Chapter LVII

They numbered scarce eight summers when a name Rose on their souls and stirred such motions there As thrill the buds and shape their hidden frame At penetration of the quickening air: His name who told of loyal Evan Dhu, Of quaint Bradwardine, and Vich Ian Vor, Making the little world their childhood knew Large with a land of mountain lake and scaur, And larger yet with wonder love belief Toward Walter Scott who living far away Sent them this wealth of joy and noble grief. The book and they must part, but day by day, In lines that thwart like portly spiders ran They wrote the tale, from Tully Veolan.

The evening that Fred Vincy walked to Lowick parsonage (he had begun to see that this was a world in which even a spirited young man must sometimes walk for want of a horse to carry him) he set out at five o'clock and called on Mrs Garth by the way, wishing to assure himself that she accepted their new relations willingly.

He found the family group, dogs and cats included, under the great apple-tree in the orchard. It was a festival with Mrs Garth, for her eldest son, Christy, her peculiar joy and pride, had come home for a short holiday - Christy, who held it the most desirable thing in the world to be a tutor, to study all literatures and be a regenerate Porson, and who was an incorporate criticism on poor Fred, a sort of object-lesson given to him by the educational mother. Christy himself, a square-browed, broad-shouldered masculine edition of his mother not much higher than Fred's shoulder - which made it the harder that he should be held superior - was always as simple as possible, and thought no more of Fred's disinclination to scholarship than of a giraffe's, wishing that he himself were more of the same height. He was lying on the ground now by his mother's chair, with his straw hat laid flat over his eyes, while Jim on the other side was reading aloud from that beloved writer who has made a chief part in the happiness of many young lives. The volume was 'Ivanhoe,' and Jim was in the great archery scene at the tournament, but suffered much interruption from Ben, who had fetched his own old bow and arrows, and was making himself dreadfully disagreeable, Letty thought, by begging all present to observe his random shots, which no one wished to do except Brownie, the active-minded but probably shallow mongrel, while the grizzled Newfoundland lying in the sun looked on with the dull-eyed neutrality of extreme old age. Letty herself, showing as to her mouth and pinafore some slight signs that she had been assisting at the gathering of the cherries which stood in a coral-heap on the tea-table, was now seated on the grass, listening open-eyed to the reading.

But the centre of interest was changed for all by the arrival of Fred Vincy. When, seating himself on a garden-stool, he said that he was on his way to Lowick Parsonage, Ben, who had thrown down his bow, and snatched up a reluctant half-grown kitten instead, strode across Fred's outstretched leg, and said 'Take me!'

'Oh, and me too,' said Letty.

'You can't keep up with Fred and me,' said Ben.

'Yes, I can. Mother, please say that I am to go,' urged Letty, whose life was much checkered by resistance to her depreciation as a girl.

'I shall stay with Christy,' observed Jim; as much as to say that he had the advantage of those simpletons; whereupon Letty put her hand up to her head and looked with jealous indecision from the one to the other.

'Let us all go and see Mary,' said Christy, opening his arms.

'No, my dear child, we must not go in a swarm to the parsonage. And that old Glasgow suit of yours would never do. Besides, your father will come home. We must let Fred go alone. He can tell Mary that you are here, and she will come back to-morrow.'

Christy glanced at his own threadbare knees, and then at Fred's beautiful white trousers. Certainly Fred's tailoring suggested the advantages of an English university, and he had a graceful way even of looking warm and of pushing his hair back with his handkerchief.

'Children, run away,' said Mrs Garth; 'it is too warm to hang about your friends. Take your brother and show him the rabbits.'

The eldest understood, and led off the children immediately. Fred felt that Mrs Garth wished to give him an opportunity of saying anything he had to say, but he could only begin by observing -

'How glad you must be to have Christy here!'

'Yes; he has come sooner than I expected. He got down from the coach at nine o'clock, just after his father went out. I am longing for Caleb to come and hear what wonderful progress Christy is making. He has paid his expenses for the last year by giving lessons, carrying on hard study at the same time. He hopes soon to get a private tutorship and go abroad.'

'He is a great fellow,' said Fred, to whom these cheerful truths had a medicinal taste, 'and no trouble to anybody.' After a slight pause, he

added, 'But I fear you will think that I am going to be a great deal of trouble to Mr Garth.'

'Caleb likes taking trouble: he is one of those men who always do more than any one would have thought of asking them to do,' answered Mrs Garth. She was knitting, and could either look at Fred or not, as she chose - always an advantage when one is bent on loading speech with salutary meaning; and though Mrs Garth intended to be duly reserved, she did wish to say something that Fred might be the better for.

'I know you think me very undeserving, Mrs Garth, and with good reason,' said Fred, his spirit rising a little at the perception of something like a disposition to lecture him. 'I happen to have behaved just the worst to the people I can't help wishing for the most from. But while two men like Mr Garth and Mr Farebrother have not given me up, I don't see why I should give myself up.' Fred thought it might be well to suggest these masculine examples to Mrs Garth.

'Assuredly,' said she, with gathering emphasis. 'A young man for whom two such elders had devoted themselves would indeed be culpable if he threw himself away and made their sacrifices vain.'

Fred wondered a little at this strong language, but only said, 'I hope it will not be so with me, Mrs Garth, since I have some encouragement to believe that I may win Mary. Mr Garth has told you about that? You were not surprised, I dare say?' Fred ended, innocently referring only to his own love as probably evident enough.

'Not surprised that Mary has given you encouragement?' returned Mrs Garth, who thought it would be well for Fred to be more alive to the fact that Mary's friends could not possibly have wished this beforehand, whatever the Vincys might suppose. 'Yes, I confess I was surprised.'

'She never did give me any - not the least in the world, when I talked to her myself,' said Fred, eager to vindicate Mary. 'But when I asked Mr Farebrother to speak for me, she allowed him to tell me there was a hope.'

The power of admonition which had begun to stir in Mrs Garth had not yet discharged itself. It was a little too provoking even for *her* self-control that this blooming youngster should flourish on the disappointments of sadder and wiser people - making a meal of a nightingale and never knowing it - and that all the while his family should suppose that hers was in eager need of this sprig; and her vexation had fermented the more actively because of its total repression towards her husband. Exemplary wives will sometimes find

scapegoats in this way. She now said with energetic decision, 'You made a great mistake, Fred, in asking Mr Farebrother to speak for you.'

'Did I?' said Fred, reddening instantaneously. He was alarmed, but at a loss to know what Mrs Garth meant, and added, in an apologetic tone, 'Mr Farebrother has always been such a friend of ours; and Mary, I knew, would listen to him gravely; and he took it on himself quite readily.'

'Yes, young people are usually blind to everything but their own wishes, and seldom imagine how much those wishes cost others,' said Mrs Garth She did not mean to go beyond this salutary general doctrine, and threw her indignation into a needless unwinding of her worsted, knitting her brow at it with a grand air.

'I cannot conceive how it could be any pain to Mr Farebrother,' said Fred, who nevertheless felt that surprising conceptions were beginning to form themselves.

'Precisely; you cannot conceive,' said Mrs Garth, cutting her words as neatly as possible.

For a moment Fred looked at the horizon with a dismayed anxiety, and then turning with a quick movement said almost sharply -

'Do you mean to say, Mrs Garth, that Mr Farebrother is in love with Mary?'

'And if it were so, Fred, I think you are the last person who ought to be surprised,' returned Mrs Garth, laying her knitting down beside her and folding her arms. It was an unwonted sign of emotion in her that she should put her work out of her hands. In fact her feelings were divided between the satisfaction of giving Fred his discipline and the sense of having gone a little too far. Fred took his hat and stick and rose quickly.

'Then you think I am standing in his way, and in Mary's too?' he said, in a tone which seemed to demand an answer.

Mrs Garth could not speak immediately. She had brought herself into the unpleasant position of being called on to say what she really felt, yet what she knew there were strong reasons for concealing. And to her the consciousness of having exceeded in words was peculiarly mortifying. Besides, Fred had given out unexpected electricity, and he now added, 'Mr Garth seemed pleased that Mary should be attached to me. He could not have known anything of this.'

Mrs Garth felt a severe twinge at this mention of her husband, the fear that Caleb might think her in the wrong not being easily endurable. She answered, wanting to check unintended consequences -

'I spoke from inference only. I am not aware that Mary knows anything of the matter.'

But she hesitated to beg that he would keep entire silence on a subject which she had herself unnecessarily mentioned, not being used to stoop in that way; and while she was hesitating there was already a rush of unintended consequences under the apple-tree where the tea-things stood. Ben, bouncing across the grass with Brownie at his heels, and seeing the kitten dragging the knitting by a lengthening line of wool, shouted and clapped his hands; Brownie barked, the kitten, desperate, jumped on the tea-table and upset the milk, then jumped down again and swept half the cherries with it; and Ben, snatching up the half-knitted sock-top, fitted it over the kitten's head as a new source of madness, while Letty arriving cried out to her mother against this cruelty - it was a history as full of sensation as 'This is the house that Jack built.' Mrs Garth was obliged to interfere, the other young ones came up and the tete-a-tete with Fred was ended. He got away as soon as he could, and Mrs Garth could only imply some retractation of her severity by saying 'God bless you' when she shook hands with him.

She was unpleasantly conscious that she had been on the verge of speaking as 'one of the foolish women speaketh' - telling first and entreating silence after. But she had not entreated silence, and to prevent Caleb's blame she determined to blame herself and confess all to him that very night. It was curious what an awful tribunal the mild Caleb's was to her, whenever he set it up. But she meant to point out to him that the revelation might do Fred Vincy a great deal of good.

No doubt it was having a strong effect on him as he walked to Lowick. Fred's light hopeful nature had perhaps never had so much of a bruise as from this suggestion that if he had been out of the way Mary might have made a thoroughly good match. Also he was piqued that he had been what he called such a stupid lout as to ask that intervention from Mr Farebrother. But it was not in a lover's nature - it was not in Fred's, that the new anxiety raised about Mary's feeling should not surmount every other. Notwithstanding his trust in Mr Farebrother's generosity, notwithstanding what Mary had said to him, Fred could not help feeling that he had a rival: it was a new consciousness, and he objected to it extremely, not being in the least ready to give up Mary for her good, being ready rather to fight for her with any man whatsoever. But the fighting with Mr Farebrother must be of a metaphorical kind, which was much more difficult to Fred than

the muscular. Certainly this experience was a discipline for Fred hardly less sharp than his disappointment about his uncle's will. The iron had not entered into his soul, but he had begun to imagine what the sharp edge would be. It did not once occur to Fred that Mrs Garth might be mistaken about Mr Farebrother, but he suspected that she might be wrong about Mary. Mary had been staying at the parsonage lately, and her mother might know very little of what had been passing in her mind.

He did not feel easier when he found her looking cheerful with the three ladies in the drawing-room. They were in animated discussion on some subject which was dropped when he entered, and Mary was copying the labels from a heap of shallow cabinet drawers, in a minute handwriting which she was skilled in. Mr Farebrother was somewhere in the village, and the three ladies knew nothing of Fred's peculiar relation to Mary: it was impossible for either of them to propose that they should walk round the garden, and Fred predicted to himself that he should have to go away without saying a word to her in private. He told her first of Christy's arrival and then of his own engagement with her father; and he was comforted by seeing that this latter news touched her keenly. She said hurriedly, 'I am so glad,' and then bent over her writing to hinder any one from noticing her face. But here was a subject which Mrs Farebrother could not let pass.

'You don't mean, my dear Miss Garth, that you are glad to hear of a young man giving up the Church for which he was educated: you only mean that things being so, you are glad that he should be under an excellent man like your father.'

'No, really, Mrs Farebrother, I am glad of both, I fear,' said Mary, cleverly getting rid of one rebellious tear. 'I have a dreadfully secular mind. I never liked any clergyman except the Vicar of Wakefield and Mr Farebrother.'

'Now why, my dear?' said Mrs Farebrother, pausing on her large wooden knitting-needles and looking at Mary. 'You have always a good reason for your opinions, but this astonishes me. Of course I put out of the question those who preach new doctrine. But why should you dislike clergymen?'

'Oh dear,' said Mary, her face breaking into merriment as she seemed to consider a moment, 'I don't like their neckcloths.'

'Why, you don't like Camden's, then,' said Miss Winifred, in some anxiety. 'Yes, I do,' said Mary. 'I don't like the other clergymen's neckcloths, because it is they who wear them.'

‘How very puzzling!’ said Miss Noble, feeling that her own intellect was probably deficient.

‘My dear, you are joking. You would have better reasons than these for slighting so respectable a class of men,’ said Mrs Farebrother, majestically.

‘Miss Garth has such severe notions of what people should be that it is difficult to satisfy her,’ said Fred.

‘Well, I am glad at least that she makes an exception in favor of my son,’ said the old lady.

Mary was wondering at Fred's piqued tone, when Mr Farebrother came in and had to hear the news about the engagement under Mr Garth. At the end he said with quiet satisfaction, ‘*That* is right;’ and then bent to look at Mary's labels and praise her handwriting. Fred felt horribly jealous - was glad, of course, that Mr Farebrother was so estimable, but wished that he had been ugly and fat as men at forty sometimes are. It was clear what the end would be, since Mary openly placed Farebrother above everybody, and these women were all evidently encouraging the affair. He, was feeling sure that he should have no chance of speaking to Mary, when Mr Farebrother said -

‘Fred, help me to carry these drawers back into my study - you have never seen my fine new study. Pray come too, Miss Garth. I want you to see a stupendous spider I found this morning.’

Mary at once saw the Vicar's intention. He had never since the memorable evening deviated from his old pastoral kindness towards her, and her momentary wonder and doubt had quite gone to sleep. Mary was accustomed to think rather rigorously of what was probable, and if a belief flattered her vanity she felt warned to dismiss it as ridiculous, having early had much exercise in such dismissals. It was as she had foreseen: when Fred had been asked to admire the fittings of the study, and she had been asked to admire the spider, Mr Farebrother said -

‘Wait here a minute or two. I am going to look out an engraving which Fred is tall enough to hang for me. I shall be back in a few minutes.’ And then he went out. Nevertheless, the first word Fred said to Mary was -

‘It is of no use, whatever I do, Mary. You are sure to marry Farebrother at last.’ There was some rage in his tone.

‘What do you mean, Fred?’ Mary exclaimed indignantly, blushing deeply, and surprised out of all her readiness in reply.

'It is impossible that you should not see it all clearly enough - you who see everything.'

'I only see that you are behaving very ill, Fred, in speaking so of Mr Farebrother after he has pleaded your cause in every way. How can you have taken up such an idea?'

Fred was rather deep, in spite of his irritation. If Mary had really been unsuspicious, there was no good in telling her what Mrs Garth had said.

'It follows as a matter of course,' he replied. 'When you are continually seeing a man who beats me in everything, and whom you set up above everybody, I can have no fair chance.'

'You are very ungrateful, Fred,' said Mary. 'I wish I had never told Mr Farebrother that I cared for you in the least.'

'No, I am not ungrateful; I should be the happiest fellow in the world if it were not for this. I told your father everything, and he was very kind; he treated me as if I were his son. I could go at the work with a will, writing and everything, if it were not for this.'

'For this? for what?' said Mary, imagining now that something specific must have been said or done.

'This dreadful certainty that I shall be bowled out by Farebrother.' Mary was appeased by her inclination to laugh.

'Fred,' she said, peeping round to catch his eyes, which were sulkily turned away from her, 'you are too delightfully ridiculous. If you were not such a charming simpleton, what a temptation this would be to play the wicked coquette, and let you suppose that somebody besides you has made love to me.'

'Do you really like me best, Mary?' said Fred, turning eyes full of affection on her, and trying to take her hand.

'I don't like you at all at this moment,' said Mary, retreating, and putting her hands behind her. 'I only said that no mortal ever made love to me besides you. And that is no argument that a very wise man ever will,' she ended, merrily.

'I wish you would tell me that you could not possibly ever think of him,' said Fred.

'Never dare to mention this any more to me, Fred,' said Mary, getting serious again. 'I don't know whether it is more stupid or ungenerous

in you not to see that Mr Farebrother has left us together on purpose that we might speak freely. I am disappointed that you should be so blind to his delicate feeling.'

There was no time to say any more before Mr Farebrother came back with the engraving; and Fred had to return to the drawing-room still with a jealous dread in his heart, but yet with comforting arguments from Mary's words and manner. The result of the conversation was on the whole more painful to Mary: inevitably her attention had taken a new attitude, and she saw the possibility of new interpretations. She was in a position in which she seemed to herself to be slighting Mr Farebrother, and this, in relation to a man who is much honored, is always dangerous to the firmness of a grateful woman. To have a reason for going home the next day was a relief, for Mary earnestly desired to be always clear that she loved Fred best. When a tender affection has been storing itself in us through many of our years, the idea that we could accept any exchange for it seems to be a cheapening of our lives. And we can set a watch over our affections and our constancy as we can over other treasures.

'Fred has lost all his other expectations; he must keep this,' Mary said to herself, with a smile curling her lips. It was impossible to help fleeting visions of another kind - new dignities and an acknowledged value of which she had often felt the absence. But these things with Fred outside them, Fred forsaken and looking sad for the want of her, could never tempt her deliberate thought.