Chapter Nine

They began the new life at Palstrey Manor, which was ancient and most beautiful. Nothing Walderhurst owned was as perfect an example of olden time beauty, and as wonderful for that reason. Emily almost wept before the loveliness of it, though it would not have been possible for her to explain or particularise the grounds for her emotion. She knew nothing whatever of the venerable wonders of the architecture. To her the place looked like an immense, low-built, rambling fairy palace--the palace of some sleeping beauty during whose hundred years of slumber rich dark-green creepers had climbed and overgrown its walls and towers, enfolding and festooning them with leaves and tendrils and actual branches. The huge park held an enchanted forest of trees; the long avenue of giant limes, their writhen limbs arching and interlocking, their writhen roots deep in velvet moss, was an approach suited to a fairy story.

* * * * *

During her first month at Palstrey Emily went about still in her dream. It became more a dream every day. The old house was part of it, the endless rooms, the wonderful corridors, the gardens with their revelations of winding walks, labyrinths of evergreens, and grass paths leading into beautiful unexpected places, where one suddenly came upon deep, clear pools where water plants grew and slow carp had dreamed

centuries away. The gardens caused Emily to disbelieve in the existence of Mortimer Street, but the house at times caused her to disbelieve in herself. The picture gallery especially had this effect upon her. The men and women, once as alive as her everyday self, now gazing down at her from their picture frames sometimes made her heart beat as if she stood in the presence of things eerie. Their strange, rich, ugly, or beautiful garments, their stolid or fervid, ugly or beautiful, faces, seemed to demand something of her; at least she had just enough imagination to feel somewhat as if they did. Walderhurst was very kind to her, but she was afraid she might bore him by the exceeding ignorance of her questions about people whom he had known from his childhood as his own kith and kin. It was not unlikely that one might have become so familiar with a man in armour or a woman in a farthingale that questions connected with them might seem silly. Persons whose ancestors had always gazed intimately at them from walls might not unnaturally forget that there were other people to whom they might wear only the far-away aspect of numbers in catalogues of the Academy, or exhibitions of that order.

There was a very interesting catalogue of the Palstrey pictures, and Emily found and studied it with deep interest. She cherished a touching secret desire to know what might be discoverable concerning the women who had been Marchionesses of Walderhurst before. None of them but herself, she gathered, had come to their husbands from bed-sitting rooms in obscure streets. There had been noble Hyrsts in the reign of Henry I., and the period since then elapsed had afforded time for numerous bridals. Lady Walderhurst was overcome at moments by her reflections

upon what lay behind and before her, but not being a complex person or of fervid imagination, she was spared by nature the fevers of complex emotions.

In fact, after a few weeks had passed she came out of her dream and found her happiness enduring and endurable. Each day's awakening was a delight to her, and would probably be so to the end of her existence, absolutely because she was so sane and uncomplex a creature. To be deftly assisted in her dressing by Jane Cupp, and to know that each morning she might be fittingly and becomingly attired without anxiety as to where her next gown was to come from, was a lovely thing. To enjoy the silent, perfect workings of the great household, to drive herself or be driven, to walk and read, to loiter through walled gardens and hothouses at will,--such things to a healthy woman with an unobscured power of enjoyment were luxuries which could not pall.

Walderhust found her an actual addition to his comfort. She was never in the way. She seemed to have discovered the trick of coming and going undisturbingly. She was docile and affectionate, but not in the least sentimental. He had known men whose first years of marriage, not to speak of the first months, had been rendered unbearable by the fact that their wives were constantly demanding or expecting the expression of sentiments which unsentimental males had not at their fingers' ends. So the men had been annoyed or bored, and the women had been dissatisfied. Emily demanded nothing of the sort, and was certainly not dissatisfied. She looked very handsome and happy. Her looks positively improved, and

when people began to call and she to pay visits, she was very much liked. He had certainly been quite right in deciding to ask her to marry him. If she had a son, he should congratulate himself greatly. The more he saw of Osborn the more he disliked him. It appeared that there was a prospect of a child there.

This last was indeed true, and Emily had been much touched and awakened to sympathy. It had gradually become revealed to her that the Osborns were poorer than they could decently admit. Emily had discovered that they could not even remain in the lodgings in Duke Street, though she did not know the reason, which was that Captain Osborn had been obliged to pay certain moneys to stave off a scandal not entirely unconnected with the young woman his arm had encircled the day Walderhurst had seen him on the top of the bus. He was very well aware that if he was to obtain anything from Lord Walderhurst, there were several things which must be kept entirely dark. Even a scandal belonging to the past could be made as unpleasant as an error of to-day. Also the young woman of the bead cape knew how to manage him. But they must remove to cheaper lodgings, and the rooms in Duke Street had been far from desirable.

Lady Walderhurst came in one morning from a walk, with a fresh colour and bright eyes, and before taking off her hat went to her husband's study.

"May I come in?"

Walderhurst had been writing some uninteresting letters and looked up with a smile.

"Certainly," he answered. "What a colour you have! Exercise agrees with you. You ought to ride."

"That was what Captain Osborn said. If you don't mind, I should like to ask you something."

"I don't mind. You are a reasonable woman, Emily. One's safe with you."

"It is something connected with the Osborns."

"Indeed!" chilling slightly. "I don't care about them, you know."

"You don't dislike her, do you?"

"No-o, not exactly."

"She's--the truth is, she is not at all well," with a trifle of hesitance; "she ought to be better taken care of than she is in lodgings, and they are obliged to take very cheap ones."

"If he had been a more respectable fellow his circumstances would have been different," rather stiffly.

Emily felt alarmed. She had not dreamed of the temerity of any remark suggestive of criticism.

"Yes," hastily, "of course. I am sure you know best; but--I thought perhaps--"

Walderhurst liked her timidity. To see a fine, tall, upstanding creature colour in that way was not disagreeable when one realised that she coloured because she feared she might offend one.

"What did you think 'perhaps'?" was his lenient response.

Her colour grew warmer, but this time from a sense of relief, because he was evidently not as displeased as he might have been.

"I took a long walk this morning," she said. "I went through the High Wood and came out by the place called The Kennel Farm. I was thinking a good deal of poor Mrs. Osborn because I had heard from her this morning, and she seemed so unhappy. I was looking at her letter again when I turned into the lane leading to the house. Then I saw that no one was living there, and I could not help going in to look--it is such a delightful old building, with its queer windows and chimneys, and the ivy which seems never to have been clipped. The house is so roomy and comfortable--I peeped in at windows and saw big fireplaces with benches inside them. It seems a pity that such a place should not be lived in and--well, I thought how kind it would be of you to lend it to the

Osborns while they are in England."

"It would indeed be kind," remarked his lordship, without fervour.

Her momentary excitement led Emily to take the liberty of putting out her hand to touch his. She always felt as if connubial familiarities were rather a liberty; at least she had not, so far, been able to overcome a feeling rather of that order. And this was another thing Walderhurst by no means disliked. He himself was not aware that he was a man with a good deal of internal vanity which enjoyed soothing food. In fact, he had not a sufficiently large brain to know very much about himself or to be able to analyse his reasons for liking or disliking people or things. He thought he knew his reasons for his likes and dislikes, but he was frequently very far away from the clear, impersonal truth about them. Only the brilliant logic and sensitiveness of genius really approaches knowledge of itself, and as a result it is usually extremely unhappy. Walderhurst was never unhappy. He was sometimes dissatisfied or annoyed, but that was as far as his emotions went.

Being pleased by the warm touch of Emily's hand, he patted her wrist and looked agreeably marital.

"The place was built originally for a family huntsman, and the pack was kept there. That is why it is called The Kennel Farm. When the last lease fell out it remained unlet because I don't care for an ordinary tenant. It's the kind of house that is becoming rare, and the bumpkin

farmer and his family don't value antiquities."

"If it were furnished as it could be furnished," said Emily, "it would be beautiful. One can get old things in London if one can afford them. I've seen them when I've been shopping. They are not cheap, but you can get them if you really search."

"Would you like to furnish it?" Walderhurst inquired. The consciousness that he could, if he chose, do the utmost thing of its kind in this way, at the moment assumed a certain proportion of interest to him under the stimulation of the wonder and delight which leaped into Emily's eyes as the possibility confronted her. Having been born without imagination, his wealth had not done for him anything out of the ordinary every-day order.

"Would I like to do it? Oh, dear!" she exclaimed. "Why, in all my life I have never dreamed of being able to do such things."

That, of course, was true, he reflected, and the fact added to his appreciation of the moment. There were, of course, many people to whom it would be impossible to contemplate the spending of a sum of money of any importance in the indulgence of a wish founded on mere taste. He had not thought of the thing particularly in detail before, and now that he realised the significance of the fact as a fact, Emily had afforded him a new sensation.

"You may do it now, if you wish," he said. "I once went over the place with an architect, and he said the whole thing could be made comfortable and the atmosphere of the period wholly retained for about a thousand pounds. It is not really dilapidated and it is worth saving. The gables and chimneys are very fine. I will attend to that, and you can do the rest in your own way."

"It may take a good deal of money to buy the old things," gasped Emily. "They are not cheap in these days. People have found out that they are wanted."

"It won't cost twenty thousand pounds," Walderhurst answered. "It is a farm-house after all, and you are a practical woman. Restore it. You have my permission."

Emily put her hands over her eyes. This was being the Marchioness of Walderhurst, and made Mortimer Street a thing still more incredible. When she dropped her hands, she laughed even a trifle hysterically.

"I couldn't thank you," she said. "It is as I said. I never quite believed there were people who were able to think of doing such things."

"There are such people," he said. "You are one of them."

"And--and--" She put it to him with a sudden recollection of the thing her emotions had momentarily swept away. "Oh! I must not forget, because

I am so pleased. When it is furnished--"

"Oh! the Osborns? Well, we will let them have it for a few months, at any rate."

"They will be so thankful," emotionally. "You will be doing them such a favour."

"I am doing it for you, not for them. I like to see you pleased."

She went to take off her hat with moisture in her eyes, being overpowered by his munificence. When she reached her room she walked about a little, because she was excited, and then sat down to think of the relief her next letter would carry to Mrs. Osborn. Suddenly she got up, and, going to her bedside, knelt down. She respectfully poured forth devout thanks to the Deity she appealed to when she aided in the intoning of the Litany on Sundays. Her conception of this Power was of the simplest conventional nature. She would have been astonished and frightened if she had been told that she regarded the Omnipotent Being as possessing many of the attributes of the Marquis of Walderhurst. This was, in fact, true without detracting from her reverence in either case.