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About This Edition

This book is a simplified English adaptation created for extensive reading practice.
The text was generated using ChatGPT and prepared for intermediate English learners as part of an educational project.

Target reading level: CEFR A2-B1

This edition aims to support fluency development through accessible vocabulary, expanded narration, and improved readability while preserving the original story structure.

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Charlotte Brontë, *Shirley* (Simplified Edition, Adapted and Simplified by ChatGPT)

Part 1

In these days there are many curates in the north of England. You can find one in almost every parish. They are young, full of energy, and ready to move about. But I am not going to speak about these later years. I am going back to the beginning of the nineteenth century, to a colder and harder time. If you expect a soft love story, you must lower your hopes at once, because I mean to begin with something plain, sharp, and real.

In the years 1811 and 1812, curates were not common. In one part of Yorkshire, however, there were three young men of that class within a short distance of each other. I will show them to you at once. Come with me into a small, tidy house near Whinbury, and let us look into the little parlor. There sit Mr. Donne of Whinbury, Mr. Malone of Briarfield, and Mr. Sweeting of Nunnely. They are having dinner together in Mr. Donne's lodgings, and while they eat, I will tell you what sort of men they are.

All three are young and active, but they do not spend their strength in visiting the poor or helping in schools, though their older superiors would gladly see them do so. They have chosen another habit. They are always going from one lodging to another, dining together, drinking tea together, and sleeping under each other's roofs. They do this in every season and in every kind of weather. It is not friendship that drives them, because they often quarrel. It is not religion, because they scarcely speak of true religious feeling at all. It seems to be nothing more noble than a restless wish to meet, eat, argue, laugh, and give trouble to their landladies.

Mrs. Gale, the woman who keeps Mr. Donne's lodgings, is serving the dinner, and she is not pleased. On Monday Malone came and stayed too long. On Tuesday Malone and Sweeting both came, stayed to supper, slept there, and were still present at breakfast the next morning. Now it is Thursday, and both are back again

at dinner. Mrs. Gale feels that enough is enough. She is even less pleased because these young clergymen are not polite guests. They complain about the food, speak proudly, and look down on the very woman who cooks and serves them.

Sweeting says the beef is tough. Donne says the beer is flat. Malone demands bread in a harsh voice and orders Mrs. Gale to cut it for him. She obeys, but with anger in her heart. He is a large Irishman, strong in body and loud in manner, and she fears him as much as she dislikes him. The three of them, though they complain, eat very well. The beef, the pudding, the vegetables, the cheese, and even the spice cake disappear completely. When Mrs. Gale brings the empty dish into the kitchen, her little son Abraham cries bitterly, because he had hoped for the last of the cake.

After the meal, the curates sit with wine before them and begin to talk. Their talk is not about books, or public matters, or deep questions. They argue about small church points that seem important only to themselves. Malone has had a little more wine than the others, and it sharpens his rude humor. He mocks Donne's thin body, his nose, and his old coat. He laughs at Sweeting's small size, his music, and his liking for ladies. Donne answers with stiff pride, Sweeting with easy carelessness, and at last both begin to attack Malone in return.

They make fun of his Irish speech and ask if clergymen in Ireland carry pistols and clubs when they go out to visit their people. That is too much for him. Malone bursts into anger. He shouts, pounds the table, waves his arms, and cries out against the English. Donne and Sweeting laugh at him. The noise in the little room grows so great that any stranger might think a duel would follow before night ended. But Mr. and Mrs. Gale are not alarmed. They know these young men. They know that this storm will pass, and that tomorrow the same men will probably meet again as if nothing had happened.

While the shouting continues upstairs, a knock comes at the front door. Mr. Gale opens it and finds Mr. Helstone there. He is a middle-aged clergyman, small but straight, sharp-eyed, and hard in face like a bird of prey. He asks at once who is upstairs. When he hears that all three curates are there, he steps into the house, listens, and then goes up without ceremony. He enters the room and stands before

them. At once the young men fall silent.

Helstone does not sit down. He rebukes them with biting force. He says that the noise sounded less like holy tongues from heaven and more like the confusion of Babel. He blames Malone most of all. Donne and Sweeting, he says, were quieter before Malone came, and would be quieter if he were gone. He speaks like a soldier scolding careless young officers, not like a soft and gentle churchman. There is no warm sweetness in him, but there is power, wit, and strong judgment.

He says he came to see Malone for a reason. Robert Moore is alone at Hollow's Mill tonight. New machinery is expected from Stilbro', and the country is in a dangerous state. Men are out of work, hungry, and angry, and Moore is hated because he is bringing in new frames and shears. Helstone wants Malone to go to the mill and be there in case trouble comes. Sweeting adds a darker warning. A weaver named Mike Hartley, half wild and full of violent ideas, has spoken of Moore as a man who should be made an example. He has even told a strange vision of silent soldiers moving across the land, which he took as a sign of bloodshed.

Malone does not care much for visions, but he is too proud to refuse the task. Helstone mocks the other two curates and offers them pistols, but neither wants to go. Donne says he never touches such things. Sweeting says his mother would not like it. Malone alone takes his hat and stick and strides off into the wet night, saying he would not mind a fight at all. Thus he leaves the house, and the first part of my story moves away from foolish supper talk toward darker matters.

The night is black and wet. Malone walks heavily along the road, seeing little and thinking less about the sky or fields around him. He passes the inn called the Red House and is tempted by thoughts of whisky, but he keeps on. Then he cuts across the fields toward Hollow's Mill. He passes a large dark house, silent and without light, and at last goes down into a hollow where one small light shines below. There stands the white cottage by the mill.

A servant opens the door and tells him Moore is not in the house but in the counting-house at the mill. For one brief moment a lady's head appears from a doorway inside, and that is enough to send the big Irishman back into the rain

with sudden shyness. He hurries away to the mill, where he finds Moore in a plain, bright room with a good fire, a lamp, a desk, and plans for machinery upon the walls. Moore receives him politely, though not warmly. He had not wanted help, and Malone can hear that in his voice.

Malone settles by the fire, and the two men begin to talk. They speak first of small local gossip, and Malone jokes about Sweeting and the Sykes girls. Then the talk turns to Moore himself and to rumors that he may marry one of several young women in the district. Moore rejects all such talk with quiet impatience. He says he has no mind for marriage dreams. Cloth will not sell, workers cannot be employed, and the mills cannot run as they should. Business trouble fills his thoughts more than love does.

Malone grows tired of this serious talk, and Moore notices it. He brings out food and drink from a cupboard and asks if Malone can cook mutton chops. Malone can, and does so eagerly. While he cooks, Moore prepares punch. Malone becomes cheerful and noisy as he eats and drinks, but Moore remains controlled and thoughtful. He is a dark, thin man, with a foreign look, grave gray eyes, and a face made anxious by care. He is only partly English, born from mixed family lines, and he thinks first of trade, work, and the rebuilding of his fortunes.

Moore has put much of his small capital into new machinery. He has improved the old mill as far as he can, but war, bad markets, and hard times press on him from every side. The workers hate the machines because the machines mean hunger to them. They hate the mill and they hate Moore, who is seen as a man who will go forward no matter who suffers. Yet that hatred does not frighten him. It almost excites him. He sits there on this dangerous night waiting for his wagons as if waiting for battle.

At last he hears wheels. He takes a lantern and goes out to open the gates. The wagons come in, but they are wrong at once. No men answer him. No machinery is there. A voice calls from the dark, “We’ve smashed them,” and then runs off. Moore looks into the wagons and finds them empty. His workers, too, are gone. He finds a note fastened to the harness. It says the machines have been broken on Stilbro’ Moor and the men left tied in a ditch. It warns him not to bring in more

machines.

Moore reads the message and does not break down. He stands still, thinking. Then he moves quickly. He takes the wagons inside, speaks briefly to the women in the cottage, and sends the servant Sarah to ring the mill bell as loudly as she can. He stables the horses, lights the mill front, and prepares for action. The bell rings out across the wet night. Men from the Red House come running with lanterns, and soon Mr. Helstone rides in as well, sharp and eager as ever.

Moore tells him what has happened and shows him the note. Helstone at once sees what must be done. Some men will stay behind at the mill. Others will go with him and Moore to Stilbro' Moor to find the bound workers and face whatever danger may still remain. Malone, whose food and punch have made him less steady than before, is ordered to remain and guard the mill. Moore mounts his horse. Helstone makes one last dry joke, and then the rescue party rides out into the darkness.

Part 2

I have noticed that cheerfulness often comes less from the weather than from the heart. That night was wet, dark, and unsafe, yet Moore and Helstone rode toward Stilbro' Moor in very good spirits. Their danger did not trouble them. It seemed rather to wake them up. If any of the men who had broken the frames had seen them clearly, those men might gladly have shot them from behind a wall, and both riders knew it.

I know very well that a clergyman ought to be a man of peace. I do not forget what his calling should be. Still, I will not call Helstone a devil only because he loved a hard ride, a hard word, and a hard fight with wrongdoers. The simple truth, as I see it, is that he had missed his true road in life. He should have been a soldier, but fate made him a priest.

He was a stern little man, brave, honest, fixed in his ideas, and not quick to pity. He had little softness, little patience for weakness, and no gift for gentle comfort. Yet he was sincere, faithful, and steady to his own law of duty. Men like

that are often both loved and hated. Some worship them, and others curse them, and both sides usually have their reasons.

Since Moore and Helstone were riding out for the same purpose, you may think they passed the road in friendly talk. They did not. These two men were made in such a way that they could rub each other raw within a few minutes. Moore hated the war because it hurt trade, and Helstone defended it because he saw it as England's stand against a great wrong. Very soon Moore began to provoke him, praising Napoleon's force and mocking Wellington as a dull man who moved too slowly.

Helstone answered with full fire. He said Wellington stood for England, for a just cause, and for brave resistance. Moore replied that power usually wins, and then Helstone struck back with the story of Israel and Egypt, crying that right, not strength, had won at the Red Sea. Moore twisted the comparison at once. He said France was Israel, Napoleon was Moses, and old Europe was the corrupt power that deserved to fall.

Their quarrel was still rising when a gig rolled suddenly up beside them. In it sat Joe Scott, rescued from the ditch, and the man who had found him was Hiram Yorke of Briarmains. Yorke had been coming back from market when he heard groans on the moor, stopped, cut the men loose with his knife, and brought Scott along with him. The smashed machinery could not be saved, but the workers were alive. Yorke joked over the whole matter in his rough way, and after a little more talk he pressed the party to come to his house and warm themselves.

The night was miserable, and his windows looked bright and pleasant through the rain, so they accepted. The men were sent to the kitchen, but Moore and Helstone entered by the front. The house was large without being proud, and the room into which they were shown was full of comfort and taste. There were pictures of Italy on the walls, books in neat cases, fine little objects on the mantel, music on a sofa, and a great fire burning clearly in the grate. I could see at once that the master of the house had once traveled, had once observed much, and still had an eye for beautiful things.

Yorke offered wine, and Helstone refused it stiffly. That refusal did not trouble

Yorke in the least. He said he could drink a man's wine and still oppose him at every meeting the next day. He then turned his sharp tongue first on Helstone, then on Malone, who was absent at the mill, and then on Moore, whom he ordered out of a certain chair by the fire because it had been his father's chair and belonged to no one else. Moore moved at once, half amused, half idle, and then Yorke began to lecture him for making enemies on every side.

Moore said he did not care whether Yorkshire workers hated him or not. Yorke answered that this was exactly the speech of an outsider. He told him to go back to Antwerp if he cared so little for the place where he lived. They even changed into French for a few moments, Yorke speaking it almost as purely as Moore. In that short exchange Moore showed something deeper than anger. He spoke with bitterness of "friends," remembering how badly his father and uncles had been deserted in hard times. That word, he said, had no sweetness for him now.

At that point, while Yorke sat back in his carved old chair, I too will pause and draw his picture more clearly. He was about fifty-five, with white hair, a strong fresh face, and a body still firm and active. He looked like a man made for the open air, strong thought, and strong speech. He could talk in broad Yorkshire one minute and in very good English the next. When he chose, his manner was that of an old-fashioned gentleman, but when he chose otherwise, he could be rough enough to cut through skin.

His mind was harder to describe than his face. He was no pattern of universal kindness. He had too little reverence and too little sympathy. He respected neither rank nor office simply because they were rank and office, and he spoke of kings, lords, priests, and institutions with an impatience that often turned into scorn.

Because he lacked that softer power by which one person enters another's place, he was often unjust. He could hate classes of people in a broad and foolish way, though he believed himself the friend of freedom. He spoke for equality, yet pride lived very strongly in him. He did not bow willingly to any man, and he could be cruel with his tongue when a person bored him, offended him, or simply seemed dull in his sight. Mercy was not one of his easy habits.

He had little imagination too, and made small use of poetry except to laugh at

it. Good painting and music he could enjoy because he could see or hear their result. But a quiet poet, a dreamer, a deeply feeling person who did not succeed in plain worldly work, would have found little kindness in Hiram Yorke. Still, I do not wish to judge him only by what he lacked. He had real powers, and some of his best qualities were very solid indeed.

He was honorable, capable, and widely respected. Poor people loved him because he treated them like a father when they were under his care. He managed his own workers firmly and skillfully, and rebellion did not grow easily around him because he knew how to stop it early. He had traveled in Europe when young, spoke French and Italian, and had brought back books, pictures, and a taste different from that of most men in the district. He liked what was original, strong, and full of character, whether high or low.

That helps explain why he did not dislike Moore. Moore's foreign speech and face reminded him of younger days abroad. He had also known Moore's father through business, and he believed Robert himself had the sharp brain and hard will that often make money in the end. Helstone was another matter. Between Yorke and Helstone there stood not only politics and religion, but an older wound. In former years both men had cared for Mary Cave, and Mary married Helstone.

Yorke had loved her deeply. Helstone, I think, only fancied her and married her more easily than passionately. He was not made to understand a quiet wife. He believed that if a woman did not complain, then she needed nothing. Mary faded slowly, died young, and after her death people in the district began to whisper that she had died of a broken heart. Those stories were unfair, but Yorke partly believed them, and from that time his dislike of Helstone grew into something much darker.

After this long silent history, the talk in the room turned again to the state of the country. Helstone argued for strict rule, strong magistrates, and, if needed, soldiers. Yorke asked whether force could feed hungry men or give work to those who had none. He said the government had crushed trade, taxed the people cruelly, and driven the country toward ruin. Helstone answered him with warnings about sin and judgment to come. Yorke answered in his own style, half mocking and

half serious, and the quarrel rose again until Moore laughed and said that, by their own account, both his companions were terrible men.

That ended the visit. Helstone stood up stiffly. Yorke declared it was past midnight, rang for a servant, ordered the people in the kitchen sent off to bed, and then himself showed his guests to the door with sudden force. So they were pushed out almost as quickly as they had been invited in. Moore laughed at the rough ending, but Helstone was offended to the core. The horses were waiting, the night was still raw, and the two men rode away from Briarmains with Mr. Yorke's hard wit, hard history, and hard opinions left burning behind them.

Part 3

Moore woke the next morning in no low or beaten mood. He and Joe Scott had slept in the mill, and when day was only beginning to thin the darkness, the master was already up, dressing and even singing as he moved. Joe, surprised, asked whether he was not cast down by the loss of the frames. Moore answered that he was not cast down at all. He said they would have the machinery yet, and reminded Joe of Bruce and the spider, meaning that defeat only taught a man to try again.

From that point the talk turned, as it often did between them, to country, class, and pride. Joe called him French, then Dutch, then Flemish, and Moore rejected each name in turn with sharp exactness. He was born at Antwerp, he said, and was what he was, not to be roughly bundled under whatever label an English workman chose. Joe answered with equal freedom that Moore must be part Yorkshire too, because he was keen to get on and make money. I could see that the master liked Joe's boldness better than he pretended, though he mocked him as conceited and rough.

Joe then began to praise the intelligence of northern workers, who, by trade and machinery, had learned to think for themselves. He spoke of politics, law, and hardship, and hinted that men in cottages understood much more than their betters supposed. Moore would not allow him to turn the poor into saints or the rich into

devils. He answered that vice and virtue lived in every rank, and that human nature was mixed everywhere. I am glad to say that, whatever faults Moore and Joe had, they were not brutal men to children, and I will not stain my page by pretending otherwise.

Dawn by this time had spread a weak and chill light over the hollow. The little mill children came running in through the cold air, carrying their small baskets and cans. Moore stood at the entrance and counted them one by one as they passed. He spoke sharply to late comers, and one who was much too late had to pay a fine before he entered. After breakfast time was given, and the children bent over their poor meal of bread and coffee, Moore at last left the mill and turned toward his house.

Hollow's Cottage stood near enough to the factory for convenience, yet with a little look of privacy because of the hedge and lane. It was a small white house with a green porch, bare winter borders, and signs that flowers would come when spring truly arrived. Three trees rose beside it, graceful enough to give the place some dignity. It was a snug and thoughtful little home, fit for peace if peace had lived there. Yet I could see that to a man like Moore, whose whole spirit pushed forward, such a nest might easily feel too small.

Instead of entering at once, he worked in the garden for a while with a spade until his sister Hortense called him to breakfast. She sat in the parlor in a very odd morning dress, orderly in her own eyes, foreign in everyone else's, with curl papers still in her black hair. She was a capable woman, proud, narrow, offended by trifles, and deeply devoted to her brothers. Over breakfast she complained of Sarah the servant, of English cooking, of English manners, and of the insult paid her when she wore black wooden shoes to church. Moore listened with patience, and only advised her, very mildly, to do as the English did while she lived in England.

Hortense then began to speak of Caroline Helstone, who came daily for lessons. In her own view, she was forming the girl with almost motherly wisdom, shaping her mind, taste, and habits into order. Moore amused himself by asking for Caroline's faults, and Hortense, pleased to instruct him, declared that her pupil

was generally quiet and obedient, yet sometimes showed strange inward hurry and feeling. Just then Caroline herself arrived, wrapped in a winter mantle and full of concern about the attack on the wagons. She had heard of it only at breakfast and had come early because she feared for both brother and sister at Hollow's Cottage.

She soon forgot the frames, however, in a greater fear. Moore was going to Whinbury on business, and the roads were lonely, with hedges and plantations along them. She begged him to return by six, before full dark, because these were dangerous times and mill owners were hated men. He drew her on, half teasing and half serious, until she spoke even more plainly. Then she went further still and said what had long been in her heart, that if she had been a boy, she would gladly have learned his trade, kept his books, written his letters, and helped him to grow rich enough to pay his father's debts.

Moore listened with a kind of grave softness that did not often appear in him. Yet he still spoke from the hard creed of care and poverty, saying that poor people must be narrow, prudent, and anxious. Caroline would not let him rest there. She told him that something was wrong not only in his ideas of happiness but in his manner to his workers. He said he was not proud, only cold, taciturn, and unlike them. She answered with a sigh that justice without kindness would never make him loved, and bent over her grammar because she could not set right what lay deeper in him.

Before going, he ruled the lines in her exercise book, mended her pens, and then stepped into the garden. From the warm side of the mill wall he gathered the first small flowers and leaves of spring, tied them with silk, and laid the little bouquet upon her desk. He went out, came back on the excuse that he had forgotten his gloves, and then asked her to stay all day at the cottage instead of going home. He promised to return in good time, dine with her and Hortense, read in the evening, and walk with her to the rectory by moonlight. Her eyes brightened at once, and after he had truly gone, she sat in such a glow of inward joy that even Hortense noticed her delay in beginning work.

That day, I think, Caroline looked her best. She was pretty enough at any time, with her soft brown hair, delicate skin, expressive eyes, and neat slight figure; but

happiness made her brighter than beauty alone could do. Her life had not been a rich one. Her parents had been parted, her father had died early, her mother was absent from her life, and her uncle Helstone, though honest in his way, was not the man to guide a young girl gently or closely. For that reason Hortense's offer to teach her French, sewing, and other accomplishments had been eagerly accepted, though Caroline secretly wished less to sit in the parlor with grammar than to sit in the counting house with Robert.

All that afternoon she was a poor scholar and a very happy creature. Sunshine at first seemed to warm her mind as well as her body, but later the weather changed. Rain streamed down, the light failed early, and fears began to steal over her that Moore would remain at Whinbury till the sky cleared. At last Hortense declared that he would certainly not return before moonrise, and ordered coffee. Caroline went into the kitchen in low spirits, where Sarah, while sewing her own dress, told her that Moore was in fact already back, having come by the back way and gone first to the counting house. In a moment Caroline changed from languor to life, and even helped Sarah cut cloth and prepare the tray while she listened for his step.

He came in wet and cold, but not through, and stood at the kitchen hearth warming himself. Caroline, after one moment of self-command, turned to him with a face all light and welcome. She confessed that she had been miserable when she thought he would not return. He, seeing more in her face than perhaps he had meant to see, laid a hand upon her shoulder and kissed her forehead. Then followed one of those brief conversations which seem small in words and yet alter the whole air between two people, for Caroline openly praised his goodness, trusted him with her whole heart, and scarcely tried to hide that she was his friend with unusual devotion.

They went into the parlor, where Hortense soon forgot her anger against Sarah when Robert fetched her music and settled the evening plan. Caroline did not want chess or any dull game. She wanted voices from the past, strong souls speaking again across the years. So she chose Shakespeare, and more particularly "Coriolanus," saying that in it Robert would find something like his own nature

awakened and shown to him. Hortense wished the reading to be accompanied by embroidery, but Moore, to save Caroline from sewing, declared that she must give all her attention to his accent and follow the page with her eyes.

He read, and as he read he warmed. Caroline quickly saw that he felt a dangerous sympathy with proud Coriolanus, especially where that Roman hero scorned the hungry people and carried command into every human relation. She checked him gently, telling him that this was one of the faults they shared. He continued to the end, and when they spoke afterward, she drew the lesson clearly. He must not treat workers as a mob to be despised, she said, nor imagine that cold pride could ever win their regard. Kindness would do more for his safety than scorn.

Then it was his turn to ask something of her. He bade her repeat the French poem that had moved her so deeply, Chénier's "La Jeune Captive." She did so, and as she spoke, her face, voice, and feeling changed so much that Moore could not keep his eyes from her. When she finished, she looked at him with the open smile of a happy child and asked whether she had done it well. Nine o'clock struck. Her servant had come from the rectory. Moore wrapped her mantle around her himself, walked her home in the cold moonlight, and parted from her with little outward show. Yet when he returned alone and stood by his own gate, he told himself abruptly that all this must stop, that there was weakness and even ruin in it, and that by tomorrow the passing madness would be gone.

Part 4

Caroline was now eighteen. At that age, I think, many people still live in a bright half-dream. They believe life is going to open like a beautiful country just beyond the hills. Hope speaks to them as if tomorrow must bring happiness, and love, when it first comes near, seems like a blessing without danger. They do not yet know how much pain may hide under desire, or how hard life can strike before it teaches its lessons.

That night, after Robert had walked with her to the rectory, Caroline did not

want to spend time with her uncle. She stayed away from his room until the hour for prayers. Mr. Helstone read part of the evening service in his clear, nasal, unchanging voice, and when it ended, Caroline came forward as usual to wish him good-night. He asked whether she had learned her lessons and done her sewing, and then told her to go to bed and keep to useful things, such as shirt-making and pie-making. To him, that was good advice for any young woman.

In her small bedroom, alone at last, she let her thoughts speak freely. They spoke sweetly, because she was still full of the happiness of the evening. She told herself that when two people loved each other, marriage must naturally follow. She loved Robert, and she believed that Robert loved her too. His eyes, his manner, his kindness, even the flowers he had brought her, all seemed to promise a future she could almost touch.

She told herself she would be a good wife to him. She would not flatter him foolishly, but she would help him, comfort him, and tell him the truth about his faults. She knew he was not a man for soft words and easy romance, and she loved him all the more for that. In her thoughts, his reserve became sincerity, his gravity became strength, and his silence became depth. When she looked in the glass before sleeping, even her own reflection seemed to support her hopes.

The next morning she woke in the same glad state. At breakfast she was more talkative than usual with her uncle, and that alone showed how light her heart was. She spoke of flowers in the garden, birds in the church tower, and small household things. Then, with unusual courage, she asked him why he always spoke of marriage so coldly. That question led them into a conversation which did her no good at all.

Mr. Helstone answered that it was wiser, especially for women, to remain single. He said most marriages were unhappy, and that to marry a couple was often to help in a piece of folly. Caroline pressed him farther, half from curiosity and half from dislike of such views. Then he spoke of her dead aunt in a way that shocked her, not by open cruelty, but by dryness. He would not speak tenderly of marriage even when his own life was the example before him.

His bitter tone drove her thoughts toward her parents. She remembered enough

of her father to fear and pity him, and she knew that her mother, though alive, was absent and silent. At last she asked where her mother was. Mr. Helstone answered that he hardly knew, and added that the woman never wrote or asked about her daughter. Those words hurt deeply, and yet they did not stop Caroline from going to the cottage, because even pain could not overcome the pull that drew her toward Robert.

She ran almost all the way down to Hollow's Mill. As soon as she came in sight of the white house, she saw him standing at the garden gate in his working dress. To her he looked better than anyone else alive. She paused a moment to look at him, and in that pause her love rose warmly and proudly in her heart. Then she went forward to meet him.

He received her kindly, but coldly. The charm of the night before was gone. He spoke like a cousin, not like a lover, and the change was plain enough to wound her at once. A man, when disappointed in love, may speak and demand an answer; a woman in Caroline's place could do neither. She could only feel the blow, hide it, and suffer in silence.

I will not pretend that Robert had deceived her. He had not promised what he now denied. He had simply drawn back because he feared poverty, dependence, and a marriage that his judgment called imprudent. Caroline understood enough of this to blame herself rather than him. She told herself that if there was bitterness in her, it must fall on her own heart. So she controlled her face, studied with Hortense as usual, and went home quietly at dinner-time.

Yet the day became harder, not easier. She had hoped to spend the evening again at the cottage, or at least to see Robert at the rectory. False hope kept whispering that he might still come. She tried to read, sew, and write, but she could not settle to anything. Then the bell rang, and for one instant she thought Robert had come. It was only Malone.

Donne followed Malone, and Sweeting followed Donne. The three curates gathered with Mr. Helstone in the dining-room, and more wine was called for. Caroline heard their laughter and talk with weariness and dislike. To her they were poor company indeed. They were men, and educated men, but beside Robert they

seemed empty, noisy, and small.

Matters grew worse when Mrs. Sykes and three of her daughters arrived in their pony-carriage. Caroline, nervous with visitors at the best of times, had to receive them, seat them, and speak civilly while wishing herself far away. Mrs. Sykes was a religious, formal woman, and her daughters were handsome, sure of themselves, and heavy with the belief that their own ways were the proper ways for everyone. They spoke in turns about meetings, speakers, pious works, and respectable society. Caroline felt awkward and foolish before them, and knew too well how little skill she had for this kind of social duty.

Since the curates were staying, Mrs. Sykes and her girls decided to remain for tea. That choice brought much trouble into the kitchen, where Eliza the cook complained of the lack of bread and cakes. Caroline had to order muffins and crumpets from the village, bring out the best tea things, and try to appear cheerful while inwardly miserable. She even reflected, with painful honesty, that she did not want to become exactly like these ladies, but she did want to become stronger than she now was.

Tea was served in full Yorkshire style, and the curates entered the room with sudden confusion when they found ladies there. Helstone was easy and lively at once, placing himself among the young women with complete confidence. Sweeting managed fairly well too, because Mrs. Sykes liked him. Donne planted himself beside Caroline and began to talk. Malone took the seat on her other side and soon fell silent, having spent his three usual questions about walking, Moore, and Sunday school.

Donne was worse than silence. He complained of Yorkshire, mocked the people, sneered at local ways, and carried himself as if he had known much finer circles elsewhere. Caroline disliked him strongly, and sometimes answered with spirit, asking why he had entered the church if he hated common people so much. That kind of answer did not improve his opinion of her, but she could not help herself. The whole evening dragged in noise and emptiness.

At last Caroline slipped away to the dining-room for a few minutes of quiet. There, by the low fire, she rested her tired senses and let her thoughts turn back

to the Hollow. While she sat alone, the bell rang again. This time it truly was Robert. He had not come to see her, only to leave a short message for her uncle, but that was enough to set her heart beating wildly once more.

Fanny showed him into the dining-room with paper and ink, and he found Caroline there. She was ready to flee, but there was nowhere to go. At first she thought he was troubled to see her, and she was ashamed. Yet when she moved to leave, he gently held her back and spoke to her. He asked her to tell her uncle that he had found one of the men concerned in the recent outrage and hoped to have him arrested by the next day.

They then spoke more personally. She begged him not to prosecute too boldly, because Yorkshire people could keep anger alive for years. He laughed at that warning, but thanked her for caring about his safety. When he asked if she prayed for him, she answered that she always prayed for him, Louis, and Hortense. That reply touched him. He spoke of himself with some sadness, calling himself a man made for business and money, not for any gentler place in a pure heart.

Caroline understood what he meant. She said quickly that she would think of him only as her cousin, and that he need not fear any mistake in her. Yet in saying this, she showed more pain than she wished. He answered that at this moment he stood before her not as a tradesman, but as her kinsman. Then voices were heard from the next room, the company began to rise, and the moment had to end. Before leaving by the window to avoid all the guests in the passage, he kissed her three times and said it was allowed between cousins.

The next morning Moore rose before sunrise and rode to Whinbury on business. After breakfast he sat in his counting-house, looked through letters and newspapers, and waited with unusual restlessness. A man named Sugden, carrying the staff of a constable, soon came in and sat down to wait with him. Helstone followed not long after, bright, eager, and ready for action. Moore then explained that the man they expected was none other than Moses Barraclough, the preacher with the wooden leg.

Joe Scott told the story in his own rough way. Barraclough had once tried to court Sarah, the servant at the cottage, but Fred Murgatroyd had been his rival.

Through jealousy and chance, Murgatroyd and another man had overheard Barraclough speaking in a barn and learned that he had helped lead not only the attack on Moore's frames but other violent acts as well. Moore had already ridden to get a warrant, and now he meant to catch Barraclough when the man came boldly to speak with him.

Mr. Sykes also arrived, nervous and uncertain. He feared the bad feeling that law proceedings might stir up, yet after one strong glass of Hollands and water he became suddenly brave in words. He declared that he would never be trampled on and would spend his last penny in the law. Helstone watched him with dry amusement, and Moore, had he been left to himself, might have made crueler fun of the poor man's borrowed courage. I have to say that this was one of Moore's harsher moods.

Soon a sound of many feet was heard in the yard. A deputation had come to speak with the master. Moore went out to meet them. At their head stood two men: Barraclough himself, false and theatrical, and another speaker known as Noah of Tim's, slow, pompous, and full of grand words. Noah suggested that since Moore was a foreigner, he should leave the district and go home. Barraclough, in his turn, begged Moore to give up his machinery and take on more hands.

Moore listened with cool contempt. He exposed Barraclough as a hypocrite and a drunkard, mocked Noah's fine language, and refused every demand. Then he declared openly that he would remain where he was, bring in better machinery still, and never submit to dictation from any man there. At his whistle, Sugden came out. Moore pointed straight at Barraclough and had him arrested on the spot for his part in the attack on Stilbro' Moor.

There was a rush to save the prisoner, but Moore drew a loaded pistol and warned them back. He guarded Barraclough into the counting-house, then returned to face the others. At that point a different man stepped forward. This was William Farren, honest, hungry, worn by want, and without the false air of the two leaders. He said plainly that he did not want blood, fire, or destruction. He wanted work, food, and time for poor people to live. He asked Moore to make his changes more slowly.

Here Moore failed where he might have won a friend. He argued that if he paused while others went forward, he would be ruined in a month. He said he would get new frames tomorrow, and if those were broken, he would get more. He ended with the hard words, “I’ll never give in.” The mill bell rang for noon, and he turned away. Farren went home cast down, more hurt by the want of sympathy than by the refusal itself.

At his cottage there was only a little porridge for the family dinner, and even that was not enough. When the children asked for more, William stepped outside and fought his grief alone. Then Mr. Hall, the vicar of Nunnely, came by. Hall was not like Helstone. He was plain, thoughtful, kind, and quietly sorrowful where others were sharp. He entered the cottage, spoke to the parents and children with real warmth, and soon understood the full weight of their poverty.

Instead of merely talking, he tried to help. He asked whether William could do anything useful if he had a little money, and Grace Farren answered at once that he could begin as a small hawker and seller of goods. Hall promised to try to raise five pounds as a loan, not a gift, and gave a few shillings at once so the family might eat better that day. Then he spoke to them seriously and kindly about endurance, duty, and God’s will. So this chapter closes not with the proud strength of Moore, nor with the noisy fraud of Barraclough, but with the quiet goodness of a man who came into a poor house, saw suffering clearly, and did what he could.

Part 5

After his talk with William Farren, Moore was not quite the same man for a while. He did not become soft, and he did not change his plans, but something in him had been struck. Joe Scott saw it before anyone spoke of it. The master, who was usually quick with sharp answers, sat more silent than before, and even Joe’s rough jokes could not draw him out.

When the day’s work was over, Joe tried in his own way to make him leave the counting-house and breathe the evening air. Moore laughed at the advice and pushed him away, but then called him back. He asked about the Farrens, whether

they were decent people, whether William had been a good worker, and whether there was any skill in him besides mill work. Joe answered plainly that William was honest, clean, and badly reduced, and that he understood gardening as well as factory labor. Moore said no more, but he had heard what he wanted to hear.

That evening was clear, but the air turned cold as soon as the sun went down. Frost crept across the ground, and the lights of Briarmains shone through the dusk. The old house stood warm, full of voices, and close enough to the road for life to move around it. It was no lonely hall cut off from the world. It was a house with a family in it, and that fact gave it a power different from the white stillness of Hollow's Cottage.

Inside Briarmains, several tempers and natures were gathered together. Mrs. Yorke sat large, stiff, and severe, a woman who judged quickly and liked little in young ladies that men liked much. Yet near her was little Jessie, all life, freedom, and bold speech. In a quieter corner sat Rose Yorke, grave, inward, and already deep in her book, as if the room round her hardly existed. Caroline Helstone came there too, a little shy at first, but glad of any place where she might escape her own thoughts for an hour.

Mrs. Yorke received her coldly, but Jessie made up for it at once, running to her, kissing her, and saying aloud what others would not say at all. Rose, when Caroline approached her in the right spirit, accepted her too. Caroline had the gift of understanding certain silent natures. She did not force herself upon Rose, but knelt beside her and read with her quietly, and that was enough. A friendship of a very still kind began there.

I must pause for a moment over the two Yorke girls. Jessie was quick, bright, charming, ready to shine wherever there was company or pleasure. Rose had a deeper and stronger nature, but not the same power to please at once. Jessie was the sort of girl everyone noticed. Rose was the sort of girl one only truly valued after looking longer and knowing more.

During the evening, talk turned to Moore. Rose had heard ladies at Whinbury speaking of him and mocking him behind his back. One called him a man-hater, another spoke of him as dark, affected, and sentimental. Moore listened with

amusement, and Mr. Yorke laughed heartily at the malice of the women. Yet one part of the story touched Moore more than the rest, because Rose said that among those ladies there had been one who defended him.

Rose could not name the lady, but she described her place in church, and it was plain enough to anyone who knew the parish that the unknown defender was Caroline. That small fact mattered to Moore. He did not say much, but he wanted to know more than he admitted. For Caroline too, the conversation was dangerous, because praise, blame, and feeling were all moving too near the truth.

The evening passed, and then ended in the way evenings often do when one heart hopes for more than the others know. Under the moon, Caroline remained outside with thoughts that had become almost painful in their force. She longed for one sign, one look, one kind word from Robert. Instead, she saw him pass with Mr. Yorke and go away without seeing her at all. The sight was brief, but it hurt her deeply, and she went home not merely sad, but almost driven to despair.

The next morning, at breakfast, she asked her uncle whether he would object if she tried to find a place in some family. Mr. Helstone stared at her, half angry and half amazed. He had not understood how much she had changed. Now, looking hard at her, he saw that the color had gone from her face, that she had grown thinner, and that she no longer looked like the same bright young girl who had once moved quietly through his house.

Left alone that day, Caroline felt the rectory more lonely than ever. Even sewing gave her no real occupation. Fanny, going in and out on her work, told her she should dress and go take tea with Miss Mann or Miss Ainley. Caroline answered that old maids seemed to her a sad race, and Fanny, who had her own rough views, called them selfish. Yet Caroline knew that this was not true of Miss Ainley, and at last she turned her steps toward that quiet lady’s little house.

Miss Ainley was plain, precise, and formal in manner, but she was kind from the heart. Once Caroline sat with her, the stiffness of the welcome disappeared, and something better came in its place. Miss Ainley spoke not about herself, but about the poor, the sick, and the help that ought to be given wherever possible. She had little money, but she gave time, labor, patience, and courage, and she did

this so steadily that many people forgot how much she sacrificed.

Caroline learned a lesson there which she badly needed. She saw that a woman might be unmarried and yet not be empty, narrow, or bitter. A quiet life could still be a useful life. A plain face could still cover a noble heart. I do not say that this visit cured Caroline's pain, but it checked one foolish idea in her mind, and that was something.

Later she went again to Hollow's Cottage, where another trial awaited her. Mrs. Yorke was there with her daughters, Hortense was busy with household matters, and talk rose first on girls, then on women, then on duties, talents, marriage, and children. Rose spoke with force about a girl's powers not being buried only in linen, stockings, and kitchen stores. Caroline, stirred by the subject, said that love must have a place in such questions, because God had given the heart its feelings for a reason.

Those words led Mrs. Yorke straight toward the wound she had guessed in Caroline. With cruel coolness she began to hint that young women sometimes made their way into a house, pleased the sister, and quietly tried their luck with the brother. Hortense did not understand the full meaning of the attack, but Caroline did. She sat burning with shame, pain, and anger, until at last she lifted her head and defended herself.

She said Mrs. Yorke had attacked her without cause, and that her own relations with her cousins were being darkened by ugly suggestions. Then, with strong feeling, she declared that whom her feelings taught her to love, that person she must and would love. She added that if ever she had husband or children, she hoped her impulses would be strong enough to compel that love too. There was truth in her words, and because there was truth in them, they cost her more to say.

Mrs. Yorke only answered with harder irony. Robert was not even there; he was away at Whinbury, and the absence made the humiliation sharper. Caroline had spoken from her heart before women who did not spare her. When she left the cottage, she carried away no comfort from that tea table. So this part closes with her still more wounded than before, knowing her own heart better, yet seeing no path by which that heart could find peace.

Part 6

Caroline did not give way without a struggle. She had more strength in her heart than many people guessed, and now she used it against her own pain. She walked long distances in all kinds of weather, and when she came home pale and tired, she still would not rest. Instead, she paced her room until she was faint, hoping that weariness would force sleep upon her at night.

It did not. When the house was quiet and other people slept, she often sat awake in the dark or lay tossing on her bed. At such times weak thoughts came and tempted her. More than once she wrote letters to Robert, saying she was unhappy, begging him not to forget her, and asking only for friendship; but she never sent them. Shame and good sense stopped her hand before morning.

At last her suffering reached such a point that she felt some change must come, or she would break under the strain. One desire rose more and more in secret within her. She wanted to know something of her mother, though fear went with the wish. No one had ever spoken of that mother warmly. The little she had heard was cold, doubtful, and chilling, and so even hope could not come to her without dread.

Still, she could think of one practical plan. She would leave Briarfield and try to support herself as a governess. If she could not be happy, she might at least be useful, and if she must wear a yoke, she thought it better to put it on while she was still young. The thought was humble enough, but it gave her mind a point to fix on, and that was already some relief.

Her walks, though lonely, almost always bent at last toward the Hollow. She did not go down into the valley, but she reached the stile beneath the old thorn tree as often as she could. From there she could see the cottage, the mill, the garden, the still water, and above all the counting-house window. At a certain hour the light there would spring out suddenly. It became her errand to watch for that light, and her reward to see it.

When it shone clear in the dark, she went home with a sort of comfort. If a

shadow crossed it, she said to herself that Robert had moved before the lamp, and that she had, in some poor way, seen him. On nights when no light appeared, she knew he was absent, and then she turned away doubly sad. So small a thing as a ray through glass became enough to feed hope where hope had almost died.

The road from the Hollow passed near Fieldhead, that old gray house which stood empty no longer. It was still kept in good order, with its mossy walls, its latticed windows, its stone porch, its great cedar, and its old-world look. More than one evening Caroline paused there, but one mild May night she lingered longer than usual near the gate. The place was still, the moon was shining beneath the black cedar boughs, and the beauty of the scene only made her feel more lonely.

As she sat there, the hall door opened, and two men came out. One was old Mr. Yorke, and the other was Robert. They crossed the lawn, passed through the gate, and went down the fields without seeing her. That moment, brief as it was, struck her like a blow. If he had only been alone, if he had only seen her, she thought he would have spoken kindly; but the chance was gone, and she went home almost desperate.

The next morning at breakfast she asked her uncle whether he would object to her looking for a place in a family. He stared at her in complete surprise. Until that moment he had hardly noticed how greatly she had changed. Now he saw that her color was gone, her figure thinner, and her whole appearance weaker and worn down.

He questioned her roughly, and then, because he had no true understanding of what she suffered, offered the kind of help he understood best. He proposed a watering place, change of air, a servant to accompany her, even money for a new dress. But he would not hear of governess work. His niece, he said, should never go out to earn bread in that fashion while he was alive.

Caroline tried to tell him that work was what she needed. He answered by laughing at women’s whims and calling her fancy foolish. Yet even he could not wholly escape the fact that she was altered. Weeks passed, and though she neither sank lower nor grew stronger, everyone around began to notice the same thing. Many said she was going to die. She herself never believed that. She knew she

had no fixed illness. It was grief that had thinned her, grief and sleepless nights.

She avoided company more than ever. Older ladies offered advice and medicines; younger ladies looked at her with that cold curiosity which suffers nothing and forgives little. They guessed that she had been disappointed in love, and because their own notions of love were small and worldly, they judged her by those same poor measures. I do not blame Caroline for staying away from them. A wounded heart does not mend well under shallow eyes.

One morning, however, Mr. Helstone came into the parlor while she was painting flowers and told her to leave her work at once. He declared that the paints were poisoning her and ordered her to get her bonnet. He meant to take her on a call. This was so unusual that she could hardly believe him. When he named Fieldhead as their destination, her surprise became still greater.

Shirley Keeldar had been at Fieldhead for a week. She was now of age, mistress of the old house and owner of the estate, and Mr. Helstone had met her the night before. He had been pleased with her, and now he had decided that Caroline should know her. Caroline tried to say that Miss Keeldar would have no reason to want her, but her uncle brushed this aside, praised Shirley's spirit, and hurried her out of the house.

Caroline went unwillingly enough. Her health was low, her courage small, and she dreaded new faces. The old hall itself increased her uneasiness. It was large, dark, and ancient, with carved heads on the walls and a deep shadow under the gallery. The room into which they were shown was lined with dark oak and filled with old furniture, rich and handsome but severe enough to make a timid guest feel still more ill at ease.

There they found not Shirley but another lady, evidently older, with auburn hair, a formal dress, and a manner both proper and uncertain. This was Mrs. Pryor. She received them civilly, but with such embarrassment that Caroline, who knew well what nervous discomfort felt like, at once moved nearer and spoke gently to her. Left to themselves, those two would have made friends quickly enough, but Mr. Helstone's hard gaze and sarcastic voice put Mrs. Pryor more and more out of countenance.

At that moment Shirley herself entered from the garden, carrying flowers in a little silk apron. She came up to the rector without the least shyness, gave him her hand, and spoke with lively ease. That one movement changed the whole room. Her manner had grace, freedom, and spirit in it, and even old Helstone, who had come half ready to lecture her, visibly enjoyed her from the first.

She was not a golden-haired beauty like Caroline. Her coloring was clearer and darker, her eyes a deep gray, her hair dark brown, and her face full of changing life. She had a look at once thoughtful and quick, and when she stood still and bent a little toward Caroline, examining her with grave simplicity, she almost seemed like a young gentleman rather than a young lady. Even her name had been chosen for a son, and she herself played with that fact gladly.

She asked Caroline's age, gave her a bouquet, and said plainly that the pale look in her face must be changed. If the girl needed sea air, then sea air should be tried, and if companionship was wanted, then companionship should be offered. Mrs. Pryor, speaking more carefully, added that Miss Helstone's visits at Fieldhead would be welcome. Shirley openly said the same, and even promised that, as soon as Caroline was gone, she would ask Mrs. Pryor's opinion of her character.

The talk then turned toward Robert Moore. Shirley said she had seen enough of him already in business matters to feel uncertain what to make of him. As tenant he seemed admirable, but as man and neighbor she had not yet decided whether she liked him. She begged first Mr. Helstone and then Caroline to tell her what sort of person he really was.

Mr. Helstone answered first, and not kindly. He called Moore narrow, selfish, and unpatriotic because of his views on the war. Shirley objected that the war hurt his trade, but the rector only hardened further. Then Caroline, unable to stay silent, said clearly that Robert was both her friend and her relative. Shirley at once turned to her and asked for a sketch of his character. That direct appeal threw Caroline into painful confusion, and Mrs. Pryor, with delicate tact, changed the subject before worse embarrassment could follow.

Yet Shirley had seen enough. She knew already that Caroline defended Robert

from something stronger than cousinly duty. Her eyes had flashed over the matter too keenly not to understand. Still, she pressed no farther then. She gave Mr. Helstone flowers too, argued with him merrily about trade, told him she might as well be called an esquire since she held a man's place, and laughed over the thought of becoming churchwarden, magistrate, or captain of yeomanry.

So ended the first visit. But Shirley had spoken truly when she said she wanted Caroline's society. She soon began to seek it often, and had she not sought it herself, she would scarcely have had it at all, for Caroline never believed people could really want her. Yet Shirley did want her. Though she had now met many young women in the district, she found no real companion among them.

She might have been bright and probably happy, but no one lives well without genial society. The fashionable girls round Briarfield did not satisfy her. She could laugh with them, visit them, and be easy among them, but she did not warm to them. Mrs. Pryor, who disliked Shirley's joking habit of calling herself a gentleman, warned her against it, and Shirley, out of real respect, did not mock the reproof. She only stood by the window, began chirping to a bird outside, and then slipped without noticing into a whistle, which startled her governess all over again.

In that same quiet talk at Fieldhead, Shirley said she meant to fetch Caroline and take her walking over Nunnely Common. Mrs. Pryor advised that Caroline should wrap up well, since the wind was fresh and she looked delicate. Shirley obeyed at once. She easily persuaded Caroline to come, and once they were out on the quiet road together, they began to talk with a freedom both soon enjoyed.

Their first real conversation made each understand the other. They spoke of landscape, of storms, of wild hills, of woods, and of the strange life of old places. Caroline described Nunnwood and its deep green dell where the ruins of a nunnery lay among ancient trees. Shirley answered eagerly, and they planned to spend a whole summer day there alone, taking books, pencils, and food in little baskets.

From woods and weather they moved to company, and from company to men. Both agreed that excursions changed their nature when gentlemen joined them. If the men were foolish, the day was spoiled by noise and irritation. If they were

clever and attractive, another kind of trouble came in their place, a quicker pleasure perhaps, but also anxiety and disturbance.

Then they spoke more personally still. Caroline admitted that in the company of a really gifted and good man, she sometimes felt unworthy to stand beside him. Shirley rejected that at once. She said she was never so glad as when she met a superior whom she could truly look up to. To stoop, she said, degraded her; to look up glorified her. This difference between them did not divide them. It only made their talk deeper.

They then came to marriage, and here both showed more of themselves than either had intended. Caroline, taught by sorrow and by her uncle's harsh sayings, spoke with fear of the change that marriage might bring. Shirley answered more passionately. She said she would never willingly marry a man who could grow cold, weary, and indifferent, or who would turn a woman into a burden in his own eyes. Better remain single forever than suffer that.

Yet she also painted another possibility, the one that women trust when they love. They watch a man, she said, and see whether he is just, truthful, kind to children, gentle to animals, patient with women, faithful in family life, and good in small daily acts. If all this is seen, why should they not believe he will be a kind husband too? Caroline listened, and then quietly gave Robert as her example. The cat at the rectory climbed to his knee, the old dog always came to greet him, and he treated both gently.

Shirley seized on this with delight. Yes, she cried, that was exactly the sign. Beauty alone had charm, and goodness with beauty had far greater charm, but when mind was added too, who could resist it? Caroline, drawn on by sympathy, praised Robert's face, his forehead, his eyes, and his character. Shirley answered warmly that he was graceful and good. There was enthusiasm in her voice, but no jealousy. Rather, she seemed honestly glad that Caroline had trusted her enough to speak.

By the time they reached the rectory gates, something firm had been formed between them. Shirley said plainly that if Caroline were truly what she seemed, then they would suit each other well. She added that never before had she been

able to talk with a young lady as she had talked that morning. She kissed Caroline and promised to fetch her again very soon.

Mrs. Pryor, too, cultivated the new acquaintance. She came one afternoon to the rectory when Mr. Helstone was out, and Caroline found her trembling and almost overcome in the dining room, as if the very act of entering the house had shaken her. Caroline gently loosened her shawl and bonnet and soothed her until she grew quiet again. Mrs. Pryor allowed these little acts of care from Caroline more readily than from most people, and from that hour an odd but tender tie began to deepen between them.

Once calm, Mrs. Pryor talked well, even beautifully. She was formal in speech, but clear in thought and rich in knowledge. Her eye soon fell upon the portraits in the room, especially that of Caroline's mother and those of the two Helstone brothers. Her remarks on them were thoughtful and exact, and when she spoke of Caroline's father, she hinted with grave caution that principle had not been his strength. Caroline, who always preferred truth to flattery, listened closely and did not resent the honesty.

Before leaving, Mrs. Pryor said openly that Caroline must come often to Fieldhead, and that if ever she needed help in her studies, she might command it. These were not loud or warm words, but they carried real care. Caroline felt it at once. In that house she had found not only the quick, bright friendship of Shirley, but also the watchful, quiet, almost hidden kindness of Mrs. Pryor. For the first time in many weeks, her thoughts had found a new channel, and the sharp pressure on one wounded point in her heart was a little less.

Part 7

There were times when Shirley loved action, company, and quick talk. There were other times when she loved to do nothing at all. Then it was enough for her to lie still under a tree with the sky above her and the grass under her, while Caroline sat not far away. She could be happy with only light, air, memory, and hope. Her past gave her sweet thoughts, and her future still seemed to promise

brightness.

Yet one day Caroline came near and found tears in Shirley's eyes. That sight surprised her deeply, because Shirley was not a girl whom sorrow seemed able to conquer. When asked why she wept, Shirley answered half laughing that it pleased her to cry, because her heart was at once sad and glad. Then, in her quick strange way, she asked why Caroline did not weep too, since she herself had greater cause. Caroline answered by asking whether Shirley was not also lonely, and Shirley replied, very softly and very surely, that at heart she was not.

That answer stayed with Caroline. She already believed she knew what it meant. Her own illusions were nearly gone by this time. She did not expect happiness for herself, and she had begun to shape in her mind a hard future of endurance. Still, habit was strong, and one evening she again went to the stile by the old thorn tree and looked down toward the Hollow, hoping to see the lamp in the counting-house.

No lamp shone that night. After waiting long, she turned sadly away, and as she passed Fieldhead, its moonlit beauty drew her eyes. Hall, cedar, lawn, and pavement all lay quiet and pale under the clear sky. On the bright stone before the house she saw two dark figures moving side by side. At first she thought one must be Mrs. Pryor, but the second figure was too tall. The man was Robert Moore.

Caroline stood hidden and watched them. It was not their words that struck her first, but their appearance together. Shirley seemed all grace, youth, and ease, with curls loose about her neck and a jewel shining at her throat. Robert walked beside her in deep quiet, close enough to show that this was no chance meeting. Caroline thought of other evenings when she had walked with him in a less splendid place, and the comparison was cruel.

In her pain she told herself that Shirley had already won what she herself had lost. Shirley was rich, free, beautiful, and made to stand beside a man in the open light. She herself felt only like a shadow, hidden outside that brightness and unable to claim even the little place she had once held. I will not say that her judgment was fair, but it was natural. A wounded heart sees sharply, and often wrongly.

Some of the conversation then reached her ears, though she did not remain

long enough to hear all. Shirley was speaking playfully of Robert's tenacity and his silent way of making plans. Robert answered that Barraclough had now been convicted and sent away, and that other men would certainly seek revenge. He meant to prepare for that danger carefully. Shirley approved him so long as he stayed on the defensive, and promised to try to win Helstone over to his side.

They then spoke of Michael Hartley and of the danger of wandering alone by night. Shirley urged Robert to go straight home and not haunt the Hollow as he liked to do. He obeyed more readily than he would have obeyed many others. He even said, in a low voice, that life had lately become valuable to him, because a hand had been stretched out to save him when he was near ruin. Shirley asked if he were truly rescued, and he answered that her help had at least given him another chance.

The next evening Caroline kept her promise to go to Fieldhead, but she came with a heavy heart. She had spent gloomy hours upstairs at the rectory, sewing steadily and trying to form some plan for her own future. More strongly than ever, she wished for fixed work that would force her mind away from one point of pain. She had resolved to ask Mrs. Pryor's advice about becoming a governess.

At tea she looked pale enough for both Shirley and Mrs. Pryor to notice it. Mrs. Pryor asked whether she slept well, and Caroline admitted that she did not. The rectory oppressed her, she said. Its age, its nearness to the churchyard, and its whole air of death and loneliness seemed to weigh upon her. She confessed that moonlight now looked sad to her and calm evenings gave her no calm. There was, she said, an inexpressible weight on her mind that she could neither explain nor cast off.

Mrs. Pryor advised more exercise, and Caroline answered that she already walked till she was ready to fall. Then she spoke plainly. She wanted to leave home and become a governess, as Mrs. Pryor once had been. At once Shirley broke in against the idea with strong feeling. She declared that a governess's life was hard, lonely, and unfit for Caroline's nature, and Mrs. Pryor, though gentler, agreed that Caroline was too young and not strong enough for such work.

Caroline insisted that severe duties were exactly what she needed. Shirley

answered with equal firmness that she would not hear of it. She said openly that it was now one of her daily pleasures to watch for Caroline coming through the trees, to have her near, to talk to her or sit in quiet with her. This was selfish language, Shirley admitted, but it was honest, and honesty was better than polite emptiness. Caroline could not deny that such affection moved her, but it still did not cure her inward pain.

I think Shirley reasoned as well as she could from what she knew, but she did not know enough. She saw only a dear friend growing pale and restless. She did not see the exact source of the suffering, or how every hour of idleness turned the same knife in the same wound. So she destroyed Caroline's plan in perfect sincerity, and then at once set up another plan of her own.

She proposed a long summer journey. Each year, she said, she liked to travel somewhere, and this year she would go north if Caroline and Mrs. Pryor would go with her. She spoke first of the Scotch lochs and the English lakes, and then, growing more eager, of the Hebrides, Shetland, Orkney, and even the Faroe Islands. The very thought of such a journey changed Caroline's face. She spoke of ocean waves, sea birds, wild rocks, and the old northern seas with a delight that was at least partly real.

That led them into a lighter and stranger talk. Caroline imagined white birds, lonely shores, and whales moving through northern waters. Shirley, with more fancy and mischief, said she expected at least one mermaid to rise by moonlight and show herself to them on deck. She described the white arm, the shining mirror, the dangerous beauty, and the sudden angry dive back into the sea when women, not men, stood looking on. Mrs. Pryor, practical as ever, gently interrupted to ask why they spoke so seriously of what did not exist.

At that moment Mrs. Pryor heard a step outside. Shirley rose, went to the window, and came back with a change in her face that Caroline did not miss. Robert Moore had arrived from Stilbro'. He entered looking better than he had looked for many months, with more color, more settled hope, and more life in his whole manner. He said he had come at once to tell Shirley the result of his business.

He had seen Colonel Ryde at the barracks, and the colonel approved his plans

and offered military help. Robert did not want too many soldiers, only a small visible force, because his main trust was still in his own civilians. He had also received a note from the Home Secretary, who blamed the weakness of northern mill owners and urged them to act firmly against disorder. Robert laid the letter and newspapers before Shirley, and they read and discussed the matter together with grave interest.

While they spoke, Robert also observed the room. Shirley sat directly before him in the evening light, bright in color, graceful in dress, and fully alive in every feature. Caroline sat close beside him in quieter dress, in shadow, with no ornament at all. The contrast between them was clear enough to anyone who wished to see it. Robert spoke kindly to Caroline too, asking after Hortense and carrying small messages between them, and even this little near talk revived her for a few moments.

But her relief did not last. As the conversation deepened between Robert and Shirley, she saw in them what looked to her like full understanding, equal force, and mutual hope. Shirley spoke to him with seriousness and respect, not with flirtation, and Robert answered in the same tone. Caroline felt like one who has been given a crumb and then made to stand aside while a full meal is set before another. I do not know whether Robert meant any such cruelty, but this was what she felt.

At nine o’clock Caroline rose to go. Shirley begged her to come again the next day and remember their northern journey. Robert then took his hat and said he would walk part of the way with her. Once outside, he put her hand under his arm as he had done in former days, and that old familiar kindness nearly undid all her self-command. He said he was glad she had found a place at Fieldhead and hoped she would remain there often.

Their talk then moved to more private things. He asked if she was often alone now, whether she was well, and whether her uncle was kind to her. She tried to answer lightly, but he pressed her a little, and at last she admitted, in her own way, that separation seemed to estrange them. He answered by asking whether old friendship should truly be forgotten. Then she confessed more than she had meant

to confess. She told him that she had often come in the evening to the top of the Hollow fields, had watched for his lamp, and had sometimes seen his shape pass between the light and the window.

This led him to speak in that half-playful, half-dreaming way which could be more dangerous than open tenderness. He said he might imagine her beside him in the counting-house, reading with him or sitting unseen at his side. He told her too that once in the cottage parlor he had thought for a moment that he saw her standing in the moonlight, and found at last that it was only a curtain and a flowering plant. Then he said that he had, as it were, two natures, one for business and one for home. Gérard Moore belonged to mill and market; cousin Robert could still be a dreamer.

Caroline answered with warmth that he looked better, freer, and more hopeful than he had done a few months earlier. He admitted that some difficulties had passed, and that he now had more sea-room, though storms could still come. She wished him success and happiness with all her heart. He said he would take her words as a good omen. For a little while they stood in that mild summer night speaking almost as they had spoken long ago.

When they reached the churchyard, he did not want to leave her. He even tried to draw her toward the church porch and laughed at the thought of dodging Mr. Helstone among the graves if necessary. Caroline, though inwardly moved by his wish to stay, was more frightened than pleased. She begged him to go, reminding him that her uncle hated him for political reasons and would be furious to catch them together. He teased her a little, then at last obeyed, covered her clasped hands for one moment with his own, and went off just in time.

He had to hide all the same. Helstone came out for his usual round and paused so near the great monument that Robert, crouching behind it with dew on his bare head, could almost have touched him. Caroline, safe in her room by then, watched from behind the blind until her uncle went in and Robert escaped across the wall. After that she did not sleep soon. She sat long at the window, listening to the night and living again every moment of the walk. Yet even in the middle of that sweet inward dream, she still told herself what she believed must be true, that Robert

would marry Shirley in the end.

Part 8

The day after the little dinner at Fieldhead, Shirley spoke with great pleasure about the success of the evening. She said she liked watching gentlemen enjoy a good meal, because men, for all their dignity, often kept something childlike about food and comfort. Then she turned, as she often did, to Robert Moore. She wondered what could truly please him, for he did not give himself away like other men. Caroline answered that she did not know, because whenever she tried to study him, he somehow seemed already to be studying her.

Shirley seized on that at once. She said Robert was always on his guard, always ready, never giving another person an advantage. Even when his eyes were elsewhere, his mind seemed busy with the minds of those around him. Then, with one of her quick turns, she asked Caroline how such a nature affected her. Caroline, who had learned by now to protect herself a little, escaped by answering Shirley with a question of her own.

Before more could be said, the bell rang. Shirley ran to the window and cried out that two visitors were coming together. She declared that she had lately made a splendid conquest, though without effort, and hinted that Caroline might have her choice of the pair if she wished. At that same moment Tartar, the great dog, began to bark below, and his bark changed quickly into a deeper and far more dangerous growl.

What followed was full confusion. There was a harsh command, the crack of a stick, a leap, a yell, and then a rush upstairs. One of the visitors fled in terror and shut himself into a bedroom. The other, Malone, tried to force his way in after him, for fear had driven both men to selfish speed. Shirley ran into the hall and calmed the whole storm almost at once. Tartar, once caressed by his mistress, lay at her feet like a loyal beast who only wished not to be struck.

She then called up to the gallery with open laughter, asking Mr. Malone how he did and gently informing him that he had chosen the wrong door, since the

room he was trying to enter belonged to Mrs. Pryor. She ordered her servant John to go and free Mr. Donne from his refuge. In coming down again, Malone almost slipped on the polished oak stairs, and this new loss of dignity put him in no better humor. Yet once he entered the parlor and saw the ladies quiet and courteous, he forced himself back into civility.

He chose a chair by the door, perhaps for air, perhaps for safety, and tried to make himself agreeable. His effort was a poor one. He sighed at the end of every sentence, played with a large silk handkerchief, and at last found nothing better to do with it than to tie it round his crossed legs. This performance, repeated more than once, almost overcame Shirley with silent laughter, and made Caroline turn aside so that her face should not betray her amusement.

Caroline also noticed something else. Malone had once shown her attention, or at least as much attention as a man like him could show. Now, seeing Shirley before him, rich, brilliant, and full of life, he shifted his aim at once and with no attempt to hide it. Caroline was more amused than hurt, because she thought too little of him to care. Shirley, meanwhile, saw through him perfectly and let him expose himself as much as he pleased.

Donne at last came down, outwardly calm enough, though very pale within. He had not the spirit either to confess his fear or to laugh at it. Shirley questioned him in her light, dangerous way and offered him no more than the mercy he deserved. Soon after, Sweeting arrived with Mr. Hall, and the whole air changed. Hall brought goodness with him. Sweeting, who had neither spite nor pride of the crueler kind, followed pleasantly enough and was soon at ease.

They all walked in the garden together, and there the talk turned to the new fund being raised for the poor. Hall had been active in collecting money, and Shirley, eager to help, entered warmly into the plan. Caroline sat with flowers in her lap and made a little nosegay for Hall, who pleased her more than ever by his gentle kindness and his entire want of pretension. Hall, in his turn, kept a flower she gave him and treated the small gift as if it had real value.

During this cheerful time Donne spoiled what he could. He came forward with a request for a subscription to another school and then began to speak with

contempt of Yorkshire society. He called the district coarse, the rich people narrow, and the poor people worse still. He even suggested that Shirley's contribution was mean for a lady of her fortune. Shirley bore this a little while, but not long.

At last she stopped him in a voice quiet enough, but colder than any open anger. She said plainly that he had insulted the people among whom he lived, the poor who suffered, and the rich whose money he was trying to take. She reminded him that he was asking, not commanding, and that gratitude would better suit him than scorn. Donne, too dull to feel shame quickly and too vain to see how badly he had behaved, still tried to stand his ground.

Then Shirley ended the matter. She told him to leave her house at once. There was no mistaking her this time. She spoke like the mistress of Fieldhead and the owner of land, house, and gate. Donne had no answer left. He went, and thus made his true exodus. Shirley even curtseyed him out with such grave politeness that the form itself became a sharp dismissal.

The fund, however, did well. Shirley's example, the work of the three rectors, and the quiet help of Miss Ainley and Margaret Hall brought in a useful sum. For the moment this eased the suffering of many poor families. Outward violence also seemed to lessen. No mill was attacked, no cloth was burned, and for a short time the district looked calmer. Shirley hoped that the danger had passed and that summer and perhaps peace would restore trade before greater harm was done.

She often said as much to Robert Moore, and he listened, smiling, but never quite agreeing. He admitted that peace would save him if it came in time, and that he now worked his mill only on hope and bold expectation. He was manufacturing for a future market, not a present one. He also freely owned that it was Shirley's loan which had saved him from ruin and given him the power to continue. Yet he doubted the lasting effect of charity upon the hungry and angry workers. Relief, he said, did not remove the humiliation of dependence, nor the hatred they felt toward the mill owners.

Even when he spoke hopefully, he still warned her that the calm might only be delay, not safety. He compared the country to a summer sky that threatens thunder day after day before the storm at last breaks. Shirley would end these talks by

begging him to take care of himself. He always promised that he would, and once he said that he wished to live because the future now opened before him like a paradise. He had nearly named the vision he saw there, but the servant came in with tea and stopped him.

Then Whitsuntide came with glorious weather. The schools were cleaned, brightened, and decorated with flowers and green branches. Long tables were spread for the patrons and teachers, and the children's feast was prepared for the open air. Briarfield had been chosen as the meeting place mainly because Helstone wished it so, and when Helstone strongly wished a thing, other men generally yielded rather than oppose him.

In former years this festival had been a burden to Caroline. She had to appear in public, lead her school class, receive company, and do it all while feeling shy, unsupported, and very small before the richer people of the district. This year the whole matter looked different because Shirley was to be with her. Shirley's courage alone gave her some of that same courage. The one fear was that Shirley, careless in small matters of time, would be late.

So Caroline rose early, helped to prepare the rectory for guests, dressed in white muslin, and then hurried through fields and lanes to Fieldhead to fetch her friend. She found Shirley still on a couch with a book, while Mrs. Pryor urged her in vain to get ready. Caroline wasted no words. She took the book away, dressed Shirley with her own hands, fastened ribbons and hooks, and pushed her at last into complete order. The two young women then set out together, one all quiet grace, the other richer in color and style, and both looking beautiful in their different ways.

They arrived in good time. The Whinbury school was already approaching, headed by the great Dr. Boultby and the stiff little Donne. The churchyard and rectory garden soon filled with children, teachers, patrons, and visitors. Shirley looked with real joy on the crowd, knowing that many poor children wore decent holiday clothes because she had helped their families. Caroline too had done good in her quieter way, giving up little comforts of her own and sewing for the children of her class.

In the rectory parlors, Shirley's presence again transformed Caroline. Instead of shrinking into corners, she moved among the guests, spoke when needed, smiled naturally, and seemed almost another person. Donne, still sour from Fieldhead, passed her and Shirley with an offended scowl. Malone, by contrast, tried one more foolish advance by presenting Shirley with a huge bunch of red roses. She laughed at him, and though the laugh was light, he saw clearly enough that he had been made ridiculous.

Soon the three rectors entered to take a little refreshment before the march. Boultby settled grandly into the chair prepared for him and received wine and sweets like a prince. Hall stood in the fresh air by the window, gentler and more human than ever. Helstone looked at his watch, declared that it was time, and in another moment had marshalled the whole force with military decision. The children stood in three great bodies, the teachers were placed between them, and the leaders were called to the front.

Grace Boultby and Mary Sykes were given Whinbury. Margaret Hall and Miss Ainley were given Nunnely. Caroline Helstone and Shirley Keeldar were placed at the head of Briarfield. Then the curates took their positions before the lady leaders, the rectors moved to the very front, the clerks to the rear, and Helstone lifted his hat. At once the bells burst out, the bands played, the drums rolled, and the whole long procession stepped forward under the bright sun with music, order, and glad hearts.

Part 9

The long procession moved on in sunshine, music, and order, yet to some spirits it did not feel like a mere holiday walk. Shirley, especially, could not hear drums and marching tunes without turning the whole scene in her mind into something sterner. She said they might be pilgrims, or Covenanters going up among the hills, ready to pray and perhaps to fight. She even cried that she almost longed for danger, for a cause, a country, or at least a lover to defend.

Old Helstone turned in his saddle, caught the fire in her face, and laughed at

her. He told her that England was not calling upon them to fight, and that her spirit must be held in. Shirley answered that he had better follow his own advice, for he was scarcely calmer than she was. There was play in the exchange, but also truth, because both had something warlike in them.

Then Caroline pointed to a red line on the far road. Shirley looked more sharply and at once saw what it was. Cavalry were riding fast from the direction of Stilbro'. That sight changed the meaning of the day in a moment, because men already feared that trouble might break out somewhere near Briarfield.

What followed was not a long drawn battle, but it was real violence. The expected disturbance had indeed broken out in Royd Lane, and Moore, Helstone, the soldiers, and their helpers had to act quickly. There was smoke, confusion, movement, and blood enough to turn the school holiday for a time into something much darker. By the end, the rioters were broken, though not without cost.

Shirley proved at once that when action was needed, she did not fail in it. Food, drink, bedding, wagons, and every sort of practical help were called for, and she answered the call on a scale so large that Moore later laughed and called her an excellent army contractor. She had guessed generously, and if she overdid her preparations, no one could say she had been cold or slow.

Caroline's concern was of another kind. Hidden a little in the shade, she saw Moore come toward the pump to wash his hands and forehead, where a slight cut still bled. She tried to go to him at once, but Shirley stopped her firmly, saying that to rush forward then would only trouble him and expose both of them before soldiers, clergy, and servants. Caroline struggled, then yielded, because even in pain she knew Shirley was right.

Moore's wound was no more than a graze, but the affair itself had not been light. One of the rioters had been killed and six were hurt. Moore and Helstone went among the fallen, gave orders that they should be carried into the mill, and then rode off in haste to bring surgical help from different directions. It was stern work, and both men did it with the coolness natural to them.

Caroline, left behind with her feelings still burning, broke down at last. She said she ought to be glad, because Robert had come through danger bravely and

well, yet she could not help feeling miserable. She confessed to Shirley that what hurt her most was not his wound, but the distance between them. Once, she said, she had stood nearer to him. Shirley then did the wisest thing she could do, and left her alone for a few minutes to cry in peace.

The wounded, meanwhile, were not neglected. Covered wagons, straw, beds, and linen were quickly found. Mrs. Yorke busied herself in preparing soft transport, Mr. Hall stayed with the injured like a nurse as well as a clergyman, and Miss Ainley sent lint and household linen without noise or show. Even in the midst of violence, the quiet goodness of some people became plain.

After this interruption, the holiday resumed as far as it could. About half past three the procession turned back, and by four it had reached the school again. Long benches were set out in the fields, the children were seated, and baskets and steaming vessels were brought forward. Mr. Hall gave grace, the children sang, and then buns and hot sweet tea were served with real abundance.

There was no mean allowance that day. Each child was to have more than enough, so that a portion could be carried home to those who had been kept away by age, sickness, or some other hindrance. Beer was given to the musicians and singers, and when the eating was done, the children were allowed to play freely. The whole thing had a generous spirit, and that spirit mattered in such hard times.

Then the bell called the teachers, patrons, and patronesses into the schoolroom. It was a lively scene. Servant girls, clerks’ wives, singers’ wives, and others had been drawn into service for the occasion, and they moved about among flowers, bright china, silver teapots, bread and butter, and trays of good things, each trying to look her smartest. Even the canaries sang above the cheerful noise.

Caroline, as the rector’s niece, took her place at one of the chief tables, while Mrs. Boultby and Margaret Hall presided at the others. Hall stood near Caroline, a little grave still because of Royd Lane, and she tried in her gentle way to lead him back toward ease. Shirley, by contrast, was unusually silent. She sat watching all around her with keen attention, as if the day’s danger had not fully passed from her mind.

Yet the feast did end, and with its ending came a quieter hour between the two

friends. They spoke again as they had spoken on other walks, more deeply than most girls of their age were expected to speak. Their subject passed from outward things to inward ones, and at last to love itself. Caroline, hurt by what she had seen and felt, spoke almost fiercely of those refined ladies and gentlemen who use the word “vulgar” at every turn, yet cannot mention love without showing the poverty of their own minds.

She said such people were cold, cowardly, and stupid on that subject because they had never truly loved and had never truly been loved. Shirley agreed with warmth. She said they took a living fire and treated it like something low and dirty. In their ignorance, she said, they insulted what was noble because they could only imagine what was coarse.

Before that, too, in the long warm evening, Shirley had spoken in her own freer fashion about Eve and Milton. She would not accept the common version of womanhood as weak, lower, or naturally made for blame. She spoke as if woman had a high nature of her own, and as if poets and moralists had often wronged her by narrowing that nature. Caroline could not follow every bold turn of her thought, but she felt its force.

The bells at last cut short their talk and called the crowd to church. Still, not all of Chapter XVIII belongs to that one evening. Life moved on, summer deepened, and the northern journey that Shirley and Caroline had planned still seemed possible for a time. But before July ended, another obstacle fell upon Fieldhead.

Shirley’s inward life during that period was a strange and rich one. She could be idle in body and yet full of silent delight in mind. A room, a book, a twilight sky, the first evening star, or the sight of a tree in calm light could fill her with a happiness that asked nothing from other human beings. She did not even know how rare such moments were, or how much they were worth.

Then the invasion came. An uncle, an aunt, and two cousins from the south, the Sympsons of Sympson Grove, arrived in state at Fieldhead and took possession as visiting relatives know how to do. Shirley, who could resist many things, submitted to this with less struggle than Caroline expected. The reason,

she said, was that old ties still had force, and that she had once spent two years of her youth at Sympson Grove.

She explained further that she had little in common with these relations. There was, however, one exception, a younger male relative, little Harry Sympson, of whom she had once been fond; but he had not yet come north. In church on the next Sunday, the Fieldhead pew showed the whole prim family group together, with Shirley among them like something rare and misplaced. She looked, as the book itself suggests, like a black swan among tame domestic birds.

This visitation cut Caroline off from Fieldhead for the time. She would not force herself into the middle of formal relatives and their stir. So she was thrown back once more on the gray rectory, on long morning walks by lonely paths, and on long afternoons in the still parlor or under the garden trellis where red currants ripened and monthly roses shone in the light. All these quiet places, instead of soothing her, only made her solitude plainer.

To fill the hours, she tried reading old books from her uncle’s shelves. There was little there that truly served her. The Greek and Latin were useless to her, and the lighter reading mostly belonged to dead years: old ladies’ magazines stained by sea water, Methodist stories full of wonders and warnings, and other faded volumes from which she had once taken what sweetness she could. Now they had little taste left for her.

She also sewed for the poor, as Miss Ainley directed, trying to turn pain into use. Yet tears often fell on the work as she held it. Then she would wonder how Miss Ainley, living so quietly and so much alone, managed to keep such steady peace of mind. In that question there was both humility and hunger, because Caroline wanted not only occupation, but a way to live without being consumed by her own heart.

Part 10

The evening after the feast and church service closed with a quiet beauty that seemed almost too soft for danger. The stars came out clearly, and the last light

was still enough for Shirley to say she could easily walk home alone. Caroline would not hear of that. She wanted Shirley to wait until the crowd was gone, and while they stood among the laburnums in the rectory garden, Mr. Helstone came up and changed the whole color of the night.

He said he would not sleep at home. He had met an old friend and meant to go with him, returning perhaps about noon the next day. Since the clerk could not be had to sleep in the house, he asked Shirley to stay at the rectory in his place and guard Caroline and the servants through the night. Shirley at once took the post in her own bold spirit, calling herself the first gentleman in Briarfield and accepting the charge as if it were a commission.

Mr. Helstone then spoke more plainly. He said that if there should be any disturbance in the night, the girls must not be helpless, and he offered Shirley a brace of pistols from his study. She demanded them without the least false modesty and promised to cock them before going to bed. I must admit that old Helstone admired her all the more for this, because courage, or something near it, always pleased him beyond softer virtues. They went in together and ate a late supper, though neither Caroline nor Shirley could have said what she tasted.

When the servants had gone up to their room, Caroline took a candle and quietly went through the whole house. She made sure every door was barred and every window fast, even in the old back parts that frightened her at other times. Then she came back and laid the pistols on the table. She said she had a strange excited feeling and did not wish to sleep yet, and Shirley answered that she too felt restless, though the night itself was calm and full of stars.

They sat at the open window and listened toward the Hollow. The stream could be heard so clearly that it seemed to run just under the churchyard wall. The girls leaned their arms on the sill and watched the pale summer night without speaking much. Each knew that men were abroad, each knew danger might be near, and each guessed that the others concerned in it believed them safe in bed, unconscious and inactive.

Then the dog began to bark. At first it was only the weary, teasing bark that dogs give at common passing things, but soon it changed. Caroline quieted him

for a moment and came back, only to find Shirley had put out the candle and was leaning farther from the open window into the darkness. Both listened more sharply now, and soon they heard not only the stream, but another sound below the churchyard wall.

It was a dull measured tread, not of a few men, but of many. The tramp drew nearer and spread wider, until they understood that hundreds were moving along the road. At last a voice cried, “Halt!” and the march stopped. There was a low conference below, and since hearing only part was worse than hearing all, Shirley took up the pistols, passed out silently through the glass door, and stole down to the garden wall. Caroline would never have gone alone, but she followed close behind.

Hidden behind the wall and the lilacs, they heard enough to chill them. Men below were speaking of the rectory as an old rambling house and asking who slept inside besides the parson. They learned that the servants’ rooms lay one way and Caroline’s another. Nothing came of that pause, however. The men did not attack the house. After a little more muttering, the great body moved on, and the direction of its march left no doubt in Shirley’s mind. It was going toward the Hollow.

What had been guessed before was now certain. The girls knew where the blow would fall. They could not remain quietly within doors while so much depended on what was passing below in the valley. Therefore, when the mass had gone on ahead, they left the rectory and made their way cautiously by lanes and fields toward the mill, keeping as hidden as they could. It was no light step for Caroline, but love and terror made her equal to it for the time.

When they came near enough, the attack was already in full motion. Moore had expected it for days and had made every preparation. The mill was fortified, armed, and garrisoned; he himself stood to the defense with a cool firmness that steadied every man beside him. The rioters, who had found weak resistance elsewhere, met here for the first time a master who was neither confused nor afraid. The fire from the mill was steady, the resistance organized, and the defiance plain. Before an hour had passed, their leaders saw that the place would not be carried and drew the men away across the fields.

At dawn the girls crept nearer, yet still did not show themselves openly. When soldiers and gentlemen came out of the great door into the yard, they drew quickly into a shed where old iron and timber were stored. From there they could see all and still remain unseen. The sight before them was no triumph. The fresh glen, green and dewy in the summer morning, had in one place been turned ugly by violence. The windows were shattered, stones and broken weapons lay everywhere, blood stained the gravel, one body lay still near the gates, and several wounded men writhed or groaned on the ground.

Shirley, who had loved the excitement while action lasted, changed at once when she saw the pain it had left behind. She said this was what she had wanted to prevent, and there were tears in her eyes for the poor fellows who lay hurt there. Caroline's eye sought one figure only, and soon she found it. Helstone was there, Malone too, and Robert. When he came toward the pump to wash the blood from a slight cut on his forehead, Caroline could scarcely bear Shirley's hold upon her arm.

She begged to go to him, to ask how he was, to do something, anything. Shirley would not let her move. She said that to break from hiding then would only trouble Robert, expose them both before soldiers and clergymen, and bring regret afterward. Caroline resisted for a moment and then yielded, though tears rose in her eyes. Robert's wound proved only a graze, and after washing it he went at once to the wounded men.

Moore and Helstone examined each prostrate body, ordered the injured carried into the mill, and then rode off at full speed to fetch surgical help from different directions. Only after he had gone did Caroline fully break down. She said she should have liked one word with him before he left. Shirley answered sternly that this was an hour for joy, not tears, because Robert had come through danger bravely and honorably. Caroline replied that Shirley did not know what pain lived in her heart, and that while she rejoiced in one sense, in another she felt utterly miserable because she was now so far removed from him. Shirley then did the best thing possible and left her a few minutes alone to cry.

At daybreak they stole back to the rectory unseen. Shirley lay down and slept

almost immediately, as healthy and vigorous people can sleep after storms both inward and outward. Caroline could not sleep at all. She sat up beside her friend and watched the June sun rise. She prayed, tried to submit, tried to reason with her own mind, and found no ease. I will not hide it: in that hour her faith itself seemed darkened to her, because sorrow had so long outlasted hope.

Yet the new day had to be met, and the girls soon went on to Fieldhead. The road was already filling with riders and walkers going toward the Hollow, eager to talk over the fight. At the hall they found the back court and kitchen crowded with poor people who had come, as usual, for milk and butter, but now stayed to gossip over the battle. Shirley stepped among them with admirable coolness, scolded them good-humoredly for their love of idle talk, and sent them all home in five minutes. Such plain speech suited them better than soft flattery ever would have done.

Inside, Mrs. Pryor met them trembling and pale. She had passed a bad night and blamed herself because she had not shown more firmness or readiness in the emergency. In the hurry and strain of the morning, Shirley's impatient nature led her to speak too sharply where she should have been gentler, and this left a wound that would not appear fully until later. Still, there was too much to do for anyone to remain long with hurt feelings. Orders had to be given, relief had to be arranged, and the whole neighborhood seemed moving toward the mill.

Moore came at last and found that Shirley, taking the matter in large style, had prepared food and supplies on something like a military scale. He laughed and called her an excellent army contractor. She answered that no one had told her how many men there might be, and she had preferred abundance to failure. The laugh ended when the true account was given. No man on Moore's own side had been seriously hurt, but one rioter was dead and six wounded. Hall had been with them like a nurse, Miss Ainley had sent lint and linen, and Mrs. Yorke too had busied herself in getting covered wagons and bedding ready. Shirley, hearing this, was relieved, though she still feared the victors might be harder than they needed to be.

Caroline, half hidden in shade behind Mrs. Gill, asked quietly whether Robert

was much hurt, and he showed that the cut on his temple was scarcely more than a scratch. That answer satisfied her, though it did not ease her heart. Afterward Moore and Shirley spoke together with the same serious tone they had used before. He was curious about the rectory night and tried to read from Shirley's face what she and Caroline had done and understood. Shirley fenced with him, refused to tell more than she chose, and finally sent him either to breakfast at Fieldhead or back to the Hollow if duty called him there first.

He said the second choice was the only possible one. He must return to the mill. Before leaving, he promised that the first leisure he had should bring him again. Then he went, and with that departure the movement of these two chapters closes. The battle has been fought, the first outward danger has passed, and yet nothing is truly settled. The blow has only driven the inner pain of several hearts deeper out of sight, where it can work more silently and, as often happens, more powerfully.

Part 11

While Shirley was downstairs speaking with Robert after the attack on the mill, Caroline went back upstairs to Mrs. Pryor. She found her much cast down. Mrs. Pryor did not complain openly, but it was plain that Shirley's sharp words had hurt her. Caroline, who now understood her better than most people did, saw that even when Mrs. Pryor looked still and controlled, she felt things deeply. So she sat near her, spoke gently, and tried to give comfort in quiet ways rather than in many words.

At last Mrs. Pryor spoke of herself with unusual openness. She said she had never possessed much confidence or decision, though she had always wished strongly to do right. The strange events of the night, and the sudden need to act for others, had confused her. She blamed herself for not being firmer. Caroline answered as kindly as she could, but before she could say much more, there came a soft knock at the door.

It was Shirley. She stood in the gallery looking truly ashamed, more like a

sorry child than a proud heiress. She begged Caroline to tell Mrs. Pryor that she knew she had behaved badly and that she asked pardon with her whole heart. Caroline gladly carried the message. Mrs. Pryor rose, went to the door, and let Shirley in, though with some trembling.

Shirley threw her arms round her old governess and kissed her warmly. She said she could not bear any coldness between them and must be forgiven at once. Mrs. Pryor answered that there was nothing to forgive, and she wished the matter forgotten. Yet one thing remained in her mind and could not be removed. She still felt that the whole event had proved her unequal to sudden crises, and that judgment against herself stayed even after she had fully forgiven Shirley.

Shirley was soon called away again, because everyone wanted something from her that morning. First came Mr. Helstone, as lively and pleased with himself as if the whole night had been made for his enjoyment. He spoke at length of the fight, the law, the rioters, and the courage shown at the mill. He even praised Robert Moore very freely, saying that no cooler commander could have been wished for, and that Moore had known not only how to win, but how to keep harsher men from abusing victory.

Helstone then declared that public opinion would soon change. He said people had long misjudged Moore and would now begin to see his merits. He was still talking in this spirit when another visitor arrived and cut him short. That visitor was Hiram Yorke. At once Helstone seized his hat and left almost in flight, for he had no wish to exchange words with his old enemy while the memory of the night's fighting was still hot.

Yorke, as might be expected, came in no gentle mood. He attacked almost everybody in his strong rough way. The magistrates, the soldiers, the mob leaders, and the masters all felt his anger. But he reserved his bitterest words for the fighting clergymen. To him it was a scandal that parsons should fire guns and move among soldiers, and he denounced Helstone and Malone with special force.

Yet even Yorke was not wholly unjust. Though he blamed the violence done to the rioters, he did not excuse the riot itself. He saw the wrong on all sides, and because he had a habit of striking at every side, his visit was stormy enough. After

he too was gone, calm returned to Fieldhead. The day moved on, and with it Caroline's life seemed to begin a new inward stage.

I think this was the point at which Mrs. Pryor's place in Caroline's life truly deepened. The older lady had already been kind, but now her care became closer and more watchful. Caroline spent more whole days at Fieldhead. Sometimes Shirley claimed her, sometimes Mrs. Pryor did, and both gave her real welcome. Shirley's friendship was bright, open, and full of movement. Mrs. Pryor's was quiet, exact, and almost hidden, yet it never tired.

She watched Caroline's face, steps, voice, sleep, work, and even little changes of expression with a kind of anxious devotion. She liked to be asked for help. She liked still more to see Caroline depend on her. Nothing in her manner was noisy or overflowing, but there was a steady warmth under the cool outside. Caroline soon learned that this strange reserved woman could be trusted as few others could be.

I do not wonder that Caroline valued her so much. Mrs. Pryor was formal in speech, old-fashioned in dress, and full of little habits unlike those of other people. Yet she was truthful, careful, thoughtful, and deeply kind after her own manner. Once anyone had grown used to her presence, that presence seemed a support. Caroline began to feel that very strongly.

Nor did she feel any true humiliation in being much at Fieldhead. Shirley's wealth and position did not press on those around her as the wealth of many other rich people did. She could enjoy being mistress of an estate and lady of the manor, but money was not the centre of her mind. Her thoughts moved elsewhere, and that made equality easier in her company than in the company of many who possessed far less. Mrs. Pryor therefore could live there without abasement, and Caroline could visit there without pain from any social slight.

Yet Caroline's inward state was not truly improving. Her heart had been diverted, but not healed. By degrees Mrs. Pryor noticed what Shirley had not fully noticed. One evening at tea she touched Caroline's curls from her cheek, looked closely at her, and said that she was growing thin and pale. She asked whether she slept well. Caroline answered honestly that she did not. She said she sometimes

dreamed sad dreams, and when awake in the night, the rectory seemed to her an old dreary house standing too near the churchyard.

She then said more than she had said before. She confessed that she was growing nervous, that calm evenings now seemed mournful, and that moonlight itself no longer comforted her. Pleasant weather and beautiful scenes could not make her glad. There was, she said, a weight on her mind which she would gladly have thrown off if she could, but reason and effort did not move it. Shirley listened in wonder, because such feelings were far from her own healthy nature.

Mrs. Pryor advised more exercise. Caroline answered that she already walked till she was ready to fall. Mrs. Pryor then said she should go away from home. On that opening Caroline spoke plainly and asked for something not light or amusing, but hard and useful. She wished to become a governess and begged Mrs. Pryor to speak to her uncle on the subject.

Shirley broke in at once against the idea. She called it a painful life and asked why Caroline should dream of taking such a step. Mrs. Pryor agreed that Caroline was too young and not strong enough for such severe duties. Caroline answered that severe duties were exactly what she wanted, because she needed something fixed and demanding to take hold of her life. Shirley then turned from argument to affection and said openly that she wanted Caroline near her, that it was one of her pleasures to see her come daily through the trees to Fieldhead.

Caroline was touched, but she still believed work was what she needed. Then Mrs. Pryor spoke again, and now what she said changed everything. She told Caroline that she had long thought over this matter. She explained that she had a small independent income from her own savings and from a legacy. When Shirley married, and Mrs. Pryor ceased to be needed at Fieldhead in the same way, she meant to take a house of her own.

She then said, with unusual force, that she could not bear solitude. She had no relations she cared to draw close around her. To Caroline, however, she was attached. Her society, she said, would be a dear privilege, an inestimable comfort and blessing. Therefore Caroline must come and live with her. She asked abruptly whether Caroline refused her, and whether Caroline could love her.

Caroline answered at once that she did love her and would gladly live with her, though she felt the offer too generous. At those words Mrs. Pryor grew deeply agitated. She said that all she had should one day be Caroline's, and begged her never to call such love too kind. That phrase pierced her heart, she said. Then the self-command which usually held her so closely gave way. Tears rolled down her face, and soon she wept aloud.

Caroline tried to soothe her with kisses and soft words, but the storm had to spend itself. At last it passed of its own force. Mrs. Pryor then murmured something about a poor lonely lamb, kissed Caroline again, and abruptly said they must go home. For a little while she walked very fast, as if driven by her own feelings. Then, by degrees, she grew calm, resumed her usual quiet pace, and before they reached Fieldhead, the shy self-controlled outer manner had returned.

So this chapter ends not with noise, but with a deep inward movement. No secret has yet been spoken. No full explanation has been given. But a bond has tightened. Caroline now has in Mrs. Pryor not only a friend and guide, but a woman who loves her with a force that can no longer be hidden by silence alone.

Part 12

Only half of Robert Moore's force had been seen in the defense of the mill. The other half appeared afterward, and it was in some ways the harder half. He pursued the chief leaders of the riot with a cold, tireless resolution that suited his nature well. The common men, those who had followed in hunger and anger, he could pass on road or street without word or threat. But the men who had led, planned, and excited the violence, he hunted like prey.

This work pleased him almost more than trade itself. It gave him movement, danger, purpose, and the sharp use of his mind. He rode fast and far, urged slow magistrates into action, questioned, watched, compared stories, and pressed every clue till it yielded something. The district, already disturbed, now felt his energy as another kind of storm. Men feared his eye nearly as much as they feared his pistol.

Yet while he thus spent himself outwardly, another life, much quieter and far more helpless, was sinking within a few miles of him. Caroline's strength, never firmly restored, had been wearing away for weeks. Hope, disappointment, jealousy, shame, sleeplessness, and the inward strain of loving without relief had all done their work. I do not call it a romantic illness. It was grief acting on a delicate body until body and mind alike gave way.

She still tried to keep some order in her days. She sewed, read a little, answered when spoken to, and moved about the rectory with an appearance of gentleness and control. But the power inside was spent. Even when tears came, they came quietly, almost without visible struggle, and were wiped away as if she were ashamed of asking pity from anyone. Her very patience made the danger greater, because loud pain is often more quickly noticed than silent decline.

There were moments when Shirley's friendship and Mrs. Pryor's vigilant affection turned her thoughts aside and gave her a little breathing space. But no cure had touched the root of her misery. Robert was still the fixed point of her mind. She believed him lost to her. She believed him rising every day into closer union with Shirley. And because she did not accuse either of them openly, her suffering turned all the more completely inward.

Moore, on his side, seems not to have guessed the full truth. He may have seen that Caroline had altered. He may even have felt some uneasiness at the change in her face. But he had business, danger, law work, pursuit, and his own future to occupy him, and these things, once set in motion, carried him on. A man like Robert seldom pauses soon enough to see what slow grief is doing in a quiet house near his own.

At last Caroline ceased to struggle against the weight on her heart and dropped under it. She became truly ill. The rectory parlor no longer saw her at meals. Her room grew dim and still, and the old house, which she had already called dreary, now became in fact a sickroom. Her uncle, startled at last, sent for such help as he understood. His first feeling was not wise, but alarmed and tender after its own fashion.

He could not comprehend how mind and body had come to such a pass

together. He would much more readily have understood a fever from cold, or a cough from rain, than this wasting from inward causes. Yet he did not neglect her. He went in and out more often than was his custom, asked rough questions in a rough voice, and grew angry, not with Caroline, but with the shadowy enemy which he could neither define nor strike. To such men, helplessness often comes out looking like ill temper.

Mrs. Pryor, however, understood better. She knew that no common nursing alone would serve here. She came frequently, then constantly, and at last watched by Caroline not as a mere visitor, but as one who had a right deeper than friendship to remain near that bed. At first she still restrained herself. She would sit apart, sew, watch, rise at a sound, listen for every change of breathing, and yet not venture near enough to seem to claim too much.

One visit from Hortense Moore wounded the patient more than the visitor knew. Hortense came, full of ordinary concern, and while speaking with Mrs. Pryor let it be known that Robert had been called away that very morning to Birmingham on police business connected with the rioters. He might not return for a fortnight. To healthy ears, this was only business news. To Caroline, already weak, it fell with cruel force.

Mrs. Pryor heard her weeping afterward and dared not at once go near. She knew too well what name lived at the centre of that grief. She who had so carefully avoided prying into the exact secret of Caroline's heart now found it spoken without words. The nurse could only wait, suffer, and pray that strength might be given to do what must soon be done. I think this waiting was harder for her than many active duties would have been.

As evening closed, she took tea to the bedside. Caroline woke from a short troubled sleep and at first did not know where she was. She began to speak as if she stood once more at the cottage or in the garden at Hollow's Mill. She said she had smelled the honeysuckles in the glen, had been to call Robert to breakfast, had seen the dew on the flowers and the peaches ripening. These broken words, dreamy and wandering as they were, cut Mrs. Pryor to the heart.

She asked softly whether Caroline knew her. Then, when the patient still

drifted between dream and waking, she drew her close, called her darling again and again, and struggled to quiet both the feverish child and her own more feverish heart. By degrees Caroline came back to consciousness. She knew Mrs. Pryor, knew that she had been dreaming, and even tried to comfort the woman who held her. That effort, weak as it was, showed how gentle she remained under suffering.

Afterward she spoke more clearly than before, and what she said was even sadder than the delirium. She confessed that she was not always equally ill or hopeless, but that there had been hours when she had neither reason nor strength to wish to get well. Life looked empty before her. She could not see what she had to recover for, or how a future without love, home, or settled purpose was to be borne. A physician might have called this nervous depression. I call it the cry of a starved heart.

Mr. Helstone, coming in later, tried to help in the only language he knew. He brought food with his own hand, arranged pillows, scolded weakness, praised common sense, and talked of chicken that day and partridge the next as if appetite alone would bring life back. There was awkward love in all this. Caroline knew it, and because she knew it, she did her best to please him. She ate what little she could, smiled, and thanked him so sweetly that the rugged old man bent and kissed her like a father who had nearly lost his child before understanding what she was worth.

He left them together for the night. That night was one of the quietest Caroline had known for a long time, because she was no longer alone. Whatever name had or had not yet been spoken, whatever truth had or had not yet been openly owned, Mrs. Pryor’s arms were round her like a mother’s. Feverish dreams still came, but whenever Caroline woke, she found a human heart near her on which she could lean. The comfort of that presence worked where medicines had failed.

As for Mrs. Pryor, peace did not come to her so easily. While the patient rested at intervals, the watcher remained wakeful. Her whole past seemed rising before her and asking whether she would still keep silence. She had borne silence for years. She had turned it into habit, duty, and almost into a second nature. But now silence itself seemed cruel.

Till break of day, I think, she wrestled inwardly with God and with memory. She had long believed herself called only to bear, repent, and endure apart. Now another duty stood before her, one not passive but bold. She must decide whether she would continue merely to watch Caroline's life fail inch by inch, or whether she would venture everything on one truth. That truth, once spoken, could never be recalled into secrecy again.

Morning came, and with it no noisy change in the house, but a great change in Mrs. Pryor's own resolve. She had ceased to hover between impulse and fear. Her tenderness, which had long hidden itself under formality, was gathering strength to act. I will not say that the step became easy to her. It did not. But necessity had become stronger than dread.

Caroline, meanwhile, lay weaker in body, yet a little more peaceful after the night's guarded rest. She did not know what decision had formed above her pillow while she slept and woke by turns. She only knew that Mrs. Pryor's presence soothed her, and that for the first time in many days she could rest her head somewhere without feeling wholly desolate. In deep suffering, even such small peace is much.

Thus this chapter closes under a shadow, but not under the same shadow with which it opened. At the beginning, Moore rode abroad hunting other men. At the end, another human struggle, much quieter and much holier, has nearly reached its crisis in the rectory chamber. One life has been wearing out in silence, and another, bound to it more closely than the world yet knows, has at last found the courage to choose between continued concealment and saving love.

Part 13

Caroline had hoped that after the great inward change brought by Mrs. Pryor's love, peace would come quickly. It did not. Relief had touched one part of her life, but another wound still bled. She could not turn off thought as one closes a door. Even while gratitude warmed her, pain still returned whenever Robert's image rose before her.

One late afternoon Shirley came suddenly to the rectory. She found Caroline sitting alone, withdrawn into one of those cold inward moods which do not always show themselves by tears. Shirley looked at her sharply and said at once that she knew the cause. If Caroline had not walked home the night before in the company she did, she said, she would not be such a different creature today. Caroline tried to put her off, but Shirley was not so easily turned aside.

Shirley then spoke with a strange heat, half playful and half real. She said she had felt so irritated the whole day that, had she possessed a trustworthy second, she could almost have called Robert out. She even talked of pistols in the old wild tone that sometimes came upon her when she was strongly stirred. Caroline, trying to lighten the matter, asked whether Shirley meant to shoot Robert or herself. Shirley answered in a manner that showed she was not merely jesting, though neither was she speaking plainly.

There was no common girlish jealousy in her mood. She was angry for Caroline rather than for herself. She had seen enough to know that Robert's conduct, whether meant kindly or not, had power to disturb Caroline too deeply. She felt that he drew near, drew back, and yet never wholly withdrew, and this, to a frank nature like Shirley's, seemed unfair. In her eyes, a man should either come forward honestly or keep away altogether.

Still, she did not let the talk sink into bitterness. She stayed, had tea there, and by mere force of affection kept company with Caroline through the evening. Yet even companionship could not save Caroline from her own thoughts. She had already begun to see herself as one set apart from happiness, and each fresh meeting with Robert only drove that thought more deeply into her mind. What others might have called romance had become to her something much nearer to sickness.

I do not blame her for this weakness, if weakness it must be called. She had loved without encouragement enough to justify hope, yet with quite enough kindness shown to make hope hard to kill. Such conflicts do not leave proud natures untouched, and they wear still more cruelly on natures gentle and shy. Caroline's error was not boldness, but depth. She suffered, not because she had

spoken too much, but because she had been forced to feel too much in silence.

By degrees the strain told on her whole frame. She grew weaker, not all at once, but by a slow wasting that frightened no one at first because each small step downward looked slight when taken alone. She still tried to appear composed. She still answered kindly, rose when needed, sat with work in her hands, and did not burden others with open complaint. But under that quiet outside, the powers of life were sinking.

Mrs. Pryor saw this earlier than anyone else and with a fear far sharper than Shirley's. Shirley could grieve, wonder, and blame herself for not understanding enough, but Mrs. Pryor's sorrow had another element in it. She watched as one watches over something doubly dear, because what lay in danger before her was not only a beloved young friend, but her own child. The thought that she might lose Caroline just when she had found her again almost overthrew her reason.

One evening, when the weakness had become very visible, Mrs. Pryor sat by the bedside and sang hymns and old songs because Caroline asked her to do so. The singing soothed the sick girl, but at the same time it touched feelings too deep for long restraint. Mrs. Pryor tried a Scottish song at Caroline's request and broke down before the end. Caroline, though so weak herself, drew her near and tried to comfort her, saying that she would gladly soothe the one who so often soothed her.

Then the decisive moment came. Caroline said that if only some abundant happiness could reach her, she believed she might live. Mrs. Pryor asked whether she truly loved her. Caroline answered that she did, beyond what words could well express, and that she sometimes felt as if she could grow to Mrs. Pryor's heart itself. Upon that answer, the mother could keep silence no longer.

She rose, locked the door softly, came back to the bedside, and let more moonlight fall upon Caroline's face. Then, leaning over her, she spoke quickly and with an altered voice. If Caroline loved her so, she said, then the truth should bring neither pain nor shock. That heart to which Caroline wished to cling was the very source of her own life. The blood in Caroline's veins had first flowed in hers. She was not merely a friend. She was her mother.

Caroline did not understand at once. She thought first of some kind adoption, some claim of affection taken in a figurative sense. Mrs. Pryor answered with greater force that there was nothing figurative in what she said. She had borne Caroline, nursed her, and had the true right to call herself her mother. No other woman could claim that name. James Helstone's wife and Mrs. Pryor were one and the same person.

After the first wonder came acceptance, and with acceptance came a sweetness which no argument could have created. Caroline did not recoil, question coldly, or demand proofs in a harsh spirit. She believed because her heart recognized something long missed yet somehow known. She called her "mamma," and the word sounded so natural to both that it seemed less like a new thing learned than an old thing remembered. Mrs. Pryor, hearing it, was shaken between joy and grief together.

Then she began, little by little, to explain the strange history of their separation. She confessed it with humility, not defending herself so much as accusing her own want of courage. After her husband's death she had long been free to claim her daughter, yet had not done so. She had feared the child's beauty because beauty had been joined, in her dreadful experience, with falseness and cruelty. When Caroline's portrait had been sent to her as a child of eight, her delicate and aristocratic look had filled her with terror instead of drawing her near.

This confession sounds hard, but Caroline did not hear it in hardness. Mrs. Pryor spoke from a life bruised and misled by a cruel marriage. She had once lived under the rule of a man whose outward grace hid inward falsehood, and the memory of that life had poisoned her trust. She thought a lovely child might inherit not only a father's face, but a father's nature. Lacking courage and faith in her own power to guide such a child, she had left Caroline in Mr. Helstone's hands.

Caroline listened with pity far greater than surprise. She did not rise up to condemn. She saw too clearly that cowardice had been mixed here with suffering, not selfish ease. What moved her most was not the story of the past, but the living truth of the present. The woman before her loved her with a devotion that no silence had been able to kill. Once that was felt, much else could be forgiven.

Their positions then changed in a touching way. The mother had broken down under confession, and the daughter now soothed her. Caroline hushed her, told her to rest, called her again and again “mamma,” and asked for simple things with the gentle authority of love: that a candle should be brought, that her uncle should later come and acknowledge the truth, that Mrs. Pryor should take supper in the room and not leave her for one minute that night. Mrs. Pryor accepted every request like a servant made blessed by service.

Yet she still judged herself severely. She said that her lack of moral courage had been the bane of her life and had made her, in one sense, an unnatural parent. Caroline would not let that word stand without softening it by affection, but neither did she demand false praise. Between them now there was no need of falsehood. Truth, once spoken, made gentleness easier, not harder.

So the night passed under a new relation and a new peace. The sick girl was still weak, still in danger, still far from restored either in body or in mind. But she was no longer desolate. She had found at last what she had lacked from childhood, a mother’s living heart close beside her own. And if happiness, as she had said, could indeed call back life where life was failing, then I think some first drops of that reviving happiness had begun to fall before morning.

Part 14

Not every desperate prayer wins the answer it begs for. A watcher may spend whole nights in silent struggle, asking God again and again to spare the life he loves best, and yet morning may still come with a worse look on the patient’s face. Mrs. Pryor had feared that very morning more than once. She had imagined Caroline waking weaker, more wandering, more distant from this world than before. Instead, when day truly came, her daughter opened her eyes gently and said in a clear voice that she had slept well.

That one soft word, “mamma,” almost overcame Mrs. Pryor with joy. She rose quickly so that Caroline should not see the tears springing to her eyes. Yet even then she dared not yield herself to hope. The revival seemed too slight, too

trembling, too much like the weak rising of a lamp that may sink again at any moment. She watched still with fear, because improvement came and went in uncertain waves.

Caroline herself did what she could to help recovery. She tried to eat, tried to speak, tried to look cheerful, and often failed through sheer weakness. The wish to seem better was there, but the body would not always obey the will. Many an hour passed in which Mrs. Pryor could only sit and fear that life had not strength enough to hold fast. Still, the first turn had been made, and I think both mother and daughter felt that, though neither would have spoken confidently of it.

During this time they were left more alone than before. It was the end of August, and almost everyone in Briarfield seemed to be away. Shirley and her companions had gone to the seaside, the Yorkes likewise, Hall and Louis Moore had gone north among the Lakes, Hortense had been drawn away again to Wormwood Wells, and Robert was still absent in London after his business at Birmingham. Thus the rectory sickroom stood apart in a strange quiet, as if the whole neighborhood had stepped back and left Mrs. Pryor alone with her child.

The weather itself seemed against recovery. For many days an east wind had been blowing, dry, hot, and wearing. It scorched the lips, robbed the sky of depth, and spread a pale dead haze over hill and field. Under such air Caroline's bodily convalescence could not keep pace with the peace now growing in her heart. She was calmer in spirit because she had found her mother, yet the frame remained weak and feverish.

Then at last the change came. The east wind died. A small cloud rose in the west, rain and storm followed for a while, and when that had passed, all nature seemed washed and renewed. The sky recovered its living blue, the hills stood out clear, the earth regained freshness, and the west wind blew in soft and pure through the open lattice. That wind, joined to Caroline's youth, to her mother's care, and to God's mercy above all, began the real healing.

Mrs. Pryor soon saw the signs. Caroline was not merely smiling more brightly. Something fearful had gone from her face and eyes, something hard to name, but easy to remember once seen. She was still pale and thin, yet she looked like a

living sick girl now, not like a beautiful shape from which the inner fire had nearly gone. Her thirst lessened, food ceased to be wholly hateful to her, and sometimes she could even choose what she would like to taste.

Nourishment brought strength little by little. Soon she was able to sit up, and after that she longed for air, flowers, and sunshine again. Mr. Helstone, generous in material things as always, bought a garden-chair for her use. He carried her downstairs in his own arms, placed her in it himself, and gave the charge of wheeling her among the walks to William Farren. That choice pleased her better than any other could have done.

William and Caroline had many small interests in common, and small interests are often the sweetest in convalescence. They could speak of bees in the turf, hedge birds, nests, young leaves, fruit, flowers, and the habits of every humble creature in the garden. Neither was ashamed of such topics. To them they were real, and because they were real, they gave ease. Caroline would have no other guide for her chair when William was at hand, and his quiet companionship suited her perfectly.

Mrs. Pryor did not understand this ease at all. She could not speak to William except with stiffness, nor could she believe that a man in his place might have delicate feelings or a proud reserve. When she gently asked whether he might not grow too free if treated so openly, Caroline answered at once that William was too proud and too sensitive ever to presume. Mrs. Pryor smiled a little at this, not out of cruelty, but from old habits of class feeling which were still strong in her. William, for his part, knew when he was misjudged, and answered her coldness with a brow almost sulky.

Evening always gave Caroline back wholly to her mother, and those hours became their richest time. During the day Mrs. Pryor could still be formal with others, still quiet and somewhat frozen with servants, and still exact in her ceremonious civility toward Mr. Helstone. But alone with Caroline all that hardness melted. She liked to hear her daughter call, ask, depend, and command in little ways. No one else had ever claimed her services so naturally or trusted her so completely.

Caroline, on her side, loved this dependence more and more. She would lay her head in her mother's lap, rearrange her handkerchief, smooth her hair, and talk to her with a sweet mixture of petting and seriousness. She even took upon herself the task of reforming Mrs. Pryor's dress. She declared that the old-fashioned gowns and bonnets made her look older and stranger than she truly was, and insisted that black silk should be worn every afternoon, and a black satin dress bought for Sundays. Mrs. Pryor objected that she had hoped to buy new things instead for Caroline, but Caroline would not allow it.

In these conversations the past sometimes rose between them, though never long in a bitter form. Caroline asked whether her mother had nothing left from her father, no token she truly valued. Mrs. Pryor answered that she possessed one treasure beyond price. When Caroline asked to see it, she was told, with a tenderness that could not be mistaken, that it was speaking to her at that moment, with its arms round her neck. So the mother declared that her living daughter was the one gift she prized most, and Caroline, hearing this, only loved her the more.

By the time the Fieldhead party returned, Caroline was nearly well. Shirley came to the rectory almost at once, without waiting even for fine weather. On entering, she did what strong people often do when deeply moved: she said little. She took Caroline in her arms, kissed her once, looked at her keenly, and said only that she was better and safe now. Yet her eyes showed both fear and wonder when they rested on the change in that once fading face.

Soon afterward she was told the whole truth about Mrs. Pryor. To Caroline's astonishment, Shirley answered coolly that this was no news to her. She had long guessed it. She had heard enough of Mrs. Pryor's history, of James Helstone's character, and of the strange emotion visible between mother and daughter to form her own conclusion, and she had kept that conclusion to herself. This revelation made Caroline see yet another side of Shirley, one more reserved and self-governing than she had suspected before.

Life at Fieldhead, however, was far from simple just then, for the Sympsons were still there. Mr. Sympson was a respectable, proper, worrying man, full of good principles and worldly prudence. His wife was kind, patient, and submissive,

but narrow in her whole training and outlook. The daughters were correct young women in the highest degree, educated faultlessly, governed by rule, frightened by anything original, and inwardly horrified by whatever did not fit their received pattern of thought and conduct.

Henry Sympson alone was different. He was pale, lame, intelligent, affectionate, and much given to thought. Shirley loved him, and he clung to Shirley with complete devotion. Near him moved the tutor, Louis Moore, connected with the family yet never one of them. Mr. Sympson was stiffly civil to him, Mrs. Sympson attentive but formal, the young ladies scarcely aware of him as a man at all, and Shirley herself, to Caroline's surprise, seemed to notice him hardly more than the rest. He bore this silent exclusion with outward patience, asking only to be left to his duties and his one faithful friend in the house, the great dog Tartar.

Caroline could not understand Shirley's manner to him. She knew from Hall and from William Farren that Louis was no common man. Both had praised his mind and temper warmly, and both spoke of him as a true gentleman. Yet at Fieldhead he seemed kept in the background, and Shirley, who was often generous by instinct, looked toward him with a strange mixture of indifference and irritation that puzzled Caroline more each day.

The puzzle deepened when Henry, searching Louis's desk one morning, found a packet of old French copy-books. They proved to be Shirley's own exercise-books from four years earlier at Sympson Grove, when Louis had been her teacher. This discovery startled Caroline. Here was another secret Shirley had never mentioned. Henry spoke freely of those earlier days, recalling Shirley as a wild bright pupil who had learned quickly and made lesson-time lively, and even remembering how Louis had praised one of her compositions and drawn for her a snowy scene she had described.

Soon after, in the summer-house, Caroline asked Shirley why all this had been kept so quiet. Shirley fenced with the matter, laughed, and would explain little. While they were there, Louis came and sat just outside with Tartar and the little birds that knew him as a feeder. Shirley, hidden within, dropped crumbs into his

hand, and he accepted the act with perfect calm. Their brief exchange had in it something sharper and more private than ordinary speech, and when he walked away, Caroline saw that Shirley's pride had somehow been wounded.

Later, in the schoolroom, the same hidden history showed itself again. Shirley and Henry teased each other over the old copy-books, and when Hall and Louis returned, the talk turned to the desk, the portfolio, and the sketches within it. Shirley opened the portfolio with Louis's key and looked through the drawings first in silence, while he stood behind her chair. Then visitors were announced in the drawing-room, and she had to leave. Before she went, the mirror over the fireplace showed her both Hall and Louis watching her gravely, and she yielded to duty with clear reluctance.

Once she was gone, Henry, with a boy's curious exactness, called her a kind of white witch. Louis answered him sharply and told him to study in silence. That stern note ended the scene and, for the present, the chapter too. Much remained unexplained, but the old copy-books had done their work. They had shown Caroline that the silence between Shirley and Louis was not empty silence, and that beneath Fieldhead's smooth daily order there lay a past connection not lightly to be dismissed.

Part 15

Caroline was now much at Fieldhead, and Shirley held her there with a warmth that proved how little the Sympsons truly suited her. They were respectable people, exact in their habits, correct in their opinions, and always ready with proper forms. Mr. Sympson was pious, worldly, and worrying. His wife was patient and good, but narrow from long training. The two daughters were models of regulated young-ladyhood, so faultless in rule that anything fresh, strong, or original filled them with secret horror.

Henry alone differed from the rest of his family. He was pale, lame, affectionate, quick in feeling, and far more alive than his sisters. Shirley loved him and made him her pet, and he loved Shirley with complete devotion. Near

him, and yet apart from them all, moved Louis Moore. He was connected with the family, served within it, and yet was not really of it. He took civility where civility was given, asked for nothing more, and kept a world of his own within himself.

In that house one creature besides Henry openly sought him. This was Tartar. The great dog, harsh to others and difficult even with Shirley at times, had taken a deep liking to Louis. More than once he left Shirley's feet and went straight to the tutor's side, laying his great black head upon his knee as if he knew where he was best understood. Shirley noticed it, and though she sometimes tried to call him back, the dog obeyed Louis more readily than his mistress.

Caroline, who now heard good accounts of Louis from several sides, could not understand the coldness that often seemed to stand between him and Shirley. William Farren called him a true gentleman, and Hall spoke of him as one of the best men he had known since Cambridge. Yet when Caroline tried to plead his cause, Shirley would answer impatiently, or refuse the subject altogether. This puzzled Caroline the more because she had begun to see that indifference was not the true explanation.

One day, sitting with Shirley in the summer-house, she asked directly why Louis had never been mentioned as the former tutor at Sympson Grove. Shirley answered lightly at first, then sharply. When Caroline suggested that perhaps Shirley disliked seeing Robert's brother in a dependent position, Shirley broke out with proud scorn at the phrase "Robert's brother," as if the words themselves were an offence. Caroline saw then that the matter touched not indifference, but wounded pride and some older history not yet explained.

That history soon began to show itself. Henry, searching about the schoolroom one day, found a bundle of old French copy-books. They proved to be Shirley's, written four years before under Louis's guidance. Her old exercises, translations, and little compositions were all there, kept carefully in the tutor's desk, together with drawings he had made. To Caroline this was revelation enough. A mere forgotten pupil's work is not usually preserved with such fidelity.

Soon afterward, when the Sympsons had driven out and Shirley remained at home, Henry came to call her into the schoolroom. Louis, he said, wished to hear

her read French again, as in the old days. Shirley hesitated, but went. She entered with outward composure, hung up her bonnet beside Henry's cap, and sat down where Louis had placed a chair ready near his own desk. From the first word, the old relation between master and scholar seemed to return.

Louis gave no speeches and asked no favors. He simply took up the tone of authority he had once used and expected obedience. When Shirley's curls fell over the page and hid it from him, he calmly told her to put back her hair. She paused for a moment, half tempted perhaps to rebel, but his face was cool, quiet, and unmoved, and she obeyed. Then he made her read from Saint-Pierre, corrected her slipping accent, and in a few minutes had brought her back under the old discipline.

After that came a more curious trial. He reminded her of a French composition she had once written, called "The First Learned Woman," and declared that he still remembered it. Shirley challenged him to prove this, and he began to repeat it from memory. Whether the youthful essay had been wise or foolish mattered less than the fact that he remembered it so exactly. His memory of her words, and her confusion under that memory, told Caroline later much more than the exercise itself could have told.

Henry, delighted with all this, drew them farther into the past. He reminded Shirley how rebellious she had once been at Sympson Grove, how she had quarrelled with her uncle, defied the whole house, and been brought at last, not to meanness, but to submission before better judgment. Louis did not tease much, yet he allowed enough to be said to make Shirley blush more than once. There was no open tenderness in him, but there was deep mastery, and she felt it.

The lesson then softened into a happier scene. Hall and Caroline came in, a little meal was spread near the fire, and Shirley, forgetting her ordinary pride, moved about among them almost like a handmaid. She gave bread and milk even to Louis without shrinking, and when she stood too long by the fork, overheated with the work, he quietly took it from her and bade her rest. Then Henry brought in the portfolio of sketches, and Shirley, now fully interested, opened it with his key and looked first at every drawing herself while Louis stood behind her chair

and watched in silence.

That pleasant interval could not last. Wheels were heard in the yard. Sir Philip Nunnely had returned with the family, and Shirley knew she would be called back to the drawing-room and formal duty. Mr. Sympson entered the schoolroom and stood in displeased surprise at finding such a group gathered there. The freedom of the scene, innocent though it was, offended his stiff notions of order. So the hour ended, and with it ended one of the last untroubled moments before another shadow fell on Shirley.

The next morning she came down in one of her brightest moods and even invited her two female cousins to walk with her, a thing so rare that they could scarcely believe it. The day itself was dim and autumnal, but there seemed to be sunshine enough within Shirley for them all. On the way home she stayed behind a little to speak with her foreman, John, while the Misses Sympson went on. After speaking to him, she lingered alone by the gate in the quiet lane, full, as she later confessed, of very happy thoughts about the future.

It was there that the change came. A dog came panting wildly up the lane. Shirley knew it at once as Phœbe, one of Mr. Sam Wynne's pointers, a poor creature often cruelly beaten and now plainly distraught. Shirley tried to stop and soothe her, meaning to bring her in and give her water and food. Phœbe, too wild to know her, turned and bit her arm, drawing blood, and then fled on. A moment later the keeper came running after the animal with a gun and told Shirley the dreadful truth: the dog was mad.

She did not faint or cry out. She did something more terrible and more characteristic. Going straight into the laundry, she heated an iron and burned the wound herself, driving the hot metal into it so that no servant might guess what had happened. Then she went upstairs and said nothing. From that hour, the strange quiet shadow which her cousins noticed began to settle upon her face and manner.

It did not pass in a day or a week. She seemed still herself, yet altered. A deeper stillness came into her eyes, her voice, and all her movements. Outwardly she bore the change bravely enough, but inwardly fear had entered where fear had never

lived before. The small scar on her arm, hidden afterward by a bracelet, robbed her of sleep, made her nervous and thin, and forced her to look forward to the possibility of madness.

During this same period Mr. Sympson pressed her in his usual tyrannical manner, and one day he drove her so hard that, once rid of him, she sat down pale and shaken and at last wept. Louis found her thus. Before he could do more than speak a few words of grave kindness, he handed her a note from Yorke about Robert. Robert had been shot from behind the wall of Milldean plantation and was badly wounded, though not, it was hoped, fatally. Louis, for all his usual self-command, was deeply moved, because Robert was his only brother.

Shirley forgot herself at once in the thought of others. She comforted Louis as well as she could and urged hope strongly upon him. In time Robert's danger passed, but he stayed long away, and that absence troubled Shirley in another way. One day, when she and Louis were again alone, she asked whether he had heard from Robert and why he remained in town so long. Louis answered with a touch of quiet bitterness that he had thought Shirley knew better than anyone why Robert was reluctant to return.

That answer did not end the interview, because Shirley at last resolved to tell the secret she had carried alone. She asked Louis whether, whatever happened, he would stand by her with self-possession and not leave her to frightened fools. Then she showed him the scar under the bracelet and told the whole tale of Phœbe. Louis was shocked less by the bite itself than by her silence afterward. He asked why she had not come to him at once, and she answered simply that she had no claim.

He spoke more warmly then than was his custom. He said that to be of use to her was the best thing he could ask in this world. She, still outwardly composed, continued her account and told how she had burned the wound herself and kept the whole matter hidden. The story, which she had borne alone for weeks, was now at last laid before one person whom she believed neither weak nor agitated. Whether that would save her peace or trouble it more, she could not yet know.

The dinner bell then rang and broke the conversation. Shirley gathered up her

work and rose, but before leaving she returned once more to Robert. Louis admitted that he would write and urge his brother's return, though not in Shirley's name. She accepted that, and with the old fear still hidden under her calm exterior, obeyed the call to dinner. Thus these two chapters close: one with a past intimacy made visible, and the other with a secret terror confessed at last, but not yet ended.

Part 16

Louis Moore was a man who could live quietly for a long time without complaint. Silence did not crush him as it would crush many others, because he had a large inward life of his own. He could sit in one room, with little around him, and still not feel poor in company. Yet even for him there were hours when solitude changed its face. On one such evening at Fieldhead, silence became almost painful.

Everyone had gone to Nunnely. Shirley was gone, the Sympsons were gone, even little Henry had gone, and Louis had stayed behind by choice. Sir Philip had kindly asked him to join the party, but Louis would much sooner have wandered alone in the darkest part of the old forest than have spent the evening in formal company. He wanted one presence near him that night, but not the baronet, not Lady Nunnely, not the Sympsons, and not any of the polite people gathered at the priory. He wanted Shirley.

The season was turning, and the weather had not settled into peace. The day's heavy rain had passed, but the night was full of wind. Clouds ran fast over the moon, and the whole sky seemed alive, restless, and shining. The gale moved through the trees and round the old house with a grand wild sound. It was not a night for easy sleep or calm reading.

Louis sat for a while in the schoolroom, listening. At last he rose and said to himself that he was tired of that little cell. He wanted a larger place, freer air, and stronger impressions. So he left the room and went through the empty house without a candle, because the moonlight was already enough. It entered through the broad windows and lay over floors and walls in shifting silver.

He passed from room to room as if looking for something lost. In one sense he was. At last he came to the old oak parlor, where a fire still glowed on the hearth. There, everything at once told him that Shirley had been there not long before. A chair stood by a little work-table. A small satin bag hung over the chair back. The desk stood open, the keys were left in the lock, and on the table lay a glove, a pen, a seal, and a few red berries on a green leaf.

These were trifles, but to him they were full of life. I think it is often so in love. What means nothing to another person becomes almost powerful to the one who loves. Louis looked at those small signs of Shirley's presence as if he had found the warm trace of her hand itself. Carelessness in her did not offend him. On the contrary, it pleased him because even her faults seemed alive, human, and near.

He stood there thinking that any man who loved her would have much to correct in her and yet would not stay displeased. A rebuke given to Shirley, he thought, would not end in lasting anger. It would melt into kindness almost at once. Better, he felt, to spend half an hour blaming her with warmth than a whole day coldly admiring another woman who never stirred the blood. Then he stopped himself and said that he was talking aloud like a fool.

He drew the curtains across the wide window, shut out the moon, fed the fire, lit candles, and placed another chair opposite Shirley's. Then he sat down and took out a small blank book and a pencil. If he could not speak openly to any living creature, he could at least write. He began to set down what he would never have dared say before another human being. In that little notebook, his guarded nature opened at last.

He wrote first that solitude had once been pleasant to him. He had imagined it like a quiet and noble companion, cold perhaps, but beautiful. Since Shirley had once come close to him, had spoken to him freely, and had asked for his strength, solitude had become hateful. It was no longer a calm high friend, but an empty thing, cold and deathlike. He could not bear it now because it was not she.

Then he wrote of one brief meeting in the drawing-room, when Shirley had come in dressed to go to a concert. She had hardly spoken, but her shyness had moved him deeply. He had seen color rise in her face, and he had taken that

modesty, not as weakness, but as something pure and beautiful. He even laughed a little at himself in writing this, admitting that such words might sound like the words of a dreamer. Yet he would not deny what he felt.

From there his thoughts moved to her softer side, the side few people saw clearly. He remembered her once asking for his protection, once confessing that she was not so strong and self-sufficing as others believed. He remembered a secret tear and the humility of that moment. It had delighted him, not because he despised her weakness, but because it let him feel stronger than she was, able to sustain and guide her as a husband should guide and support his wife.

That was one of the deepest truths in his feeling. He admired her perfections, but it was her faults and little wildnesses that drew her nearest to him. Through them he found a way to exercise power over her, and that power pleased him. He did not want a woman without edges, without pride, without resistance. He wanted one who gave him something to govern, restrain, and shape. In this, Louis was not gentle in imagination, even where he was faithful in love.

He wrote that Shirley would charm him in any place and under any condition. If she had been poor, plainly dressed, and standing at a cottage door, he still believed he would have stayed to speak to her and would have left her with regret. Yet because she was what she was now, rich, bright, careless, and commanding, she seemed to him almost more than earthly. He knew also that her little habits would irritate his brother Robert, while they delighted him. The open desk, the forgotten keys, the careless purse, all gave him pleasure because they offered him something to manage and set right.

Then he compared Shirley with Caroline. Caroline, he wrote, was gentle, exact, delicate, and nearly faultless. She would suit Robert well, because Robert liked order, fitness, and a house where everything was in place. But Louis did not want a lamb. He said plainly that a wife for him must have spirit enough to stir his great patience and make use of his strength. He preferred something bright, warm, and dangerous over something purely meek and blameless.

He confessed even more than that. He loved to watch Shirley return from a ride, wild with wind and motion, and he had often waited in the yard for the chance

to lift her from the saddle. He had noticed too that she refused such service from other men, even from Sir Philip, yet accepted it from him without reluctance. That small fact fed his whole heart. He asked on the page whether she knew how gladly all his powers stood ready to serve her whenever she gave them a task.

He also reflected that her carelessness never made her coarse. Even when she forgot things or left them lying about, everything belonging to her was clean, delicate, and truly lady-like. There was no meanness, no dirt, no vulgar disorder in her. In one sense she was heedless; in another she was naturally refined. I think he was right in seeing this. There are people whose neglect only reveals the depth of their good breeding, because even their confusion keeps a kind of grace.

Then his thoughts turned darker. He wrote that he could never do more than worship and wish for her. He believed he could make her happy, yet feared she would belong to some man who lacked the power to master and steady her nature. He named Sir Philip in his mind and warned him silently, thinking he had often seen Shirley endure the young baronet rather than love him. He believed she shrank inwardly from his nearness, though she was outwardly gentle with him.

At the end, Louis let his feeling rise into something almost feverish. He imagined a man praying for a goddess to appear and then being destroyed by the very glory he had asked to see. So, he thought, he himself might vanish under the splendor of the woman he loved, while she remained untouched above him. This was no calm practical meditation. It was the language of a man who had held himself in for too long and had at last broken into passion where no human ear could hear him.

Then he heard the carriage returning. At once he came down from dream into action. He shut the desk, took the keys, gathered up the bag, the purse, the glove, the pen, and the seal, and put them all in his pocket. He smiled to himself as he did so, because he knew Shirley would have to come to him for every one of these things. He meant to make her ask, wait, confess carelessness, and receive a lecture before he restored them. If he must be her slave, he thought, he would at least win small privileges from his chains.

Part 17

Everyone in Briarfield said it was more than time for Robert Moore to come home. His long absence had become a public puzzle, and every district round about helped to explain it in its own foolish way. Some said he was staying away for business, but that could not be true, because his business in Birmingham and London had already been finished. He had tracked down the four chief rioters, seen them tried, convicted, and sent away. That much the newspapers had clearly reported.

Yet his success brought him no true public love. The manufacturers were glad enough in private, because they hoped fear of the law would now hold back further violence. But common talk among the poorer and angrier sort was still dark and dangerous. In alehouses men muttered threats over beer and gin, and one rumor even declared that Robert dared not return to Yorkshire because his life would not be safe for an hour if he did.

Hiram Yorke heard that rumor and laughed at it with rough pleasure. He said that if such talk ever reached Moore, it would bring him home at once. So it proved. Robert sent word ahead naming the day of his return to Stilbro', and Joe Scott passed the news to Yorke. On market-day Yorke therefore made sure to be present when the absentee came back.

Robert arrived in time for the market dinner and took his usual place among the clothiers and blanket-makers. Because he was still something of a stranger, and because he had lately acted where others had shrunk back, the company gave him marked attention. Some of these men, who in open daylight had kept their distance from him for fear of sharing his danger, now praised him almost as a champion of their class. The more wine went round, the more their praise rose.

Robert bore all this badly, though not in the way foolish men bear praise. He did not swell with it. He did not enjoy it. He sat back in his chair, quiet, dark, and almost sullen, while half-bred tradesmen repeated his deeds and mixed their compliments with coarse abuse of the working people. Yorke, who hated flattery almost more than he hated cowardice, watched him with inward delight. To see a

public man cold under public praise pleased him extremely.

At last Robert could bear no more. He rose before the others, left the wine, and took the road home. Yorke followed within minutes. Soon they were riding together out of Stilbro' while the last light was fading from the sky and the moor darkened before them. Yorke, warmed by wine and glad to have the younger man beside him again, did most of the talking at first.

He soon turned from public matters to private gossip. He told Robert bluntly that he had missed his chance with Shirley Keeldar. Fortune, Yorke said, had almost thrown twenty thousand pounds into his hands, and all Robert had needed to do was take it. Instead, he had ridden away to Warwickshire, then gone on to London, and left the field open. Sir Philip Nunnely, Yorke believed, would likely carry off the prize before Christmas.

Robert answered at first in his ordinary guarded way, neither denying much nor showing much. But Yorke kept pressing him, half teasing and half serious, until the younger man's restraint broke. He said he had so quarrelled with himself, so fought against pain and shame, that he felt as if the whole machinery of his nature were breaking down. Yorke, now fully interested, urged him to speak plainly and confess all.

Robert then did what perhaps he had needed to do for a long time. He admitted that he had believed Shirley loved him. He had seen her eyes light up when she found him in company, seen her color rise when she greeted him, heard tenderness in the way she spoke his name, and felt her kindness, concern, and practical help around him. From all this he had drawn one conclusion. He thought her frank friendship meant love.

He then looked at Shirley with worldly calculation more than with deep affection. He saw youth, beauty, power, and wealth. He saw in her the chance to save his honor, to clear old debts, and to rebuild his fortunes. He also owed her real gratitude, because her loan had already rescued him from financial ruin. Therefore he persuaded himself that marriage with her would be wise and natural. He even took secret pleasure in believing that she had been the first to love and show it.

Yet when Yorke asked him plainly whether he loved her, Robert gave an answer truer than any romantic speech. He said she was beautiful in her own way and highly attractive, but she never seemed to him like the woman meant to be his other self. She stirred his vanity and interested his mind, but she did not enter his heart. He wanted to be practical, not romantic, and therefore one night in August he went to Fieldhead, after sending a note asking for a private interview.

Shirley received him calmly, thinking perhaps that he had come on business. He proposed to her in a hard, determined manner, with more of bargain than of love in his words. He even felt irritated when she did not blush, tremble, or look down like the heroine of a foolish dream. Instead, she stared, rose, walked quickly through the room, and cried out in shocked amazement. Then she told him the truth in words he could never forget.

She said he had spoken less like a lover asking for a heart than like a robber demanding a purse. That sentence struck him because it was true. When he tried to say that he had believed she loved him, she rejected the idea with strong indignation. She told him that he had insulted her whole sex by turning her open kindness into a bold plan to catch a husband. She said she had respected and liked him, but only as a brother might be liked, and that his proposal had lowered him terribly in her eyes.

Robert did not defend himself well, because in that moment even he saw the ugliness of what he had done. Shirley wept, but her tears were full of pride as well as hurt. She said he had misread her completely and had judged her mind through a warped selfish view. At last, when he turned to go, she still found enough greatness in herself to forgive him partly and to hold out her hand. He kissed it many times, and they parted in sorrow, not hatred. Still, the bond between them, as it had once stood, was broken.

Yorke called it a strange story. Robert answered that he would never again speak of marriage to any woman unless he truly loved her. Then Yorke, still puzzled, asked what had gone wrong between two young, handsome, spirited people who seemed so well matched from the outside. Robert gave an answer that matters greatly. He said that whenever he and Shirley came very near, they were

never truly at ease together. They could admire each other, but not rest in each other. Their talk was the talk of politics, trade, and sharp intelligence, not the talk of home or the heart.

Then the conversation changed, and in changing it moved nearer to Robert's deepest truth than perhaps either rider yet fully knew. Yorke spoke of Mary Cave, the woman he had once loved and lost to Helstone. Robert then asked a series of questions. Suppose, he said, Mary had not been cold, but modest; not dull, but thoughtful; not lifeless, but deeply feeling. Suppose she had listened gladly, welcomed her lover quietly, trembled when he held her hand, and hidden her love out of purity rather than pride. Would Yorke still have left such a woman to seek another for money?

Yorke was deeply struck. He admitted, after much struggle, that if love had been secure and humble and faithful, he still might have been weak enough to leave it. That dark confession helped Robert too. It forced him to see that human beings are capable of throwing away what is best simply because it is gentle, sure, and close at hand. I think, though he did not fully speak it yet, that the woman in his mind during those questions was not Shirley at all. It was Caroline.

After that, Robert spoke in a new tone about public matters. During his time in Birmingham and London, he said, he had looked more closely into the true causes of the country's distress. He had seen hunger, cold, unemployment, and hopelessness at close hand. He had seen both thoughtful people crushed down into misery and rougher people driven by sheer animal want into desperate anger. He did not pretend he would become weak with rioters or stop defending his property. He would still resist mobs and hunt down ringleaders if necessary.

But he said something larger than that. He said a man must think not only of his own schemes and debts, but also of justice toward others. Unless he learned to be more patient with ignorance and more merciful toward suffering, he would have to despise himself as unjust. This was not a full conversion into softness. Robert was not made for softness. It was, however, the beginning of a moral change, and that matters more than easy sentiment.

By then the moon had risen red through the haze above Rushedge, and the two

riders had nearly crossed the moor. Below them, the lights of Briarfield shone in the valley like stars. They were descending between dark plantations now, much nearer home, and Yorke was looking ahead toward Briarmains when a voice suddenly spoke from behind a wall beside the road. It muttered words of judgment from Scripture, dark words about the death of the wicked.

Then came the flash and the shot. The calm of the night shattered in one instant. Yorke knew at once what had happened. The transported rioters had been punished by law, but their friends or allies had not forgotten. Before he even turned, he understood that Birmingham had now been avenged in Yorkshire.

Part 18

The matter that had long been hanging in the air now came to a point. Sir Philip Nunnely knew it, Mr. Sympson knew it, and Shirley knew it too. One evening at Nunnely Priory settled the question, though not in the way Mr. Sympson desired. I think Sir Philip's decision was helped by several small things, all joining together in one hour.

He had lately noticed that Shirley looked more delicate and thoughtful than before. That touched the weak poetic side of his nature. A sonnet began to form in his head, and while it was still there, one of his sisters persuaded Shirley to sit at the piano and sing one of Sir Philip's own ballads. It was, by good fortune, one of the least affected things he had ever written, and therefore one of the best.

Just before singing, Shirley had been standing at the window, looking out on the park under a wild moonlit sky. She had seen the great trees struggling with the wind and heard the deep roar of the woods below. The quick clouds and the swift moon had stirred her inwardly. So when she sat down to sing, she did not sing like a trained young lady performing a proper duty. She sang like a living creature moved by what she had just seen and felt.

The ballad spoke of faithful love, of love that stays near in disaster, of love that clings more closely when poverty and danger come. Shirley gave to those words both softness and force. She impressed everyone in the room, though not

all were pleased in the same way. Sir Philip was charmed. The Misses Sympson and the Misses Nunnely were more troubled than delighted, because what was natural in Shirley seemed improper to minds that thought correctness the same thing as truth.

Old Lady Nunnely, sitting by the fire, watched Shirley with cold disapproval. Her look said plainly enough that this was not the woman she wanted for her son. Sir Philip saw that look and understood it. Because he feared delay might ruin his chance, he resolved to speak at once. The room had a deep recess within it, almost like a second chamber, and there he found his opportunity.

While the young ladies made music and the older ladies talked together, Sir Philip joined Shirley near a cabinet in that recess and whispered his proposal hurriedly. She stood still for a moment as if struck motionless, then answered him in a low voice. They parted at once, and she went back to the fire. Sir Philip watched her with great anxiety, while Mr. Sympson, who had seen enough to guess what had passed, returned home full of worldly joy.

He could not keep such a matter to himself. The next morning he hinted broadly to Louis Moore that a splendid connection was about to be added to the family. Louis guessed the truth at once and named Sir Philip. Mr. Sympson tried to preserve dignity, but he was too pleased with his own imagined success to do so gracefully. After that he waited in constant excitement for the formal opening of the affair.

At last a letter came from Sir Philip, and Mr. Sympson himself handed it to Shirley. She took it away to her own room and was long in answering it. He knew by her face that something important had been decided, but he dared not question her at once. There was in her expression something that checked him. I think even meddling people sometimes feel instinctively when they are near a will stronger than their own.

Later, however, he could hold in no longer. Returning one day from a visit, he asked Shirley to go with him into another room for what he called a strictly private interview. She followed him very quietly, like a person who sees an unpleasant thing coming and chooses to face it rather than shrink. They sat opposite each

other in the drawing-room, with a few yards between them, and he began in a grand and troubled manner.

He told her that the whole Nunnely family had suddenly gone south again, and he demanded an explanation. Shirley answered calmly that the family had every right to go. He then asked whether Sir Philip had proposed to her. She admitted it at once. When he pressed farther, she told him plainly that she had refused Sir Philip, and this answer threw him almost out of his senses.

He could hardly believe that she, Shirley Keeldar, had refused a baronet with rank, property, and family. She, however, was not shaken. She said Sir Philip was too young for her, too gentle, and too little master of himself or of others. She respected him and thought him good, but she could not trust his happiness in her keeping. What she wanted, she said, was not a boy she must guide, but a man whose strength would naturally govern hers.

This statement bewildered Mr. Sympson, because Shirley's pride and independence seemed to him entirely at war with such a wish. But she explained herself more clearly. A tyrant, she said, would not hold her for an hour, because she would rebel and break away. Yet a true master, a man of firm sense and command, one whose praise could reward and whose displeasure could punish, might win both her obedience and her love. It was a bold thing for a young woman to say to such an uncle, but boldness in Shirley was often only another form of truth.

Mr. Sympson then grew coarser. He hinted that she must have painted from life, that such a man already existed in her thoughts, and that this dangerous ideal was tied to some real person. Shirley fenced with him for a moment, half mocking and half delaying. Then, when he drove her farther, she spoke in a more direct and fiery way. Her words were no longer playful now.

At last he named Moore, not Robert, but Louis first, because Louis was his son's tutor and therefore, in his narrow view, socially beneath them all. That insult drew from Shirley the strongest language yet. She said that when the name of Moore was spoken, shame and fear should both disappear, because the Moores knew only honor and courage. When he cried out against the family as low traders

and Flemish upstarts, she met him with open admiration, praising the manly bearing, talent, daring, and force of the man she meant.

From that point the quarrel widened into something larger than one marriage question. Shirley said that her uncle's god was the world, and that he worshipped position, arrangement, and decorous worldly advantage. She spoke with great passion against marriages made under that false religion, unions where young were tied to old, the living to the dead in spirit, and homes were built on disgust, fear, deceit, and unloving habits. I do not say all her language was measured, but it was certainly sincere.

Mr. Sympson could make no answer strong enough for her. He was frightened, offended, and confused all at once. He muttered that she was improper, almost irreligious, and wholly unsafe company for his daughters. She told him that he could not plan her life for her, that her heart and conscience would dispose of her hand, and those two alone. At last he stumbled away in complete disorder, cursing the dog on the mat and flinging one vulgar insult after another behind him.

When the door had shut, the excitement left Shirley suddenly. She sank down, tired to the heart, and after a few minutes fell asleep upon the sofa. That quick sleep was natural to her after great agitation. It was not indifference, but reaction. One who entered shortly afterward found her there, rosy, half smiling, and yet with wet lashes, as if a few tears had fallen before rest came.

The person who entered was Louis Moore. He called her name softly, and when she woke and saw him, she said at once that she had been afraid her uncle had returned and that she and Mr. Sympson had quarreled. Louis answered that Mr. Sympson should let her alone, especially as she was not yet fully strong. He then told her more: her uncle was giving orders in the schoolroom as if the whole family were to leave Fieldhead immediately. Shirley asked first whether Henry was to go too, and Louis said he could not yet tell, because Mr. Sympson was not the most consistent of men.

But that was not the true reason Louis had come. He had a note from Yorke concerning Robert. Shirley saw at once that something was wrong. Louis, who had held himself firm till then, admitted that Robert had been shot the night before

from behind the wall at Milldean plantation. He was severely wounded, though, it was hoped, not fatally, and the attackers had escaped.

Shirley turned pale, but she did not lose herself. She read the note, understood its meaning, and tried at once to strengthen Louis, who was deeply shaken because Robert was his only brother. She laid her hand for a moment over his and told him to hope. He then asked her to go to the rectory and tell Caroline the news, because she would hear it best from Shirley. She promised instantly and asked whether she should say there was no immediate danger. He told her yes, and then prepared to leave at once for Briarmains.

Before parting, she asked him to bear up, whatever might be coming. He answered only that time would show whether he could do so. Yet her pity had already helped him more than he confessed. As he walked away, he felt the touch of her hand as something at once soft and powerful, and took from that brief contact more strength than from many words. Thus this chapter ends with one quarrel finished, another danger opened, and several hearts driven at once into deeper trouble.

Part 19

Robert Moore was carried to Briarmains because it was nearer than the Hollow, and once there, Mr. Yorke took charge of him with the energy of a man who liked power and knew how to use it. The sight of sudden blood, danger, and helpless dependence roused all the strongest parts of his nature. He had Robert laid in the best bed in the house, sent for help, and managed everything as if the wounded man were one of his own sons. Mrs. Yorke, stern as she often was in common life, proved fully equal to the occasion. She was not frightened by wounds, and once a real duty lay before her, she met it in her own hard, capable fashion.

The surgeon came, examined the wound, and gave hope. The ball had not struck the most dangerous part. Much weakness and fever might follow, but life itself did not seem lost. This judgment gave some comfort to the household, though no one present thought the danger slight. Robert was young and strong,

yet even youth and strength look uncertain when a man lies pale and senseless on a strange bed.

Hiram Yorke, relieved in part, did not therefore become gentle in speech. He talked roughly, blamed the coward who had fired from hiding, and wished aloud that the fellow were in his grip for five minutes. Yet under the roughness there was real feeling. He sat by the bed much longer than a mere acquaintance would have done, rose whenever Robert moved, and watched the changing face with something close to fatherly concern.

Martin Yorke watched too, though in a very different way. He was still only a schoolboy, but not a common one. What he saw, he felt strongly, and what he felt, he soon wanted to turn into action. He admired Robert's courage, liked the stir and secrecy of the whole affair, and soon discovered that a new power had fallen into his hands. He now knew things that certain ladies wished very much to know, and he understood perfectly that such knowledge could be used.

Shirley, once she heard the truth, could not rest content with second-hand reports. Robert's danger, however partly past, touched her deeply. She would not go openly to Briarmains and risk fresh talk, observation, and interference. Nor could she send a formal message and remain satisfied with that. She wanted sight, certainty, and one answer to the one question that mattered. Was he really safe?

Martin soon guessed her wish and offered the means of fulfilling it. A meeting was arranged, not in the house, but outside, under the old oak in the wood. The day was already turning wild, and by the hour he reached the place, snow had begun to fall. The sky darkened early, the wind grew sharp, and the old tree stood black and strange against the whitening path. Martin, walking there to and fro, approved the whole scene. To his excited boyish mind, it suited romance exactly.

At last he heard the light quick step he expected. Through the snow Shirley came without hesitation, wrapped against the cold, but not checked by it. She went straight to him and asked at once, "How is he?" Martin was struck, not for the first time, by the way she thought first and wholly of Robert. Yet he did not answer with simple kindness. He liked the feeling that she must wait upon his words.

He soon told her what she most wanted to know. Robert lived, the surgeon had

hope, and the wound, though grave enough, did not seem mortal. Shirley listened with such relief that for a moment her whole face changed. The hardness of self-command went out of it, and Martin saw gratitude, softness, and inward agitation all together. Those expressions, once seen, fixed themselves in his lively imagination.

He then led her on to say more than she had meant to say. He asked whether she cared so much for Moore. Shirley answered him with impatience, then with truth. Yes, she did care. She cared not in the cold fashionable way of people who speak of attachment and mean vanity, amusement, or convenience, but with a warm troubled interest she could neither deny nor govern. Martin listened like one who has accidentally opened a door into another person's secret chamber and is delighted by the discovery.

Yet even then he did not forget himself. He admired Shirley greatly, not with a man's full love, but with a boy's sharp mixture of romance, pride, curiosity, and vanity. He liked to feel that he was useful to her, that she had come through snow and wind because he had summoned her, and that he, not some wiser or older person, now guided her steps. Such feelings made him alternately generous and teasing.

He offered at last to take her farther and let her see Robert with her own eyes. She agreed immediately. The chance was dangerous and perhaps imprudent, but she had not come into the wood to turn back half satisfied. Martin brought her toward Briarmains, found the right moment, slipped her in by a private way, and with much caution got her near the sickroom. There Robert lay weak, feverish, and altered enough by suffering to touch even a less warm heart than Shirley's.

She did not stay long, nor did she attempt scenes, speeches, or display. One look was almost enough. She saw that life remained, and because life remained, courage returned. If she spoke, it was quietly; if she touched his hand, it was only for an instant. Martin, watching all this, felt both the beauty of the sight and the power of his own position in bringing it about. He meant to remember both.

When the visit was over, he took her away again as secretly as he had brought her. He would not let the adventure end in common fashion. Even while he served

her, he claimed little inward rewards for himself. A word, a glance, the sense that she trusted him for the moment, all had value in his eyes. He was too young to understand himself fully, yet old enough to enjoy the dignity of seeming necessary to one he admired.

But Martin had not finished using his power. Another person wished for news of Robert as keenly as Shirley had wished, though in a different spirit and with a more patient sorrow. This was Caroline. Her health was better now, but not her peace. After all she had suffered, Robert's wound fell on her heart with doubled force. She wanted to see him, yet delicacy, fear, and circumstance all stood in the way.

Martin soon found means of reaching her too. On a snowy Sunday, when Briarfield Church must still be attended and when common life went on in spite of storm, he met her and made her understand that something might be done if she had courage enough. Caroline, though timid in many things, was not timid where Robert was concerned. She had come out in weather that almost stopped others, and the moment Martin hinted at hope, she fixed on that hope completely.

He teased her, of course, because teasing was half his pleasure. He praised her eyes, her teeth, and her looks with absurd freedom, calling himself a new variety of the Yorke race and behaving with a boldness that would have offended her had she not been too anxious to care. She bore it because she wanted one answer only. How was Mr. Moore? Martin saw perfectly that every other word was mere delay to her.

At last he told her enough to draw her on. Robert was better. He was weak, but safe enough to be seen quietly for a few minutes. Caroline's whole face changed at once. Martin watched it with much inward triumph. He now felt himself master of a little drama, and he liked his office amazingly. He therefore led her step by step, not directly to the room, but through delay, warning, and concealment, all of which increased the excitement for him and the strain for her.

When at last he brought her into Robert's room, the scene proved gentler and truer than anything Martin could have invented. Robert, pale from loss of blood and still suffering, was lying propped among pillows. Caroline came near,

trembling so much that she could scarcely speak. Yet once he knew who stood beside him, a different look came into his face. Weak as he was, he stretched out his hand, and all the distance of former months seemed at that moment much less than before.

Their talk was low and broken, but it was full of more meaning than many louder declarations. Caroline asked how he felt, whether he had pain, whether she disturbed him. He answered that her presence did not disturb him at all. He even said enough to show that he knew her feeling had not changed, and that his own heart was no longer where worldly calculation had once tried to place it. Weakness often breaks down walls which pride and prudence keep standing in stronger hours.

Caroline, hearing this, could neither remain wholly calm nor wholly distrust what she heard. She had suffered too much to become wildly hopeful in one minute, yet she was deeply moved, and he was deeply moved as well. Robert began speaking of future things almost before prudence allowed it. He pictured work renewed, the Hollow changed, poor people employed, schools maintained, and Caroline at the centre of a home that should be both useful and happy. In such dreams there was extravagance, but there was truth too.

He called her by names warmer and nearer than cousinly use, and she, though shy to the last, no longer drew wholly back from that tenderness. Their understanding was not settled into formal promise then and there, but the essential barrier had fallen. Each now knew the other loved truly. All the former doubts, silences, and false turns had been burned away by suffering.

Martin, however, would not allow this interview to lengthen into danger. He heard movements in the house, knew his mother might appear at any moment, and stepped in with sudden authority. Caroline was not to say long farewells, nor was Robert to be agitated by parting scenes. He made them separate with scarcely more than a last look, carried Caroline off almost by force, and wrapped her shawl about her in the hall while the snowy world waited outside.

Had his mother not been near, and had a certain native modesty not still held him back, he might at that instant have demanded a kiss from Caroline as reward

for all his management. As it was, he let her pass, though not without telling himself that she remained in his debt and that one day he would be paid. So he watched her skim rather than walk across the snowy road, while inside the house Robert lay weaker in body but stronger in hope than he had been for many a month.

Thus these two chapters bring several long-divided lines nearer to their meeting. Robert's wound, meant to silence him, has instead opened his heart. Shirley has learned more clearly what she feels and what she does not feel. Caroline, after long suffering, has at last heard the answer her heart had feared never to hear. And Martin, half schoolboy and half young schemer, has discovered in helping others a kind of power which he enjoys far too much to surrender willingly.

Part 20

Martin Yorke had now tasted two things that many older people never give up once they have known them. One was excitement. The other was power over the feelings of others. Having once helped Shirley and then Caroline to see Robert, he could not bear to sink back into ordinary schoolboy life, where lessons, meals, and family habits moved on without mystery. Caroline, especially, had taken hold of his mind in a way that annoyed and delighted him at once.

He had called her plain often enough in former days, and perhaps had half believed it. Now her face would not leave him. He saw it in the schoolroom, in the street, in the snow, and in his own inward fancies. This did not make him humble or gentle. It made him more eager to go on with the strange little romance into which he had pushed himself.

He was not a common boy. Even then, before the world had had time to smooth him, he had something separate and marked in his nature. Later he would try, with much labor, to polish himself into the pattern approved by most people, but he would never quite succeed. At present, he was all sharp corners, unusual moods, restless wit, and obstinate will.

On the Saturday afternoon before this chapter opens, he sat in the wood with

a book of fairy tales and a head full of plans. The book may have been in his hand, but another unwritten book was really open before him. He was thinking of chances, meetings, devices, and the best way of drawing Caroline once more within his little circle of action. He did not yet know how many first chapters in life never reach a second.

Sunday generally displeased him. The morning service was long, the sermon usually worse than long, and the whole usage of the day crossed his active, perverse temper. Mr. Yorke and his wife were not strict church people in the common sense, for they stood outside the Establishment in opinion, yet every Sunday saw the whole large family placed in their pew at Briarfield Church. Theory and habit are often very different things.

This Sunday, however, a new charm had appeared. Deep snow had fallen. Mrs. Yorke declared at breakfast that the weather was too severe for the children to go out, and she proposed instead that they remain at home and hear sermons read in the back parlor. Martin answered at once that he was going to church. There followed the usual family conflict, carried on in low voices, sharp sayings, and immovable wills. Martin would not explain himself, because a boy like Martin never explains where explanation would lessen the dignity of resistance.

His mother accused him of mere perverseness. He denied it, but would not give the true reason. Mr. Yorke, though amused, warned him that the way was hard, the drift deep, and the sleet cruel. Martin still rose, wrapped himself carefully, and went out. He thought to himself that his father had more sense than his mother, because a man at least knew when direct pressure only hardened another will.

The church was nearly empty when he reached it. Snow and bitter wind had kept away all the comfortable people with cushioned pews and carriage habits. Only the oldest, poorest, and most faithful had ventured out. Such people often show the strongest loyalty to church or chapel, because habit, patience, and spiritual hunger bind them where convenience never did. Martin saw all this without being softened by it.

His thoughts ran in quite another direction. He was waiting for Caroline. He told himself savagely that if she stayed away, he would despise her. He even built

up a whole angry judgment against her in advance, calling her weak, shallow, and like all other girls. Such judgments came easily to him, because disappointment always moved faster than justice in his mind.

The service began. The rectory pew stood empty. Martin's contempt rose quickly. He told himself that he had been deceived, that Caroline's fine eyes and gentle face meant nothing, and that she was only another frail common creature who would not face discomfort for the sake of either him or Robert. So bitter did these inward speeches become that he even forgot where he was and remained kneeling after the proper moment, only discovering his mistake when the hymn had already begun.

Then came a change. The Sunday-school children entered at last, pattering into their places, and behind them came the older girls with their teacher. That teacher was Caroline, wrapped in the familiar gray cloak and bonnet. Martin's satisfaction was so sharp that he had to hide his face behind his hymnbook. She had come after all. The snow, the wind, and Mrs. Pryor's care had not kept her away.

Yet satisfaction did not stay pure in him for long. Caroline never once looked toward his pew, or if she did, he did not catch the glance. By the end of the sermon he was offended all over again. He wanted proof that he had been in her thoughts, and because he could not see that proof openly, he was ready to deny it altogether. Such was the boy's temper, proud, exacting, and unreasonable in the same breath.

When church ended, he took the nearest way home through the fields. It was the roughest way too, untrodden and difficult under the snow, but he preferred it. Near the second stile, under a clump of trees, he saw an umbrella struggling against the wind, and behind it the gray cloak. Caroline had been waiting there for him. At once his whole inward weather changed.

He seated himself on the stile with deliberate coolness and began the conversation as if time were entirely his own. He asked whether she would exchange him for Mrs. Pryor, since she now called Mrs. Pryor "mamma." Caroline, in haste and earnestness, hardly knew what to do with such teasing. She answered simply that Mrs. Pryor truly was her mother, and then tried to bring him to the point. Martin, however, was in no hurry at all.

He complimented her teeth, talked nonsense about becoming handsome himself, and declared he meant to start a new branch of the Yorke family. He even contrasted himself with his grim ancestors and joked about an old painted Yorke who, he insisted, must have resembled him in face and character. Caroline tried once or twice to pull him back to sober ground, but he only wandered farther, because teasing her now gave him almost as much pleasure as helping her had given him before.

At last she asked directly how Robert was. Martin at once saw that this was the true object of her coming. He answered perversely, saying that Robert was no worse, but was still shut up, starved, and treated as if his mind would be lost before his body healed. There was exaggeration in this, yet enough truth to make Caroline anxious. She praised Martin for having been good before and asked when he would be so good again.

He refused at first, or pretended to refuse. He said the former business had given him too much trouble and that he liked his ease. Caroline answered more boldly than usual that the thing must be done, because Robert wished to see her and she wished to see him. Martin fenced, delayed, and reminded her that his past help had been of his own free choice. She replied that he would help again all the same.

What pleases me here is that Caroline, gentle as she was, did not give way. She had been weakened by suffering, but not emptied of purpose. When Martin grew provoking, she did not melt into tears or apologies. She simply told him that if he would not help, she would manage without him. That answer pleased and irritated him together, which is often the best possible effect on natures like his.

Then she turned to go. She could not even keep the umbrella open against the wind, and she went off across the snow in haste and vexation. Martin watched her from the stile. He did not call her back. He preferred to study her, judge her, and enjoy his own power over the situation. He admitted now that she was not vapid, not shallow, and not weak. Any woman who would force her way through a Sunday storm for five minutes' speech with the man she loved had, in his eyes, at least the first claim to respect.

Yet respect alone did not satisfy him. He wanted repetition. He wanted her to come again and again. He even wanted to see how far she would go, what she would dare, whether he could make her cry, or draw her into anger, or bend her to pleading. The whole matter fascinated him because it showed him one human being thinking of another with a constancy beyond anything he had yet understood. It was new knowledge, and because it was new, he meant to play with it.

Having reached this conclusion, he finally rose and turned homeward. Hunger now reminded him that goose, apple-pie, and rice-pudding waited at Briarmains. The romance in his head did not prevent a very healthy appetite in his body. So he went down the snowy slope in good humor, thinking he had had a remarkably pleasant morning. He had been disappointed, angered, gratified, admired, resisted, and amused, all within a few hours, and to a spirit like Martin's that mixture was far better than peace.

Part 21

Martin had planned cleverly enough, but his little schemes were soon swept aside by a stronger will than his own. Robert Moore, once he began to recover, refused to remain a helpless patient at Briarmains. One day he dismissed Mrs. Horsfall from nursing duties, the next he insisted on dressing himself, and soon after he declared that he would return to the Hollow at once. Mrs. Yorke thought the move madness, but Mr. Yorke, who liked strength even when it was obstinate strength, helped him rather than hindered him.

Before leaving, Robert had to soften Mrs. Yorke, and he did it more successfully than many stronger men might have done. He bent over her, called himself her wilful son, and asked for a farewell embrace. That rough good woman, who had watched him with so much skill and care, could not resist him then. Even the little girls had to be kissed and soothed before he entered the chaise. Then he went back to Hollow's Cottage, weaker in body than before, yet in some inward way calmer.

At the garden gate he paused and thought over the change in himself. Earlier,

ruin in business had seemed to him almost the same as personal disgrace. Now he no longer thought so. Ruin was still an evil, but not a dishonor, and if it came, he believed he could still work like any other man and support himself honestly. That was not a small change in Robert. It showed that pain and danger had already done something which argument alone could never have done.

Once inside, he looked at the cottage with new eyes. The little parlor, once too narrow and plain for him, seemed bright, clean, and almost pleasant. He told Hortense he was glad to come home, a phrase she had never heard from him before. Then, after wandering a little about the room, he quietly steered the talk toward one practical desire. He wanted a guest that very evening, some quiet person who would tire neither himself nor his sister.

Hortense first proposed Miss Mann, then Miss Ainley, but Robert would have neither. At last he made her send to the rectory for Caroline. Sarah delayed tea, Harry Scott carried the note, and soon Caroline herself entered by the kitchen, trim, graceful, and fresh from the cold air. She paused to speak kindly to Sarah, to notice the kitten and the canary, and then came into the parlor as if she belonged there naturally. The sense of quiet pleasure that came with her was felt by all, but especially by Robert.

Hortense led the first part of the tea-table talk, praising Caroline's improved looks and health. She was right. Caroline no longer looked crushed, slow, and heart-sick as she had looked before. She seemed lighter, more elastic, and more quietly happy, and when Hortense at last went upstairs to her drawers, the change showed still more clearly. Left with Robert, Caroline talked with unusual ease and animation, and he, watching her closely, said she looked like one who had heard good news.

She answered that one source of her happiness was plain enough. She had found her mother and now lived in the daily warmth of that bond. She spoke of Mrs. Pryor with such open tenderness that Robert half jested that she almost made him jealous of "mamma." Yet he knew there was another cause too, and pressed her to name it. Then, little by little, the talk moved toward what neither of them could quite leave untouched.

Robert said at last that one day he must tell her something not at all to his credit. Caroline answered that she already knew much of it, or thought she did. When he drew her on, she confessed that she had learned, partly by instinct and partly from what Shirley had let fall during a long night's talk, that he had once asked Shirley to marry him and had been refused. Robert, instead of denying it, admitted the truth very plainly. He called the act mean and wrong, and did not try to wash it clean with fine excuses.

He even spoke more harshly of himself than Caroline wished to hear. He said he had been tempted by wealth, by advantage, and by the bright outside of a splendid offer, not by true love. Caroline would not let him dwell too long in self-contempt. She answered that people should judge others by the same measure they would wish used for themselves, and that she would give him no scorn, only affection. That word moved him strongly, and he had to quiet her when she began to tremble under the very feelings she wished to control.

The talk then turned again to Shirley, but now in a wholly different light. Robert still believed Shirley incapable of real love and perhaps unwilling ever to marry. Caroline at once opposed him. She said Shirley did love, and that sincerely. When Robert pressed her, she admitted that during their night-long talk she had discovered, not by direct confession, but by tone, look, and all that escaped in spite of pride, that Shirley's heart was already engaged. Robert asked who the man was, and Caroline enjoyed teasing him for a few minutes before she answered.

At last she whispered the name. It was not Sir Philip, nor Hall, nor any man of rank or outward show. It was Louis Moore. Robert started, laughed briefly in delighted surprise, and immediately saw the greatness of the truth. He had misread Shirley completely. He now had to confess not only that she had judged him rightly in rejecting him, but that she had fixed her heart where perhaps it had belonged for years. The knowledge pleased him more than it hurt him, because it set several confused things in order at once.

Before Caroline left, he whispered a few more words to her at the foot of the stairs. He asked whether he must now call Shirley noble and whether he must forgive her. Caroline answered that if he wished to speak truth, he must do both.

He then said something even more important. Whatever Shirley's beauty might be, he had no heart left to give her. There was no heart he could call his own in his breast. That was no open declaration yet, but it came very near one. Caroline understood enough to go home with fresh inward hope.

The next chapter opens at Fieldhead, where outward matters moved more smoothly than inward ones. Mr. Sympson and Shirley patched up a sort of peace after their fierce quarrel. Shirley, who could not bear to seem inhospitable, begged the whole family to stay a little longer, and begged it so earnestly that it was plain she had some private reason. They stayed, partly because she wished it, partly because her uncle still feared to leave her too free.

Louis, who had resigned in disgust after Mr. Sympson's coarse behavior, was persuaded to remain until the family should actually depart. Mrs. Sympson's entreaties helped, Henry's attachment helped too, but the strongest reason was elsewhere. Louis found it hard enough to leave Fieldhead at all, and impossible to do so while Shirley was still there. So the old arrangement continued outwardly, even though much had changed under the surface.

Shirley herself was transformed by relief. Once she had trusted Louis with her fear and once he had answered it with strength, the whole nervous misery caused by Phœbe's bite seemed to lose much of its power. Her spirits rose again. She became once more bright, careless, and full of life, almost like a child restored after dark illness. Yet in her relation with Louis, a new shyness had appeared, and this shyness made him at once happy and miserable.

He wrote of it afterward in the schoolroom, and his own words show his state better than any dry report could do. He watched her every movement, noticed every flush and silence, and rejoiced in signs that would have escaped another man. At the same time he was tortured by uncertainty. She withdrew from him in company, used formal names again, and seemed sometimes all reserve and wild freedom. He believed she loved him, yet he wanted certainty renewed every hour.

He therefore contrived chances of being alone with her and tried to read her heart more deeply. In one such schoolroom meeting he spoke first of his likely departure and of his dreams of freedom in the West. He painted to her, half in

earnest and half as trial, the figure of some poor orphan girl whom he might teach, guide, and finally marry. Shirley answered with pride and satire, mocking the very thought that he could so lightly dispose of himself. Their talk sharpened by degrees until each had touched the other in the sorest place.

Then came the turn. She moved to leave him, and he barred the door. He told her he had thrown off the tutor and now stood before her simply as a man and as a gentleman. He said plainly that for four years she had been growing into his heart, that he loved her with all his strength, and that he must know what answer she gave. Shirley tried at first to evade, then to jest, then to escape. None of these ways served her long.

At last she yielded enough to make the truth clear. She said the thing he wanted was already in his possession. When he pressed her still further, she gave him what he demanded, not with tame sweetness, but in her own proud and fiery fashion. She told him he might die without her if he chose, but if he dared, he might live for her. In that answer lay surrender and challenge both, and Louis took both. He claimed her on the spot with a joy that almost shook his self-command to pieces.

Yet even in the middle of rapture, the old worldly obstacle rose again. His poverty and her wealth stung him for one instant, and she instantly forbade him ever again to torment her with such scruples. Then she spoke in the true tone of her heart. She asked him not to lift from her all the duties of property and station, but to share them, guide her where she was ignorant, master her where she was faulty, and remain always her friend and companion. He promised that he would. Thus, in the schoolroom, their fate was finally sealed.

The Sympsons did go at last, though not before suspicion and explanation had nearly betrayed everything. Afterward Louis removed for a time to Stilbro' and took work with a professional friend, but he rode daily to Fieldhead. That did not satisfy him. Shirley, now his in truth, often seemed more shy, elusive, and difficult than before. He met her in moonlit halls, watched her glide like a pale spirit down the staircase, held her for brief moments in his arms, and begged her to fix the marriage day. She answered softly, escaped quickly, and left him divided between

happiness and torment. So these chapters bring matters much farther on than their title promises, though not yet quite to the end.

Part 22

Yes, I must now settle matters at last. I have no more long scenes to unfold, no more dark roads to follow, and no more hidden feelings to keep back from you. What remains is to tell, briefly and clearly, what became of the chief people whose lives have moved before us. Then you and I must part.

I will begin, as the original ending does, with the curates. It is only fair to remember them, though they have not always appeared at the noblest moments. First comes Malone, Peter Augustus himself, ready enough, no doubt, to push to the front and claim attention. But I will not pretend to tell his whole later story in plain detail. If I told it simply, many readers would refuse to believe it, and I have no wish to waste my last pages in arguments with disbelief.

Let Malone, then, stand a little aside, noisy as ever and still not improved enough to deserve a long farewell from me. I pass to Sweeting, who ends far better. He married Dora Sykes, the great and handsome daughter of the rich mill-owner, and in this case fortune, comfort, and kind feeling went together. He obtained a good living, she brought a handsome portion, and they settled into a long, easy, and respected married life. Their parish liked them, their friends liked them, and the world, which had once laughed at little Sweeting, found no fault with him in the end.

Donne too turned out better than one might once have expected. He married a small, sensible, quiet woman who did him more good than any lecture could have done. Domestic life steadied him. He never became large-minded, and I do not think he was ever meant to be great, but he became useful. He grew into an active parish priest and a much more tolerable man than the foolish, narrow, self-important young curate whom Caroline had once found so hard to bear.

As for the greater matters, they reached their close more happily than, at one time, I dared to hope. Robert recovered. Shirley fixed her day at last. Louis, after

all his patience, all his inward burning, and all his jealous happiness, was not kept waiting forever. The several lines that had so long crossed, checked, and troubled one another came at length into their true order.

Robert had once built proud and restless dreams for himself, dreams of trade, reform, growth, and success. Those dreams had been mixed with selfishness, and hardship had torn them often enough. Yet some of them survived in a sounder form. He had learned to value more than money, but he had not ceased to value honest work. He still wished to build, to employ, and to go forward; only now his plans included other human lives more truly than before.

Caroline, on her side, had passed through suffering enough to quiet forever any girlish illusions. She no longer stood where I first showed her, silent, shrinking, and half starved in heart. She had found her mother. She had found at last an answer to love. She had not become bold in any noisy way, but she had become steadier, deeper, and more equal to happiness. The tenderness in her was the same; the weakness in her was less.

I remember that Robert once spoke extravagantly of what he meant to do in the Hollow. He imagined cottages, gardens, work for the poor, schools supported by the mill, and a household in which Caroline, Shirley, and Miss Ainley would all take part in useful labor. At the time those hopes sounded partly like a day-dream spoken in the sweetness of recovered love. Yet some day-dreams are not wholly false. A few of his hopes, at least, came near enough to truth to deserve remembrance.

The great outward close came in August. The bells rang through Yorkshire again, and not Yorkshire only, but England, for the news had come from Spain that Salamanca was won. Briarfield was to be illuminated. The tenants at Fieldhead had a feast; the workers at Hollow's Mill had one too; and the schools were treated with unusual joy. On that same day, in Briarfield church, two marriages were solemnized. Louis Gérard Moore married Shirley Keeldar, and Robert Gérard Moore married Caroline Helstone.

In the first marriage, Mr. Helstone himself performed the ceremony, while Hiram Yorke gave Shirley away. In the second, Mr. Hall officiated. Even in this

arrangement there was a fitness I like. Helstone, who had once fenced so sharply with Shirley, stood at the altar for her. Hall, who had shown so much quiet goodness through the darker parts of the story, joined Robert and Caroline. Among the bridal party, the two young bridesmen who most drew the eye were Henry Sympson and Martin Yorke.

I do not say that all difficulties vanished after the weddings. Life does not work with such easy completeness. Shirley remained bright, proud, spirited, and not always easy to govern. Louis, for all his power over her, had enough to do. Robert still had ambition, impatience, and strong blood in him. Caroline still had a delicate nature. But these were now the difficulties of true union, not the torments of separation, mistake, and silence.

Some time after all this, I passed up the Hollow myself. Tradition says that place had once been green, solitary, and wild. I found it altered indeed. There stood the realized shape of Robert's industrial hopes: a great mill, a black road, cottages, gardens, and the solid marks of work done in brick, stone, and smoke. The old loneliness had gone. The valley had been taken into the modern world and made to serve it.

When I came home, I told my old housekeeper where I had been. She answered, in her old way, that this world is full of queer changes. She remembered the first old mill, then its fall, then the laying of the new foundation-stone. She remembered both Mr. Moores there, and their two wives too. She said Mrs. Louis had always looked the grander, dressed more richly, smiled more brightly, and had eyes that seemed to pierce one through. Mrs. Robert, she said, was quieter. In that old woman's simple contrast there was much truth.

I then asked what the Hollow had been like long before the mills and cottages. She told me it had once been full of oaks and nut trees, lonely and beautiful, and so full of old country wonder that her own mother had come home frightened one summer evening, saying she had seen a fairy in Fieldhead Hollow. That, she said, was the last fairy ever seen in the district, though such beings had been heard of much later. The place, in her mind, still belonged half to old legend and half to change.

I do not think that old memory and the new fact destroy each other. Both are true in their way. The green hollow changed. The fairy place became a place of labor, smoke, wages, cottages, and human plans. The wild old silence was broken. Yet what men build, suffer, hope for, and love in such places is no less real than what the old tales imagined there before them. The world changes, and still remains the world.

The story, then, is told. I will not force a moral upon you. If you wish to seek one, you may do so for yourself, and perhaps you will find more than one. You may find something about pride, or patience, or charity, or the use and misuse of power. You may find something about how slowly true knowledge comes between human hearts. I only wish you well in the search.