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# THE HEIR OF FAIRMOUNT GRANGE

# The Heir of Fairmount Grange

BY

AGNES MAULE MACHAR

*Author of 'Roland Green, Knight,' 'Marjorie's Canadian Winter,' 'Down the River to the Sea,' etc., etc.*

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# HE HEIR OF FAIRMOUNT GRANGE

## PART I

### CHAPTER I

'Poor child! poor child!' said Mrs Jocelyn, musingly, as she poured into her cup a liberal portion of the rich country cream which, as a Londoner, she much appreciated, 'It is certainly very sad for her! I wish I could see what she had better do. I think I shall write by the next mail to Caroline Aylmer, to ask her if she can think of anything suitable for her, out in Canada. Mr Aylmer has come very well there, and as Caroline is so prosperous herself, she might very well do something for poor Ethel! I should be only too glad to have the dear child myself, but really our accommodation is so limited, and then Clara and I have so many engagements for this summer—Clara is in *such* request, you see—and a stranger in deep mourning does interfere so much with all one's arrangements,

for of course you can't take her on visits to your friends, and she would be dreadfully dull if you left her at home, alone!'

'Quite so, Mrs Jocelyn,' replied an elderly gentleman beside her, to whom her remarks had been addressed, and who might have sat for a type of the old fashioned family lawyer; 'the circumstances are indeed most deplorable. My good friend Mr Howard seemed good for many years. Doubtless he thought so himself, and postponed making any special provision for his niece. And of course the present *denôument* was so unexpected, for, by all the laws of probability, this scapegrace of a nephew should have worn himself out long ago!'

'Yes,' remarked an elderly lady, whose lank grey curls shaded a mildly benevolent face of somewhat sentimental expression; 'It *does* seem sad that good and ill should not be better apportioned in this world. To think of that poor prodigal Jack Howard, living on through all his follies, and turning up, *now*, when no one thought of him, to rob poor Ethel of her natural rights! Pity now that cousin Henry hadn't taken *my* advice, and brought her more out into society. Then her future might have been satisfactorily provided for, for she really is unusually attractive. But what about that young Fane who used to be down here so much? Cousin Henry seemed to think there was—or would be—something between him and

hel. I saw them together once, and he seemed ite devoted to the dear girl.'

'Oh, very likely, my dear,' rejoined Mrs Ponsonby irically, 'no doubt he *was* quite devoted to the iress of Fairmount Grange! It is a very different ing *now*. Of course, dear Ethel *is* very sweet d graceful, and cultivated and all that; but there e very few young men now-a-days who don't ok out for something more. And for a young an who has to make his living by his pen, to under- ke a wife, brought up as Ethel has been, would simply heroic; and heroes are not as thick as ackberries! Besides, this young Fane seems to getting into society, thanks mainly to the intro- ctions he got from Henry. I believe he's quite pular already, so I'm afraid there isn't much ospect in that direction.'

'Ah!' exclaimed Miss Ponsonby, 'it is too bad at there is so little chivalry and romance in this tter-of-fact age. I can't bear to think of Ethel ing thrown on the mercies of a cold world, after the tender care and petting she has had so long!'

'Well,' said Mrs Jocelyn, 'no one can say it's *my* lt. I told Henry long ago that he should have ought her up to do something for herself. He ght have had her musical talent more developed any rate. Nothing like making a girl indepen- nt, especially when she's an *orphan!*'

'Come now, my dear,' said her husband, who had

been seemingly absorbed in his breakfast, 'don't grudge the poor child the pleasant youth she has had. She will be better for that all her life. And no doubt things will turn out better than we can see at present. You know "God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb"!' With which consoling reflection, which, he imagined, was taken from Scripture, Mr Jocelyn applied himself with much satisfaction to the completion of the business in hand; and the breakfast talk went on in that subdued, decorous tone which people instinctively use in a house where there has been a recent death.

The early May sun was shining pleasantly in at the oriel window on the silver and glass of a well-appointed breakfast table, fragrant with hyacinths and Parma violets. The party that surrounded it was evidently composed of members of various households, collected together for some special occasion, and that a mournful one, to judge by their sombre attire, and the seriousness in manner and appearance, which all endeavoured to maintain. There was, as might have easily been seen by a close observer, no host or hostess present.

The only person who could have occupied that position, the 'poor child' of Mrs Jocelyn's commiseration, was at that moment lying on a couch in her pretty dressing-room, looking nearly as white as her wrapper, with hands passively folded, and eyes dreamily fixed on a photograph that stood on

little easel, on a table by her side. It was the portrait of a young man, with a bright and handsome face, expressive in every line of a nervous, sensitive, and somewhat sensuous temperament. To Ethel Howard, just then, it seemed the sole point of rest and solace in these sad days, when all her old, familiar, tranquil life seemed suddenly overwhelmed with disaster, and the pleasant little world in which she had lived from infancy was turned upside down. She had much to think of, 'poor child,' and that compassionate expression seemed appropriate enough to anyone who marked the delicate, childlike contour of the youthful face; the soft violet eyes, misty with recent tears, the curved, sensitive lips, compressed with a resolute quietness. It was the face of one who would feel far more than she would be likely to express, and so would suffer all the more intensely, in silence.

Many perplexing thoughts thronged into her mind as she lay there; fond memories of the past, mingled with a shrinking dread of the future, the former so sweet and bright with protecting love and tenderness, the latter so blank and desolate, save for the one ray of sunshine of which the bright face in the photograph was the outward expression. It was not wonderful that she should cling to the associations it represented, and to the solitude of her own room; shrinking, naturally enough, from

the well-intended but rather trying sympathy of the relatives who had collected at Fairmount Grange for the funeral of her uncle and adopted father, the only one she had ever known.

Only a few days before, the Grange, over whose quiet rural beauty so dark a cloud seemed now to rest, had been as happy a home as could easily have been found. Mr Howard, a quiet and studious recluse, had been one of the most loveable of men; and, having taken his orphan niece into his heart as well as his home, he had left nothing undone that indulgent affection could do for her happiness and welfare. Some people said, indeed, that her mother, whom she strikingly resembled, had been the object of his own early love, and that her marriage to his brother had made him a bachelor for life. Certainly no father could have been more affectionate and thoughtful; and, as his adopted daughter, and the future mistress of Fairmount Grange, Ethel had had as happy a life, with as hopeful a future, as could fall to the lot of any girl. At least she had thought so until she had met Edgar Fane, and discovered that the only lack in her little paradise was now supplied in his evident devotion and unconcealed pleasure in her society. He had first found his way to Fairmount Grange as the young tutor of a reading party, one of whom was a near connection of Mr Howard, and a frequent visitor at the Grange. Mr Howard had been much taken

ith the young man's pleasant manner, bright talk, nd good scholarship, and had done what he could o promote the literary career in which young Fane as just beginning to achieve some success. People rophesied a brilliant future for him, and Mr Howard, who cared far more for intellect and iterary tastes, than for more material possessions, sed to watch the growing attraction between young ane and Ethel with kindly interest, and would mile quietly to himself as he watched them linger- ng in the pleasant walks about the Grange, and hought how well they suited each other, and how e could bear to think of leaving his dear Ethel ith one like Edgar Fane to take care of her—and airmount Grange. There had been no positive ngagement, nor even any definite love-making— hat would have been premature on the young man's art—but Mr Howard saw that things were drift- ng in that direction, and was not sorry to see it. s for Ethel, she would scarcely have owned to her- elf, much less to any one else, that Edgar Fane nd she were anything more than *friends*. But hen the sudden death of her uncle had left her ome desolate, her heart involuntarily took refuge n the thought of the *one* friend to whom she in- tinctively turned for comfort in the sudden atastrophe which had swallowed up all the bright- ess of her life, and changed the whole colouring of er future.

For Fairmount Grange had been an entailed property, a thing which had seemed of small importance, so long as the 'scrapegrace nephew,' Jack Howard, had been supposed dead—the natural consequence of the dissipated habits which had wrecked his career and made him an aimless wanderer. He had not been heard from for more than ten years, and Mr Howard had so fully persuaded himself that he must have died abroad, that he had scarcely felt a misgiving as to his adopted daughter finding any obstacle to her undisputed succession. The property was not large, but neither the owner nor the heir presumptive possessed any extravagant tastes, and Ethel had reigned as a small princess in her little domain, assuming more and more the reigns of government, as her indulgent uncle grew more and more passive, more absorbed in his favourite books and studies. But, very shortly before his unexpected death, the prodigal had reappeared at Fairmount Grange, to his uncle's great dismay. Mr Howard had speedily persuaded him to take his departure to a safe distance from the Grange and from Ethel, whom he did not wish even to see this unpresentable cousin. She, although she knew of his arrival, did not in the least appreciate the gravity of the situation, having been so accustomed to regard her present life as a matter of course, that the idea of any change never occurred to her for a moment. It

was, then, with a strange bewilderment—scarcely amounting to realisation, that she heard the truth, which the old family lawyer broke to her as gently as possible—that she had now no claim to the home which had been hers so long, and that Fairmount Grange was the property of a man with whom she could not wish to have any intimacy.

The discovery seemed rather to add poignancy to her grief for the loss of her uncle, than to trouble her for herself. The thought of his beloved home passing into the hands of so unworthy a successor was inexpressibly bitter—indeed intolerable to her; and for a time the double shock had so prostrated the poor girl, that she seemed to lie passive under its weight. Mrs Jocelyn had applied all the consolation that occurred to her, interspersed with hints which her practical mind could not quite suppress—that Ethel must brace herself to meet the altered situation, and think what it would be best for her to do. At first this scarcely conveyed any meaning to her mind; but gradually it dawned on her, that the calamity which had befallen her, *meant* that she could no longer live the happy careless life she had hitherto done—that she must expect to earn her own living, like other poor girls she had known—Marion Evans, for instance, the late Rector's daughter, who had been obliged to take a situation as a governess. Unless—! But she shrank sensitively from her aunt's broad hint about

the attentions of Edgar Fane. She had never allowed herself to put the idea of marriage definitely to her own mind—even as the heiress of Fairmount Grange, and *now* that things were so changed, it was horrible to have it suggested as a possible alternative from a life of poverty and struggle. Edgar Fane, she knew, was still striving to make good his foothold on the lowest rounds of the ladder that leads to prosperity, if not to fame. How could she, for the present, think of adding to his cares, even if he should ask her to do so? It was, therefore, with strangely mingled feelings that she gazed sadly at the photograph, and re-read once more, the little note expressing sympathy, and promising an early visit, which she had received shortly after the news of Mr Howard's death had reached the writer.

## CHAPTER II

Miss Howard forced herself to come down to dinner that evening, to take her place once more at the head of her uncle's table. It would not be long that she would be called to play the part of hostess, and she felt that she must do her duty to her guests while she could. The man of law had taken his departure. Mr and Mrs Jocelyn and Miss Monsonby were still there, and the latter frequently imperiled Ethel's hardly maintained composure, by expressions of sympathy which she could well have spared.

'Ah! a sad change for you, my love, are you sure you feel equal to being down stairs? Poor Henry! how I miss him at every turn.' So persistently sympathetic was the good lady indeed, that the practical Mrs Jocelyn at last interposed somewhat sharply, begging her 'for goodness sake to try to think of something else for a little while, and let poor Ethel have some peace.'

Mr Jocelyn indulged in a few mild platitudes,

keeping up at least a show of conversation, for which Ethel was duly grateful. Above all things she dreaded any allusion to Edgar Fane, from whom, during the day, she had had a few lines announcing a visit the next morning; and her heart beat painfully at the thought of the interview she longed for and yet half dreaded. She had never seen Edgar under the least shadow of sadness, and she wondered how he, who loved sunshine and happiness, would bear himself under circumstances so sorrowful. She bravely maintained her composure, however, even offering Mr Jocelyn the game of backgammon in which she knew he delighted, but which he declined, with a compassionate glance at the pale, resolutely calm face, with the dark shadows under the eyes speaking of sorrow and sleepless nights, which it seemed so strange to see on Ethel Howard's fair young face.

'As we can't very well expect to enjoy your music yet, my dear, I won't trouble you to entertain me in any other way. I think you had much better retire early, and get some sleep if you can.'

It seemed very strange to Ethel to go up stairs without the affectionate kiss and blessing that had been wont to dismiss her nightly to rest. The soft May moonlight found its way into her room through a half open shutter, and she sat for a long time looking out at the broad lawn, silvered by the moonlight, and flecked by the deep shadows of the

dars, and the lighter tracery of the blossoming rubs. It was all so sweet, so peaceful—she felt hard to believe that he who had seemed the ntre and life of it all had left it for ever. Where as he now? And she soon lost herself in those istful but vain attempts to guess at the conditions the unseen life, that haunt every mourner, till e almost lost the thought of Edgar, and weariness last brought on the first refreshing sleep she had nown since her great bereavement.

'I wonder whether he will think all this black ery unbecoming and dreadful,' Ethel could not sist asking herself, as she stood before her mirror ext morning and criticised the effect of her sombre ourning draperies, which, under Mrs Jocelyn's pervision, had been so heavily loaded with crape. thel had often heard Edgar talk impatiently of e conventional paraphernalia of mourning, and y how he disliked it. Would it repel him now? e wondered. But he would be blind indeed if he uld not see how strongly the black surroundings ightened the exquisite delicacy of her complexion, not pale, but fair,' the finely moulded features and e shining coils of soft chestnut hair that seemed e natural complement of the dark violet eyes. he sorrowful expression, so unwonted on the fair oung face, had given to the wistful curves of her outh a new expression of softness and pathos. o any careful observer, Ethel Howard seemed, in

her deep mourning, sweeter and nobler than pe
haps she had ever looked before.

She was far too restless and nervous to wait i
the house the expected arrival; and she was anxio
to get away from the curious and observant ey
of which she was painfully conscious. She fe
too, as if she could not bear to see Edgar enter th
familiar rooms where he had always before e
countered Mr Howard's unaffected welcome. S
occupied herself, therefore, in strolling about th
grounds, watching the Scotch gardener, Brown,
work among the flower-beds, replying to his i
quiries as to what she thought of his summ
arrangements, forgetting, for the time being, th
she was no longer in a position to give him orde
and mournfully surveying the rich beauty of th
hyacinths that had been her uncle's especial pri
and delight.

'What would you think about the calceolari
Miss Ethel,' asked Brown, 'would you think they
the verbenas would look best yonder? They
just about ready to set out.'

'Mr Howard always liked the calceolarias b
over there, Brown. He liked to see the gold relie
against the dark green of the ceder boughs. B
do as you think best, yourself,' she said, a stra
pang striking her as she thought that neither h
uncle or she would enjoy them there that summ
She turned away with a sigh; and Brown, recolle

ng himself, sighed too, and said to himself, as he rushed away the moisture from his eyes with his oat sleeve, 'Poor lassie! poor lassie! it's a sad hange for her, as well as for the rest of us.'

'If Mr Fane comes, Thompson,' Ethel had said to he faithful old servant who discharged the various uties of butler and footman, 'you can tell him he ill find me up at the beech-tree seat.'

'Very well, Miss Howard,' he had replied, glad o hear that his young mistress was going to have he consolation of a visit from her handsome young over, in which character the household at Fair-nount Grange had by common consent recognised im.

It was a fair English scene that lay before Ethel, s she sat under the copper beech, just budding into af. Fairmount Grange took its name from the hill hat rose behind it, commanding a charming view ver undulating pastoral country, with a typical illage and church in the foreground, glimpses of a inding river, and a range of misty blue hills eyond. Ethel had often sat there with her uncle r Edgar Fane, enjoying the changeful beauty of he scene, in the early morning or evening hours. ow, the same familiar landscape was before her, ut she scarcely noticed its beauty. A choking eeling of suspense, which she scarcely understood, osorbed every other impression; little as it was isible in the calm, somewhat set face, paler than

usual, and still paler from the contrast with t
dead black of her draperies.

It seemed to her that she had sat there a lo
time, absently noticing the changes of light a
shade on the distant woods, clothed in the fi
tender green of spring, as the light clouds flitt
over the soft May sky, when, at last, a well kno
footstep, quick and elastic, approached on t
winding ascent. Ethel sat very still, watching f
the first glimpse of the approaching figure—
young man fashionably and faultlessly attir
whose usually bright face was strangly pale a
agitated. Ethel was indeed visibly the calmer
the two as he pressed her hand silently, with e
dent emotion, which seemed at first to preve
further expression. Ethel was the first to speak

'It was so kind of you to come,' she said; then
seemed as if she too could get no further.

'I should have come before, if I could,' he sa
hurriedly, 'it was awfully hard to stay in to
trying to work, while my thoughts were with y
down here; but I had a pile of work that must
finished before I could leave. How hard it m
all have been for you, the suddenness of the sho
the sad duties, and then all these painful and un
pected consequences!'

'You have heard, then,' she said, glad to esc
a more direct allusion to her bereavement, of wh
it seemed impossible for her to speak. Edgar t

her query with the same sense of relief. What solation for a mourner had *he*, indeed, to offer, whom the 'resurrection and the life' were but illusion of the mind!'

'Yes,' he exclaimed, 'I have heard what an stice you have to suffer, through this precious ng they call 'law'! I've always maintained that t blessed law of entail is a survival from a primi- barbarism. To think that a scamp like your sin (I beg your pardon for calling him so, but n't think of it with patience), should come in to you of what is yours by every moral right and sideration! If ever I have a chance, I shall, at st, have a try at helping to upset such a wretched tem!'

'It seemed very strange at first,' said Ethel etly; 'but I think I am growing reconciled to idea. I had no idea that Fairmount Grange ld ever seem so *un*homelike a place as it does, w that *he* is gone who made it home!' Her lips d eyelids quivered slightly, but she controlled rself with an effort.

'It is intolerable to think of your having to ve your home,' he said with real emotion. 'Dear ss Howard, dear Ethel, I can hardly realise it, u can't think how trying it has been to me!' s voice had sunk so low that it was barely dible. Ethel sat very still and pale, with an ex- ession of forced composure. Yet the words

'dear Ethel' seemed to be what her heart had been hungering for during all these dreary days.

'And now,' he continued, 'what would I not give to be in a position to offer you—not my heart, for that I am sure you know is yours already—but a home worthy of you. It would be the sweetest thing life could bring me. And here I am tied absolutely by the hard facts of existence! Before your uncle's death, I was withheld from asking for your love, by the fear that my devotion might be misunderstood. *Now* the obstacle is, utter inability at present to offer you anything but a share in a struggle for existence, which is hard enough for myself alone!'

He stopped as if for a reply. But what was there to say? A chill seemed creeping over Ethel's heart. She had thought of all this herself, over and over again. She had been wont to dream as maidens will, of a warm impassioned love that will not look at obstacles, and holds nothing impossible, so that it may win the prize of all prizes, and she had unconsciously allowed herself to associate these dreams with the thought of Edgar Fane. She had been prepared for an offered sacrifice, for an appeal to wait for a home to be won by steadily patient toil and struggle; and she had been prepared to refuse to accept the sacrifice—to refuse to let a generous heart pledge itself to what it might yet regret. But she was *not* prepared to be a passive

listener to the statement of the impossibility of it all, and her heart sank with a sense of loss and humiliation that sent the blood to her heart and left her paleness paler.

'It's awfully hard,' he continued presently, 'when one thinks of the difference a very little more money might make to one, and see other fellows positively rolling in it, and fooling it away! This cousin of yours—what good will it be to *him* to take what should have been yours? And literature is such a precarious thing! Even when one makes a hit, one may not repeat it till the Greek Kalends—and meantime one must wait—and *starve!*'

He spoke so bitterly that Ethel, for the moment, ceased to feel her own pain, in sympathy with struggling genius. She did not think of noticing the perfection of his costume in every detail, or of calculating its probable cost. She had been too much accustomed to such perfection in those about her, not to take such things as a matter of course. To be sure the young curate, who was saving his little income in order to marry Marian Evans, wore very threadbare coats, but she had never connected these two circumstances. Her sympathy overcame the involuntary sense of disappointment, and she spoke at last.

'I am so sorry, Mr Fane,' she said gently, 'that you have such a hard struggle. I wish I could help

it. I know my uncle would have tried to make it easier for you, if—but please don't say anything more about me. I am not worrying about *that* at all. A woman can get on with very little, and I have so many friends—and my music!'

'But I want you to understand how I love you—how inexpressibly painful it is to *me*, to resign the sweetest hope of my life. Perhaps a brighter day may come, when I shall be able to throw myself and my success at your feet, and ask you to accept both!'

He spoke now with force and fervour, as he flattered himself; and, indeed, in look and tone he seemed, for the moment, the impassioned lover of Ethel's day-dream.

But her maidenly pride had been deeply hurt, and she would not even meet his eye. She summoned all her self-control, and said, with quiet dignity, 'We need not discuss such remote possibilities *now*, Mr Fane. I quite understand your position, and I am sorry you should think it necessary to explain it. Suppose we walk down to the house. What a lovely morning it is! I think the spring tints never looked so exquisitely tender!'

Edgar Fane would have liked to prolong the interview, but her manner was so decided, that he had no choice but to follow her lead, and they walked slowly on, keeping up with some success, an indifferent conversation. They had walked on

for some distance, when, to Ethel's relief, they encountered Mr Jocelyn leisurely taking his morning stroll. He invited them to accompany him to look at a young plantation, but Ethel excused herself by saying that she wished to return to the house at once, suggesting very decidedly that Mr Fane should accompany her uncle. She turned down a walk that led towards the house; but suddenly a thought seemed to strike her, and, taking a little private path by which they were wont to go to church, she soon found herself at a little wicket gate leading into the churchyard. There was no one within sight, and she made her way at once to her uncle's new-made grave. She sat motionless for a time, as one stunned and bewildered. Then as she seemed to wake to recognition of the circumstances, she hid her face in her hands, and gave way to a rush of tears that seemed to relieve a little the pent-up emotion which had weighed on her heart like lead. Her slight form quivered from head to foot, till the first violence of the paroxysm had spent itself, and she murmured, 'My dear, dear uncle! I shall never have anyone to love me as you did! Oh, why did you leave me! Oh uncle! Henry!' She was weeping quietly again, somewhat calmer and more composed, trying to steady herself entirely before returning to preside at the luncheon table with the dignity that befitted her uncle's darling. Her eyes

were fixed on the grave beside her, and so absorbed was she in thought that she did not hear approaching footsteps, which came to a sudden stop at sight of the graceful figure in black seated by the grave. The man who approached was not young, and, despite his garb, that of a gentleman, had a shabby, unkempt appearance. His face was not merely tanned by exposure, but flushed with an ominous dark red hue that betrayed its origin clearly enough.

His step was unsteady even now, though he endeavoured to steady it as he approached the figure, whose identity he seemed at once to divine. It startled Ethel from her abstraction, and she looked up, a vague instinctive hope rising against her will. She rose hastily to her feet, as she encountered the fixed and evidently interested gaze of the stranger's dull, heavy eyes. And, notwithstanding his generally disreputable appearance, there was enough of the Howard in his form and features, taken in connection with his downward glance at herself and the new-made grave, to enable her to guess quickly who he was. Presently he spoke, in a voice that he tried to steady, which, thick and tremulous as it was, reminded her painfully of her uncle.

'My cousin, Miss Howard, I suppose. Excuse me if I intrude; allow me to introduce your unworthy servant and cousin, Jack Howard—myself!'

Ethel bowed. She could not bring herself to

shake hands with the dissipated looking stranger, and a hot flush rose rapidly to her pale cheek, as she felt the sting of humiliation that a man like *this* should be *her* cousin and her uncle's representative. She wished to reply courteously to his self-introduction, but words did not come readily.

'I'm awfully sorry—indeed I am,' he continued in the soft, rich voice, which seemed the only gentlemanlike trait he had not lost. 'Awfully cut up, I assure you—to inconvenience any lady! Hope you won't think it necessary to make any change. There's lots of room in the Grange,—you know. I didn't like to ask to see you, but I wanted to say that I shouldn't on any account wish to disturb you, and you could get some old lady to stay with you—Miss Ponsonby, perhaps! I met her just now, and she has been talking to me like a mother. I shan't want to be at the Grange, much, and when I did go there I shouldn't disturb you any more than I could help.'

'You are very kind, indeed, Mr Howard,' Ethel replied. She could not call him by his Christian name. 'But the Grange would not seem home to me without Uncle Henry.'

The dull, unsteady eyes were again fixed admiringly on her pale, sweet flowerlike face. A new idea seemed to penetrate his half stupified mind.

'Why couldn't we *make* it home for you' he said.

'Why couldn't you just change the *Miss* Howard to *Mrs* Howard and remain mistress at the Grange, just as you always have been! *I* shouldn't trouble you much, so it wouldn't make much difference to you, you know. I should like that *awfully*, indeed I should! I can't bear the idea of being a nuisance to you, indeed I can't. Don't turn away like that. Do think of it, Miss Howard—Cousin Ethel—if you'll let me take the liberty!'

He spoke with the insistence with which a man in his condition will sometimes press a sudden idea which has seized upon his mind. Ethel could divine that he had fortified himself previously in his usual way. Her face was alternately flushing and paling. She felt as if she had been subjected to another intolerable humiliation. That a man like *this* should ever dream of hinting at marriage to *her*, who had scarcely thought of it definitely in connection even with Edgar Fane! It stung her as much as a coarse insult would have wounded a less sensitive girl. Yet she felt that it was not intended disrespectfully; and that this man, wreck as he was, had yet some real chivalry in his nature. With a great effort she replied, 'It is really very kind of you, Mr Howard, but I trust you will feel that it is impossible for me to think of such a thing, and please oblige me by not speaking of it again. Are you not going back to the Grange? Mr and Mrs Jocelyn will be glad to see you at luncheon.'

As she spoke, she turned to lead the way from the churchyard, the last place in which she cared to be disturbed by this most unwelcome intruder. But it could not be helped, and she felt that he was scarcely accountable for what he said. It was only another consequence of her loss, and her unprotected condition, she bitterly felt.

But poor Jack Howard had sense enough to feel 'that he had put his foot in it,' and that his presence was unwelcome. Nor was he at all anxious to have any more of Mrs Jocelyn's or Miss Ponsonby's society, than he had had in his very short call. In the most courteous manner he could, he bade Miss Howard 'Good-morning,' saying that he should go back to the village inn where he had already put up, as he should leave for London by the afternoon train. Ethel was inwardly much relieved. It was hard enough to meet Edgar Fane at luncheon, but to meet him in the presence of this man, who claimed such near kinship, would have been too great a humiliation. Yet, in spite of the repulsion he had inspired, she could not help having a kindly feeling for poor Jack Howard, at least after his heavy shambling figure had disappeared from her view.

Edgar Fane travelled to London by the same afternoon train, after a commonplace farewell to Miss Howard and her relatives; but though he knew very well who his fellow-traveller was, he took care to give him a wide berth. He had, indeed

bitter thoughts of his own to occupy him. Fairmount Grange, with Ethel Howard as its mistress, had at least been a charming 'castle in the air,' and now it was in ruins. And Ethel ejected from her possessions was impossible for *him*. 'It was just his luck,' which he duly bewailed, thinking, as the train rattled on, of the pleasant chapter in his life which was now closed, whatever other chapters might hereafter open. As for Ethel herself, she lay in her quiet room, exhausted with the agitation she had undergone, feeling as if the *only* chapter of *her* life had come to an end, and the future had nothing more to look forward to. And indeed Ethel Howard would never be quite the same light-hearted girl again. A deeper and more lasting happiness she *might* have—that which comes from bearing and overcoming, but precisely what she had had before she could not in the nature of things again experience.

## CHAPTER III

A MONTH had dragged slowly by at Fairmount Grange, where Ethel had always found the time to fly too swiftly. That she still remained in her old home was somewhat contrary to her own desire, although her heart still clung to its dear associations, and she shrank with dread from the final leavetaking, which the old servants and dependants would feel almost as much as *she* did. But it was not quite clear yet what were to be her plans for the future. A life cannot be torn up by the roots and transplanted in a day. And as the solution of the problem seemed so difficult to arrive at, Mrs Jocelyn's practical mind had decreed that she should for the present remain at the Grange, having as her companion Miss Ponsonby, who was by no means reluctant to enjoy this pleasant change in her own restricted life, and to assume a position which she would have liked for a permanent one. Indeed she had always felt herself somewhat injured, in that her cousin Henry had

not long ago installed her as the mistress of Fairmount Grange. She was not, however, a very cheerful companion for Ethel. Her sympathy was too obvious and insistent, and poor Ethel often shrank from her openly expressed commiseration for the loss of Fairmount Grange, almost as much as she did from the more veiled and hinted sympathy in the severer trial which all could guess at, though Miss Howard never referred, in the most distant way, to Mr Fane's existence. She had received a letter from him after his return to London, a letter that seemed to express the conflicting feelings that alternately swayed him, the vivid remembrance of Ethel's charms, with a stronger realisation of the 'hard facts' of life, and the rash imprudence of committing himself to a life of struggle and self-denial for which he felt himself so entirely unfitted. He bewailed the hard fate that had crossed his plans and hopes; but he thought very little about the prospects and fate of the girl he professed to love. She had replied to his letter as curtly as she had done to his spoken appeal, begging him to banish the matter from his mind, and wishing him all success in his present work. Fane—always sensitive—read, or fancied he read between the lines, at least a suggestion of the contempt which, in his inmost heart he knew he deserved, and would probably receive from a girl like Ethel. And, to escape unpleasant reflections, he followed her advice

with greater ease than he had believed possible, being greatly helped in this by a wished-for invitation for a few days' shooting in August, the party invited including, as he knew, the pretty Niss Addington, with whom he had had a rather pronounced flirtation during the preceding winter.

Ethel tried to take up her broken life again as best she could,—read, worked, and walked with Miss Ponsonby; even trying the piano occasionally, as she knew her uncle would have wished her to do. But every spot she visited,—every book she took up had some strong association with either her uncle or Edgar Fane. Every piece of music had tender associations with the pleasant evening hours when her uncle had sat by apparently buried in book or newspaper, but ever and anon uttering some word of affectionate appreciation, and Edgar Fane had stood by her side, turning the leaves, and occasionally accompanying her in a song. Every walk about the Grange had its memories of the two who had made up her little world. She found her best solace in visiting her poor *protégés*, and forgetting, for a time, her own more sentimental troubles in their very prosaic and practical ones; often wondering, indeed, how they could bear the pressure of poverty and sickness with the patience they generally showed. And Mr Lyle, the curate, who was to marry her friend Marion Evans, frequently met her in her visits and walks, and would

talk to her in his calm, clear, gentle tones of the purer happiness to be found in rising above 'the chances and changes of this troublesome world,' to the peace that can know neither change nor loss. These quiet, meditative days, under the shadow of her heavy sorrow, taught her much that she never forgot in years to come.

At last the morning post brought a note from Mrs Jocelyn, which Ethel opened with the presentiment that it contained her fate. Mrs Jocelyn was so 'practical' that she generally ended in having her way, and becoming the arbiter of her little circle; and Ethel knew that whatever plan her aunt constructed, would be buttressed and supported by so many good and sufficient reasons, that she should never be able successfully to resist it, however distasteful it might be. The letter was dated from a country house at which she and her daughter were sojourning, enjoying a round of gaiety,—she herself being congenially occupied in promoting her daughter's matrimonial interests. Ethel glanced impatiently over the preliminary lines, enlarging on the pleasantness of their surroundings, and the attentions Clara was receiving, till she came to the important paragraph which concerned herself, and read as follows ;—

'I am so glad, my dear child, to say that I have just had a most kind letter from your aunt Caroline, with one to yourself which I enclose. I think her

invitation is just the thing for you! It will give you the change you need, and time to look about you out there, where I have no doubt you will find it easier to get something suitable than it would be here. Your aunt has considerately sent me a cheque sufficient to pay all your expenses out, so that there is nothing to prevent you from going as soon as you can get ready. I hope you will write at once to say when you will be ready to sail. Anything you want I shall be happy to get for you when we return next week to Blackheath. Or you might come up yourself, a few days sooner, and do any shopping you want. Clara and I will be delighted to see you for a little visit, before you sail. Make up your mind, like a dear girl, and set mine at ease about you.'

Ethel turned eagerly to the enclosed letter in her aunt's large flowing hand, which was already familiar to her, from the occasional letters she had received from her during childhood. It was dated 'Toronto, Canada'; and, after expressing warm sympathy with Ethel in her sorrow, as well as her own regret for Mr Howard's death, she went on to say:—

'It would give me the greatest pleasure, my dear Ethel, to receive you here and learn to know you. I always wished to have my sister's child with me, but gave way to your uncle's claim. Now I hope

you will come to me at once, and see if we cannot do something to cheer your most natural sorrow, and make you feel at home with us. Fanny will be delighted to have you for a companion, and as we spend part of our summer in quiet country quarters, at Murray Bay, below Quebec, your society will he doubly welcome. I hear you are an accomplished musician, so you can be of great use to Fanny in helping her to keep up her music, which she is very remiss about doing when we are in the country. I wish I could go myself to bring you out, and am sorry that you will have to take the voyage alone, but it is now so short that you don't need to mind that, and Mr Jocelyn can put you under the captain's care. As we shall be going to Murray Bay about the first of July, we might arrange to meet you in Quebec, and show you the 'lions' of that old historic city, which I am sure will interest you. I think and hope that you will enjoy Canada very much, even if, in some respects, you may think it a long way behind dear old England. I have been very happy here, and I think we can make *you* so.'

There was more to the same effect, for the letter was a long one, and Ethel could not but feel its affectionate cordiality. She handed both letters across the table to Miss Ponsonby, who was waiting

with repressed impatience to learn their contents, her own breakfast being quite neglected.

'Well,' she remarked, after a leisurely perusal, 'I must say that is a most kind letter of your Aunt Caroline's. Her generosity is really quite refreshing. And I do think, Ethel, you ought to be most thankful for such an opening! There is no knowing what it may lead to. When I was young, there was nothing for girls but to go out to India, like the boys. *Now* there are so many things they can do,' she observed, regretfully.

Ethel scarcely followed the course of her aunt's remarks. The question of severance of all the old home-ties, though so long impending, had never come quite so near her. It seemed to bring a dizzy feeling to her head, and a choking one to her throat, to be brought face to face with an immediate decision. Yet she felt instinctively the comforting warmth and affection of her Aunt Caroline's letter. It was so different from Mrs Jocelyn's mere *kindness*, the two things being only too distinct and distinguishable. She had, too, a distinct remembrance of a visit from her at Fairmount Grange, of an ample matronly presence, of being enfolded in a warm motherly embrace, of kisses and candy alternately and liberally administered; and her heart had always warmed to Aunt Caroline's name. The letter seemed like a call from a loving voice that she

could not refuse to hear. But there were so many other cries in her heart from the happy past, from her dear old home, from her uncle's grave, from the still unquenched love that Edgar Fane had awakened, that the step of venturing out into a great unknown world seemed to her shy inexperience a formidable one indeed. So absorbed was she by these conflicting emotions, that she scarcely noticed the other letters and notes that lay beside her plate, till Miss Ponsonby had repeatedly reminded her of their existence. She took them up absently; one was the periodical epistle from Marion Evans, that would keep till her mind was more at leisure. Another was in an unknown hand, which excited her curiosity. She opened it, glanced at once at the signature, and was astonished to read the only half-recognised name 'John Howard.'

It was only by degrees that she made out from the awkward and somewhat incoherent epistle, that the writer meant, in all seriousness, to renew and press his very sudden proposal of marriage. He assured her that he had not been able to forget her, and the thought had positively haunted him,—that she might just as well as not remain the mistress of her old home, with scarcely any change in the situation. She need not be troubled with him, if she didn't wish it; though he thought that perhaps if a woman like her could care for him

a little, he might yet have a chance to turn over a new leaf. But he was quite willing to remain away from Fairmount Grange, for which he had no particular fancy, and leave her undisputed mistress, either legally, as his wife, or informally as Miss Howard. She could keep the place in order for him, and he would be free to continue the roving life to which he had so long been accustomed, that he could scarcely settle down to any other. He closed by begging her to believe him very much at her service, and her affectionate cousin, John Howard.

She felt that it was really a thoroughly kind-hearted letter—confused as it was; and it brought the tears to Ethel's eyes, with a sense of the futility and cross purposes of life. If she could but have felt this a right and honourable solution of the question, how gladly would she have stayed peacefully in her old home, instead of going out as a stranger into the wide world, from which she shrank in over-sensitive shyness. It would hurt no one if she were to remain in her present position, as her cousin's nominal wife, and would save so much pain, and even possible evil to others, for what sort of a master would poor Jack Howard make for Fairmount Grange? To take care of all that her uncle had valued—and she knew that, without a careful eye, many things they had both loved must suffer—seemed to her the only thing she could now

care to live for. She could still be the kind, thoughtful friend of the poor *protégés*—of the old and sickly folks who had so long looked to the Grange for all that lightened the burden of their life. And then—she would still have some things in her power; and with a girl's somewhat fantastic magnanimity, she thought how an anonymous cheque might sometimes find its way to help a struggling young genius in London, who, even if he *had* disappointed her perhaps too romantic expectations, was still her *friend*, for whom it would be pleasant to do an occasional hidden act of kindness. All these thoughts and images flitted rapidly through her mind. On one side—the pleasant country home—the tranquil, useful life she loved—the independence of position—the good that might be done for others; on the other, a venture into new and untried circumstances, into exile, or what so seemed to her, into a country associated in her mind with Indian savages, and bitter cold, with stories of rude pioneer life, and tales of ice-palaces, and a winter that reigned during half the year! Even her aunt's affectionate letter failed to brighten the dark side of the mental picture, with the stormy sea in addition, which she dreaded as people vaguely dread an almost unknown evil. For the short passage from Dover to Calais, on the occasion of her only trip to the Continent, was her sole experience of the sea, and it was an experience she

shrank from repeating. All these considerations seemed to chase each other through her mind, while she sat with her still untasted breakfast before her, Miss Ponsonby being still engrossed in discussing over and over again the letter her niece had handed to her.

'Ah, yes,' she continued in a steady monologue, 'your Aunt Caroline's letter is all that could be desired! I could have wished, my love, that you and I should have stayed on together *here*. This sweet, quiet life has been quite delightful. But, as that can't be, I really think it would be flying in the face of Providence not to accept at once Mrs Aylmer's invitation. Don't you think so yourself? Shall you write at once to accept it? I will write to your Aunt Jocelyn for you, if you like, to say when you will go to town. We can soon pack up your things here, you know, with Lisette.'

'Never mind, auntie, dear. I'll write myself, but I should like to take a little time to think over it all. I suppose, as you say, I ought to go; but I can't quite make up my mind to it, just yet.

'Well, well, my dear, it's your own affair, and you ought to know your own mind best! Only, if I had such an offer made to *me*, I know I shouldn't hesitate. And it will give you such opportunities of enlarging your mind—of seeing new places—and scenery—and all that! That is such an advantage,

you know! But you are right to take plenty of time to consider it.'

Ethel spent much of her morning on the beech-tree seat, with the best intentions of considering carefully all the *pros* and *cons*;—but, in spite of herself, she found herself always relapsing into dreams. Visions of what might have been, came in to carry off her thoughts in utterly aimless directions—and she could not help mentally playing, as it were, with Jack Howard's proposal, while, all the time, she knew quite well in her heart that she could never accept it. Some girls in her position would scarcely have hesitated to do so; but her own innate sense of womanly delicacy and honour, strengthened by her uncle's influence, would have utterly revolted from such a desecration of the most sacred of unions, for the sake of comfort and convenience. And she knew just as well that she *must* accept her aunt's invitation, that she must not disappoint her relations, by refusing to do what was expected of her, and, indeed, she could give no reason for doing so that would satisfy a severely practical relative. But she would gladly have remained as a housemaid at Fairmount Grange, if that had been possible, rather than venture into the unknown world beyond the sea.

'Have you decided then, my love?' asked Miss Ponsonby anxiously, as she saw Ethel seat herself at her Davenport, that afternoon.

'I suppose so, auntie' she replied, wearily; 'I suppose there really is only one thing to do. It was only that I could hardly bear to think so, at first.'

'Yes, I know, my poor darling!' said Miss Ponsonby, sympathetically, and Ethel submitted as patiently as she could to the kindly meant consolation and petting, which tried her inexpressibly.

It was comparatively easy to write the letters to her aunts. The one to Mrs Jocelyn needed only to be clear and decided; to say just when she would go to her in London, and when she would be ready to sail. The reply to her Aunt Caroline, too, was easy for her. Her aunt's affectionate tone had won her confidence, and she could write freely about her own sense of loss and her appreciation of Mrs Aylmer's kindness. But the letter to her cousin cost her much more thought and trouble. Something in the poor fellow's blundering, but kindly-meant epistle, touched her deeply, and made her feel as if the bond of kindred counted for *something* after all. She tried her best to express herself so as to make him feel that she recognised his kind intention, and desired to maintain all the family feeling which should characterise their present relation, without the slightest encouragement to his suggestion of any other. And she succeeded in inditing the only true womanly letter that poor Jack Howard had ever received in his life, a life in

which he had been so often assumed to be 'good for nothing,' that he had been only too content to drift on, and let his life verify the valuation thus set upon it. Such a letter as *that*, he felt bitterly, when he read it—had any such fallen to his lot when his life was still plastic—might have helped him to resist the fatal influences that had dragged him down and lost him so much that he only *now* began vaguely to appreciate.

Ethel had finished her three letters before it occurred to her, with some remorse, that in her preoccupation she had not yet opened the one from Miss Evans, which she had laid aside at the moment, and had completely forgotten. She took it up at once, wondering how she could have been so careless and negligent of her oldest friend. The contents of the letter gave her a thorough surprise. Marion, usually so calm and equable, wrote in great excitement, to say that a sudden change had come over all her plans. Mr Lyle had, through an old friend, received an urgent invitation to take the position of assistant clergyman in a Canadian city, had decided to accept it, and in two or three weeks they would sail for this new home. It had all been so sudden, that she could scarcely realise it yet. Her employers had been most kind in allowing her to resign her present engagement, which they could the more easily do, as the holiday season was so near, and they were to go abroad for a few weeks.

She was to have gone with them, but, of course, she would far rather go with dear Gilbert to his new sphere of work.

It would be a dreadful hurry, she said,—'but I am not ambitious, you know, in the matter of *trousseau*, so I can manage! Only there is *one* thing I have set my heart on. I want to see both you and my dear old home once more, and I want to be married in my father's and Gilbert's dear old church. Could you, dearest Ethel, if you are still to be some time at the Grange, let me come to you for a day? If so, it would add so much to my happiness. And I know you wouldn't care to be formally a bridesmaid just now, but as I am to be married, quite quietly, in my travelling dress, perhaps you wouldn't mind standing beside me? I should feel it so much more like having some one belonging to me, and there is no one I should care to have at such a time, but *you*!'

Ethel's exclamation of surprise at once aroused Miss Ponsonby's curiosity.

'Oh, my dear,' she said, when Ethel had explained, I *did* hear Mr Thornby say that he thought we might lose Mr Lyle very soon, that he had had such an offer, and that, very probably, he might accept. I forgot to tell you when you came in; besides you see Mr Lyle so often, that I really thought you would know more than *I* did.'

And then Ethel remembered that she had not

seen Mr Lyle for a week past, indeed he had been away to see his absent rector, and consult him about the step he was considering. But it seemed to her a remarkable coincidence, that, just as she had decided upon a journey which she dreaded so much, she should find that the old friend of her girlhood was about to take the same formidable voyage. If they could only go together, it would take nearly all the terror out of the enterprise. And why should they not? She sat down at once to write to Marion, to extend most warmly the desired invitation, to explain her own plans, and express her hope that the newly married couple would be willing to let her accompany them, and not consider her in the light of an inconvenient intruder on their honeymoon happiness.

The afternoon sunlight was falling softly over the lawn, lengthening the shadows of the great cedar, and deepening the tints of the laburnum and other flowering shrubs. Ethel was pouring out tea for her 'aunt,' as she called her cousin, at the little wicker table on the lawn, when Mr Lyle walked up the gravel drive, and approached them with a glow of happy excitement on his face that made him seem half-a-dozen years younger.

'Oh, my dear Mr Lyle,' exclaimed Miss Ponsonby, 'we know what is making you look so bright and happy. We have heard all about your good fortune; and I am so glad to hear it. Do you know

we are to have a wedding here soon? That will be charming, indeed! I have heard so much about Miss Evans from dear Ethel. I am sure you will have a treasure of a wife.'

Mr Lyle smilingly acknowledged Miss Ponsonby's effusiveness, as well as the quieter congratulations of Ethel, and expressed the liveliest interest and pleasure when the latter told him of her own plans, and of the letter she had just written to Marion. 'Nothing could be more delightful,' he said, 'than to think that Marion would have a lifelong friend near her in a strange land; it would take away half the sense of exile. He would write at once to engage a berth in the same steamer. Miss Howard's presence would be like a little bit of home for them both. In fact, he considered it a most providential coincidence.'

'It does seem very strange,' remarked Ethel, after they had discussed all the necessary details, 'when I had no idea this morning that either Marion or I should be going to do anything of the kind.'

'Well,' said Mr Lyle, gently, 'you know "there's a divinity that shapes our ends, rough hew them as we will." I suppose we are not so ready to believe *that*, when the "shaping" does not seem to us desirable, as it most certainly does in this particular case. Now,' he added, in a tone full of kindly concern, 'you won't let all the leave-takings try you

too much? Remember all *is* ordered for the best.'

'Indeed, I shall try, Mr Lyle,' said Ethel, earnestly, as he bade her good night; but even then the tears started to her eyes, as she watched him disappear behind the sweeping boughs of the trees that shaded the drive, and thought how soon the familiar features of this home of her childhood,—lost to her for ever, would be only a memory to haunt her through the coming years that looked so blank and dreary to her now!

## CHAPTER IV

THE little wedding in the village church was a very simple and quiet one, but the people who thronged the place to see their dear curate married, declared with one consent that it was 'as nice as it could be.' 'Miss Evans,' they pronounced, 'just sweet' in her dove coloured cashmere, and 'every inch a lady;' and Miss Howard, in her simple white muslin, without a touch of colour anywhere, save her shining chestnut hair and violet eyes, 'looked just like an angel, as she was, poor dear—and what could they all do without her, now that she was going away to foreign parts?'

Marion, as a bride, was just the same bright, capable, unselfish girl she had always been. Her experience of the hardness of life seemed not to have hurt her in the least. The sunny side of things was the one which presented itself most readily to her, and she could generally find something to enjoy even in the gloomiest circumstances. Her unobtrusive sympathy and cheery spirit were

just the mild tonic that Ethel's more brooding nature needed; and in the little bustle of the brief visit, and modest wedding preparation, she lost something of the weight of her past sorrow and impending trial. As the little wedding party left the church, Ethel's eye chanced to fall on the figure of a stranger, in a grey travelling suit, who had evidently come in to witness the ceremony, and who seemed to survey the bridal party with some interest and curiosity. 'Some tourist, I suppose,' thought Ethel, 'who has strayed into the church to see an English wedding.' Even in her momentary glance, she noticed the calm, grave, yet as it seemed sympathetic look in the stranger's dark hazel eyes, which impressed her favourably; and, though no one would have called him handsome, he seemed to leave an impression of both strength and gentleness, notwithstanding his tall stalwart figure.

The little party went back to the Grange for an informal luncheon, before Mr and Mrs Lyle departed to catch the train. Ethel, whose preparations for removal were nearly completed, was to meet them in London, after their brief farewell visit to Mr Lyle's family. She herself had but little to do in town, but was to spend a day at Mrs Jocelyn's house before proceeding with the Lyles to Liverpool; and Miss Ponsonby, who lived with a sister-in-law in a tiny house at Notting Hill, was to accompany her thither.

The last evening at Fairmount Grange had come, and was as fair as an English June evening could be. The fragrance of honeysuckle and lime blossoms blended deliciously with that of the new-mown grass. The flower-beds had begun to wear their summer glow, contrasting brilliantly with the sombre hues of cedar and laurel. Ethel had got through the painful ordeal of farewell visits, amid the tears and lamentations of the poor women who were devoted to her, and the crying of the children, when told by their mothers that 'Miss Ethel,' with her kind heart and bountiful hand, was going away across the sea, where they would see her no more. The rounds of the familiar rooms had been made, her own special possessions packed up—some to be left, for the present, in London, the rest to go with her to Canada. Very tired, but still maintaining a resolute calm, she at last sat down with her aunt for their usual five o'clock tea on the lawn. Miss Ponsonby's overflowing condolences were, as usual, somewhat oppressive, and Ethel's forced composure was once or twice so nearly upset, that she was glad to hide her starting tears and quivering lip, by bending over Nero, the faithful old house-dog, who, divining in his canine way some impending calamity, came up to lay his head on her lap and look imploringly into her eyes. Should she ever look on these dear familiar objects again? And then there arose the nsistent thought—if only she

could have accepted Jack Howard's proposal—if only!

She was startled out of this reflection by Miss Ponsonby's exclamation.

'My dear! I do believe there is that wretched man again! I think he might have had the decency to keep away till you were gone!'

Ethel looked up to recognise that it was indeed the unwelcome figure of Jack Howard himself. The sudden pang and annoyance and humiliation awakened by the first glance, showed her at once how impossible would have been that '*if only*' which had flitted through her mind. How could she have borne to look at him, if she had given him any right to come to her? The poor fellow came up—humbly enough. He had never felt his own degradation so much, as since he had been brought into contact with Ethel's pure, refined womanhood. He would not have been cowed by the presence of any man, but it was with difficulty that he now stammered forth an apology for his intrusion.

'I wanted to see you for a few minutes before you leave Fairmount, Miss Howard, if you would kindly let me have a little private conversation.'

'Certainly, Mr Howard,' Ethel replied, gravely. 'If you will excuse us, Aunt Julia, we can go to the library. There are some lists there that I had left for you, and I may as well give them to you now.'

Howard followed her lead, and after she had ex-

plained the papers to him, seeing that she waited for his communication, he began, with a broken and tremulous voice.

'Miss Howard, I can't bear it, indeed I can't, to have you go away like this! I've thought and thought, and, for my life, I can't see why you should! I will cut off my right hand, if that will keep you here! Yes, I know what you said;—excuse me, cousin Ethel, but—I—couldn't give up hoping that if I could see you and speak to you again, you might give way. I assure you, you could do what you liked with me; perhaps you might even turn me out a respectable member of society yet!' He broke off, with a somewhat bitter laugh, as he felt rather than saw the unyielding firmness of the fair face which had haunted him night and day since he had seen it first.

'It *can't be*, Mr Howard,' she said, with an intensity of emphasis that seemed to seal his fate.

'Well, many a girl has done worse, I assure you! I'm not half a bad sort of fellow! It's not my fault if I'm my father's son! Well, won't it do if I just go off and leave you here in peace? I'll promise not to come near the place. A small allowance is all I ought to have—you know I *can't* keep money!'

'Mr Howard—Cousin Jack!' replied Ethel, deeply touched by the poor fellow's hopeless, almost abject tone. 'It is impossible for me to do as you wish; but, believe me, I fully appreciate your

kindness. But you must wake up to your responsibilities, and be man enough to meet them. You can, if you will only look for strength from the right source! I shall often think of, and pray for you; for my uncle's sake and your own. Now, won't you shake hands, and say good-bye?'—for he had turned away, with quivering features and the look of a wounded animal.

He took her offered hand, pressing it so tightly that she almost cried out with the pain—then turned and was gone before she could think of another kind parting word to say. She sank down into her uncle's old chair, while a rush of tears came to relieve her over-strained heart—tears of a divine compassion for the poor 'forlorn and shipwrecked brother,' as well as springing from the unspoken pain that had been oppressing her all day.

It was almost a relief when she and Miss Ponsonby were fairly off, and the train had carried them out of sight of everything associated with Fairmount Grange. The London visit helped to give a new turn to her thoughts, and she had scarcely realised the situation, when, with Mr and Mrs Lyle beside her, she had taken her seat in the Liverpool train, and said the final farewell to her uncle and aunt. Clara had not come home with her mother. 'The dear girl is so much in request,' said Mrs Jocelyn, that they really wouldn't hear of her leaving?'

She had time for a good many parting thoughts, as the train swiftly sped on, and Mr and Mrs Lyle considerately left her to the quiet she evidently desired. She had half hoped, half dreaded that she might, by some chance, encounter Edgar Fane in London; but this pleasure or pain, she hardly knew which, was *not* one of the incidents of her visit. Edgar Fane had indeed heard through the Jocelyns of her approaching departure and brief visit, but he had no mind to risk an interview which would probably upset him for a time, and was, just then, in a pleasant rush of alternate work and social pleasure. Miss Addington was smiling on him too, and if her father should turn out propitious, it might end in something quite as advantageous as the possession of Ethel and Fairmount Grange.

The final moment of embarking arrived with incredible rapidity, and Ethel, half bewildered, found herself on the busy dock thronged by clustering passengers and piles of luggage. There happened to be some delay about theirs, and Mr Lyle was obliged to leave the ladies while he went in search of it. Ethel, in a sort of dreamy bewilderment at the novelty of the scene, was absently watching the various groups and wondering which were to be their fellow-passengers. Suddenly she was half awaked out of her dreaminess at the sight of a figure in grey tweed and wideawake, that impressed her as unaccountably familiar. He turned just

then to look for a companion, and as his eyes encountered her own, Ethel felt that they expressed both recognition and interest. At once she recollected the occasion on which she had met them before.

'Look, Marion, there's the stranger I noticed in church on your wedding day. Isn't it odd we should see him here again?'

'Why, dear, you don't suppose *I* saw him *then!* The Queen and all the royal family might have been there and I should never have known it. I have a vague impression of you and dear Gilbert, that's all. Oh! here he is, did you find the luggage, dear?'

They were all on board at last. The final goodbyes had been said, the parting waving and cheering were over, and the passengers, postponing parting regrets, however poignant, to more immediate needs, were trying to settle down in their state-rooms, and make themselves as comfortable as circumstances would permit. On applying for the berths Mr Lyle had engaged, it was found, to Ethel's great disappointment, that the state-room beside her friend's,—bespoken for *her*,—had been through some mistake given to a couple of other passengers instead. When Mr Lyle expressed the lady's disappointment, the purser suggested that possibly the gentlemen to whom it had been assigned might be willing to exchange it for that appropriated to

the lady in another part of the vessel. Mr Lyle went in search of the gentlemen in question, one of whom came forward at once to say that he would accommodate a lady with the greatest pleasure. When the purser introduced him to the party generally as 'Mr Stuart,' Ethel saw with another little sensation of surprise, that it was the same figure in the grey tweed. Again there was the same look of interest and recognition, as Mr Stuart remarked that he had the more pleasure in doing anything in his power for the young lady's comfort, as he believed that she was the niece of an old and dear friend of his, Mrs Aylmer, and he had just heard of her expected visit. Then, courteously deprecating all thanks, and saying that he hoped to have the pleasure of following up this unexpected introduction during the voyage, he rapidly removed his and his companion's belongings from the state-room, and disappeared. And now they were fairly off; the steamer swiftly ploughing her way through the green waves, and, at every moment, as it were, widening the chasm between the present and the past.

# PART II

## CHAPTER V

THE bustle and confusion of the first hours at sea were over. The passengers had got themselves and their traps shaken down in their temporary abode for the eight or nine days' voyage. The first dinner was over, and had given an opportunity to each of scrutinising the appearance of his or her fellow travellers at the same table. Ethel noticed Mr Stuart at some distance below them, and, beside him, a young man with fair hair and lively blue eyes, who kept up an animated conversation with him during the whole meal. As the evening was delightfully calm, Mr Lyle established his two ladies, with their sea-chairs, books, rugs, and wraps, in a comfortable nook near the wheel-house, from whence they could watch the fair shores of England gradually fading into a dim blue line, which on the morrow they would see no more. They all sat very silent, as the glowing sun gradually sank into

the waves, amid dun and purple clouds, reflected on the smooth expanse below in softer and more ethereal tints. They thought much less of the beauty of the sunset than of that vanishing shadowy blue line which represented so much that was dear and sacred to all three. Even the newly married pair felt a shadow steal over their happiness, as they thought of all the old familiar life that seemed slipping away from them for ever. 'If I forget thee, oh Jerusalem,' Mr Lyle murmured, in a tone meant for only his wife to hear, while she pressed more tightly the hand she held. As for Ethel, she was glad to turn away her head, that a few quiet tears might have their way, as there came thronging upon her a thousand happy recollections of the home now closed to her for ever, of her beloved uncle, now in his grave, and of another grave, as it seemed to her in her heart, the grave of a lost hope and vanished trust, and a love wounded unto death. That chapter, she felt, was closed; but she had no heart as yet to turn over new leaves and look on to those which might follow.

The late midsummer dusk was beginning to close about them, obliterating the rich iridescent hues of the reflected sunset glow, when Mr Lyle, who had already made some new acquaintances, returned from his stroll about the deck accompanied by their new friend of the morning, and woke Ethel out of her reverie, by saying:

'Mr Stuart wishes for an introduction in due form, Miss Howard. He tells me he is a lawyer, and partner in Mr Aylmer's firm, and is anxious to make your acquaintance in a regular way.'

Ethel looked up with awakened interest and a faint smile, as she met the stranger's somewhat scrutinising glance. She saw a man about thirty, who, though tall and well-proportioned, could scarcely be called handsome; the chief attraction of his strong rather than fine face, being in the soft dark hazel eyes, clear and penetrating, and considerably darker than the light brown hair; and in a smile the more winning, when it occurred, because the expression was habitually grave. There was about the firm lips too, a curve that indicated a quick sense of humour controlled by the gravity, amounting almost to sadness, which predominated. His face at present was softened into sympathy as he looked down at the deep mourning dress, which gave an added paleness to the finely cut face, with its marks of repressed feeling, her long black veil having been thrown back in order the better to enjoy the lovely sunset.

'I am very glad to have this opportunity of making your acquaintance, Miss Howard,' he said. 'Your aunt, Mrs Aylmer, is one of my dearest and most valued friends. As I was in England on some business of our firm, she had asked me to call at Fairmount Grange, in case I should be anywhere

near it. I *did* happen to be within a few miles, and came on with the full intention of calling on you; but in the circumstances in which I heard you then were, I felt it would be unpardonable for a stranger to intrude upon you. It happened to be the day of Mr Lyle's wedding, and I strayed into the church to see what was going on, when I heard some one point you out, and had the pleasure of at least *seeing* you, which I knew would interest your aunt very much. I even took a mental note of your dress for her benefit! I had no idea we should meet again so soon.'

'I noticed you there, as a stranger,' Miss Howard replied, 'and we even speculated a little as to *why* you were there. We set you down as a stray tourist, who wanted to see a wedding in an English country church.'

'You came very near it, certainly,' he said, with a smile. 'I quite plead guilty to being anxious to see everything distinctively English—or Scotch—which interests me even more closely, as you may suppose from my name. We in Canada read and hear so much about these old country churches, and the old-fashioned rural life, so different from anything you can have in a new country, that it is a positive rapture really to *see*, for the first time, what has always seemed more like romance than reality. I felt very like the old Scotch woman who said to the traveller returned from Palestine,

"Ye'll no get *me* to believe that there's any such place as Jerusalem!"'

It was Ethel's turn to smile; indeed she came nearer laughing than she had done for weeks. Mr Lyle remarked:

'I think we can all understand that feeling. But you were happy if you found your idea unspoiled by the reality.'

'I found it so in most cases,' he said, 'most certainly in *that* one. The whole scene greatly delighted me. Everything seemed so thoroughly in keeping, so tranquil, so peaceful, so full of that mellowing influence of time and long civilisation. The village seemed to me a typical one. I can easily imagine what it must be to leave such a charming home.' Then, as he noted the shadow that quickly stole over Ethel's face, he hurriedly changed the subject, adding, 'and yet, I doubt if, after the more strenuous life of a young country, one *could* contentedly settle down into that quiet round of existence, even in such a lovely spot. There would be a certain monotony!'

Ethel looked surprised. She somewhat resented this imputation as a slight on her old home.

'It seems to me,' she said, 'that life can never seem monotonous when you care very much about the people and things around you.' As she spoke her mind went back to her uncle's happy studious

seclusion, engrossed in the interest of books and thought, and of the little world about him.

'I quite agree with you,' rejoined Mr Stuart quickly, feeling the apparent ungraciousness of his remark. 'I was merely thinking of the effect that even such delicious tranquillity has on a stranger accustomed to work in harness so long, that he almost wonders what he should do with himself if turned loose among the clover. I quite admit that I myself may be at fault. Please don't suppose, however, that I did not intensely enjoy the quiet loveliness of your charming village and its surrounding landscape. I carry it about with me as a picture to enjoy in memory in work-a-day hours. I have not had a great deal of poetry in my life, nor perhaps in my composition, but there is a couple of lines that I often think of when a scene one has much enjoyed comes vividly up before one afterwards. It is about

'"The inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude."'

'Oh yes, from Wordsworth's "Daffodils,"' exclaimed Miss Howard, with a brightening expression. 'That was such a favourite of—'

But her voice fell, and she stopped short. She could not yet bring herself to speak of her uncle to a stranger.

Mrs Lyle, divining her feeling, interposed with

a remark about the length of the summer twilight, and after a little more desultory talk, Mr Stuart said that he feared he was keeping them from seeking the rest they must need. He hoped to have many opportunities of enjoying their society, and, if they would allow him, he would introduce his cousin, Mr Kavanagh, looking towards the fair-haired, bright-faced young man who was evidently waiting impatiently for him, introducing him to the ladies in due form. Then, to the evident disgust of the young man, he remarked that he would say Good-night, as the ladies would need all the rest they could get, if they should have the change in the weather which seemed likely to come before long.

His warning proved true. When Ethel, next morning, awoke from the profound sleep of exhaustion, she found that, instead of gliding smoothly over a summer sea, the vessel was tossing amid heavy rolling waves, while gusts of rain, mingled with the showers of spray, dashed against the narrow port-holes. She found it, moreover, utterly impossible to rise, and, for the next two days, neither she nor Mrs Lyle could venture to leave their berths. The latter, indeed, suffered much the more severely, so that Ethel was the first ready to go on deck again, thankful to escape the close and dreary monotony of a narrow cabin, and get a little fresh air above. Mr Lyle escorted her

to the deck, settled her in the quiet nook behind the wheel-house, well provided with books and wraps, and then, with an apology, returned to his wife, who so much needed his care. Ethel was glad to recline in perfect quietness, watching the novel scene; the boundless ocean on all sides, with here and there a distant sail in the offing, the only object to break the monotony of the limitless blue; with the steady *drive, drive,* of the great screw churning up the glittering lines of foam in the vessel's wake. It seemed to lull her into a dreamy, semi-unconscious condition, in which past, present, and future seemed hopelessly blurred and indistinguishably mingled,—even the sense of pain being soothed to sleep, as if under the influence of an anodyne. She gave no heed to the groups of passengers dotted over the deck, or pacing up and down it; nor did she notice that Mr Stuart and the fair-haired young man he had called 'Kavanagh' approached her at short intervals in the course of their promenade, glancing with interest in her direction, and instinctively lowering their voices whenever they drew near the chair, whose occupant was so motionless that they thought her fast asleep.

At length she half started up, as a sudden puff of wind turned over the leaves of a small book that had been lying open but unheeded on her lap. As she did so, the book slipped down on the deck, its leaves still flapping, sliding gradually away

from her outstretched hand. Young Kavanagh was by her side in a moment, and had caught it up and handed it to her with his most courteous bow, before she could remember who he was, or where she had seen him before. Then her eye fell on Mr Stuart, who had also come forward with the same intention.

'I'm so much obliged to you,' she said, after returning the salutation of the two young men. 'I should not have liked to lose *that*! I see one must be more careful at sea.'

'Ah! Matthew Arnold's poems,' exclaimed Kavanagh presently, his blue eyes lighted up with the pleasure always excited in them by the sight of an attractive woman. 'Are they favourites of yours?'

'Some of them are,' she replied, with some reserve.

'It's not the sort of poetry that young ladies in general care about, so far as *I* know,' said Kavanagh, who was evidently somewhat irrepressible, while Mr Stuart listened, with his observant, somewhat amused expression. Kavanagh had taken a seat near, and was turning over the leaves of the book with a simultaneous request for permission to do so.

'I don't know'—said Miss Howard honestly, 'that I should ever have found them out for myself! I learned to care for them by hearing some of them

read to me so often that I have them almost by heart. Besides they are especially interesting to me for another reason. Mr Arnold was a personal friend of my uncle's, and once came to visit him.'

'Ah!' exclaimed Kavanagh, enthusiastically. 'How delightful to actually come in contact with such men! *That* must have been a privilege indeed! Norman,' he said turning to Mr Stuart, 'I say, do you know "Rugby Chapel?" No. Well then, read it now. It will just suit *you*;—may he, Miss Howard?' he asked turning to her.

'Certainly,' she said, as Mr Stuart remarked rather drily:—

'I didn't know *he* was a favourite of yours.'

'Why? Mayn't a man enjoy Arnold and Browning as well as Rossetti and Swinburne? I go in for catholicity in taste, you know!'

Mr Stuart took the book, and was quickly absorbed in the poem indicated, while Mr Kavanagh forthwith demanded of Miss Howard what she thought of Browning, to which she was obliged to reply that she had read very little of him, and was at once offered the loan of as many of his poems as would have kept her hard at work during the whole remainder of the voyage; after which Mr Kavanagh proceeded to discourse with all the confidence of an enthusiastic modern student, on the distinguishing excellences and limitations of Tennyson and Browning, Morris

and Swinburne, till Miss Howard was filled with amazement at his encyclopædic knowledge and copious fluency.

'Kavanagh is fresh from a University course of English literature,' remarked Mr Stuart, looking up at last from his absorbed perusal of the poem. '*One* has to bear *that* in mind to save one from absolute humiliation, Miss Howard!'

'Please don't pay any attention to him, Miss Howard,' said Kavanagh, persuasively. '*That's* the way he's always professing ignorance, but once in a while he will come out with things that show that he knows a great deal more than he pretends. How do you like *that*, Norman? Has the right ring, has it not?'

'It is very beautiful,' Mr Stuart replied, meditatively. 'Somehow, I had scarcely thought that Matthew Arnold could have expressed himself quite as he does here. I thought his position was more coldly neutral.'

'My uncle used to say,' replied Miss Howard, 'that the influence of his father's teaching and character had left such an indelible impression on his heart, that, when its deepest feeling was stirred, as it was then, the impression showed itself.'

'I understand that very well, indeed,' said Stuart. 'The influence of one living human personality often counts for more with us than all

the arguments that ever were constructed. But there's the luncheon bell, and somehow one always feels ready for it, strange to say!'

'Yes,' said Kavanagh. 'I've been having intimations of a lunch not realised, for the last half hour.'

'Miss Howard, this flippancy is really inexcusable! Do you feel equal to going down?' said Mr Stuart.

Miss Howard very much preferred to stay where she was; and Mr Stuart at once offered to bring up a tray for her, sending off Mr Lyle, who came up on the same errand, to attend to his own luncheon.

And Ethel, to her surprise, found herself quite capable of doing justice to the liberal supplies which her two new acquaintances speedily brought up for her refreshment. She had not so much enjoyed a meal for many weeks past.

## CHAPTER VI

THE conversation just narrated was the first of a good many three-cornered discussions. Mr Stuart and Kavanagh frequently found their way, by a natural attraction, to Miss Howard's corner of the deck, the latter being usually chief speaker. It entertained Ethel to listen to his long discursive monologues, while Mr Stuart would occasionally put in some ironical, though good-natured caveats. Kavanagh's travelling library seemed to be extensive, to judge by the number of volumes he was constantly inviting Miss Howard, 'to look into a little.' In fact, she was almost bewildered by the number of new writers of whom he discoursed so fluently, brought up as she had been mainly on the English classics—although she had, of course, heard some of the names referred to by Edgar Fane. Moreover, Mr Kavanagh was well armed with quotations, and was an excellent reciter, so that a more entertaining companion on shipboard could scarcely be desired. Yet sometimes Ethel found

herself wishing that Mr Stuart would talk a little more. She felt as if she would like to know him better, and that, somehow she made very little progress in so doing. He seemed quite satisfied to sit and listen to Kavanagh's rhapsodies with a half critical, half admiring look in his thoughtful eyes, which made Ethel feel that he must be strongly attached to the young man, notwithstanding the great difference between them. But she felt more and more convinced, as the days went by, and she noticed how Kavanagh with his limited range of experience, was perpetually repeating himself, that Mr Stuart could have talked better than his young cousin if he had liked to try. But he evidently *would not* try, and, sometimes to Ethel's surprise, and even slight chagrin, he would rise and leave Kavanagh and herself to follow out one of their discussions, while he thoughtfully paced the deck alone. Their talk bored him, she supposed. No doubt they were too bookish and sentimental, but Kavanagh would have it so, and it seemed impossible not to follow his lead. Yet she would sometimes find her attention wandering from one of Kavanagh's enthusiastic tirades, while she followed with her eyes the stalwart figure of Mr Stuart, wondering what he might be thinking about, with that almost sternly grave look on his face; while she occasionally caught a rapid wistful glance in the direction of Kavanagh and herself.

They were two thirds of the way across, before Mrs Lyle felt well enough to be one of the deck party. Her presence seemed to bring a more practical every-day element into the circle. She was constantly bringing the others, Mr Lyle included, into the region of common sense, as she called it. She openly made fun of some of Kavanagh's rhapsodies and little affectations of literary criticism, and privately chaffed Ethel about the evident devotion of the romantic youth.

'If it were any other girl, my dear, I should call it a flirtation, but I know *you couldn't* flirt if you tried, and that young fellow is rather too openly eager to please, for the usual style of flirtation. If I am not mistaken, Mr Stuart thinks there is something in it.'

'Oh, I hope not!' exclaimed Ethel; to whom the very word flirtation was odious.

'Oh, come dear, I didn't mean anything serious. You needn't look so distressed. It's the most natural thing in the world for a clever young fellow, with all his time on his hands, to devote himself to showing off and making himself agreeable to any fair maiden he meets, even if she were much less fair than you, *chérie*. That youth is far too much in love with himself to be the victim of any *grande passion* yet awhile. And it's a charming youth in its way, only the other is worth a hundred of it!'

'So I think too,' said Ethel, frankly.

But this remark of Mrs Lyle's put her on her guard, and she became a trifle more distant to young Kavanagh, who forthwith began to wonder whether he might have in any way offended her. Mr Stuart, too, looked a little puzzled at the shadow that seemed to have stolen over the cordiality of their intercourse. They still found plenty of entertainment, however, in watching the other groups of passengers, and Kavanagh and Mrs Lyle vied with each other in constructing imaginary histories and futures for them. There was the fussy impatient, military gentleman, who, as Kavanagh said, seemed always to be ordering a regiment, and who must be going out to be commander-in-chief. Then there was the pale lady in widow's weeds, with her two little boys, who, Kavanagh declared, had buried her husband on the shores of the Mediterranean, and who would eventually console herself by marrying a certain tall, thin, bare-faced individual who was evidently a scientist. Then there was the large family of sturdy English folk whom Kavanagh dubbed 'the colonists,' and for whom he predicted a glowingly prosperous future in the north-west. He himself had just made a rapid trip across the 'Continent' with his cousin, and was full to overflowing of the scenery, picture-galleries, and cathedrals, of which he had had a

hasty glimpse, and of which he could discourse *ad infinitum*.

While these playful talks were going on, Mr Stuart was usually engaged in earnest discussions with Mr Lyle regarding leading social questions of the day, which showed that he had thought to some purpose about some of the problems of most practical interest. Mr Lyle, who was the only clergyman on board, had added to his other functions of temporary chaplain, that of visiting the sick and suffering among the steerage passengers, and Mr Stuart accompanied him on some of these 'descents to Avernus,' as Kavanagh called them. And, as Mr Lyle would afterwards inform Ethel, Mr Stuart never went without doing something to relieve the suffering he saw. Mr Lyle and he frequently discussed the glaringly disproportionate discomfort in the steerage, as one of the many obvious practical contradictions to a professed religion of brotherly love; while the sad stories of some of the emigrants enlisted the warmest sympathies of the ladies. One poor young woman, in particular, going out with two children to join her young husband, was the object of special compassion, when they heard that one of her children had died on the passage, and that she herself was so ill that it was doubtful whether she would live to reach Quebec. Mrs Lyle and Ethel went down to see her, well supplied with lemons, jellies, and other little dainties, to tempt her

to take a little nourishment. But it was almost too much for Miss Howard.

'Oh, why must things be so unequal in this world?' she exclaimed, as they sat on deck that evening, watching one of the rich glowing sunsets they were now enjoying, gradually give way to the mild radiance of a growing moon. 'It seems almost selfish to enjoy all that we do, while there is so much suffering so near us. At home our poor people all seemed as comfortable in *their* way as we were in *ours*. I wonder they ever make up their minds to go through it all!'

'Oh, well, they don't know much about it before they start; and, after all, the discomfort is soon over!' suggested Kavanagh, consolingly.

'But worse than that,' said Mr Stuart, 'is what they often have to endure after—the first winter especially! I don't wonder that the starving denizens of East London catch at *any* straw, but really the weakly Londoner is one of the last people who should be encouraged to emigrate. He is usually unfit for hard work, as well as for the severity of our winter climate, when all out-door work is at a stand-still, and there is scarcely any employment, even for our own day-labourers. He and his family have to drag out a suffering existence on charity, with scanty supply of the warm clothing they would need to meet a degree of cold which they have never known before. The consequence is an amount of

misery, every winter, in our large towns and cities that would rather surprise the officers of our emigration societies. It is downright cruelty to send feeble, stunted paupers to a country like Canada, especially without money enough to tide them over the first inevitably idle winter. Only the strong and energetic should be sent to us, and these not later than May, so that they may have the whole summer before them. These, if they choose to go out to conquer the wilderness, may do very well. But the sickly, starved men and women, and the poor stunted children—volumes could be written about the misery which many of these endure!'

He spoke with force and effect, as he always did when stirred by any subject that strongly appealed to his sympathies.

'Well,' said Mr Lyle, 'when I have had some Canadian experience, I may be able to give a few points to one or two of our emigration societies.'

'Come, Miss Howard,' said Kavanagh, 'just look at the exquisite effect of that tremulous line of silver on the sea. It's a shame to be losing any of this beauty, worrying over matters you cannot mend.'

'But it seems selfish not to *think* of them, at least,' said Ethel.

'I avoid it on principle,' he replied, 'it's out of my line to turn reformer, and I don't believe in torturing myself uselessly. My cousin and Mr

Lyle seem positively to enjoy the sight of suffering, just as a doctor does that of sickness, with a view, to relieving it, you know! But my line is art, rather than philanthropy, and I believe in Goethe's plan, not to let his mental poise be disturbed by painful humanitarian considerations.'

'My uncle used to call Goethe a selfish egoist,' said Ethel, her thoughts going back to old time discussions between her uncle and Edgar Fane, when the latter had adopted something of Kavanagh's present line of thought. She scarcely heard his reply, so much had the sudden recollection overpowered the present.

## CHAPTER VII

THE *Parisian* entered the Gulf of St Lawrence, and its passengers had soon a range of rugged savage hills in sight, which, Mr Stuart told them, were the outposts of the great Laurentian range of rocky ramparts, 'the oldest formation in the world,' he assured them, though paradoxically situated in a 'new country.' He had a good deal to tell them, suggested by the scenes through which they were passing, about the pioneer explorers of Canada—Cartier, Champlain, De Monts, Poutrincourt—their early voyages of discovery, the sufferings they endured, and their long and weary struggle, first with the Indian savages, then with their English neighbours, and finally with both combined. He was much better informed about these matters than his discursive cousin—as Ethel could easily see. He even pointed out a wild rocky island, lashed by the surge, on which a certain noble adventurer had brutally landed his niece, abandoning her to perish there with the lover who threw

himself into the sea and swam to join her. Yet the poor girl lived on, though her lover died—lived on alone, shooting wild animals to supply herself with food and clothing, till, at last, she was accidentally found by a passing vessel, and rescued from a living grave.

'What a subject for a tragic poem in the style of one of Browning's dramatic monologues!' exclaimed Kavanagh.

'Why don't you write one, then?' asked Mrs Lyle, 'I am sure you must write poetry, Mr Kavanagh.'

'He does, a little,' said Mr Stuart, 'But I don't give him much encouragement to waste time with it.'

'Oh *do* repeat some, won't you?' said Mrs Lyle.

'I'm afraid you would find it anything but edifying! Besides, I never can remember anything appropriate when I try.'

'Give us what I found you inditing last night,' suggested Mr Stuart, gravely, yet with a little mischief in his glance.

'Thanks awfully; *that* is for strictly private circulation,' he said, colouring slightly.

'Well now, Mr Kavanagh,' said Mrs Lyle, 'such a critic as you are ought to be able to give other people something to criticise. Can't you write some verses now, about this lovely night and those moonlit waves, with some nice moral reflection

brought in at the end, something we could all keep as a souvenir of the voyage and of our pleasant talks, when we are all scattered to the four winds?'

A slight cloud seemed to pass over the party, called up by the allusion to their approaching separation.

'I don't believe in writing to order, you know, Mrs Lyle; nor do I think moral reflections good art.' Kavanagh never felt quite sure that Mrs Lyle was not poking fun at him.

'Oh, but just for the occasion, you know! It would be very nice, really. Don't you think so, Ethel?'

'Yes, indeed,' said Miss Howard, sincerely. 'I think it would be delightful to have such a souvenir, if Mr Kavanagh would be kind enough to give it to us.'

'Well—I'll see what I can do,' he replied, 'but now I must go to get ready some letters for Rimouski—are yours ready, Norman?'

'Oh yes, I wrote mine this morning.'

'Always ahead of time,' he said, somewhat enviously. 'Well, I'll see if inspiration visits me when I take pen in hand.' And he went off, humming '*A la Claire Fontaine*,' a French Canadian air of which he was very fond.

'Will is a good fellow,' remarked Mr Stuart, looking affectionately after him; 'I know *you*

think him a little conceited, Mrs Lyle, but he has something in him, and if he only has the patience to work it out, I hope to be proud of him some day.'

'Conceit is rather a common fault in the young men of this age,' remarked Mr Lyle, indulgently. 'It's a wonder that any of them escape it, when they seem to learn so much more than their elders ever had the chance of doing.'

'Yes,' said Mr Stuart. 'I sometimes wish I had had his long University course, but I was obliged to hurry things up a little, and have never found time to make up for it by private reading.'

He did not say—what Ethel learned long after—that his own years of study had been shortened, in order the sooner to help others, and that Kavanagh had had his 'long course' mainly through *his* generous intervention.

Mrs Lyle was still easily fatigued, and went below early. But the night was so perfect, that Miss Howard gladly acceded to Mr Lyle's suggestion, that she should remain longer on deck to watch the silvery wake of the vessel, the clear sky, and the solemn curves of the distant hills, he himself promising to return for a while, to have a little more of their last night at sea.

'When shall we reach Quebec?' asked Ethel, after a long silence, during which her mind had been outrunning the vessel's course westward.

'Some time to-morrow evening,' he replied, and

after a moment's silence continued, 'We shall have a charming sail to-morrow, up the St Lawrence, between these grand hills, all the way to Quebec!'

She scarcely noticed his remark. Presently she startled him with the question, 'What is my cousin Fanny like, Mr Stuart?'

He hesitated a moment, and his words when they came, seemed slightly constrained.

'How can I describe her? I'm not at all good at that sort of thing! Perhaps the best I can do is to say that she is as different from you as could very well be, if that gives you any light on the subject.'

'It is rather vague,' replied Miss Howard, smiling.

'Well, I shall try to be a little more explicit. She is fair, with blue eyes, and hair of a golden tint, very strong and full of life, and what her friends call a very jolly girl. She can swim and row and climb hills, and do almost everything her brothers can do. And, Miss Howard—don't be shocked—but she can do one thing *you* never could!'

'What is that?' inquired Ethel, wonderingly, though she added, 'I'm sure from your account she can do *several* things *I* can't.'

'She is, if the truth must be told, I am sorry to say, she is a great flirt!'

'Oh!' exclaimed Ethel, in dismay, 'I'm so sorry! I'm afraid—' 'I shall not like her,' she was about to say, but stopped.

'Yes you *will* like her very much' he said, answering her interrupted speech. 'You couldn't help liking her. She is so frank and generous and good-humoured, and as happy as the day is long. I always find her happiness quite infectious, and her flirting is so constitutional, almost unconscious, that you can't find much fault with it, and on the whole it is very innocent.'

Ethel was still silent and dissatisfied. She had so often heard her uncle speak severely of the 'selfish vulgarity' of flirting, that this apparent toleration on the part of a man like Mr Stuart, to whom she had unconsciously begun to attribute her uncle's high ideal in all things, was rather disappointing. He divined her thought, and presently went on.

'Please don't misunderstand me, I think that flirting with intent to deceive, is selfish and wicked. A man or woman who deliberately tries to win the love of another, just from selfish vanity, is doing a cruel thing, and taking a terrible risk. But your cousin's flirting is so open and so impartial, that it could not deceive anyone but a fool! She *may* give pain by it sometimes!' he added, in a lower tone, 'but that she does not realise, or she would be too kind-hearted to do it, that is, if she could help it, which I doubt.'

'And my aunt?' said Ethel, glad to change a somewhat unsatisfactory subject.

'Oh, Mrs Aylmer is kindness personified, in my estimation. I have reason to know that, for she has been like a mother to me ever since I knew her, and especially since my own mother died, a year or two since. Miss Howard, I wish you had known *her*!'

She looked up surprised at the sudden turn of his remark, and caught the softened expression of his eyes and of the grave lines of his face.

'She came nearer to my idea of perfection than anyone I have ever met,' he continued, in a low tone. 'Her death solved the question of questions for me. I have had my doubts and difficulties like most men, I suppose, but nothing could ever make me doubt that the secret life-spring of such a character, such a life and death as hers, is the true secret of life for us all!'

'I have often felt like *that* about my uncle,' said Ethel in a low tone. She could not yet speak of him without difficulty and emotion. 'If one could only have the least idea how such life goes on! My uncle used often to quote those lines:—

> "Somewhere, surely, afar,
> In the sounding labour-house vast,
> Of being, is practised that strength;
> . . . . . .
> Still thou performest the word
> Of the Spirit in whom thou dost live,
> Prompt, unwearied as here!"

*Now*, I think of them so often!'

'Well, of one thing I am sure,' said Mr Stuart. 'When the secrets of that life are revealed we shall wonder at its simplicity, and at ourselves for ever doubting it! I have no more doubt that my mother is living on in the same loving trust which inspired her here, than I have that I myself am now living this limited and imperfect life!'

They were silent for a little while, with the heavy roll of the screw and the rush of the waves against the stern for an accompaniment of the silence. Ethel's eyes were moist, she did not know why.

At length Mr Stuart broke the silence. 'Miss Howard,' he began, 'I should like to express to you something of the pleasure that I have had during this voyage, from your society and that of your friends. I hope we shall meet often, and that we shall be friends always.'

'I hope so, too, Mr Stuart,' Ethel said, heartily.

'There is something else that I wanted to tell you,' he went on, more slowly; but just then he was interrupted by the return of Mr Lyle, followed immediately after by Kavanagh, so that the 'something else' remained unsaid.

'Well, Will,' said his cousin, seeing a sheet of paper in the young man's hand, 'was the muse propitious?'

'I'm afraid there isn't much *muse* about it, not even *a*musing. You know even poets can't write

to order, and do their best; however, I have tried to fulfil Mrs Lyle's behest. Oh, she isn't here!'

'No, that's too bad,' said her husband. 'But I shall be happy to represent her on this occasion, and she can hear it again.'

Kavanagh was not, perhaps, very sorry to be spared what he would have called the 'dry light' of Mrs Lyle's criticism.

'It's a Rondeau,' he explained, as he opened his paper and read it by the aid of the moonlight.

Miss Howard did not much care for Rondeaus, or any other 'poetical confectionery,' as her uncle and Edgar Fane used to call them. But she kept this to herself, and Kavanagh began—

'Straight to her goal from eve till day,
Untired she cleaves her watery way;
  She may not change her course for fear
  Of hidden rocks or tempests near;
Naught lures her from her course to stray!

The sparkling moonbeams dance and play
About her wake; she will not stay,
  But still, through light and darkness steer,
    Straight to her goal.

Even so my heart, mayest thou obey
'Mid darkening clouds or passion's play,
  The compass true that guides thee here,
  Maintain thy course serene and clear,
'Neath summer sun or winter grey,
    Straight to thy goal!'

'I think it's very good indeed,' said Mr Lyle, while Ethel joined in thanking him for this pretty, souvenir of their moonlight nights at sea. Mr Stuart only said, 'Take your sermon home, Will.' Then the spell of the moonlight settled down upon them, and they sat on almost in silence, reluctant to break up their last evening on shipboard. Mr Lyle at length looked at his watch, and declared that it was almost midnight; and they unwillingly said good-night, and went below.

Miss Howard lay long awake that night, thinking over the past few days, which seemed to mark a new era in her life. She felt as if she had never until now appreciated the pleasant interlude it had made for her. Besides the novelty of the experience, the dreamy eventless days at sea had had the effect of dulling the pain of the previous weeks, and making a gulf between them and the present, which tended to make previous impressions faint and shadowy. Painful thoughts and memories had been for the time lulled to sleep, a result materially promoted by the stimulating companionship of her two new friends. She was surprised to recognise how much less the thought of Edgar Fane now haunted her than it had done, much to her annoyance, in the beginning of the voyage. The number of new ideas that Kavanagh was always presenting to her mind, and the new lights in which she had come to look at old subjects, had the natural effect

of diminishing the intensity of former feelings. She was somewhat dismayed to find that there seemed to be an interval of positive mental distance between her present life and that she had left behind, analagous to the leagues of sea that intervened between her and old England. Yet even now the thought of Fane could not be vividly suggested by any passing association without a throb of pain that left an ache behind. And somehow she found herself frequently making involuntary mental comparisons between Fane and Mr Stuart, and also between Kavanagh and his cousin, considerably to the advantage of the latter. How kind and thoughtful he always was, though he did not seem to like her nearly as well as Kavanagh did. And it seemed as if, through the talks she had overheard between him and Mr Lyle, she looked out into a world compared with which her own little one at home was as a land-locked pool beside this great breezy sea—a world of storm and stress indeed, but of life and energy—a world in which there was so much that called for high and earnest effort, that there seemed to be scarcely any room for brooding over mere personal loss and pain—a world in which each was called to do all he or she could for the common weal. She felt she should be better all her life long for this outlook, and for knowing Mr Stuart. But what could be the 'something else' that he had wanted to say to her?

## CHAPTER VIII

THE following was a glorious July day, and the great green hills which seemed to draw nearer as the grand river narrowed to some twenty miles across, looked grander still, as the shadows of the soft fleecy clouds flitted across the masses of fir and birch woods that clothed them from base to summit. Scarcely a human habitation broke this wild solitude. As Mr Stuart remarked, it was still as lonely in its grandeur, as when Cartier's 'white-winged canoes' as the Indians called them, first floated up the mighty river.

'One can indeed imagine something of his delight in the discovery of such a magnificent stream,' remarked Mr Lyle. 'Oh, *there* seems to be a pretty large place in the distance!'

'That is Cacouna, with *Rivière du Loup*, close by, both very favourite resorts,' said Mr Stuart, 'though not in my opinion to compare for scenery with Murray Bay, of which we shall get a glimpse presently, Miss Howard. Nearer to us, to the

right, you may catch a glimpse of two or three houses, and a gap, which is the mouth of the Saguenay, of which you may have heard. Those ranks of shadowy hills that you can see stretching away to the northward, are the mountain walls that guard the deep, still, gloomy stream, which winds about among them for some hundred and fifty miles.'

'Yes,' said Kavanagh, 'it is far grander, in my opinion, than the Rhine, though its grandeur is of a sombre savage type, very different from the "exulting and abounding river," between "the hills that bear the corn and wine!" *These* bear nothing but rugged firs and half starved birches, sometimes only the skeletons of the same, alternating with great splintered and weather-scarred rocks; and still they have the overpowering fascination of grandeur and sublimity. I wonder why it is that darkness, ruggedness, gloom, and mystery, seem to exercise, after all, a more powerful fascination than the sunniest and most luxuriant beauty.'

'I suppose,' said Mr Lyle, 'because they are more in harmony with the unsatisfied, striving, restless human spirit, which nothing material can ever satisfy, or compel to say, at any moment, "stay, thou art fair!"'—

'"Now is for dogs and apes,
Man has for ever"'—

quoted Mr Stuart.

'Or, as Shelley puts it,' said Miss Howard—

> "We look before and after,
> And pine for what is"'—

'Lunch!'—exclaimed Kavanagh, starting to his feet. 'It is a shame to lose any of this beauty. But the best part of it is to come yet, so, the sooner we get through the material part of our unsatisfying satisfaction, the more time we shall have for the other thing.'

The summer afternoon wore all too swiftly away, as they steamed on, against the tide, among ever opening vistas of high green hills and great blue bays, with little French hamlets at intervals showing white against the green, or perched beside a guardian church, on the summit of the height. The pretty cove of Murray Bay, nestling in the bosom of the surrounding hills, with its long high pier stretching out into the river, was duly pointed out by Mr Stuart, and Ethel strained her eyes to catch a glimpse of the little cluster of houses of *Point-au-Pic*, among which he told her was Mrs Aylmer's summer cottage. She tried to imagine what life there would be like, while Mr Stuart pointed out the pretty brown river that ran down, dark and cold, from the recesses of the hills, and emerged into the bay, just where the gleam of a white church showed picturesquely against dark bosky heights.

'You will be charmed with Murray Bay, Miss Howard,' he said. 'You and your cousin will be rambling among the hills, and the queer little French farms all day long, while I am pouring over dry books and dusty law papers. For Mr Aylmer is patiently waiting till I can relieve him of the charge of the office, which he doesn't like to leave altogether to clerks, even in the long vacation, so I shall have to hasten westward almost immediately.'

Then there were more grand sweeps of river, and the ever-varying succession of beautiful hill outlines, dappled with the fleeting shadows of the light summer clouds, and relieved by the scattered white villages that gradually formed a continuous line along the right shore. On the southern bank the hills were much more remote, melting away in delicate atmospheric tints, while a wide sweep of level country skirted the shore, and towns and villages gleamed out in the slanting rays of the western sun.

'That is the *Ile aux Coudres*,' said Mr Stuart, 'so called from the filberts that Cartier found there on his first cruise.'

Then the long, populous Isle of Orleans came into view, and he told them that it had first been called the Isle of Bacchus, from its abundance of wild grapes, and how it had been, for a time, the asylum of the poor persecuted Huron Indians, who had been well-nigh exterminated by the fierce Iroquois.

But what was that sheen of golden glory, glowing against a shadowy grey background, as they steamed up the narrow channel between Orleans and the shore, along which ran a line of white houses, like a fringe?

'There it is, there's Quebec!' exclaimed Kavanagh eagerly. 'Doesn't she sit like a crowned queen on her rocky throne? We Canadians are far prouder of Quebec than you are of London. It's the central point of our country's history.'

'I didn't know you *had* a country, distinct from Britain,' said Miss Howard. Kavanagh laughed as he replied:

'Oh, I assure you many of us think we have! When you live in a country that stretches across a continent, over a few millions of square miles, you may be excused for thinking it a *country*, and not merely a *colony*. We have a considerable party looking towards independence, sooner or later, you know; *quorum magna pars fui*, as we used to say at school.'

'And are *you* in favour of that too, Mr Stuart?'

'I am not politician enough to decide such a question,' he replied with a smile. 'And the larger humanitarian problems are so much more interesting to me than political ones, that I scarcely care to concern myself with questions in which I should feel myself so much at fault. I believe Canada *has* a destiny of her own to work out, and I think

it more likely, more in accordance with experience, that she will achieve her destiny as an independent nationality, than as a part of any great nation. But I leave that, as I do other matters, to "the Divinity that shapes our ends." Whatever her ultimate destiny may be, she will be best fitted to fulfil it as she grows into a healthy national spirit *now*. That is all I care about.'

They were rapidly nearing Quebec, and the three strangers eagerly watched the unfolding picture, as the distant golden sheen gradually resolved itself into houses, churches, terraces; with the Citadel perched aloft on the dark frowning height, scowling defiance on all intruders.

'Certainly *this* picture is very different from what Cartier or Champlain saw here when they first cast anchor under that great rock,' said Mr Lyle.

'Yes,' said Mr Stuart, 'I've often tried to imagine how it all looked to Champlain. He, no doubt, often imagined some such picture as this in the far future, for he seemed, from the first, to have foreseen that this bare rock was the key to the possession of Canada. That is Dufferin Terrace—that long line of railing broken by the *kiosques* at the corners. It is the pride of Quebec, and no wonder, for the view is enchanting. I like it almost better than the wider view from the Citadel, because it is more limited, and does not put your receptive

powers to so severe a strain. One can enjoy the details of the scene better when there is less of the illimitable.'

And now they were rapidly approaching the busy quay at Lévis, opposite the city, where many of the passengers were to take the waiting train. The Lyles were to remain in Quebec while Ethel did, and, very soon, the whole party were transferred, with their luggage, to the ferryboat that was to take them across the mile-wide strait. As they drew near, Ethel gazed in a delighted surprise at the old grey masses of buildings rising tier above tier from the water's edge, their quaint air of antiquity recalling the old Norman towns which she had seen when abroad with her uncle.

'It was a "New France," you know, that Champlain founded,' said Mr Stuart—a new Normandy across the sea; and now it seems in some respects older than old France; at least, in many ways, it belongs much more to the old *régime*.'

'It is so different from one's idea of a new country,' said Miss Howard, 'of course I *knew* Quebec was old, but I didn't realise it before.'

'Very few English people realise either what a great or what a complex country Canada is,' said Mr Stuart. 'Our race problem, arising out of our eventful history, is the most preplexing one we have to-day.'

'And the Philistines would really like to erase

the old lines in which our most romantic history is written,' said Kavanagh, impatiently.

'His cousin laughed. 'There is your æsthetic point of view,' he said. 'I don't want to see any old landmarks destroyed, but I don't want to see the lines made hard and fast, or bitten in by jealousy and hatred, but softened and shaded into each other by sympathy and mutual forbearance.'

'You want the millennium in short,' rejoined his cousin.

'We *all* want it,' said Mr Lyle.

By this time the ferryboat reached the pier, where a number of people stood expectant. As they stepped ashore, Ethel noticed a fresh, fair young girl, somewhat sunburnt, in a navy blue 'fishwife' dress, and a coquettish sailor hat, attended by two sturdy lads. She walked quickly to meet Mr Stuart, who was leading the way, and who, to her utter surprise, bent down and kissed her upturned face, then, turning to Ethel, he said: 'Here is your cousin, my dear Fanny.'

Before Ethel could recover from her surprise, she was seized, kissed, and then a merry ringing voice exclaimed,

'I am so glad you have come, you darling! you know I'm your cousin Fanny.'

# PART III

## CHAPTER IX

'My dear, dear, child; a thousand times welcome! How glad I am to have you with me at last! You are certainly a Howard—but still there is something about you that reminds me so much of my dear sister!'

These sentiments, with any number of variations on the same theme, were repeated again and again by Mrs Aylmer, as she sat with her arm round her niece in a comfortable apartment prepared for the latter at the St Louis Hotel. Ethel could scarcely get in an answer to any of the numerous questions put to her, as to her health, her experiences, the voyage, and all the friends she had left behind.

'And how glad I am that you happened to come in the same steamer with Norman Stuart! He is such a dear fellow! I suppose he told you that he is engaged to Fanny. It was rather a surprise to us when he asked us for her; he is so much older

and graver, and she was so very young at the time! They have been engaged for two or three years, you know. But it's a great satisfaction to me to think of having him for a son-in-law. You see, we know him so thoroughly, and have found him so truly estimable, and he is so good and kind that we can fully trust her to him—so different from most young men. He has been such an excellent son and brother, too. Well, dear, I see you are looking very tired, and it's too bad of me to keep on talking so long! Now, you must feel *quite* at home with us, and do exactly as you feel inclined. You must lie down now and rest—indeed I think you had best go to bed at once. I'll send Fanny to you with a cup of tea. She is having a talk with Norman, I suppose. You will miss your maid here, I am afraid. We don't often indulge in such luxuries *here*, you know.'

Ethel protested that she would not miss her maid at all, that she was very independent, and had indeed rather felt a maid a superfluity, and that she hoped Fanny would not be disturbed, as she did not need any tea, but would follow her aunt's advice and retire to rest at once. Very soon, however, Fanny appeared, her bright face showing bright even in the growing dusk, carrying a tiny tray that held a cup and saucer, sugar bowl and cream jug, and some inviting little rolls.

'Why, you've got no light yet, dear; just wait a

minute and I'll light the gas. Now, mamma says you must drink this tea and eat as much as you can. She doesn't think you're looking at all well, and neither do I. And you've been at sea so many days, and are not a bit brown! See how much *I* am sunburnt! You know, at Murray Bay we're out all the time.'

Ethel thought she would have no objection to a little burning, too—so healthy and pure and rich was her cousin's colour.

'Norman has been telling me all about how he first met you; isn't it funny you should have happened to come out together? I hope you like him. Isn't he a darling? Just see what he has brought me from Florence, when he had so little time there, too!'

As Fanny spoke she unclosed a morocco case, displaying a set of fine Florentine mosaic.

'You see I always admired Florentine mosaics so much! So he remembered it when he was there—wasn't it nice of him? See, this was my engagement ring. Isn't it a beauty! I wanted it a diamond set with sapphires, so much, and he took such trouble to get me this.'

It was indeed a beautiful ring, handsomer than Ethel would somehow have expected Mr Stuart to care to buy. She admired it sincerely, only wondering a little at the extreme frankness with which Fanny spoke of her betrothed.

'And how do you like his cousin, Mr Kavanagh?' she ran on, scarcely waiting for a reply. 'I have only seen him once before, just when he was going abroad as a young student, and he is so much improved that I should scarcely have recognised him. I think he's delightful! I tell Norman if I hadn't been engaged to *him*, I should certainly fall in love with his cousin. Well, if you won't have anything more, I suppose I had better leave you alone; or can I do anything to help you? You know you'll want a good sleep, for we are going to do a lot of sight-seeing to-morrow. And the next day, we are going to take the Saguenay boat to Murray Bay, but we are not going to stop there on the way down, for mamma wants you to see the Saguenay first; so we shall have a two days' sail on the river; if you're not tired of it. And Norman and Mr Kavanagh are to stay and go with us. Won't that be charming?'

Ethel agreed that it *would* be very pleasant, and said that it was very good of her aunt to plan so much pleasure for her. But she was rather glad when her vivacious cousin finally left her, and she had put out the light, leaving the moonlight to stream into the room, recalling the glory of the previous nights at sea. She was glad to have a little time to think quietly over all the varied impressions of the day; and especially over the surprising piece of news, that Mr Stuart was

engaged to her cousin Fanny. Somehow, she had never suspected such a thing. No doubt this was the 'something else' that Mr Stuart had been about to tell her! It seemed to be rather a puzzle to her, how it had come about. She could not quite put them together in her mind. Her cousin was certainly very sweet and charming, but yet she did not seem at all the sort of girl that she herself would have expected Mr Stuart to choose. But then, she had often heard Miss Ponsonby say there was no accounting for people's choice in such matters! It was pleasant, at any rate, that he should be going to be so near a connection, and she hoped, that, as he said, they should always be friends. But still the thought would perpetually recur that this 'jolly girl' could scarcely be just the companion that Mr Stuart would require! After all, however, it was no business of hers to decide for him. She sincerely hoped he would be happy, in any case. But her experience with Edgar Fane had given her a sort of distrust of love in general. She told herself she could never care for any one in *that* way again. But *that* was no reason why other people should not be happy!

## CHAPTER X

It seemed odd, next morning, to Ethel to awake and find that she was no longer on ship board; and to realise that she was indeed in a new and strange land. Mrs Aylmer came to look for her before she was fully dressed, and at breakfast she met again all her friends of the steamer; for the old ship party still kept together, with the addition of the new and racy element imparted by the presence of Mrs Aylmer and three of her family. The former looked, in the fresh morning light, rather older than she had at first seemed to Ethel, but still a fresh comely motherly matron, recalling her childish vision of years ago. In the warm atmosphere of *her* frank affection Ethel seemed to feel at home at once. The whole party, including Mr and Mrs Lyle, were to 'do' Quebec together before they separated next morning to proceed to their different destinations. It was a misty morning, and the outlines of the hills were all blotted out by a tantalising curtain of white vapour. Mrs

Aylmer and Mr Stuart, however, prophesied that this would soon clear away, and that they should have a lovely day. It was decided that instead of at once taking the carriages for the expedition to the Citadel, they should, first of all, visit the Grey Nunnery and the *Basilica*, both close by, and then walk on to Dufferin Terrace. Their first stop was accordingly made at the Grey Nunnery, the most venerable of all the French conventual establishments in Canada, the home of the grey nuns from the time when, in 1639, Madame de la Peltrie and Marie de l'Incarnation, two remarkable enthusiasts, led their little company of *religieuses* across the stormy sea to this wild and savage wilderness, in order to succour the sick and teach the little Indian children. Mr Stuart had already given his friends an outline of the interesting stories of some of these missionary pioneers, and therefore it was with a vivid interest that Ethel surveyed the great plain grey building which replaces the original log hut, and the garden alleys in which still stroll the successors of the first devoted band; where, till lately, stood an aged ash tree under which the charming Madame de la Peltrie used to sit while instructing her young barbarians.

'Do you see that lighted lamp suspended there?' asked Fanny, coming up to Ethel in the richly decorated chapel, which the placid-faced nun who escorted them was so proud and eager to display.

'Yes,' replied Ethel, 'what is it for? It looks so odd in broad daylight.'

'It is kept lighted in memory of a young girl who died a hundred and fifty years ago, and whose brothers left money to keep it always burning in her honour. Isn't that a charming story? I'm afraid *my* brothers will never do that for *me*! nor any one else either,' she added looking archly up at Mr Stuart, as he came up to them.

'I don't quite see the good of it—I own!' he said. 'Now, if they had paid for the care of some poor children, I think it would have been a great deal better.'

'Oh, you are so aggravatingly practical and philanthropic exclaimed Fanny, shrugging her shoulders. 'Ethel, just wait till you hear him and mamma on some of their charitable hobby-horses.'

Ethel made no reply. The tone of the remark grated upon her, and she felt as if it must grate on Mr Stuart also, whose eyes she carefully refrained from meeting. Then the sister who was attending them came up to ask if they would like to see the skull of Montcalm, which was preserved there in a silver case, which Ethel hastened to decline with thanks, and an inward shudder.

The *Basilica* was a little disappointing after foreign cathedrals, especially as the white and gold of the interior seemed scarcely in harmony with the rugged massiveness of the exterior. But it was

interesting, as Mr Stuart remarked, to remember that the original rude church on the same spot had shared the fortunes of the little colony from its earliest infancy and through all its struggles; and that the poor harassed colonists used to assemble there, when threatened with destruction from Indian or British invasions, to pray for deliverance, or to give 'humble and hearty thanks' for timely succour in the hour of extremity. She felt that a place so long associated with the religious life and deepest feeling of a community should be counted a sacred place, in which Mr Stuart fully concurred, though Mrs Lyle shook her head a little at such a 'toleration of idolatry.'

'I fancy, after all, there are few churches in which *some* idolatry is not tolerated, my dear Mrs Lyle. It is only a question of degree.'

'I fear,' said Mr Lyle, 'there is too much of *that* in human nature, and there is a good deal of human nature in our churches, as well as elsewhere.'

By the time they had reached the terrace the grey morning had brightened considerably. As they crossed the 'Ring' by the Governor's garden, as the shady enclosure behind the terrace is called, Mr Stuart pointed it out as the scene of many a 'pow-wow,' or council with the Indians in the old fighting days, and a temporary place of shelter for the remnant of the persecuted Huron tribes when fleeing from their relentless Iroquois foes. On the

terrace they halted with a general exclamation of delight. The soft mists were drifting away into fleecy clouds, leaving open patches of clear blue sky, and exquisite glimpses of blue and purple mountains, and nearer wooded hills dotted with white villages, and sloping down to a broad level stretch of fields and farms, through which, like a blue ribbon, the St Charles wound its way to join its great ally, the St Lawrence. Just below them, beyond the dingy old houses and narrow streets of the old town, lay the broad river, studded with steamers and sailing crafts of all sorts and sizes, sweeping eastward in a double channel, divided by the purple isle of Orleans, while, just opposite rose the wooded heights of Lévis, dotted with forts and convent, and with the busy dock and village lying at their feet. The English strangers looked down, with much interest, on the tall narrow houses and the close streets and alleys lying so directly below the terrace-railing, that one could drop a stone into the little market-place below, near which Champlain built his first log cabin, with its enclosing palisades, still surviving in the quaint drawings from his busy pen.

With the help of Mr Stuart's rendering of the historical associations, these old places seemed to be, in Ethel's eyes, alive with the picturesque and romantic history of the past centuries. Fanny Aylmer soon seemed tired of the 'antiquarian talk,'

as she termed it; and ensconced herself in one of the little *kiosques*, with Kavanagh and her two brothers; who had joined them on the terrace, all four being soon quite absorbed in a series of playful altercations, interspersed with observations on the various passers-by. They had found the two boys Harry and Teddy waiting for them on the terrace, and these had naturally joined the more lively portion of the party, towards which Mrs Aylmer was constantly gravitating, with gentle maternal injunctions not to be quite so noisy.

They must not tarry too long on the terrace, however, as they had further heights to scale. The whole party stowed themselves away in two carriages, dividing as evenly as possible. Mr Stuart smilingly motioned to Fanny to share his seat beside the driver, in the larger of the two, but she declared that would be too stupid, that it was much better that he should pair off with Miss Howard, and Mr Kavanagh should accompany her in the other carriage. Fanny generally had her own way with everyone, and Mr Stuart at once accepted the arrangement, with a courteous invitation to Miss Howard, whose observant eyes, however, marked a slight expression of annoyance on his face which she had never seen there before. She felt somewhat uncomfortable at being thus as it were, forced on a companion who must be wishing for the one he preferred, but she tried to

make the best of the situation by an effort to talk more than was usual with her. There was not much time, however, for any such efforts, as they had soon reached the top of the winding road, and were set down at the massive gate of the Citadel, in order to make the regulation tour of the walls, attended by a soldier-guide. If the view from the terrace had been enchanting, that from the bastions of the Citadel exhausted all their available vocabulary of admiration. Although the July sun poured down on them the full intensity of its noon-day heat, they could scarcely tear themselves from contemplating the wide panorama of mountain vista and sweeping river, pastoral country and woodland, clustering villages and gleaming spires, with the old grey city, its walls and gates, at their feet.

'Oh,' said Miss Howard to her aunt, 'I never imagined anything so grandly beautiful when I thought of Canada!'

Mrs Aylmer smiled contentedly. 'Yes, my dear, there is no lack of that here, as I have often told the people at home, though they never seemed to take it in. When I first married Mr Aylmer, who was then only a poor young lawyer, one would have thought I was going to bury myself in the wilds of Africa, judging by the compassion that was lavished upon me! But, as I have told you, I have been very happy here. No woman could ask to be happier!' and her eye wandered lovingly

to her own trio whom Mr Stuart had now joined, making, as Miss Howard fancied, some not very effectual efforts to detach Fanny from Kavanagh and secure a little of her attention for himself.

'I'm afraid dear, you've lost your devoted admirer!' whispered Mrs Lyle, in an aside, as they separated to take their places in their respective carriages, Mr Lyle accompanying Mrs Aylmer with Ethel and Mr Stuart.

## CHAPTER XI

It was a tired but very animated little party that sat down in the cool hotel dining-room, to enjoy a luncheon which the morning expedition had prepared them thoroughly to appreciate. Ethel, who was by no means strong yet, looked so pale and fatigued, that her aunt insisted on her going to lie down immediately after luncheon, and sat beside her for a while, talking about her youngest girl Carrie, who had been left at Murray Bay with a friend of Fanny's, who was visiting them.

'I think you will find Carrie almost more companionable that Fanny,' she said, 'though Fanny is a dear, sweet child. But she never cared much for books or work, she is too active for that. Now Carrie is quite another sort of child, such a quiet, thoughtful little creature, much more like *you*. I have sometimes wished, for Mr Stuart's sake, that Carrie had been Fanny. Only *then*, perhaps, he might not have fallen in love with her. But I fancy Fanny tries him a little sometimes, though

she doesn't mean it. She is so young and full of life, that she really does not yet understand a monopolising affection. She treats Mr Stuart just like a big brother, as she used to regard him, before she had any idea of anything more. Sometimes I think she has much of that feeling for him still.'

Mrs Aylmer, like Fanny, seldom demanded a reply, so that Ethel did not feel called upon to say what she thought; which was, that this would scarcely content Mr Stuart.

The afternoon drive was deferred till four o'clock, so that the heat might not be too oppressive. They were to have 'high tea' at the inn near Montmorency Falls, and return in the cool evening moonlight.

*This* time Mr Stuart did not again ask Fanny to be his companion, but allowed the morning's arrangement to stand unchanged, neither she nor Kavanagh seeming in the least tired of it. They first drove down the beautiful St Louis Road to Sillery, descending there to the pretty cove just under high overhanging wooded banks, where, behind the wharf, covered with lumber piles, lies a tiny picturesque French hamlet, and where Mr Stuart pointed out to Ethel a little grey weather worn cottage under an overshadowing elm, from the boughs of which hung a board with the inscription,—'*emplacement du premier couvent des religieuses hospitalienes.*' There, he told her, the

hospital nuns had their first abode on their arrival in the country, preferring it to the site given to them at the settlement in Quebec.

'They came out here,' he continued, 'after their grand reception by the Governor, and when they arrived at the little mission established by Noel Sillery, Knight of Malta, after whom it was named, they knelt down and thanked God for having brought them to the goal of their desires. Nay, more, they kissed every little Indian girl they met, without caring, as the old Jesuit relation says, whether the child's face had been washed or not.'

'It seems to me wonderful,' said Ethel, 'that they could feel so enthusiastic about those poor Indians.'

'My dear Miss Howard, don't you know that it isn't the value of the *object* that determines the amount of the enthusiasm, but the nature of the enthusiast? True love never calculates the precise value of the object. Don't you know we "love because we *must*?" It is part of our best nature, the most divine! Some poet has said that love ceases to be love when it demands a reason.'

'Most true,' said Mr Lyle, drily. 'That is the secret of a good many marriages! and it's a mainspring of success, too, in Christian work,' he added, more seriously.

'Yes, I'm sure it is true,' said Ethel, thoughtfully. She felt it had been in a measure true of her own love for Edgar Fane, still living on after she had

been forced to feel his lack of worthiness. And no doubt that was why Mr Stuart loved her cousin, as she thought she could see, so much more than Fanny seemed to love *him*.

'And there,' said Mr Stuart as they drove on a little farther, and watched an enclosure shaded by a spreading Canadian maple, 'there is the tomb of the first French missionary who was buried in Canadian soil, a loving, humble, useful brother, always ready for anything and everything, from reading mass to tending pigs. Nothing was beneath him, nothing exhausted his loving patience. He well deserved this honour paid to his memory.

'Amen!' said Mr Lyle; 'let us be thankful for such men anywhere, in any Church.'

Then Mr Stuart pointed out the ancient-looking two-story house, now stuccoed over, which was the original Jesuit residence, and is now the most ancient house standing, with one exception, in North America.

As they returned to the city, they turned aside, on the Heights of Abraham, to look at the battered, weather-worn monument, dedicated to the memory of Wolfe, and the victory by which he won for Britain one of the greatest prizes ever contested by two great nations. Kavanagh and Mr Stuart between them described the position of the two armies on that eventful 13th of September, pointing out the rough pass still retaining the name of Wolfe's

cove, by which the English hero and his men scrambled up the steep Heights among the brushwood, and won the victory by sheer force of the pluck and determination which startled into panic the bewildered and harassed French troops.

'Well,' said Ethel, 'I do think, after such a wonderful exploit, and one which won for us such a great country, Wolfe surely deserves something more from Britain than that miserable little pillar!'

'I fancy he would have cared little about a fine monument,' said Mr Stuart. 'If I read his character right, he would be satisfied with his success in doing good work; and, next to that, he would care more to live in the heart of the country he had served so well.'

They re-entered the old city by the new St Louis Gate, while Kavanagh inveighed again at its spick-and-span newness, and the barbarism of removing the ancient gates and walls—one of the few bits of antiquity Canada had to show. They rattled over the hard pavements, past the shops where Indian wares and furs were temptingly displayed for the benefit of tourists—through the St John's Gate, which, at least, was *old;* and then, across Dorchester bridge, over the St Charles. As they passed across, Mr Stuart, as in duty bound, pointed out the precise spot where Cartier laid up his ships, and where he wintered amid the solitude and desolation of an Alpine landscape—his ships sheeted in ice, in

what seemed to the new-comers almost Arctic cold; while the horrible scurvy carried off half of the explorers, and left the other half a weak and wretched remnant.

From such dreary reminiscences of the past, it was pleasant to turn away to take in the beauty of their present surroundings, as they drove on between meadows of emerald green, stretching down from the wooded hills behind, to the blue St Lawrence on their right, fringed with graceful elms and beeches; while pretty old-fashioned country houses, dotted here and there, might very well have done duty for French *chateaux*. The road lay for some miles along the village street of Beauport, which followed the course of the river in a long straggling line, after the fashion of French Canadian villages in general. The English visitors were enchanted by the steep-roofed little houses, painted in gay and varying colours, succeeding each other for several miles, with their long garden-like strips of farm extending down to the river on one side of the road, and upwards to the hills on the other. The tiny front gardens were gay with larkspurs, sweet-peas, marigolds, and other bright flowers, and trim dark-eyed French girls sat at the open doors and on the small front balconies, with their sewing or knitting. Nearly half way down the long street stood the big stone church, like the guardian of the village, sending the gleam of its bright spire many miles away.

As the straggling cottages ceased, the scenery grew wilder, and soon they rattled over a wooden bridge beneath which the cold brown stream of the Montmorency brawled foaming, over dark rocky ledges, like a true mountain torrent.

At the little inn where the carriage road ended, they left the carriages, giving orders for a substantial tea to be ready against their return, and, passing through a gate, followed the footpath across the fields to the high river bank opposite the falls, where they came into view of the white rush of a magnificent cataract, thundering in an avalanche of snowy foam down from its giddy height, crowned by dark pine-woods which, by the contrast of their deep sombre green, intensified the glittering whiteness of the sheet of falling water in clouds of ethereal spray. Some slender attendant cascades strayed over the dark precipice beyond the central fall, one of them lying as it were, in exquisite threaded braids of silver among the jagged ledges of the dark brown precipice.

A long and somewhat dizzy wooden stair descended in zig-zag the steep face of the cliff on which they stood, presenting the best view of the cataract from different points. Fanny and her brothers, with Kavanagh, who, of course led the way, had descended a long steep stair and were rambling among the damp brown rocks at the bottom, almost before the others had left the top.

Mr and Mrs Lyle followed their example, at a more leisurely pace, but as Mrs Aylmer naturally did not care to 'march down the hill and then march up again,' Ethel, who rather dreaded the dizzy descent, willingly remained with her aunt at the foot of the first zig-zag. Mr Stuart accompanied the Lyles to the foot of the precipice, and then, seeing that Fanny was far in advance and too much engrossed with her present attendant even to look back, he soon returned to the place where Mrs Aylmer and Miss Howard were waiting.

'It's pleasant, sometimes,' he said, after they had sat for a time in silence, 'to lose all definite thought, and even self-consciousness, in a roar and rush like that.'

'Oh, do *you* feel it so?' Ethel said. 'I didn't know *other* people felt like that. I supposed it belonged to my own lazy dreaminess. Do you know Mr Stuart, my life in England seems to me almost like one long dream, now. I wonder if I am just beginning to wake!'

'That was how I felt after I came out here,' said Mrs Aylmer, smiling. 'But I fancy most young girls who have lived sheltered lives are apt to live more in dreams than in anything else! When a girl marries a busy man, as I did, it wakes her up effectually. And that reminds me that I got a letter from my husband just as we started, which I will read now, if you will excuse me.'

Her companions seemed both indisposed to talk, and there was another silence, during which Ethel felt as if the continuous lullaby of the cataract's roar was soothing her to sleep. Suddenly, a stray association crossed her mind, and she asked Mr Stuart if the little inn they had stopped at was not the one described in Mr Howell's pretty story, 'A Chance Acquaintance,' which Mr Stuart had lent her on shipboard, and which had greatly conduced to her intelligent enjoyment of Quebec.

'Yes,' he said, 'that's the identical inn.'

'I wonder whether Kitty was right?' she said, reflectively. 'I can't quite make up my mind.'

'What? In breaking with her lover because she had found out his weakness. No, I can't think so, not, at least, if she really loved him. As I said to-day, I don't believe in any so-called love, unless it can love on, "for better for worse," patiently "bearing all things," and looking for the coming good in which it believes. No, it seems to me that she should have had patience, if her love had been true, helping her lover to overcome a false strain, a weakness, and grow into a truer and nobler life. It was almost as bad in *her* to throw him off finally, because of his failure in true knighthood, as it was in *him* to be ashamed of *her* because her home-made dress failed to come up to the requirements of his fashionable friends. I'm afraid there was a good deal of personal pride on both sides!'

'But then, if he was like *that*, Kitty felt he could never be anything else.'

'Which was a quite unwarrantable assumption. We scarcely appreciate how much "a long communion tends to make us what we are." I have great faith in the power of a steady, patient love, to gradually mould any character for good. That is, if there is love on *both* sides.'

Again there was silence. Ethel was thinking of Edgar Fane, and wondering whether she had been right in trying to banish him from her thoughts and heart. But then, what good would it have done? She felt sure *now*, that his, at least, had been no *true* love.

But the evening shadows were lengthening. The sunset light was fading out of the sky, and the torrent showed pale and spectral in the light of the rising moon. Mrs Aylmer declared it was more than time they were starting for the inn, and Mr Stuart, at her request, called in the stragglers to return to the ranks, and begin the return march. Fanny came up, looking flushed and excited, with a long rent in her dress, which she stayed behind to pin up for the time. Mr Stuart remained with her, while Kavanagh walked on with Miss Howard, apparently anxious to atone a little for his barefaced desertion of her.

Fanny completed her temporary repairs, humming a lively air as she did so, while Mr Stuart

stood silently by till she was ready, and then they walked on together.

'Norman,' she said, looking up at last, as if his grave, quiet manner had suddenly impressed her, 'what's the matter? You *do* look awfully bored! And I've scarcely seen you to-day!'

'Whose fault is that, Fanny?' he asked, reproachfully.

She calmly ignored the remark.

'Do you know, I think your cousin is delightful. I wish he were not going so soon! Don't you think he might stay for a few days with us at Murray Bay?'

'He can do as he likes,' replied Mr Stuart, dryly. 'I should *think* he would wish to join his own family as soon as possible. He has been away a long time, and his mother, who is an invalid, will be impatient to see him.'

'Well, it wouldn't do her any *great* harm to wait just a *little* longer, and he would be such an acquisition to us there, in the way of expeditions, and so on; especially as we want to show Ethel all the lions.'

Mr Stuart made no reply. The rest of the party had by this time reached the inn. He gently detained Fanny a moment, under the screen of some thick tangled shrubbery, and drawing her to him he said,

'Do you know, dear, sometimes I almost think you don't love me at all.'

'Now don't be silly, there's a dear. You know

you promised me never to be silly or jealous, or anything tiresome.'

As she spoke she looked at him with the half-appealing, half-pouting look that always conquered his disapproval of her caprices, and the implied reproach ended after the orthodox fashion of lovers quarrels in general, with one of those sudden impulsive demonstrations of Fanny's which always seemed to her lover to 'hide a multitude of sins.'

'I'll drive home with you to-night,' she whispered, winningly. 'You can ask your cousin to exchange with you.'

The exchange was effected, Kavanagh acquiescing with apparent readiness. Possibly he wished to make up for his past neglect of Miss Howard. Possibly there might have been another reason.

The 'high tea' which was awaiting the party was warmly appreciated. The delicious salmon, the home-made bread and butter, the wild raspberries and cream, called forth many commendations, and received full attention. But even the pleasantest excitement has its penalty of fatigue, and as they drove home in the silvery moonlight that flooded the picturesque landscape, and showed the distant hills like the 'baseless fabric of a vision,' there was little disposition to talk. Even the irrepressible Kavanagh was comparatively silent, while at least half of the party were almost asleep before they reached the hotel.

## CHAPTER XII

By eight o'clock next morning, the party of the day before was finally broken up. Ethel, with the Aylmers, as well as Stuart and Kavanagh, was on board the Saguenay steamer: and Mr and Mrs Lyle had taken the early train for the West. Ethel had promised to visit her friend, later in the year, and in the meantime to write often.

'And look after your cousin, my dear,' said Mrs Lyle. 'It will be too bad, if that reckless Kavanagh tries to cut out Mr Stuart.'

'Oh, he would never be so dishonourable!'

'Not *intentionally*, I am sure, but people never know what they may drift into, when they go in for a reckless flirtation!'

Fanny, at all events, did not seem to have derived any harm from hers—if it was one—in so far as that day's experience showed. She was as bright and good-humoured as could be, exemplary to her lover, most kind to Ethel, and perhaps just a shade cool to Kavanagh, who alone seemed at times a

trifle depressed; though at others, his spirits seemed positively wild. The day was another succession of glorious pictures. Ethel intensely enjoyed this second view of the grand phalanx of wooded hills, always noting, with Mr Stuart and Kavanagh, some feature which had especially attracted their attention on the upward cruise. This time they passed much nearer the bold north shore, landing passengers at the high wooden piers on the way, built to suit the variations of the tide. Some of the lighthouses they touched at looked intensely lonely, with nothing in sight but wild wooded uplands, and the stretch of sparkling water over which white gulls were circling on the watch for their prey. Fanny and the boys amused themselves by tossing them fragments of biscuit, which the birds seemed able to detect a quarter of a mile off—swooping down upon them from afar with unerring precision. Kavanagh quoted the 'Ancient Mariner'; and he, with Mr Stuart and Ethel, got into one of their three-cornered discussions as to the real meaning of the poem. The other tourists on board also came in for a little of the same attention that Kavanagh had given to their fellow-passengers at sea. Among them were some French ecclesiastics and *religieuses* in the quaint robes of their order, who were especially interesting to Ethel, after all the stories she had been hearing of the devotion of their predecessors. There were, of

course, the usual number of English tourists, and Ethel had not yet got over the unreasonable expectation of looking for some familiar face among all the unfamiliar ones; and occasionally was conscious of an involuntary start, as a chance resemblance in some young Englishman vividly recalled Edgar Fane.

As they neared the pier at Murray Bay, the boys prepared to disembark, while Mrs Aylmer and Fanny eagerly scanned the little crowd of summer visitors that always comes down to meet the steamer.

'There's Carrie! and Milly!' exclaimed Fanny, waving her handkerchief; while Mrs Aylmer put up her opera-glass to have a better view of her younger daughter. As they came nearer, Ethel caught the shy eager glance of a girl of sixteen,—not nearly so pretty as Fanny, but as her mother had said, with a much more thoughtful expression. Standing beside her was a very small neat and slender figure, who, Fanny said, was her greatest friend, Milly Bruce. 'She and I have been schoolmates for years,' she said, 'and she stays with us here every summer.'

There was a short and animated colloquy with the girls on the pier, standing almost on a level with the deck, while the boys landed with much waving of hats, and a warm welcome from the two girls, as the steamer moved away. 'We shall be

back to-morrow night, if the tide is favourable,' said Mrs Aylmer. 'Have a good supper ready for us!'

The girls nodded, and waved a farewell; and the steamer was soon under weigh again. Mrs Aylmer pointing out to Ethel the curiously shaped rock, tufted with pine and cedar, that rose near the pier, and gave the name of *Point-au-Pic* to the long village behind it. They watched the little group walking lightly up the winding road, in the direction of Mrs Aylmer's cottage, till they could no longer distinguish them, and then Ethel's eye once more turned with a sort of fascination to the grand masses of purple hills,—rising, range behind range, to north and west. She had never been much among hills, and *these* gave her intense delight.

'I think, yes, I think I would rather have the St Lawrence than the Rhine, take it for all in all!' said Kavanagh, who seemed to have become again the Kavanagh of shipboard. 'And do you notice the sky, Miss Howard? "So clear, so blue, so largely vaulted," as Matthew Arnold quotes from Maurice De Guérin, in that beautiful essay you were reading at sea.'

'Yes,' said Miss Howard. 'That just expresses what I have been feeling about the difference between this Canadian sky and our English one. It is so much more "largely vaulted."'

'Yes, you'll find we have many good things in

Canada,' replied Kavanagh, 'by-and-bye you'll find you wouldn't care to go back!' Miss Howard smiled incredulously. It did not seem likely that Canada could ever fill the place in her heart possessed by her dear old England. As they neared the long bare spit of land on which stands the pier of *Rivière-du-Loup*, Miss Howard noticed a curious range of isolated rocks standing out in the river near the south shore.

'They are called *Les Pèlerins*, I suppose from their resemblance to a procession of pilgrims. They have very curious mirage effects as seen from Murray Bay,' said Mr Stuart.

But the tea-bell rang, and every one was ready to go down, for the savoury odour of trout and salmon which came up from the saloon below, was particularly grateful to appetites sharpened by the bracing air. When they came on deck again, they found they had left *Rivière-du-Loup* far behind, with its attendant sea-side village of Cacouna, and were again crossing the river to Tadoussac. The setting sun was shedding a golden glory across the broad stream, and soon exquisite hues of amber and rose and purple were suffusing sky and river and distant hills. It seemed a transfiguration of the scene, and Ethel sat silently enraptured by the charm of its wonderful beauty. Kavanagh had produced his pocket Shelley, and was quoting his

favourite sunset description from 'Julian and Maddalo,' of which he said it reminded him.

'Indeed, it reminds *me* of Venetian sunsets by Turner,' said Ethel, 'such as I have seen in the National Gallery, that made me cease to wonder at Ruskin's raptures over him, even though I could hardly believe them quite real.'

From which they drifted into a discussion on Ruskin, about whom they never could all agree, while Fanny, getting tired of talk that was out of her line, strayed into the saloon and began to play over some French-Canadian airs. By-and-bye Kavanagh went off to join her, and his melodious tenor voice was soon heard accompanying the piano in the simple and lively songs, '*A la Claire Fontaine*,' '*En roulant ma boule*,' and other stirring choruses, while the others sat silently listening to the music and watching the distant lights of Tadoussac beginning to gleam out brightly through the growing dusk.

The moon had not risen when they reached the pier in its shadowy rocky recess. Mr Stuart proposed that while the boat lay at the pier, they should walk across the wooden bridge that looked 'Tyrolean,' as Kavanagh said, in its rude simplicity, to see the oldest church in North America. They could just see its rude, simple outline, and Mr Stuart told them how it had been first built by the earliest fur-traders, and how closely it had been

associated with the rude life of Indian and white trappers and hunters along the dark and mysterious Saguenay. Dark and mysterious, indeed, it looked, as they left the lights of Tadoussac behind, and saw the great, dark, shadowy curves of the steep hills close in about them on both sides, while there seemed to breathe from them a mountain air, descending from the cold north towards which they were voyaging. It seemed to Ethel a poem or a dream materialised, and she was almost sorry when a late rising moon dispersed some of the mystery by revealing the rough weather-scarred rocks, partially clothed with the stunted tempest-twisted firs and birches, which heightened their air of rugged savagery.

'It will be twelve o'clock before we pass Cape Eternity and Cape Trinity, but it is worth while to sit up all night for the sake of seeing them by moonlight,' said Mr Stuart.

All but Mrs Aylmer were of the same mind, and she good-naturedly said she would lie down on the sofa and sleep, till they called her in time to get a sight of the grand precipices, which she had seen several times already, but never by moonlight.

It seemed as if they were watching a magical panorama unfold before them, as the passage of point after point opened up endless variations on the same theme of wild wooded hills, bold, bare crags, and silent shadowy streams. Cooler and

cooler grew the night air, seeming at once an anodyne and a stimulant. The little party scarcely cared to talk, even Fanny seeming for the time subdued into silence.

'There's Cape Eternity looming up now,' she said, as they rounded a point and saw a great shadowy mass some distance beyond them. 'I'll go and call mamma.'

Ethel almost held her breath, oppressed with overpowering awe, as they approached the mighty pile of grey weather-beaten granite that seemed to tower sheer above them to the skies, the nearer one partially clothed with a scanty vegetation. It seemed like the menacing presence of some mighty force that might at any moment break its invisible bounds, and crush them to atoms. Cape Trinity was, however, the more picturesque and impressive, with its massive triple tiers of scarred and splintered granite, lifting its bare time-worn brow to so dizzy a height that it wearied the eye to follow it to the summit. So illusory was the effect of its mighty mass in altering apparent proportions, that it seemed impossible to believe their own distance from the rocky wall so great, that a small stone, thrown by Mr Stuart with his utmost force, fell far short of it. With the moonlight silvering its summit, while its base and the dark river below lay in deepest shadow, the sublimity of the scene was intensified to the highest

point. It was a picture, as Kavanagh said, to be engraved on one's memory as '*an awe for ever*.'

'It seems to me,' added Mr Stuart, 'that the very fact, that such commonplace material as a mass of great stone can produce such a feeling of awe in our minds, shows in itself our own affinity with that Infinite Power of which this seems an inadequate symbol. The source of the awe is really in our own kinship, which transcends our mental powers to grasp, whether it appears in the immensity of the starry heavens, or the imperative of the "Ought"—the two things that most impressed the soul of Kant.'

'Yes,' said Ethel, 'I believe *all* one's best thoughts come without our being able to tell whence or why.'

'And then, when we begin to reason about them, they are gone,' said Mr Stuart, smiling.

'Let us then *say* no more, but behold in silence!' said Kavanagh, oracularly; and indeed, little more was said till they had left the triple curve of Cape Trinity, and the dark mass of Cape Eternity far behind, and then reluctantly turned in to sleep. As Ethel entered the cabin below, on which the ladies' staterooms opened, she was almost startled to see the sofas covered by the black-robed forms of recumbent nuns, *en route* for the large convent of Chicoutimi, at the head of the navigable portion of the river. The sunrise next morning awakened Ethel to find that the steamer was no longer in

motion, and as she came out of her stateroom to take a look through the window, she found the nuns already kneeling at their morning devotions. Their dark motionless figures seemed to her to belong to the past history of the region, rather than to be real women like herself, and the *religieuses* would have been surprised had they had any idea of the romantic interest they inspired in the young English lady, whom some of them perhaps regarded with a little wistful envy.

The steamer was lying at the pier of Ha-ha Bay,* in a recess of several miles in width, on the line of the fiord, as the Saguenay may appropriately be called. There the tide runs out so far that the steamer is often stranded for hours, as happened to be the case on that particular morning. The juniors of the party set out for an early stroll up the rugged hillside that rose from the bay, with a summer hotel and a neat church perched on its slope. As they came near the church—a large one for the size of the village of bare brown wooden cottages below—they found that early mass had already begun. The ecclesiastics who had been their fellow-passengers, one of the officers of the steamer, and a few poor country folk composed the congregation. Ethel wished to look in, and Mr Stuart offered to accompany her, the other two preferring to extend

* So called, because here the first explorers found the first soundings in this mountain fiord.

their walk. The service was chanted in Latin, and though the words were of course unintelligible, or nearly so, Ethel felt the soothing influence of the hushed quiet—the measured chanting, the devotional attitudes of the worshippers, and the sacred associations of the crucifix and pictures. It seemed, as she said to herself, though too shy to say it aloud, like a benison on the enjoyment of the bright summer day, like a soul given to the hieroglyphics of nature, otherwise so unsatisfying to the higher being.

They came out of the church, and, joining the others, they strolled down to the little straggling brown village below, and held a brief colloquy with a pleasant-faced young French mother, whose little ones brought tiny canoes to sell to the strangers, and who looked at Miss Howard with wonder when she tried to make her understand that she had just come across the great ocean. She told her, in a broad *patois*, that Ethel could scarcely understand that she was herself *bien contente*, in her mountain home, though it *was very* cold in winter, and her husband was absent all summer at his distant employment. But then he was *un bon garçon* and he and the children seemed to make up for all disadvantages.

The thriving village of Chicoutimi, with its large saw-mill, was the terminus of their sail. Beyond *that*, Mr Stuart said, there were rapids with bits of

navigable stream, and picturesque lakes, but the scenery was far from being so grand as that of the fiord itself. They re-passed Cape Trinity with the afternoon sunshine pouring down upon its hoary brow as it had done for ages past, softening a little the stern effect of its rugged grandeur, in which it seemed to stand sentinel, like some stern Titanic warder, over the dark imprisoned stream below. Then there followed the savage succession of barren crags and pine-crested hills, sometimes swept completely bare of vegetation by devastating fires which had left serried ranks of gaunt skeletons, where noble pines and graceful birch had risen to meet the sun and wind. Sometimes the rocks receded a little from the shore, leaving a few hill-side farms or white villages nestling among the ledges of the hills, each with its protecting church, seeming to give a gentler effect of human habitation. Yet the general character was that of savage gloom, and perhaps every one shared to some extent in Fanny's exclamation of relief, as they again neared Tadoussac, which looked in daylight a shade less picturesque than it had done in the dusky twilight of the evening before,

'Thank goodness, we are getting out from all these gloomy crags, and into our own St Lawrence once more!'

Yet Ethel looked back on the rocky gateway of the dark fiord, with a wistful feeling of fascination

that would not relax its hold. She often in dreams passed up that sombre shore again.

It was almost bewildering to step from their steamer, with all the associations of the Saguenay still clinging about it, into the noise and bustle of the little crowd on the pier at Murray Bay; and to be at once surrounded by the eager clamour of the re-united family party. A primitive square haycart carried up the luggage of the travellers; while Mrs Aylmer and Ethel were perched up on one of the two-wheeled *calèches* in waiting—Fanny and the young men walking home with the merry group which had come to meet them. Mrs Aylmer's cottage was perhaps a mile from the pier on the side of the hill-slope that rose from the bay, all along its curve. It was a plain unpainted wooden house, the wide verandah alone relieving its bareness, a happy combination of bungalow and Swiss *châlet*. The furniture was of the simplest description, but it looked homelike and comfortable, with a little fire burning in the wide corner fireplace, for the evening was cool; and bright prints and other simple ornaments on the wooden walls, and pretty baskets of ferns and flowers, more than made up for the simplicity of the furnishing. In front, a little shrubbery, with a few flowers, separated it from the road. Behind it a lawn-tennis ground lay between it and the slope above, which rose gradually into a thicket of spruce and cedar, the

fragrance of which floated down on the fresh evening breeze.

The neat and pleasant apartment which had been assigned to Ethel was in front of the house, and even in the fading evening light, she could see how lovely was the view. Beyond the range of cottages which lined the opposite side of the road, she looked over a stretch of wet sands, left bare by the tide, across the blue stream of the Murray, to a bold ridge of promontory whose steep sides rose, darkly wooded, from the ocean-like St Lawrence, the farther shore of which was faintly discernible, some twenty miles away. Looking on to her left, her eye followed the valley of the Murray, nestling among the purple hills. It seemed to her the most charming combination of highland and seaside that she had ever seen.

But she did not linger long *then* over its beauty, for she saw on her table some newly arrived English letters in familiar hand-writing. She turned to open them with the unreasonable feeling which every traveller knows, that, because so many silent days had separated her from her old home, *something* important *must* have happened of which these letters would make her aware.

# PART IV

## CHAPTER XIII

THE travellers felt naturally inclined to rest awhile, and the day after their arrival at Murray Bay was passed in lounging, leisurely strolls, and quiet talk. It was one of the uncertain, April-like days very common in that region, when frequent showers alternate with glorious bursts of brilliant sunshine, and exquisite double rainbows brood over the transfigured hills. Ethel, who had now recovered much of her natural elasticity of spirit and keen enjoyment of natural beauty, was eager to see something more of the picturesque surroundings that had so delighted her on her arrival the evening before. Her cousin Carrie had 'taken to' her at first sight, and was ready to take her in charge, and act as general *cicerone*, appropriating her whenever it was possible to secure her for a companion; while Fanny and the boys equally appropriated Mr Kavanagh, carrying him off to see all their favourite haunts within reach. Miss

Bruce in the meantime took some pains to secure the lion's share of Mr Stuart's society. Ethel was not much attracted to this young lady. Her keen grey eyes had an unpleasantly watchful and scrutinising expression, and Ethel's quick intuition, which she at first resented in her own mind as uncharitable, gave her the impression of a shallow and selfish nature.

The morning was spent in exploring the long straggling village that stretched along the shore of the bay which gives its name to the place, at the foot of the green rounded hills that bound the narrow strip of valley. Ethel looked with much curiosity, at the little foreign-looking wooden houses with their tiny balconies or verandas, now tenanted chiefly by summer visitors, and almost guiltless of furniture, with the exception of the big box-stove, the tall cupboards, and plain wooden chairs, that belonged to the French owners, who themselves inhabited them in winter. The temporary tenants, however, had made the simple furnishings more home-like and attractive, by pinning up prints and photographs on the walls, and hanging birchen baskets and toy canoes filled with fern, about the rooms and verandas. Then there were the various hotels to inspect, and meet there, old friends of the Aylmers of former years; and troops of merry children to watch, as they bathed on the sands, or dug holes to catch smelts. No one of the party

thought of mustering courage for bathing so soon; for the water is so cold at Murray Bay that it requires Spartan fortitude to venture into it.

Late in the afternoon, after the clouds had cleared away, promising a glorious sunset, the younger members of the party took a leisurely walk along the road that leads round the head of the bay, following the curve of the shore, past the quaint French farmhouses, with their round clay ovens by the side of the road in front, and their narrow strips of corn-field and tobocco-patches stretching up the side of the slope behind, while, here and there, a path through a little tangle of brushwood led up to the pasture-land above. As the road rounded the bay, with its stretch of yellow sands, at low tide, and two large vessels, lying stranded on them, they came at intervals on rustic bridges that crossed tiny trickling brooks, and could hear the unseen plash of a miniature waterfall, through the dense foliage that filled a hidden ravine. Presently they found themselves in the picturesque little French village, so foreign in its aspect to Ethel's English eyes, with its grey balconied cottages, showing glimpses of primitive Norman interiors, while the housewives sat knitting or sewing at their open doors, chatting merrily with each other, and ready to give a nod and smile to 'Ma'amselle Fanny,' whom they knew very well as a yearly visitor. The children at play would

stop as they passed by, and salute them with a respectful bow or curtsey, very different, as Ethel was quite ready to admit, from Anglo-Saxon awkwardness. They inspected the large white church which was so conspicuous and picturesque a point in the distant view of the bay, and looked with interest at the pretty *Presbytère* close by, with its shady garden overhanging the river, where the priest, in his long cassock, walking meditatively up and down the paths, unconsciously completed the picture. Then they crossed the substantial bridge that spans the Murray, just above its *embouchure*, where its shallow stream strays at low tide, among the dark boulders and golden gravel, with an occasional tiny rapid quickening its flow. They pursued the path, which curved backward, ascending the wooded hill on the other side of the bridge, among cool pine woods, with glimpses of the bay, river, and distant hills, showing through its openings; till they reached a little memorial chapel standing on a wooded hill-side, embowered in foliage. As they stood looking at it, a bright French Canadian boy came up, and offered to find '*le clef*,' if they would like to go in. Ethel, to whom such things were a novelty, thought she should like to see the interior, and to rest there for a while, as she was beginning to feel very tired with the long walk. Mr Stuart volunteered to stay

with her while the rest of the party continued their ramble somewhat farther.

Ethel looked with much interest at the rude pictures and the candles, and the lamp that always burned before the little shrine. 'It seems a strange fancy,' she said at last, 'to build this sort of memorial to a dead friend. It reminds one of shrines we hear about in China and other heathen countries.'

'Yes,' Mr Stuart replied, 'I suppose it all comes from the same root, the common mistake of thinking of religion as a *ceremonial*, rather than as a *life*. As some of our philosophers do that, it is not much wonder if the unthinking multitude do it too. But still I think I can understand *this*. It is such a strong instinct in our nature to try to associate the sacred memories so dear to us with all that we feel most sacred in our own inner life, the *deathless* life. Are not our churchyards often illustrations of the same feeling?'

'I suppose so,' said Ethel, 'but it always seems *too* sad—the grave, I mean.'

'It *would* be,' he replied, 'but for the "hope of an endless life." *That* seems to open up a vista into the clear heaven, above all the chances and changes of this mortal life. At least I got such a glimpse from my mother's peaceful death-bed, and I think I could never lose it.'

Their companions had not yet returned when

they came out of the chapel, and began slowly to retrace the homeward way; so that their quiet talk went on without interruption. Ethel had never felt so much at home with Mr Stuart, nor had he ever conversed so freely with her. It seemed as if they had got on a friendly footing of comradeship, and he talked to her as frankly as he might have done to a sister. She was surprised to find how deeply and seriously he had thought about subjects, of which, with all her conscientiousness in regard to what she considered 'religious duties' *she* had hitherto thought very conventionally and superficially. Some of the expressions used by Mr Stuart during this walk set her thinking for days to come; and she instinctively recognised the difference between his earnest tone and the mere surface talk which was all that Edgar Fane had ever ventured on, in referring to a subject in which he himself felt no deep interest. The subject led Mr Stuart to reminiscences of his own early life and home training—of his mother, early widowed, and of her brave determination to educate her children at any sacrifice to herself—of the debt he felt he owed to her memory in discharging the same duty towards the younger members of his family, and of his own early professional struggles, previous to becoming a member of Mr Aylmer's firm. Ethel had often wondered what her aunt's

husband might be like, and now she ventured to put the question.

'He is a very quiet, hard-working man, and a good lawyer, much engrossed by his profession, and a most indulgent husband and father. He is not by any means so conversational as your aunt,' he said, with a smile, 'but he is a close observer, and in conducting a case nothing seems to escape him. And now' he added, with a half-drawn sigh, 'after my long holiday, I have to "buckle to" and plunge into work. There's always plenty of *that*, even in vacation. I confess it's something of an effort, for law would not have been my choice, had I been free to choose.'

'No?' said Ethel, looking at him in some surprise.

'No?' he said, 'I took it up simply as the best means of earning a living and providing for those whom it was my duty to care for. I did not feel a vocation for either medicine or the Church, and I believed I had the qualities that a lawyer needs most—patience, perseverance, and willingness to *work*.'

'And what should you have preferred had you been free to choose?' she inquired, with some interest.

'Well, I'm afraid it sounds a trifle priggish to say so, but I think I should have liked nothing so well as setting to work to make life more tolerable for

some of my fellow-creatures. There is so much of that to do on every side! Of course I know one has always a chance of doing *something*, and a lawyer has many opportunities, if he will use them; but I often envy people who can devote the greater portion of their time to lightening the load of misery and sin that oppresses this sorrowful world, following, in so far as one might, the greatest of examples.'

There was a thoughtful silence, and very soon the attention of both was absorbed in watching the growing beauty of the sunset hues. It seemed to Ethel afterwards as if the earnest thoughtful tone of their talk had blended so harmoniously with the peaceful influences of the summer evening, that she could never afterwards recall the beauty of the surrounding scene, the soft shadowy green of the nearer hills, here and there thrown out by the warm sunset light, the crimson and purple of the distant ones, and the rich soft colouring of sky and river, without again hearing also those low spoken words, so simple and yet so earnest. She had always been a 'religious' girl, but from that hour both religion and life seemed to her fraught with a new meaning and a new interest.

As their little party collected in the bright sitting-room that evening, Mrs Aylmer begged her niece to give them some music, provided that it did not pain her to do so. Ethel assented at once,

feeling that she must overcome her natural disinclination to play the old familiar airs to comparative strangers under such changed circumstances. She selected some of her favourite *Songs without Words*, rendered with her usual delicacy and feeling, which proved to be favourites of Mr Kavanagh's also. Fanny and Miss Bruce protested that they would give anything to play like *that*, which Mrs Aylmer remarked they would not be likely to do, unless they worked harder. Mr Stuart leaned back in his chair in silence, losing not a note of what gave him the keenest enjoyment, though even Miss Bruce's pointed appeal failed to draw out any decided expression of it. But he came up to Ethel a little later, and thanked her for the pleasure she had given him.

'I don't know much about music,' he said, 'so I never attempt to criticise it, but I know what most appeals to me, and seems to realise indefinite cravings that nothing else can satisfy.' The remark called a little colour to Ethel's still pale cheek, for she could not help being pleased with Mr Stuart's approbation. She was annoyed, at the moment, to meet the keen eyes of Miss Bruce, which seemed always on the watch, and her uneasy consciousness of annoyance only made the colour grow deeper.

'Well, what shall we do to-morrow?' asked Fanny, abruptly ending one of the playful quarrels in which she and Kavanagh were perpetually

engaged; 'we ought to have an expedition of some sort, seeing that it's Norman's last day here.'

'I hope *not*!' exclaimed Mr Stuart, 'you know I am asked to come again in the end of next month, and I *mean* to come, if only to see you home.'

'Oh, *don't* talk of going home yet, when we've only just come!' exclaimed Fanny, with her most becoming pout. 'But what shall we do? can't we have a canoe-party, and a picnic up the river?'

'I think Ethel would hardly be fit for a canoe-party, *yet*,' said Mrs Aylmer. She had better begin with a shorter and easier trip. Besides, I couldn't go, and I don't want to lose Norman's last day.'

'Suppose we drive to the Falls of the Fraser,' suggested Miss Bruce, '*that's* not too far, and it's such a lovely place for a picnic.'

This suggestion was finally accepted, and the details of the expedition quickly settled. Next morning all were early astir, some to prepare sandwiches and other requisites for the luncheon, others to look up the needed vehicles, and discuss the weather. Miss Howard seemed brighter and more like her old self than she had done since her uncle's death. She looked charming, her aunt thought, when she came down appropriately attired for the expedition, in a dark grey travelling-ulster relieved by a plain white collar, which had a less sombre effect than the dead black she had hitherto worn, and also showed the fine outlines of her figure to perfection.

'Cousin Ethel, I really think you're getting up a colour!' exclaimed Fanny, looking charming herself in her favourite dark-blue sailor costume, as they stood with tightly packed baskets, awaiting the arrival of the *calèches*, these primitive-looking vehicles being the only ones fit for the rough roads they had to drive over.

'Yes,' said Miss Bruce, mischievously, I thought ast evening that Miss Howard's colour was beginning to come back.'

Oh, I am sure that the air of Murray Bay will do wonders for you—my child,' said her aunt, with her kindly smile, innocent of any covert allusion, which Ethel of course ignored, though she could not prevent her colour from deepening again, to her great annoyance.

When the *calèches* drove up, Kavanagh as usual claimed Fanny as his companion, on the ground that he needed her to show him the way. Mr Stuart made no objection to the arrangement, being evidently disposed to allow Fanny the utmost freedom of action. Kavanagh had told him, the night before, that he thought he should remain at Murray Bay for a week's visit, which he had been pressingly invited to do by Fanny, seconded by the always hospitable Mrs Aylmer. 'You know,' he said, 'It won't really make any difference to any one, and I might never have a chance to be here again.'

'Well, you know your own business best, Will,' his cousin had gravely replied. 'You must do as you think right.'

Will would rather he had said, 'Do as you *like best*,' which might mean a different thing. The refrain of his own rondeau, 'Straight to the goal,' had been haunting him a little, but, after all, why should he *not* spend a week in so charming a place, in delicious summer weather, to say nothing of the pleasant society? Into what he *might* be drifting he would not allow himself time to think.

Miss Bruce made a palpable bid for a seat in the *calèche* Mr Stuart was to drive—each vehicle holding in general only one person besides the driver.

He did not take the hint, however—observant as he usually was—but said, turning to Ethel, and holding out his hand, 'May not I help you up, Miss Howard.' She at once, of course, accepted his offered aid, feeling that any hesitation would be superfluous and ill-timed. Miss Bruce consoled herself with the eager invitation of the boys to squeeze into the one which *they* were to drive, while Mrs Aylmer and Carrie packed themselves into another which happened to be rather larger, with a driver who could make himself conveniently small.

The charming morning had put every one into excellent spirits, as they drove rapidly up the road that followed the curve of the Bay, crossed the

bridge at the village, and followed the river upward for several miles. Then they turned off into a narrower road that ran in among the hill-side farms, up and down short hills, often ladder-like in steepness, where it sometimes seemed as if the *calèche* —passengers and all—must topple over on the little Canadian pony, which set its sturdy feet firmly against the stones, as if shod with creepers. The experience was rather startling at first, and Ethel had to hold on to the *calèche* for a time, laughingly declaring that it was as bad as a first lesson in riding. Gradually, however, she became accustomed to the motion, and learned to balance herself so as not to fear even the steep ascents, where Mr. Stuart alighted to lead the pony up, and lighten his burden. At length, after a long succession of such ups and downs, they left all semblance of a road behind, taking down fences, and crossing pasture-fields, as if *that* were a matter of course. When even the ponies could go no farther, the whole party alighted, the young men undertaking the conveyance of the baskets. Soon the murmur of an unseen waterfall reached their ears, and very soon they came out upon a mountain stream, rambling in an aimless fashion among dark brown boulders and golden gravel, and making, here and there, a preliminary leap, in a small cascade, before taking the final leap. They clambered down the crags, amid clustering foliage, till they came to a

ledge of flat rock, partly carpeted with green turf, close to the verge of the sheet of silvery foam that descended, in a succession of smaller leaps, into the boiling pool below. The depth of the fall was not great, but the cascade possessed a picturesque beauty that was heightened by the luxuriant overhanging foliage, and by the sylvan beauty of the river down below. From the rock on which they stood, they looked down on a broad green plateau, partially shaded by fine spreading trees and dotted with grazing cows—jutting out into the river, which then wound its way leisurely behind a richly wooded promontory, and so passed out of further view. To Ethel it recalled scenes in Wales which she had visited with her uncle, while Kavanagh went into a torrent of raptures over it, comparing it with half-a-dozen Swiss waterfalls in a breath.

The little party were soon scattered, enjoying the falls from different points of view, and in different ways. The boys of course were speedily engaged in scaling all possible, and some impossible descents and ascents, Fanny, with Kavanagh's assistance, following as far as she could venture; while the others found their way down in a more leisurely fashion, enjoying the fragrance of the moist air, and the cool, soothing rush of the cascade. On the green plateau below, with the cascade in full view, they sat down to enjoy the luncheon which the

girls had set out on the grass, with some tasteful decorations of wild-flowers and ferns, and it is scarcely necessary to say that it received ample justice. Then followed an hour or two of repose for the elders at least, Kavanagh giving them one of his favourite poetical recitations, after which there were various strolls to some pretty nooks in the vicinity, well-known to the young Aylmers, or lingering saunterings along the river bank. Mr Stuart and Fanny had one *tête-à-tête* walk, from which Fanny returned with a heightened colour and a somewhat ruffled temper, while Mr Stuart's grave face wore a disturbed and pained expression very unusual to it. Kavanagh, who had been talking with the other girls, meantime, in a somewhat *distraite* manner, soon found an excuse for stealing off with Fanny, so far, that when the hour of departure came, it was difficult to find them. Mr Stuart seemed silent and pre-occupied, as he handed Ethel into the *calèche* for the return drive, and for some distance there was but little attempt at conversation, Ethel feeling warm sympathy with him, as well as some indignation with her cousin for her reckless and open flirtation.

'She is not a bit worthy of his affection, when she can trifle with it so recklessly,' was the thought that kept repeating itself in her mind as she occasionally ventured on a common-place remark.

'It is strange what complex beings we are, and

how little we understand ourselves, after all,' he remarked, at last, very irrelevantly to her previous observation, and rather as if he were thinking aloud than replying.

Ethel did not need to make any reply, as just then they came to one of the interrupting hills that precluded conversation. The pony was descending it at his usual pace, when some strap in the harness suddenly gave way, interfering with his motion so much that he set off at a rate which it required all Mr Stuart's strength to check. He was a good driver, and did not loose his presence of mind; but the hill was a long one, and an upset seemed imminent. He glanced at his companion who had grown suddenly pale, for she was still far from strong. 'Keep quite still,' he said, in a rather peremptory tone, 'and hold firmly on to me and the *calèche*.' She obeyed instinctively, and with all the force of his strong arm he continued to hold in the frightened animal, hoping that it would soon become quieter. But presently there was a sudden turn, the *calèche* swayed violently, and, before she knew what was happening, Ethel had felt herself caught in Mr Stuart's firm grasp, and he had cleared the overturning vehicle at a bound, with her in his arms. Both came down heavily on the rough bank, and as Mr Stuart staggered to his feet and tried to raise the girl, whose eyes were closed in a momen-

tary faintness, he exclaimed, by an involuntary impulse, 'Ethel, are you hurt, dear?'

She heard the unexpected words, with a strange, startled thrill of emotion, and opening her eyes met *his* fixed upon her face, with an expression that haunted her for weeks after.

The occupants of the other vehicles quickly gathered round them, and Mrs Aylmer could scarcely be reassured that Ethel had not met with some serious injury. The boys soon captured the pony, who came back, crestfallen, with his *calèche* behind him, looking very much ashamed of himself. Carrie and Ethel exchanged places, much to Ethel's relief, though not for the reason her aunt assigned for the change. She would not have been in the least afraid to venture the pony again; but it was a relief just then not to have to talk to Mr Stuart.

## CHAPTER XIV

THE arrival of the steamer at the pier, shortly after the return of the party, made Mr Stuart's departure and leave-taking a very hurried one, which was rather a relief to Ethel, who soon recovered from the slight shock of the upset, though the other disturbing experience, known only to herself, was not so easily forgotten. She discovered too, with no little vexation as the days went by, that Mr Stuart's departure had made a blank in her life for which she had been quite unprepared. She had never realised till now how much the almost constant companionship of the last few days had become a part of her daily life, and so important a part that she found herself consciously missing it at almost every moment. Mr Stuart's opinions and standards of judgment had made such an impression on her mind that she could not help involuntarily referring to this test every subject that came up for discussion. It seemed as if the old, long-established sense of reliance that she had been accustomed to feel in

her uncle's judgment, combined with the more recently awakened sympathy and fellow-feeling that had drawn her to Edgar Fane, as almost the first masculine friend of her own age who had come in her way, had both been transferred to this new friend. She felt thoroughly dissatisfied with herself, for what seemed to her the disgraceful fickleness that made it possible for her, in so short a time, to be so strongly influenced by an entirely new friendship. For she would not call it to herself by any other name, though she knew in those underlying depths of consciousness in which we often dimly feel what we will not explicitly confess, even to ourselves, that Mr Stuart had grown to be something more than an ordinary friend. But independently of her own past, it seemed to her disloyal to every consideration of duty and gratitude to think of her cousin's betrothed as she had begun, insensibly, to think of Mr Stuart. That *he* thought of *her* only as a friend and future connexion she felt sure, for though those hasty impulsive words and the look that still haunted her might have made her think otherwise, she was convinced that he loved her capricious cousin with his whole heart, and that his love was strong enough to bear with the faults that so evidently pained him, until it had helped her to overcome them. What preposterous vanity it would be for her to imagine for a moment that his brief intercourse with herself

could so soon have changed a feeling that had, as she had every reason to believe, been the growth of years. She felt lowered in her own esteem, and almost seemed to herself guilty of treachery to her cousin, as well as annoyed, by the persistency with which the thought and image of Mr Stuart would haunt her, despite her firm resolve to conquer the often overpowering longing for his society. But the unsatisfied craving, the longing just to hear his voice again would steal upon her heart in lonely, thoughtful hours, and indeed almost seemed to grow upon her, as the long summer days passed by, with no other interest strong enough to fill up this new blank in her life, indeed for the present seemed to swallow up all the others. To Fanny she tried to atone, by every means in her power, for the involuntary disloyalty which troubled her sensitive conscience. But Fanny, at all events, was serenely unconscious of anything to complain of; nor did her betrothed's departure seem to trouble *her* at all. She always professed a dislike to 'sentimental people,' and if she missed him in any degree she managed to conceal the feeling very effectually. She was full of overflowing spirits, ready for anything in the shape of an expedition, in which she and Kavanagh were always the leaders. Nothing fatigued her, and Ethel often envied her the physical vigour and elasticity which made her, after every long ramble or day's pleasuring, just as fresh

and energetic as ever to plan and carry out new excursions next morning. Ethel was anxious to carry out her aunt's desire that she should help Fanny to improve in her music, but she found it impossible to prevail upon her to settle down to the steady practice that she so much needed.

'Winter will do well enough for *that*,' she declared impatiently. 'Our summer here is short enough without wasting time on stupid practising indoors.'

'And then, in winter, you have your luncheons and five o'clock teas, and shopping, and parties,' said Milly Bruce; '*I* know just how it always is! Now, if Miss Howard would only give *me* a few hints I should be so grateful!'

Ethel was willing to be of service to anyone, even to Miss Bruce, whom she by no means fancied; and that practical young lady took her at her word, and gained a good deal thereby, being quite willing to take all necessary trouble, if only she could approach Miss Howard as a performer. Ethel fancied that she availed herself of the opportunity to turn the conversation in the direction of Mr Stuart; that she tried to draw her out about their intercourse at sea, in order to ascertain how much she had seen of him then, as well as how she liked him; in which attempts, however, she signally failed to extract much information.

Will Kavanagh's *one* week insensibly extended

itself to *three;* all the more easily because Mr Aylmer was detained in town a fortnight by some unexpected business, arising out of the arrival of a friend whom he had not expected till later in the season; and Fanny declared that they 'could not possibly get on without a man body about the house, over and above the two boys!' Kavanagh, however, managed to divide his attentions among the three girls with tolerable impartiality, though now and then Fanny and he would mysteriously disappear for two or three hours, always, however, having some excellent reason to give for their absence. For the rest, the days slipped as swiftly and pleasantly by as charming scenery, bracing air, and perfect freedom could make them do. There were hill-side rambles and boating-parties, and drives to other picturesque waterfalls in the vicinity, or to visit friends whose cottages were some miles off on the opposite promontory of *Cap-A-L'Aigle,* where the smooth highway ran for miles along the verge of the bold headland, below which lay the mighty river like a great blue crystal, bounded by cliffs of amethyst and opal, while, to the north and west, the ever varying vista of mountain tops presented an enchanting mingling of rich purples and blues, frequently spanned by superb rainbows; and at sunset it often seemed as if the heavens above were opened and let down a flood of glory that made them glow with rose and crimson, and

lighted up the nearer woods with an exquisite golden green. Such a succession of fine sunsets Ethel had never seen before, and could never after forget, for each as it came recalled that first sunset walk with Mr Stuart which seemed to have left such an indelible impression on her mind.

All things, however, must come to an end, and Kavanagh's visit ended very soon after Mr Aylmer's arrival. Possibly the consciousness of the quiet watchful scrutiny of Fanny's father made the young man a little uncomfortable. At all events it seemed to rouse him to think about his expectant relatives, and to decide that it was time that he should make his way westward to join them. But evidently it was something of a wrench to tear himself away, and the Kavanagh of he evening before his departure was oddly different from the lively young fellow Ethel had first known on shipboard. His characteristic buoyancy seemed all gone, and he could scarcely keep up even the semblance of cheerfulness; and, after a long *tête-à-tête* walk which he and Fanny had taken up the hill that rose immediately above the cottage, there were traces of tears on Fanny's blooming cheeks, which the keen eye of Miss Bruce at least, could clearly discern. Whatever her motive for it might be, that young lady, Ethel felt sure, took some trouble to secure for Fanny and Kavanagh as much opportunity for private

talk as possible, especially on *that* evening. Did she *wish* that Fanny should break off her engagement with Mr Stuart? It looked like it, certainly.

Mr Aylmer had brought some little remembrances from Mr Stuart for the family party, and among them was a package of books for the general enjoyment. Miss Howard noticed, with an involuntary sense of pleasure, that among these there were several of a kind which neither Fanny nor her mother would be in the least likely to care for reading, but which, in the course of their conversations, *she* had expressed a desire to read. On looking through them as she eagerly did, she found several passages marked, bearing on subjects which she had discussed with him, with special interest.

'I'm sure I don't know what Norman sent these dry books for! he knows I don't care for *that* sort of thing!' exclaimed Fanny, impatiently, as she looked over the titles of the volumes. 'I don't think anyone is likely to read them but *you*, Ethel.'

'Perhaps they were *meant* for Miss Howard—or *me*,' said Miss Bruce, with a significant glance towards Ethel, whose colour rose with quick annoyance. Fanny, meantime, was glancing over a letter, *not* a very long one, and as she closed it, she remarked, 'Norman sends his kindest remembrances to every one, and hopes to be here again in about three weeks. Just fancy how time flies! I can

scarcely believe that it's *three whole* weeks since he went away.'

Ethel could not help the thrill of pleasure called up by the announcement. Perhaps it was visible in her eyes, for, as she looked up, she met Miss Bruce's scrutinising glance once more, and again the consciousness of being watched brought the too ready colour to her cheek. She most cordially wished that Miss Bruce would not consider her worthy of so much attention.

After Kavanagh's departure, Fanny's spirits and energy seemed to diminish perceptibly. She would sometimes grow almost fretful, a strange thing for *her*, and would sometimes beg off from some of their expeditions, pleading a most unusual fatigue; and remain at home alone. She watched the arrival of the mail with most unusual interest, and once, Ethel coming upon her suddenly in the shrubbery, found her absorbed in reading a letter, which, with evident confusion, she hastily crushed together and thrust into her pocket. Ethel felt an instant conviction that the letter was from Kavanagh, for Fanny never seemed to feel any embarrassment in announcing a letter from 'Norman,' which, indeed, usually became at once in some degree public property.

Ethel's own letters were no many — Miss Ponsonby and Mrs Lyle being almost her only correspondents, for it scarcely needs to be said that

Mrs Jocelyn was far too busy to write unnecessary and unprofitable letters. A passage in one of Miss Ponsonby's letters about this time gave her some pain and vague uneasiness, though she could not feel that she had anything to reproach herself with in not having acted otherwise. The passage ran thus:—

'Your old friend and neighbour, Mr Thornby, was here the other day, and gave me all the news about the Grange and the neighbourhood. He says that Jack Howard is there now, trying to take his place as master, but that, as might be expected, he seems like a fish out of water—looks thoroughly miserable. Half the time he isn't himself, for of course he finds people like himself to drink with; and the other half he seems to be in the deepest melancholy. A few people have called on him, as Mr Thornby did at first, but he believes he hasn't returned any of their visits, and Mr Thornby doesn't think that the poor fellow can last very long; and I'm sure no one could desire it. So, my dear, the king may come to his own again, and we may have you back in your right place *yet*!'

The last sentence sent through Ethel a pang of something like remorse, as she remembered Jack's pitiful appeal to her for help to rise to something better than he could otherwise reach. And now what if by her refusal she were to be in some sort the cause of his defeat and premature death? But

could she have acted otherwise? She thought *not.* Yet the thought suggested by her aunt, that such a death might profit herself, was utterly repulsive to her. Much as she loved her old home, she could not think of such a possibility without a sense of pain and dismay.

Mr Aylmer showed Ethel all possible consideration and kindness, and evidently took to her on his own account, so that they were frequently companions in the long walks in which he delighted, and which Ethel was now strong enough to take without over-fatigue. He was something of a naturalist, in his way, preferring the recreation of hunting for 'specimens' to fishing or *loafing,* which, in his eyes, were almost convertible terms. He knew a good deal about the natural history of the region, and Ethel gleaned no little information from him in the course of their strolls along the favourite road to *Cap-A-L'Aigle,* and up the shady fragrant mountain road that led to Quebec, where the occassional cabin of a *habitant,* with its little field of maize and its invariable tobacco patch, would be for miles the sole break in the 'forest primeval.' This rugged road, leading up and down great pine clad hills through a wild and sparsely peopled region, was, as Mr Aylmer explained to her, the *land* route to Quebec, and therefore the only one available in winter weather. Life in this rugged land, with its severe winter, was hard enough, he

remarked, and yet these poor *habitants*, on the whole, seemed to lead a gayer and happier existence than the more prosperous Anglo-Saxon settlers of the milder country to the west.

'Part of their easy-going content is doubtless owing to their natural passivity, and even to their lack of enterprise,' he observed. 'But, at least, they are not given to our Anglo-Saxon habit of strain and worry. They take life as it comes, with a smile and a shrug over inevitable hardships, and they are not always tiring themselves by climbing hills before they reach them.'

'*That* would indeed be rather superfluous, *here*,' Ethel replied, with a smile, 'when the actual hills must keep them well employed.'

Mr Aylmer, however, did not respond to her smile, seeming pre-occupied with his own thoughts.

'I sometimes feel as if my Fanny must have some French blood in her,' he continued, somewhat irrelevantly. 'She takes life so easily, in general, almost too easily. And yet she does not seem to me quite in her usual spirits just now; though certainly she is the picture of health. I sometimes wonder whether Mr Stuart and she are altogether suited to each other. Fanny has not exactly the qualities that I should have expected Stuart to prize most in a wife. But still you never can tell what *any* one will do when he falls in love. If

they *are* honestly in *love* with each other, other things won't so much matter.'

Ethel looked a little surprised at hearing so romantic a sentiment from the quiet and elderly Mr Aylmer. She did not suspect, till afterwards, that he might have been trying to draw out her own impressions on the subject. As she did not find it easy to reply, feeling that she could hardly reassure Fanny's father on *that* score, she was glad when he continued, in a meditative tone, apparently not requiring an answer:

'There's no one I know whom I esteem more highly than Mr Stuart, or to whom I would more readily entrust my daughter; but I don't want any child of mine to marry without having her whole heart in it! I've seen too much of the folly and misery of that sort of thing! But it's not easy to get at Fanny's real feelings. I often think she seems more careless than she really is.'

Ethel had this conversation strongly recalled to her mind the very next evening. The day following would be Fanny's birthday, and at tea-time the boys brought in the letters which had arrived by the afternoon mail. Two were for Fanny, and both, with unusual reticence, she put into her pocket without opening them.

'Well, what does Norman say?' asked Mrs Aylmer, as usual, a little later, after finishing the perusal of some of her own correspondence.

'Oh, I haven't read it yet,' she said, indifferently. 'There's no comfort in reading your letters when every one is talking around you.'

Mr Aylmer said nothing, but Ethel noticed that his eye rested somewhat wistfully on Fanny, who rushed at once into another subject of conversation.

After tea, as the family party were all scattered in different directions, Ethel, drawn out by the calm beauty of the rich August sunset, strolled up the hill behind the house, to secure the wider view of the Bay and the surrounding mountains, which she so much enjoyed, and of which she never grew tired. As she passed a little cluster of the dwarf spruce that grows there so abundantly, she was startled by hearing a stifled sob, and presently discerned Fanny's blue dress and fair hair, as she lay on the turf, shaken with sobs, and quite unconscious of any observation. Ethel's first instinctive impulse was to go up to her cousin and offer her ready sympathy. But the next instant she reflected that Fanny had plainly come here to secure the privacy she could not find in the small house where there was no security from interruption, and her sensitive delicacy of feeling made her shrink from intruding upon her unawares. Accordingly, she turned away in a different direction, so noiselessly, that Fanny remained quite unconscious of her having approached her retreat. As she returned towards the house in the gathering

dusk, she encountered Miss Bruce, evidently a little out of humour.

'I was wondering where you had all hidden yourselves,' she exclaimed, when she recognised Ethel. 'I was writing letters upstairs, and when I came down, I found the house quite empty. Where's Fanny?'

'I think she is up on the hill,' replied Ethel, and somewhat to her surprise, Miss Bruce, who was not much addicted to twilight wanderings, declared her intention of going up to look for her. Ethel meantime seated herself on a rustic bench in a retired nook of the little garden, and as she heard Milly's voice calling 'Fanny, Fanny!' in the distance, through the clear stillness of the evening, she could not help speculating a little as to what might be the cause of the emotion she had witnessed in her usually light-hearted cousin. The thought had gathered strength in her mind that Kavanagh had supplanted Mr Stuart in Fanny's affection—and that the flirtation so carelessly begun, had ended in earnest. If so, she felt pained for Mr Stuart, to whom it must, she believed, be a severe blow, for Ethel could not believe that he would hold her to her engagement a moment after she should desire to be released, whatever might be the sacrifice to himself. But, after all, might not this be better than to be disappointed in his wife, after the irrevocable step should have been taken?

While still absorbed in these speculations she heard the voices of the two girls returning. She was just about to join them, when some low spoken words of Fanny's reached her ear and made her stop short.

'I *do* think I shall *have* to tell him, Milly, before he comes back.'

'I wouldn't do *that*, my dear,' replied Miss Bruce, coaxingly. 'It is so much easier and better to *say* such things, than to *write* them. You can soften it down so much better, you know.'

Ethel turned back quickly, provoked at the *contretemps* that had made her an involuntary listener to what was not intended for her ears. But she could not help hearing the words, nor could she help the inference her quick intuition drew from them. Was it Mr Stuart who was to be 'told'? And was Miss Bruce afraid that, if Fanny were to tell him before he came back, he might not return at all? She was angry with herself for her involuntary suspicion, but, however *that* might be, she felt very great sympathy for Mr Stuart, over whom she thought she saw a heavy trial impending.

At breakfast next morning there was a brisk discussion as to what particular mode they should take of celebrating Fanny's birthday. A picnic to the Falls of the Fraser was warmly advocated by the boys, but decidedly negatived by Fanny, who

declared that she was tired of picnics in general, and of those Falls in particular.

'I don't want to do *anything* in particular,' she said, pettishly. 'It's much too warm! I mean to try bathing this morning while it *is* warm, and if Ethel and Harry would go up to the "Lorne House," and ask the Elliotts and Franklins to afternoon tea and tennis, that would be ever so much better than tiring ourselves out with a picnic!'

The elder members of the family were nothing loth to acquiesce in this arrangement, and when Fanny and Miss Bruce set out for their dip, Ethel and her little cousin also set out for the 'Lorne House.' Ethel had never attempted bathing in the cold water of the Bay, which is scarcely safe for a delicate constitution, and indeed the others did so only when it was especially warm. Harry who had had *his* swim already, was always glad to be his cousin's escort, and they strolled leisurely down to the large hotel at the '*Pic*,' meeting merry groups of sojourners at every turn. After seeing the young people Fanny wanted, who were only too glad to accept the invitation, Ethel and Harry walked down the long flight of steps leading from the hotel to the pier, and turned aside to look at the Indian wares of the squaws who sit at their little stalls near the shore, with toy canoes, snow-shoes, baskets, and other trinkets to tempt the summer visitors into parting with a little of their spare cash.

Harry wanted to buy a birthday gift for Fanny, and Ethel had selected a pretty little canoe, filled with trailing vines, when her eye was caught by the figure of a young man who had just descended the flight of steps down which they had come. She had by this time almost lost the habit of scanning, as she had been inclined to do instinctively, the faces of passers-by in the search for a familiar face. But she was instantly attracted to *this* approaching figure by the intuitive certainty that it was a familiar one. In another moment she had recognised, and was recognised by—Edgar Fane!

## CHAPTER XV

ETHEL was so overcome by surprise, that it swallowed up every other emotion, in this most unexpected meeting. At least, she was conscious of no other feeling, as the young man hastened forward to meet her, irreproachable, as usual, in his faultless summer attire, with his attractive air of gentle deference and an unmistakable expression of happiness on his clear-cut features. Naturally *he* spoke first; indeed, Ethel could only exclaim, half articulately, 'Mr Fane, is it possible?'

'I *thought* I should give you a surprise,' he said, as composedly as if they had parted only yesterday, 'I was just on my way to look you up, having heard from Mrs Jocelyn that I was likely to find you here!'

'But, how do *you* come to be here?' she rejoined, regaining her composure the more easily, because of *his* perfect freedom from embarrassment.

'Oh, *that's* easily explained,' he said, 'it came about as naturally as possible. I got a commission to write

up the Canadian North West for the *Quic-quid*; and as Canada has had special attractions for me of late, I jumped at the offer. I left the steamer at Rimouski, to get on the quicker, and came by train to *Rivière du Loup*, and thence here by boat. We had a fog, and did not get in till very late last night, so I was rather late this morning; but as soon as I had finished breakfast, I set out to look for you, little dreaming that I should find you so near!'

The explanation was, indeed, simple enough; but Ethel felt, to say the least, rather uncomfortably surprised at Fane's great anxiety to meet her, and at the right he evidently assumed to feel and express the same, a right which the terms of their parting had scarcely justified. This feeling made her involuntarily cool in her manner, and the young man instinctively felt the coolness, attributing it to a natural *pique*, for which he was quite prepared. He began at once to talk of indifferent matters, was duly introduced to Harry, discussed the beauty of the scenery, the charming clearness of the air, her own improved looks, described the last occasion on which he had seen her aunt, and gave her all the bits of home news that seemed to occur to him. But he never spoke of *one* piece of news, a very important one, which had been his motive for securing his present mission and for his present forced march to find Miss Howard, without delay.

As they approached the post office, where Harry,

as usual, was to ask for the letters, a small boy of his acquaintance rushed up to him to ask him to accompany him on a fishing excursion for which he was just starting. Harry of course was nothing loth, but returned to speak to his cousin, as if afraid of failing in courtesy as her escort. 'Tell you what, cousin Ethel,' he said, 'I'll just run on first and ask the post-mistress to get out the letters, and then you can call in and take them home.'

'Harry is always anxious to fulfil his commissions to the *letter*,' rejoined Miss Howard, smiling. 'He has learned from his father that he ought always to do what he undertakes to do. He is very attentive to me, and I can't help being very fond of him, partly,' she added, in a low voice, 'because he is my uncle's namesake.'

'I don't wonder,' Fane replied, rather absently, 'he will be a noble man if he grows up like Mr Howard. Allow me,' he said, as they reached the door of the little post-office, filled with people asking for their respective mails. 'I will go in and get them for you.'

Ethel—glad to be saved the inconvenience of pressing through the crowd or of waiting for an indefinite time—stopped for a moment at the door to exchange a few words with an acquaintance, then instinctively passed slowly on, leaving Fane to follow and overtake her, which he presently did, apologising for the delay, and complaining of the

difficulty he had had in getting his inquiries attended to.

The delay, however, was not quite so long as his manner would have led Ethel to believe. He had pushed his way to the front with his usual energy, and, asking the French post-mistress for Monsieur Aylmer's letters, had received the handful which she had just picked out at Harry's request. He glanced eagerly over them as he took them from her. There were three addressed to Miss Howard, one bearing a Canadian stamp, while the other two, one of which was evidently a lawyer's letter, bore English stamps and London post-marks.

His face clouded over as he surveyed them wistfully, as if he would fain have scanned their contents. 'They haven't lost much time, at any rate,' he said to himself, 'I hardly thought they would have been *quite* so prompt. Awfully bad luck for me. Let me see,' he said to himself, as he lingered for a moment at the door, noticing that Miss Howard had gone on; 'it can't possibly do *her* any harm to wait a day or two for *this*, as she's not expecting; it and it will give me a little more time. I could tell her all about it some day, when it would only seem a good joke. Nothing could be easier than to drop it into the post-office again in a day or two, when it's all settled, and nobody will be a particle the wiser.'

It has often been remarked that temptation

generally awaits him who is ready to be tempted. It was not easy to decide at once. Give her those letters, and how could he have the face to ask her for what he had come so far to secure—what he really, too, *wanted* so much for its *own* sake, now that it would not have to be the price of self-denial, but the reverse. He hurriedly obeyed his impulse, thrust the two English letters into his pocket, and walked rapidly on to overtake Miss Howard.

'Any letters for *me*?' she inquired, glancing at his hand, as he overtook her. For answer, he put the handful he held into her hand.

'From Marion Lyle,' she remarked, as she looked at the one addressed to herself, 'you will remember *her*, I am sure, as Marion Evans, our old rector's daughter. I came out with her and her husband, and they are settled in a charge in Ontario.'

'Oh, indeed,' he replied, abstractedly. 'Yes, I remember you once told me that Lyle was engaged to her. Ah, Miss Howard, how happy those old days were, I have never been so happy since! You don't know how I have lived them over, in memory.'

'Yes,' replied Ethel, who could not help responding when the chord of old home feeling was touched—'they were indeed, happy days! My poor old uncle! No one can ever be quite like *him*.'

'I quite agree with you,' said Fane, warmly, 'he was the best friend I ever had, and nothing can

blot out the memory of his kindness, and of the dear old place, where I learned to know him and *you*!' They had struck into a quiet piece of private lane, leading up to a side entrance to Mr Aylmer's cottage, and his voice, as he spoke, had sunk into the pleading tone she remembered so well.

'Ethel,' he continued, still in the same low tone. 'You know I felt it would be selfish in me to bind you down to the uncertainties and cares of a life like mine, but I could never forget you, even had I wished to do so. I felt that it would be the mistake of my life to let you go out of it.' This was strictly true, but the mistake had not pressed heavily on him till within the last fortnight.'

'And *now*,' he continued, 'now that things are brightening with me, almost beyond my hopes, it has been my first desire to see you again, hoping to find you the same true-hearted Ethel in whose regard for me I once ventured to believe!'

As he spoke, the hot colour rushed to her face and retreated again, leaving her deadly pale. She could not but be moved by the unexpected appeal, by the old familiar tone that once had so much power over her—by the allusion to the old feeling that had been so strong. But that was *dead now*, beyond all hope of revival, she felt only too surely. Was *he* then, after all, the constant lover, and *hers* the shallow fickle sentiment she had so condemned in *himself*? And how could she ever tell him how

everything was changed, how her whole inner world was turned upside down?

'I though *that* was all at an end,' she said at last, in a voice unsteady with painful emotion, seeing that he waited for her to speak.

'I did not wish to trammel you,' he said, reproachfully. 'But you know I said the time might come when I might feel able to ask what I could not then.'

'Oh! Mr Fane,' she said, with a great effort, '*please* don't speak of it any more. I told you *then* it was to be *quite* at an end, and I have felt it so. There are some things one *can't* take up again.'

'Ethel!' he said in a tone of deep disappointment and reproach. 'If there were any woman I could have trusted to be true to herself and to those who love her, under *any* circumstances, it would have been *yourself*. And I *can't* think otherwise, *yet*. If I am mistaken, and if, in the course of the few weeks that have passed since we parted, you have learned to love some one else, who loves *you*, of course I shall say no more. But till you tell me *that* I must *hope*. It is natural that you should feel vexed with me, perhaps, because I did not act from impulse, but I thought *then* that I was acting for the best. I think, now, that I was mistaken; but you surely would not be unforgiving! Tell me, Ethel, has *any one else* taken my place? If so, and he is worthy,

I shall respect his rights. If not, I shall wait for an answer till you have had time to think and understand.'

'No one has any "rights!" Mr Fane,' she said, a little haughtily. 'But indeed, I would rather not pursue the subject. I thought it was dropped, finally, last May.'

'Nay, dear Ethel, he said, imploringly, 'I shall not take an answer now. This has come upon you too suddenly. I shall leave my plea for your full consideration, before you give me a final reply.'

They had arrived at the door of the cottage, and Mr Aylmer and Teddy came up at the same moment, precluding any further private conversation. The three girls were only a little way behind, their faces glowing, and their merry tones attesting the stimulating effect of their very cold bath. Even Fanny seemed to have in great measure recovered her usual high spirits.

There was a little stir of surprise, as Ethel, with all the composure she could assume, made the needful introductions. Mr Aylmer, who if he had ever heard of Fane's existence, had long ago forgotten all about him, seemed pleased to meet any of Ethel's friends, and looked with a benign scrutiny at the young man in whom he at once suspected a possible suitor. Fanny, however, remembered very well what *she* had heard of him, for Mrs Jocelyn, in her letter to Mrs Aylmer, had dilated a good deal on his

former attentions to her niece, and on his heartless defection. After a short but comprehensive survey, she set him down at once as a conceited prig, who thought he was doing Ethel a favour in condescending to come out after her, and inwardly hoped that her consin would have nothing to say to him. If *she* could help it, she should *not*, that was certain. Miss Bruce, who of course, jumped at conclusions, seemed so pleased with his arrival that Fanny asked her if she were going to set her cap at *him* now? 'as she does at Norman,' she thought, 'though she might save herself the trouble, for he would never look at *her* even if—' the sentence remained unfinished. It was a curious, half contemptuous liking, after all, that Fanny had for her old school chum and *confidante*.

Mrs Aylmer, with many things to occupy her motherly soul, had forgotten all about Edgar Fane, whose name had made but slight impression on her mind. That he was a friend of Ethel's, and that he had been one of her uncle's, of whom he spoke with such warm appreciation, was enough for *her*. She greeted him with her usual warm kindliness, insisted that he should spend the day with them, and was evidently impressed by his graceful, deferential manner and by the conversational powers which he exerted to the best advantage. Mr Aylmer, who rather missed his wonted society, was by no means sorry to come upon so agreeable

a talker, so well posted in current events, literary gossip, English politics, and other matters in which he was himself interested. The hour or two before the early dinner seemed to pass with unusual rapidity.

Ethel was glad to leave them to their talk and escape to her own room, to think in quiet over the unexpected meeting. She had no doubt as to the reply she should give to her old lover. She knew quite well that she did *not* love him *now;* even his most earnest pleading had no power to move her; but she felt almost conscience-stricken that it *should* be so, and lowered in her own esteem to think that she could so soon have 'got over' the love she had once thought so true and lasting. Still more painfully did she feel the embarrassment and pain of making Edgar Fane understand that the old feeling was really dead, that her refusal did not proceed from coyness or *pique*, but from the utter absence of the love he expected to find unchanged. But when the thought of Mr Stuart forced itself upon her, and she had to confess to herself that the close intercourse she had had with him had been mainly the cause of the disappearence of the old attachment, she felt doubly humiliated. Certainly, she *must* be decided in her reply, but she would make the refusal as gentle as she possibly could, the more so, that she was easily persuaded that she had been hasty in her judgment of

his conduct, and had done him injustice in her thoughts.

He, on his side, behaved with the most scrupulous consideration and tact, betraying no desire to press her, a consideration by no means lost upon her, and was, she could not help admitting, a most charming guest, so courteous, so obliging, so easily pleased and entertained. He was delighted with the scenery, and ready to enter into all the enthusiasm of the young people about their favourite points of view. He could make a first-rate descriptive article about it, he declared, it was all so primitive and original. The first day passed rapidly in walks and talks, and the second was spent in the same way, without much opportunity for the *tête-à-tête* talk which Ethel dreaded. It chanced, however, on the evening of the second day, that the young folks, accompanied by Mr Aylmer, took a walk up the valley, in the same direction that Ethel had first walked with Mr Stuart. Fanny monopolised Mr Fane on the outward stroll, with such determination that Ethel wondered whether Kavanagh were in turn to be superseded. But on the way homeward, Mr Fane with equal determination, managed to secure Ethel's companionship, and also to linger a little behind the rest. It happened again to be a magnificent sunset, much like that well remembered one, when she had walked that same way with Mr Stuart, and the association brought him

so vividly before her, that he seemed almost more real than her present companion, while his earnest voice still echoed in her ears. She could not help feeling the difference between the full flow of sympathy that had characterised their talk, and the effort that it now cost her to listen and reply to Mr Fane. She hardly knew what he said or what she replied. She only felt pained by his persistent pleading, and by his determination not to understand that her negative was well considered and final.

She was thankful when the end of that long painful conversation came at last, and they entered the gate of the cottage. As they did so, a long way behind the rest of the party, she noticed Fanny going up the hill behind the house with a companion who looked strangely familiar. Could it really be Mr Stuart? But she *knew* that it was! He must have arrived unexpectedly, a good deal in advance of the time when he was expected. It was strangely trying and tantalising, with the sound of Edgar Fane's eager pleading in her ears, to see those two setting out on a 'lover's walk,' as they doubtless were—and why should they *not* be?

Mr Fane had engaged to accompany his host and hostess to visit some friends at the 'Lorne House' near the pier, which they set out to do, after a hasty tea, at which neither Fanny nor Mr Stuart appeared. As soon as they had gone, Ethel betook

herself to her own room, knowing that the young people would soon be setting out for a 'bonfire' party in the neighbourhood, from which Ethel had, of course, excused herself. She sat there a good while alone, to rest after the strain of the walk, and try to throw off thoughts that seemed too much for her, wishing also to avoid the necessity of talking to Mr Stuart just then, when he and Fanny returned together. She heard the little bustle of departure, and thought she noticed that Fanny's gay tones were a little less gay than usual. Waiting till all was quiet, and all had, as she thought, departed, she went down stairs and opened the piano, to relieve a little the oppression on her heart, by putting a little of the sadness she felt into the plaintive strains of Mendelssohn's *Lieder ohne Worte*. By-and-bye, she strayed into the 'Moonlight Sonata,' suggested by the flood of silvery radiance that had begun to pour in through the open window into the otherwise unlighted room. As she ceased playing at last, she was surprised to hear a sigh, and a slight movement in a distant corner of the room. She looked up, startled, and, at the same moment, Mr Stuart rose from an armchair in which he had been reclining, hidden completely by the shadow cast by a door that stood ajar.

'I thought you had gone out with the others!' she exclaimed, after the first surprised greeting.

'I saw you out with Fanny, as I came in from our walk.'

'I was not very long with her,' he replied. 'Fanny was anxious to be off to her 'bonfire' party, for which I had no inclination; and I was sitting here when you came down. As you did not see me, I thought I would remain *incognito*, and enjoy your music—perhaps more of it than I should have had if you had known I was here. I have never forgotten the delight I had from it on my last visit. You will forgive the liberty, will you not?'

'Oh, certainly,' she said, 'if you really enjoyed it; but I thought you were not expected quite so soon.'

'Nor was I,' he replied, hesitating a moment, and then went on, almost hurriedly: 'I found I could get away a little sooner than I had thought—and I can't bear suspense! I wanted to know just how things stood! Fanny's letters have been very unsatisfactory, and Kavanagh was in such wretched spirits, that—at last—I got the truth out of him, and the end of it is, Miss Howard, I have offered Fanny her freedom, and she has gladly accepted it.'

With the exception of an involuntary expression of surprise, Ethel made no reply. She was, indeed, afraid to trust her voice. Nor did she know exactly what to say, not being sure whether condolence was in place, and not being able to express

a regret she did not really feel, except for his supposed disappointment.

'You know what was my *theory* about such matters,' he added, half smiling. 'I seem to have falsified my own principles. But I think I see *now* that I was wrong in letting Fanny pledge herself to me so young—poor child! perhaps, indeed, I hardly knew *myself*, then. To *her* it was clearly impossible to give what I looked for, and my affection was only a burden to her, especially of late. I have no doubt she will be happier with my cousin than I could ever have made her! I have something in view for *him* that will, I think just suit him, and I hope it will not be very hard to reconcile Mr and Mrs Aylmer to the new departure. It is on dear Mrs Aylmer's account that I mind it *most*, and I think it was half my affection for her that influenced me at first. She is a fond mother, and will be satisfied with anything that is likely to make her darling happy.'

There was a short silence. Ethel could not force herself to discuss the subject. Presently, however, Mr Stuart sent her thoughts on a different track, by observing, with a suggestion of constraint in his voice, 'I don't know whether I ought not to congratulate *you*, Miss Howard. I hear you have an English friend here, and, if what Miss Bruce avers is true—'

'No! no!' she exclaimed hastily, replying to the

first part of his remark, and ignoring the second. 'Mr Fane is merely an old friend—and nothing more!'

He was studying her face, clearly visible in the moonlight, with a look that—could she have seen it—was full of a wistful questioning. 'Then, Ethel,' —it seemed to say. But how could *he*, who had been the betrothed of her cousin only an hour before, ask her to accept him *now*?'

But the *tête-à-tête*, which had become somewhat embarrassing, was interrupted by the return of the senior division of the party, and soon after by the rest. Mrs Aylmer was, of course, delighted to find Norman returned, and he and Mr Fane were duly introduced, and after a mutual scrutiny, were soon engaged in animated conversation.

Fanny looked into her cousin's room that evening, on her return from the party. She was evidently a little flurried, was in high spirits, and looking her best. 'What! not gone to bed yet?' she said. We had such a jolly party. Mr Fane came in for a while, as he had promised me, and everyone thinks him delightful. If *you* won't have anything to say to him, I think *I* must take pity on him myself! Oh! by the way, I wanted to tell you; my engagement to Norman is broken off! Good-night!'

## CHAPTER XVI

'I'M sure I can't understand what has come over Fanny!' said Mrs Aylmer, to Ethel, detaining her after the others had left the breakfast table, and had gone out to enjoy the fresh breezy morning air.

Ethel did her best to console her aunt for her very natural disappointment, saying all the good she could of Mr Kavanagh, his talents, his amiability, his literary enthusiasm, and prophesying that he would prove an excellent husband for Fanny, and that he would make his mark yet, with such a stimulus to steady him and awaken him to the responsibilities of life. Of course nothing had been said to Fanny in reference to him, nor would the subject be referred to until he should speak himself. But Mr Stuart had felt it necessary to confide to her parents all he *knew*, as well as all he *suspected*.

Their talk was interrupted by Harry's entrance with a pile of letters for the household, and Mrs

Aylmer was soon deep in a long letter from Mrs Jocelyn. Suddenly she dropped the letter and looked up with an exclamation. 'Oh,' she cried, '*how sad.* Poor young man! My dear child, how strange that *you* have not been written to.'

'Why, what is it, Aunt Caroline?' she exclaimed.

'Why, my dear, Mrs Jocelyn says that your cousin, Jack Howard is *dead*—was found dead with his revolver beside him. He must have shot himself in a fit of low spirits, after the "D. T's." she says, And he left a scrawl addressed to Ethel, which Mr Grimshaw was to send when he wrote. I suppose the poor creature couldn't endure his wretched life any longer. Dear me, how dreadfully sad! "But it's a piece of great good fortune for Ethel," she read on; "Miss Ponsonby wrote by last mail, so *I* did not think it necessary to do so. Please give her our love and congratulations. I suppose we shall see her back soon, as there will be a great deal to attend to, of course. Clara and I will be delighted to see her here, on her way to take her own proper place again."'

Ethel sat almost stunned by this most unlooked for piece of intelligence. She scarcely realised the consequences to herself, so shocked did she feel at the tidings of this tragic close to her cousin's wasted life.

'But it's really *very* odd that *you* haven't heard yet from your uncle's lawyer, this Mr Grimshaw,'

said Mrs Aylmer, after a few moments' silence, 'nor from your cousin, Miss Ponsonby either. We must inquire particularly at the post-office, for *I* got some letters by last mail. Sometimes they are a little negligent. Someone else may have got it by mistake. Well, well, how strangely things turn out sometimes. But, my darling, *we* shall be so sorry to lose you,' and she bent over Ethel in a loving embrace, which her niece warmly returned, for her aunt had won a large share of her uncle's place in her heart.

But a strange thought had darted into Ethel's mind, while her aunt was speaking, a thought that she hated herself for entertaining for a moment. But it would not go. Could Edgar Fane *have known of this?* She would not let herself think so. And yet the coincidence was strange. She could not help watching his manner, when Mrs Aylmer hurried out to the lawn to proclaim the news. He certainly expressed surprise, and in a manner that seemed natural enough, but with her newly aroused suspicions, she could not *feel* that it was genuine. And Fanny darted a glance at him, which, to Ethel, seemed to reflect her own thought. He congratulated Miss Howard with subdued *empressement*, but added, in a sorrowful aside, meant for *her* ear alone—'This, of course, precludes my further pleading my cause. I must leave it now in your hands.'

Mr Aylmer and Mr Stuart were not present, having set off directly after breakfast for a long ramble among the hills, the latter feeling that his presence in the circumstances in which Fanny and he stood, might be a little embarrassing while Mr Aylmer and he had naturally many things to discuss. Mrs Aylmer had therefore to wait as patiently as she could for her husband's return, to share with him this wonderful news.

'Where is Mr Fane?' asked Fanny, coming down with her hat on, an hour later, of Miss Bruce, who had been playing lawn-tennis with him and the boys, while she and Ethel had been talking over the changed situation.

'Gone down to the hotel to see a friend,' was the reply. 'And where are *you* going?'

'To the post office, with Ethel, to inquire for those missing letters.'

'It was not long before they returned without having got any satisfaction, the people at the post-office declaring that they knew nothing of them. But, during the forenoon, a messenger brought them to the house, saying that they must have been dropped into the box that morning, by some one who had taken them out by mistake. Ethel remembered only too well how Mr Fane had received the letters for the family for *her*, only two days before, but she shared the natural conclusion with no one, not even with Fanny, who was vaguely

suspicious, so that the matter outwardly passed off as an accident.

A canoe-party and picnic in company with some of their neighbours, had been planned for that afternoon, and they were just starting from the vicinity of the cottage, when Mr Aylmer and Mr Stuart returned from their walk. Mr Fane had been ambitious of acquiring the art of managing a canoe, and had spent most of the preceding day in practising paddling, with Teddy and Harry Aylmer. He 'had got on *first rate*,' the boys declared, and now claimed the honour of paddling Miss Howard up the river to their rendezvous. She saw no good reason for refusing. To do so would wound his self-esteem, and to accept would be the last favour she would ever be likely to have the opportunity of granting him. After that day, they were not likely to meet often, and she knew that he would have more regard for appearances than to urge his suit any further *now*. She still had enough of the old kindly feeling left, to be sincerely sorry for his severe disappointment, even while she feared that in his eagerness to secure his object he had been tempted to conduct which he would once have scorned as utterly beneath him. As to his ability to manage the canoe, she took his word and that of the boys without hesitation, and indeed bestowed very little thought on that somewhat important question.

'Are *you* not going too, Stuart,' asked Mr Aylmer, as they stood by and watched the pretty little flotilla about to start.

'No,' he replied, 'I'm rather heavy for one of these little egg-shells, and indeed,' he added, uneasily, 'I always feel a little uneasy when I see the girls embarking in them, though they laugh at my old-fashioned ideas, and declare there is no danger. Perhaps,' he called out, 'I may *walk* up and join you at your picnic ground. But are you *sure* you quite understand canoeing, Fane?' he asked, looking on rather anxiously as the latter assisted Ethel to settle herself on the gay cushions in the bottom of the canoe.

'Oh, I think so,' he replied, carelessly, and somewhat curtly; 'a fellow who has been coxswain in a Cambridge eight, ought to be able to paddle his own canoe.'

'A *non sequitur*,' replied Stuart. 'Well, be careful, and *bon voyage*.' He looked after them, however, with an anxious and unsatisfied glance.

Suddenly he exclaimed to Mr Aylmer, 'I don't like the look of things out there,' and hurrying to a skiff that lay moored close by, he jumped into it, wrenched it loose, and pushed it off without further ceremony—following at a little distance in the wake of the last canoe, containing Ethel and Fane. It was well that he did so. Fane got on very well so long as they were in smooth and shallow water,

but as they proceeded up stream, the rapidity of the current carried them near one of the occasional boulders in the shallow river. As they approached one of these rather closely, Fane not finding that the canoe answered his paddle as he desired, made a sudden movement of impatience in the attempt to give the boulder a wide berth; and Ethel startled by the sudden lurch, moved towards the same side, and grasped the side of the canoe. Instantly, the frail bark was over, and both its occupants in the water. Fane could swim fairly well, but had no idea how to save another. He lost his head for a moment, hastily made for the canoe, which was floating off bottom upward, and then bethought himself of looking round for Ethel.

But *she* had been already grasped by a strong arm, and Mr Stuart holding her up with one hand, soon reached the shallower water, where they could wade to the nearer shore. The shock of the sudden immersion had left Ethel half stunned, but Mr Stuart half supported half carried her to the grassy bank, where he gently laid her down, supporting her head on his breast, while, in that moment of excited feeling, throwing off the restraint he had imposed on himself so long, he pressed his lips to her forehead, exclaiming, 'Ethel, my darling! may I not claim you for my own, *now*!'

. . . . . .

A few days later, the bustle of the preparations

for leaving the cottage had begun. The Aylmers were about to take leave of their pleasant summer quarters. Mr Fane, disappointed in his cherished plan, and mortified by the signal failure of his last effort, had made a desperate attempt to win the favour of Fanny, who had recklessly led him on, in order to 'avenge her cousin,' though even independently of that motive, it is doubtful whether she could have resisted the temptation of flirting with so attractive a young man. But he soon found he could make no further progress, and was obliged to depart, crestfallen, to console himself as well as he could with the execution of his journalistic commission, the less ostensible object of his journey having proved so fruitless. Ethel's betrothal to Mr Stuart, sudden as it appeared to all but the observant Miss Bruce, greatly helped to reconcile Mrs Aylmer to losing him for a son-in-law. At least, 'it kept him in the family,' she said, 'and no doubt Ethel was better suited to him than Fanny would have been.'

On the evening before the general break-up, Mr Stuart and Ethel sat together on the hill side, enjoying a last view of the beautiful bay and river, and the noble hills that would henceforth be associated with some of their sweetest recollections. They talked of the new life that was opening before them, after the quiet wedding which was soon to take place at Mr Aylmer's home in Toronto, and

then as soon as Mr Stuart could arrange for a short absence, he was to accompany his wife to England, to make some necessary arrangements at Fairmount Grange.

'And you're *sure* you won't try to tempt me to give up an active life, and settle down in the capacity of *major-domo* in this little paradise?' asked Mr Stuart, looking smilingly at his betrothed.

'No,' she replied, earnestly, 'I shall never ask you to let any power lie idle for my pleasure. Besides,' she added with a momentary look of deep sadness, 'I never can *quite* get over the feeling that the Grange is a sort of *Aceldama*, the price of life.'

'My dear girl,' he replied, 'you must put *that* thought out of your mind. You are in no sense responsible for that poor fellow's mental and moral shipwreck. You could not possibly have acted otherwise, and, perhaps the manner of his taking off had after all a higher touch about it than his wretched life, for at least he seemed to *desire* good to *you* through his death. That pathetic little scrawl he left shows germs of latent good that, who knows, may yet be developed in a more kindly atmosphere. Don't suppose I mean to defend suicide, but the poor fellow was scarcely responsible, and what is sin in one may not be equally sin in another whose ideas are entirely different. You know I have great faith in the breadth and depth of the divine love that flows

round our incompleteness, just as that incoming tide flows round that stranded vessel and floats it on its way.'

'Thank you,' said Ethel, 'I like that image. And I know we must not judge others of whose hearts we can know so little. Only, as the Grange has come to me in so painful a way, I could hardly bear to keep it for mere selfish pleasure. I have been thinking how it would do to put Aunt Ponsonby in charge there, and let it be a place to which some of the poor sickly London mothers and children could come for a little change and fresh air. We could visit it as often as you could get away, and it might bring a little happiness into some sad lives, and be the means of making some lives better, of helping *some*, perhaps, to escape the fate of my poor cousin! My aunt is a very kind-hearted woman, and has no object or special interest in life, so I think it would benefit *her*, too. *That* would be bringing good out of evil, would it not?'

'Indeed it would, dear,' he replied. 'It's a noble thought, at any rate, and looks by no means impracticable, though some people no doubt would think it utter folly. It's worthy of *you* to plan it.'

'But it was from *you* that I first learned to think of these things at all,' exclaimed Ethel, looking up, with a smile. 'It was *you* who first taught me that true life is life lived for others; and now that

I am so happy myself, you will help me to live that life, won't you?'

'God helping me, *I will*, my darling,' he replied, drawing her closer to him. And the evening shadows stole gently down around them, gradually blotting out the outlines of the landscape, while above them the stars shone brightly out, opening as it were, a way into the infinite beyond.

THE END

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