Chapter XXXVI - Written in the Schoolroom

Louis Moore's doubts, respecting the immediate evacuation of Fieldhead by Mr Sympson, turned out to be perfectly well founded. The very next day after the grand quarrel about Sir Philip Nunnely, a sort of reconciliation was patched up between uncle and niece: Shirley, who could never find it in her heart to be or to seem inhospitable (except in the single instance of Mr Donne), begged the whole party to stay a little longer: she begged in such earnest, it was evident she wished it for some reason. They took her at her word: indeed, the uncle could not bring himself to leave her quite unwatched - at full liberty to marry Robert Moore, as soon as that gentleman should be able (Mr Sympson piously prayed this might never be the case) to reassert his supposed pretensions to her hand They all stayed.

In his first rage against all the house of Moore,.Mr Sympson had so conducted himself towards Mr Louis, that that gentleman - patient of labour or suffering, but intolerant of coarse insolence - had promptly resigned his post, and could now be induced to resume and retain it only till such time as the family should quit Yorkshire: Mrs Sympson's entreaties prevailed with him thus far; his own attachment to his pupil constituted an additional motive for concession; and probably he had a third motive, stronger than either of the other two: probably he would have found it very hard indeed to leave Fieldhead just now.

Things went on, for some time, pretty smoothly; Miss Keeldar's health was re- established; her spirits resumed their flow; Moore had found means to relieve her from every nervous apprehension; and, indeed, from the moment of giving him her confidence, every fear seemed to have taken wing: her heart became as lightsome, her manner as careless, as those of a little child, that, thoughtless of its own life or death, trusts all responsibility to its parents. He and William Farren - through whose medium he made inquiries concerning the state of Phoebe - agreed in asserting that the dog was not mad: that it was only ill- usage which had driven her from home: for it was proved that her master was in the frequent habit of chastising her violently. Their assertion might, or might not, be true: the groom and gamekeeper affirmed to the contrary; both asserting that, if hers was not a clear case of hydrophobia, there was no such disease. But to this evidence Louis Moore turned an incredulous ear: he reported to Shirley only what was encouraging: she believed him: and, right or wrong, it is certain that in her case the bite proved innocuous.

November passed: December came: the Sympsons were now really departing; it was incumbent on them to be at home by Christmas; their packages were preparing; they were to leave in a few days. One

winter evening, during the last week of their stay, Louis Moore again took out his little blank book, and discoursed with it as follows:

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'She is lovelier than ever. Since that little cloud was dispelled, all the temporary waste and wanness have vanished. It was marvellous to see how soon the magical energy of youth raised her elastic, and revived her blooming.

'After breakfast this morning, when I had seen her, and listened to her, and - so to speak - felt her, in every sentient atom of my frame, I passed from her sunny presence into the chill drawing-room. Taking up a little gilt volume, I found it to contain a selection of lyrics. I read a poem or two: whether the spell was in me or in the verse, I know not, but my heart filled genially - my pulse rose: I glowed, notwithstanding the frost air. I, too, am young as yet: though she said she never considered me young, I am barely thirty; there are moments when life - for no other reason than my own youth - beams with sweet hues upon me.

'It was time to go to the schoolroom: I went. That same schoolroom is rather pleasant in a morning; the sun then shines through the low lattice; the books are in order; there are no papers strewn about; the fire is clear and clean; no cinders have fallen, no ashes accumulated. I found Henry there, and he had brought with him Miss Keeldar: they were together.

'I said she was lovelier than ever: she is. A fine rose, not deep but delicate, opens on her cheek; her eye, always dark, clear, and speaking, utters now a language I cannot render - it is the utterance, seen not heard, through which angels must have communed when there was 'silence in heaven.' Her hair was always dusk as night, and fine as silk; her neck was always fair, flexible, polished - but both have now a new charm: the tresses are soft as shadow, the shoulders they fall on wear a goddess-grace. Once I only saw her beauty, now I feel it.

'Henry was repeating his lesson to her before bringing it to me - one of her hands was occupied with the book, he held the other: that boy gets more than his share of privileges; he dares caress and is caressed. What indulgence and compassion she shows him! Too much: if this went on, Henry, in a few years, when his soul was formed, would offer it on her altar, as I have offered mine.

'I saw her eyelid flitter when I came in, but she did not look up: now she hardly ever gives me a glance. She seems to grow silent too - to me she rarely speaks, and, when I am present, she says little to

others. In my gloomy moments, I attribute this change to indifference, - aversion, - what not? In my sunny intervals I give it another meaning. I say, were I her equal, I could find in this shyness - coyness, and in that coyness - love. As it is, dare I look for it? What could I do with it, if found?

'This morning I dared, at least, contrive an hour's communion for her and me; I dared not only wish - but will an interview with her: I dared summon solitude to guard us. Very decidedly I called Henry to the door; without hesitation, I said, 'Go where you will, my boy, but, till I call you, return not here.'

'Henry, I could see, did not like his dismissal: that boy is young, but a thinker; his meditative eye shines on me strangely sometimes: he half feels what links me to Shirley; he half guesses that there is a dearer delight in the reserve with which I am treated, than in all the endearments he is allowed. The young, lame, half-grown lion would growl at me now and then, because I have tamed his lioness and am her keeper, did not the habit of discipline and the instinct of affection hold him subdued. Go, Henry; you must learn to take your share of the bitter of life with all of Adam's race that have gone before, or will come after you; your destiny can be no exception to the common lot: be grateful that your love is overlooked thus early, before it can claim any affinity to passion: an hour's fret, a pang of envy, suffice to express what you feel: Jealousy, hot as the sun above the line, Rage, destructive as the tropic storm, the clime of your sensations ignores - as yet.

'I took my usual seat at the desk, quite in my usual way: I am blessed in that power to cover all inward ebullition with outward calm. No one who looks at my slow face can guess the vortex sometimes whirling in my heart, and engulfing thought, and wrecking prudence. Pleasant is it to have the gift to proceed peacefully and powerfully in your course without alarming by one eccentric movement. It was not my present intention to utter one word of love to her, or to reveal one glimpse of the fire in which I wasted. Presumptuous, I never have been; presumptuous, I never will be: rather than even seem selfish and interested, I would resolutely rise, gird my loins, part and leave her, and seek, on the other side of the globe, a new life, cold and barren as the rock the salt tide daily washes. My design this morning was to take of her a near scrutiny - to read a line in the page of her heart: before I left I determined to know what I was leaving.

'I had some quills to make into pens: most men's hands would have trembled when their hearts were so stirred; mine went to work steadily, and my voice, when I called it into exercise, was firm.

'This day-week you will be alone at Fieldhead, Miss Keeldar.'

'Yes: I rather think my uncle's intention to go is a settled one now.'

'He leaves you dissatisfied.'

'He is not pleased with me.'

'He departs as he came - no better for his journey: this is mortifying.'

'I trust the failure of his plans will take from him all inclination to lay new ones.'

'In his way, Mr Sympson honestly wished you well. All he has done, or intended to do, he believed to be for the best.'

'You are kind to undertake the defence of a man who has permitted himself to treat you with so much insolence.'

'I never feel shocked at, or bear malice for, what is spoken in character; and most perfectly in character was that vulgar and violent onset against me, when he had quitted you worsted.'

'You cease now to be Henry's tutor?'

'I shall be parted from Henry for a while - (if he and I live we shall meet again somehow, for we love each other) - and be ousted from the bosom of the Sympson family for ever. Happily this change does not leave me stranded: it but hurries into premature execution designs long formed.'

'No change finds you off your guard: I was sure, in your calm way, you would be prepared for sudden mutation. I always think you stand in the world like a solitary but watchful, thoughtful archer in a wood; and the quiver on your shoulder holds more arrows than one; your bow is provided with a second string. Such too is your brother's wont. You two might go forth homeless hunters to the loneliest western wilds; all would be well with you. The hewn tree would make you a hut, the cleared forest yield you fields from its stripped bosom, the buffalo would feel your rifle-shot, and with lowered horns and hump pay homage at your feet.'

'And any Indian tribe of Black-feet, or Flat-heads, would afford us a bride, perhaps?'

'No' (hesitatingly): 'I think not. The savage is sordid: I think, - that is, I hope, - you would neither of you share your hearth with that to which you could not give your heart.'

'What suggested the wild West to your mind, Miss Keeldar? Have you been with me in spirit when I did not see you? Have you entered into my day-dreams, and beheld my brain labouring at its scheme of a future?'

'She had separated a slip of paper for lighting papers - a spill, as it is called - into fragments: she threw morsel by morsel into the fire, and stood pensively watching them consume. She did not speak.

'How did you learn what you seem to know about my intentions?'

'I know nothing: I am only discovering them now: I spoke at hazard.'

'Your hazard sounds like divination. A tutor I will never be again: never take a pupil after Henry and yourself: not again will I sit habitually at another man's table - no more be the appendage of a family. I am now a man of thirty: I have never been free since I was a boy of ten. I have such a thirst for freedom - such a deep passion to know her and call her mine - such a day- desire and night-longing to win her and possess her, I will not refuse to cross the Atlantic for her sake: her I will follow deep into virgin woods. Mine it shall not be to accept a savage girl as a slave - she could not be a wife. I know no white woman whom I love that would accompany me; but I am certain Liberty will await me; sitting under a pine: when I call her she will come to my loghouse, and she shall fill my arms.'

'She could not hear me speak so unmoved, and she was moved. It was right - I meant to move her. She could not answer me, nor could she look at me: I should have been sorry if she could have done either. Her cheek glowed as if a crimson flower, through whose petals the sun shone, had cast its light upon it. On the white lid and dark lashes of her downcast eye, trembled all that is graceful in the sense of half-painful half-pleasing shame.

'Soon she controlled her emotion, and took all her feelings under command. I saw she had felt insurrection, and was waking to empire - she sat down. There was that in her face which I could read: it said, I see the line which is my limit - nothing shall make me pass it. I feel - I know how far I may reveal my feelings, and when I must clasp the volume. I have advanced to a certain distance, as far as the true and sovereign and undegraded nature of my kind permits - now here I stand rooted. My heart may break if it is baffled: let it break - it shall never dishonour me - it shall never dishonour my sisterhood in me. Suffering before degradation! death before treachery!

'I, for my part, said, 'If she were poor, I would be at her feet. If she were lowly, I would take her in my arms. Her Gold and her Station are two griffins, that guard her on each side. Love looks and longs, and

dares not: Passion hovers round, and is kept at bay: Truth and Devotion are scared. There is nothing to lose in winning her - no sacrifice to make - it is all clear gain, and therefore unimaginably difficult."

'Difficult or not, something must be done; something must be said. I could not, and would not, sit silent with all that beauty modestly mute in my presence. I spoke thus; and still I spoke with calm: quiet as my words were, I could hear they fell in a tone distinct, round, and deep.

'Still, I know I shall be strangely placed with that mountain nymph, Liberty. She is, I suspect, akin to that Solitude which I once wooed, and from which I now seek a divorce. These Oreads are peculiar: they come upon you with an unearthly charm, like some starlight evening; they inspire a wild but not warm delight; their beauty is the beauty of spirits: their grace is not the grace of life, but of seasons or scenes in nature: theirs is the dewy bloom of morning - the languid flush of evening - the peace of the moon - the changefulness of clouds. I want and will have something different. This elfish splendour looks chill to my vision, and feels frozen to my touch. I am not a poet: I cannot live on abstractions. You, Miss Keeldar, have sometimes, in your laughing satire, called me a material philosopher, and implied that I live sufficiently for the substantial. Certain I feel material from head to foot; and glorious as Nature is, and deeply as I worship her with the solid powers of a solid heart, I would rather behold her through the soft human eyes of a loved and lovely wife, than through the wild orbs of the highest goddess of Olympus.'

'Juno could not cook a buffalo steak as you like it,' said she.

'She could not: but I will tell you who could - some young, penniless, friendless orphan-girl. I wish I could find such a one: pretty enough for me to love, with something of the mind and heart suited to my taste: not uneducated - honest and modest. I care nothing for attainments; but I would fain have the germ of those sweet natural powers which nothing acquired can rival; any temper Fate wills, - I can manage the hottest. To such a creature as this, I should like to be first tutor and then husband. I would teach her my language, my habits, and my principles, and then I would reward her with my love.'

'Reward her! lord of the creation! Reward her!' ejaculated she, with a curled lip.

'And be repaid a thousandfold.'

'If she willed it, Monseigneur.'

'And she should will it.'

'You have stipulated for any temper Fate wills. Compulsion is flint and a blow to the metal of some souls.'

'And love the spark it elicits.'

'Who cares for the love that is but a spark - seen, flown upward, and gone?'

'I must find my orphan-girl. Tell me how, Miss Keeldar.'

'Advertise; and be sure you add, when you describe the qualifications, she must be a good plain cook.'

'I must find her; and when I do find her, I shall marry her.'

'Not you!' and her voice took a sudden accent of peculiar scorn.

'I liked this: I had roused her from the pensive mood in which I had first found her: I would stir her further.

'Why doubt it?'

'You marry!'

'Yes, - of course: nothing more evident than that I can, and shall.'

'The contrary is evident, Mr Moore.'

'She charmed me in this mood: waxing disdainful, half insulting, pride, temper, derision, blent in her large fine eye, that had, just now, the look of a merlin's.

'Favour me with your reasons for such an opinion, Miss Keeldar.'

'How will you manage to marry, I wonder?'

'I shall manage it with ease and speed when I find the proper person.'

'Accept celibacy!' (and she made a gesture with her hand as if she gave me something) 'take it as your doom!'

'No: you cannot give what I already have. Celibacy has been mine for thirty years. If you wish to offer me a gift, a parting present, a keepsake, you must change the boon.'

'Take worse, then!'

'How? What?'

'I now felt, and looked, and spoke eagerly. I was unwise to quit my sheet- anchor of calm even for an instant: it deprived me of an advantage and transferred it to her. The little spark of temper dissolved in sarcasm, and eddied over her countenance in the ripples of a mocking smile.

'Take a wife that has paid you court to save your modesty, and thrust herself upon you to spare your scruples.'

'Only show me where.'

'Any stout widow that has had a few husbands already, and can manage these things.'

'She must not be rich then. Oh these riches!'

'Never would you have gathered the produce of the gold-bearing garden. You have not courage to confront the sleepless dragon! you have not craft to borrow the aid of Atlas!'

'You look hot and haughty.'

'And you far haughtier. Yours is the monstrous pride which counterfeits humility.'

'I am a dependent: I know my place,'

'I am a woman: I know mine.'

'I am poor: I must be proud.'

'I have received ordinances, and own obligations stringent as yours.'

'We had reached a critical point now, and we halted and looked at each other. She would not give in, I felt. Beyond this, I neither felt nor saw. A few moments yet were mine: the end was coming - I heard its rush - but not come; I would daily, wait, talk, and when impulse urged, I would act. I am never in a hurry: I never was in a hurry in my whole life. Hasty people drink the nectar of existence scalding hot: I taste it cool as dew. I proceeded: 'Apparently, Miss Keeldar, you are as little likely to marry as myself: I know you have refused three, nay, four advantageous offers, and, I believe, a fifth. Have you rejected Sir Philip Nunnely?'

'I put this question suddenly and promptly.

'Did you think I should take him?'

'I thought you might.'

'On what grounds, may I ask?'

'Conformity of rank; age; pleasing contrast of temper, for he is mild and amiable; harmony of intellectual tastes.'

'A beautiful sentence! Let us take it to pieces. 'Conformity of rank.' - He is quite above me: compare my grange with his palace, if you please: I am disdained by his kith and kin. 'Suitability of age.' - We were born in the same year; consequently, he still a boy, while I am a woman: ten years his senior to all intents and purposes. 'Contrast of temper.' - Mild and amiable, is he: I - - - what? Tell me.'

'Sister of the spotted, bright, quick, fiery leopard.'

'And you would mate me with a kid - the Millennium being yet millions of centuries from mankind; being yet, indeed, an archangel high in the seventh heaven, uncommissioned to descend - - ? Unjust barbarian! 'Harmony of intellectual tastes.' - He is fond of poetry, and I hate it - - '

'Do you? That is news.'

'I absolutely shudder at the sight of metre or at the sound of rhyme, whenever I am at the Priory or Sir Philip at Fieldhead. Harmony, indeed! When did I whip up syllabub sonnets, or string stanzas fragile as fragments of glass? and when did I betray a belief that those penny-beads were genuine brilliants?'

'You might have the satisfaction of leading him to a higher standard - of improving his tastes.'

'Leading and improving! teaching and tutoring! bearing and forbearing! Pah! My husband is not to be my baby. I am not to set him his daily lesson and see that he learns it, and give him a sugar-plum if he is good, and a patient, pensive, pathetic lecture if he is bad. But it is like a tutor to talk of the 'satisfaction of teaching.' - I suppose you think it the finest employment in the world. I don't - I reject it. Improving a husband! No. I shall insist upon my husband improving me, or else we part.'

'God knows it is needed!'

'What do you mean by that, Mr Moore?'

'What I say. Improvement is imperatively needed.'

'If you were a woman you would school Monsieur, votre mari, charmingly: it would just suit you; schooling is your vocation.'

'May I ask, whether, in your present just and gentle mood, you mean to taunt me with being a tutor?'

'Yes - bitterly; and with anything else you please: any defect of which you are painfully conscious.'

'With being poor, for instance?'

'Of course; that will sting you; you are sore about your poverty: you brood over that.'

'With having nothing but a very plain person to offer the woman who may master my heart?'

'Exactly. You have a habit of calling yourself plain. You are sensitive about the cut of your features, because they are not quite on an Apollo-pattern. You abuse them more than is needful, in the faint hope that others may say a word in their behalf - which won't happen. Your face is nothing to boast, of certainly: not a pretty line, nor a pretty tint, to be found therein.'

'Compare it with your own.'

'It looks like a god of Egypt: a great sand-buried stone head; or rather I will compare it to nothing so lofty: it looks like Tartar: you are my mastiff's cousin: I think you as much like him as a man can be like a dog.'

'Tartar is your dear companion. In summer, when you rise early, and run out into the fields to wet your feet with the dew, and freshen your cheek and uncurl your hair with the breeze, you always call him to follow you: you call him sometimes with a whistle that you learned from me. In the solitude of your wood, when you think nobody but Tartar is listening, you whistle the very tunes you imitated from my lips, or sing the very songs you have caught up by ear from my voice; I do not ask whence flows the feeling which you pour into these songs, for I know it flows out of your heart, Miss Keeldar. In the winter evenings, Tartar lies at your feet: you suffer him to rest his head on your perfumed lap; you let him couch on the borders of your satin raiment: his rough hide is familiar with the contact of your hand; I once saw you kiss him on that snow- white beauty-spot which stars his broad forehead. It is dangerous to say I am like Tartar; it suggests to me a claim to be treated like Tartar.'

'Perhaps, sir, you can extort as much from your penniless and friendless young orphan-girl, when you find her.'

'Oh! could I find her such as I image her. Something to tame first, and teach afterwards: to break in and then to fondle. To lift the destitute proud thing out of poverty; to establish power over, and then to be indulgent to the capricious moods that never were influenced and never indulged before; to see her alternately irritated and subdued about twelve times in the twenty-four hours; and perhaps, eventually, when her training was accomplished, to behold her the exemplary and patient mother of about a dozen children, only now and then lending little Louis a cordial cuff by way of paying the interest of the vast debt she owes his father. Oh!' (I went on) 'my orphan-girl would give me many a kiss; she would watch on the threshold for my coming home of an evening; she would run into my arms; should keep my hearth as bright as she would make it warm. God bless the sweet idea! Find her I must.'

'Her eyes emitted an eager flash, her lips opened; but she reclosed them, and impetuously turned away.

'Tell me, tell me where she is, Miss Keeldar!'

'Another movement: all haughtiness, and fire, and impulse.

'I must know. You can tell me. You shall tell me.'

'I never will.'

'She turned to leave me. Could I now let her part as she had always parted from me? No: I had gone too far not to finish. I had come too near the end not to drive home to it. All the encumbrance of doubt, all the rubbish of indecision must be removed at once, and the plain truth must be ascertained. She must take her part, and tell me what it was. I must take mine and adhere to it.

'A minute, madam,' I said, keeping my hand on the door-handle before I opened it. 'We have had a long conversation this morning, but the last word has not been spoken yet: it is yours to speak it.'

'May I pass?'

'No. I guard the door. I would almost rather die than let you leave me just now, without speaking the word I demand.'

'What dare you expect me to say?'

'What I am dying and perishing to hear; what I must and will hear; what you dare not now suppress.'

'Mr Moore, I hardly know what you mean: you are not like yourself.'

'I suppose I hardly was like my usual self, for I scared her; that I could see: it was right; she must be scared to be won.

'You do know what I mean, and for the first time I stand before you myself. I have flung off the tutor, and beg to introduce you to the man: and remember, he is a gentleman.'

'She trembled. She put her hand to mine as if to remove it from the lock; she might as well have tried to loosen, by her soft touch, metal welded to metal. She felt she was powerless, and receded; and again she trembled.

'What change I underwent I cannot explain; but out of her emotion passed into me a new spirit. I neither was crushed nor elated by her lands and gold; I thought not of them, cared not for them: they were nothing: dross that could not dismay me. I saw only herself; her young beautiful form; the grace, the majesty, the modesty of her girlhood.

'My pupil,' I said.

'My master,' was the low answer.

'I have a thing to tell you.'

'She waited with declined brow, and ringlets drooped.

'I have to tell you, that for four years you have been growing into your tutor's heart, and that you are rooted there now. I have to declare that you have bewitched me, in spite of sense and experience, and difference of station and estate: you have so looked, and spoken, and moved; so shown me your faults and your virtues - beauties rather; they are hardly so stern as virtues - that I love you - love you with my life and strength. It is out now.'

'She sought what to say, but could not find a word: she tried to rally, but vainly. I passionately repeated that I loved her.

'Well, Mr Moore, what then?' was the answer I got, uttered in a tone that would have been petulant if it had not faltered.

'Have you nothing to say to me: Have you no love for me?'

'A little bit.'

'I am not to be tortured: I will not even play at present.'

'I don't want to play; I want to go.'

'I wonder you dare speak of going at this moment. You go! What! with my heart in your hand, to lay it on your toilet and pierce it with your pins! From my presence you do not stir; out of my reach you do not stray, till I receive a hostage - pledge for pledge - your heart for mine.'

'The thing you want is mislaid - lost some time since: let me go and seek it.'

'Declare that it is where your keys often are - in my possession.'

'You ought to know. And where are my keys, Mr Moore? indeed and truly, I have lost them again; and Mrs Gill wants some money, and I have none, except this sixpence.'

'She took the coin out of her apron-pocket, and showed it in her palm. I could have trifled with her; but it would not do: life and death were at stake. Mastering at once the sixpence, and the hand that held it, I demanded - 'Am I to die without you, or am I to live for you?'

'Do as you please: far be it from me to dictate your choice.'

'You shall tell me with your own lips, whether you doom me to exile, or call me to hope.'

'Go. I can bear to be left.'

'Perhaps, I too can bear to leave you: but reply, Shirley, my pupil, my sovereign - reply.'

'Die without me if you will. Live for me if you dare.'

'I am not afraid of you, my leopardess: I dare live for and with you, from this hour till my death. Now, then, I have you: you are mine: I will never let you go. Wherever my home be, I have chosen my wife. If I stay in England, in England you will stay; if I cross the Atlantic, you will cross it also: our lives are riveted; our lots intertwined.'

'And are we equal then, sir? Are we equal at last?'

'You are younger, frailer, feebler, more ignorant than I.'

'Will you be good to me, and never tyrannise?'

'Will you let me breathe, and not bewilder me? You must not smile at present. The world swims and changes round me. The sun is a dizzying scarlet blaze, the sky a violet vortex whirling over me.'

'I am a strong man, but I staggered as I spoke. All creation was exaggerated: colour grew more vivid: motion more rapid; life itself more vital. I hardly saw her for a moment; but I heard her voice - pitilessly sweet. She would not subdue one of her charms in compassion: perhaps she did not know what I felt.

'You name me leopardess: remember, the leopardess is tameless,' said she.

'Tame or fierce, wild or subdued, you are mine.'

'I am glad I know my keeper, and am used to him. Only his voice will I follow; only his hand shall manage me; only at his feet will I repose.'

'I took her back to her seat, and sat down by her side: I wanted to hear her speak again: I could never have enough of her voice and her words.

'How much do you love me?' I asked.

'Ah! you know: I will not gratify you: I will not flatter.'

'I don't know half enough: my heart craves to be fed. If you knew how hungry and ferocious it is, you would hasten to stay it with a kind word or two.'

'Poor Tartar!' said she, touching and patting my hand: 'poor fellow; stalwart friend; Shirley's pet and favourite, lie down!'

'But I will not lie down till I am fed with one sweet word.'

'And at last she gave it.

'Dear Louis, be faithful to me: never leave me. I don't care for life, unless I may pass it at your side.'

'Something more.'

'She gave me a change: it was not her way to offer the same dish twice.

'Sir!' she said, starting up, 'at your peril you ever again name such sordid things as money, or poverty, or inequality. It will be absolutely

dangerous to torment me with these maddening scruples. I defy you to do it.'

'My face grew hot. I did once more wish I were not so poor, or she were not so rich. She saw the transient misery; and then, indeed, she caressed me. Blent with torment, I experienced rapture.

'Mr Moore,' said she, looking up with a sweet, open, earnest countenance, 'teach me and help me to be good. I do not ask you to take off my shoulders all the cares and duties of property; but I ask you to share the burden, and to show me how to sustain my part well. Your judgment is well balanced; your heart is kind; your principles are sound. I know you are wise; I feel you are benevolent; I believe you are conscientious. Be my companion through life; be my guide where I am ignorant: be my master where I am faulty; be my friend always!'

'So help me God, I will!'

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Yet again, a passage from the blank book, if you like, reader; if you don't like it, pass it over:

'The Sympsons are gone; but not before discovery and explanation. My manner must have betrayed something, or my looks: I was quiet, but I forgot to be guarded sometimes. I stayed longer in the room than usual; I could not bear to be out of her presence; I returned to it, and basked in it, like Tartar in the sun. If she left the oak-parlour, instinctively I rose, and left it too. She chid me for this procedure more than once: I did it with a vague, blundering idea of getting a word with her in the hall or elsewhere. Yesterday towards dusk, I had her to myself for five minutes, by the hall-fire: we stood side by side; she was railing at me, and I was enjoying the sound of her voice: the young ladies passed, and looked at us; we did not separate: ere long, they repassed, and again looked. Mrs Sympson came; we did not move: Mr Sympson opened the dining-room door; Shirley flashed him back full payment for his spying gaze: she curled her lip, and tossed her tresses. The glance she gave was at once explanatory and defiant; it said - 'I like Mr Moore's society, and I dare you to find fault with my taste.'

'I asked, 'Do you mean him to understand how matters are?'

'I do,' said she; 'but I leave the development to chance. There will be a scene. I neither invite it nor fear it - only, you must be present; for I am inexpressibly tired of facing him solus. I don't like to see him in a rage; he then puts off all his fine proprieties and conventional disguises, and the real human being below is what you would call

'commun, plat, bas - vilain et un peu méchant.' His ideas are not clean, Mr Moore; they want scouring with soft soap and fuller's earth. I think, if he could add his imagination to the contents of Mrs Gill's bucking-basket, and let her boil it in her copper, with rain-water and bleaching-powder (I hope you think me a tolerable laundress), it would do him incalculable good.'

'This morning, fancying I heard her descend somewhat early, I was down instantly. I had not been deceived: there she was, busy at work in the breakfast-parlour, of which the housemaid was completing the arrangement and dusting. She had risen betimes to finish some little keepsake she intended for Henry. I got only a cool reception; which I accepted till the girl was gone, taking my book to the window-seat very quietly. Even when we were alone, I was slow to disturb her: to sit with her in sight was happiness, and the proper happiness, for early morning - serene, incomplete, but progressive. Had I been obtrusive, I knew I should have encountered rebuff. 'Not at home to suitors,' was written on her brow; therefore, I read on - stole, now and then, a look; watched her countenance soften and open, and she felt I respected her mood, and enjoyed the gentle content of the moment.

'The distance between us shrank, and the light hoar-frost thawed insensibly: ere an hour elapsed, I was at her side, watching her sew, gathering her sweet smiles and her merry words, which fell for me abundantly. We sat as we had a right to sit, side by side: my arm rested on her chair; I was near enough to count the stitches of her work, and to discern the eye of her needle. The door suddenly opened.

'I believe, if I had just then started from her, she would have despised me: thanks to the phlegm of my nature, I rarely start. When I am well off, bien, comfortable, I am not soon stirred: bien I was - très bien - consequently, immutable: no muscle moved. I hardly looked to the door.

'Good morning, uncle,' said she, addressing that personage; who paused on the threshold in a state of petrifaction.

'Have you been long downstairs, Miss Keeldar, and alone with Mr Moore?'

'Yes, a very long time: we both came down early; it was scarcely light.'

'The proceeding is improper - - '

'It was at first: I was rather cross, and not civil; but you will perceive that we are now friends.'

'I perceive more than you would wish me to perceive.'

'Hardly, sir,' said I: 'we have no disguises. Will you permit me to intimate, that any further observations you have to make may as well be addressed to me. Henceforward, I stand between Miss Keeldar and all annoyance.'

'You! What have you to do with Miss Keeldar?'

'To protect, watch over, serve her.'

'You, sir? - you, the tutor?'

'Not one word of insult, sir,' interposed she: 'not one syllable of disrespect to Mr Moore, in this house.'

'Do you take his part?'

'His part? Oh, yes!'

'She turned to me with a sudden, fond movement, which I met by circling her with my arm. She and I both rose.

'Good Ged!' was the cry from the morning-gown standing quivering at the door. Ged, I think, must be the cognomen of Mr Sympson's Lares: when hard pressed, he always invokes this idol.

'Come forward, uncle: you shall hear all. Tell him all, Louis.'

'I dare him to speak! The beggar! the knave! the specious hypocrite! the vile, insinuating, infamous menial! Stand apart from my niece, sir: let her go!'

'She clung to me with energy. 'I am near my future husband,' she said: 'who dares touch him or me?'

'Her husband!' he raised and spread his hands: he dropped into a seat.

'A while ago, you wanted much to know whom I meant to marry: my intention was then formed, but not mature for communication; now it is ripe, sun-mellowed, perfect: take the crimson-peach - take Louis Moore!'

'But' (savagely) 'you shall not have him - he shall not have you.'

'I would die before I would have another. I would die if I might not have him.'

'He uttered words with which this page shall never be polluted.

'She turned white as death: she shook all over: she lost her strength. I laid her down on the sofa: just looked to ascertain that she had not fainted - of which, with a divine smile, she assured me; I kissed her, and then, if I were to perish, I cannot give a clear account of what happened in the course of the next five minutes: she has since - through tears, laughter, and trembling - told me that I turned terrible, and gave myself to the demon; she says I left her, made one bound across the room - that Mr Sympson vanished through the door as if shot from a cannon - I also vanished, and she heard Mrs Gill scream.

'Mrs Gill was still screaming when I came to my senses; I was then in another apartment - the oak-parlour, I think: I held Sympson before me crushed into a chair, and my hand was on his cravat: his eyes rolled in his head - I was strangling him, I think: the housekeeper stood wringing her hands, entreating me to desist; I desisted that moment, and felt at once as cool as stone. But I told Mrs Gill to fetch the Red-House Inn chaise instantly, and informed Mr Sympson he must depart from Fieldhead the instant it came: though half frightened out of his wits, he declared he would not. Repeating the former order, I added a commission to fetch a constable. I said - 'you shall go - by fair means or foul.'

'He threatened prosecution - I cared for nothing: I had stood over him once before, not quite so fiercely as now, but full as austerely. It was one night when burglars attempted the house at Sympson Grove; and in his wretched cowardice he would have given a vain alarm, without daring to offer defence: I had then been obliged to protect his family and his abode by mastering himself - and I had succeeded. I now remained with him till the chaise came: I marshalled him to it, he scolding all the way. He was terribly bewildered, as well as enraged; he would have resisted me, but knew not how: he called for his wife and daughters to come. I said they should follow him as soon as they could prepare: the smoke, the fume, the fret of his demeanour was inexpressible, but it was a fury incapable of producing a deed: that man, properly handled, must ever remain impotent. I know he will never touch me with the law: I know his wife, over whom he tyrannises in trifles, guides him in matters of importance. I have long since earned her undying mother's gratitude by my devotion to her boy: in some of Henry's ailments I have nursed him - better, she said, than any woman could nurse: she will never forget that. She and her daughters quitted me to-day, in mute wrath and consternation - but she respects me. When Henry clung to my neck, as I lifted him into the carriage and placed him by her side - when I arranged her own wrapping to make her warm, though she turned her head from me, I saw the tears start to her eyes. She will but the more zealously advocate my cause, because she has left me in anger. I am glad of this: not for my own sake, but for that of my life and idol - my Shirley.'

Once again he writes - a week after: 'I am now at Stilbro': I have taken up my temporary abode with a friend - a professional man - in whose business I can be useful. Every day I ride over to Fieldhead. How long will it be before I can call that place my home, and its mistress mine? I am not easy - not tranquil: I am tantalised - sometimes tortured. To see her now, one would think she had never pressed her cheek to my shoulder, or clung to me with tenderness or trust. I feel unsafe: she renders me miserable: I am shunned when I visit her: she withdraws from my reach. Once, this day, I lifted her face, resolved to get a full look down her deep, dark eyes: difficult to describe what I read there! Pantheress! - beautiful forest-born! - wily, tameless, peerless nature! She gnaws her chain: I see the white teeth working at the steel! She has dreams of her wild woods, and pinings after virgin freedom. I wish Sympson would come again, and oblige her again to entwine her arms about me. I wish there was danger she should lose me, as there is risk I shall lose her. No: final loss I do not fear; but long delay - -

'It is now night - midnight. I have spent the afternoon and evening at Fieldhead. Some hours ago she passed me, coming down the oak-staircase to the hall: she did not know I was standing in the twilight, near the staircase- window, looking at the frost-bright constellations. How closely she glided against the banisters! How shyly shone her large eyes upon me I How evanescent, fugitive, fitful, she looked, - slim and swift as a Northern Streamer!

'I followed her into the drawing-room: Mrs Pryor and Caroline Helstone were both there: she has summoned them to bear her company awhile. In her white evening dress; with her long hair flowing full and wavy; with her noiseless step, her pale cheek, her eye full of night and lightning, she looked I thought, spirit-like, - a thing made of an element, - the child of a breeze and a flame, - the daughter of ray and rain-drop, - a thing never to be overtaken, arrested, fixed. I wished I could avoid following her with my gaze, as she moved here and there, but it was impossible. I talked with the other ladies as well as I could, but still I looked at her. She was very silent: I think she never spoke to me, - not even when she offered me tea. It happened that she was called out a minute by Mrs Gill. I passed into the moon-lit hall, with the design of getting a word as she returned; nor in this did I fail.

'Miss Keeldar, stay one instant! ' said I, meeting her.

'Why? - the hall is too cold.'

'It is not cold for me: at my side, it should not be cold for you.'

'But I shiver.'

'With fear, I believe. What makes you fear me? You are quiet and distant: why?'

'I may well fear what looks like a great dark goblin meeting me in the moonlight.'

'Do not - do not pass! - stay with me awhile: let us exchange a few quiet words. It is three days since I spoke to you alone: such changes are cruel.'

'I have no wish to be cruel,' she responded, softly enough; indeed, there was softness in her whole deportment - in her face, in her voice: but there was also reserve, and an air fleeting, evanishing, intangible.

'You certainly give me pain,' said I. 'It is hardly a week since you called me your future husband, and treated me as such; now I am once more the tutor for you: I am addressed as Mr Moore, and Sir; your lips have forgotten Louis.'

'No, Louis, no: it is an easy, liquid name; not soon forgotten.'

'Be cordial to Louis, then: approach him - let him approach.'

'I am cordial,' said she, hovering aloof like a white shadow.'

'Your voice is very sweet and very low,' I answered, quietly advancing: 'you seem subdued, but still startled.'

'No - quite calm, and afraid of nothing,' she assured me.

'Of nothing but your votary,'

'I bent a knee to the flags at her feet.

'You see I am in a new world, Mr Moore. I don't know myself, - I don't know you: but rise; when you do so, I feel troubled and disturbed.'

'I obeyed; it would not have suited me to retain that attitude long. I courted serenity and confidence for her, and not vainly: she trusted, and clung to me again.

'Now, Shirley,' I said, 'you can conceive I am far from happy in my present uncertain, unsettled state.'

'Oh, yes; you are happy!' she cried hastily: 'you don't know how happy you are! - any change will be for the worse!'

'Happy or not, I cannot bear to go on so much longer: you are too generous to require it.'

'Be reasonable, Louis, - be patient! I like you because you are patient.'

'Like me no longer, then, - love me instead: fix our marriage-day. Think of it to-night, and decide.'

'She breathed a murmur, inarticulate yet expressive: darted or melted from my arms - and I lost her.'