his anxious and laborious efforts were likely, at last, to be crowned with the happiest success: a truly eligible addition was about to be made to the family connections.

'In Sir Philip Nunnely?' Louis Moore conjectured.

Whereupon Mr Sympson treated himself simultaneously to a pinch of snuff and a chuckling laugh, checked only by a sudden choke of dignity, and an order to the tutor to proceed with business.

For a day or two, Mr Sympson continued as bland as oil, but also he seemed to sit on pins, and his gait, when he walked, emulated that of a hen treading a hot griddle. He was for ever looking out of the window, and listening for chariot-wheels: Bluebeard's wife - Sisera's mother - were nothing to him. He waited when the matter should be opened in form; when himself should be consulted; when lawyers should be summoned; when settlement discussions, and all the delicious worldly fuss, should pompously begin.

At last there came a letter: he himself handed it to Miss Keeldar out of the bag: he knew the handwriting; he knew the crest on the seal. He did not see it opened and read, for Shirley took it to her own room; nor did he see it answered, for she wrote her reply shut up, - and was very long about it, - the best part of a day. He questioned her whether it was answered; she responded, 'Yes.'

Again he waited - waited in silence - absolutely not daring to speak: kept mute by something in Shirley's face, - a very awful something - inscrutable to him as the writing on the wall to Belshazzar. He was moved more than once to call Daniel, in the person of Louis Moore, and to ask an interpretation: but his dignity forbade the familiarity. Daniel himself, perhaps, had his own private difficulties connected with that baffling bit of translation: he looked like a student for whom grammars are blank, and dictionaries dumb.

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Mr Sympson had been out, to while away an anxious hour in the society of his friends at De Walden Hall. He returned a little sooner than was expected; his family and Miss Keeldar were assembled in the oak-parlour; addressing the latter, he requested her to step with him into another room: he wished to have with her a 'strictly private interview.'

She rose, asking no questions, and professing no surprise.

'Very well, sir,' she said in the tone of a determined person, who is informed that the dentist is come to extract that large double tooth of his, from which he has suffered such a purgatory this month past. She left her sewing and her thimble in the window-seat, and followed her uncle where he led.

Shut into the drawing-room, the pair took seats, each in an arm-chair, placed opposite, a few yards between them.

'I have been to De Walden Hall,' said Mr Sympson. He paused. Miss Keeldar's eyes were on the pretty white and green carpet. That information required no response: she gave none.

'I have learned,' he went on slowly, - 'I have learned a circumstance which surprises me.'

Resting her cheek on her forefinger, she waited to be told what circumstance.

'It seems that Nunnely Priory is shut up; that the family are gone back to their place in - - shire. It seems that the baronet - that the baronet - that Sir Philip himself has accompanied his mother and sisters.'

'Indeed!' said Shirley.

'May I ask if you share the amazement with which I received this news?'

'No, sir.'

'Is it news to you?'

'Yes, sir.'

'I mean - I mean' - pursued Mr Sympson, now fidgeting in his chair, quitting his hitherto brief and tolerably clear phraseology, and returning to his customary wordy, confused, irritable style; 'I mean to have a thorough explanation. I will not be put off. I - I - shall insist on being heard; and on - on having my own way. My questions must be answered. I will have clear, satisfactory replies. I am not to be trifled with. (Silence.)

'It is a strange and an extraordinary thing - a very singular - a most odd thing! I thought all was right: knew no other: and there - the family are gone!'

'I suppose, sir, they had a right to go.'

'Sir Philip is gone!' (with emphasis).

Shirley raised her brows: 'Bon voyage!' said she.

'This will not do: this must be altered, ma'am.'

He drew his chair forward; he pushed it back; he looked perfectly incensed, and perfectly helpless.

'Come, come, now, uncle,' expostulated Shirley, 'do not begin to fret and fume, or we shall make no sense of the business. Ask me what you want to know: I am as willing to come to an explanation as you: I promise you truthful replies.'

'I want - I demand to know, Miss Keeldar, whether Sir Philip has made you an offer?'

'He has.'

'You avow it?'

'I avow it. But now, go on: consider that point settled.'

'He made you an offer that night we dined at the Priory?'

'It is enough to say that he made it. Go on.'

'He proposed in the recess - in the room that used to be a picture gallery - that Sir Monckton converted into a saloon?'

No answer.

'You were both examining a cabinet: I saw it all: my sagacity was not at fault - it never is. Subsequently, you received a letter from him. On what subject - of what nature were the contents?'

'No matter.'

'Ma'am, is that the way in which you speak to me?'

Shirley's foot tapped quick on the carpet.

'There you sit, silent and sullen - you who promised truthful replies'

'Sir, I have answered you thus far: proceed.'

'I should like to see that letter.'

'You cannot see it.'

'I must and shall, ma'am. I am your guardian.'

'Having ceased to be a ward, I have no guardian.'

'Ungrateful being! Reared by me as my own daughter - '

'Once more, uncle, have the kindness to keep to the point. Let us both remain cool. For my part, I do not wish to get into a passion; but, you

know, once drive me beyond certain bounds, I care little what I say: I am not then soon checked. Listen! You have asked me whether Sir Philip made me an offer: that question is answered. What do you wish to know next?'

'I desire to know whether you accepted or refused him? and know it I will.'

'Certainly: you ought to know it. I refused him.'

'Refused him! You - you, Shirley Keeldar, refused Sir Philip Nunnely?'

'I did.'

The poor gentleman bounced from his chair, and first rushed, and then trotted, through the room.

'There it is! There it is! There it is!'

'Sincerely speaking, I am sorry, uncle, you are so disappointed.'

Concession - contrition, never do any good with some people. Instead of softening and conciliating, they but embolden and harden them: of that number was Mr Sympson.

'I disappointed? What is it to me? Have I an interest in it? You would insinuate, perhaps, that I have motives?'

'Most people have motives, of some sort, for their actions.'

'She accuses me to my face! I - that have been a parent to her - she charges with bad motives!'

'Bad motives, I did not say.'

'And now you prevaricate. You have no principles!'

'Uncle, you tire me: I want to go away.'

'Go you shall not! I will be answered. What are your intentions, Miss Keeldar?'

'In what respect?'

'In respect of matrimony.'

'To be quiet - and to do just as I please.'

'Just as you please! The words are to the last degree indecorous.'

'Mr Sympson, I advise you not to become insulting: you know I will not bear that.'

'You read French. Your mind is poisoned with French novels. You have imbibed French principles.'

'The ground you are treading now returns a mighty hollow sound under your feet. Beware!'

'It will end in infamy, sooner or later: I have foreseen it all along.'

'Do you assert, sir, that something in which I am concerned will end in infamy?'

'That it will - that it will. You said just now you would act as you please. You acknowledge no rules - no limitations.'

'Silly stuff! and vulgar as silly!'

'Regardless of decorum, you are prepared to fly in the face of propriety.'

'You tire me, uncle.'

'What, madam - what could be your reasons for refusing Sir Philip?'

'At last, there is another sensible question: I shall be glad to reply to it. Sir Philip is too young for me: I regard him as a boy: all his relations - his mother especially - would be annoyed if he married me: such a step would embroil him with them: I am not his equal in the world's estimation.'

'Is that all?'

'Our dispositions are not compatible.'

'Why, a more amiable gentleman never breathed.'

'He is very amiable - very excellent - truly estimable, but not my master; not in one point. I could not trust myself with his happiness: I would not undertake the keeping of it for thousands: I will accept no hand which cannot hold me in check.'

'I thought you liked to do as you please: you are vastly inconsistent.'

'When I promise to obey, it shall be under the conviction that I can keep that promise: I could not obey a youth like Sir Philip. Besides, he would never command me: he would expect me always to rule - to guide, and I have no taste whatever for the office.'

'You no taste for swaggering, and subduing, and ordering, and ruling?'

'Not my husband: only my uncle.'

'Where is the difference?'

'There is a slight difference: that is certain. And I know full well, any man who wishes to live in decent comfort with me as a husband must be able to control me.'

'I wish you had a real tyrant.'

'A tyrant would not hold me for a day - not for an hour. I would rebel - break from him - defy him.'

'Are you not enough to bewilder one's brain with your self-contradiction?'

'It is evident I bewilder your brain.'

'You talk of Sir Philip being young: he is two-and-twenty.'

'My husband must be thirty, with the sense of forty.'

'You had better pick out some old man - some white-headed or bald-headed swain.'

'No, thank you.'

'You could lead some doting fool: you might pin him to your apron.'

'I might do that with a boy: but it is not my vocation. Did I not say I prefer a master? One in whose presence I shall feel obliged and disposed to be good. One whose control my impatient temper must acknowledge. A man whose approbation can reward - whose displeasure punish me. A man I shall feel it impossible not to love, and very possible to fear.'

'What is there to hinder you from doing all this with Sir Philip? He is a baronet; a man of rank, property, connections, far above yours. If you talk of intellect, he is a poet: he writes verses: which you, I take it, cannot do, with all your cleverness.'



'Neither his title, wealth, pedigree, nor poetry, avail to invest him with the power I describe. These are featherweights: they want ballast: a measure of sound, solid practical sense would have stood him in better stead with me.'

'You and Henry rave about poetry! you used to catch fire like tinder on the subject when you were a girl.'

'Oh! uncle, there is nothing really valuable in this world, there is nothing glorious in the world to come, that is not poetry!'

'Marry a poet, then, in God's name!'

'Show him me, and I will.'

'Sir Philip.'

'Not at all. You are almost as good a poet as he.'

'Madam, you are wandering from the point.'

'Indeed, uncle, I wanted to do so; and I shall be glad to lead you away with me. Do not let us get out of temper with each other: it is not worth while.'

'Out of temper, Miss Keeldar! I should be glad to know who is out of temper?'

'I am not, yet.'

'If you mean to insinuate that I am, I consider that you are guilty of impertinence.'

'You will be soon, if you go on at that rate.'

'There it is With your pert tongue, you would try the patience of a Job.'

'I know I should.'

'No levity, miss! This is not a laughing matter. It is an affair I am resolved to probe thoroughly, convinced that there is mischief at the bottom. You described just now, with far too much freedom for your years and sex, the sort of individual you would prefer as a husband. Pray, did you paint from the life?'

Shirley opened her lips; but instead of speaking she only glowed rose-red.

'I shall have an answer to that question,' affirmed Mr Sympson, assuming vast courage and consequence on the strength of this symptom of confusion.

'It was an historical picture, uncle, from several originals.'

'Several originals! Bless my heart!'

'I have been in love several times.'

'This is cynical.'

'With heroes of many nations,'

'What next - - '

'And philosophers.'

'She is mad - - '

'Don't ring the bell, uncle; you will alarm my aunt.'

'Your poor dear aunt, what a niece she has!'

'Once I loved Socrates.'

'Pooh! No trifling, ma'am.'

'I admired Themistocles, Leonidas, Epaminondas.'

'Miss Keeldar - - '

'To pass over a few centuries, Washington was a plain man, but I liked him: but, to speak of the actual present - - '

'Ah! the actual present - - '

'To quit crude school-girl fancies, and come to realities.'

'Realities! That is the test to which you shall be brought, ma'am.'

'To avow before what altar I now kneel - to reveal the present idol of my soul - - '

'You will make haste about it, if you please; it is near luncheon time, and confess you shall.'

'Confess, I must: my heart is full of the secret; it must be spoken: I only wish you were Mr Helstone instead of Mr Sympson, you would sympathise with me better.'

'Madam - it is a question of common sense and common prudence, not of sympathy and sentiment, and so on. Did you say it was Mr Helstone?'

'Not precisely, but as near as may be: they are rather alike.'

'I will know the name - I will have particulars.'

'They positively are rather alike; their very faces are not dissimilar - a pair of human falcons - and dry, direct, decided both. But my hero is the mightier of the two: his mind has the clearness of the deep sea, the patience of its rocks, the force of its billows.'

'Rant and fustian!'

'I daresay he can be harsh as a saw-edge, and gruff as a hungry raven.'

'Miss Keeldar, does the person reside in Briarfield? answer me that.'

'Uncle - I am going to tell you - his name is trembling on my tongue.'

'Speak, girl!'

'That was well said, uncle. 'Speak, girl!' it is quite tragic. England has howled savagely against this man, uncle; and she will one day roar exultingly over him. He has been unscared by the howl, and he will be unelated by the shout.'

'I said she was mad - she is.'

'This country will change and change again in her demeanour to him: he will never change in his duty to her. Come, cease to chafe, uncle, I'll tell you his name.'

'You shall tell me, or - - '

'Listen! Arthur Wellesley, Lord Wellington.'

Mr Sympson rose up furious: he bounced out of the room, but immediately bounced back again, shut the door, and resumed his seat.

'Ma'am, you shall tell me this: will your principles permit you to marry a man without money - a man below you?'

'Never a man below me.'

(In a high voice.) 'Will you, Miss Keeldar, marry a poor man?'

'What right have you, Mr Sympson, to ask me?'

'I insist upon knowing.'

'You don't go the way to know.'

'My family respectability shall not be compromised.'

'A good resolution: keep it.'

'Madam, it is you who shall keep it.'

'Impossible, sir, since I form no part of your family.'

'Do you disown us?'

'I disdain your dictatorship.'

'Whom will you marry, Miss Keeldar?'

'Not Mr Sam Wynne, because I scorn him: not Sir Philip Nunnely, because I only esteem him.'

'Whom have you in your eye?'

'Four rejected candidates.'

'Such obstinacy could not be, unless you were under improper influence.'

'What do you mean? There are certain phrases potent to make my blood boil - improper influence! What old woman's cackle is that?'

'Are you a young lady?'

'I am a thousand times better: I am an honest woman, and as such I will be treated.'

'Do you know' (leaning mysteriously forward, and speaking with ghastly solemnity), 'do you know the whole neighbourhood teems with rumours respecting you and a bankrupt tenant of yours - the foreigner Moore?'

'Does it?'

'It does. Your name is in every mouth.'

'It honours the lips it crosses, and I wish to the gods it may purify them.'

'Is it that person who has power to influence you?'

'Beyond any whose cause you have advocated.'

'Is it he you will marry?'

'He is handsome, and manly, and commanding.'

'You declare it to my face! The Flemish knave! The low trader!'

'He is talented, and venturous, and resolute. Prince is on his brow, and ruler in his bearing.'

'She glories in it! She conceals nothing! No shame, no fear!'

'When we speak the name of Moore, shame should be forgotten and fear discarded: the Moores know only honour and courage.'

'I say she is mad.'

'You have taunted me till my blood is up. You have worried me till I turn again.'

'That Moore is the brother of my son's tutor. Would you let the Usher call you Sister?'

Bright and broad shone Shirley's eye, as she fixed it on her questioner now.

'No: no. Not for a province of possession - not for a century of life.'

'You cannot separate the husband from his family.'

'What then?'

'Mr Louis Moore's sister you will be.'

'Mr Sympson . . . I am sick at heart with all this weak trash: I will bear no more. Your thoughts are not my thoughts, your aims are not my aims, your gods are not my gods. We do not view things in the same

light; we do not measure them by the same standard; we hardly speak in the same tongue. Let us part.'

'It is not,' she resumed, much excited - 'It is not that I hate you; you are a good sort of man: perhaps you mean well in your way; but we cannot suit: we are ever at variance. You annoy me with small meddling, with petty tyranny; you exasperate my temper, and make and keep me passionate. As to your small maxims, your narrow rules, your little prejudices, aversions, dogmas, bundle them off: Mr Sympson - go, offer them a sacrifice to the deity you worship; I'll none of them: I wash my hands of the lot. I walk by another creed, light, faith, and hope than you.'

'Another creed! I believe she is an infidel.'

'An infidel to your religion; an atheist to your god.'

'An - atheist!!!'

'Your god, sir, is the World. In my eyes, you too, if not an infidel, are an idolater. I conceive that you ignorantly worship: in all things you appear to me too superstitious. Sir, your god, your great Bel, your fish-tailed Dagon, rises before me as a demon. You, and such as you, have raised him to a throne, put on him a crown, given him a sceptre. Behold how hideously he governs! See him busied at the work he likes best - making marriages. He binds the young to the old, the strong to the imbecile. He stretches out the arm of Mezentius and fetters the dead to the living. In his realm there is hatred - secret hatred: there is disgust - unspoken disgust: there is treachery - family treachery: there is vice - deep, deadly, domestic vice. In his dominions, children grow unloving between parents who have never loved: infants are nursed on deception from their very birth; they are reared in an atmosphere corrupt with lies. Your god rules at the bridal of kings - look at your royal dynasties! your deity is the deity of foreign aristocracies - analyse the blue blood of Spain! Your god is the Hymen of France - what is French domestic life? All that surrounds him hastens to decay: all declines and degenerates under his sceptre. Your god is a masked Death.'

'This language is terrible! My daughters and you must associate no longer, Miss Keeldar: there is danger in such companionship. Had I known you a little earlier - but, extraordinary as I thought you, I could not have believed - - '

'Now, sir, do you begin to be aware that it is useless to scheme for me? That, in doing so, you but sow the wind to reap the whirlwind? I sweep your cobweb projects from my path, that I may pass on

unsullied. I am anchored on a resolve you cannot shake. My heart, my conscience shall dispose of my hand - they only. Know this at last.'

Mr Sympson was becoming a little bewildered.

'Never heard such language!' he muttered again and again. 'Never was so addressed in my life - never was so used.'

'You are quite confused, sir. You had better withdraw, or I will.'

He rose hastily.

'We must leave this place: they must pack up at once.'

'Do not hurry my aunt and cousins: give them time.'

'No more intercourse: she's not proper.'

He made his way to the door; he came back for his handkerchief; he dropped his snuff-box; leaving the contents scattered on the carpet, he stumbled out; Tartar lay outside across the mat - Mr Sympson almost fell over him: in the climax of his exasperation he hurled an oath at the dog, and a coarse epithet at his mistress.

'Poor Mr Sympson! He is both feeble and vulgar,' said Shirley to herself. 'My head aches, and I am tired,' she added; and leaning her head upon a cushion, she softly subsided from excitement to repose. One, entering the room a quarter of an hour afterwards, found her asleep. When Shirley had been agitated, she generally took this natural refreshment. it would come at her call.

The intruder paused in her unconscious presence, and said - 'Miss Keeldar.'

Perhaps his voice harmonised with some dream into which she was passing - it did not startle, it hardly roused her, without opening her eyes, she but turned her head a little, so that her cheek and profile, before hidden by her arm, became visible: she looked rosy, happy, half-smiling, but her eyelashes were wet: she had wept in slumber; or perhaps, before dropping asleep, a few natural tears had fallen after she had heard that epithet; no man - no woman is always strong, always able to bear up against the unjust opinion - the vilifying word: calumny, even from the mouth of a fool, will sometimes cut into unguarded feelings. Shirley looked like a child that had been naughty and punished, but was now forgiven and at rest.

'Miss Keeldar,' again said the voice: this time it woke her; she looked up and saw at her side Louis Moore - not close at her side, but standing, with arrested step, two or three yards from her.

'Oh, Mr Moore!' she said; 'I was afraid it was my uncle again: he and I have quarrelled.'

'Mr Sympson should let you alone,' was the reply: 'can he not see that you are yet far from strong?'

'I assure you he did not find me weak: I did not cry when he was here.'

'He is about to evacuate Fieldhead - so he says. He is now giving orders to his family: he has been in the schoolroom issuing commands in a manner which, I suppose, was a continuation of that which he has harassed you.'

'Are you and Henry to go?'

'I believe, as far as Henry is concerned, that was the tenor of his scarcely- intelligible directions; but he may change all to-morrow: he is just in that mood when you cannot depend on his consistency for two consecutive hours: I doubt whether he will leave you for weeks yet. To myself he addressed some words which will require a little attention and comment by-and-by, when I have time to bestow on them. At the moment he came in, I was busied with a note I have got from Mr Yorke - so fully busied that I cut short the interview with him somewhat abruptly: I left him raving: here is the note - I wish you to see it - it refers to my brother Robert.' And he looked at Shirley.

'I shall be glad to hear news of him: is he coming home?'

'He is come: he is in Yorkshire: Mr Yorke went yesterday to Stilbro' to meet him.'

'Mr Moore - something is wrong - - '

'Did my voice tremble? He is now at Briarmains - and I am going to see him.'

'What has occurred?'

'If you turn so pale I shall be sorry I have spoken. It might have been worse: Robert is not dead, but much hurt.'

'Oh! sir; it is you who are pale. Sit down near me.'

'Read the note - let me open it.'



Miss Keeldar read the note: it briefly signified that last night Robert Moore had been shot at from behind the wall of Milldean Plantation, at the foot of the Brow; that he was wounded severely, but it was hoped not fatally: of the assassin, or assassins, nothing was known - they had escaped. 'No doubt,' Mr Yorke observed, 'it was done in revenge: it was a pity ill-will had ever been raised; but that could not be helped now.'

'He is my only brother,' said Louis, as Shirley returned the note. 'I cannot hear unmoved that ruffians have laid in wait for him, and shot him down like some wild beast from behind a wall.'

'Be comforted: be hopeful. He will get better - I know he will.'

Shirley, solicitous to soothe, held her hand over Mr Moore's, as it lay on the arm of the chair: she just touched it lightly, scarce palpably.

'Well, give me your hand,' he said; 'it will be for the first time: it is in a moment of calamity - give it me.'

Awaiting neither consent nor refusal, he took what he asked.

'I am going to Briarmains now,' he went on. 'I want you to step over to the Rectory, and tell Caroline Helstone what has happened: will you do this? she will hear it best from you.'

'Immediately,' said Shirley, with docile promptitude. 'Ought I to say that there is no danger?'

'Say so.'

'You will come back soon, and let me know more?'

'I will either come or write.'

'Trust me for watching over Caroline. I will communicate with your sister, too; but, doubtless, she is already with Robert?'

'Doubtless; or will be soon. Good morning, now,'

'You will bear up, come what may? ' We shall see that.'

Shirley's fingers were obliged to withdraw from the tutor's: Louis was obliged to relinquish that hand folded, clasped, hidden in his own.

'I thought I should have had to support her,' he said, as he walked towards Briarmains, 'and it is she who has made me strong. That look of pity - that gentle touch! No down was ever softer - no elixir more

potent! It lay like a snowflake: it thrilled like lightning. A thousand times I have longed to possess that hand - to have it in mine. I have possessed it - for five minutes I held it. Her fingers and mine can never be strangers more - having met once, they must meet again.'