

Chapter VII

'*Perigot*. As the bonny lasse passed by, *Willie*. Hey, ho, bonnilasse! *P*. She roode at me with glauncing eye, *W*. As clear as the crystal glasse. *P*. All as the sunny beame so bright, *W*. Hey, ho, the sunnebeame! *P*. Glaunceth from Phoebus' face forthright, *W*. So love into thy heart did streame.' - SPENSER: *Shepard's Calendar*.

'The kindest symptom, yet the most alarming crisis in the ticklish state of youth; the nourisher and destroyer of hopeful wits; * * * the servitude above freedom; the gentle mind's religion; the liberal superstition.' - CHARLES LAMB.

The first sign of the unimagined snow-storm was like the transparent white cloud that seems to set off the blue. Anna was in the secret of Rex's feeling; though for the first time in their lives he had said nothing to her about what he most thought of, and he only took it for granted that she knew it. For the first time, too, Anna could not say to Rex what was continually in her mind. Perhaps it might have been a pain which she would have had to conceal, that he should so soon care for some one else more than for herself, if such a feeling had not been thoroughly neutralized by doubt and anxiety on his behalf. Anna admired her cousin - would have said with simple sincerity, 'Gwendolen is always very good to me,' and held it in the order of things for herself to be entirely subject to this cousin; but she looked at her with mingled fear and distrust, with a puzzled contemplation as of some wondrous and beautiful animal whose nature was a mystery, and who, for anything Anna knew, might have an appetite for devouring all the small creatures that were her own particular pets. And now Anna's heart was sinking under the heavy conviction which she dared not utter, that Gwendolen would never care for Rex. What she herself held in tenderness and reverence had constantly seemed indifferent to Gwendolen, and it was easier to imagine her scorning Rex than returning any tenderness of his. Besides, she was always thinking of being something extraordinary. And poor Rex! Papa would be angry with him if he knew. And of course he was too young to be in love in that way; and she, Anna had thought that it would be years and years before any thing of that sort came, and that she would be Rex's housekeeper ever so long. But what a heart must that be which did not return his love! Anna, in the prospect of his suffering, was beginning to dislike her too fascinating cousin.

It seemed to her, as it did to Rex, that the weeks had been filled with a tumultuous life evident to all observers: if he had been questioned on the subject he would have said that he had no wish to conceal what he hoped would be an engagement which he should immediately tell his father of: and yet for the first time in his life he was reserved not only about his feelings but - which was more remarkable to Anna -

about certain actions. She, on her side, was nervous each time her father or mother began to speak to her in private lest they should say anything about Rex and Gwendolen. But the elders were not in the least alive to this agitating drama, which went forward chiefly in a sort of pantomime extremely lucid in the minds thus expressing themselves, but easily missed by spectators who were running their eyes over the *Guardian* or the *Clerical Gazette*, and regarded the trivialities of the young ones with scarcely more interpretation than they gave to the action of lively ants.

'Where are you going, Rex?' said Anna one gray morning when her father had set off in his carriage to the sessions, Mrs. Gascoigne with him, and she had observed that her brother had on his antigropelos, the utmost approach he possessed to a hunting equipment.

'Going to see the hounds throw off at the Three Barns.'

'Are you going to take Gwendolen?' said Anna, timidly.

'She told you, did she?'

'No, but I thought - Does papa know you are going?'

'Not that I am aware of. I don't suppose he would trouble himself about the matter.'

'You are going to use his horse?'

'He knows I do that whenever I can.'

'Don't let Gwendolen ride after the hounds, Rex,' said Anna, whose fears gifted her with second-sight.

'Why not?' said Rex, smiling rather provokingly.

'Papa and mamma and aunt Davilow all wish her not to. They think it is not right for her.'

'Why should you suppose she is going to do what is not right?'

'Gwendolen minds nobody sometimes,' said Anna getting bolder by dint of a little anger.

'Then she would not mind me,' said Rex, perversely making a joke of poor Anna's anxiety.

'Oh Rex, I cannot bear it. You will make yourself very unhappy.' Here Anna burst into tears.

'Nannie, Nannie, what on earth is the matter with you?' said Rex, a little impatient at being kept in this way, hat on and whip in hand.

'She will not care for you one bit - I know she never will!' said the poor child in a sobbing whisper. She had lost all control of herself.

Rex reddened and hurried away from her out of the hall door, leaving her to the miserable consciousness of having made herself disagreeable in vain.

He did think of her words as he rode along; they had the unwelcomeness which all unfavorable fortune-telling has, even when laughed at; but he quickly explained them as springing from little Anna's tenderness, and began to be sorry that he was obliged to come away without soothing her. Every other feeling on the subject, however, was quickly merged in a resistant belief to the contrary of hers, accompanied with a new determination to prove that he was right. This sort of certainty had just enough kinship to doubt and uneasiness to hurry on a confession which an untouched security might have delayed.

Gwendolen was already mounted and riding up and down the avenue when Rex appeared at the gate. She had provided herself against disappointment in case he did not appear in time by having the groom ready behind her, for she would not have waited beyond a reasonable time. But now the groom was dismissed, and the two rode away in delightful freedom. Gwendolen was in her highest spirits, and Rex thought that she had never looked so lovely before; her figure, her long white throat, and the curves of her cheek and chin were always set off to perfection by the compact simplicity of her riding dress. He could not conceive a more perfect girl; and to a youthful lover like Rex it seems that the fundamental identity of the good, the true and the beautiful, is already extant and manifest in the object of his love. Most observers would have held it more than equally accountable that a girl should have like impressions about Rex, for in his handsome face there was nothing corresponding to the undefinable stinging quality - as it were a trace of demon ancestry - which made some beholders hesitate in their admiration of Gwendolen.

It was an exquisite January morning in which there was no threat of rain, but a gray sky making the calmest background for the charms of a mild winter scene - the grassy borders of the lanes, the hedgerows sprinkled with red berries and haunted with low twitterings, the purple bareness of the elms, the rich brown of the furrows. The horses' hoofs made a musical chime, accompanying their young voices. She was laughing at his equipment, for he was the reverse of a dandy, and he was enjoying her laughter; the freshness of the morning mingled with the freshness of their youth; and every sound

that came from their clear throats, every glance they gave each other, was the bubbling outflow from a spring of joy. It was all morning to them, within and without. And thinking of them in these moments one is tempted to that futile sort of wishing - if only things could have been a little otherwise then, so as to have been greatly otherwise after - if only these two beautiful young creatures could have pledged themselves to each other then and there, and never through life have swerved from that pledge! For some of the goodness which Rex believed in was there. Goodness is a large, often a prospective word; like harvest, which at one stage when we talk of it lies all underground, with an indeterminate future; is the germ prospering in the darkness? at another, it has put forth delicate green blades, and by-and-by the trembling blossoms are ready to be dashed off by an hour of rough wind or rain. Each stage has its peculiar blight, and may have the healthy life choked out of it by a particular action of the foul land which rears or neighbors it, or by damage brought from foulness afar.

'Anna had got it into her head that you would want to ride after the hounds this morning,' said Rex, whose secret associations with Anna's words made this speech seem quite perilously near the most momentous of subjects.

'Did she?' said Gwendolen, laughingly. 'What a little clairvoyant she is!'

'Shall you?' said Rex, who had not believed in her intending to do it if the elders objected, but confided in her having good reasons.

'I don't know. I can't tell what I shall do till I get there. Clairvoyants are often wrong: they foresee what is likely. I am not fond of what is likely: it is always dull. I do what is unlikely.'

'Ah, there you tell me a secret. When once I knew what people in general would be likely to do, I should know you would do the opposite. So you would have come round to a likelihood of your own sort. I shall be able to calculate on you. You couldn't surprise me.'

'Yes, I could. I should turn round and do what was likely for people in general,' said Gwendolen, with a musical laugh.

'You see you can't escape some sort of likelihood. And contradictoriness makes the strongest likelihood of all. You must give up a plan.'

'No, I shall not. My plan is to do what pleases me.' (Here should any young lady incline to imitate Gwendolen, let her consider the set of her head and neck: if the angle there had been different, the chin

protrusive, and the cervical vertebrae a trifle more curved in their position, ten to one Gwendolen's words would have had a jar in them for the sweet-natured Rex. But everything odd in her speech was humor and pretty banter, which he was only anxious to turn toward one point.)

'Can you manage to feel only what pleases you?' said he.

'Of course not; that comes from what other people do. But if the world were pleasanter, one would only feel what was pleasant. Girls' lives are so stupid: they never do what they like.'

'I thought that was more the case of the men. They are forced to do hard things, and are often dreadfully bored, and knocked to pieces too. And then, if we love a girl very dearly we want to do as she likes, so after all you have your own way.'

'I don't believe it. I never saw a married woman who had her own way.'

'What should you like to do?' said Rex, quite guilelessly, and in real anxiety.

'Oh, I don't know! - go to the North Pole, or ride steeple-chases, or go to be a queen in the East like Lady Hester Stanhope,' said Gwendolen, flightily. Her words were born on her lips, but she would have been at a loss to give an answer of deeper origin.

'You don't mean you would never be married?'

'No; I didn't say that. Only when I married, I should not do as other women do.'

'You might do just as you liked if you married a man who loved you more dearly than anything else in the world,' said Rex, who, poor youth, was moving in themes outside the curriculum in which he had promised to win distinction. 'I know one who does.'

'Don't talk of Mr Middleton, for heaven's sake,' said Gwendolen, hastily, a quick blush spreading over her face and neck; 'that is Anna's chant. I hear the hounds. Let us go on.'

She put her chestnut to a canter, and Rex had no choice but to follow her. Still he felt encouraged. Gwendolen was perfectly aware that her cousin was in love with her; but she had no idea that the matter was of any consequence, having never had the slightest visitation of painful love herself. She wished the small romance of Rex's devotion to fill up the time of his stay at Pennicote, and to avoid explanations which would bring it to an untimely end. Besides, she objected, with a

sort of physical repulsion, to being directly made love to. With all her imaginative delight in being adored, there was a certain fierceness of maidenhood in her.

But all other thoughts were soon lost for her in the excitement of the scene at the Three Barns. Several gentlemen of the hunt knew her, and she exchanged pleasant greetings. Rex could not get another word with her. The color, the stir of the field had taken possession of Gwendolen with a strength which was not due to habitual associations, for she had never yet ridden after the hounds - only said she should like to do it, and so drawn forth a prohibition; her mamma dreading the danger, and her uncle declaring that for his part he held that kind of violent exercise unseemly in a woman, and that whatever might be done in other parts of the country, no lady of good position followed the Wessex hunt: no one but Mrs. Gadsby, the yeomanry captain's wife, who had been a kitchenmaid and still spoke like one. This last argument had some effect on Gwendolen, and had kept her halting between her desire to assert her freedom and her horror of being classed with Mrs. Gadsby.

Some of the most unexceptionable women in the neighborhood occasionally went to see the hounds throw off; but it happened that none of them were present this morning to abstain from following, while Mrs. Gadsby, with her doubtful antecedents, grammatical and otherwise, was not visible to make following seem unbecoming. Thus Gwendolen felt no check on the animal stimulus that came from the stir and tongue of the hounds, the pawing of the horses, the varying voices of men, the movement hither and thither of vivid color on the background of green and gray stillness: - that utmost excitement of the coming chase which consists in feeling something like a combination of dog and horse, with the superadded thrill of social vanities and consciousness of centaur-power which belongs to humankind.

Rex would have felt more of the same enjoyment if he could have kept nearer to Gwendolen, and not seen her constantly occupied with acquaintances, or looked at by would-be acquaintances, all on lively horses which veered about and swept the surrounding space as effectually as a revolving lever.

'Glad to see you here this fine morning, Miss Harleth,' said Lord Brackenshaw, a middle-aged peer of aristocratic seediness in stained pink, with easy-going manners which would have made the threatened deluge seem of no consequence. 'We shall have a first-rate run. A pity you didn't go with us. Have you ever tried your little chestnut at a ditch? you wouldn't be afraid, eh?' 'Not the least in the world,' said Gwendolen. And that was true: she was never fearful in

action and companionship. 'I have often taken him at some rails and a ditch too, near - '

'Ah, by Jove!' said his lordship, quietly, in notation that something was happening which must break off the dialogue: and as he reined off his horse, Rex was bringing his sober hackney up to Gwendolen's side when - the hounds gave tongue, and the whole field was in motion as if the whirl of the earth were carrying it; Gwendolen along with everything else; no word of notice to Rex, who without a second thought followed too. Could he let Gwendolen go alone? under other circumstances he would have enjoyed the run, but he was just now perturbed by the check which had been put on the impetus to utter his love, and get utterance in return, an impetus which could not at once resolve itself into a totally different sort of chase, at least with the consciousness of being on his father's gray nag, a good horse enough in his way, but of sober years and ecclesiastical habits. Gwendolen on her spirited little chestnut was up with the best, and felt as secure as an immortal goddess, having, if she had thought of risk, a core of confidence that no ill luck would happen to her. But she thought of no such thing, and certainly not of any risk there might be for her cousin. If she had thought of him, it would have struck her as a droll picture that he should be gradually falling behind, and looking round in search of gates: a fine lithe youth, whose heart must be panting with all the spirit of a beagle, stuck as if under a wizard's spell on a stiff clerical hackney, would have made her laugh with a sense of fun much too strong for her to reflect on his mortification. But Gwendolen was apt to think rather of those who saw her than of those whom she could not see; and Rex was soon so far behind that if she had looked she would not have seen him. For I grieve to say that in the search for a gate, along a lane lately mended, Primrose fell, broke his knees, and undesignedly threw Rex over his head.

Fortunately a blacksmith's son who also followed the hounds under disadvantages, namely, on foot (a loose way of hunting which had struck some even frivolous minds as immoral), was naturally also in the rear, and happened to be within sight of Rex's misfortune. He ran to give help which was greatly needed, for Rex was a great deal stunned, and the complete recovery of sensation came in the form of pain. Joel Dagge on this occasion showed himself that most useful of personages, whose knowledge is of a kind suited to the immediate occasion: he not only knew perfectly well what was the matter with the horse, how far they were both from the nearest public-house and from Pennicote Rectory, and could certify to Rex that his shoulder was only a bit out of joint, but also offered experienced surgical aid.

'Lord, sir, let me shove it in again for you! I's seen Nash, the bone-setter, do it, and done it myself for our little Sally twice over. It's all

one and the same, shoulders is. If you'll trusten to me and tighten your mind up a bit, I'll do it for you in no time.'

'Come then, old fellow,' said Rex, who could tighten his mind better than his seat in the saddle. And Joel managed the operation, though not without considerable expense of pain to his patient, who turned so pitiably pale while tightening his mind, that Joel remarked, 'Ah, sir, you aren't used to it, that's how it is. I's see lots and lots o' joints out. I see a man with his eye pushed out once - that was a rum go as ever I see. You can't have a bit o' fun wi'out such sort o' things. But it went in again. I's swallowed three teeth mysen, as sure as I'm alive. Now, sirrey' (this was addressed to Primrose), 'come alonk - you musn't make believe as you can't.'

Joel being clearly a low character, it is, happily, not necessary to say more of him to the refined reader, than that he helped Rex to get home with as little delay as possible. There was no alternative but to get home, though all the while he was in anxiety about Gwendolen, and more miserable in the thought that she, too, might have had an accident, than in the pain of his own bruises and the annoyance he was about to cause his father. He comforted himself about her by reflecting that every one would be anxious to take care of her, and that some acquaintance would be sure to conduct her home.

Mr Gascoigne was already at home, and was writing letters in his study, when he was interrupted by seeing poor Rex come in with a face which was not the less handsome and ingratiating for being pale and a little distressed. He was secretly the favorite son, and a young portrait of the father; who, however, never treated him with any partiality - rather, with an extra rigor. Mr Gascoigne having inquired of Anna, knew that Rex had gone with Gwendolen to the meet at the Three Barns.

'What is the matter?' he said hastily, not laying down his pen.

'I'm very sorry, sir; Primrose has fallen down and broken his knees.'

'Where have you been with him?' said Mr Gascoigne, with a touch of severity. He rarely gave way to temper.

'To the Three Barns to see the hounds throw off.'

'And you were fool enough to follow?'

'Yes, sir. I didn't go at any fences, but the horse got his leg into a hole.'

'And you got hurt yourself, I hope, eh!'

'I got my shoulder put out, but a young blacksmith put it in again for me. I'm just a little battered, that's all.'

'Well, sit down.'

'I'm very sorry about the horse, sir; I knew it would be a vexation to you.'

'And what has become of Gwendolen?' said Mr Gascoigne, abruptly. Rex, who did not imagine that his father had made any inquiries about him, answered at first with a blush, which was the more remarkable for his previous paleness. Then he said, nervously -

'I am anxious to know - I should like to go or send at once to Offendene - but she rides so well, and I think she would keep up - there would most likely be many round her.'

'I suppose it was she who led you on, eh?' said Mr Gascoigne, laying down his pen, leaning back in his chair, and looking at Rex with more marked examination.

'It was natural for her to want to go: she didn't intend it beforehand - she was led away by the spirit of the thing. And, of course, I went when she went.'

Mr Gascoigne left a brief interval of silence, and then said, with quiet irony, - 'But now you observe, young gentleman, that you are not furnished with a horse which will enable you to play the squire to your cousin. You must give up that amusement. You have spoiled my nag for me, and that is enough mischief for one vacation. I shall beg you to get ready to start for Southampton to-morrow and join Stilfox, till you go up to Oxford with him. That will be good for your bruises as well as your studies.'

Poor Rex felt his heart swelling and comporting itself as if it had been no better than a girl's.

'I hope you will not insist on my going immediately, sir.'

'Do you feel too ill?'

'No, not that - but - ' here Rex bit his lips and felt the tears starting, to his great vexation; then he rallied and tried to say more firmly, 'I want to go to Offendene, but I can go this evening.'

'I am going there myself. I can bring word about Gwendolen, if that is what you want.'

Rex broke down. He thought he discerned an intention fatal to his happiness, nay, his life. He was accustomed to believe in his father's penetration, and to expect firmness. 'Father, I can't go away without telling her that I love her, and knowing that she loves me.'

Mr Gascoigne was inwardly going through some self-rebuke for not being more wary, and was now really sorry for the lad; but every consideration was subordinate to that of using the wisest tactics in the case. He had quickly made up his mind and to answer the more quietly -

'My dear boy, you are too young to be taking momentous, decisive steps of that sort. This is a fancy which you have got into your head during an idle week or two: you must set to work at something and dismiss it. There is every reason against it. An engagement at your age would be totally rash and unjustifiable; and moreover, alliances between first cousins are undesirable. Make up your mind to a brief disappointment. Life is full of them. We have all got to be broken in; and this is a mild beginning for you.'

'No, not mild. I can't bear it. I shall be good for nothing. I shouldn't mind anything, if it were settled between us. I could do anything then,' said Rex, impetuously. 'But it's of no use to pretend that I will obey you. I can't do it. If I said I would, I should be sure to break my word. I should see Gwendolen again.'

'Well, wait till to-morrow morning, that we may talk of the matter again - you will promise me that,' said Mr Gascoigne, quietly; and Rex did not, could not refuse.

The rector did not even tell his wife that he had any other reason for going to Offendene that evening than his desire to ascertain that Gwendolen had got home safely. He found her more than safe - elated. Mr Quallon, who had won the brush, had delivered the trophy to her, and she had brought it before her, fastened on the saddle; more than that, Lord Brackenshaw had conducted her home, and had shown himself delighted with her spirited riding. All this was told at once to her uncle, that he might see how well justified she had been in acting against his advice; and the prudential rector did feel himself in a slight difficulty, for at that moment he was particularly sensible that it was his niece's serious interest to be well regarded by the Brackenshaws, and their opinion as to her following the hounds really touched the essence of his objection. However, he was not obliged to say anything immediately, for Mrs. Davilow followed up Gwendolen's brief triumphant phrases with -

'Still, I do hope you will not do it again, Gwendolen. I should never have a moment's quiet. Her father died by an accident, you know.'

Here Mrs. Davilow had turned away from Gwendolen, and looked at Mr Gascoigne.

'Mamma, dear,' said Gwendolen, kissing her merrily, and passing over the question of the fears which Mrs. Davilow had meant to account for, 'children don't take after their parents in broken legs.'

Not one word had yet been said about Rex. In fact there had been no anxiety about him at Offendene. Gwendolen had observed to her mamma, 'Oh, he must have been left far behind, and gone home in despair,' and it could not be denied that this was fortunate so far as it made way for Lord Brackenshaw's bringing her home. But now Mr Gascoigne said, with some emphasis, looking at Gwendolen -

'Well, the exploit has ended better for you than for Rex.'

'Yes, I dare say he had to make a terrible round. You have not taught Primrose to take the fences, uncle,' said Gwendolen, without the faintest shade of alarm in her looks and tone.

'Rex has had a fall,' said Mr Gascoigne, curtly, throwing himself into an arm-chair resting his elbows and fitting his palms and fingers together, while he closed his lips and looked at Gwendolen, who said -

'Oh, poor fellow! he is not hurt, I hope?' with a correct look of anxiety such as elated mortals try to super-induce when their pulses are all the while quick with triumph; and Mrs. Davilow, in the same moment, uttered a low 'Good heavens! There!'

Mr Gascoigne went on: 'He put his shoulder out, and got some bruises, I believe.' Here he made another little pause of observation; but Gwendolen, instead of any such symptoms as pallor and silence, had only deepened the compassionateness of her brow and eyes, and said again, 'Oh, poor fellow! it is nothing serious, then?' and Mr Gascoigne held his diagnosis complete. But he wished to make assurance doubly sure, and went on still with a purpose.

'He got his arm set again rather oddly. Some blacksmith - not a parishioner of mine - was on the field - a loose fish, I suppose, but handy, and set the arm for him immediately. So after all, I believe, I and Primrose come off worst. The horse's knees are cut to pieces. He came down in a hole, it seems, and pitched Rex over his head.'

Gwendolen's face had allowably become contented again, since Rex's arm had been reset; and now, at the descriptive suggestions in the latter part of her uncle's speech, her elated spirits made her features less unmanageable than usual; the smiles broke forth, and finally a descending scale of laughter.

'You are a pretty young lady - to laugh at other people's calamities,' said Mr Gascoigne, with a milder sense of disapprobation than if he had not had counteracting reasons to be glad that Gwendolen showed no deep feeling on the occasion.

'Pray forgive me, uncle. Now Rex is safe, it is so droll to fancy the figure he and Primrose would cut - in a lane all by themselves - only a blacksmith running up. It would make a capital caricature of 'Following the Hounds.'

Gwendolen rather valued herself on her superior freedom in laughing where others might only see matter for seriousness. Indeed, the laughter became her person so well that her opinion of its gracefulness was often shared by others; and it even entered into her uncle's course of thought at this moment, that it was no wonder a boy should be fascinated by this young witch - who, however, was more mischievous than could be desired.

'How can you laugh at broken bones, child?' said Mrs. Davilow, still under her dominant anxiety. 'I wish we had never allowed you to have the horse. You will see that we were wrong,' she added, looking with a grave nod at Mr Gascoigne - 'at least I was, to encourage her in asking for it.'

'Yes, seriously, Gwendolen,' said Mr Gascoigne, in a judicious tone of rational advice to a person understood to be altogether rational, 'I strongly recommend you - I shall ask you to oblige me so far - not to repeat your adventure of to-day. Lord Brackenshaw is very kind, but I feel sure that he would concur with me in what I say. To be spoken of as 'the young lady who hunts' by way of exception, would give a tone to the language about you which I am sure you would not like. Depend upon it, his lordship would not choose that Lady Beatrice or Lady Maria should hunt in this part of the country, if they were old enough to do so. When you are married, it will be different: you may do whatever your husband sanctions. But if you intend to hunt, you must marry a man who can keep horses.'

'I don't know why I should do anything so horrible as to marry without *that* prospect, at least,' said Gwendolen, pettishly. Her uncle's speech had given her annoyance, which she could not show more directly; but she felt that she was committing herself, and after moving carelessly to another part of the room, went out.

'She always speaks in that way about marriage,' said Mrs. Davilow; 'but it will be different when she has seen the right person.'

'Her heart has never been in the least touched, that you know of?' said Mr Gascoigne.

Mrs. Davilow shook her head silently. 'It was only last night she said to me, 'Mamma, I wonder how girls manage to fall in love. It is easy to make them do it in books. But men are too ridiculous.'"

Mr Gascoigne laughed a little, and made no further remark on the subject. The next morning at breakfast he said -

'How are your bruises, Rex?'

'Oh, not very mellow yet, sir; only beginning to turn a little.'

'You don't feel quite ready for a journey to Southampton?'

'Not quite,' answered Rex, with his heart metaphorically in his mouth.

'Well, you can wait till to-morrow, and go to say goodbye to them at Offendene.'

Mrs. Gascoigne, who now knew the whole affair, looked steadily at her coffee lest she also should begin to cry, as Anna was doing already.

Mr Gascoigne felt that he was applying a sharp remedy to poor Rex's acute attack, but he believed it to be in the end the kindest. To let him know the hopelessness of his love from Gwendolen's own lips might be curative in more ways than one.

'I can only be thankful that she doesn't care about him,' said Mrs. Gascoigne, when she joined her husband in his study. 'There are things in Gwendolen I cannot reconcile myself to. My Anna is worth two of her, with all her beauty and talent. It looks very ill in her that she will not help in the schools with Anna - not even in the Sunday-school. What you or I advise is of no consequence to her: and poor Fannie is completely under her thumb. But I know you think better of her,' Mrs. Gascoigne ended with a deferential hesitation.

'Oh, my dear, there is no harm in the girl. It is only that she has a high spirit, and it will not do to hold the reins too tight. The point is, to get her well married. She has a little too much fire in her for her present life with her mother and sisters. It is natural and right that she should be married soon - not to a poor man, but one who can give her a fitting position.'

Presently Rex, with his arm in a sling, was on his two miles' walk to Offendene. He was rather puzzled by the unconditional permission to see Gwendolen, but his father's real ground of action could not enter into his conjectures. If it had, he would first have thought it horribly cold-blooded, and then have disbelieved in his father's conclusions.

When he got to the house, everybody was there but Gwendolen. The four girls, hearing him speak in the hall, rushed out of the library, which was their school-room, and hung round him with compassionate inquiries about his arm. Mrs. Davilow wanted to know exactly what had happened, and where the blacksmith lived, that she might make him a present; while Miss Merry, who took a subdued and melancholy part in all family affairs, doubted whether it would not be giving too much encouragement to that kind of character. Rex had never found the family troublesome before, but just now he wished them all away and Gwendolen there, and he was too uneasy for good-natured feigning. When at last he had said, 'Where is Gwendolen?' and Mrs. Davilow had told Alice to go and see if her sister were come down, adding, 'I sent up her breakfast this morning. She needed a long rest.' Rex took the shortest way out of his endurance by saying, almost impatiently, 'Aunt, I want to speak to Gwendolen - I want to see her alone.'

'Very well, dear; go into the drawing-room. I will send her there,' said Mrs. Davilow, who had observed that he was fond of being with Gwendolen, as was natural, but had not thought of this as having any bearing on the realities of life: it seemed merely part of the Christmas holidays which were spinning themselves out.

Rex for his part thought that the realities of life were all hanging on this interview. He had to walk up and down the drawing-room in expectation for nearly ten minutes - ample space for all imaginative fluctuations; yet, strange to say, he was unvaryingly occupied in thinking what and how much he could do, when Gwendolen had accepted him, to satisfy his father that the engagement was the most prudent thing in the world, since it inspired him with double energy for work. He was to be a lawyer, and what reason was there why he should not rise as high as Eldon did? He was forced to look at life in the light of his father's mind.

But when the door opened and she whose presence he was longing for entered, there came over him suddenly and mysteriously a state of tremor and distrust which he had never felt before. Miss Gwendolen, simple as she stood there, in her black silk, cut square about the round white pillar of her throat, a black band fastening her hair which streamed backward in smooth silky abundance, seemed more queenly than usual. Perhaps it was that there was none of the latent fun and tricksiness which had always pierced in her greeting of Rex. How much of this was due to her presentiment from what he had said yesterday that he was going to talk of love? How much from her desire to show regret about his accident? Something of both. But the wisdom of ages has hinted that there is a side of the bed which has a malign influence if you happen to get out on it; and this accident befalls some charming persons rather frequently. Perhaps it had befallen

Gwendolen this morning. The hastening of her toilet, the way in which Bugle used the brush, the quality of the shilling serial mistakenly written for her amusement, the probabilities of the coming day, and, in short, social institutions generally, were all objectionable to her. It was not that she was out of temper, but that the world was not equal to the demands of her fine organism.

However it might be, Rex saw an awful majesty about her as she entered and put out her hand to him, without the least approach to a smile in eyes or mouth. The fun which had moved her in the evening had quite evaporated from the image of his accident, and the whole affair seemed stupid to her. But she said with perfect propriety, 'I hope you are not much hurt, Rex; I deserve that you should reproach me for your accident.'

'Not at all,' said Rex, feeling the soul within him spreading itself like an attack of illness. 'There is hardly any thing the matter with me. I am so glad you had the pleasure: I would willingly pay for it by a tumble, only I was sorry to break the horse's knees.'

Gwendolen walked to the hearth and stood looking at the fire in the most inconvenient way for conversation, so that he could only get a side view of her face.

'My father wants me to go to Southampton for the rest of the vacation,' said Rex, his baritone trembling a little.

'Southampton! That's a stupid place to go to, isn't it?' said Gwendolen, chilly.

'It would be to me, because you would not be there.' Silence.

'Should you mind about me going away, Gwendolen?'

'Of course. Every one is of consequence in this dreary country,' said Gwendolen, curtly. The perception that poor Rex wanted to be tender made her curl up and harden like a sea-anemone at the touch of a finger.

'Are you angry with me, Gwendolen? Why do you treat me in this way all at once?' said Rex, flushing, and with more spirit in his voice, as if he too were capable of being angry.

Gwendolen looked round at him and smiled. 'Treat you? Nonsense! I am only rather cross. Why did you come so very early? You must expect to find tempers in dishabille.'

'Be as cross with me as you like - only don't treat me with indifference,' said Rex, imploringly. 'All the happiness of my life depends on your loving me - if only a little - better than any one else.'

He tried to take her hand, but she hastily eluded his grasp and moved to the other end of the hearth, facing him.

'Pray don't make love to me! I hate it!' she looked at him fiercely.

Rex turned pale and was silent, but could not take his eyes off her, and the impetus was not yet exhausted that made hers dart death at him. Gwendolen herself could not have foreseen that she should feel in this way. It was all a sudden, new experience to her. The day before she had been quite aware that her cousin was in love with her; she did not mind how much, so that he said nothing about it; and if any one had asked her why she objected to love-making speeches, she would have said, laughingly, 'Oh I am tired of them all in the books.' But now the life of passion had begun negatively in her. She felt passionately averse to this volunteered love.

To Rex at twenty the joy of life seemed at an end more absolutely than it can do to a man at forty. But before they had ceased to look at each other, he did speak again.

'Is that last word you have to say to me, Gwendolen? Will it always be so?'

She could not help seeing his wretchedness and feeling a little regret for the old Rex who had not offended her. Decisively, but yet with some return of kindness, she said -

'About making love? Yes. But I don't dislike you for anything else.'

There was just a perceptible pause before he said a low 'good-bye.' and passed out of the room. Almost immediately after, she heard the heavy hall door bang behind him.

Mrs. Davilow, too, had heard Rex's hasty departure, and presently came into the drawing-room, where she found Gwendolen seated on the low couch, her face buried, and her hair falling over her figure like a garment. She was sobbing bitterly. 'My child, my child, what is it?' cried the mother, who had never before seen her darling struck down in this way, and felt something of the alarmed anguish that women, feel at the sight of overpowering sorrow in a strong man; for this child had been her ruler. Sitting down by her with circling arms, she pressed her cheek against Gwendolen's head, and then tried to draw it upward. Gwendolen gave way, and letting her head rest against her

mother, cried out sobbingly, 'Oh, mamma, what can become of my life? There is nothing worth living for!'

'Why, dear?' said Mrs. Davilow. Usually she herself had been rebuked by her daughter for involuntary signs of despair.

'I shall never love anybody. I can't love people. I hate them.'

'The time will come, dear, the time will come.'

Gwendolen was more and more convulsed with sobbing; but putting her arms round her mother's neck with an almost painful clinging, she said brokenly, 'I can't bear any one to be very near me but you.'

Then the mother began to sob, for this spoiled child had never shown such dependence on her before: and so they clung to each other.