II. THE EVENTS OF A FORTNIGHT

1. THE NINTH OF JULY

The day of their departure was one of the most glowing that the climax of a long series of summer heats could evolve. The wide expanse of landscape quivered up and down like the flame of a taper, as they steamed along through the midst of it. Placid flocks of sheep reclining under trees a little way off appeared of a pale blue colour. Clover fields were livid with the brightness of the sun upon their deep red flowers. All waggons and carts were moved to the shade by their careful owners, rain-water butts fell to pieces; well-buckets were lowered inside the covers of the well-hole, to preserve them from the fate of the butts, and generally, water seemed scarcer in the country than the beer and cider of the peasantry who toiled or idled there.

To see persons looking with children's eyes at any ordinary scenery, is a proof that they possess the charming faculty of drawing new sensations from an old experience--a healthy sign, rare in these feverish days--the mark of an imperishable brightness of nature.

Both brother and sister could do this; Cytherea more noticeably. They watched the undulating corn-lands, monotonous to all their companions; the stony and clayey prospect succeeding those, with its angular and abrupt hills. Boggy moors came next, now withered and dry--the spots upon which pools usually spread their waters showing themselves as

circles of smooth bare soil, over-run by a net-work of innumerable little fissures. Then arose plantations of firs, abruptly terminating beside meadows cleanly mown, in which high-hipped, rich-coloured cows, with backs horizontal and straight as the ridge of a house, stood motionless or lazily fed. Glimpses of the sea now interested them, which became more and more frequent till the train finally drew up beside the platform at Budmouth.

'The whole town is looking out for us,' had been Graye's impression throughout the day. He called upon Mr. Gradfield--the only man who had been directly informed of his coming--and found that Mr. Gradfield had forgotten it.

However, arrangements were made with this gentleman--a stout, active, grey-bearded burgher of sixty--by which Owen was to commence work in his office the following week.

The same day Cytherea drew up and sent off the advertisement appended:--

'A YOUNG LADY is desirous of meeting with an engagement as governess or companion. She is competent to teach English, French, and Music. Satisfactory references--Address, C. G., Post-Office, Budmouth.'

It seemed a more material existence than her own that she saw thus delineated on the paper. 'That can't be myself; how odd I look!' she said, and smiled.

2. JULY THE ELEVENTH

On the Monday subsequent to their arrival in Budmouth, Owen Graye attended at Mr. Gradfield's office to enter upon his duties, and his sister was left in their lodgings alone for the first time.

Despite the sad occurrences of the preceding autumn, an unwonted cheerfulness pervaded her spirit throughout the day. Change of scene--and that to untravelled eyes--conjoined with the sensation of freedom from supervision, revived the sparkle of a warm young nature ready enough to take advantage of any adventitious restoratives. Point-blank grief tends rather to seal up happiness for a time than to produce that attrition which results from griefs of anticipation that move onward with the days: these may be said to furrow away the capacity for pleasure.

Her expectations from the advertisement began to be extravagant. A thriving family, who had always sadly needed her, was already definitely pictured in her fancy, which, in its exuberance, led her on to picturing its individual members, their possible peculiarities, virtues, and vices, and obliterated for a time the recollection that she would be separated from her brother.

Thus musing, as she waited for his return in the evening, her eyes fell on her left hand. The contemplation of her own left fourth finger by symbol-loving girlhood of this age is, it seems, very frequently, if not always, followed by a peculiar train of romantic ideas. Cytherea's thoughts, still playing about her future, became directed into this romantic groove. She leant back in her chair, and taking hold of the fourth finger, which had attracted her attention, she lifted it with the tips of the others, and looked at the smooth and tapering member for a long time.

She whispered idly, 'I wonder who and what he will be?

'If he's a gentleman of fashion, he will take my finger so, just with the tips of his own, and with some fluttering of the heart, and the least trembling of his lip, slip the ring so lightly on that I shall hardly know it is there--looking delightfully into my eyes all the time.

'If he's a bold, dashing soldier, I expect he will proudly turn round, take the ring as if it equalled her Majesty's crown in value, and desperately set it on my finger thus. He will fix his eyes unflinchingly upon what he is doing--just as if he stood in battle before the enemy (though, in reality, very fond of me, of course), and blush as much as I shall.

'If he's a sailor, he will take my finger and the ring in this way,

and deck it out with a housewifely touch and a tenderness of expression about his mouth, as sailors do: kiss it, perhaps, with a simple air, as if we were children playing an idle game, and not at the very height of observation and envy by a great crowd saying, "Ah! they are happy now!"

'If he should be rather a poor man--noble-minded and affectionate, but still poor--'

Owen's footsteps rapidly ascending the stairs, interrupted this fancy-free meditation. Reproaching herself, even angry with herself for allowing her mind to stray upon such subjects in the face of their present desperate condition, she rose to meet him, and make tea.

Cytherea's interest to know how her brother had been received at Mr. Gradfield's broke forth into words at once. Almost before they had sat down to table, she began cross-examining him in the regular sisterly way.

'Well, Owen, how has it been with you to-day? What is the place like--do you think you will like Mr. Gradfield?'

'O yes. But he has not been there to-day; I have only had the head draughtsman with me.'

Young women have a habit, not noticeable in men, of putting on at a moment's notice the drama of whosoever's life they choose. Cytherea's

interest was transferred from Mr. Gradfield to his representative.

'What sort of a man is he?'

'He seems a very nice fellow indeed; though of course I can hardly tell to a certainty as yet. But I think he's a very worthy fellow; there's no nonsense in him, and though he is not a public school man he has read widely, and has a sharp appreciation of what's good in books and art. In fact, his knowledge isn't nearly so exclusive as most professional men's.'

'That's a great deal to say of an architect, for of all professional men they are, as a rule, the most professional.'

'Yes; perhaps they are. This man is rather of a melancholy turn of mind, I think.'

'Has the managing clerk any family?' she mildly asked, after a while, pouring out some more tea.

'Family; no!'

'Well, dear Owen, how should I know?'

'Why, of course he isn't married. But there happened to be a conversation about women going on in the office, and I heard him say

what he should wish his wife to be like.'

'What would he wish his wife to be like?' she said, with great apparent lack of interest.

'O, he says she must be girlish and artless: yet he would be loth to do without a dash of womanly subtlety, 'tis so piquant. Yes, he said, that must be in her; she must have womanly cleverness. "And yet I should like her to blush if only a cock-sparrow were to look at her hard," he said, "which brings me back to the girl again: and so I flit backwards and forwards. I must have what comes, I suppose," he said, "and whatever she may be, thank God she's no worse. However, if he might give a final hint to Providence," he said, "a child among pleasures, and a woman among pains was the rough outline of his requirement."'

'Did he say that? What a musing creature he must be.'

'He did, indeed.'

3. FROM THE TWELFTH TO THE FIFTEENTH OF JULY

As is well known, ideas are so elastic in a human brain, that they have no constant measure which may be called their actual bulk. Any important idea may be compressed to a molecule by an unwonted crowding of others; and any small idea will expand to whatever length and breadth of vacuum the mind may be able to make over to it. Cytherea's world was tolerably

vacant at this time, and the young architectural designer's image became very pervasive. The next evening this subject was again renewed.

'His name is Springrove,' said Owen, in reply to her. 'He is a thorough artist, but a man of rather humble origin, it seems, who has made himself so far. I think he is the son of a farmer, or something of the kind.'

'Well, he's none the worse for that, I suppose.'

'None the worse. As we come down the hill, we shall be continually meeting people going up.' But Owen had felt that Springrove was a little the worse nevertheless.

'Of course he's rather old by this time.'

'O no. He's about six-and-twenty--not more.'

'Ah, I see.... What is he like, Owen?'

'I can't exactly tell you his appearance: 'tis always such a difficult thing to do.'

'A man you would describe as short? Most men are those we should describe as short, I fancy.'

'I should call him, I think, of the middle height; but as I only see him sitting in the office, of course I am not certain about his form and figure.'

'I wish you were, then.'

'Perhaps you do. But I am not, you see.'

'Of course not, you are always so provoking. Owen, I saw a man in the street to-day whom I fancied was he--and yet, I don't see how it could be, either. He had light brown hair, a snub nose, very round face, and a peculiar habit of reducing his eyes to straight lines when he looked narrowly at anything.'

'O no. That was not he, Cytherea.'

'Not a bit like him in all probability.'

'Not a bit. He has dark hair--almost a Grecian nose, regular teeth, and an intellectual face, as nearly as I can recall to mind.'

'Ah, there now, Owen, you have described him! But I suppose he's not generally called pleasing, or--'

'Handsome?'

'I scarcely meant that. But since you have said it, is he handsome?'

'Rather.'

'His tout ensemble is striking?'

'Yes--O no, no--I forgot: it is not. He is rather untidy in his waistcoat, and neck-ties, and hair.'

'How vexing!... it must be to himself, poor thing.'

'He's a thorough bookworm--despises the pap-and-daisy school of verse--knows Shakespeare to the very dregs of the foot-notes. Indeed, he's a poet himself in a small way.'

'How delicious!' she said. 'I have never known a poet.'

'And you don't know him,' said Owen dryly.

She reddened. 'Of course I don't. I know that.'

'Have you received any answer to your advertisement?' he inquired.

'Ah--no!' she said, and the forgotten disappointment which had showed itself in her face at different times during the day, became visible again.

Another day passed away. On Thursday, without inquiry, she learnt more of the head draughtsman. He and Graye had become very friendly, and he had been tempted to show her brother a copy of some poems of his--some serious and sad--some humorous--which had appeared in the poets' corner of a magazine from time to time. Owen showed them now to Cytherea, who instantly began to read them carefully and to think them very beautiful.

'Yes--Springrove's no fool,' said Owen sententiously.

'No fool!--I should think he isn't, indeed,' said Cytherea, looking up from the paper in quite an excitement: 'to write such verses as these!'

'What logic are you chopping, Cytherea? Well, I don't mean on account of the verses, because I haven't read them; but for what he said when the fellows were talking about falling in love.'

'Which you will tell me?'

'He says that your true lover breathlessly finds himself engaged to a sweetheart, like a man who has caught something in the dark. He doesn't know whether it is a bat or a bird, and takes it to the light when he is cool to learn what it is. He looks to see if she is the right age, but right age or wrong age, he must consider her a prize. Sometime later he ponders whether she is the right kind of prize for him. Right kind or wrong kind--he has called her his, and must abide by it. After a time he

asks himself, "Has she the temper, hair, and eyes I meant to have, and was firmly resolved not to do without?" He finds it is all wrong, and then comes the tussle--'

'Do they marry and live happily?'

'Who? O, the supposed pair. I think he said--well, I really forget what he said.'

'That is stupid of you!' said the young lady with dismay.

'Yes.'

'But he's a satirist--I don't think I care about him now.'

'There you are just wrong. He is not. He is, as I believe, an impulsive fellow who has been made to pay the penalty of his rashness in some love affair.'

Thus ended the dialogue of Thursday, but Cytherea read the verses again in private. On Friday her brother remarked that Springrove had informed him he was going to leave Mr. Gradfield's in a fortnight to push his fortunes in London.

An indescribable feeling of sadness shot through Cytherea's heart. Why should she be sad at such an announcement as that, she thought,

concerning a man she had never seen, when her spirits were elastic enough to rebound after hard blows from deep and real troubles as if she had scarcely known them? Though she could not answer this question, she knew one thing, she was saddened by Owen's news.

4. JULY THE TWENTY-FIRST

A very popular local excursion by steamboat to Lulstead Cove was announced through the streets of Budmouth one Thursday morning by the weak-voiced town-crier, to start at six o'clock the same day. The weather was lovely, and the opportunity being the first of the kind offered to them, Owen and Cytherea went with the rest.

They had reached the Cove, and had walked landward for nearly an hour over the hill which rose beside the strand, when Graye recollected that two or three miles yet further inland from this spot was an interesting mediaeval ruin. He was already familiar with its characteristics through the medium of an archaeological work, and now finding himself so close to the reality, felt inclined to verify some theory he had formed respecting it. Concluding that there would be just sufficient time for him to go there and return before the boat had left the shore, he parted from Cytherea on the hill, struck downwards, and then up a heathery valley.

She remained on the summit where he had left her till the time of his expected return, scanning the details of the prospect around. Placidly

spread out before her on the south was the open Channel, reflecting a blue intenser by many shades than that of the sky overhead, and dotted in the foreground by half-a-dozen small craft of contrasting rig, their sails graduating in hue from extreme whiteness to reddish brown, the varying actual colours varied again in a double degree by the rays of the declining sun.

Presently the distant bell from the boat was heard, warning the passengers to embark. This was followed by a lively air from the harps and violins on board, their tones, as they arose, becoming intermingled with, though not marred by, the brush of the waves when their crests rolled over--at the point where the check of the shallows was first felt--and then thinned away up the slope of pebbles and sand.

She turned her face landward and strained her eyes to discern, if possible, some sign of Owen's return. Nothing was visible save the strikingly brilliant, still landscape. The wide concave which lay at the back of the hill in this direction was blazing with the western light, adding an orange tint to the vivid purple of the heather, now at the very climax of bloom, and free from the slightest touch of the invidious brown that so soon creeps into its shades. The light so intensified the colours that they seemed to stand above the surface of the earth and float in mid-air like an exhalation of red. In the minor valleys, between the hillocks and ridges which diversified the contour of the basin, but did not disturb its general sweep, she marked brakes of tall, heavy-stemmed ferns, five or six feet high, in a brilliant light-green

dress--a broad riband of them with the path in their midst winding like a stream along the little ravine that reached to the foot of the hill, and delivered up the path to its grassy area. Among the ferns grew holly bushes deeper in tint than any shadow about them, whilst the whole surface of the scene was dimpled with small conical pits, and here and there were round ponds, now dry, and half overgrown with rushes.

The last bell of the steamer rang. Cytherea had forgotten herself, and what she was looking for. In a fever of distress lest Owen should be left behind, she gathered up in her hand the corners of her handkerchief, containing specimens of the shells, plants, and fossils which the locality produced, started off to the sands, and mingled with the knots of visitors there congregated from other interesting points around; from the inn, the cottages, and hired conveyances that had returned from short drives inland. They all went aboard by the primitive plan of a narrow plank on two wheels--the women being assisted by a rope. Cytherea lingered till the very last, reluctant to follow, and looking alternately at the boat and the valley behind. Her delay provoked a remark from Captain Jacobs, a thickset man of hybrid stains, resulting from the mixed effects of fire and water, peculiar to sailors where engines are the propelling power.

'Now then, missy, if you please. I am sorry to tell 'ee our time's up. Who are you looking for, miss?'

'My brother--he has walked a short distance inland; he must be here

directly. Could you wait for him--just a minute?'

'Really, I am afraid not, m'm.' Cytherea looked at the stout, round-faced man, and at the vessel, with a light in her eyes so expressive of her own opinion being the same, on reflection, as his, and with such resignation, too, that, from an instinctive feeling of pride at being able to prove himself more humane than he was thought to be--works of supererogation are the only sacrifices that entice in this way--and that at a very small cost, he delayed the boat till some among the passengers began to murmur.

'There, never mind,' said Cytherea decisively. 'Go on without me--I shall wait for him.'

'Well, 'tis a very awkward thing to leave you here all alone,' said the captain. 'I certainly advise you not to wait.'

'He's gone across to the railway station, for certain,' said another passenger.

'No--here he is!' Cytherea said, regarding, as she spoke, the half hidden figure of a man who was seen advancing at a headlong pace down the ravine which lay between the heath and the shore.

'He can't get here in less than five minutes,' a passenger said. 'People should know what they are about, and keep time. Really, if--'

'You see, sir,' said the captain, in an apologetic undertone, 'since 'tis her brother, and she's all alone, 'tis only nater to wait a minute, now he's in sight. Suppose, now, you were a young woman, as might be, and had a brother, like this one, and you stood of an evening upon this here wild lonely shore, like her, why you'd want us to wait, too, wouldn't you, sir? I think you would.'

The person so hastily approaching had been lost to view during this remark by reason of a hollow in the ground, and the projecting cliff immediately at hand covered the path in its rise. His footsteps were now heard striking sharply upon the flinty road at a distance of about twenty or thirty yards, but still behind the escarpment. To save time, Cytherea prepared to ascend the plank.

'Let me give you my hand, miss,' said Captain Jacobs.

'No--please don't touch me,' said she, ascending cautiously by sliding one foot forward two or three inches, bringing up the other behind it, and so on alternately--her lips compressed by concentration on the feat, her eyes glued to the plank, her hand to the rope, and her immediate thought to the fact of the distressing narrowness of her footing. Steps now shook the lower end of the board, and in an instant were up to her heels with a bound.

'O, Owen, I am so glad you are come!' she said without turning. 'Don't,

don't shake the plank or touch me, whatever you do.... There, I am up. Where have you been so long?' she continued, in a lower tone, turning round to him as she reached the top.

Raising her eyes from her feet, which, standing on the firm deck, demanded her attention no longer, she acquired perceptions of the new-comer in the following order: unknown trousers; unknown waistcoat; unknown face. The man was not her brother, but a total stranger.

Off went the plank; the paddles started, stopped, backed, pattered in confusion, then revolved decisively, and the boat passed out into deep water.

One or two persons had said, 'How d'ye do, Mr. Springrove?' and looked at Cytherea, to see how she bore her disappointment. Her ears had but just caught the name of the head draughtsman, when she saw him advancing
directly to address her.

'Miss Graye, I believe?' he said, lifting his hat.

'Yes,' said Cytherea, colouring, and trying not to look guilty of a surreptitious knowledge of him.

'I am Mr. Springrove. I passed Corvsgate Castle about an hour ago, and soon afterwards met your brother going that way. He had been deceived in

the distance, and was about to turn without seeing the ruin, on account of a lameness that had come on in his leg or foot. I proposed that he should go on, since he had got so near; and afterwards, instead of walking back to the boat, get across to Anglebury Station--a shorter walk for him--where he could catch the late train, and go directly home. I could let you know what he had done, and allay any uneasiness.'

'Is the lameness serious, do you know?'

'O no; simply from over-walking himself. Still, it was just as well to ride home.'

Relieved from her apprehensions on Owen's score, she was able slightly to examine the appearance of her informant--Edward Springrove--who now removed his hat for a while, to cool himself. He was rather above her brother's height. Although the upper part of his face and head was handsomely formed, and bounded by lines of sufficiently masculine regularity, his brows were somewhat too softly arched, and finely pencilled for one of his sex; without prejudice, however, to the belief which the sum total of his features inspired--that though they did not prove that the man who thought inside them would do much in the world, men who had done most of all had had no better ones. Across his forehead, otherwise perfectly smooth, ran one thin line, the healthy freshness of his remaining features expressing that it had come there prematurely.

Though some years short of the age at which the clear spirit bids good-bye to the last infirmity of noble mind, and takes to house-hunting and investments, he had reached the period in a young man's life when episodic periods, with a hopeful birth and a disappointing death, have begun to accumulate, and to bear a fruit of generalities; his glance sometimes seeming to state, 'I have already thought out the issue of such conditions as these we are experiencing.' At other times he wore an abstracted look: 'I seem to have lived through this moment before.'

He was carelessly dressed in dark grey, wearing a rolled-up black kerchief as a neck-cloth; the knot of which was disarranged, and stood obliquely--a deposit of white dust having lodged in the creases.

'I am sorry for your disappointment,' he continued, glancing into her face. Their eyes having met, became, as it were, mutually locked together, and the single instant only which good breeding allows as the length of such a look, became trebled: a clear penetrating ray of intelligence had shot from each into each, giving birth to one of those unaccountable sensations which carry home to the heart before the hand has been touched or the merest compliment passed, by something stronger than mathematical proof, the conviction, 'A tie has begun to unite us.'

Both faces also unconsciously stated that their owners had been much in each other's thoughts of late. Owen had talked to the young architect of his sister as freely as to Cytherea of the young architect.

A conversation began, which was none the less interesting to the parties engaged because it consisted only of the most trivial and commonplace remarks. Then the band of harps and violins struck up a lively melody, and the deck was cleared for dancing; the sun dipping beneath the horizon during the proceeding, and the moon showing herself at their stern. The sea was so calm, that the soft hiss produced by the bursting of the innumerable bubbles of foam behind the paddles could be distinctly heard. The passengers who did not dance, including Cytherea and Springrove, lapsed into silence, leaning against the paddle-boxes, or standing aloof--noticing the trembling of the deck to the steps of the dance--watching the waves from the paddles as they slid thinly and easily under each other's edges.

Night had quite closed in by the time they reached Budmouth harbour, sparkling with its white, red, and green lights in opposition to the shimmering path of the moon's reflection on the other side, which reached away to the horizon till the flecked ripples reduced themselves to sparkles as fine as gold dust.

'I will walk to the station and find out the exact time the train arrives,' said Springrove, rather eagerly, when they had landed.

She thanked him much.

'Perhaps we might walk together,' he suggested hesitatingly. She looked as if she did not quite know, and he settled the question by showing the

way.

They found, on arriving there, that on the first day of that month the particular train selected for Graye's return had ceased to stop at Anglebury station.

'I am very sorry I misled him,' said Springrove.

'O, I am not alarmed at all,' replied Cytherea.

'Well, it's sure to be all right--he will sleep there, and come by the first in the morning. But what will you do, alone?'

'I am quite easy on that point; the landlady is very friendly. I must go indoors now. Good-night, Mr. Springrove.'

'Let me go round to your door with you?' he pleaded.

'No, thank you; we live close by.'

He looked at her as a waiter looks at the change he brings back. But she was inexorable.

'Don't--forget me,' he murmured. She did not answer.

'Let me see you sometimes,' he said.

'Perhaps you never will again--I am going away,' she replied in lingering tones; and turning into Cross Street, ran indoors and upstairs.

The sudden withdrawal of what was superfluous at first, is often felt as an essential loss. It was felt now with regard to the maiden. More, too, after a meeting so pleasant and so enkindling, she had seemed to imply that they would never come together again.

The young man softly followed her, stood opposite the house and watched her come into the upper room with the light. Presently his gaze was cut short by her approaching the window and pulling down the blind--Edward dwelling upon her vanishing figure with a hopeless sense of loss akin to that which Adam is said by logicians to have felt when he first saw the sun set, and thought, in his inexperience, that it would return no more.

He waited till her shadow had twice crossed the window, when, finding the charming outline was not to be expected again, he left the street, crossed the harbour-bridge, and entered his own solitary chamber on the other side, vaguely thinking as he went (for undefined reasons),

'One hope is too like despair
For prudence to smother.'