

far. Your time is valuable. Would it be a long job?"

"It would doubtless take some months; but the pleasure of seeing order dawn from confusion would itself repay me. And I might come upon certain books of which I am greatly in want. You will have to allow me a carpenter though, for the shelves are not half sufficient to hold the books; and I have no doubt those there are standing in need of repair."

"I have a carpenter amongst my people. Old houses want constant attention. I shall put him under your orders with pleasure. Come and dine with me to-morrow, and we'll talk it all over."

"You are very kind," I said. "Is Mr. Brotherton at home?"

"I am sorry to say he is not."

"I heard the other day that he had sold his commission."

"Yes—six months ago. His regiment was ordered to India, and—his mother— But he does not give us much of his company," added the old man. "I am sorry he is not at home, for he would have been glad to meet you."

Instead of responding, I merely made haste to accept Sir Giles' invitation. I confess I did not altogether relish having anything to do with the future property of Geoffrey Brotherton; but the attraction of the books was great, and in any case I should be under no obligation to him; neither was the nature of the service I was about to render him such as would awaken any sense of obligation in a mind like his.

I could not help recalling the sarcastic criticisms of Clara when I entered the drawing-room of Moldwarp Hall—a long, low-ceiled room, with its walls and stools and chairs covered with tapestry, some of it the work of the needle, other some of the Gobelin loom; but although I found Lady Brotherton a common enough old lady, who showed little of the dignity of which she evidently thought much, and was more condescending to her younger neighbour than was agreeable, I did not at once discover ground for the severity of those remarks. Miss Brotherton, the eldest of the family, a long-necked lady, the flower of whose youth was beginning to curl at the edges, I found well-read, but whether in books or the reviews of them, I had to leave an open question as yet. Nor was I sufficiently taken with her not to feel considerably dismayed when she proffered me her assistance in arranging the library. I made no objection at the time, only hinting that the drawing up of a catalogue afterwards might be a fitter employment for her fair fingers; but I resolved to create such a fearful pothole at the very beginning, that her first visit should be her last. And so I doubt not it would have fallen out, but for something else. The only other person who dined with us was a Miss Pense—at least so I will call her—who, although the law of her existence appeared to be fetching and carrying for Lady Brotherton, was yet in virtue of a poor-relationship, allowed an uneasy seat at the table. Her obedience was mechanically perfect. One wondered how the mere nerves of volition could act so instantaneously upon the slightest hint. I saw her more than once or twice withdraw her fork when almost at her lips, and, almost before she had had it down, rise from her seat to obey some half-whispered half-nodded behest. But her look was one of injured meekness and self-humbled submission. Sir Giles now and then gave her a kind or merry word, but she would reply to it with almost abject humility. Her face was gray and pinched, her eyes were very cold, and she ate as if she did not know one thing from another.

Over our wine, Sir Giles introduced business. I professed myself ready, with a household and carpenter at my orders when I should want them, to commence operations the following afternoon. He begged me to ask for whatever I might want, and after a little friendly chat, I took my leave, elated with the prospect of the work before me. About three o'clock the next afternoon, I took my way to the Hall to assume the temporary office of creative librarian.

#### CHAPTER XXXII.

##### PREPARATIONS.

It was a lovely afternoon, the air hot, and the shadows of the trees dark upon the green grass. The clear sun was shining sideways on the little oriel window of one of the rooms in which my labour awaited me. Never have I seen a picture of more stately repose than the huge pile of building presented, while the curious vane on the central square tower glittered like the outburning flame of its hidden life. The only objection I could find to it was that it stood isolated from its own park, although the portion next to it was kept as trim as the smoothest lawn. There was not a door anywhere to be seen except the two gateway entrances, and not a window upon the ground floor. All the doors and low windows were either within the courts, or opened on the garden, which, with its terraced walks and avenues and one tiny lawn, surrounded the two further sides of the house, and was itself enclosed by walls.

I knew the readiest way to the library well enough; once admitted at the outer gate, I had no occasion to trouble the servants. The rooms containing the books were amongst the bedrooms, and after crossing the great hall, I had to turn my back on the stair which led to the ball-room and drawing-room, and ascend another to the left, so that I could come and go with little chance of meeting any of the family.

The rooms, I have said, were six, none of them of any great size, and all ill-fitted for the purpose. In fact, there was such a sense of confinement about the whole arrangement as gave me the feeling that any difficult book read there would be unintelligible. Order, however, is only another kind of light, and would do much to destroy the impression. Having with practical interest surveyed the situation, I saw there was no space for action. I must have at least the temporary use of another room.

Observing that the last of the suite of book-rooms farthest from the armoury had still a door into the room beyond, I proceeded to try it, thinking to know at a glance whether it would suit me, and whether it was likely to be yielded for my purpose. It opened, and, to my dismay, there stood Clara Coningham, fastening her collar. She looked sharply round, and made a half-indignant step towards me.

"I beg your pardon a thousand times, Miss Coningham," I exclaimed. "Will you allow me to explain, or must I retreat unheard?"

I was vexed indeed, for, notwithstanding a certain flutter at the heart, I had no wish to renew my acquaintance with her.

"There must be some fatality about the place, Mr. Cumbermede!" she said, almost with her old merry laugh. "It frightens me."

"Precisely my own feelings, Miss Coningham. I had no idea you were in the neighbourhood."

"I cannot say so much as that; for I had heard you were at The Moat; but I had no expectation of seeing you—least of all in this house. I suppose you are on the scent of some musty old book or other," she added, approaching the door where I stood with the handle in my hand.

"My object is an invasion rather than a hunt," I said, drawing back that she might enter.

"Just as it was, the last time you and I were here!" she went on, with scarcely a pause, and as easily as if there had never been any misunderstanding between us.

I had thought myself beyond any further influence from her fascinations, but when I looked in her beautiful face, and heard her allude to the past with so much friendliness, and such apparent unconsciousness of any reason for forgetting it, a tremor ran through me from head to foot. I mastered myself sufficiently to reply, however.

"It is the last time you will see it so," I said; "for here stands the Hercules of the stable—about to restore it to cleanliness, and what is of far more consequence in a library—to order!"

"You don't mean it!" she exclaimed with genuine surprise. "I'm so glad I'm here."

"Are you on a visit, then?"

"Indeed I am; though how it came about I don't know. I daresay my father does. Lady Brotherton has invited me, stiffly of course, to spend a few weeks during their stay. Sir Giles must be in it; I believe I am rather a favourite with the old man. But I have another fancy: my grandfather is getting old; I suspect my father has been making himself useful, and this invitation is an acknowledgment. Men always buttress their ill-built dignities by keeping poor women in the dark; by which means you drive us to infinite conjecture. That is how we come to be so much cleverer than you at putting two and two together, and making five."

"But," I ventured to remark, "under such circumstances, you will hardly enjoy your visit."

"Oh! shan't I? I shall get fun enough out of it for that. They are—all but Sir Giles—they are great fun. Of course they don't treat me as an equal, but I take it out in amusement. You will find you have to do the same."

"Not I. I have nothing to do with them. I am here as a skilled workman—one whose work is his sufficient reward. There is nothing degrading in that—is there? If I thought there was, of course, I shouldn't come."

"You never did anything you felt degrading?"

"No."

"Happy mortal!" she said, with a sigh—whether humorous or real, I could not tell.

"I have had no occasion," I returned.

"And yet, as I hear, you have made your mark in literature?"

"Who says that?" I should not.

"Never mind," she rejoined, with, as I fancied, the look of having said more than she ought. "But," she added, "I wish you would tell me in what periodicals you write."

"You must excuse me. I do not wish to be first known in connection with fugitive things. When first I publish a book, you may be assured my name will be on the title-

page. Meantime, I must fulfil the conditions of my *entrée*."

"And I must go and pay my respects to Lady Brotherton. I have only just arrived."

"Won't you find it dull? There's nobody of mankind at home but Sir Giles."

"You are unjust. If Mr. Brotherton had been here, I shouldn't have come. I find him troublesome."

I thought she blushed, notwithstanding the air of freedom with which she spoke.

"If he should come into the property to-morrow," she went on, "I fear you would have little chance of completing your work."

"If he came into the property this day six months, I fear he would find it unfinished. Certainly what was to do should remain undone."

"Don't be too sure of that. He might win you over. He can talk."

"I should not be so readily pleased as another might."

She bent towards me, and said in an almost hissing whisper.

"Wilfrid, I hate him."

I started. She looked what she said. The blood shot to my heart, and again rushed to my face. But suddenly she retreated into her own room, and noiselessly closed the door. The same moment I heard that of a further room open, and presently Miss Brotherton peeped in.

"How do you do, Mr. Cumbermede?" she said. "You are already hard at work, I see."

I was in fact, doing nothing. I explained that I could not make a commencement without the use of another room.

"I will send the housekeeper, and you can arrange with her," she said, and left me.

In a few minutes Mrs. Wilson entered. Her manner was more stiff and formal than ever. We shook hands in a rather limp fashion.

"You've got your will at last, Mr. Cumbermede," she said. "I suppose the thing's to be done."

"It is, Mrs. Wilson, I am happy to say. Sir Giles kindly offered me the use of the library, and I took the liberty of representing to him that there was no library until the books were arranged."

"Why couldn't you take a book away with you and read it in comfort at home?"

"How could I take the book home if I couldn't find it?"

"You could find something worth reading, if that were all you wanted."

"But that is not all. I have plenty of reading."

"Then I don't see what's the good of it." Books are very much like people, Mrs. Wilson. There are not so many you want to know all about; but most could tell you things you don't know. I want certain books in order to question them about certain things."

"Well, all I know is, it'll be more than it's worth."

"I am afraid it will—to you, Mrs. Wilson; but though I am taking a thousand times your trouble, I expect to be well repaid for it."

"I have no doubt of that. Sir Giles is a liberal gentleman."

"You don't suppose he is going to pay me, Mrs. Wilson?"

"Who else should?"

"Why, the books themselves, of course."

Evidently she thought I was making game of her, for she was silent.

"Will you show me which room I can have?" I said. "It must be as near this one as possible. Is the next particularly wanted?"

I asked, pointing to the door which led into Clara's room.

She went to it quickly, and opened it far enough to put her hand in and take the key from the other side, which she then inserted on my side, turned in the lock, drew out, and put in her pocket.

"That room is otherwise engaged," she said. "You must be content with one across the corridor."

"Very well—if it is not far. I should make slow work of it, if I had to carry the books a long way."

"You can have one of the footmen to help you," she said, apparently relenting.

"No, thank you," I answered. "I will have no one touch the books but myself."

"I will show you one which I think will suit your purpose," she said, leading the way.

It was nearly opposite—a bedroom, sparsely furnished.

"Thank you. This will do—if you will order all the things to be piled in that corner."

She stood silent for a few moments, evidently annoyed, then turned and left the room, saying,

"I will see to it, Mr. Cumbermede."

Returning to the books and pulling off my coat, I had soon compelled such a cloud of very ancient and smouldering dust, that when Miss Brotherton again made her appearance, her figure showed dim through the thick air, as she stood—dismayed I hoped—in the doorway. I pretended to be unaware of her presence, and went on beating and blowing, causing yet thicker volumes of solid vapour to clothe my presence. She withdrew without even an attempt at parody.

Having heaped several great piles near the

door, each composed of books of nearly the same size, the first rudimentary approach to arrangement, I crossed to the other room to see what progress had been made. To my surprise and annoyance, I found nothing had been done. Determined not to have my work impeded by the remissness of the servants, and seeing I must place myself at once on a proper footing in the house, I went to the drawing-room to ascertain, if possible, where Sir Giles was. I had of course put on my coat, but having no means of ablution at hand, I must have presented a very unprettiable appearance when I entered. Lady Brotherton half rose, in evident surprise at my intrusion, but at once resumed her seat, saying, as she turned her chair half towards the window where the other two ladies sat.

"The housekeeper will attend to you, Mr. Cumbermede—or the butler."

I could see that Clara was making inward merriment over my appearance and reception.

"Could you tell me, Lady Brotherton," I said, "where I should be likely to find Sir Giles?"

"I can give you no information on that point," she answered, with consummate stiffness.

"I know where he is," said Clara, rising. "I will take you to him. He is in the study."

She took no heed of the glance broadly thrown at her, but approached the door.

I opened it, and followed her out of the room. As soon as we were beyond hearing, she burst out laughing.

"How dared you show your workman's face in that drawing-room?" she said. "I am afraid you have much offended her ladyship."

"I hope it is for the last time. When I am properly attended to, I shall have no occasion to trouble her."

She led me to Sir Giles' study. Except newspapers and reports of companies, there was in it nothing printed. He rose when we entered, and came towards us.

"Looking like your work already, Mr. Cumbermede!" he said, holding out his hand.

"I must not shake hands with you this time, Sir Giles," I returned. "But I am compelled to trouble you. I can't get on for want of attendance. I must have a little help."

I told him how things were. His rosy face grew rosier, and he rang the bell angrily. The butler answered it.

"Send Mrs. Wilson here. And I beg, Hurst, you will see that Mr. Cumbermede has every attention."

Mrs. Wilson presently made her appearance, and stood with a flushed face before her master.

"Let Mr. Cumbermede's orders be attended to at once, Mrs. Wilson."

"Yes, Sir Giles," she answered, and waited.

"I am greatly obliged to you for letting me know," he added, turning to me. "Pray insist upon proper attention."

"Thank you, Sir Giles. I shall not scruple."

"That will do, Mrs. Wilson. You must not let Mr. Cumbermede be hampered in his kind labours for my benefit by the idleness of my servants."

The housekeeper left the room, and after a little chat with Sir Giles, I went back to the books. Clara had followed Mrs. Wilson, partly, I suspect, for the sake of enjoying her confusion.

#### CHAPTER XXXIII.

##### ASSISTANCE.

I RETURNED to my solitary house as soon as the evening began to grow too dark for my work, which, from the lowness of the windows and the age of the glass, was early. All the way as I went, I was thinking of Clara. Not only had time somewhat obliterated the last impression she had made upon me, but I had, partly from the infection of Charles's manner, long ago stumbled upon various excuses for her conduct. Now I said to myself that she had certainly a look of greater sedateness than before. But her expression of dislike to Geoffrey Brotherton had more effect upon me than anything else, inasmuch as there Vanity found room for the soles of both her absurdly small feet; and that evening, when I went wandering, after my custom, with a volume of Dante in my hand, the book remained unopened, and from the form of Clara flowed influences mingling with and gathering fresh power from those of Nature, whose feminine front now brooded over me half-withdrawn in the dim, starry night. I remember that night so well! I can recall it now with a calmness equal to its own. Indeed in my memory it seems to belong to my mind as much as to the outer world; or rather the night filled both, forming the space in which my thoughts moved, as well as the space in which the brilliant thread of the sun-lighted crescent hung clasping the earth-lighted bulk of the moon. I wandered in the grass until midnight was long by, feeling as quietly and peacefully at home as if my head had been on the pillow and my soul out in a lovely dream of cool daylight. We lose much even by the good habits