

'You've never been into one perhaps, dear?'

'N--never,' said Matilda flatly. 'Whatever do I see yonder--a row of white things on the down?'

'Yes, that's a part of the encampment above Overcombe. Lots of soldiers are encamped about here; those are the white tops of their tents.'

He pointed to a wing of the camp that had become visible. Matilda was much interested.

'It will make it very lively for us,' he added, 'especially as John is there.'

She thought so too, and thus they chatted on.

XVII. TWO FAINTING FITS AND A BEWILDERMENT

Meanwhile Miller Loveday was expecting the pair with interest; and about five o'clock, after repeated outlooks, he saw two specks the size of caraway seeds on the far line of ridge where the sunlit white of the road met the blue of the sky. Then the remainder parts of Bob and his lady

became visible, and then the whole vehicle, end on, and he heard the dry rattle of the wheels on the dusty road. Miller Loveday's plan, as far as he had formed any, was that Robert and his wife should live with him in the millhouse until Mrs. Garland made up her mind to join him there; in which event her present house would be made over to the young couple. Upon all grounds, he wished to welcome becomingly the woman of his son's choice, and came forward promptly as they drew up at the door.

'What a lovely place you've got here!' said Miss Johnson, when the miller had received her from the captain. 'A real stream of water, a real mill-wheel, and real fowls, and everything!'

'Yes, 'tis real enough,' said Loveday, looking at the river with balanced sentiments; 'and so you will say when you've lived here a bit as mis'ess, and had the trouble of claning the furniture.'

At this Miss Johnson looked modest, and continued to do so till Anne, not knowing they were there, came round the corner of the house, with her prayer-book in her hand, having just arrived from church. Bob turned and smiled to her, at which Miss Johnson looked glum. How long she would have remained in that phase is unknown, for just then her ears were assailed by a loud bass note from the other side, causing her to jump round.

'O la! what dreadful thing is it?' she exclaimed, and beheld a cow of Loveday's, of the name of Crumpler, standing close to her shoulder. It

being about milking-time, she had come to look up David and hasten on the operation.

'O, what a horrid bull!--it did frighten me so. I hope I shan't faint,' said Matilda.

The miller immediately used the formula which has been uttered by the proprietors of live stock ever since Noah's time. 'She won't hurt ye. Hoosh, Crumpler! She's as timid as a mouse, ma'am.'

But as Crumpler persisted in making another terrific inquiry for David, Matilda could not help closing her eyes and saying, 'O, I shall be gored to death!' her head falling back upon Bob's shoulder, which--seeing the urgent circumstances, and knowing her delicate nature--he had providentially placed in a position to catch her. Anne Garland, who had been standing at the corner of the house, not knowing whether to go back or come on, at this felt her womanly sympathies aroused. She ran and dipped her handkerchief into the splashing mill-tail, and with it damped Matilda's face. But as her eyes still remained closed, Bob, to increase the effect, took the handkerchief from Anne and wrung it out on the bridge of Matilda's nose, whence it ran over the rest of her face in a stream.

'O, Captain Loveday!' said Anne, 'the water is running over her green silk handkerchief, and into her pretty reticule!'

'There--if I didn't think so!' exclaimed Matilda, opening her eyes, starting up, and promptly pulling out her own handkerchief, with which she wiped away the drops, and an unimportant trifle of her complexion, assisted by Anne, who, in spite of her background of antagonistic emotions, could not help being interested.

'That's right!' said the miller, his spirits reviving with the revival of Matilda. 'The lady is not used to country life; are you, ma'am?'

'I am not,' replied the sufferer. 'All is so strange about here!'

Suddenly there spread into the firmament, from the direction of the down:--

'Ra, ta, ta! Ta-ta-ta-ta-ta! Ra, ta, ta!'

'O dear, dear! more hideous country sounds, I suppose?' she inquired, with another start.

'O no,' said the miller cheerfully. 'Tis only my son John's trumpeter chaps at the camp of dragoons just above us, a-blowing Mess, or Feed, or Picket, or some other of their vagaries. John will be much pleased to tell you the meaning on't when he comes down. He's trumpet-major, as you may know, ma'am.'

'O yes; you mean Captain Loveday's brother. Dear Bob has mentioned him.'

'If you come round to Widow Garland's side of the house, you can see the camp,' said the miller.

'Don't force her; she's tired with her long journey,' said Mrs. Garland humanely, the widow having come out in the general wish to see Captain Bob's choice. Indeed, they all behaved towards her as if she were a tender exotic, which their crude country manners might seriously injure.

She went into the house, accompanied by Mrs. Garland and her daughter; though before leaving Bob she managed to whisper in his ear, 'Don't tell them I came by waggon, will you, dear?'--a request which was quite needless, for Bob had long ago determined to keep that a dead secret; not because it was an uncommon mode of travel, but simply that it was hardly the usual conveyance for a gorgeous lady to her bridal.

As the men had a feeling that they would be superfluous indoors just at present, the miller assisted David in taking the horse round to the stables, Bob following, and leaving Matilda to the women. Indoors, Miss Johnson admired everything: the new parrots and marmosets, the black beams of the ceiling, the double-corner cupboard with the glass doors, through which gleamed the remainders of sundry china sets acquired by Bob's mother in her housekeeping--two-handled sugar-basins, no-handled tea-cups, a tea-pot like a pagoda, and a cream-jug in the form of a spotted cow. This sociability in their visitor was returned by Mrs. Garland and Anne; and Miss Johnson's pleasing habit of partly dying

whenever she heard any unusual bark or bellow added to her piquancy in their eyes. But conversation, as such, was naturally at first of a nervous, tentative kind, in which, as in the works of some minor poets, the sense was considerably led by the sound.

'You get the sea-breezes here, no doubt?'

'O yes, dear; when the wind is that way.'

'Do you like windy weather?'

'Yes; though not now, for it blows down the young apples.'

'Apples are plentiful, it seems. You country-folk call St. Swithin's their christening day, if it rains?'

'Yes, dear. Ah me! I have not been to a christening for these many years; the baby's name was George, I remember--after the King.'

'I hear that King George is still staying at the town here. I hope he'll stay till I have seen him!'

'He'll wait till the corn turns yellow; he always does.'

'How very fashionable yellow is getting for gloves just now!'

'Yes. Some persons wear them to the elbow, I hear.'

'Do they? I was not aware of that. I struck my elbow last week so hard against the door of my aunt's mansion that I feel the ache now.'

Before they were quite overwhelmed by the interest of this discourse, the miller and Bob came in. In truth, Mrs. Garland found the office in which he had placed her--that of introducing a strange woman to a house which was not the widow's own--a rather awkward one, and yet almost a necessity. There was no woman belonging to the house except that wondrous compendium of usefulness, the intermittent maid-servant, whom Loveday had, for appearances, borrowed from Mrs. Garland, and Mrs. Garland was in the habit of borrowing from the girl's mother. And as for the demi-woman David, he had been informed as peremptorily as Pharaoh's baker that the office of housemaid and bedmaker was taken from him, and would be given to this girl till the wedding was over, and Bob's wife took the management into her own hands.

They all sat down to high tea, Anne and her mother included, and the captain sitting next to Miss Johnson. Anne had put a brave face upon the matter--outwardly, at least--and seemed in a fair way of subduing any lingering sentiment which Bob's return had revived. During the evening, and while they still sat over the meal, John came down on a hurried visit, as he had promised, ostensibly on purpose to be introduced to his intended sister-in-law, but much more to get a word and a smile from his beloved Anne. Before they saw him, they heard the trumpet-major's smart

step coming round the corner of the house, and in a moment his form darkened the door. As it was Sunday, he appeared in his full-dress laced coat, white waistcoat and breeches, and towering plume, the latter of which he instantly lowered, as much from necessity as good manners, the beam in the mill-house ceiling having a tendency to smash and ruin all such head-gear without warning.

'John, we've been hoping you would come down,' said the miller, 'and so we have kept the tay about on purpose. Draw up, and speak to Mrs. Matilda Johnson. . . . Ma'am, this is Robert's brother.'

'Your humble servant, ma'am,' said the trumpet-major gallantly.

As it was getting dusk in the low, small-paned room, he instinctively moved towards Miss Johnson as he spoke, who sat with her back to the window. He had no sooner noticed her features than his helmet nearly fell from his hand; his face became suddenly fixed, and his natural complexion took itself off, leaving a greenish yellow in its stead. The young person, on her part, had no sooner looked closely at him than she said weakly, 'Robert's brother!' and changed colour yet more rapidly than the soldier had done. The faintness, previously half counterfeit, seized on her now in real earnest.

'I don't feel well,' she said, suddenly rising by an effort. 'This warm day has quite upset me!'

There was a regular collapse of the tea-party, like that of the Hamlet play scene. Bob seized his sweetheart and carried her upstairs, the miller exclaiming, 'Ah, she's terribly worn by the journey! I thought she was when I saw her nearly go off at the glare of the candle. No woman would have been frightened at that if she'd been up to her natural strength.'

'That, and being so very shy of men, too, must have made John's handsome regimentals quite overpowering to her, poor thing,' added Mrs. Garland, following the catastrophic young lady upstairs, whose indisposition was this time beyond question. And yet, by some perversity of the heart, she was as eager now to make light of her faintness as she had been to make much of it two or three hours ago.

The miller and John stood like straight sticks in the room the others had quitted, John's face being hastily turned towards a caricature of Buonaparte on the wall that he had not seen more than a hundred and fifty times before.

'Come, sit down and have a dish of tea, anyhow,' said his father at last.

'She'll soon be right again, no doubt.'

'Thanks; I don't want any tea,' said John quickly. And, indeed, he did not, for he was in one gigantic ache from head to foot.

The light had been too dim for anybody to notice his amazement; and not

knowing where to vent it, the trumpet-major said he was going out for a minute. He hastened to the bakehouse; but David being there, he went to the pantry; but the maid being there, he went to the cart-shed; but a couple of tramps being there, he went behind a row of French beans in the garden, where he let off an ejaculation the most pious that he had uttered that Sabbath day: 'Heaven! what's to be done!'

And then he walked wildly about the paths of the dusky garden, where the trickling of the brooks seemed loud by comparison with the stillness around; treading recklessly on the cracking snails that had come forth to feed, and entangling his spurs in the long grass till the rowels were choked with its blades. Presently he heard another person approaching, and his brother's shape appeared between the stubborn tree and the hedge.

'O, is it you?' said the mate.

'Yes. I am--taking a little air.'

'She is getting round nicely again; and as I am not wanted indoors just now, I am going into the village to call upon a friend or two I have not been able to speak to as yet.'

John took his brother Bob's hand. Bob rather wondered why.

'All right, old boy,' he said. 'Going into the village? You'll be back again, I suppose, before it gets very late?'

'O yes,' said Captain Bob cheerfully, and passed out of the garden.

John allowed his eyes to follow his brother till his shape could not be seen, and then he turned and again walked up and down.

XVIII. THE NIGHT AFTER THE ARRIVAL

John continued his sad and heavy pace till walking seemed too old and worn-out a way of showing sorrow so new, and he leant himself against the fork of an apple-tree like a log. There the trumpet-major remained for a considerable time, his face turned towards the house, whose ancient, many-chimneyed outline rose against the darkened sky, and just shut out from his view the camp above. But faint noises coming thence from horses restless at the pickets, and from visitors taking their leave, recalled its existence, and reminded him that, in consequence of Matilda's arrival, he had obtained leave for the night--a fact which, owing to the startling emotions that followed his entry, he had not yet mentioned to his friends.

While abstractedly considering how he could best use that privilege under