

upon him. Never till to-night had he left the house that sheltered Lucille without a pang of regret, but to-night, after the discovery of the portrait in the loft, he felt in sore need of solitude. He wanted to look his situation straight in the face. This man—the man his hand had slain—was the father of his promised wife. The hand that he was to give to Lucille at the altar was red with her father's blood. Most hideous thought, most bitter fatality which had brought that villain across his path out yonder in the trackless forest. Was this world so narrow that they two must needs meet—that no hand save his could be found to wreak God's vengeance upon that relentless savage?

Her father! And in the veins of that gentle girl, who in her innocent youth had seemed to him fair and pure as the snowdrop unfolding its white bells from out a bed of newly-fallen snow, there ran the blood of that most consummate scoundrel! All his old theories of hereditary instincts were at fault here. From such a sire so sinless a child. The thought tortured him. Could he ever look in that sweet pensive face again without conjuring up the vision of that wild haggard visage he had seen in the red glare of the pine-logs, those hungry savage eyes, gleaming athwart elf-locks of snaky hair, and trying to find a strange distorted likeness between the two faces?

And this horrible secret he must keep to his dying day. One hint, one whisper of the fatal truth, and he and Lucille would be sundered for ever. Did honor counsel him to confess that deed of his in the forest? Did honor oblige him to tell this girl that all her hopes of reunion with the father she had loved so dearly were vain; that his hand had made a sudden end of that guilty life, cut off the sinner in his prime, without pause for repentance, without time even to utter one wild appealing cry to God? True that the man had declared himself an infidel, that he was steeped to the lips in brutish selfishness, grovelling, debased, hardened in sin. Who should dare say that repentance was impossible, even for a wretch so fallen? Far as the east is from the west are the ways of God from the ways of man, and in His infinite power there are infinite possibilities of mercy and forgiveness.

"I was mad when I did that deed," thought Lucius; "mad as in the time that followed when I lay raging in a brain fever; yet, Heaven knows, I believed it was but stern justice. There was no tribunal yonder. We were alone in the wilderness with God, and I deemed I did but right when I made myself the instrument of His wrath. All that followed that awful moment is darkness. Schanck never spoke of that villain's fate, nor did I. We instinctively avoided the hideous subject, and conspired to hide the secret from Geoffrey. Poor, good-natured old Shanck! I wonder whether he had found his way back from the Californian gold-fields, if I had leisure for such a pilgrimage, I'd go down to Battersea and inquire. I doubt if a rough life among gold-diggers would suit him long."

## BOOK II.

### CHAPTER I.

#### GEOFFREY SETS FORTH ON A VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY.

Not very far did Geoffrey Hossack proceed upon his Norwegian voyage. At Hull he discovered that—perusing his Bradshaw with a too rapid eye, and a somewhat disordered mind—he had mistaken the date of the steamer's departure, and must waste two entire days in that prosperous port, waiting for the setting forth of that vessel. Even one day in that thriving commercial town seem to him intolerably long. He perambulated King William street and the market place, Silver street, Myton gate, Low gate, and all the gates; stared at the shipping; lost his way amidst a tangle of quays and dry docks and wet docks and store-houses and moving bridges, which were for ever barring his way; and exhausted the resources of King's-station-upon-Hull in the space of two hours. Then, in very despair, he took rail to Withernsea, and dined at a gigantic hotel, where he was ministered by a London waiter, who provided him with the regulation fried sole and cutlet. Having washed down these two familiar viands with two or three glasses of Manzanilla, he set forth in quest of a solitude where to smoke his cigar in communion with that vast waste of waters—the German Ocean—and his own melancholy thoughts.

Go to Norway; try to forget Janet Bertram amid those lonely hills, with no companions save the two faithful lads who carried his guns, and performed the rough services of life under canvas. Try to forget her amidst the solitude of nature. Vain hope! An hour's contemplation of the subject on that lonely shore, remote from the parade and the band and all the holiday traffic of a popular watering-place, was enough to make a complete change in Mr. Hossack's plans. He would not go to Norway. Why should he put the North Sea between himself and his love? Who could tell what might happen in his absence, what changes might come to pass involving all his chance of happiness, and he, dolt and idiot, too far away to profit by their arising? No; he would stay in England, within easy reach of his idol. He might write her a little line now and then, just to remind her of the mere fact of his existence, to acquaint her with his abode. She had not forbidden him to write. Decidedly, come what might, he would not leave England. This decision arrived at, after profound cogitation, he breathed more freely. He had been

going forth like an exile—unwillingly, as if driven by Nemesis, that golden-winged goddess who made such hard lines for the Greeks. He had set forth in the first rush and tumult of his passion, deeming that in the wild land of the Norse gods he might stifle his grief, find a cure for his pain. He felt more at ease now that he had allowed love to gain the victory. "It is a privilege to inhabit the same country with her," he told himself.

Not long did he linger in Hull. The next morning's express carried him back to London, uncertain as to how he should spend his autumn; willing even to let his guns rust so that he need not drag himself too far away from Janet Bertram.

"Janet," he repeated fondly, "a prettier name than Jane; a name made for simplest tenderest verse. I'm glad I have learnt to think of her by it."

There were letters waiting for him at the Cosmopolitan, forwarded from Stillmington, nearly a week's arrears of correspondence; letters feminine and masculine; the feminine bulky, ornamental as to stationery, be-monogrammed, redolent of rose and frangipani; cousinly epistles which Geoffrey contemplated with a good-humored indifference.

He looked over the addresses eagerly, lest by remotest chance—yet he could not even hope so much—there might be a letter from Mrs. Bertram. There was none; so he opened one of the cousinly epistles with a profound sigh.

Hillersdon Grange, Hampshire. Her county and his. He and Lucius had been born and bred not twenty miles apart, and had begun their friendship at Winchester School. Mr. Hossack's people lived in Hampshire, and were unwearied in their invitations, yet he had not revisited his native place since his return from America.

"I can't understand why a man should be attached to the place where he was born," he used to say in his careless fashion, when his cousins reproached him for his indifference. "In the first place, he doesn't remember the event of his birth; and in the second, the locality is generally the most uninteresting in creation. Wherever you go, abroad or at home, you are always dragged about to see where particular people were born. You knock your head against the low timbers of Shakespeare's birthplace at Stratford; you go puffing and panting up to a garret to see where Charlotte Corday was first admitted to the mystery of existence; you drive through Devonshire lanes to stare at the comfortable homestead where Raleigh blinked at life's morning sun; you mount a hill to admire the native home of Fox; you go stages out of your way to contemplate the cradle of Robespierre. And when all that a man loved in his boyhood lies under the sod, and the home where he spent his early life seems sadder than a mausoleum, people wonder that he is not fond of those empty rooms, haunted by the phantoms of his cherished dead, simply because he happened to be born in one of them."

Thus had argued Mr. Hossack when his cousins reproached him with his want of natural affection for the scenes of his childhood. Hillersdon Grange was within three miles of Homefield, where Geoffrey's father had ended his quiet easy life about ten years ago, leaving his only son orphaned but remarkably well provided for. Squire Hossack of Hillersdon was the elder scion of the house, and owner of a handsome landed estate, and the Miss Hossacks were those two musically-disposed damsels whom it had been Geoffrey's privilege to escort to various concerts and matinees in the winter season last past.

The letter now in Geoffrey's hand was from the elder of the damsels, a hard-riding good-looking young woman of four-and-twenty, who kept her father's house, domineered over her younger sister, and would have had no objection to rule Geoffrey himself with the same wise sway.

Her letter was a new version of the oft-repeated invitation. "Papa says, if you don't come to us this year, he shall think you have quite left off caring about your relations, and declares he really never will ask you again," she wrote. "It does seem a hard thing, Geoffrey, that you can go scampering about the world, and living in all manner of outlandish places—Stillmington, for instance, a place which I am to'd is abominably dull out of the hunting season, and what you can have found to amuse you all these months in such a place, I can't imagine—and yet, excuse the long parenthesis, can't find time to come to us, although we are so near dear old Homefield, which you must be attached to, unless your heart is much harder than I should like to suppose it. The birds are plentiful this year, and papa says there are some snipe in Dingley marsh. Altogether he can promise you excellent sport after the first of next month.

"But if you want to oblige Dessie and me" (Dessie was the pet name for the younger sister) "you will come at once, as there are to be grand doings at Lady Baker's next week; and eligible young men being scarce in this neighborhood, we should be glad to have a good-looking cousin to show off. Papa escorts us, of course; but as he always contrives to get among the old fogies who talk vestry and quarter-sessions, we might almost as well be without any escort at all. So do come, dear Geoff, and oblige your always affectionate cousin,

ARABELLA HOSSACK.

"P. S. Please call at Cranmer's, Chapell's, and a few more of the publishers before you come, and bring us down anything they may recommend. Dessie wants some really good songs, and I should like Kalbé's fantasias upon the newest Christie melodies."

Lady Baker! Lucius had named this lady as one of the friends of his sister Janet. One of the county people whose notice had been the beginning of the luckless end. It was at Lady Baker's house that Janet had met the villain who blighted her life.

This was an all-sufficient reason for Geoffrey's prompt acceptance of his cousin's invitation. It was only by trying back that he could hope to discover the after-life of that man who had called himself Vandeleur, only by going back to the very beginning that he could hope to track his footsteps to the end. Could he but discover this scoundrel's later history, and find it end in a grave, what happiness to carry the tidings of his discovery to Janet, and to say, "I bring you your freedom, and I claim you for my own by the right of my devotion."

He knew that she loved him. That knowledge had power to comfort and sustain him in all the pain of severance. True love can live for a long time upon much nutriment as this.

He wrote to Lucius, telling him where he was going, and what he was going to do, and started for Hillersdon next morning, laden with a portmanteau full of new music for those daughters of the horseleech, his cousins.

Hillersdon Grange was, as Geoffrey confessed with the placid approval of a kinsman, "not half a bad place" for an autumn visit. The house was old, a fine specimen of domestic architecture in the days of the Plantagenets. It had been expanded for the accommodation of modern inhabitants; a ponderous and somewhat ugly annex added in the reign of William the Third; a cloister turned into a drawing-room at a later period—as the requirements of civilised people grew larger. The fine old hall, with its open roof, once the living room of the manse, was now an armory, in which coats of mail that had been hacked at Cressy, and hauberts that had been battered in the Wars of the Roses, were diversified by antlers and stuffed stags' heads, the trophies of the hunting field in more pacific ages.

The Hossacks were not an old family. They could not boast that identity with the soil which constitutes rural aristocracy. They had been bankers and merchants in days gone by, and their younger sons were still merchants, or bankers. Geoffrey's father, and the Squire of Hillersdon Grange, had succeeded, one to the paternal acres, acquired a few years before his birth; the other to the counting-house and its wider chances of wealth. Both had flourished. The Squire living the life that pleased him best, farming a little in a vastly expensive and vastly unprofitable fashion, writing a letter to the *Times* now and then about the prospects of the harvest, or the last discovery in drainage; quoting Virgil, sitting at Quarter Sessions, and laying down parochial law in the vestry. The younger making most money, working like a slave, and fancying himself the happier and the better man, to be cut off in his prime by heart-disease or an over-worked brain, while Geoffrey was a lad at Winchester.

The grounds at Hillersdon were simply perfection. The place was on the borders of the New Forest, and the Squire's woods melted into that wider domain. A river wound through the park, and washed the border of the lawn; a river which had shallow-willow-sheltered bends where trout abounded, rushy coves and creeks famous for jack, a river delightful alike to the angler and to the landscape painter.

"Not half a bad place," said Geoffrey, yawning and looking at his watch on the first morning after his arrival; "and now, having breakfast copiously upon your rustic fare—that dish of trout was worthy of mention—may I ask what I am to do with myself? Just eleven! Three hours before luncheon! Do you do anything in the country when you are not eating or sleeping?"

This inquiry was addressed to the sisters Belle and Dessie—good-looking young women, with fine complexions, ample figures, clear blue eyes, light brown hair, and the freshest of morning toilets, in the nautical style, as appropriate to the New Forest—wide blue collars flung back from full white throats, straw hats bound with blue ribbon, blue serge petticoats festooned coquettishly above neat little buckled shoes, with honest thick soles for country walking; altogether damsels of the order called "nice," but in no manner calculated to storm the heart of man. Good daughters in the present, good wives and mothers, perhaps, in the future, but not of the syren tribe.

"I don't suppose Hillersdon is much duller than the backwoods of America," said Arabella, the elder, with some dignity; "and I hope you may be able to endure life until the 1st with no better company than ours."

"My dearest Belle, if you and Dessie had paid me a visit on the banks of the Saskatchewan, I should have been unutterably happy, especially if you had brought me a monstrous hamper of provisions—a ham like that on the sideboard, for instance, and a few trides of that kind. I didn't mean to depreciate Hillersdon; the hour and a half or so I spent at the breakfast-table was positively delightful. But the worst of what people call the pleasures of the table is that other pleasures are apt to pall after them. Perhaps the best thing you could do would be to drive me gently about the park in your pony carriage till luncheon. I don't suppose for a moment that I shall be able to eat any more at two o'clock; but the country air might have a revivifying effect. One can but try."

"You lazy creature! drive you, indeed!" exclaimed Dessie. "We'll do nothing of the kind. But I tell you what you shall do if you like—and

of course you will like—you shall be coxswain of our boat, and we'll row you up to Dingley."

"You'll row! Ah, I might have known those blue collars meant something rather desperate. However, steering a wherry isn't very hard labor, as the burlesque writers would say. I'll come."

The sisters were delighted. A good-looking cousin to damsels in a rural district is like waterbrooks in a dry land. In their inmost hearts those girls doated on Geoffrey, but artfully suppressed all outward token of their affection. Many a night during the comfortable leisure of hairbrushing, when their joint maid had been dismissed, had the sisters speculated on their cousin's life, wondering why he didn't marry, and whom he would marry, and so on, while the real consideration paramount in the mind of each was, "Will he ever marry me?"

They strolled across the lawn (not a croquet-lawn of a hundred and twenty feet square, after the manner of "grounds" attached to suburban villas, but a wide undulating tract of greenward, shaded here and there by groups of picturesque old trees—maple, and copper beech, and ancient hawthorns on which the berries were beginning to redden) to a Swiss bathhouse with pointed gables and thatched roof, ample room for a small flotilla below, and a spacious apartment above—a room which, had young men been dominant in the household, would doubtless have been made a tabagie or a billiard room, but which, under the gentler sway of young ladies, had been gaily decorated with light chintz draperies and fern-cases, innocent-looking maple furniture, easels, piano and work-baskets.

That winding river reminded Geoffrey of the weedy ditch at Stillmington on which he had spent many a summer afternoon, pulling against the stream with disconsolate soul, thinking of his implacable divinity. He gave a little sigh, and wished himself back in Stillmington, to suffer, to hope, to despair—only to be near her.

"I must make an end of this misery somehow," he said to himself, "or it will make an end of me."

"What a sigh, Geoffrey! and how thoughtful you look!" exclaimed Dessie, who had an eye which marked every mote in the summer air.

"Did I sigh? I may have eaten too much breakfast. Look here, Belle, you'd better let me take a pair of sculls, while you and Dessie dabble your hands in the water and talk of your last new dresses. It isn't good for a man to be idle. I shall have the blues if I sit still and steer."

"What a strange young man you are!" said Belle. "Ten minutes ago you wanted to loll in a pony carriage and be driven."

"I might have ended the pony carriage, but I can't endure the boat unless I make myself useful. There, get in please, and sit down. What a toposh affair! and as broad as a house! I should think the man who built Noah's Ark must have designed this."

The sisters exclaimed against this disparagement of their bark, which a local boatbuilder had adorned with all the devices of his art—cane-work French polish and gilding, crimson damask-covered cushions, dainty cord and tassels—all those prettinesses which the Oxonian, who likes a boat that he can carry on his shoulder, regards with ineffable contempt.

The stream was narrow but deep, and pleasantly sheltered, for the most part, with leafage; the banks clothed in beauty, and every turn of the river disclosing a new picture. But neither Geoffrey nor his companions gave themselves up to the contemplation of this ever-varying landscape. Geoffrey was thinking of Janet Bertram; the girls were wondering what made their cousin so silent.

Mr. Hossack plied his sculls bravely, despite his abstraction, but even in this was actuated less by a desire to gratify his cousins than by a lurking design of his own. Six miles up this very stream lay Mardenholme, the mansion of the Bakers. Lady Baker's famous gardens—gardens on which fabulous sums were annually lavished—sloped down to the brim of this very river. If he could row as far as Mardenholme, he might induce the girls to take him in to Lady Baker forthwith, and thus obtain the interview he sighed for. To hope for any confidential conversation with that lady on the day of a great garden-party seemed foolish in the extreme; nor did it suit his impatient spirit to wait for the garden-party.

"When are these high jinks to come off at Lady Baker's?" he inquired presently, in his most careless manner.

"Next Tuesday. It's to be such a swell party, Geoffrey—croquet, archery, a morning concert, a German tea, *tableaux vivants*, and a dance to wind up with."

"*Tableaux vivants*," said Geoffrey, with a yawn; "the Black Brunswicker and the Huguenot, I suppose. We have grown too æsthetic for the Juan and Haydee, and the Conrad and Medora of one's youth. Are you two girls in the tableaux?"

"O, dear no," exclaimed Belle, bridling a little. "We are not Lady Baker's last mania. We are neighbors, and she always invites us to her large parties, and begs us to come to her Thursday kettledrum, and is monstrously civil; but in her heart of hearts she doesn't care a straw for humdrum country people. She is always taking up artists, and singers, and actors, and that kind of thing. She positively raves about them."

"Ah, I've heard something of that before," said Geoffrey thoughtfully. "She's musical, isn't she?"

"She calls herself so—goes to the opera perpetually in the London season, and patronises