

Buntingford waved to her as they approached, then jumped out and followed her into the twilight of the inn parlour.

"My dear Helena!" He put his arm round her shoulder and kissed her heartily. "God bless you!—good luck to you! Geoffrey has given me the best news I have heard for many a long day."

"You are pleased?" she said, softly, looking at him.

He sat down by her, holding her hands, and revealing to her his own long-cherished dream of what had now come to pass. "The very day you came to Beechmark, I wrote to Geoffrey, inviting him. And I saw you by chance the day after the dance, together, in the lime-walk." Helena's start almost drew her hands away. He laughed. "I wasn't eavesdropping, dear, and I heard nothing. But my dream seemed to be coming true, and I went away in tip-top spirits—just an hour, I think, before Geoffrey found that drawing."

He released her, with an unconscious sigh, and she was able to see how much older he seemed to have grown; the touches of grey in his thick black hair, and the added wrinkles round his eyes,—those blue eyes that gave him his romantic look, and were his chief beauty. But he resumed at once:

"Well, now then, the sooner you come back to