In the first half of 1872 William Morris worked hard at a novel. He was in a difficult emotional situation. The love affair of his wife Janey and Rossetti had come into the open, and even the quiet Burne-Jones, his greatest friend, had been captivated by the tempestuous Mary Zambaco. He had already made his first Icelandic journey, and acquired Kelmscott Manor. In the novel he tried to objectify his emotions, taking the theme of two brothers in love with the same girl, Clara. With her, Morris makes the break from pre-Raphaelite ideals and defines a healthy, natural girl, full of down-to-earth energy. His vivid account of the river-journey is the first version of a theme that reaches its culmination in *News from Nowhere*. Although dissuaded by Georgiana Burne-Jones from carrying on with the novel, the completed section is an important document and an absorbing piece of writing, yet, surprisingly, has remained unpublished until now. Penelope Fitzgerald, author of a biography of Edward Burne-Jones, has transcribed and edited the original text, and provided an introduction to what is now known as *The Novel on Blue Paper*.

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THE NOVEL ON BLUE PAPER BY WILLIAM MORRIS. EDITED AND INTRODUCED BY PENLOPE FITZGERALD.

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INTRODUCTION

The novel which William Morris began to write early in 1872 is unfinished and unpublished and also untitled. I have called it The Novel on Blue Paper because it was written on blue lined foolscap, and Morris preferred to call things what they were.

The only first-hand information we have about it is a letter which Morris wrote to Louie Baldwin\textsuperscript{1} on the 12th of June, 1872.

Dear Louie,

Herewith I send by book-post my abortive novel: it is just a specimen of how not to do it, and there is no more to be said thereof: 'tis nothing but landscape and sentiment: which thing won't do. Since you wish to read it, I am sorry 'tis such a rough copy, which roughness sufficiently indicates my impatience at having to deal with prose. The separate parcel, paged 1 to 6, was a desperate dash at the middle of the story to try to give it life when I felt it failing: it begins with the letter of the elder brother to the younger on getting his letter telling how he was going to bid for the girl in marriage. I found it in the envelope in which I had sent it to Georgie to see if she could give me any hope: she gave me none, and I have never looked at it since. So there's an end of my novel-writing, I fancy, unless the world turns topside under some day. Health and merry days to you, and believe me to be

Your affectionate friend,

William Morris

\textsuperscript{1}Louisa Baldwin (1845-1925) was the youngest surviving child of the Methodist minister, George Macdonald, and the sister of Georgiana Burne-Jones. On her eleventh birthday she was taken as a treat to meet Rossetti, and became a pet of the whole circle. Although her marriage to the manufacturer Alfred Baldwin was a happy one, Louie's health failed and she became a chronic invalid.
The tone of gruff modesty, and in particular the catch phrase from Dickens, is habitual to Morris and can be taken for what it is worth. In spite of the disapproval of Georgiana Burne-Jones, whose opinion he valued at the time above all others, he did not destroy his MS, but kept it, and after what was presumably further discouragement from Louie, he kept it still. He must have been aware, too, why he had been given no hope. Mackail tells us that Morris 'had all the instinct of a born man of letters for laying himself open in his books, and having no concealment from the widest circle of all,' and (of the Prologues to The Earthly Paradise) that there is 'an autobiography so delicate and so outspoken that it must needs be left to speak for itself.' That, we have to conclude, was the trouble with the novel on blue paper; it did speak for itself, but much too plainly.

The background of the novel—the 'landscape'—is the Upper Thames valley, the watermeadows, streams and villages round about Kelmscott on the borders of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire. Morris had gone down to inspect Kelmscott Manor House in May 1871, and in June he entered into a joint tenancy of the old house with Rossetti at £60 a year. The grey gables, flagged path, enclosed garden cram-full of flowers, lime and elm trees 'populous with rooks', white-panelled parlour, are all recognisably described in this novel, although Morris when he wrote it had never spent a summer there. It was the house he loved 'with a reasonable love, I think.' Rossetti, not a countryman, had hoped

3 Little Dorrit Book 1, chap 10. The Circumlocution Office 'was beforehand with all the public departments in the art of perceiving HOW NOT TO DO IT.'

4 J.W. Mackail O.M. (1859-1945) married Margaret, the Burne-Jones' daughter, and was commissioned to write his classic Life of William Morris (1895) by Burne-Jones himself. Mackail's letters and unpublished notes show that he was obliged to exercise a great deal of tact and omit some episodes altogether.

Historically speaking, the village should be spelled Kelmscott and the house Kelmscott, but the villagers themselves seem to have given up the distinction.

that the place would be good for his nerves. But in the seclusion of the marshes his obsession with the beauty of Jane Morris, and his compulsion to paint her again and again, reached the point of melancholy mania. Morris had a business to run and was obliged to be in London a good deal. The seemingly intolerable tension arose between the three of them which has been so often and so painfully traced by biographers. To Morris it was 'this failure of mine.' Mackail, cautiously describing the subject of the novel as 'the love of two brothers for the same woman', evidently saw no farther into it than the failure. Once, however, when I was trying to explain the situation, and its projection as myth, to a number of overseas students, one of them asked a question which I have never seen in any biography: 'Why then did Morris not strike Rossetti?'

I hope to show that this question is very relevant to the novel on blue paper. Certainly Morris was not 'above', or indifferent to, his loss. It is a mistake to refer his much later opinions, as reported by Shaw, or Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, or Luke Ionides, or as expressed in News from Nowhere to his 'restless heart' of 1868-73. Which of us would like to be judged, at thirty-nine, by our frame of mind at the age of fifty-seven? Morris himself knew this well enough. 'At the age of more than thirty years' he wrote in Killian of the Closes (1895) 'men are more apt to desire what they have not than they that be younger or older.'

And Morris might have been pressed into a violent demonstration at this time by yet another cruel test, the profoundly unsettling behaviour of his greatest friend, Edward Burne-Jones. Burne-Jones had been married since 1860 to Georgie, the charming, tiny and indomitable daughter of a Methodist

5 Morris was a complete fatalist in his attitude towards the conduct of all human beings where sex was concerned.' (Bernard Shaw, Morris As I Knew Him 1936). 'Women did not seem to count with him.' (Luke Ionides, Memories 1925). 'He was the only man I ever came in contact with who seemed absolutely independent of sex considerations.' (W.S. Blunt, BL Add MSS.45350). Blunt did not know Morris well until 1889.
minister. The Neds had started out in lodgings with £30 between them, and their happy and stable marriage, together with Burne-Jones’ designs for the Firm, were part of the very earth out of which Morris’s life and work took growth. But in 1867 the quiet Ned suddenly claimed, much more openly than Rossetti, the freedom to love unchecked. He had been totally captivated by a most tempestuous member of the Greek community in London, Mary Zambaco. Of this radiantly sad and unpredictable young woman he drew the loveliest by far of his pencil portraits; ‘I believed it to be all my future life,’ he told Rossetti. The affair came and went and came again, to the fury of Ionides, and the sympathetic interest of the Greek women. It lingered on, indeed, until 1873. Morris, stalwart, stood by his friend, but the effect of this new confounding of love and loyalty, on top of his own ‘failure’, must have been hard to master; the effect of Mary herself can be guessed at, perhaps, from the strange intrusion of one of the characters, Eleanor, into the novel on blue paper.

Meanwhile, Georgie was left to manage her life and her two children as best she could. In his own loneliness and bewilderment Morris felt deeply for hers, and at this time he was unquestionably in love with her.

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Some of his drafts and manuscript poems of 1865-70\(^7\) show this without disguise, though always with a chivalrous anxiety. He must not intrude; he thanks her because she ‘does not deem my service sin.’ A pencil note reads on one draft ‘we two are in the same box and need conceal nothing—scold me but pardon me.’ He is ‘late made wise’ to his own feelings, and can only trust that time will transform them into the friendship that will bring him peace. Meanwhile the dignity and sincerity with which she is bearing ‘the burden of thy grief and wrong’ is enough, in itself, to check him.

…nor joy nor grief nor fear
Silence my love; but those grey eyes and clear
Truer than truth pierce through my weal and woe…

Georgie, in fact, was steadfast to her marriage, and strong enough to wait. ‘I know one thing,’ she wrote to her friend Rosalind Howard, ‘and that is that there is love enough between Edward and me to last out a long life if it is given us.’

In the meantime, what was Morris’s outward response to the assault on his emotions? Work, as always, was his ‘faithful daily companion.’ After returning from Iceland in September 1871 he illuminated the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, designed the Larkspur wallpaper, began his novel, and fiddled about in ‘a maze of re-writing and despondency’ with his elaborate masque, Love Is Enough. But the moral of Love Is Enough, (as Shaw complained), is not that love is enough. Pharamond, coming back from his quest for an ideal woman to find that his kingdom has been usurped by a stronger man, accepts that frustration and loss are worthy—‘though the world be a-waning’—to be called a victory in the name of love. But Morris knew, as Shaw knew, that this is nonsense. The victory, melancholy as it is, is for self-control. Renunciation is achieved through the will and strengthens the will,

\[^7\]BL Add MSS 45.298. Some of these poems were included, in variant forms, by May Morris in the Collected Works vol. XXIV and in vol. 1 of the supplementary volumes.
not the emotions. And this, with a far more positive hero than poor Pharamond, is, I believe, the real subject of the novel on blue paper.

Morris had been delicate as a child, but as soon as he grew into his full strength he was subject to fits of violent rage, possibly epileptic in origin. To what extent these were hereditary it is impossible to say. His father was said to be neurotic, and may well have clashed with his eldest son; when Morris was eleven he was sent as a boarder to his school at Woodford, although it was only a few hundred yards away from his home. What seems strange in his later life is the attitude of his close friends, who seem to have watched as a kind of entertainment his frenzied outbursts, followed by the struggle to control himself and a rapid childlike repentance. At times he would beat himself about the head in self-punishment. ‘He has been known to drive his head against a wall,’ Mackail wrote, ‘so as to make a deep dent in the plaster, and bite almost through the woodwork of a window frame.’ Yet with the exception of the day when he hurled a fifteen century folio at one of his workmen, missing him, but breaking a door panel, there is no record of his making a physical attack on anyone. To return to the student’s question—Morris did not strike anybody, least of all the ailing Rossetti, because he waged almost to the end of his life a battle for self-control.

The recognition of restraint as an absolute duty may be referred back to the tutor who prepared Morris, when he was seventeen years old, for his entrance to Oxford. This tutor, the Rev F.B. Guy, was one of the faithful remnant of the Oxford Movement, who had survived Newman’s conversion, or desertion, to Rome. Morris believed at this time that he was going to enter the Church, and could not fail to learn from Guy the Movement’s insistence on sacrifice and self-correction, even in the smallest things. The Tractarians saw the religious impulse not as a vague emotion, but as a silent discipline growing from the exercise of the will. All that we ought to ask, Keble had said, is room to deny ourselves. And Morris, willingly enlisted in a struggle which he was never to win, persisted in it long after he had parted from orthodox Christianity. At the age of twenty-three he concluded that he must not expect enjoyment from life—‘I have no right to it at all events—love and work, these two things only.’ In 1872, when love had betrayed or rejected him, he wrote: ‘O how I long to keep the world from narrowing on me, and to look at things bigly and kindly.’

The most telling expression of Keble’s doctrines in fiction was Charlotte M. Yonge’s *Heir of Redclyffe* (1853). It was said to be the novel most in demand by the officers wounded in the Crimean War, and it was the first book greatly to influence Morris. Here he read the family story of a tragic inheritance. Guy, the heir, has the ferocious temper of his Morville ancestors, and has to struggle as best he can with the curse of sin and death. All his ‘animal spirits’, all his great capacity for happiness is overshadowed by the temptation to anger, and he is driven to strange extremes, cutting up pencils, biting his lips till the blood runs down, and refusing, in obedience to a vow, even to watch a single game of billiards. ‘Resistance should be from within.’ He sees his whole life as ‘failing and resolving and failing again’. Philip, on the other hand, the high-minded young officer, provokes the Heir and leads him, from the best possible motives, into temptation. Here the novel sets out to show the evil that good can do, and when Guy dies to save him from fever, Philip is left to suffer for ever ‘the penitence of the saints.’

*The Heir of Redclyffe*, as an exemplary text, asks for a kind of inner or even secret knowledge from its readers. From page to page we are reminded of Kenelm Digby’s *Broadstone of Honour*, which held up the example of mediaeval chivalry to Young England. That is why Guy’s nearest railway station is called Broadstone. Again, Guy and his sweetheart

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9Sir Kenelm Digby, *The Broadstone of Honour; or the True Sense and Practice of Chivalry* (1822-7).
Amy are, in a sense, acting out the story of Sintram \(^{10}\) (the book which Newman would only read when he was quite alone.) Sintram, tempted by the world, the flesh and the devil, and burdened by his father’s crime, has to toil upward through the snows to reach Verena, his saintly mother. That is why the widowed Amy calls her child Verena. And Sintram itself makes mysterious reference to its frontispiece, a woodcut version of Dürer’s engraving *The Knight, Death and the Devil*, over which Morris and Burne-Jones, as students, had ‘pored for hours.’ \(^{11}\)

These potent images remained with Morris, even though in *The Earthly Paradise* he had unlocked half the world’s tale-board. In the second of his late romances, for example, *The Well at the World’s End* (1892-3), Sintram’s evil dwarf reappears. In 1872, the time of his greatest emotional test and stress, he set to work on this novel which is a temptation story, although the hero must proceed simply on his own resolution, without prayer, without divine grace, without the saving hand of the loved woman. And most unexpectedly, Morris returned from his dream-world, the ‘nameless cities in a distant sea’, to place the story in a solid English parsonage, or, to be more accurate, in Elm House, Walthamstow, the first home that he could remember.

Morris opens his tale with the sins of the father. One of those impulses which ‘sometimes touch dull, or dulled, nature’—a distinction which Morris was always careful to make—arouses the train of memory in Parson Risley. Eleanor’s letters follow. The parson’s sin is not that he was Eleanor’s lover. This is shown clearly enough later in Mrs Mason’s reproach: ‘Mr Risley, if my husband likes to make love to every girl in the village, he has a full right to it, if I let him’—a remark which blends well with the ‘sweet-smelling abundant garden’ and the fertile melon beds. Risley’s guilt then, is not a matter of sexuality but a denial of it, firstly through cold cowardice in rejecting a woman ‘like the women in poetry, such people as I had never expected to meet,’ and secondly through his vile temper. These two aspects of his nature are his legacy to his sons.

The Parsonage, as has been said, recalls the house in Walthamstow where Morris was born, and in the two boys, John and Arthur, he represents the opposing sides, as he understood them, of his own character. In some ways the brothers are alike or even identical. Both are romantically imaginative and given to dreaming their lives into ‘tales going on’, both are fond of fishing (not a trivial matter to Morris), both, of course, love Clara, both dislike their father and both resemble him. ‘As to the looks of the lads, by the way, it would rather have puzzled anyone who had seen them to say why the little doctor should have said that either was not like his father. Some strange undercurrent of thought must have drawn it out of him, for they were obviously both very much like him.’ John, however, is manly, open, friendly, bird-and-weather-noticing: Arthur is a book-worm, and sickly. (‘Love of ease, dreaminess, sloth, sloppy good-nature’, Morris said, ‘are what I chiefly accuse myself of.’) \(^{12}\) Arthur is ‘versed in archaeological lore’, while John is in touch with earth and water—‘with a great sigh of enjoyment he seemed to gather the bliss of memory of many and many a summer afternoon into this one’—and yet, perversely, Arthur is to be the farmer and John the businessman.

From the guilty father John inherits anger, Arthur cowardice. John’s loss of temper alarms Arthur; ‘Are you in a rage with me? Why, do you know, your voice got something like Father’s in a rage.’ But just as Parson Risley fails to answer Eleanor’s letter, so Arthur conceals John’s.

John’s struggle for self-control is marked by very small

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\(^{10}\) H. de la Motte Fouqué, *The Seasons: Four Romances from the German* (English trans. 1843). *Sintram and his Companions* is the winter romance.

\(^{11}\) Guy stands looking at the woodcut ‘as if it were a dream’, but Philip thinks it ‘hardly safe for so excitable a mind to dwell much on the world of fiction. *The Heir of Redclyffe*, chap. 5.

\(^{12}\) Mackail, 2, 158.
incidents. Resistance, as the Heir of Redclyffe recognises, must be from within. At the beginning of the day’s outing, when Clara greets Arthur tenderly, ‘they did not notice that John turned away to the horse’s head.’ At Ruddywell Court, when Arthur begins to do the talking and Clara is entranced, John ‘got rather silent’. On the return to the farm, when Clara kisses Arthur, John is left ‘whistling in sturdy resolution to keep his heart up, and rating himself for a feeling of discomfort and wrong.’ When she is poised for a few moments between the two of them in the rocking boat, but at length sits down by Arthur, so that both of them are facing the golden sunset to which John’s back is now turned, he pulls at the oars ‘sturdily’, exerting his strength for them in silence. These small everyday victories of the will lead up to a disastrous failure, the furious and destructive letter, and the despairing attempt to redeem it by a postscript—‘tell Clara I wrote kindly to you.’

Arthur, on the other hand, the ‘saint’ of the novel, is shown indulging himself in the sweetness of his dreams and the horror of his nightmares, and even when he becomes the centre of consciousness this self-indulgence is obvious. Clara’s love for him is founded, in the Chaucerian mode, on pity. When he reads John’s letter, he is afraid. He lies to Clara, who against her better judgement accepts the lie. Arthur is, in fact, almost without will-power, while John, in his blundering way understands keenly the importance of the will. ‘...nobody does anything,’ he tells Mrs Mason, ‘except because he likes it. I mean to say, even people who have given up most to please other people—but then, they’re all the better people, to be pleased by what’s good rather than by what is bad.’ And he has ‘a feeling not very pleasant of not being listened to.’

In 1872 Samuel Butler published Erewhon, Hardy, Under the Greenwood Tree, and George Eliot, Middlemarch. All of these seem very far removed from the unfinished tale-telling on blue paper. But when Morris told Louie Baldwin that he was impatient at having to deal with prose, he underrated the poetry of his story. This lies in the interrelationship of the three journeys—the passage of a summer’s day, the first walk upstream to the paradise of the farm, and the crucial turning-point of John’s adolescence. The June prologue of The Earthly Paradise opens, (also in the meadows of the Upper Thames)—

O June, O June, that we desired so.
Wilt thou not make us happy on this day?
Across the river thy soft breezes blow
Sweet with the scent of beanfields far away,
Above our heads rustle the aspens grey,
Calm is the sky with harmless clouds beset,
No thought of storm the morning vexes yet.

This is the exact poise of the novel, between past darkness, present happiness (John when he first goes to Leaser is ‘happier than he was last year’) and the coming unknown discontent. And so John, at seventeen, stands on the confines of his own home, with ‘the expectant longing for something sweet to come, heightened rather than chastened by the mingled fear of something as vague as the hope, that fills our hearts so full in us at whiles, killing all commonplace there, making us feel as though we were on the threshold of a new world, one step over which (if we could only make it) would put life within in our grasp. What is it? Some reflex of love and death going on throughout the world, suddenly touching those who are ignorant as yet of the one, and have not learned to believe in the other?’ Mackail quotes this passage in part, but dismisses the novel as ‘certainly the most singular of his writings’. Jane Morris’s comment on the Life, however, is interesting: ‘You see, Mackail is not an artist in feeling, and therefore cannot be sympathetic while writing the life of such a man.’

Penelope Fitzgerald

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NOTE


In this version I have corrected spelling, punctuation, omissions and repetitions, and regularised the names, ages and place names. I have also paragraphed the story, which has meant cutting out one or two of the mediaevalising ‘and so’s’, divided it into short chapters and given them chapter headings, but I have left the story itself without a title, as Morris did.

I have altered one word (on p.67) for consistency’s sake. Arthur cannot start rowing at this point without in every sense rocking the boat.

P.F.

CHAPTER I

THE VILLAGE OF ORMSLADE

Our story begins in a village not so very far from London, yet in a country out of the tracks of the busiest people, and at any rate, for whatsoever reason, with a remote and unchanging air about it, that put it beyond dullness, and made the commonplace people, who wore away their monotonous and thoughtless lives there seem to the dreamy wanderer through the streets as if they must deal with a different code of right and wrong, different ways of hope and fear and pleasure and pain than him.

It was an old village of middling size, with no squire’s house in it or near it, because a very great lord’s house some five miles off swallowed up all the land thereabout; the rectory, on the other hand, was rich, and the rector served for squire in this village of Ormslade, which stood nearly on the borders of rich grazing country and a strange open waste, sometimes wooded and sometimes bare, called Scolton Chase. Old as the village street was it looked still older, for, in that country of good building stone, people kept building decent houses with little mullioned windows a good hundred years later than in most parts of England, and the houses here were mostly built of this brown stone with slate roofs.

A queer little old red-brick house with stiff iron railings and two yards of garden along its front had a brass plate on the door and held the doctor; another red brick house, as small, and not lacking the railings and garden, but new, and with a blue slate roof, had a general shop below, and rooms where the curate lodged above; another, originally made of two of the ordinary houses knocked into one, had been taken possession of by a retired skipper, who had long spent his
days in building rockwork about the garden, fowl-houses and statues like castles in wood and plaster, and an arbour with a dome to it. The other houses were all of one type, only differing in being bigger or smaller, and in some of them having little gardens in front which most lacked, the little white-haired freckled children building their mud-pies right up against the brown stone walls of them; the village inn was not among the biggest; it stood back a little from the road, a big pollard elm in front of the door with a circular bench round its roots, and the sign thrust out from halfway up its bole, where one could still dimly see the two white harts and the bugle of the Scolton arms.

Near its end the long street was cut across by a road, the northern arm of which led up through rising ground to the Chase, the southern into the heart of the undulating hedged meadow land; just down this road lay the Rectory first, and then the church; the Rectory a handsome old stone house, with a garden whose long high wall ran alongside the road, and had a square turret-like pleasure arbour at the corner of it, a common fashion thereabouts. The church and churchyard ended the village on that side: and the ground sloped quickly away from them into fields, heavily hedged as aforesaid. Looking from the crazy paling of the churchyard one might see the rich countryside, not very far indeed, for it soon swelled up into a hedged slope again, a patchwork at some times of the year of ploughed field and grass mead, but this June tide all green, the just cleared hayfield showing bright among the beans and corn.

Between the first slope and the church had been a battle once; the whole countryside had been much fought over in the parliamentary wars; and in the time when Oxford was Charles’ headquarters, a regiment of Royalist horse surprised a band of Roundhead levies marching towards Reading, and beat them into rout after a fierce skirmish; many men fell in the village street itself, and in the parish register was record of eighteen troopers buried on the north side of the church. Nearer the river again the partisans of the luckless

Richard the Second had had one of their last scatterings, but the place of this was grown dim by this time; on the north side of the village history went back with a great leap, for on the borders of the Chase were three barrows, and the farmhouse they stood by had kept at any rate the popular idea of what they were, in the name of Danesho Hall.

The church itself was one of those architectural oddities of which there are so many in England—the chancel high-walled, rich in carving, a very lantern of traceried windows, with a low roof covered with lead; the nave barnlike with low aisle walls, and a high roof patched in all sorts of ways and ruinous enough; this latter again nearly swallowed up the low, square tower, in which there was scarcely a stone awry, and the tangled carving of whose Norman door was sharp and clear still. Inside, there were remnants of painted screen work struggling among rickety deal pews, the rich farmers’ (in default of squire’s) pews cushioned and red-curtained; this in the nave; then the now bare magnificence of the chancel beyond, so startling, so little cared for; the rich chantry by the side of it whose alabaster images had been scored all over with initials of Bumpkin’s sweethearts through generations of slumbrous sermons; and in the chancel itself, the wasted and broken remains of the necessities of the old worship—half the altar stones built into the pavement, figures in stained glass without heads or turned upside down, painted tiles in the pavement, a brass or two, a half dozen of hatchments on the walls; and amidst it all, blocking up a window bay, the tomb of a member of the rector’s family—(it was a family living)—who some fifty years ago had been a professéd dilettante and a travelled man, and had enlightened his native place with an Italian work of art in memory of his wife, and himself, when he should come to die. This was a marvel for miles around. There was Death and his dart in it, and the rector on his knees, and his wife of her own accord opening Death’s door in the towering marble rockwork, amidst which an angel held a scroll of Fiat Voluntas Tua and the date—simpering meantime on a stained glass bishop in the
opposite window, who, for all return, grinned queerly upon him from his aureoled head held in his hand.

The church was wretchedly kept enough amidst all these signs of former wealth, and was rather the place for an antiquary than for a seeker after the picturesque, and the village, again, full of architectural and historical interest as it was, would not have been called pretty or charming by people; and certainly I should not have called it cheerful, though there was nothing squalid about it. The general absence of gardens towards the street, the brown walls and brown road meeting, the brown-faced, heavily-walking men, the brown-faced anxious-looking women, the silence of the world (as it were) among the many noises of this summer afternoon, the landscape beyond so rich and so limited—no big hill, no wide river to lead one’s thoughts or hopes along. Was it a place to crush passion or to soothe it, or rather to nurse and foster it with brooding, with a sense of isolation and imprisonment?

CHAPTER II
THE RECTORY

I have told of the inside of the church; I will now do as much for the rectory. There was little modern or gay in it. Inside its high wall you came into a court with a drive round it, and a grass plot in the middle, the stable on one side and the kitchen garden on the other. There were roses enough, trained on the wall right up to the topmost windows—old-fashioned, these were, but not the mediaeval ones of the poorer houses. A stone porch led into a big white-panelled hall, with unclerical matters enough for decoration—reminiscences not only of the hunting-field, but of travelled members of the family, the principal one being a stuffed tiger in the corner, carefully dusted, but bald and shining in many places now. Its death was the handiwork of the late rector, once a sepoy captain, who laid aside his sword to be inducted into the family living. To him, also, were to be referred one or two Indian cabinets and a carved ivory junk in the low-ceilinged square drawing-room, and a carpet growing threadbare in the long dining-room, once a pleasant room enough, but dealt with unluckily by him of the monument, so that it is now drab and bare, with horsehair chairs and a stiff-legged sideboard with a sarcophagus cellaret underneath it, and with four vulgar portraits on the walls.

There stood the present rector now, leaning against the fireplace, though there was nothing in the grate but pink and white strips of paper, and a little, hardbitten, apple-cheeked old man, visibly a doctor, stood opposite to him with his hat in his hand, ready to go.

“Well,” said this latter, “he’ll do now. He’s beginning to eat like a trump.”

The rector grunted acquiescence, or pleasure—anything you will—and the doctor looked at him rather hard for a time, and then said:

“How different he is to you—in looks, I mean; not much like his mother either.”

The rector didn’t answer, and the doctor said again, after a pause:

“‘He’s a clever lad, your son. I hope he mayn’t turn out too clever, and give us the slip.’

‘Which do you mean?’ said the other, in a tone as if he repented his rudeness in not answering before, yet didn’t wish the talk to last.

‘Why, Arthur, of course; weren’t we talking of him? No, John is all right, though he’s clever enough too—but sharp, and full of sense. O, he’ll do! He’ll die a rich man, I should say.’

The rector smiled faintly, but said nothing, and the little doctor smiled too, as the pleasantest way of showing that he knew he was to go, and bustled out of the room, leaving the usual doctor’s injunctions behind him.
When he had shut the hall door upon him, the rector turned, sauntered slowly into the drawing-room and thence through an open glass door down a high flight of stone steps and out into the old-fashioned flower garden with its terrace and mulberry tree, and straight-cut flower borders, and the great row of full-foliaged elms that cut it off from the fields without. He stopped presently in the yellow light of the sinking sun, amid the sweet scent of the June flowers, and stared hard at the beauty before him, muttering: 'She was right that day; it was a dull place to bury oneself in.'

A pang compounded of the memory of hopes and fears, pleasures and pains of many past years shot through him as he spoke; one of those sparks of feeling which sometimes touch dull, or dulled, natures for a moment. If they could only catch at them and grasp in them the thread that would lead them out of the wretched maze! For the scent of the summer evening had somehow mingled with thoughts that the talk about his sons had begun in him, and for that moment he remembered what he might have been, rather than what he was. Old aspirations, old enthusiasms, the kindling of what he thought true love—and the slaking of it—it was too bitter to let him muse long. He turned back again into the house, feeling that less of a prison than the sweet summer garden that led into the fields, that led into other fields, that led he didn’t care where. He flung himself down into a chair and took a stupid book of travels in his hand and didn’t read it.

Sooth to say, he did not look like a man likely to have pleasant thoughts. He was a handsome man, too; liker to a captain of dragoons than a parson, one would have said; tall and well-knit, with black hair, black eyebrows over fierce-looking grey eyes, a straight, well-made nose, a well-fashioned mouth, and large chin and jaw; all the features cast in a find mould—yet all spoilt; his brow knit in an ugly half-scowl, his eyes with little expression in them but suppressed rage, his nose swelled and reddened, his mouth and chin grown coarse and lumpy—an unlovely face. People in general are not very quick to read character in a face, but the simplest people had found out that Parson Risley was of no use to them, in spite of his good looks. It must be said, too, that he had always (in any case where it was possible) acted with a reckless cruelty which in rougher times would perhaps have developed and won for him the reputation of an Ezzelin; and though he had tempered this from time to time by giving great gifts, yet this man of just forty, with what seemed an easy life to lead, dealing with no very important matters, without ambition, as it seemed, without serious opposition, without fear of having his position lessened, without anything much to grasp at, had managed to make himself both feared and hated in the limited society in which he moved.

Yes! even as the beautiful church was a grave and a ruin, the comely well-conditioned village a dull prison, the fair sweet-scented countryside a sort of dull enchanted valley to be escaped from, so was this handsome house and handsome man, its owner, the scene and actor of a tragedy without meaning and without ending, a curse without a name, a lurking misery that could not be met and grappled with, because its very existence had slain sight, and memory, and hope—that of pain itself, that quickens those whom God will not have die while they seem to live.

CHAPTER III
MRS RISLEY’S SECRET

Parson Risley had taken the living of Ormslade as a young man, newly married; his wife bore him two sons at Ormslade and died a year after the birth of the second, little regretted by him. She had been a pale, thin, querulous, flaxen-haired woman with blue eyes, whom he had never treated with even a show of respect. For this, as for everything else, she didn’t
seem to care greatly; yet when she was sickening for her last illness (she died in childbirth of her third child, who died with her) it is certain that she had in her mind a great longing to live till one of her sons grew up, that she might tell him a grievance of hers, and perhaps entrust a hatred to him; a hatred to his father.

Nobody was with her when she died except the hired nurses and the little village doctor. Of this latter she asked many questions as to ‘when he thought children grew old enough to understand matters of love’ and the like questions which he parried as well as he could, and in his turn asked leading questions, to see if she would not tell him the story, whatever it was. But she didn’t open herself to him, and died, and left all unsaid.

After all, it was no great thing that she had to tell; only how she had found three letters in an old pocket-book of her husband’s, hidden away among clothes. Here they all are, in order that we may make an end of the rector’s history at once, before we begin that of his sons, with whom our tale will chiefly have to do. They all dated from before his marriage; the first is in his own hand:

Hasted Hall

My love, my darling—

I could not do it yesterday, though I came up to London for nothing but to tell you. And yet I was going to do it, the last half hour we were together, though you were so happy and bright. Didn’t you notice how confused and stupid I was? But then, when you took me upstairs to see your newly-furnished bedroom, and were so pretty over talking about all the things, and showed me your dear clothes in the drawers, and I saw your little slippers lying about, and all the dear things that touch your body that I love so, then my heart failed me, as I thought I should never lie with you in the new pretty bed, and I came away with the kisses that I feel now, and leaving that lie behind me—for you know the kind of thing I have to say. Don’t curse me; live, and think of me, as I shall think of you.

I am to be married next Thursday. Who knows, we may meet again—my wife may die before we are either of us very old—you know, dear, that life won’t be very pleasant to me so don’t be too angry. At all events, be sure that I don’t love her. Ugh! I haven’t told you a word about it, and now, when all is over, why should I? Yet I must say this much, that I should have been clean ruined if I had not. Just a hint to my father a month ago about what might have happened to me made him quite mad, and you don’t know how I ran into debt —there, you forgive me, don’t you? as you have forgiven me so many times.

Ah, my God, if I were only back with you to forgive and be forgiven over and over again! How can I do it, how can I do it? To lie, and pretend to love this ugly stupid woman—hard-hearted, too she is—when I have had the cleverest and most beautiful woman in the world in my arms! Why was I born among rich people loving all sorts of comfort? One thing more—I shall go to my rectory as soon as I am married—my wife is rich—I can easily afford to send you £250 a year, so you will be richer now than you have been, I must try to think how you can write to me, for I must hear of you—for indeed and indeed I shall always love you, my precious, my darling, my own! O, if you could only kiss your poor James.

The second letter was this, in a large well-formed woman’s hand:

There is your letter back again. Take it, and the curse with it you pretend to dread. Yet if I curse you, I don’t curse God; I bless him rather for showing me what you are while I could yet escape from you—yes, even at the cost of all the pollution I have suffered from you, and the loss of the house (a dull loveless one, certainly) I left for you. Curse you and your money—the money for which you have sold me and yourself. I will have none of it. Who cares whether I die or not? And as for you—I know you now, my eyes are opened; all sorts of little things come back to me now, and I see what they mean. I stifled all doubts in me—all disgusts I hid to myself—I should soon have got to be as base as you. Ah, why am I writing to him and telling him of my feelings as if we were still—lovers? but note this: may your life grow duller and duller in the dull place you are going to bury yourself in—may you have no escape in the whole world from dullness—I say I know you, may all your grossnesses and falsenesses increase on you till everything hates you, till your face that I have kissed, and hung over, changes as your base soul works on it. My curse,
my curse, upon you—ah, why are words so weak?—I will not die, do you hear? I will live and curse you.

The third, with the date of the next post, was in the same hand:

O no, no, no, I didn’t mean it—and have you forgiven me? Indeed I will live, and wait, and hope, and try to keep young and—handsome for you. O, what a letter I could write! If you only knew how full my heart is of love for you; yes, I shall be happy with my love, whatever happens. I could tell you many things, only the same and horror of my last miserable words keeps returning. What did I do the night I sent the letter off?—last night it was. Let me tell you that, for I know you will be pleased to hear about me, and that you are forgiving me as you read this.

I wandered about the street after post time till it got dark, and then went right into town; it was such a fine bright evening, and I felt so strange, not at all like I expected to feel; I can’t tell you how, but not mad at all. So it got dark, and still I walked about, all through the City at first, and then I turned westward and got into the Strand, and people spoke to me as if I was—well, I shall never be that, never! I will live and be good till I can be with you again, my darling—and then I began to love you so again, and I cried, and put my veil down, and I stopped at the turning off to Waterloo Bridge and went half way down the street toward the bridge—and then there were so many people about; and I turned back and went straight to the Olympic; and I took a ticket for the stalls, quite sensibly, and went in and sat in one of the stalls close by the door, just where we sat last week, my darling—and Robson was acting in Medea still, though it was half over. Wasn’t it strange of me? And shall I tell you how I felt when the people laughed? Well, I thought quite distinctly: ‘Now I needn’t trouble to kill myself after all, because I must have died, and this is hell’—you have forgiven me, dear, haven’t you? that’s why I tell you all this—well, Medea came to an end, and then there was a farce, and people laughed more and more till we all got up, and I got my bonnet and walked straight home, and it was raining when I came to Waterloo Bridge, for I went that way home. There were few people about, but I walked straight home, and ran sometimes. I don’t know why, but I had a feeling on me of being too late.

Well, I got home, and I daresay you can guess—poor child!

who must be so unhappy yourself—as to how I felt when I left myself in. Anything one calls home is the worst place to be in when one is unhappy, isn’t it, dear? Yet I must have gone to sleep, for soon it was broad daylight when I looked round again; broad daylight outside, I mean, for the red curtains in the little back room that you don’t like were drawn, and made the front room dark and dismal—and I found myself wet, very stiff and tired, and footsore; and I crept upstairs to our—my bedroom; then I began to take off my clothes—dear, I can’t tell you any more what I did, but it was all very dreadful; but don’t grieve too much, for I am better now; because the sun rose after a bit, long before Martha was astir, and then I crept downstairs in those slippers, dear, and got the pen and ink, and began to write this; and I felt quite happy at once, but tired and ill.

Your letter was very kind, I know—so kind, my darling, that I know you have forgiven me—and you mustn’t think me light-headed for writing all this. I am quite sensible: and to show you that I will talk about money matters—of course I would take your money, dear, if only to be obliged to you, and to live by you still; but it would be so very awkward for you to send it. And you must remember my telling you of Mr Dixon, my godfather? and how, in spite of all, he wanted me to come and live with him; I shall do so soon now. He is one of the best of old men, who knows and cares so little about the ways of society that I think he looks upon marriage as quite as shocking as anything else. Think of me, dear, among the books and papers in his museum of a house on Stoke Newington Common though I don’t suppose you were ever near there. O darling, darling, think of me, and be as happy with your wife as you can be. Get children, and love them. Who knows what may happen? as you said in your letter.—O, my dear, it is almost the bitterest of all that I didn’t keep your dear, dear letter. Yet, even if you don’t write to me again, I shall know you have forgiven me. Yet your kisses, those kisses you spoke of are on my lips still—

Goodbye, goodbye—

Your Eleanor

These three letters, put in one envelope and addressed in Mrs Risley’s weak formal hand, were found under her pillow when she died. Her husband took them, glanced at them, and made a motion toward the fire, but didn’t throw them in.
One may hope from this that at least a little pain shot across him as he put them away in his bureau. But I think there was something of fear, too, and it must be said that he had never answered no. 3—that no. 2 had not astonished him exactly, but made him both uneasy and resentful; and that he rather looked at himself as an injured man, on that score, thenceforward.

CHAPTER IV

ELEANOR'S VISIT

About six weeks after Mrs Risley’s death, on a bright day in the middle of a wet February, when the floods were all out about the river, the parson came in from a solitary ride through the sopping country; and as he put his foot to the ground his servant said to him:

‘There’s a lady in the drawing-room waiting to see you, sir. She would wait, and said she had particular business.’

And he gave a card as he spoke, on which the rector read Miss Ullathorne with an unconsidered look, for the name was utterly unknown to him. Yet, as he crossed the hall, the conventional smile that he had drawn over his face faded away, as with a strange feeling, half of fear, half of pleasure, he opened the drawing-room door, expecting to see—he couldn’t tell why—the writer of those two letters. He went in, and, in spite of his expectation turned pale and trembled when he saw a tall woman standing with her back toward him looking out of the window, for he knew it was she without seeing her face. She turned round suddenly, and faced him with a half startled, half joyous cry, and held out both her hands to him.

She was a beautiful woman, black-haired and dark-eyed, with full lips and a gloriously proportioned figure; but grown thin, with a face worn and haggard, though flushed now as she came toward him with all her frame trembling, and her lips half-open, and her beautiful eyes eager and flashing. She stopped after the first step and hastily took off her gloves, and came forward and stretched out—more timidly it seemed now—one hand to him. I know not what change came over her face as their hands met, for he took hers as if he were afraid of it, and let it drop at once, and said in a short, dry way:

‘Sit down, Eleanor. I am glad to see you.’

But she still stood looking at him, and hadn’t spoken a word yet, and the change went on in her face all the while.

‘What can I do for you?’ he said after a while, in a voice that tried to be softer. She heaved a great sigh, and seemed as if she would speak, but said nothing; and presently, he himself sat down, and she moved her hand as if to touch him, but let it fall again.

‘Did you come from London today? How are you getting on now, Eleanor?’ He spoke hurriedly, almost as if in fear, this time.

She made no answer; again he said:

‘You are looking ill. You must be tired. Do sit down; let me get you a glass of wine.’

She turned from him, and stooped down over the glass case that held the ivory junk with its painted and gilded puppets. It was growing dusk now. He called out, with growing trouble in his voice:

‘Eleanor, is it really you?’

She turned, and answered nothing.

‘I will do anything I can for you.’ he said, ‘You have heard that my wife is dead.’

Not a word. He rose up from his chair in terror, for he really began to think she was a ghost. All the dreadful threatenings of the disbelieved or disregarded creed of which he was the priest flashed across his brain, mingled with naif or gross ghost stories read long ago in queer little penny garlands with woodcuts. He put his hand before his face for a moment, as if he thought she would be gone when he removed it; but she
was there, facing him at the other end of the room in the gathering dusk.

‘My God, Eleanor, speak to me!’ he said. ‘Or are you really a ghost?’

She understood his base fear, and a smile passed over her face, and she came towards him. He could see through the twilight how deadly pale she was. When she came close to him she spoke at last, but as if it were deadly pain to her. Yet even then her voice was sweet and pure, and he felt it so, and shuddered as he heard it.

‘No,’ she said, ‘I am alive, James. Don’t you wish I were dead?’

A sound like ‘no’ came from his lips, and he moved from her a little. She spoke again slowly, and as if it were with a great effort.

‘James,’ she said, ‘when I went to the other end of the room, I thought the door was there. I meant to go at once—but it is right in these matters to leave nothing untried, so I will speak. Yes, I will call you by the old name. Dear James, my darling and my love, do you know why I came here?’

Again he gasped out ‘no’.

‘O my love,’ she said, ‘listen yet, for the old days are not yet dead in my heart, and all may well go with us yet. I came here because I heard you were free. I came to be loved, James, to be called by the old pet names, to feel your arms round me and your lips on my face—who knows?—to be married to you, if you would; if you would not, to have hope which would have given me pleasure—ah, who knows what pleasure? James, what will you give me? A little will be enough.’

He stood listening in the gloom with knitted brows, and spoke at last, glad that he couldn’t see much of her face.

‘Why will you talk like this?’ he said. ‘I did what lots of young men do. I never said I would marry you then, even, did I?—and how can I marry you now? You talk about the old times. Do you suppose three years haven’t changed me more than they have changed you? I wish you had written and asked me to meet you somewhere, instead of coming here.’

‘I cursed you once,’ she said.

He broke in, turning fiercely on her.

‘Yes, you did. You needn’t remind me of it. Look here, Eleanor, the first words of that letter made an end of the whole thing. Even when we were getting on best I was afraid of you. I wondered whether you wouldn’t cut my throat some—no, listen. When I wrote that letter about my marriage to you I was thoroughly trembling with fear, and when your letter came next morning, and I saw you had sent mine back, I didn’t open it for a couple of hours. Now, you who are so deuced clever, tell me whether one loves people one is thoroughly afraid of? You said in your letter you had found me out. Well, I believe you had, just for that moment—found out, I believe, that I can’t bear such furious women. My God, I think it’s for me to curse you now. You have made me a bad man; you and your beauty that I was luckless enough to stumble over—and I used to think how clever you were, too, and how you were like the women in poetry, such people as I had never expected to meet. You have made me an unhappy man, Eleanor. I hate you, and I wish you were dead.’

He flung himself down into a chair as he spoke, and wept aloud. She stood there, quite silent, till his weeping had sunk to sobs. Then she said in a clear low voice:

‘I don’t curse you now. I don’t say farewell to you. I have nothing to wish for, to hope for, to think of. I am glad I can’t see your face.’

He heard the room door open and shut, and then the outer door; then he slowly rose, and went out into the hall, where the servant was lighting the lamp, and a flood of horror and disgust, as one damned on earth, swept over him as the light flashed at last over the passing things. The man stared at him, as well he might, as he went to the outer door and opened it.

The night had fallen now, but the thin crescent moon was high and bright. The boughs were tossing about in the wild wind, a great mass of rain-clouds was far down to leeward, and light ragged clouds were drifting across the remote
watery grey sky. He ran out bareheaded into the moonlight, but turned back when he had got his hand on the wicket latch, and walked slowly into the house.

If there is such a thing as punishment, the hours of that night were a heavy one to him. He came down the next morning haggard and aged; and in the course of the day sent for his curate, and told him that he was worn out with the terrible loss of his wife's death, and seeing to the future of his motherless children; and that he should go away for a little rest, and would write from the Continent. And so he set out on his travels, and took care not to look at a newspaper—an English one—for he went to Paris for some weeks.

He never heard what became of her, nor need we. She was young, and might live to love again, if she could tide over a few months till the shame of having loved something that didn't exist had worn off her; if she could once more get to see any order or hope in the world.

As for the rector, he came back in two months looking little changed enough. Yet there was a whisper that all wasn't right about him; and people said his temper wasn't bettered by his wife's death; and his presence seemed to cast a blight upon any company he happened upon, though he was a pleasant man enough as the world goes, especially if no-one contradicted him. And so the days wore away.

At one time the villagers began to talk about his marrying again—the sister of the only man with whom he could be said to be really intimate, a small squire some seven miles off, named Ralph Godby, who had been a college friend of his. He was a burly, handsome, goodnatured country gentleman, who found—deuce knows how—some pleasure in the society of this moody, irritable, overbearing man, who, for the rest, would have quarrelled with him for ever, but for the proverbial necessity of its taking two to do that deed. The rector used to go and stay for two or three days at a time, and these visits got very frequent about two years after the death of Mrs Risley: and in fact he would have made love to Miss Godby, a handsome, healthy, round-armed women of twenty-three, if she had let him. But she, as kind-hearted as her brother, with the grain more of insight which a woman of otherwise the same capacity as a man always has, could not abide the sour, morose parson, who generally had a bad word for everybody, and delighted in scattering to the winds any little bit of kindly romance which the simple-hearted woman might get up about people and things about her. So she carefully put on her worst dress when he came there, and covered up her arms and neck at dinner, like a Quakeress (though, to do her justice, she was generally not sorry to let people admire them); never would ride when he was there; got tired of her archery, and laid aside her sketching; and, in short, showed her wholesome hatred of him in the simplest and most straightforward ways; so the parson got more and moreoverbearing and quarrelsome with these friends of his, till at last his visits grew sparser and sparser, and the gossips of the countryside said—which was not true—that he had made an offer, and been refused.

CHAPTER V

THE TWO LADS

Meantime, his children were growing up and had everybody's good word, yet but little notice from their father. Now and then, when they got to be boys instead of children, they went to stay with Mr Godby, where Miss Edith spoilt them terribly, and where they picked up materials for many a future dream in the library, and on the lake in the park; and then they spent a day at one or two of the farmers' houses in the parish—of one of which, more anon; but this was all the change they had, except their school, to which they went rather late, and which was no further than Hamington, a country town ten miles from Ormslade.
Their father would often go up to London, and spend a month at a time there, and would go abroad for two or three weeks, not heeding whether it was their holidays or not, and indeed thinking next to nothing of them. They, for their part, were not at all glad when he came home, both because their having the run of the whole house, and the constant society of the footman, gardener, and cook was very delightful, and also because their father, whom they always feared, was particularly morose and ill-tempered when he came back from his absences.

As they grew up they often enough heard their father spoken of in a mysterious, half-hushed way, and themselves with a condescending pity, which, though it troubled them, didn’t puzzle them for long; for they soon divined what sort of a man their father was, and with no little shame shared, perforce, the general dislike of him, or hatred rather call it.

So, passing over a good many years, let us come back to the day we began with, when John, the elder, was seventeen, and Arthur, the younger, sixteen years old.

Passing up the wide carved staircase, we come, at the top of the house, to a large, low-ceiled room, with three windows at one end overlooking the kitchen garden, though that was pretty much hidden now by the thick-leaved boughs of the great limes that brushed against the open windows, and from which delicious scent and sound came that evening. The room was white-panelled, like the greater part of the house, with three or four of the queerest and most old-world pictures hung on its walls—an old sampler, and a picture, worked in brown worsted, of Abraham and Isaac, among them; and besides these, pictures from illustrated papers pasted up here and there, a stuffed polecat with a partridge in its mouth, arranged on the mantelpiece without the expense of a glass case (which had, however, been granted to the remains of a great, big-bellied, crooked-looking roach, such a recent trophy that he had not turned brown yet) and, to crown all, the lads’ library in hanging shelves at one end of the room, and a goodish collection of tools and fishing-rods, by no means neatly disposed.

On a little deal table in the middle of the room was a huge bunch of summer flowers stuffed into a great brown jug, and then there were two white-hung beds, in one of which lay the sick lad, Arthur, just turning the corner of a low fever; by whom John sat, reading to him out of a new green-coated book—(Lane’s Arabian Nights, to wit)—in that queer sort of way boys read sometimes when they cannot read quite quick enough for their eyes or their eagerness over the story. He stopped to laugh sometimes too, as well he might, for it was the Tale of Maroof he was reading, but came to an end at last when the sick lad fell back on his pillows, and said:

‘Thanks, old chap. What a jolly story—what asses they were to leave it out of the old book! Let’s have a look at it, will you?’

He turned over the book, the other leaning over him to look at the pictures, till his hand fell, and he said:

‘Well, it was kind of father to get it me, wasn’t it?’

‘Yes,’ said John shortly, turning away, and fidgetting about among an open drawer of fishing-tackle.

‘I think he’s a generous man, and all that sort of thing,’ said Arthur. ‘I’m bound to say he’s generous with his money.’

John said nothing. After a pause Arthur said:

‘Has he said anything more about your going to Oxford since that day? You’re such a close fellow, I know you wouldn’t have told me if there had been a row, especially while I was ill.’

‘O, there was no row,’ said John. ‘He did speak to me yesterday week, and so I said the same thing over again—that I had heard him grumble at being a clergyman, and that I didn’t want to be one any more than him. I was going to say that I thought it wrong, if a fellow didn’t very much wish it, but I knew he would laugh at me so I held my tongue.’

‘Well, what did he say?’ said the other.

‘I don’t think he cared a bit. He said, well, that he wasn’t
rich enough to keep me idle, and that if I wasn’t going to take the living after him I must turn to at something next year, and mustn’t be too particular either. I said I was quite ready whenever he wished it, and there was an end of the talk. I should think he would ask you, sooner or later, old fellow.’

‘Well, I won’t,’ said Arthur emphatically. ‘Just think, I should have to be his curate! I know what I should like to be—a farmer, but not about here. I declare, last holidays I felt quite queer when we came into the George at Hamington, and there were some farmers we didn’t know, for fear they should begin to talk about father. And I say, I haven’t told you this, but when I was dreaming last week, when I was about at my worst, I kept dreaming about him—don’t you say a word about it, though.’

‘I?’ said John. ‘That’s a likely joke!’

‘Well, look here, I dreamed he asked me to come out for a ride—here, you know—and just as I got on the pony he groaned dreadfully. Then we rode away beastly fast, but though we rode out of our own gate, I didn’t know the place a bit. But presently I felt dreadfully afraid, and turned round to look at him, and his face was all aflame, I mean as if it were made of glass with fire behind it, and when I looked at him he screamed quite loud. So I tried to get away from him, and whipped the pony, and somehow I got ahead of him, and I went so fast, and knew he was behind me all the time, though I didn’t hear any noise behind me, and didn’t feel as if I were galloping, but going on just as I were a puppet pushed along a slide. And so I went till I was in a dark lane with trees on either side, and it seemed like twilight, and there was an opening ahead, and the sky showed, as if there were an open heath there, and I wanted most dreadfully to get there, and then there was a noise like when one swings round a flat piece of wood with a hole in it—do you remember? But presently I did get out onto this open place, and it was so still, and yet things seemed to be going round and I was on foot again, and quite alone. And so I walked on and on, till I got to where there was a canal on each side of a paved road, and the water in the canal was quite black, and seemed as if were boiling, though there was no steam coming from it. And then all at once I saw a man sitting in the middle of the road with his hands before his face, and got most horribly afraid at that, but I couldn’t help going on till I stood over him, and then I saw by the clothes that it was father.

I touched him, and he didn’t move—and then I touched him again, and felt him tremble, and then just as I was going away he jumped up—and just think! he was a skeleton, all but his face, which was his sure enough, and all like a glass mask with fire behind it. And he opened his mouth, and made the most horrible noise, that kept growing louder and louder. And I couldn’t run away, and—’

‘I say, Arthur, don’t go on with that,’ said John. ‘You’ll make yourself ill again. I wish the deuce we hadn’t got onto this talk, tell me another time—shan’t I read you another story?’

‘No, thankyou,’ said Arthur, ‘I am tired. Besides, it’s getting dusk, and you had better go and look after your worms.’

‘I say, old chap,’ said John, with rather an effort, ‘if you wish it a bit, I won’t go to-morrow—I’ll stay and read to you.’

‘No,’ he said. ‘You go. Mrs Hadow will sit with me, and tell me stories about the farmers hereabout, and the great people of Scolton Manor. Besides, I want you to go and tell me how Clara is, and what she’s doing.’

‘Very well, then,’ said John. ‘Goodbye for the present.’ And out he went, and not too slowly either; for he certainly looked forward to his to-morrow’s fishing, as well he might in that beautiful June weather, having been a good deal shut up with the sick lad.

As to the looks of the lads, by the way, it would rather have puzzled anyone who had seen them to say why the little doctor should have said that either of them was not like his father. Some strange undercurrent of thought must have drawn it out of him, for they were obviously both very much like him, and were handsome and well-grown. The sick boy,
as he lay white-cheeked in his bed, had certainly a great delicacy of feature that had no counterpart in his father’s coarsened face, while John was light-haired, burnt brown and freckled with the June tide, with less serious and merrier eyes than his brother’s, even had the latter been well; a bigger mouth, and fuller lips, and more massive jaw and chin, and was, in the lower part of his face, very like his father; just as Arthur was, in his black hair, and forehead, and nose, though his eyes—big, like his father’s, and of the same colour—had a faraway and dreamy look; instead of a fierce and restless one.

So John ran quickly downstairs and out into the garden, where the sun was already set, and a cloudless golden sky was burning through the elms at the bottom of the garden.

CHAPTER VI

IN THE GARDEN—OLD JACK’S STORY

John ran into the tool-house and took up a garden fork, preparatory to going off to the melon-ground where the worm populated old dung-heaps were. For some strange reason, that moment and the half-hour were one of the unforgotten times of his life; and in after days he could never smell the mixed scent of a tool-house, with its bast mats and earthy roots and herbs, in a hot summer evening, without that evening, with every word spoken and gesture made, coming up clear into his memory. It struck on him as he came out of the tool-house again into the glow of the evening, and all his boyish visions of the great water-lily leaves spreading over the perch holes, vanished and left him with that vague feeling of disappointment in life past, yet hope of life to come, the expectant longing for something sweet to come, heightened rather than chastened by the mingled fear of something as vague as the hope, that fills our hearts so full in us at times, killing all commonplace there, making us feel as though we were on the threshold of a new world, one step over which (if we could only make it) would put life within our grasp. What is it? Some reflex of love and death going on throughout the world, suddenly touching those who are ignorant as yet of the one, and have not learned to believe in the other?

He passed slowly over the grass, growing dewy now, and still moving mechanically towards the melon ground entered a walk that led to the walled kitchen garden, and which, being covered over with thick clipped yew trees, was very nearly dark now. Just as he was reaching out his hand to the latch of the door it opened suddenly, and he started back with a queer sound of terror one would not have expected to come from the strong, healthy-looking youth. It was his father, who stopped a moment, startled too, it seemed, and looked at him, and then walked on again swiftly.

John passed on into the kitchen garden with his heart still beating violently, and a sense of shame upon him. It was much too dark for him to see his father’s face in that moment; but he had fancied a look of disgust, and almost hatred, in it.

Anyhow, it was a relief to come into the light that yet was over the sweet-smelling abundant garden, and strip the first white currant bough of its fruit; more of a relief still to hear a heavy tread close before him, mingled with the squeak of a pair of stiff corduroy breeches, and presently he met, with a smiling face, the undergardener and cow-boy—so-called, for he was near sixty years old at least.

‘Going after brandlings, Master John?’ said he. ‘I’ve got you a lot well scoured, because I guessed you’d be too busy with Master Arthur, and Mrs Hadow told me you’d be going fishing about as now.’

Therewith he put the bait-box in John’s hand, and they both walked back together, the breeches performing with great regularity, till the boy said:

‘Shall you be going to Leaser Farm on the way, Master John?’
Perhaps, Jack,' said he, conscious that he was blushing in the dusk.

'Give my duty to the old missus if you do, and little Miss. I'm told she asked you why I didn't come up and see her haytime, and that. She's a kind woman, is Mrs Mason. Lord, that was a pleasant house to be at; sometimes I wish to God I hadn't married; but what Master's a good master too,' he added hastily, and then, after a pause, a little awkwardly perhaps:

'It's a year since I saw Miss Clara.'

'So you told me yesterday, Jack,' said the lad.

'Who do you think will marry her, sir?'

'Bless us, Jack, what a queer question to ask me!'

'Well, it'll break her mother's heart if anything ill comes to her. And they're a drowsy lot hereabout—drink and sleep and dodder about. I can't think anybody about here's good enough for her.'

'Ha, I know you come from Wiltshire, Jack, and despise us butter-makers, eh? Well, Clara shall go on a journey to your chalky Paradise, and bring away a moonraker.'

'I don't know what you mean, Master John,' said the cow-boy with a grin. 'But Miss Clara's father was as learned as a parson, and almost as sour, begging your pardon, sir.'

'How did he get on with father, Jack?'

'Well,' said the cow-boy, 'it ain't exactly the sort of thing to talk about to you; but I think if Mr Mason hadn't died of cholera, one or other of them must have busted; they couldn't live together in a twenty mile ring—I'm a-going down towards the cowhouse, Master John—they did hate each other so. I daresay you've heard tell that Mr Mason wasn't right about his religion—not exactly a Dissenter, you know, but thought there was no Bible, nor miracles, nor nothing; and so he didn't come to church, and you know I daresay somehow that put the parson's back up, though—no offence, Master John—but folk say the parson would be best pleased if the church were to walk off to London, so that nobody mightn't come to it. Well, there was a many things went on atwixt and atween—amongst others, a row about your going there, you and Master Arthur, when you was little, and the nurse sent away for taking you there, and she believed to be a little drunk, Master John. And that was about the time I came to your honoured father. And I'll tell you no lies, but I must say that I think it was because I was under a cloud up at Leaser that parson took me in—for that damned thief Jenkins, a porridge-faced Welshman, he said I took the oats. A man with a wife and family to say that! That was just before I was married, sir, and I often wish I'd got his head under my spade, I do.

Well, I shouldn't tell you, only you must remember that your father was as soured as might be, because Mr Mason had given you and Master Arthur half-a-crown apiece that day.'

'Yes, I remember, Jack,' said the lad, 'though I was only about nine then. It was a big tip for a farmer to give such a little chap.'

'Ah, he was always a liberal man, was Mr Mason. Well, you know I was with your father then, sir, and he came down the peach-walk of a hot day of June, swearing more than I thought to hear a parson swear. And if I don't lie, he said as he passed by me: 'I'll find something for him to do with his half-crowns.' And then—you know, you're rather young to know about things like that—but Kitty Churchill, at the post-office, she fathered her child at Mr Mason, and my wife's sister, who was still at Leaser, she said there was a fine row there. Anyhow, next day down comes Mrs Mason to the rectory, and she goes and gives your father a bit of her mind—for I'll tell you right out, Master John, it was in everybody's mouth that the parson had set Miss Kitty on to that business. Well, you know the housemaid, she told my wife that she listened at the door, and Mrs Mason, she was proud and stiff, and talked beautiful, and your father roared, and made a noise—and this is what she heard her say: 'Mr Risley, if my husband likes to make love to every girl in the village, he has a full right to it, if I let him. And let me tell you,'
"that if he was to do what he would be hanged for, he would be a better man than you, who haven't the spirit to do either right or wrong." She's a good woman, she is; and if I had a taken the oats, I'd work on anything short of a treadmill, to pay her back. But I ask your pardon, Master John, I haven't got anything to say against your father. Beside, you'll have heard this often enough before.

"Well, some of it, perhaps, Jack, but not in quite the same way. I say, I must get back, it's getting quite dark. It's going to be fine to-morrow, isn't it?"

"Why, you won't burst yourself eating all you catch, Master John. The water's as low as low."

"Never mind, Jack," he said. "I'll give you everything I catch above two pounds. Just take the fork home, will you."

And he went off whistling from the garden into the field from which they had come, just as the low moon was yellowing through the windless summer night, in which the nightingales were beginning to sing now. One may easily imagine that his nervous, sentimental mood had vanished before the gardener's talk.

Yet so it was, that it didn't pain him much to hear his father spoken of so. At any rate, that thought wasn't the uppermost in his mind, as he startled the blackbirds out of their roosts in the thick leaves. Nay, whatever there was of sordid about the story had slipped off him, and left a pleasant feeling of life active and full of incidents, and of change going on about him, with I know not what of sweeter, of sweetest, lurking behind it all; and the little pleasures lying ready to his hand, they also were so keenly felt, so full of their own beauty; how happy he was, as he strode out into the light that the just lit-up house threw over the dewy lawn! Strong, and happy, and full of life—what should touch him, or harm him?

CHAPTER VII
FATHER AND SON

He ran straight upstairs to his brother's room when he got in, and found him alone, with the candles just lighted, and looking so particularly happy that he said:

'Hello, Arthur, what's happened, old fellow? How pleased you look!'

'Why, I was just going to say the same thing to you,' he said. 'But I say, father's just been up, and he said as I was getting on all right, and he was out of anxiety about me, he was going up to town, and he thought he shouldn't be back till the holidays were over, and that he would come and see us at Hamington, and tip us. And then he left £5 for the two of us. And so he's gone.' Then presently he said:

'I wonder what people would say if they heard us two talking about Father? For after all, you know, he isn't unkind to us.'

'I don't care,' quothe John. 'But I know we're right, when all's said. Once for all, I will have no more to do with him than I can help. He don't care a bit for us—Mrs Hadow is a good deal more like our mother, than he is our father. I am a precious deal more pleased to see Mrs Hadow and little Dr Stoneman when I come home; meantime when we sit with him he has nothing to say to us except 'Don't do that'—and hang it all, I think we're old enough to be talked to now. And do you know, old chap, when I hear him preaching in church with that beastly put-on voice, I feel, not ashamed of myself— for I don't feel as if I belonged to him at all—but in such a rage. Blast his sermons.'

'I say, John,' said Arthur, raising himself a little. 'What's the matter now? Are you in a rage with me? Why, do you know, your voice got something like Father's in a rage.'

'O, I didn't mean anything,' he said. 'Only sometimes I feel a little cooped-up here. We see nobody, and go nowhere
like other boys do. I intend next summer to ask him let you
and I go somewhere—to the Continent, or somewhere. I
don’t think he’d say no.’

‘How queer!’ said Arthur. ‘That was just what I was
thinking of when you came in, and how jolly it would be!
But, I say, I shall be on my legs again in a week. Couldn’t you
knock up going to some place or other with Clara to
orrow? For of course you’ll go and see her?’

‘Well, queer again,’ said John, ‘for I was thinking of that.’
Therewith he began to busy himself with the fishing-tackle,
and presently the two were deep in talk about bait, and fish,
and chances had and lost, in this, that, and the other water.
For all the countryside was good for boys’ fishing, a lazy little
stream that ran into the river threading big ponds here and
there, especially in one place, where a great old house had
stood, long ago pulled down except for its flowery iron gates.

At last the housekeeper came in and drove John out on
behalf of the sick boy, who, indeed, soon fell asleep. John
grew down to supper with his father, who looked particularly
grim, John thought, and was, if possible, even shorter in his
words than usual. Yet as the lad looked furtively at him from
time to time, he began to think that his father must have been
weeping lately, and surprised a strange feeling in his own
heart at the discovery, about which he could only tell that it
was painful, and yet something like a pleasure. But if he could
have known it, he would have found surprise and pity there,
tempering what was really hatred, yet mixed with a kind of
rage, and the cruelty of young and happy people against suf-
fering they cannot understand.

His father seemed to feel his eyes upon him, for presently
he said impatiently:

‘Jack, just put out one of those candles. I can’t stand the
light—I’ve got a cold, I think. Fancy having a cold in the
middle of summer!’

So the evening passed. Father and son read at first. But
presently the rector got up and walked out of the room, and
John could hear him pacing the drawing-room up and down;

and with a vague fear that something bad was brewing, let his
eyes wander from his book, and his mind stray into many
strange ways of thought, and was so deep in them that he
started when his father came into the room again, though he
only sat down and took up his book again. However, he had
something to say, and said it presently, though it was nothing
very terrible.

‘Jack!’

‘Yes, father.

‘Let’s see—how old are you?’

‘Seventeen last February, father.’

‘Well, you see, next year you might have gone to Oxford.
But as you won’t, why, you’re quite old enough to turn to
business; so look here, I have got two openings for you; you
can take which you please of them. One is to go to my brother’s
solicitor, Mr. Jackson, and he will give you his hand, and he will shoc
you, and you will be a partner if you work one of these days.
The other is a place in a Russian merchant’s house—Woolaston
& Co. Mr. Godby talks to me about it the other day, and
it’s a good enough opening for a young fellow like you. Now,
that’s all I’ve got to offer you. There isn’t a third course for
you, except to loaf about on a small allowance, which, in any
case, I shall give you; but even that I won’t say no to, as far as
giving you house rent goes. But I don’t think you would like
it, and I am sure I shouldn’t. So I give you till I see you again
some two months hence, to consider.’

‘Thanks, father,’ said John. ‘It’s very kind of you.’ And
he spoke as if he really thought it so; for there was something
either about his father’s tone, or else it came from thoughts
in his own heart, that rather softened him; and he began to
build up a romance for his father in his own mind, partly a
history of what he imagined might have been, and partly of
what he imagined might be—he himself playing a large part
in this latter for sentiment and greatheartedness.

His father said nothing for a while, and they both seemed
to be at their books again. But after a while he looked up, and
said:
‘Jack, don’t you be too close friends with that woman at Leaser Farm and her brat. They will serve you a turn one of these days... don’t you hear me, eh?’

For John sat now with his dream gone, and with something like a scowl mingling with the flush on his face.

Both sat silent a while, till the rector said:

‘Well, a nod’s as good as a wink to a blind horse, and I know that whatever I do or say, you will be always over there when I’m gone. How many pretty stories of me did you hear last time you saw the widow Mason?’

‘O, father,’ said Jack. ‘You don’t suppose they talk to me about things about you?’ And he got very confused at the emphasis he had laid on the me.

Risley laughed grimly, and said:

‘They’d have given people something to talk about, I dare say, if they’d been as unhappy as I’ve been. Children, and happy people, oughtn’t to be so ready with their hard words and thoughts about those who are down, and don’t know where to turn for something pleasant to think of... Why, what’s the matter with me tonight—as if you cared whether I live or die—or anybody!’ he said with a groan, as he got up and strode out of the room, leaving John with a wretched feeling of having been unjust upon him, and a strange interest growing up in him, and mingling with the real disgust he had of his father.

The rector didn’t come back, and after John had sat a while trying in vain to arrange the confused whirl of thought that swept through his head, he stole up to his room in a guilty manner; hoping principally, it must be confessed, that he should not think of his father the next day, and spoil thereby the pleasure of more than one kind he was looking forward to.

CHAPTER VIII
UP THE STREAM

Next day, just as the fresh June morning was getting hot, John was striding fishing rod in hand and basket on shoulder, down the road past the church which ran between the Battle Meads (as they were called, in memory of the old fight). Till he had got past the church, he felt as if somebody would call him back at the last moment, and he had walked so fast that he was flushed hot enough now. He slackened his pace presently, and wiped his streaming face, laughing the while as the thought aforesaid came to him.

No shadow of last night’s fears and doubts was on his face now, and he looked, and was, as happy a fellow as might be found within the narrow seas. Both the lads, and he especially, would have been called very childish, at most times, by superficial observers, from the agonies with which they caught at little pleasures, their shyness, and (when they were talking to strangers) this clumsiness of expression, and the care with which they avoided any words or talk that expressed strong feeling of any kind. And certainly John was more excited with his day’s fishing than one would have expected a big fellow of seventeen to be.

He soon gained the top of the first slope, and from the brow of it he could see the line of alders that indicated the windings of the stream, through a narrow valley, soon bounded again by another cultivated slope. He stopped presently at an old stone bridge, and began fitting his rod together there, and disposing of his tackle on the parapet. By the side of the bridge was a stile that led down to the footpath, which followed the river for some way through the fat green meadows.

The stream itself was a sluggish one, with steepish clay banks, and much overhung with alders and maple; not very inviting, certainly, but it had the attraction for our brothers
that running water always has for boys, and John stay no time! Well, goodbye again—I wish I were going with you.
looking with real affection over the moss-grown parapet I say: does Miss Clara treat you still as little boys and kiss
Presently, as he stood thus, there came a sound of wheels you, eh?”
and turning round he saw Dr Stoneman’s gig and old whin...: The wheels drowned his cackling laughter as he spoke, so
more come pounding along. The doctor pulled up suddenly. John had his scarlet blush all to himself. To say the truth, he
would have blushed nearly as much if the doctor had only
mentioned Clara’s name; nay, he would have blushed at the
mention of almost any lady between the ages of twelve and
sixty, if she were anything short of being his aunt, for he was
of that age. However, he was not so ill pleased by the doctor’s
joke as he went down the footpath, and throwing his line into
half past twelve. How’s your father this morning? He didn’t the water, he began to fish assiduously enough; and, as luck
look very well—eh, grinning, you dog!” (there was not I would have it, he falsified both the doctor’s and the
ghost of a smile on John’s face) ‘You think I want to make
cow-boy’s prophecy by taking a fair number of fish.

So the day wore on, and, cloudless still, began to gather
that purple haze about the horizon which makes the summer
noon so threatening. John seemed to get more restless, and
passed quickly now from pool to pool; and at last, when it was
nearly half past twelve, deliberately put up his rod, and
walked down the river bank for some furlongs or so till he
met the meadow-path again.

Just here the whole landscape got freer and more cheerful;
the southern slope was a good deal drawn back from the
stream now, and left wide flat meads on that side, with a
fringe of hedgerow along the hills’ foot. The stream itself
grew shallow, and ran over gravel, or pushed its way through
beds of blue-flowered mouse-ear and horsemint, and was
bordered by willows instead of the harsh dark alders that
hung over its black pools higher up. The meadows were full
of great sleek-skinned cows who grazed quietly, or sat under
the big trees scattered here and there about them. John went
along rather fast, as though he had to get to some place by a
known time, but singing and happy.

He met a little brown-faced girl with a basket and a solemn,
stumped-tailed mongrel of a dog. The girl bobbed to the
parson’s son, and the indiscriminating dog growled at him. Then,
as he passed a muddy shallow of the stream in which the heifers

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were standing and swinging their tails in a sort of cadence, he met a white-haired lad who pulled his forelock to him. He stopped when the lad had passed, with that puzzled sense of ‘it’s all happened before’, till with a great sigh of enjoyment he seemed to gather the bliss of memory of many and many a summer afternoon into this one; and wondering deliciously why he was so happy, he walked on again as swiftly as before.

Presently he came to a treeless and shadowless bight of the stream, that ran on now straight towards a grey old bridge some fifty yards ahead, and the wide expanse of the beautiful meadow was broken by a line of thick quick-set hedge that guarded a road a little raised above the fields, in a way that told of winter floods; but now, without looking, as if by instinct, his feet turned from the river onto a footpath that cut off the corner, to a big homestead lying at the foot of the slopes, which, grass-clad and rich with elm trees, again drew nearer to the river. The grey roofs showed among plenteous lime trees populous with rooks, and a row of huge walnut trees walked, as it were, up the hill from beside the farm-yard gate. The honeyed scent of the limes floated across the mead to him as he walked on eagerly through the blazing sun, and the pleasant sounds of the farm came with it, and brought him a feeling of rest and coolness to come.

The farm-men were just slowly going off to their work again as he came up to the gate. He stopped amongst them, and spoke a few words to a tall young fellow there, a fishing and shooting companion of a good many years, and then watched them walking slowly off between the walnut trees to the upland fields, lingering again over his happiness before he went into the yard.

Indeed, it was a place, on that bright day, to exhilarate an older and more worn heart than his—or the heart of a stranger, either. For though there was nothing marked, or impressive, about the landscape, any more than at Ormslade, yet just as an atmosphere of dullness and hopelessness hung about that village, so about this was one of quietness and rest—the rest not of death, but of happy life.

Almost all the farm buildings were old, but quite trim, and in good order; the one or two where the stone was whiter were built much like the others. A paved footway led up to the house, and gave one the idea of the farmer and his family, come home from church to the Sunday dinner. The house itself was old—not later than Charles I’s time, in fact, for there was 1639, carved with the initials, L.S., above the lintel of the doorway; and in appearance it was older still, with its three little gabled roofs running into the larger main roof, the gables themselves being finished with a stone ball, threaded on an iron spike. The gable-end of the said main roof was windowless, and covered all over with a great pear tree; and at the corner of the wall furthest from where John stood was an old yew tree, nearly blocking up the narrow space between the house and the farmyard wall.

As John was just pushing the gate, a peacock suddenly swept up from inside the yew tree, and perching on the coping sent forth his harsh cry, that rang with no unpleasant sound, somehow, from out of that dark corner of the sunny place. John stopped a moment again to look at him, but presently he swept down into the field outside, and John heard light footsteps coming along the wall side. He swung the gate open quickly and passed in: coming down along the way that led to the front of the house was a tall girl clad in a light dress, bare-headed, and holding a letter in her hand.

CHAPTER IX
THE ALOE BLOSSOMS

She gave a little start, and a pleased cry, when she saw his smiling face coming towards her; and running towards him she shifted her letter into her left hand, caught his right hand in hers, and kissed his cheek quite frankly, and without
noticing apparently that it was scarlet with blushing—for in fact the youth was thinking of what Stoneman had said to him, and had been wondering all the way up from the river whether she would kiss him or not, and whether he would manage to ask her to if she didn’t; for he hadn’t seen her since the Christmas holidays, owing to Arthur’s illness, and he thought that he was really growing up to be very manly.

‘I’m so glad to see you, after all this long time. Why, I wonder when you will have done growing, John.’

He laughed frankly too, and said:

‘O, I’ve done now—I’m a man, and am going into business soon; and you’re a woman, and haven’t grown a bit this last year, I think, though you’re a year younger than me. But where were you going without your bonnet in this hot sun?’

‘Why,’ she said, ‘I wrote a letter to Arthur this morning, and I had just come out to find the boy and send him off with it.’ And she held the letter out. It was fat, and puffy.

‘What have you got inside?’ he said.

‘Why, our big aloe has blossomed this year, and I was sending him some blossoms, because you know they say they only blossom once in a hundred years, and I thought he should have something to remember his being ill this year. Dr Stoneman saw Mother yesterday, and so I know he’s better. I’m so glad.’

He held the letter out to her again to take, but she said:

‘No, won’t you take it home to him, the poor lad.’

As he did so, putting his hand back, she touched it with hers; and he thought what a difference the summer had made, for he wasn’t anything like as happy the last time he saw her, which was on a cold, rainy day at the beginning of February.

They turned now, and went side by side toward the door of the house that led into the farmhouse, she with her eyes cast down and her brow a little knitted, as though she were thinking of something hard to grasp; he with his eyes wandering from one part of her to another, and wishing—if it might be—that he could see her all at once; and indeed, it was a good wish, for if he were to live to see the aloe blossom again he would not see so good a sight.

She had really stopped growing some months ago, and was slim, and thin, though without a suspicion of ill-health about her. She was a little above the middle height of women, well-built, and with a certain massiveness about the figure, in spite of her present thinness. Her hands were long-nailed and delicate in make, but not very small, and they were browned with the sun, too, with even a little freckle here and there on them; her face, like her figure, had something strong and massive amidst its delicacy—somewhat sunburnt, too, like her hands, and beautifully clear of skin, but without much red in her cheeks; dark brown, abundant, silky hair; and a firm, clear-cut, somewhat square jaw and round, well-developed chin; lips a little over-thin, a little too firmly closed together for her youth and happiness; a straight nose with wide nostrils, and perfectly-made, but somewhat short; rather high cheekbones that gave again too much of a plaintive look to the cheeks, a wide forehead, and a beautifully-shaped head above it; and, to light all this up, large grey eyes set wide apart, fringed with dark lashes.

So capable were her eyes of all shades of expression, that they were liable from their expressiveness to be misread, so sympathetic to the soul that showed through them, that in times of strong emotion, before the lips had begun to tremble, the whole change would have come over the eyes. Amidst apparent coldness they would be tender—o, how tender!—with love; amid apparent patience they would burn with passion; amid apparent cheerfulness they would be dull and glassy with anguish. No lie or pretense could ever come near them. They were the index of the love and greatness of heart that wielded the strong will in her, which, in its turn, wrought on those firm lips of hers that serious brow which gave her the air of one who never made a mistake, a look which, without the sanctification of the eyes, might perhaps have given an expression of sourness and narrowness to her face.
I have told of what she was like here, and it is true that even at this time all this was in her face, yet certainly undeveloped, much of it. Boundless simple love, rather, her face showed now, and the frankest pleasure in whatever was delightful—and yet, how serious it was sometimes; and as John walked beside her now he felt rough and rude and awkward and common, and began to shuffle, and to tremble when her dress touched him.

By the way, one must say something about the said dress, though there was little to be told about it. She was dressed in a white cotton gown, fresh and pleasant-looking in the hot sunshine, and though it was all very plain there was nothing clownish about her, rather a very visible taste in the make of her clothes. All was dainty, from her collar of coarse old lace to her trim sandalled shoes. On the second finger of her dear right hand she had a flimsy, old-fashioned ring of two or three coloured golds and turquoises, and a little brooch at her throat of the same manufacture. These were all her ornaments; and even these, perhaps, would have seemed excessive for a workaday to the canons of taste that ruled the system she had been brought up in, which at all events implied (if they did not declare) that all ornament was display.

She led him into the cool, clean house with its sanded passages, past the kitchen where a sound of washing-up was going on; past the parlours right and left, and the foot of the queer heavily-balastraded staircase. The house was small enough, as I said before. It had been but a farmhouse, panelled all over with rather rude panelling, left unpainted in these stairs and passages, and polished dark in the parlours. However, more of these hereafter.

They went out of the front door into a little grass-plot with a border of delicious summer flowers all round it, growing as such things only do in old gardens, and railed off with a little green railing from a large orchard, scattered over rather sparsely with old and decaying trees, and bound by the high road and a great untidy hedge, all dusty now. In the orchard was wandering an old grey purling horse, that was sauntering out the end of his days in utter peace, since the good widow could not make up her mind to finish it with a bullet. Half a dozen geese pecked away gravely almost between his legs, and a peahen with two chicks wandered about restlessly. Nearer to the house, the long white stony drive that swept about the old tree will bring us again to the gate in the green fence, from which a flagged path led up to the green-painted front door with its gleaming brass knocker. A little way from the sunniest side of the flagged path was a big mulberry tree, under which sat the widow, dealing with many yards of calico, and making the deuce knows what.

CHAPTER X

CLARA AND HER MOTHER

She turned to them as she heard the sound of their footsteps, and got up from her chair to greet them. She was a woman of not more than thirty-six; much taller than her daughter, of looser make, and most certainly beautiful, but little like her daughter. Her hair was abundant, dark and crisped; she had great soft brown eyes, and a large mouth with full lips. She was thin now, and her face looked worn but not unhappy; but the principal expression on it was one of kindness—that expression of yearning softness that expects its full reward of affection, and indicates an exacting and rather restless heart.

A pleasant look of welcome lighted up her face now, as she took John’s hand and fairly wrung it.

‘O, John!’ she said, ‘I am so glad to see you! I’ve been thinking of you so much these days past, and how lonely you dear boys must have been all this time since you came home—I’m so glad to see you.’

There was a visible tone of sympathetic pity in her voice that rather embarrassed John, who felt as strong and happy
as a lad need do. He reddened, and said: 'O, thankyou, Mrs Mason—we're getting on all right now, but I can tell you we were frightened about Arthur. The poor chap didn't sleep for days and days, and it's upset all one's fun this last holidays of mine. I say, I've brought you some fish—perch.' And there-with he unslung his basket, and poured his catch out onto the grass.

'Poor things!' said Mrs Mason. 'I hope you won't care about fishing when you're a few years older, John.'

'Well,' he said, 'fish never look very much alive—do they, Clara? She had been standing a little behind him, with a thoughtful look on her face, but stepped forward when the fish fell on the grass, and said now:

'They're very pretty; I like to see them, and they certainly don't look very much alive now. Well, mother, suppose you say thankyou for the fish, and ask John to have something to eat, and he can tell us all about Arthur while he's having his dinner.'

'O, I'm ashamed of myself, me a farmer and all! But you know, we've just done our dinner; and I'm afraid I'm like other people, and when I feel hungry I feel as if everybody else must be so too, and the same if I'm glad, or sorry, or dull.'

John made a mighty effort, and he said with a great blush:

'No, I am sure you are not a bit like other people, Mrs Mason, so kind as you are.'

'Ah, my dear,' she said, 'sometimes I think the kindness of people like me may bring on dreadful things; I mean to say, when one's kind because one wants other people to be kind to one.'

He stammered at his own boldness as he answered:

'Why, if you make it like that, nobody does anything except because he likes it. I mean to say, even people who have given up most to please other people—but then, they're all the better people, to be pleased by what's good rather than by what is bad.'

They had all three talked themselves into the oak parlour by now; John, perhaps, with a feeling not very pleasant of not being listened to, which made him very silent now.

It was a beautiful old room, deliciously cool in that hot afternoon, the lowest sweeping boughs of the limes brushing the window at one end, a bay tree pruned away from the little side window which looked into the farmyard. The furniture was none of it modern, and there was a big old sideboard of earlier date than the house. A little spindle-legged table by the window was half covered up with Clara's work, innocent-looking portions of a dress she was making for herself, and the other half was cleared for that letter of hers; and the pen was still in the inkstand. On another table—a rough piece of carpentry—was a bowl of goldfish, and in the middle of the room there stood a big table with bulgy legs. An old chintz-covered sofa, and square armchairs, and half-a-dozen queer bandy-legged chairs of Queen Anne's time, completed the furniture of the room. The dark-panelled walls were decorated with six old engravings of William III's London and Westminster, framed in old black frames, and with (these latter hanging on each side of the mantelpiece) two tolerably good engravings from Italian pictures, which the taste of the late farmer had introduced.

Again, the room, like the outside of the house, looked full of quiet, happy life; and apart from the neatness and cleanliness of everything, the signs of the occupations of the two beautiful women scattered about it no doubt helped the impression which clung about the whole house, that though old, and handsome in decoration and picturesque in outline, it had never been built for anything different from what it was. Everything was what was thought fit for a rich farmer of that passed day, and everything had grown onto the place as naturally as the growth of the big limes and walnuts the old dead landreave had planted for the first tenant.

John sat down, dazed with the hot sun, and familiar with the room as he was, it had a strange look of interest that day; and again he felt that feeling of something going to happen, and his heart beat in an excited way.
Clara had left them at the door, but presently he heard footsteps and the musical jingling of glasses, and he noted her foot, setting the door left ajar fully open, and there she stood with a tray for his benefit, heavy enough. He jumped up, feeling awkward still, and hurried to take it from her. She showed no coquetry in letting him take it, for it was heavy enough, as aforesaid, but gravely helped him to get it into order on the table; and he fell to without any pressing, and with good will enough, as well he might, for everything was of the freshest, from his own schoolboy appetite to the crisp lettuces.

The elder lady sat busy over her work meantime, and asking him little matters of parish gossip, and he ought to have been getting at his ease long enough ago. The bees never ceased their music, the fowls cackled in the farmyard, there came now and again the distant sound of wheels from the road and it seemed that, even if these had been silent, there would have been a musical murmure about that marks the high tide of a bright summer's day; but he felt restless and uneasy, and wondered why Clara didn't talk, for she was wandering up and down the room restlessly, now taking up her work and picking the threads out of the unfinished seams, now sitting down in the window-seat and reaching a hand to the clematis that hung over it, now dipping the tip of her fingers into the goldfish glass and them coming up to her mother as if she were going to speak. A great grey cat jumped through the open window and came purring and rubbing against her, but got a very careless acknowledgment from her; so John eyed her, till he began to answer Mrs Mason rather at random, for he thought in himself that she too was waiting for something to happen, as he felt he was, or might be.

They were all three silent now. John had done his eating, and had drawn back his chair, and was absent-minded playing with the cat. At last Clara sat down, and pulling a clematis flower to pieces with her fingers laid before her on the table, broke the silence by saying:

'What was it you said just now, John, about going into business? Will you have to go up to London?'

'Dear me, child, how you made me start!' said her mother. 'What is it, Master John? I thought we shouldn't lose you. You always seemed so fond of the country here.'

'Well, Mrs Mason,' said he, 'I have no choice as to going somewhere, unless I take the living after my father; and you wouldn't have me waiting for his shoes, though I—though you don't like him, Mrs Mason. Besides, I shall like it. Why should you think me different from other young men who want to see the world, and get on?'

'Well,' said she, 'I have always thought you and Master Arthur very different from other lads—there, I mustn't make you blush by saying 'much better'! And we're such childish ignorant people here that I'm half afraid you will forget us. How hard it is when things change, and people, without any fault on either side, forget each other! Do you know, I wish you and Arthur were older, just as I have wished of late that Clara were my sister, instead of my daughter—and then there wouldn't be so much chance of a different set of hopes and wishes separating us.'

'Well,' he said, 'I don't want to boast, but I don't think I shall change much; and as for going away, I know that I shall often enough long to be back, but somehow I think it isn't bad for people to be apart for a bit, so that they may have something else to think of than themselves and each other; and sometimes lately—' He stopped himself, and reddened, as his custom was when he got talking or indeed thinking much about his feelings.

'What, John?' said she.

'O, nothing,' he said. 'I can't express myself properly.' And that was true; yet there was something more than a vague thought in his head; a feeling that he was half ashamed, half afraid of had fallen on him at whiles lately, of discontent and hopelessness—of emptiness in the summer country about him.

'Well,' she said, 'I see what it is, John, you want some
good excuse for explaining your being so glad of getting away from us to new people, and I don’t see who is to blame you. Well, I should be more disappointed if Arthur were going instead—I don’t mean to be unkind,’ she said hurriedly, ‘only I think he is the softest-hearted of you two.’

‘But when are you going, John?’ broke in Clara.

‘Not till after Christmas,’ he said; ‘it’s to be in a Russian merchant’s house—and now you know as much about it as I do…except that, Mrs Mason, you don’t know how much I shall miss you all.’

‘There, I didn’t mean anything,’ she said. ‘Only—I’ll tell you the truth—I was so vexed to hear that you were going that I was ill-tempered, and fell on the nearest, and that was you. So you’ll forgive me? And come and see us often this holidays? With Arthur, when he can go about again? Can you come often, now?’

‘Yes,’ he said. ‘Father’s gone away for some months. But that reminds me—Arthur will soon be about again, and we want you to take us to Ruddywell Court, and let us give Clara and you a pull on the river, and have a picnic on that little eyot in the river. Please come.’

Clara looked up, grown joyous suddenly, and said:

‘O, when shall we go, mother? I do so want to see the beautiful old house again, and that room with the red bed in it, don’t you know?—that Arthur and I liked so much, and you didn’t, John.’

‘I daresay I shall like it this time,’ he said. ‘When shall we go, Mrs Mason? Arthur will be about and quite able to go in ten days’ time.’

‘O, I shall be as pleased to go as any of you,’ she said, brightening up. ‘I’ll let you know in a couple of days, Master John, when I can manage it. There’s not much to do this time of year.’

The afternoon was getting on by this time, and for the last ten minutes there had been the sound of cows lowing by the farmyard; and in this pause Mrs Mason seemed to catch the sound, and said—‘There, now, the cows will be milked in a few minutes. I’m sure you’re not too much of a man to drink a syllabub, Master John.’ And without waiting for an answer she hurried out of the room, to get the necessary foundation for that pastoral delicacy.

So the young folk were left alone, and eyed each other rather shyly at first, till John said:

‘Father’s given Arthur such a good new Arabian Nights—not like the old one, you know—a new translation. Would you like to have a volume?’

‘Oh, I should!’ she said. ‘I do so love tales—but here’s an idea, John, bring a volume the day we go to Ruddywell, and let someone read aloud in the eyot. I don’t like swallowing my stories so greedily as you boys do. When I get something I like, I like time and place to go with it.’

‘Well, I know,’ he said. ‘I sometimes wonder if I shall have read all the good books before I die. How dull it will be! But I’m not such a bookworm as Arthur. I remember when we were all little, reading in this very room one snowy day, about Christmastime; and he and I read our books wallowing about on the floor, while you read solemnly in the inlaid chair at the table, with your sugarplums handy; but I got tired first, and then you, and then we both bullied Arthur for reading in the twilight, by the firelight—don’t you remember?’

‘Yes,’ she said, ‘so well, that I think I can see myself looking up and watching the great snow-flakes growing less and less visible as the light faded. Surely,’ she said after a pause, ‘we three have been the happiest children that ever lived.’

‘What a sweet voice you’ve got, Clara,’ he said suddenly. ‘I mean, when you talk.’

She blushed, and laughed merrily, and it was indeed sweet to hear; then she said:

‘That’s the first time you’ve ever said anything of that kind to me, John, so I don’t wonder at your blushing at it.’

He was blushing with a vengeance, but he laughed too, and said:
'This is the first time I ever saw you blush, Clara, I do believe—so you're no better than I am.'

Then they were both silent a while, until she said, gravely now:

'It's strange we should both have remembered that time so distinctly, isn't it? and be talking about it like old people. I wonder if perhaps in years to come we shall remember this afternoon; the sunniest day in the year, and all so cool and dim in here—and hark, John, the cows just let into the farmyard, and mother here with the green dragon bowl coming—looking so fresh and handsome.'

'What's that, Clara?' said Mrs Mason, colouring up too.

'About people suddenly remembering little scraps of time gone by, mother.'

'Ah, child, I hope you'll never wish you could forget everything but today.'

'No, no, I should never wish that,' she said. 'Whatever happened to me, I should wish to keep it all. But please, mother, don't look as if you were going to cry.'

And she went up to her and began fondling her, John standing by, half pleased, half embarrassed, and with a strange feeling that had gathered over him amid Clara's talk, as if he had got a pain or some great pleasure, which yet set him longing so much for something still greater that it was a pain.

'I'm an old fool,' quoth Mrs Mason, 'not to remember that nobody's griefs are interesting to anybody but themselves. Come along, I'm going to milk one of them myself, under the big walnut tree. Come and get in the hay first, Clara.'

She had indeed put on a clean big cooking-apron over her silk dress, which was somewhat shower than one would have expected a farmer to wear, even one as rich as she was. Out they went all three, Clara talking merrily about the milking, and the cows, and her pony, and her pet lamb that was grown an unwieldy great wether now, and John rather looking as if it were all a play got up for his special pleasure; and so to the big barn, with its cool dusky depths, where, with her dress tucked up, she jumped lightly over the quarterboard; John following, amid huge admiration of her ankles.

CHAPTER XI
HOW THE DAY ENDED

There she was for thrusting her hand into a truss of sweet hay, but he cried out against it: yet she was obstinate, and the two hands went in together with laughter enough, so out they passed again, blinking at the white hot sun. But as they stood together just outside the barn, looking to see the cows that stood huddled together by the byre door, lo! a tramp, and a jingling, and there was come the team from the field; two iron-grey leaders, a dapple grey wheeler, and behind a red roan and another dapple grey and a brown horse, with a sunburnt, red-lipped, freckle-faced boy swinging about on the first one.

Clara went up to the second iron-grey, (while the lad stopped his charge, grinning and pleased) and made much of him, and cried out laughing to John to feed him with his wisp of hay.

'Why shouldn't mine go in the syllabub?' he said.

'Why,' she said, 'I meant you to drink off mine, but since you won't, we'll mix them half and half.'

She took his wisp, as he stood there blushing again, and gave him back the two halves, and then took the horse's black forelock in her right hand, while she held the clean hay away with her left. It was a pretty sight, thought Mrs Mason, and she wished Arthur there to see it.

So away went the team to their stable, and then Mrs Mason turned, with no little affection, to her cows; and singing out a great strawberry-coloured Durham, coaxed it easily
enough from the rest. The four of them went off to the walnut tree in procession—first the goodwife with the china bowl; then the cow, lowing and slobbering; then Clara, holding a great trail of sweet clematis, and then John with the pail and milking-stool. So the syllabub and further milking went on. Clara twisting the clematis into the cow’s horns—who repaid that attention by eating as much of it as she could get at—and singing while the while a snatch of a sweet old tune (a Christmas carol, no less) while John did the looking on.

Then came the cow-boy for the cow, and the syllabub was drunk with laughter enough as they sat on the flowering grass; and a little west wind got up to cool the fiery afternoon, and Clara began to sing again in a pause of the merry talk, at first with a serious, dreamy face, till her mother joined in, and the two raised their voices, while John, listening, grew serious to melancholy as he looked at Clara’s sweet eyes and wide brow drawn into a little frown by her eagerness, yet felt more melancholy still when the song was done.

They sat nearly silent after this for some while, with the crickets chirruping about them, and the afternoon was wearing fast; till, to bring them back to earth again, there was a heavy footstep behind them, and the farm bailiff came up, a commonplace, businesslike-looking man, who shook John’s hand and asked with an overdone appearance of interest, about the health of the rector. Then he tried a compliment to the ladies, and a warning against sitting in the grass, as they got up and turned towards the house again. Then came tea; and after that the bailiff went away a while, and they all sat under the mulberry tree again, quiet, and rather sad perhaps, till again the bailiff appeared with books that needed Mrs Mason’s attention; and then John, who had not spoken for a long while, said:

“Well, I must go, Mrs Mason. I ought to have gone long ago. You won’t forget our day, will you?”

She smiled pleasantly on him as he turned away, and Clara said:

“I’ll go with him a little way, mother, unless you want me to help you write out at once.”

‘No, it will do when you come back, dear,’ said she.

So Clara’s bonnet was on in a minute, and the two went round the house by the same path by which Clara had first come to him that day; and then the two went slowly and soberly in the golden evening down to the river; she talking to him, asking questions about Arthur’s illness, then of what books they were reading; and then, shyly and hesitatingly, she asked about the Latin and Greek books they learned at school. He answered, and talked well enough now, but at every turn he said that Arthur could answer her better; and so they went slowly enough along the border of the stream, till he bethought him of taking home some of the waterflowers to stuff the jug on the bedroom table with, and had soon gathered a great bundle, which he thrust into his empty fishing-basket, she standing by all the while and going on with her talk.

This was just at the end of that more cheerful end of the river, and the evening was so far spent that the sun was setting in a cloudless orange sky. So, when he had shut his basket, Clara said:

‘I must go back again now, John.’

‘Yes, don’t tire yourself,’ he said, with a mighty effort.

She walked, though, a little, with him silent, till at last she said

‘Now I must go. Don’t forget the letter to Arthur.’

‘O, no,’ he said.

‘John,’ she said, ‘I’m afraid I haven’t been quite myself today.’

‘O, you’ve been cleverer and brighter than ever,’ he said. ‘And—’

‘Well,’ she said, ‘I didn’t feel so. You don’t know how startled I was by your saying you were going to London—though I know you must, and always knew you would have to—but I don’t like it.’

‘But you mustn’t think that we shall see each other often again, after a time,’ he said. ‘Something is sure to happen that will bring us together.’


“I hope so,” she said. “Give my love to Arthur. Good-bye.”

And she took his hand, and seemed as if she was going to kiss him, but did not; and turning with a kind frank smile, went swiftly on her way back again.

He stopped a minute looking after her, with something that was certainly pain; then strove on quickly, thinking how long the day had been since morning; but the pain softened soon, and he was soon dreaming of her feet brushing through the dewy grass, and the night wind rustling her dress, and her great lovely eyes turning slowly to look at the yellowing moon when it should shine through the willow boughs. The sun was down before he had got to the bridge, and by the time he was walking between the Battle Meads it was already something more than twilight.

CHAPTER XII

CLARA’S LETTER

His father’s house seemed dull and uninteresting as he stood before the doors of it; duller still as he let himself into the dark hall, for the house was not lit up yet; the servants mostly loitering about the back door, that lovely evening. He went into the dining-room and rang rather impatiently, and yet managed to swallow his feeling of disappointment and weariness before the light came, and went whistling upstairs to his brother’s room, with his hand on Clara’s letter in his pocket the while.

There was no light in his brother’s room when he got there. Mrs Hadow was sitting there with him.

“Hilloa, old fellow!” he said, pulling his water-flowers out of the fishing basket. “How are you getting on?”

“Very well,” said Arthur, rather faintly.

“He’s been up, Master John,” said Mrs Hadow, ‘and I think he’s tired himself a bit.’

“Well, I won’t stop here long with him, Mrs Hadow. He must make up his mind to sleep.”

“Don’t go yet for a bit, John,” said the sick lad. “I shall freshen up a bit presently, before I go to sleep.”

“How are the good folks up at Leaser Farm, Master John?” said the housekeeper; Arthur turned round to the wall as John answered:

“As well as well, Mrs Hadow. The whole place is like the kingdom of Heaven. It would be better to be a horse or a cow there, than a man in most other places.”

“Well,” she said, “I hope all will go on well—but Mrs Mason has always spoilt that girl dreadfully; would ask her advice about things, when the child shouldn’t have known there were such things in the world. Yes, Master John, I don’t say but that she’s a fine girl, and will marry well, too; but if you’d seen her mother ready to go down on her knees to her, when she ought to have had the rod across her back, you’d have been almost inclined to call the old lady a fool.”

“Well, she’s not so very old,” said John, laughing, “and is nearly as pretty as her daughter.”

“Ah!” said she, laughing in her turn, “you’ll be like all the men, Master John; and I don’t say they’re not a pretty pair, Widow Mason and her daughter; besides, I like them both very much—but the widow isn’t one of the wise ones; Miss Clara, maybe. Well, I’ll take myself off, and come up with Master Arthur’s supper presently, and then you must take yourself off, Master John.”

John fell to stuffing a second white jug with the mouse-ear; but as soon as the door was fairly shut, Arthur raised himself on his pillows:

“And how was Clara, old fellow?”

“I’d never seen her look so well. You remember saying in February, what boys we looked beside her. She’s much more of a woman now, and I felt such a hobbledehoy, and such a lout, beside her. I don’t think you would, though; you always had the grace of the family.”

“Nonsense!” said the other, visibly pleased, though. “You
don’t suppose Clara notices things like that—I say, did she send any message to me?’

‘Love, and hoped you were better—and a letter. Here it is.’

He stepped up to the bedside with it. Arthur took it eagerly, then lay back on the pillow with flushed cheeks, still holding it in his hand, then slowly put it under his pillow, not noticing how John was looking at him with a certain surprise at first, as though he had expected him to open and read it, then turned away suddenly; for once more the commonplace of his life was broken into by he knew not what pain, what wild hope. But presently Arthur began talking quite cheerfully about the farm, and his fishing, and what Dr Stoneman had said about him; and then John, speaking rather constrainedly at first, and happily enough afterwards, told his brother of the affairs of the pleasure-party; and then fell to talking of his own prospects, and the London sojourn that was to be; so that they were both of them cheerful enough when the housekeeper came up with the supper.

So at last John said good-night and went his way, and the housekeeper was following, leaving only the ghostly, sickroom-looking rushlight in the room, when Arthur called out:

‘O, Mrs Hadow, please leave the candle by me—I may want to read.’

Hereon a short argument followed, the dame pleading fire and fever, the lad weariness and sleeplessness; and as he was obstinate, he had his way, and the departed having set the candlestick in a basin on a chair by the bedside, with a book or two, she was scarcely gone before Arthur’s hand stole under the pillow, and forth came the previous letter that he opened with beating heart.

Though it was pretty much what he expected, it was little like what we should have thought, from what we have seen of Clara. It was partly childish, partly stiff; it began Dear Mr Arthur, and ended your sincere friend and well-wisher, Clara Mason. It was long enough, and began, and indeed went on nearly to the end, with talk about her mother, and the cows, and her pony, and the weather, and the garden, not forgetting the seldom-flowering aloe. Then it began, stiffly enough, with not a few long words, to talk of his illness, and the regrets for it; but at last came this:

Perhaps, Mr Arthur, you will think it strange for a girl of my age, and I am aware that I cannot put it into proper language, but I cannot help telling you about it—how I felt this morning as I lay awake, quite early, I was thinking about you and your brother, and wishing that I could see you. And hoping so much that you were better: then I began to wonder how our three lives would run on together, and then, all of a sudden, I felt so strange as if I understood all about it—why we were alive and liked each other so, and it felt so sweet and delightful that I think I never felt so happy in all my life; and yet I was longing for something, but the longing didn’t seem any pain to me; I can’t tell you now what I thought of in that minute—though if you had been by, I think I could have then—but it had slipped away very fast, and left me wondering what it was that had made me so happy. And so I thought and thought on, till I grew quite tired, and got up and dressed; and it was quite early, only five o’clock then; and I went out and walked a long way down the river, and I got so tired that I had to sleep in the afternoon.

But I must ask your pardon for writing such a long letter and fatiguing you so with nonsense, when you are just recovering from so severe an illness. It will give me the greatest pleasure to meet you again, quite yourself. Meantime believe me as aforesaid—

Between weakness and transport the lad wept the sweetest tears over his letter, and kissed it over and over, and put it at last on his bosom, and so, with a happy face, turned round to sleep.

He dropped off pretty soon, and passed the night with faint vague dreams of pleasant things—walking the gardens, going to hear music, and the like; and woke in the earliest dawn, to hear the birds beginning their song, and a cow lowing a long way off. He felt about for his letter, and began in the happiest way to dream awake of the fields and stream by Clara’s home, all grey and cold with the mist now. Then he thought of
himself wandering about in these meadows, sick with the
longing that he felt amid his happiness, and then the farm-
yard gate swinging open, and Clara running to meet him, her
shoes all shining wet with the dew, and putting her arms
round him, and kissing him less timidly than she did really,
with something in her eyes that he had not seen there yet;
and then the two of them turning together, and going into
the little garden in front there, and spending the day as if
there were no-one else in the world. And still he kept begin-
ning over and over again the sort of things she would say to
him, and the way in which she would kiss him, for still every
sweetest way seemed not sweet enough, till, wearied out at
last, he fell asleep again just as the eastern sky was beginning
to redder.

His waking dream turned into a sleeping one, without
changing much at first, except that it was suffused with a
vague excitement and luxury and fear withal, that had been
absent before. He was walking with Clara through meadows
not at all like the Leaser meadows, which yet they both agreed to
think were none other than it seemed. They were thickly
studded with apple-trees in bloom, and it was moonlight, yet
the birds were in full chorus; and Clara herself was clad in
light fluttering raiment, like what he had seen on angels in
old pictures, instead of her usual dress, and she spoke to him
in verse, in the rhythm of some fragment of old poetry that he
had forgotten when he was awake. And so they passed on,
till, as it happens in dreams, the landscape changed.

There were big blue mountains all about the mead, and a
rushing stream through it, and suddenly his heart seemed to
stop beating for fear; and she stopped him, and faced him,
with fear in her eyes too. And as he tried to speak, and could
not, she had turned into his brother, and they were both
quite children again, and he thought that they had lost them-
selves, and were to die.

The rush of the stream seemed to get louder and louder,
and the wind to rise and howl about the hollows of the moun-
tainside; and presently a horse came galloping past, and then
a herd of cows rushed up, and then a great flock of sheep
seemed to fill up all the valley, their endless backs all moving
like a sea, and the sounds of the bell-wether filling up all the
air.

And then, with a sense of something dreadful going to
happen, he woke, panting and gasping with an unuttered cry,
and the horror of the dream was so strong on him that at first
he seemed to wake into a world of white flame. But as he
came fully to himself he saw the broad sun flooding the room,
and smiled to himself with returning comfort as he heard the
sound of a scythe being whetted outside for the mowing of
the rough piece of grass called the drying-ground. Then came
the sound of the musical church clock, as he counted seven,
and the full memory of his happiness came on him as he felt
the letter by his side, and lay listening to the sweep of the
scythe in the swathe, the rattle of the gardener’s barrow, and
all the little noises that go to make up the music of a June
morning. He soon grew drowsy again, and fell into a dream-
less sleep, from which he was only roused by John and Mrs
Hadow coming in with his breakfast.

The sick lad mended fast enough now, and wrote Clara
little notes every day, telling her how he was. There was little
else in them, though every night he pleased himself by imag-
inering tender little sentences he would write the next day.
But his heart always failed him when the paper lay before
him, nor could he ever get further in his signature than your
affectionate friend—though he tried hard. They were a great
pleasure to him, however, and the days passed happily for
both the lads; and John went three times to Leaser Farm, and
came back the third time with the pleasure-party day duly
settled for the day after to-morrow.
CHAPTER XIII
THE PLEASURE-PARTY: THE BEGINNING

This brought the time to the end of June. There had been broken, stormy weather for nearly a week, and all the farm people went to bed the night before with fears about the weather, Mrs Mason being at least as eager as the others. The day dawned with a heavy mist, and would have looked unpromising enough to an unweatherwise person, but John was none such, and announced joyfully that they were going to have a wonderful day; as, indeed, it turned out, for the mist was clearing even from the low ground about Leaser Farm as the brothers drove their phaeton into the orchard, and stopped before the little green railings, where the two women stood ready dressed in the doorway, not to lose time.

‘My, you’re not as well as I expected to see you, Master Arthur,’ said Mrs Mason, as they all stood together beside the carriage; and indeed, Arthur was pale and trembling, and stood leaning with one hand on the carriage after Clara’s kiss, and rather timid welcome.

The two brothers looked for the moment different enough, for John’s face was flushed through its sunburn amid his ruddy-brown hair, and yet his brows were knitted anxiously; while Arthur was smiling with the look of a sick person who has suddenly got a great pleasure.

‘O, it’s nothing,’ he said. ‘I shall be all right when we are going through the air again.’

Mrs Mason turned into the house for a glass of wine, while Clara looked rather grave. Said she:

‘Are you quite sure you can go, Arthur?’

‘O dear yes,’ he said. ‘The doctor said it would do me good, didn’t he, Jack?’

He made half a step forward as he spoke, and touched her sleeve with his hand, and then let it slip onto hers. She held it quite simply and kindly, and her eyes were fixed on him with a tender and anxious look that made the poor lad forget everything else. They did not notice that John turned away to the horse’s head. But when in a moment Mrs Mason came out of the house with the glass of wine, Arthur drew his hand away rather hastily; and flushing, so that Mrs Mason cried:

‘Why, what ails you? You two haven’t been quarrelling in this minute, have you?’

Arthur laughed, though rather awkwardly. Clara flushed too, but still looked steadily at him, and with that John was come back to the carriage door in high spirits. A big handled basket with a white cloth was handed by the red-cheeked, black-haired maid into the driver’s seat; John nodded to her and shook hands with her and jumped up into his place without ceremony, leaving the three others to help themselves into the inside, where Arthur was set, despite his politeness, leaning back in the roomy back seat, with Mrs Mason discreetly sitting by him, and Clara opposite her mother.

So off they went, John turning round to talk in extra merry ways, and answered at first by Mrs Mason only; but soon, as they drove through the now bright sun and the fragrant shadow of the high hedges and lanes, all awkwardness wore off the other two as well, and they all seemed as happy as might be.

The two women were clad as for merrymaking, and both gracefully enough; the mother in black silk, with an Indian shawl over her, a sort of heirloom of her mother’s; the daughter also in a dress whose material came out of the chest on the landing at home. It was an India muslin, soft and fine, with a little sprig worked over it in floss silk. Over this she had nothing but a delicately adjusted shaded scarf; at her throat was a brooch, made of a faint miniature of some long-dead ancestor of her father’s (a red-coated, crested-helmed militia man), set in a coppery gold frame, and a thin chain of the same material was over her neck. These were her own private treasure, but her mother had lent her for the occasion an old-fashioned bracelet of thin chains of Genoese gold, clasped with a clasp of the same fashion as the ring on her
finger, described before; and she wore it on her left wrist, so
much whiter than her hands, from which she had pulled the
gloves now, rather still as though she were committing an
impropriety.

When she first got in she had a bunch of beautiful cabbage-
roses in her hand, which she held in her hand for some time,
looking at Arthur all the while, yet with a strange far-
away look in her low-lying eyes, as though she did not see
him. But that melted away in a while into mere tender kind-
ness and she reached out to him, and put it into his hands,
saying:

'I meant them for you. They are the last we shall have.'

So they drove merrily enough by roads running along the
side of the hills, till, after going down a steep descent, they
came over to a little village scattered about a goose green; and
then, turning round a corner, came upon the ancient garden
wall, over-topped with fig-trees and mulberries, of Ruddywell
Court. They stopped before the great Queen Anne iron gates
presently; and Arthur and the two ladies got down there, and
walked slowly up to the beautiful old yew-hedged garden
toward the front of the house, while John drove off to stable
his horse at the Sun, which lay nearer to the river.

The house was too much like other fine Elizabethan
houses to need any particular description, so one need only
say that it was among the completest, though not the largest,
existing of its kind. Being received by the housekeeper, they
sat down in the cool, deserted-looking hall and waited for
John, who came back presently, and they were soon all four
wondering, each in his or her own way, at the show things.
Arthur and Clara both got very eager over the pictures,
though to most people there would have been nothing very
interesting about them, as they were some few bad copies of
well-known Italian masters, or endless portraits (some not
genuine), some dull works of fourth-rate painters of such
things, and three naive queer productions of the Holbein and
Janet school; these latter, all boastfully calling themselves
works of the first master, were hung in the room with the red

beds which Clara spoke of the other day, to which they came
presently.

The place was all full of old furniture, tapestry and
armour, some of it really remarkable. They enjoyed them-
selves hugely among all these magnificences. The house-
keeper was a friend of Mrs Mason's, so they were not
trotted through at the usual rate, but sat about in special
corners, and handled everything at their pleasure. Arthur's
eyes sparkled with pleasure, and he did the talking for
almost the whole company, for he was really somewhat
versed in archaeological lore, and could tell scraps of stories
from old chronicles, and the like. John had got rather silent
now, but made little jokes from time to time, which rather
jarred on both his brother and Clara. She, for her part, kept
close by Arthur, listening with real pleasure to his talk,
taking care that he should have the best seat when they
halted, and following him to the window when he went
there to enjoy the deep green garden.

So at last they came to the room with red beds which was
called Queen Elizabeth's room, and was hung with tapestry
of an earlier date than the present house; in which knights
and ladies were walking and playing amid a faded grey
garden, populous with pheasants and rabbits. A great red-
hung bed was in the darkest corner, and a smaller one of the
same material and colour beside it. A suit of bright steel
armour was in the other corner, and on the wall were the
three pictures in question—two handsome bearded men in
slouched hats, and a wonderfully ugly, big-nosed lady in a
rich dress, holding a pink in her fingers.

The one deeply-recessed window looked over the corner of
an orchard onto wide flat meads, and a flashing river beyond.
The sun had gone from that side of the house now, and the
room was deliciously cool and full of that feeling of rest that a
shadowed room has on a hot day. So, when they had looked at
the pictures and tapestry and embroidered coverlets, Arthur
sat down somewhat wearily, and Mrs Mason said:

'Don't you think you had better rest a bit here, Master
Arthur, before dinner? You won't last out till the end of the
day if you are not careful of yourself.'

Arthur demurred, and Mrs Mason was just going to speak
again when Clara said:
'Do stay and rest, Arthur, and I'll stop with you. I'm rather
tired, too.'

The bony housekeeper smiled, for she had seen that Mrs
Mason was going to offer to stay behind, and she wasn't
over-sorry to be rid of Arthur's (to her) stupendous lore, so
that she might have her say, and didn't want to lose the
chance of talking to her friend; so she said:
'Yes, you two young ones and solemn ones stay, if any-
body must, for I know you are on the look out for ghosts and
romantic matter, and if one could see a ghost at noontide I am
sure I should come to this room to look for it.'

So they passed on, John talking merrily to the house-
keeper, and left the two there—Arthur sitting in a big chair
near the corner, and Clara near him, her dainty fresh skirts
brushing against the old hard armour. Almost without look-
ing, he was conscious that she had laid her left hand on the
breastplate, and even though he half saw it, he began to
dream about it, as his way was about everything, to make it
something different from what it was. All the morning as he
talked he imagined her thoughts about him, and had changed
her clinging kindness into heaven knows what dream of
singlehearted passion; and now as she stood silent there, and
he sat trembling and afraid to break the sweetness of being
alone with her, he imagined her in like case; and now she
turned her head a little, and their eyes met—hers so tender
and compassionate, for she saw a worn, anxious look in his
face.

'Are you very tired, dear?' she said in a sweet low voice. It
thrilled through him with inexpressible sweetness, for she
had not yet used so soft a word to him. His face lighted up as
he shook his head, and reaching out his hand, touched the
sleeve of her left arm, and then, as before, let his hand fall
down onto her palm, that yielded passively to him while a
look like surprise came into her face. He noticed it, despite
his dreaming, and began to talk hurriedly, without losing her
hand, though.

'Wouldn't you like to know all about the old fellow that
wore it, Clara? How he went to and fro, and who the people
were he was fond of?'

'Yes,' she said, 'though I suppose people were dull and
stupid then like they are now, when they fall in love, and are
happy and unhappy—and write poetry, too. I've never seen
any old books of that time, Arthur.'

'There are some old chronicles at home,' he said. 'I don't
know why I've never lent them to you. You see, when we
three have been together lately, we have been busy talking
about things going on. Besides, I wasn't sure that you could
read them easily without someone to help. Let me come over
and read pieces to you this summer, out in the garden.'

'Yes, do,' she said.

'You know,' he went on, 'one has fits of not caring for
fishing and shooting a bit, and then I get through an enor-

mous lot of reading—and then again one day one goes out,
and down to the river, and looks at the eddies and then sud-

denly one thinks of all that again. And then another day,
when one has one's rod in one's hand, one looks up and
down the field, or sees the road winding along, and I
can't help thinking of tales going on amongst it all, and long
so much for more and more books—don't you know?'

'Well,' she said, 'one day goes so much like another with
me'—and she gave a little unconscious sigh—and women
have so much less of stirring things to look forward to than
men. And yet I won't say that I don't make tales to myself
too.'

She blushed scarlet as she spoke, and Arthur felt the hand
he was nursing tighten on his a little. His heart leaped at it,
and again, what tales he told himself! He was silent as he
watched the colour fading out of her face again, and at last he
said, with a great effort:

'Clara, you get more and more beautiful every day. There!
I never said a word about that before, and if you’re not angry, I’m glad I said it now.’

If he expected to see the blush come into her face again, he was disappointed. She only looked at him with such serious eyes, as she answered:

‘Why should I be angry, Arthur? I’m pleased, because I think you know about such things, and people about here don’t much, I fancy. And though I don’t think I should set my heart on it much, I can’t help being pleased at being—being well-looking.’

‘You’re a great deal more than that,’ he said. ‘I hope we—you will be happy, for somehow beautiful people so often seem to be unhappy.’

‘O,’ she said, with a real merry laugh, ‘don’t say such unlucky things, for’ (she did colour again a little here) ‘I’ve heard Mother say that you were like to turn out the handsomest of the two—there! are you angry?’ she said, laughing again, for his face was scarlet. ‘Besides,’ she said, gravely and rather primly, ‘people are always happy when they do what is right.’

He laughed out at this, and said:

‘Ill luck for me, Miss Clara, who don’t do a twentieth part of what I ought, and never shall—come, I know you don’t believe that?’

‘I don’t know,’ she said, turning towards the armchair again. She had gently drawn her hand away for a minute or two. ‘Tell us, Arthur, could a man like that have walked about our house?’

‘No,’ he said, ‘don’t you remember the date? This fellow is as old, almost, as the chancel of our church. There’s a brass just like him in the floor.’

He rose as he spoke, and took the halberd out of the mailed hand, and lowered the blade of it for her to see the engraved ornament on it. She drew to it with a pleased smile as he began to talk about it, and tell her what the figures meant. Her face was so near his that he felt her breath upon it, and was as happy as might be; and as he moved to put it back in its place, the look of surprise came into her face, unnoticed by him.

He led her to the window-seat, on which he knelt while she leaned forward by him. Then they talked about the day, and how delightful it would be upon the river, till suddenly the voices and footsteps of the returning party were heard, and Arthur loosened her hand, and turned with a start to meet them. If he had looked at her face, he would have seen something like trouble in it now; and would certainly not have put it down to the right cause.

As for Clara, she greeted them with:

‘Arthur’s quite rested now, mother.’

‘Yes, whoever else is tired,’ quoth the housekeeper, grinning.

‘O, we’re not tired,’ said Mrs Mason, simply not seeing the cunning old lady’s grin, or noticing her emphasis; though, if we must say the truth, she would not have been greatly distressed if she had seen lovemaking going on between the two, after her first qualm of fear at the parson’s violence of indignation and brutality, and of doubt as to whether John would not have made the better lover.

Well, they walked slowly back through the corridors and cool dark rooms, happily enough, all of them; the young ones full of eager life, made miraculous by vague dreams for the future; dreams that were shared, more or less, by Mrs Mason amid the regrets of her widowhood, for she, whose sweet and kindly feelings hardly included passion, as her dreamy and vague mind hardly included reason, found her failing interest in contemplating the future of her daughter’s heart, whom she loved tenderly, scarcely remembering, maybe, that she was her daughter.
CHAPTER XIV

THE PLEASURE-PARTY: THE END

So they passed out of the house, and turning along the front of it, went by the housekeeper's invitation through the gardens toward the little inn, that, standing where the Ormslade River (as people called it, though old folks and the maps had the Blackwater) ran into the big, navigable, sea-going stream, combined in itself the character of the inn, lock-house, and ferry-house. The Ormslade River, crossing the road, became a sort of garden canal to Ruddywell Court, and turned what would have been very beautiful and quaint old gardens into a positive paradise, and the young folk grew nearly wearied by their pleasure amid the redundancy of the old garden, through which they loitered, sitting down for long spells here and there.

At last they came to where they had to cross a bridge, built in naively pedantic imitation of the glories of Palladio; and taking leave of the complaisant housekeeper, passed out into the highway a few hundred yards from the ferry-house. A rod or two further on, the backstream from above the lock crossed the road and ran into the Ormslade River, and there the two together slipped into the broad stream, which there is all the less necessity for naming, as the people thereabout never called it anything else than the River; and indeed they might be excused if they forgot that there was any other river in the world, so beautiful this stream was, such a look of history and romance and promise of great things to come it bore upon its eddies, and already, high up in that remote countryside, had that look of nobility which never belongs, as I fancy, to any river that does not personally meet the sea.

There were no longer hedges on either side of the way now—notthing but wide, clear ditches full of yellow-flowered sedge and water-flowers, and the road was a little raised above the broad meadows that spread out a long distance on this left bank of the stream; rows of willows here and there marking the course of some brook or big ditch, countless kine and horses wandering about, and the lapwing wheeling about with its peevish cry. On the right bank, low hills rose up just a rod on the other side of the tow-path, though just opposite the ferry they fell off into wide slopes of grass meadows, through which the road wound, and afterwards, upstream, fell away from the river, while downstream they rose steeper and here and there showed broken escarpments of sandy bank, pitted with sand-martins' nests.

So they came down to where the inn—a little low slate-roofed house with the sign of the Rose hanging from it—stood at the brink of the wide pool below the lock, on a sloppy, willowy piece of land, even in this June almost as much water as earth. A casting-net was hung spread out and dripping still onto the dry, dusty road by the door; there was a mangy old grey, with a very small brown child babbling about him, and hanging onto his tail; and inside, through the cool dusk of the house, one could dimly see shining pots hanging up—a very unlikely place it looked to get one's dinner at; it looked like the end of the world; for the road that ended in the shallow on this side, rose from the water on the other all grass-grown and little used, and was now, indeed, little more than a bridleway, and seemed to lead nowhere at all.

So here Mrs Mason made Arthur go into the house for a rest, while John went to get the boat ready, and see about the necessaries for the feast. Arthur looked over his shoulder to see if Clara were coming, but she said quietly:

'I must go and look at the lock. There'll be plenty of time,' and walked off briskly as she spoke.

Presently her feet were bruising scent from the great horse-mint as she picked her way between the willow stems. Then she scrambled up a little bank into the blazing sun, and so to the lock head, where she stood leaning on the sluice tops and watched the water gurgling under the shut sluices, and the shadowy faint green bleak flitting about at the top of the
water. The look of the black depths made the day seem hotter and more luxurious, as the scent of the marshland hay and clover, and the hum of bees and tinkle of sheep-bells, was carried to her across the wide meadows. Then, as she looked up in a while, the sound of church bells fell sweet upon the light wind from a little steeple she could just see at the foot of the furthest spur of the higher ground, bringing that inevitable melancholy with it that deepened upon her till with a sigh she was just turning to go, when she felt a hand upon her shoulder and said:

‘Arthur?’

‘No, it’s me,’ quoth his brother. ‘How grave you look, Clara! You look as if you could see through me.’

Her eyes changed kindly as he spoke, and she said:

‘I think the bells made me melancholy. John, let us come to the boat.’

He turned slowly, saying:

‘What were you thinking of, though?’

‘Well’, she said, ‘people can’t expect to be answered when they ask such questions as that, but for once I think I can tell you. I was thinking that it would be very dreadful to live here if one got to be unhappy.’

‘How strange’, he said. ‘I suppose the bells set me thinking too, for as I came along I was thinking and wondering what I should do to pass the days if I were living here an old man, with all one’s friends dead—or at Leaser Farm,’ he said, stammering and reddening. ‘She didn’t answer, and he was silent as they walked on. He took her firm, fine hand to help her down the bank, and his face grew graver and graver, till she said suddenly:

‘You bring the book?’

‘Yes,’ he said.

‘I’m so glad, I have been looking forward to hearing those stories, and it will be so delightful to remember them with the beautiful place, and this happy day.’

They got to the boat with this, where Mrs Mason and Arthur were already seated. Clara was rather eager to row,

but John, rather grave still, and awkwardly enough edging in some compliment to her skill with the oar, objected on the score of haste in getting to the shade being advisable. So Clara sat down beside the two others in the stern, smiling, but a little vexed. At any rate this pleased one person—Arthur, to wit—who sat with the rudder strings in his hands and her cheek nearly touching his shoulder, supremely happy; and presently she laughed merrily and said:

‘John, I was getting ill-tempered—but you must have been picking up grand manners somewhere, to beat about the bush like that, when you know I can’t row a bit.’

‘All right,’ he said, laughing himself. ‘You shall row going back—you and your mother together, if you like. We can start in good time.’

‘Worse and worse!’ said Mrs Mason, ‘unless you really mean a compliment by thinking us such fine ladies that our arms would ache at the first stroke of the oar. If you saw Clara and I washing our own smart lace things, you would think better of us, Master John.’

The two lads blushed and felt happy and shamefaced at this, but said nothing. John laying vigorously on the oars, and Arthur pumping himself in the pride of his rivercraft*, though the great big green-painted old tub was not particularly suitable for that display.

Betwixt this small pleasantry and others, they got to the eyot, which was just a long bank high and dry above the weedy shallow, that John pushed through with some difficulty; but in the middle of the said bank, someone had planted a ring of willows, and at this dry time the turf under them was soft and pleasant enough, so there they spread their feast out, Arthur lying down, and John trying to help, and looking awkward because the two women would not let him, pretending to be afraid of his breaking things. So there was plenty of laughter over their dinner, Mrs Mason cooing Arthur hugely (which he was still weak enough from his

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* The MS has ‘oarcraft’, but Arthur is supposed to be steering the boat.
illness to like rather), and Clara watching his somewhat startling appetite with amusement mingled with pleasure, too.

The business of eating over, they fell to the book, Arthur reading at first, to whom Clara drew near, and sat watching his eager face, with a little frown on it, with kind and serious eyes; but turned, in the pauses of the tale, to talk about it to John, who spoke well and without any shyness now. Then John took the book and read, not so well as Arthur, because he couldn’t help thinking of what was coming further on in the tale; and Clara, having arranged the cloths that Arthur lay on about a tree-trunk, sat by him, and still watched his face, and he sat conscious of it, and not liking to turn to her lest she should look away.

When the sun was fairly falling, and before it began to get colder, they got into the boat; the two women took the oars, and they dropped slowly downstream amid a good deal of merriment from the lads. They stopped here and there to gather wild flowers on the bank, and wandered about from side to side of the stream, doing all those little untellable things that go to make a happy day with happy people; and they were all very happy together, till at last Mrs Mason cried out that it was over-late for Arthur to be out, and they must turn at once. So she, who was sitting aft, moved to give her place up to John, and he went forward and met Clara in the middle of the boat.

It was a little difficult for them to pass one another, and as they stood thus, with her hand on his shoulder, she stopped and said:

‘John, look at the sunset now. Mother, and Arthur—turn round and look.’

For a sudden change had gone over the sky by the drift of light clouds, and the whole was full of strange golden light, and in the west the clear sky passed from orange to pale yellow and green, and the long strips and light flecks were deep crimson, unmeasurable colours. They looked silently, while the stream gurgled past them, and the water hen cried among the reeds, and the big-eyed heifers stared at them from the bank. But Arthur turned soon, to look at Clara. There she stood, with her hand still on John’s shoulder, and he holding her other hand. She had half bared her arms, beautiful but slim, as a young girl’s are; her head was bare, and little locks of hair were floating about her face in the light wind; her lips were a little parted amid pleasure and thought, and her eyes fixed full on the sky, as if she would never think of anything on earth again. But even as he gazed in ecstasy, with a strange pang at her exceeding beauty that seemed too great for her to notice him, a happy smile crossed her face, her kind eyes fell to his, and she stepped aft lightly and came and sat down by him, laying her hand on his in the fullness of her heart.

Then John sat down and threw the oars into the rowlocks. With a heavy splash the boat’s head swung round, and presently the two were facing that western glory to which John’s back was turned, as he pulled back sternly toward the lock.

It had not wholly faded when they got into the carriage there, though the clouds were dusky purple now instead of crimson, and the stars were beginning to show, and the high moon to colour. So on they drove through the odorous June night, steeped too completely in happiness to remember that their pleasure-day was nearly at an end. Arthur was rather worn out amid his delight, and Mrs Mason had made him lie as much along as he could on the back seat of the carriage, after much opposition on his part. He had Clara’s roses in his hand, for he had made them put them in water at the little inn, and they were quite fresh now. She sat opposite to him, quite hanging over him, not saying much, but listening to him when he spoke, almost (he thought) as if there were none else in the world. And indeed she thought how happy she was to have such dear friends and so fond of her as he—and his brother—were.

Yes, and as he talked to her now, telling her how he had thought of her in his illness, and of his dreams she had come into, that fever had sometimes turned into horrors, the tears
gathered in her eyes with pity and affection; and—though with a thrill of fear—she felt, despite herself, glad that he seemed fonder of her than John did.

But here was Leaser Farm at last, and the little green railing, and the lights flitting about the windows, for it was fully night now; and now Clara’s lovely eyes were blinking at the candles in the oak parlour, hot and stuffy now, while the two lads drove on still through the cool night.

Arthur’s heart was beating still at the boldness that had filled him at parting, to pass his lips from the cheek she had offered him to her averted lips, and his lips were trembling still with the sweetness of the very unbrotherlike kiss; John whistling in sturdy resolution to keep his heart up, and rating himself for a feeling of discomfort and wrong that, sooth to say, was not new to that hour of parting, but had been hanging about him all day long. As to Clara, she found her mother perhaps a trifle cross and disagreeable after the day’s pleasures, but she herself might have passed for gay; and at last, when she had put her candle out and was lying alone in her dear little room, looking at the faintly moving trees, and stars between them, that showed through her little half-opened, white-curtained window, all worldly troubles had passed away from her; and wrapped in the happiness her own beautiful and simple soul made for her, she thought of her love for those that loved her, till night and weariness had their way with her, and she fell asleep in the fragrant, peaceful place, and dreamed of herself grown very old, but happy still, with no-one lost of those that loved her.

CHAPTER XV
JOHN LEAVES HOME

Arthur lay abed the next morning, happy enough, and John sat with him at his breakfast, with the feeling (fit enough in

any case for the day after a merrymaking) that life had got very commonplace and stupid, and longing sorely for something startling to happen, but doing his best to carry on something of talk with his brother, and going every now and then to the open window, and leaning out of it in a restless manner. At last came the short sharp double ring at the bell that indicated the postman.

John started, though it may easily be believed that the lads’ correspondence was so small that neither of them need expect a letter because of that. Nevertheless, on this occasion a letter was brought up presently, and given to John, who said:

“Well, by Jove, here’s a letter from father!” and tore it open eagerly, and with some apprehension too, which latter Arthur rather more than shared.

“What is it, old fellow?” he said, before John could have half read it through.

“Why,” said John, after he had hastily skimmed through to the end, “it’s a case of ‘good-bye’”—and he threw him the letter, which ran thus:

My dear John,

You remember my telling you last time I saw you that you must make your choice of a business. Well, you must choose at once, for I have just got a letter from Godby telling me that the place in the Russian house is just vacant. If you take my advice you will take it. Godby’s friend will pull you, and by the time you are twenty-one you might put your Mother’s money into the affair, and become a junior partner—i.e. always if you work hard these four years, and learn the business.

If you determine to go, it must be at once; Godby has asked you to go and stay with him for a couple of days before you go up. That will be about as much as they will allow you, but he will put you up to things in London, for he is a good-natured fellow, and likes young people better than I do. Write to him at once. Mr. Jackson has instructions to get a lodging for you, and to pay you. Godby will tell you all about that; you are old enough to see about all you want with the housekeeper; tell her to give you money to get up to London.
there—work hard, and try to make money. You will find the making of it more amusing than anything else, besides all the amusement you can buy with it. Don't get into a mess. I did, when I was young, and that has tainted my position ever since. If you think this queer for a parson, I can't help it—I am not

[Morris's manuscript breaks off here. The final section, as he explained to Louie Baldwin, 'begins with the letter of the elder brother to the younger, on getting his letter telling how he was going to bid for the girl in marriage.' This, presumably, would be four or five years later.]

... You say I shall not be surprised, perhaps. Surprised! Why, when I was down there with you the whole air seemed full of this. It lurked in dark corners in the twilight, and the dark throbbed with it as I lay alone on my bed, till I felt as if it would burst out into a cry; and as I went up in the train the noise of the wheels and engine seemed to be telling the world of it; and when the murkiness of London drew near, there it seemed to be lying in wait for us. As I hurried up the stairs, and as I lay awake in the night, I told myself the story over and over again, till I could lie still no more, and yet was too weak to get up. Look—I am writing nonsense to you—but how could I be astonished?

And now I will talk sense, and give you advice—and believe me, for whatever reason, I am inspired to-night, and if you follow my advice all will be well with you. If otherwise, if you let any half-heartedness deceive you, it will be better for you to grow miserable and die, than to be contented and live. Again, you think me mad—for I forgive it, but read on—if you are sure, as you say you are, that Clara loves you and that you love her, heed nothing, heed nobody, but live your life through with her, cursing everything that comes in your way—everything—unless, perhaps, there was somebody who loved her better than yourself. Yet as you will not be able to imagine that, if you truly love her, the first word stands.

Everything, and everybody—I do not understand why you should hesitate. As to Father, why, if he had loved us as passionately as one reads of sometimes, I would say 'disregard him'—so there is no need to say that as he loves us little enough, that as his whole life is mingled with some blind hatred—he's sorry for him, as I am—love him, as I cannot—and

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\text{thrust him aside from your path. What else is there? Clara's mother? Make her yield, man, make her yield! She is weak and sentimental—a long face or two, a little crying, and the thing is done; and she will have no grief, only a little discomfort—let her bear it! There is not much need to pity her.}
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Well, I won't do you the injustice to think you really care what the world will say, nor think that she, with those eyes, that body that her soul has made, can care; and so you have nothing left—for you shall have, at the worst, two-thirds of any money I can make, and if you are poor, how sweet your ambition to get on will be, when it is for her! Bah! why need I preach to you about that? O, you are happy—what need of me to call on God to bless you? For be sure that his blessings are showered down on the strong lucky people who come near enough to the fire to thrust in their hands and snatch the gold out of it. They cannot heed, if they would, the wailing or the silent misery of those who are old, or blind, or weak with the horrible fever of longing that can never be satisfied.

O, how beautiful you must think the world: Stop, though! are you sure that she loves you as you love her? Nay, do not be indignant—find out without blinding yourself how the matter goes; and if you find she does not—why then, still strive with all your might to get her, to be with her—if not for many years, yet for a year; if not for a year, for a month; if not for a month, for a week—for a day, for an hour, a minute—do anything, stoop to any humiliation, tell any lie, commit any treachery—but do not die, as—as some people must, with your love barren and unsatisfied, when you can make it otherwise. Do not hesitate on the score of her happiness. If you feel real love, you must know that you really think the whole world exists only to minister to your passion. O, think of the happiness, if you can feel this and be satisfied. Yes! even without any return, it is happiness. It is worth passing through all the pain that clings about it—and if you do not feel this, you are not in love, and the desire you have will pass away into something else—into friendship, or into disgust, or hatred—how should I know or care which? What does it matter? All is either love or not love. There is nothing between. Everything else—friendship, kindness, goodness, is a shadow and a lie.

Yes, you must test your love in this way, and even then you may fall into the misery which a third possibility will bring to you. Oh my God, it is all a matter of chance—for my words are only words to you, unless you are really in love. Who can judge false love, without having felt the true? But
try your best, try your best, for all our sakes, and then God help you and all unhappy people!

your brother
John Risley

P.S. This is a wild letter; but it is all I can write just now. Do not be frightened of me when I meet you next, and tell Clara I wrote kindly to you, and was very glad that you were going to be married. You see, I am so anxious that the only two people I love in the world, or ever shall love, should be quite happy, quite without a cloud on their love. Tell dear Clara that I advised you to carry the matter through if you were inclined in spite of everything.

P.P.S. I must come and see you soon. Good-bye. J.R.

Arthur’s face grew pale enough as he read his letter, and when he had done it he walked up and down the room many times, but without saying a word, without indeed forming one in his heart. At last he walked out of the house, and straight to Leaser Farm.

There he found Clara and her mother sitting together, and, after the first greeting, sat down with no attempt to make talk, and answered at random to Mrs Mason’s anxious questions about his health. Clara sat silent for a little time, and presently said to him quite abruptly:

‘Come out with me, Arthur. I want to show you something.’

He rose without a word, and though Mrs Mason would have followed them, Clara’s bluntness, and a tone of resolute sternness in her voice, stopped her; and she sat there alone in great agitation.

When the two had got among the low-hanging lime boughs Clara turned round on him, and said:

‘What has gone wrong, Arthur?’

He caught hold of her hand and began nursing it to his breast, and the colour had come back to his cheeks again as he answered:

‘Nothing—nothing. I wrote to John and have an answer—it was so kind.’

She turned deadly pale. ‘What’s the matter? Is he ill?’ she said.

‘No, no, dear. He said he was so very, very glad, and said I should be so happy, and advised us to carry the matter through, in spite of everything.’

She was still pale. ‘Arthur,’ she said, ‘are you telling me the whole truth? I mean, are you breaking some dreadful thing to me? Don’t torment me! It isn’t kind to do those sort of things—you know I love you.’

‘O my darling,’ he cried, drawing her to him, ‘and how I love you! there is not a word more of his letter to tell you than that—and that he seemed tremendously excited about it.

And if I looked pale and anxious just now, it was because I had quite made up my mind to tell my father all about it, and that we must be married at once—and it was a little apprehension, and a great deal of excitement, that’s it. O, my own sweet, and my cowardice and nervousness has made you suffer—dear, I wish you could hurt me in return for it, but I know you are too kind, and cannot.’

He trembled all over with pleasure as he spoke, for her cheek touched his, and while he stood dreaming in his old way, he felt her sigh, and then her lips had stolen round to his, and there was no pang in his heart but of longing still unsatisfied, as they kissed together there.

‘I am so glad he was pleased,’ she said, as they walked back to the house, ‘and now you’re going to tell mother all about it.’

‘Yes,’ he said dreamily.

‘You know,’ she said, ‘I haven’t told her about it, but I am sure she knows that something has happened. I must make her happy, Arthur—she has always been so kind to me, and I know you are fond of her.’

‘Yes, very much,’ said Arthur, and they went hand in hand into the room, where indeed there was little need to say much, for Mrs Mason met them half-way as soon as Arthur had opened his mouth; and perhaps the two lovers were a little ashamed of her raptures—Arthur, at all events.

Arthur went away in the evening scarcely feeling the ground he trod on, and kissing over and over again some
THE CONCLUSION

The only indication of how the plot will develop is a working note which Morris wrote on the back of p. 51 of his (misnumbered) MS:

In writing to John Arthur is to tell him that he has heard her telling the kid about him and what a fine chap he was—talk about getting old at the picnic.

This suggests, at least, that John is going to travel farther than London, and I believe that Morris’s object in placing him at a ‘Russian merchant’s’ office is to send him off, at some point, to Russia. In that case he would have been able to draw on the experiences of his friend Crom (Cromell Price 1835-1910). In the spring of 1860, Crom applied for a post he had seen advertised in The Times as tutor to the family of Count Orloff-Davidoff, and went out with them to St. Petersburg. But he had serious differences with his employers and in 1863 resigned his post without much regret on either side (though the Count presented him with a silver cigar-cutter). Looking back on his years in Russia he saw them as a ‘period of purgatory’, and added ‘God grant that they may have eradicated many of my weaknesses.’ This in itself suggests the strain of self-discipline and expiation which I believe is so important in Morris’s tale.

By the time we reach John’s letter to his brother, Morris is in trouble with his time scheme. The Medea*, which Parson Risley and Eleanor see at the Olympic, gives us the date 1856, and he marries shortly afterwards. John is born, presumably, in 1857, and Morris originally made him fifteen when the book opens, bringing us to 1872, the actual year

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*Medea, or the Best of Mothers, with a Brute of a Husband*, with the great burlesque actor Frederick Robson as Medea, was produced at the Olympic in July 1856. This theatre was a favourite haunt of Rossetti’s, and he used to take Morris and Burne-Jones there when they came to London as young men in 1856-7.
when it was written. He later makes John tell his father that he was ‘seventeen last February’; we are now in 1874. Some years must elapse before Arthur and Clara marry, and more before the kid can be told about his uncle. If John is then in his thirties, the date will be around 1890, so that his experiences will be truly news from nowhere. This is only one more proof of how impetuously Morris dashes into his tale.

Mackail considered that the novel was about one third of the way through, and ‘was evidently going to take a tragic turn’, but it is also evident that the moral victory will be for John. As I have tried to show in the introduction, the inheritance of the father’s sin is divided between the two sons. John is tempted to rage, Arthur to cowardice. By the time of the ‘bid for the girl in marriage’, John has (though only in appearance) become harder and more worldly, Arthur more yielding and sentimental than ever. Arthur, as we should expect, is wavering under opposition. He has always wanted to be a farmer, but not about here’ (p.20), and Mrs Mason will doubtless be distressed if he intends to take her daughter to another part of the country. But the real obstacle is Parson Risley’s ‘violence’ (p.63) and his dislike of the Masons.

Arthur will certainly not have the courage to ‘tell my father all about it’ (p.75). John, on the other hand, as his letter shows, feels compelled to put himself in the front ranks of suffering and force on the marriage at any cost. I should expect him to confront his father in defence of Clara’s happiness. After a ferocious argument—and to anyone listening at the door their voices will sound exactly alike (p.27)—the Parson will drop dead of a stroke or a fit, a chance for the reappearance of Dr Stoneman, who has acted as the story’s commentator. Although John is in no way responsible, as both the doctor and Mr Godby will insist, John will take the burden of his guilt abroad. The Parson will be buried in his unpicturesque churchyard, and Arthur and Clara will be free to marry.

In this way the book’s repeated forebodings of unhappy old age will come true for all three of them. John will never see his beloved river and meadows again, and his only comfort in exile will be that he is a hero to Clara’s kid. (This would relate him to Philip in The Heir of Redclyffe and Dickens’ Sydney Carton: ‘I see her with a child upon her bosom, who bears my name...I see that I hold a sanctuary in their hearts, and in the hearts of their descendants.’) Arthur’s shameful failure, on the other hand, has been to conceal John’s real feelings from Clara. When at length she finds his letter—as Mrs Risley found her husband’s—she will realise John’s unspoken love for her, and also how close she once was to loving him herself. Arthur and she will live out their lives kindly and peaceably enough, but Arthur will never be quite free from remorse, ‘the thought that was like the shadow of a crime.’