IV

It was during the voyage that Cedric's mother told him that his home was not to be hers; and when he first understood it, his grief was so great that Mr. Havisham saw that the Earl had been wise in making the arrangements that his mother should be quite near him, and see him often; for it was very plain he could not have borne the separation otherwise. But his mother managed the little fellow so sweetly and lovingly, and made him feel that she would be so near him, that, after a while, he ceased to be oppressed by the fear of any real parting.

"My house is not far from the Castle, Ceddie," she repeated each time the subject was referred to--"a very little way from yours, and you can always run in and see me every day, and you will have so many things to tell me! and we shall be so happy together! It is a beautiful place. Your papa has often told me about it. He loved it very much; and you will love it too."

"I should love it better if you were there," his small lordship said, with a heavy little sigh.

He could not but feel puzzled by so strange a state of affairs, which could put his "Dearest" in one house and himself in another.

The fact was that Mrs. Errol had thought it better not to tell him why

this plan had been made.

"I should prefer he should not be told," she said to Mr. Havisham. "He would not really understand; he would only be shocked and hurt; and I feel sure that his feeling for the Earl will be a more natural and affectionate one if he does not know that his grandfather dislikes me so bitterly. He has never seen hatred or hardness, and it would be a great blow to him to find out that any one could hate me. He is so loving himself, and I am so dear to him! It is better for him that he should not be told until he is much older, and it is far better for the Earl. It would make a barrier between them, even though Ceddie is such a child."

So Cedric only knew that there was some mysterious reason for the arrangement, some reason which he was not old enough to understand, but which would be explained when he was older. He was puzzled; but, after all, it was not the reason he cared about so much; and after many talks with his mother, in which she comforted him and placed before him the bright side of the picture, the dark side of it gradually began to fade out, though now and then Mr. Havisham saw him sitting in some queer little old-fashioned attitude, watching the sea, with a very grave face, and more than once he heard an unchildish sigh rise to his lips.

"I don't like it," he said once as he was having one of his almost venerable talks with the lawyer. "You don't know how much I don't like it; but there are a great many troubles in this world, and you have

to bear them. Mary says so, and I've heard Mr. Hobbs say it too. And Dearest wants me to like to live with my grandpapa, because, you see, all his children are dead, and that's very mournful. It makes you sorry for a man, when all his children have died--and one was killed suddenly."

One of the things which always delighted the people who made the acquaintance of his young lordship was the sage little air he wore at times when he gave himself up to conversation;--combined with his occasionally elderly remarks and the extreme innocence and seriousness of his round childish face, it was irresistible. He was such a handsome, blooming, curly-headed little fellow, that, when he sat down and nursed his knee with his chubby hands, and conversed with much gravity, he was a source of great entertainment to his hearers. Gradually Mr. Havisham had begun to derive a great deal of private pleasure and amusement from his society.

"And so you are going to try to like the Earl," he said.

"Yes," answered his lordship. "He's my relation, and of course you have to like your relations; and besides, he's been very kind to me. When a person does so many things for you, and wants you to have everything you wish for, of course you'd like him if he wasn't your relation; but when he's your relation and does that, why, you're very fond of him."

"Do you think," suggested Mr. Havisham, "that he will be fond of you?"

"Well," said Cedric, "I think he will, because, you see, I'm his relation, too, and I'm his boy's little boy besides, and, well, don't you see--of course he must be fond of me now, or he wouldn't want me to have everything that I like, and he wouldn't have sent you for me."

"Oh!" remarked the lawyer, "that's it, is it?"

"Yes," said Cedric, "that's it. Don't you think that's it, too? Of course a man would be fond of his grandson."

The people who had been seasick had no sooner recovered from their seasickness, and come on deck to recline in their steamer-chairs and enjoy themselves, than every one seemed to know the romantic story of little Lord Fauntleroy, and every one took an interest in the little fellow, who ran about the ship or walked with his mother or the tall, thin old lawyer, or talked to the sailors. Every one liked him; he made friends everywhere. He was ever ready to make friends. When the gentlemen walked up and down the deck, and let him walk with them, he stepped out with a manly, sturdy little tramp, and answered all their jokes with much gay enjoyment; when the ladies talked to him, there was always laughter in the group of which he was the center; when he played with the children, there was always magnificent fun on hand. Among the sailors he had the heartiest friends; he heard miraculous stories about pirates and shipwrecks and desert islands; he learned to splice ropes and rig toy ships, and gained an amount of information concerning

"tops'ls" and "mains'ls," quite surprising. His conversation had, indeed, quite a nautical flavor at times, and on one occasion he raised a shout of laughter in a group of ladies and gentlemen who were sitting on deck, wrapped in shawls and overcoats, by saying sweetly, and with a very engaging expression:

"Shiver my timbers, but it's a cold day!"

It surprised him when they laughed. He had picked up this sea-faring remark from an "elderly naval man" of the name of Jerry, who told him stories in which it occurred frequently. To judge from his stories of his own adventures, Jerry had made some two or three thousand voyages, and had been invariably shipwrecked on each occasion on an island densely populated with bloodthirsty cannibals. Judging, also, by these same exciting adventures, he had been partially roasted and eaten frequently and had been scalped some fifteen or twenty times.

"That is why he is so bald," explained Lord Fauntleroy to his mamma. "After you have been scalped several times the hair never grows again. Jerry's never grew again after that last time, when the King of the Parromachaweekins did it with the knife made out of the skull of the Chief of the Wopslemumpkies. He says it was one of the most serious times he ever had. He was so frightened that his hair stood right straight up when the king flourished his knife, and it never would lie down, and the king wears it that way now, and it looks something like a hair-brush. I never heard anything like the asperiences Jerry has had! I

should so like to tell Mr. Hobbs about them!"

Sometimes, when the weather was very disagreeable and people were kept below decks in the saloon, a party of his grown-up friends would persuade him to tell them some of these "asperiences" of Jerry's, and as he sat relating them with great delight and fervor, there was certainly no more popular voyager on any ocean steamer crossing the Atlantic than little Lord Fauntleroy. He was always innocently and good-naturedly ready to do his small best to add to the general entertainment, and there was a charm in the very unconsciousness of his own childish importance.

"Jerry's stories int'rust them very much," he said to his mamma. "For my part--you must excuse me, Dearest--but sometimes I should have thought they couldn't be all quite true, if they hadn't happened to Jerry himself; but as they all happened to Jerry--well, it's very strange, you know, and perhaps sometimes he may forget and be a little mistaken, as he's been scalped so often. Being scalped a great many times might make a person forgetful."

It was eleven days after he had said good-bye to his friend Dick before he reached Liverpool; and it was on the night of the twelfth day that the carriage in which he and his mother and Mr. Havisham had driven from the station stopped before the gates of Court Lodge. They could not see much of the house in the darkness. Cedric only saw that there was a drive-way under great arching trees, and after the carriage had rolled

down this drive-way a short distance, he saw an open door and a stream of bright light coming through it.

Mary had come with them to attend her mistress, and she had reached the house before them. When Cedric jumped out of the carriage he saw one or two servants standing in the wide, bright hall, and Mary stood in the door-way.

Lord Fauntleroy sprang at her with a gay little shout.

"Did you get here, Mary?" he said. "Here's Mary, Dearest," and he kissed the maid on her rough red cheek.

"I am glad you are here, Mary," Mrs. Errol said to her in a low voice. "It is such a comfort to me to see you. It takes the strangeness away." And she held out her little hand, which Mary squeezed encouragingly. She knew how this first "strangeness" must feel to this little mother who had left her own land and was about to give up her child.

The English servants looked with curiosity at both the boy and his mother. They had heard all sorts of rumors about them both; they knew how angry the old Earl had been, and why Mrs. Errol was to live at the lodge and her little boy at the castle; they knew all about the great fortune he was to inherit, and about the savage old grandfather and his gout and his tempers.

"He'll have no easy time of it, poor little chap," they had said among themselves.

But they did not know what sort of a little lord had come among them; they did not quite understand the character of the next Earl of Dorincourt.

He pulled off his overcoat quite as if he were used to doing things for himself, and began to look about him. He looked about the broad hall, at the pictures and stags' antlers and curious things that ornamented it. They seemed curious to him because he had never seen such things before in a private house.

"Dearest," he said, "this is a very pretty house, isn't it? I am glad you are going to live here. It's quite a large house."

It was quite a large house compared to the one in the shabby New York street, and it was very pretty and cheerful. Mary led them upstairs to a bright chintz-hung bedroom where a fire was burning, and a large snow-white Persian cat was sleeping luxuriously on the white fur hearth-rug.

"It was the house-kaper up at the Castle, ma'am, sint her to yez," explained Mary. "It's herself is a kind-hearted lady an' has had iverything done to prepar' fur yez. I seen her meself a few minnits, an' she was fond av the Capt'in, ma'am, an' graivs fur him; and she said to

say the big cat slapin' on the rug moight make the room same homeloike to yez. She knowed Capt'in Errol whin he was a bye--an' a foine handsum' bye she ses he was, an' a foine young man wid a plisint word fur every one, great an' shmall. An' ses I to her, ses I: 'He's lift a bye that's loike him, ma'am, fur a foiner little felly niver sthipped in shoe-leather."'

When they were ready, they went downstairs into another big bright room; its ceiling was low, and the furniture was heavy and beautifully carved, the chairs were deep and had high massive backs, and there were queer shelves and cabinets with strange, pretty ornaments on them. There was a great tiger-skin before the fire, and an arm-chair on each side of it. The stately white cat had responded to Lord Fauntleroy's stroking and followed him downstairs, and when he threw himself down upon the rug, she curled herself up grandly beside him as if she intended to make friends. Cedric was so pleased that he put his head down by hers, and lay stroking her, not noticing what his mother and Mr. Havisham were saying.

They were, indeed, speaking in a rather low tone. Mrs. Errol looked a little pale and agitated.

"He need not go to-night?" she said. "He will stay with me to-night?"

"Yes," answered Mr. Havisham in the same low tone; "it will not be necessary for him to go to-night. I myself will go to the Castle as soon

as we have dined, and inform the Earl of our arrival."

Mrs. Errol glanced down at Cedric. He was lying in a graceful, careless attitude upon the black-and-yellow skin; the fire shone on his handsome, flushed little face, and on the tumbled, curly hair spread out on the rug; the big cat was purring in drowsy content,--she liked the caressing touch of the kind little hand on her fur.

Mrs. Errol smiled faintly.

"His lordship does not know all that he is taking from me," she said rather sadly. Then she looked at the lawyer. "Will you tell him, if you please," she said, "that I should rather not have the money?"

"The money!" Mr. Havisham exclaimed. "You can not mean the income he proposed to settle upon you!"

"Yes," she answered, quite simply; "I think I should rather not have it. I am obliged to accept the house, and I thank him for it, because it makes it possible for me to be near my child; but I have a little money of my own,--enough to live simply upon,--and I should rather not take the other. As he dislikes me so much, I should feel a little as if I were selling Cedric to him. I am giving him up only because I love him enough to forget myself for his good, and because his father would wish it to be so."

Mr. Havisham rubbed his chin.

"This is very strange," he said. "He will be very angry. He won't understand it."

"I think he will understand it after he thinks it over," she said. "I do not really need the money, and why should I accept luxuries from the man who hates me so much that he takes my little boy from me--his son's child?"

Mr. Havisham looked reflective for a few moments.

"I will deliver your message," he said afterward.

And then the dinner was brought in and they sat down together, the big cat taking a seat on a chair near Cedric's and purring majestically throughout the meal.

When, later in the evening, Mr. Havisham presented himself at the Castle, he was taken at once to the Earl. He found him sitting by the fire in a luxurious easy-chair, his foot on a gout-stool. He looked at the lawyer sharply from under his shaggy eyebrows, but Mr. Havisham could see that, in spite of his pretense at calmness, he was nervous and secretly excited.

"Well," he said; "well, Havisham, come back, have you? What's the news?"

"Lord Fauntleroy and his mother are at Court Lodge," replied Mr. Havisham. "They bore the voyage very well and are in excellent health."

The Earl made a half-impatient sound and moved his hand restlessly.

"Glad to hear it," he said brusquely. "So far, so good. Make yourself comfortable. Have a glass of wine and settle down. What else?"

"His lordship remains with his mother to-night. To-morrow I will bring him to the Castle."

The Earl's elbow was resting on the arm of his chair; he put his hand up and shielded his eyes with it.

"Well," he said; "go on. You know I told you not to write to me about the matter, and I know nothing whatever about it. What kind of a lad is he? I don't care about the mother; what sort of a lad is he?"

Mr. Havisham drank a little of the glass of port he had poured out for himself, and sat holding it in his hand.

"It is rather difficult to judge of the character of a child of seven," he said cautiously.

The Earl's prejudices were very intense. He looked up quickly and

uttered a rough word.

"A fool, is he?" he exclaimed. "Or a clumsy cub? His American blood tells, does it?"

"I do not think it has injured him, my lord," replied the lawyer in his dry, deliberate fashion. "I don't know much about children, but I thought him rather a fine lad."

His manner of speech was always deliberate and unenthusiastic, but he made it a trifle more so than usual. He had a shrewd fancy that it would be better that the Earl should judge for himself, and be quite unprepared for his first interview with his grandson.

"Healthy and well-grown?" asked my lord.

"Apparently very healthy, and quite well-grown," replied the lawyer.

"Straight-limbed and well enough to look at?" demanded the Earl.

A very slight smile touched Mr. Havisham's thin lips. There rose up before his mind's eye the picture he had left at Court Lodge,--the beautiful, graceful child's body lying upon the tiger-skin in careless comfort--the bright, tumbled hair spread on the rug--the bright, rosy boy's face.

"Rather a handsome boy, I think, my lord, as boys go," he said, "though I am scarcely a judge, perhaps. But you will find him somewhat different from most English children, I dare say."

"I haven't a doubt of that," snarled the Earl, a twinge of gout seizing him. "A lot of impudent little beggars, those American children; I've heard that often enough."

"It is not exactly impudence in his case," said Mr. Havisham. "I can scarcely describe what the difference is. He has lived more with older people than with children, and the difference seems to be a mixture of maturity and childishness."

"American impudence!" protested the Earl. "I've heard of it before. They call it precocity and freedom. Beastly, impudent bad manners; that's what it is!"

Mr. Havisham drank some more port. He seldom argued with his lordly patron,--never when his lordly patron's noble leg was inflamed by gout. At such times it was always better to leave him alone. So there was a silence of a few moments. It was Mr. Havisham who broke it.

"I have a message to deliver from Mrs. Errol," he remarked.

"I don't want any of her messages!" growled his lordship; "the less I hear of her the better."

"This is a rather important one," explained the lawyer. "She prefers not to accept the income you proposed to settle on her."

The Earl started visibly.

"What's that?" he cried out. "What's that?"

Mr. Havisham repeated his words.

"She says it is not necessary, and that as the relations between you are not friendly----"

"Not friendly!" ejaculated my lord savagely; "I should say they were not friendly! I hate to think of her! A mercenary, sharp-voiced American! I don't wish to see her."

"My lord," said Mr. Havisham, "you can scarcely call her mercenary. She has asked for nothing. She does not accept the money you offer her."

"All done for effect!" snapped his noble lordship. "She wants to wheedle me into seeing her. She thinks I shall admire her spirit. I don't admire it! It's only American independence! I won't have her living like a beggar at my park gates. As she's the boy's mother, she has a position to keep up, and she shall keep it up. She shall have the money, whether she likes it or not!"

"She won't spend it," said Mr. Havisham.

"I don't care whether she spends it or not!" blustered my lord. "She shall have it sent to her. She sha'n't tell people that she has to live like a pauper because I have done nothing for her! She wants to give the boy a bad opinion of me! I suppose she has poisoned his mind against me already!"

"No," said Mr. Havisham. "I have another message, which will prove to you that she has not done that."

"I don't want to hear it!" panted the Earl, out of breath with anger and excitement and gout.

But Mr. Havisham delivered it.

"She asks you not to let Lord Fauntleroy hear anything which would lead him to understand that you separate him from her because of your prejudice against her. He is very fond of her, and she is convinced that it would cause a barrier to exist between you. She says he would not comprehend it, and it might make him fear you in some measure, or at least cause him to feel less affection for you. She has told him that he is too young to understand the reason, but shall hear it when he is older. She wishes that there should be no shadow on your first meeting."

The Earl sank back into his chair. His deep-set fierce old eyes gleamed under his beetling brows.

"Come, now!" he said, still breathlessly. "Come, now! You don't mean the mother hasn't told him?"

"Not one word, my lord," replied the lawyer coolly. "That I can assure you. The child is prepared to believe you the most amiable and affectionate of grandparents. Nothing--absolutely nothing has been said to him to give him the slightest doubt of your perfection. And as I carried out your commands in every detail, while in New York, he certainly regards you as a wonder of generosity."

"He does, eh?" said the Earl.

"I give you my word of honor," said Mr. Havisham, "that Lord Fauntleroy's impressions of you will depend entirely upon yourself. And if you will pardon the liberty I take in making the suggestion, I think you will succeed better with him if you take the precaution not to speak slightingly of his mother."

"Pooh, pooh!" said the Earl. "The youngster is only seven years old!"

"He has spent those seven years at his mother's side," returned Mr. Havisham; "and she has all his affection."