

CHAPTER XXI.

Melancholy meditations – An eventful walk – A pleasant breakfast –
A comfortable conversation in a closet.

The slumbers of Agnes that night were not heavy, for she waked while the birds were still singing their morning hymn to the sun, which poured its beams full upon her face through her uncurtained window. She turned restlessly upon her little bed, and tried to sleep again; but it would not do; and as she listened to the twittering without, so strong a desire seized her to leave the narrow boundary of her little closet, and breathe the air of heaven, that after the hesitation and struggle of a few moments she yielded, and noiselessly creeping out of bed, and performing the business of her toilet with the greatest caution, ventured to open the door communicating with her aunt's chamber, when she had the great satisfaction of hearing her snore loud enough to mask any sound she might herself make in passing through the room.

In like manner she successfully made her way down stairs and out of the house, and her heart beat with something like pleasure as she felt the sweet morning breeze blow from the downs upon her cheek. She walked towards the beautiful point on which the windmill stands; but, alas! she was no longer happy enough to feel that the landscape it commanded could confer that sort of perfect felicity which she had before thought belonged to it. She sat down again on the same spot where Mary, Lucy, James, and herself had sat before, but with how different a feeling! and yet it wanted one whole day of a week since that time. What new sorrow was it that weighed thus upon her spirits? ... The good-humoured liking that her new acquaintance then testified towards her, had since ripened into friendship ... at the ball of the preceding evening she had, in fashionable phrase, met with the most brilliant success ... she had danced every dance, and three of them with the partner that every lady in the room would best have liked to dance with; and yet there was a feeling of depression at her heart greater than she had ever been conscious of before. How was this? ... Could Agnes herself tell the cause of it? ... Yes, if she had asked herself, she could have answered, and have answered truly, that it was because she now knew that the better, the more estimable, the more amiable the society around her might be, the more earnestly she ought to endeavour to withdraw from it ... This conviction was enough to make her feel sad, and there was no need to seek farther in order to discover other sources of sadness, if any such there were, within her bosom.

And thus she sat, again pulling thyme from the hill-side; but it was no longer so sweet as before, and she threw it from her, like a child who has broken its toy, and just reached the sage conviction that its gaudy colouring was good for nothing. While indulging in this most unsatisfactory fit of musing, the sound of a horse's feet almost close behind startled her; but instead of turning her head to see

whom it might be, she started up, and walked onward. The horseman, however, was perhaps more curious than herself, for he immediately rode past her, nor scrupled to turn his head as he did so, to ascertain who the early wanderer might be.

But even before he had done so Agnes knew, by a moment's glance at his figure as he passed her, that it was Colonel Hubert.

He checked his horse, and touched his hat, and for half an instant Agnes thought he was going to speak to her: perhaps he thought so too; but if he did, he changed his mind, for looking about in the distance, as if reconnoitring his position, he pressed the sides of his horse and galloped on, a groom presently following.

Agnes breathed more freely. 'Thank God, he did not speak to me!' she exclaimed. 'If he had, I should have wanted power to answer him ... Never, no, never can I forget ... were I to see him every day to the end of my life, I should never forget the expression of his face as my aunt Barnaby ... and that dreadful man ... walked up the room towards the tea-table! ... no, nor the glance he gave, so full of vexation and regret, when his kind-hearted, sweet-tempered friend, asked me again to dance with him! ... Proud, disdainful man! I hope and trust that I never may behold him more! ... It is he who first taught me to know and feel how miserable is the future that awaits me!' This soliloquy, partly muttered and partly thought, was here interrupted by her once more hearing the sound of a horse's feet on the turf close behind her.

'He has turned back!' thought she, 'though I did not see him pass me. Oh! if he speaks to me, how shall I answer him!'

But again the horseman rode past, and another rapid glance showed her that this time it was not Colonel Hubert, nor did she trouble herself to think whom else it might be; and if she had, the labour would have been thrown away, for in this case, as before, the rider looked back, and displayed to her view the features of Major Allen.

He instantly stopped his horse, and jumped to the ground, then skilfully wheeling the animal round, placed himself between it and the terrified Agnes, and began walking beside her.

Her first impulse was to stand still, and ask him wherefore he thus approached her; but when she turned towards him to speak, the expression of his broad, audacious countenance, struck her with dismay, and she suddenly turned round, and walked rapidly and in silence back towards the windmill, and the buildings beyond it.

'Are you afraid of me, my charming young lady?' said the Major with a chuckle, again wheeling his charger so as to place himself beside Agnes ... 'No reason, upon my soul ... How is your adorable aunt? ... Tell her I inquired for her, and tell her too, upon the honour of an officer and a gentleman, that I consider her as by far the finest woman I ever saw ... But why do you run on so swiftly, my pretty little fawn? Your charming aunt will thank me, I am sure, for not letting

you put yourself in a fever;' and so saying his huge hand grasped the elbow of Agnes, and he held her forcibly back.

A feeling of terror, greater than the occasion called for perhaps, induced Agnes to utter a cry at again feeling this hateful gripe, which seemed as if by magic to bring her relief, for at the same moment Colonel Hubert was on the other side of her. Agnes looked up in his face with an undisguised expression of delight, and on his offering his arm she took it instantly, but without either of them having uttered a word.

There was something in the arrangement of the trio that Major Allen did not appear to approve, for having taken about three steps in advance, he suddenly stopped, and saying in a sort of blustering mutter, 'You will be pleased to give my best compliments to your aunt,' he sprung upon his horse so heedlessly as to render it probable both lady and gentleman might get a kick from the animal, and making it bound forward, darted off across the down.

Agnes gently withdrew her arm, and said, but in a voice not over steady, 'Indeed, sir, I am very much obliged to you!'

'I am glad to have been near you, Miss Willoughby, when that very insolent person addressed you,' said Colonel Hubert, but without making any second offer of his arm. And a moment after he added, 'Excuse me for telling you that you are imprudent in walking thus early and alone. Though Clifton on this side appears a rural sort of residence, it is not without some of the disagreeable features of a watering-place.'

'I have lived always in the country ... I had no idea there was any danger,' ... said Agnes, shocked to think how much her own childish imprudence must have strengthened Colonel Hubert's worst opinion of her and her connexions.

'Nor is there, perhaps, any actual danger,' replied the Colonel; 'but there are many things that may not exactly warrant that name, which nevertheless...'

'Would be very improper for me! ... Oh! it was great ignorance – great folly!' interrupted Agnes eagerly; 'and never, never again will I put myself in need of such kindness!'

'Has your aunt always lived with you in the country?' was a question which Colonel Hubert felt greatly disposed to ask, but, instead of it, he said, turning down from the windmill hill, 'You reside at Rodney Place, I believe, and, if I mistake not, this is the way.'

'No, sir ... we lodge in Sion Row ... It is here, close by ... Do not let me delay your ride any more ... I am very much obliged to you;' ... and without waiting for an answer, Agnes stepped rapidly down the steep side of the hill, and was half-way towards Sion Row before the Colonel felt quite sure of what he had intended to say in return.

'But it is no matter ... She is gone,' thought he, and taking his reins from the hand of his groom, he remounted, and resumed his morning ride.



Mrs. Barnaby had not quitted her bed when Agnes returned; but she was awake, and hearing some one enter the drawing-room, called out, 'Who's there?'

'It is I, aunt,' said Agnes, opening the door with flushed cheeks and out of breath, partly, perhaps, from the agitation occasioned by her adventure, and partly from the speed with which she had walked from the windmill home.

'And where on earth have you been already, child? Mercy on me, what a colour you have got! ... The ball has done you good as well as me, I think. There, get in and take your things off, and then come back and talk to me while I dress myself.'

Agnes went into her little room and shut the door. She really was very much afraid of her aunt, and in general obeyed her commands with the prompt obedience of a child who fears to be scolded if he make a moment's delay. But at this moment a feeling stronger than fear kept her within the blessed sanctuary of her solitary closet. She seemed gasping for want of air ... her aunt's room felt close after coming from the fresh breeze of the hill, and it was, therefore, as Agnes thought, that the sitting down alone beside her own open window seemed a luxury for which it was worth while to risk the sharpest reprimand that ever aunt gave ... But why, while she enjoyed it, did big tears chase each other down her cheeks?

Whatever the cause, the effect was salutary. She became composed, she recovered her breath, and her complexion faded to its usual delicate tint, or perhaps to a shade paler; and then she began to think that it was not wise to do anything for which she knew she should be reproached ... if she could help it ... and now she could help it; so she smoothed her chesnut tresses, bathed her eyes in water, and giving one deep sigh at leaving her own side of the door for that which belonged to her aunt, she came forth determined to bear very patiently whatever might be said to her.

Fortunately^a for Agnes Mrs. Barnaby had just approached that critical moment of her toilet business, when it was her especial will and pleasure to be alone; so, merely saying in a snappish accent, 'What in the world have you been about so long?' she added, 'Now get along into the drawing-room, and take care that the toast and my muffin are ready for me, and kept hot before the fire; - it's almost too hot for fire, but I must have my breakfast warm and comfortable, and we can let it out afterwards.'

Agnes most joyfully obeyed. It was a great relief, and she was meekly thankful for it; but she very nearly forgot the muffins and the toast, for the windows of the room were open, and looked out upon the windmill and the down, a view so pleasant that it was several minutes before she recollected the duties she had to perform. At last, however, she did recollect them, and made such good use of the time that remained, that when her aunt entered bright in carmine and lilac ribbons, everything was as it should be; and she had only to sit and listen to her

ecstatic encomiums on the ball, warm each successive piece of muffin at the end of a fork, and answer properly to the ten times repeated question, –

‘Hav’nt you got a good aunt, Agnes, to take you to such a ball as that?’

At length, however, the tedious meal was ended, and Mrs. Barnaby busied herself considerably more than usual in setting the little apartment in order. She made Jerningham carefully brush away the crumbs – a ceremony sometimes neglected – set out her own best pink-lined work-box in state, placed the table agreeably at one of the windows, with two or three chairs round it, and then told Agnes, that if she had any of her lesson-book work to do, she might sit in her own room, for she did not want her.

Gladly was the mandate obeyed, and willingly did she aid Betty Jacks in putting her tiny premises in order, for she was not without hope that her friend Mary would pay her a visit there to talk over the events of the evening; an occupation for which, to say the truth, she felt considerably more inclined than for any ‘lesson-book work’ whatever.

Nor was she disappointed ... hardly did she feel ready to receive her before her friend arrived.

‘And well, Carina,⁴⁷ how fares it with you to-day? Do you not feel almost too big for your little room after all the triumphs of last night?’ was the gay address of Miss Peters as she seated herself upon one of Agnes’s boxes. But it was not answered in the same tone; nay, there was much of reproof as well as sadness in the accent with which Agnes uttered, –

‘Triumphs! ... Oh! Mary, what a word!’

‘You are the only one, I believe, who would quarrel with it. Did ever a little country girl under seventeen make a more successful *début*?’⁴⁸

‘Did ever country girl of any age have more reason to feel that she never ought to make any *début* at all?’

‘My poor Agnes!’...said Miss Peters more gravely, ‘it will not do for you to feel so deeply the follies that may, and, I fear, ever will be committed by *your* aunt and *my* aunt Barnaby ... It is a sad, vexing business, beyond all doubt, that you should have to go into company with a woman determined to make herself so outrageously absurd; but it is not fair to remember that, and nothing else ... you should at least recollect also that the most distinguished man in the room paid you the compliment of joining your party at tea.’

‘Paid *me* the compliment! ... Oh! Mary.’

‘And oh! Agnes, can you pretend to doubt that it was in compliment to you? ... And in compliment to whom was it that he danced with you?’

‘He never danced with me, Mary,’ said Agnes, colouring.

‘My dear child, what are you talking about? Why, he danced with you three times.’

‘Oh yes ... Mr. Stephenson ... he is indeed the kindest, most obliging....’

'And the handsomest partner that you ever danced with ... Is it not so?'

'That may easily be, Mary, if by partner you mean a gentleman partner, for I never danced with any till last night; and it is only saying that he is handsomer than your brother and Mr. Osborne, and I think he is.'

'And I think so too, therefore on that point we shall not quarrel. But tell me, how did you like the ball altogether? ... Did it please you? ... Were you amused? ... Shall you be longing to go to another?'

'Let me answer your last question first ... I hope *never, never, never* again to go to a ball with my aunt Barnaby ... But had it not been for the pain, the shame, the agony she caused me, I should have liked it very much indeed ... particularly the tea-time, Mary ... How pleasant it was before she came with that horrid, horrid man! Shall you ever forget the sight as they came up the room towards us? ... Oh! how he looked at her!'

Agnes shuddered, and pressed her hands to her eyes, as if to shut out an object that she still saw.

'It was tremendous,' replied her friend: 'but don't worry yourself by thinking Mr. Stephenson looked at her just then, for he really did not. You know he was sitting at the corner of the table by me, and his back was turned to her, thank heaven! ... But I will tell you who did look at her, if Stephenson did not ... that magnificent-looking Colonel stared as if he had seen an apparition; but I did not mind that half so much, nor you either, I suppose ... An old soldier like him must be used to such a variety of quizzes, that nobody, I imagine, can appear so preposterous to him as they might do to his young friend ... By the by, I think he is a very fine-looking man for his age; don't you?'

'Who?' said Agnes innocently.

'Why,^a Colonel Hubert ... His sister, who is just married to Sir Edward Stephenson, is nearly twenty years younger than he is, they say.'

'Twenty years?' said Agnes.

'Yes^b ... Must it not be strange to see them together as brother and sister? ... he must seem so much more like her father.'

'Her father!' said Agnes.

'Yes,^c I should think so. But you do not talk half as much about the ball as I expected, Agnes: I think you were disappointed, and yet I do not know how that could be. You dance beautifully, and seem very fond of it; you had the best partners in the room, danced every dance, and were declared on all sides to be the *belle par excellence*, ... and yet you do not seem to have enjoyed it.'

'Oh! I did enjoy it all the time that she was out of the room playing cards; I enjoyed it very, very much indeed ... so much that I am surprised at myself to feel how soon all my painful shyness was forgotten ... But ... after all, Mary, though you call her *your* aunt Barnaby, as if to comfort me by sharing my sufferings, she is not really your aunt, and still less is she your sole protector ... still less is she the

being on whom you depend for your daily bread. Alas! my dear Mary, is there not more cause for surprise in my having enjoyed the ball so much, than in my not having enjoyed it more?’

‘My poor Agnes, this is sad indeed,’ said Mary, all her gaiety vanishing at once, ‘for it is true. Do not think me indifferent to your most just sorrow ... Would to Heaven I could do anything effectually to alleviate it! But while you are here, at least, endeavour to think more of us, and less of her. Wherever you are known, you will be respected for your own sake; and that is worth all other respect, depend upon it. When you leave us, indeed, I shall be very anxious for you. Tell me, dear Agnes, something more about your aunt Compton. Is it quite impossible that you should be placed under her protection?’

‘Oh yes! ... She would not hear of it. She paid for my education, and all my other expenses, during five years; and my aunt Barnaby says, that when she undertook to do this, she expressly said that it was all she could ever do for me. They say that she has ruined her little fortune by lavish and indiscriminate charity to the poor, and aunt Barnaby says that she believes she has hardly enough left to keep herself alive. But I sometimes think, Mary, that I could be very happy if she would let me work for her, and help her, and perhaps give lessons in Silverton ... I know some things already well enough, perhaps, to teach in such a remote place as that, when better masters cannot be procured; and I should be so happy in doing this ... if aunt Compton would but let me live with her.’

‘Then why do you not tell her so, Agnes?’

‘Because the last – the only time I have seen her for years, though she kissed and embraced me for a moment, she pushed me from her afterwards, and said I was only more artful than aunt Barnaby, and that I should never be either graced or disgraced by her ... those were her words, I shall never forget them ... and she has the reputation of being immoveably obstinate in her resolves.’

‘That does not look very promising, I must confess. But wisdom tells us that the possibility of future sorrow should never prevent our enjoying present happiness. Now, I do think, dear Agnes, that just now you may enjoy yourself, if you like us as well as we like you, ... for we are all determined to endure aunt Barnaby for your sake, and in return you must resolve to be happy in spite of her for ours. And now adieu! ... I want to have some talk with mamma this morning; but I dare say you will hear from me, or see me again, before the end of the day. Farewell!’ ... And Miss Peters made a quiet exit from the closet and from the house; for she had heard voices in the drawing-room as she came up the stairs, and now heard voices in the drawing-room as she went down; and having business in her head upon which she was exceedingly intent, she was anxious to avoid being seen or heard by Mrs. Barnaby, lest she should be detained.

CHAPTER XXII.

A tête-a-tête in a drawing-room – Autobiography – A remarkable discovery concerning the Duke of Wellington.

The voices which alarmed Miss Peters were those of Mrs. Barnaby and Major Allen. The acquaintance between them had gone quite far enough on the preceding evening to justify the gentleman's *aimable empressement*⁴⁸ to inquire for the lady's health; besides, he was somewhat curious to know if the pretty, skit-tish young creature he had encountered in his morning's ride, had recounted the adventure to her aunt. It was his private opinion that she had not; and if so, he should know what to think of the sudden appearance and protecting demeanour of her tall friend. It was thus he reasoned as he walked towards Sion Row as soon as he had finished his breakfast; and yet, though he had lost so little time, he did not arrive till at least three minutes after the widow had begun to expect him.

'I need not ask my charming Mrs. Barnaby how she rested after her ball ... eyes do not sparkle thus, unless they have been blessed with sleep;' ... and the lady's hand was taken, bowed upon, and the tips of her fingers kissed, before she had quite recovered the soft embarrassment his entrance had occasioned.

'You are very kind to call upon me, Major Allen ... Do sit down ... I live as yet comparatively in great retirement; for during Mr. Barnaby's lifetime we saw an immense deal of company, – that old-fashioned sort of country visiting, you know, that never leaves one's house empty ... I could not stand it when I was left alone ... and that was the reason I left my beautiful place.'

'Siverton or Silverton Park, was it not? ... I think I have heard of it.'

'Yes, Silverton ... And do you know, Major, that the remembrance of all that racket and gaiety was so oppressive to my nerves during the first months of my widowhood, that I threw off everything that reminded me of it ... sold my carriages and horses, let my place, turned off all my servants; and positively, when I set off for this place in order to see my sister Peters and her family, I knew not if I should ever have strength or spirits to enter into general society again.'

'Thank God, dearest madam, that you have made the effort! ... Though the hardened and war-worn nature of man cannot melt with all the softness of yours, there is yet within us a chord that may be made to vibrate in sympathy when words of true feeling⁴⁹ reach it! How well I understood your feelings ... and how difficult it is not to envy, even in death, the being who has left such a remembrance behind! ... But we must not dwell on this ... Tell me, dear Mrs. Barnaby, tell, – as to a friend who understands and appreciates you, – do you regret the having left your elegant retirement? ... or do you feel, as I trust you do, that Providence has not gifted you so singularly for nothing? ... do you feel that your fellow-creatures have a claim upon you, and that it ought not to be in

secret and in solitude that the hours of such a being should be spent? Tell me, do you feel this?

'Alas! Major Allen, there is so much weakness in the heart of a woman, that she is hardly sure for many days together how she ought to feel ... We are all impulse, all soul, all sentiment, ... and our destiny must ever depend upon the friends we meet in our passage through this thorny world!'

'Beautiful idea! ... Where is the poet that has more sweetly painted the female heart? ... And what a study it offers when such a heart is thrown open to one! Good God! to see a creature so formed for enjoyment, – so beaming with innocent cheerfulness, – so rich in the power of conferring happiness wherever she deigns to smile, ... to see such a being turn weeping and alone from her hospitable halls, and from all the pomp and splendour that others cling to ... what a spectacle!⁵⁰ Have you no lingering regret, dearest lady, for having left your charming mansion?'

'Perhaps there are moments ... or rather, I should say, perhaps there have been moments, when something of the kind has crossed me. But if I had not disposed of my place, I should never have seen Clifton ... My spirits wanted the change, and I feel already better in this delightful air. But I confess I do regret having sold my beautiful greys, ... I shall never meet any I like so well again.'

'A set, were they?'

'Oh^a yes.'

'Four greys ... and all well matched?'

'Perfectly^b ... Poor Mr. Barnaby took so much pains about it ... It was his delight to please me ... I ought not to have sold them.'

'It was a pity,' ... said the kind Major with a sigh.

'Don't talk about it, Major Allen!' and here one of the widow's most curiously embroidered pocket-handkerchiefs, delightfully scented with musk, was lightly and carefully applied to her eyes.

'Nay,' said the Major, venturing gently to withdraw it, 'you must not yield to this dangerous softness ... I cannot bear to have those eyes concealed! ... it produces the chilling sensation of an eclipse at noon-day ... I shall run away from you if you will not look at me.'

'No, do not,' ... said the widow, making an effort to smile, which was rewarded by a look of gratitude, and a seemingly involuntary kiss bestowed upon the hand that had withdrawn the envious handkerchief.

'And that pretty little girl, your niece, Mrs. Barnaby,' ... said the Major, as if considerably changing the conversation; 'how is she this morning?'

'Oh! quite well, poor child, and in my dressing-room, going over her Italian and French lessons before she does them with me.'

'Good Heaven! ... Is it possible that you devote yourself thus? ... Take care, charming Mrs. Barnaby ... take care that you do not permit your affectionate

nature to form an attachment to that young person which may destroy all your future prospects in life! ... At your age, and with your exquisite beauty, you ought to be looking forward to the renewal of the tender tie that has already made your happiness; ... And who is there...pardon me if I speak boldly...who is there who would venture to give his whole heart, his soul, his entire existence to one who has no heart to give in return? Think you, Mrs. Barnaby, that it can be in the power of any niece in the world to atone to a woman of your exquisite sensibility for the loss of that ardent affection which can only exist between a husband and wife? ... Tell me, do you believe this?’

‘It is a question,’ replied the widow, casting her eyes upon the ground, ‘that I have never asked myself.’

‘Then neglect it no longer ... For God’s sake – for the sake of your future happiness, which must be so inexpressibly dear to all who know you ... all who appreciate you justly ... for the sake of the young girl herself, do not involve yourself by undertaking the duties of a mother towards one who from her age could never have stood to you in the relation of a child.’

‘Alas! no,’ said Mrs. Barnaby; ‘I lost my only babe a few weeks before its father ... Had it lived, it would this spring have been three years old! ... You say true ... the age of Agnes must ever prevent my feeling for her as a child of my own ... My poor sister was indeed so much older than myself, that I always rather looked upon her as an aunt, or as a mother, than as my sister.’

‘Of course you must have done so; and, interesting and inexpressibly touching as it is to witness your beautiful tenderness towards her child, it is impossible not to feel that this tenderness carried too far will inevitably destroy the future happiness of your life. Forgive, I implore you, a frankness that can only proceed from my deep interest in your welfare ... Is this young person entirely dependent upon you?’

‘At this moment she is; but she will be provided for at the death of her great-aunt, Mrs. Elizabeth Compton of Compton Basett;...and to say the truth, Major Allen, as you so kindly interest yourself in what concerns me, I neither do nor ever shall consider myself bound to retain Agnes Willoughby in my family, under any circumstances that should render her being so inconvenient.’

‘I delight in receiving such an assurance ... dear, excellent Mrs. Barnaby! ... What a heart! ... what an understanding! ... what beauty! ... what unequalled sweetness! No wonder the late Mr. Barnaby delighted, as you say, to please you! “Lives there the man,” as the immortal Byron says – “Lives there the man with soul so dead,”⁵¹ as to be capable of doing otherwise? ... But to return to the subject of this poor little girl ... she might be termed pretty, perhaps, in any society but yours ... Tell me, is this Mrs. Compton, of Compton Basett, wealthy? ... Is she also a relation of yours?’

‘Yes, she is immensely wealthy ... It is a magnificent estate. She is a maiden sister of my father’s.’

‘Then Miss Willoughby will eventually be a great fortune? How old is your aunt?’

‘My aunt is near sixty, I believe, ... but the provision intended for Agnes is only sufficient to maintain her like a gentlewoman. The bulk of the property is settled on me and my heirs.’

‘I fear you will think me an unseasonable visiter,’ said the fully-satisfied Major, rising, ‘and I will go now, lest you should refuse to admit me again.’

‘Do not go yet,’...said the gentle widow, playfully refusing the hand extended to take leave. ‘What in the world now have you got to do, that should prevent your bestowing a little more time on me?’

‘It would be difficult, Mrs. Barnaby,’ said the Major with an eloquent look, ‘to find any occupation sufficiently attractive to take me from you, so long as I dared flatter myself that it was your wish I should remain.’

‘Well, then ... sit down again, Major Allen ... for do you know, I want you to tell me all about yourself ... Where have you served? – what dangers have you passed through? You have no idea how much interest I should take in listening to the history of your past life.’

‘My sweet friend! ... Never should I have entered upon such a subject unbidden ... yet with such an auditor, how dear will the privilege become of talking of myself! ... But you must check me, if I push your gentle patience too far. Tell me when you are weary of me ... or of my little narrative.’

‘I will, I will ... depend upon it, ... only do not stop till I do, Major.’

‘Adorable sweetness! ... Thus, then, I am to be my own biographer, and to a listener whose opinion would, in my estimation, outweigh that of all the congregated world, if placed in judgment on my actions. It is probable, my charming friend, that my name as Ensign Allen may not be totally unknown to you ... It was while I still held that humble rank, that I was first fortunate enough to distinguish myself. In an affair of some importance in the Peninsula,⁵² I turned what might have been a very disastrous defeat into a most complete victory, and was immediately promoted to a company. Shortly after this I chanced to shew the same sort of spirit, which was, I believe, born with me, in a transaction nowise professional, but which, nevertheless, made me favourably mentioned, and certainly contributed to bring me into the rather general notice with which Europe at present honours me ... Yet it was merely an affair with a party of brigands, in which I put seven fellows *hors de combat*,⁵³ and thereby enabled that celebrated grandee, the Duke d’Almafonte d’Aragona d’Astrada, to escape, together with his beautiful daughter, and all their jewels. The service might have been, I own, of considerable importance to them, but the gratitude it produced in the minds of both father and daughter, greatly exceeded what was called for ... he offered me ... so widely separated as we now are, there can be no indelicacy in my confiding the circumstance to you, my dear Mrs. Barnaby, but ... the fact is, he offered me

his only daughter in marriage, with an immense fortune. But, alas! how capricious is the human will! ... my hour, my dear friend, was not yet come ... I felt, beautiful as Isabella d'Almafonte was accounted by all the world, that I could not give her my heart, and I performed the painful duty of refusing her hand. Nothing, however, could be more noble than the subsequent conduct of the duke, ... at the first painful moment he only said ... 'Captain Allen, we must submit' ... of course he said it in Spanish, but it would look like affectation, in such a narrative as this, were I not to translate it ... '*Capitano Alleno, bisogno submit-tajo nos,*' were his words ... I am sure I shall never forget them, for they touched me to the very heart ... I could not speak, my feelings choked me, and I left his palace in silence. Five years had elapsed, and I had perhaps too nearly forgotten the lovely but unfortunate Isabella d'Almafonte, when I received a packet from a notary of Madrid, informing me that her illustrious father was dead, and had gratefully bequeathed me a legacy, amounting in English money to thirty thousand pounds sterling. I was by that time already in possession of the estates of my ancestors, and such a sum might have appeared a very useless bagatelle,⁵⁴ had not an accident rendered it at that time of really important convenience.'

'Good heaven! how interesting!' exclaimed Mrs. Barnaby. 'And what, dear Major, became of the unfortunate Isabella?'

'She took the veil, Mrs. Barnaby, in the convent de Los Ceurores Dolentes,⁵⁵ within a few months of her noble father's death ... Before this event she had not the power of disposing of herself as she wished; ... but her excellent father never tortured her by the proposal of any other marriage....'

'Admirable man!' cried Mrs. Barnaby, greatly touched. 'Dear Major Allen!' she added, in a voice that seemed to deprecate opposition, 'you must, indeed you must, do me an immense favour. When Mrs. Peters took me to Bristol in her coach the other day, I bought myself this album; it has got nothing in it as yet but my own name; now, if you do not wish to break my heart, you must write the name of Isabella d'Almafonte in this first page ... it will be an autograph inexpressibly interesting!'

The Major took the book and the pen that were offered by the two hands of Mrs. Barnaby, and said with a profound sigh, –

'Break your heart! ... I should never have broken the heart of any woman, if what she asked had been seconded by such eyes as those!'

A silence of some moments followed, a part of which was employed by the Major in writing the name of Isabella d'Almafonte, and a part in gazing on the downcast lids of the admired eyes opposite to him; but this too trying interval ended at length by the lady's recovering herself enough to say, 'And that accident, Major Allen, that made the duke's little legacy convenient to you? ... what was it? ... Do not have any reserve with one whom you have honoured by the name of friend!'

‘Reserve to you! ... never! ... While you continue to admit me to your presence, all reserve on my part must be impossible. The accident was this, my friend; and I am not sorry to name it, as it gives me an opportunity of alluding to a subject that I would rather you heard mentioned by me than by any other. After the battle of Waterloo⁵⁶ – (concerning which, by the by, I should like to tell you an anecdote) – after the battle of Waterloo, I became, in common with nearly all the officers of the army, an idle man; and like too many others, I was tempted to seek a substitute for the excitement produced by the military ardour in which I had lived, by indulging in the pernicious agitations of the gaming-table. It is very likely, that if you speak of me in general society, you will be told that I have played high ... My dear Mrs. Barnaby, this is true. My large fortune gave me, as I foolishly imagined, a sort of right to play high if it amused me, and for a little while, I confess, it did amuse me;...but I soon found that a gentleman was no match for those who made gambling a profession, and I lost largely, – so largely, indeed, that I must have saddled my acres with a mortgage, had not the legacy of the Duke d’Almafonte d’Aragona d’Estrada⁵⁷ reached me just in time to prevent the necessity.’

‘I rejoice to hear it,’ replied the widow kindly; ‘and you have never hazarded so largely since, dear Major, have you?’

‘Oh! never ... In fact, I never enter a room now where anything^a like high play is going on ... I cannot bear even to see it, and I believe I have in this way offended many who still permit themselves this hateful indulgence; offended them, indeed, to such a degree, that they perfectly hate me, and utter the most virulent abuse every time they hear my name mentioned;...but for this I care little: I know I am right, Mrs. Barnaby, and that what loses their friendship and esteem, may be the means of gaining for me the regard of those, perhaps, on whom my whole happiness may depend during my future life.’

The same dangerous sort of silence as before seemed creeping on them; but again the widow had the courage to break it, by recalling to the memory of her musing and greatly pre-occupied companion the anecdote respecting Waterloo which he had promised her.

‘Waterloo!’ said he, rousing himself ... ‘Ay, dearest Mrs. Barnaby, I *will* tell you that, though there are many reasons which render me very averse to speak of it lightly. In the first place, by those who know me not, it might be thought to look like boasting; and, moreover, if I alluded to it in any society capable of the baseness of repeating what I said, it might bring upon me very active, and indeed fatal, proofs of the dislike – I may say hatred – already felt against me in a certain quarter.’

‘Gracious heaven, Major! ... be careful then, I implore you, before whom you speak! There appear to be many strangers here, of whose characters it is impossible to know anything ... If you have enemies, they may be spies expressly sent to watch you.’

'I sometimes think so, I assure you ... I catch such singular looks occasionally, as nothing else can account for; and the enemy I allude to is one who has power, as well as will, to punish by evil reports, if he cannot positively crush and ruin, those who interfere with his ambition.'

'Is it possible? Thank heaven! at least you can have no doubt of me ... So, tell me, I beseech you to tell me, to whom is it that your alarming words refer?'

The Major drew his chair close to Mrs. Barnaby, took one of her hands between both of his, and having gazed for a moment very earnestly in her face, whispered, –

'The Duke of Wellington!'⁵⁸

'Good God!' ... exclaimed the widow, quite in an agony: 'the Duke of Wellington! Is the Duke of Wellington your enemy, Major Allen?'

'To the teeth, my fairest! to the teeth!' replied the Major, firmly setting the instruments he mentioned, and muttering through them with an appearance of concentrated rage, the outward demonstration of which was increased by the firmness of the grasp in which he continued to hold her hand.

'But how can this be so?' faltered Mrs. Barnaby ... 'So brave a man as you! ... one, too, who had distinguished himself so early! How can he be so base?'

'How can he be otherwise, my friend?' replied the Major with increasing agitation, 'when'...and here he lowered his voice still more, whispering almost in her very ear, 'it is I – I, – Ferdinand Alexander Allen, who ought by right to be the Duke of Wellington, instead of him who now wears the title!'

'You astonish me more than I am able to express!'^a

'Of course I do ... Such, however, is the fact. The battle of Waterloo would have been lost, – was lost, positively lost, – till I, disdainful in such a moment to receive orders from one whom I perceived to be incompetent, rushed forward, almost knocking the Duke off his horse as I did so ... sent back the French army like a flock of sheep before an advancing lion ... seized with my own hand on the cocked hat of Napoleon ... drew it from his head, and actually flogged his horse with it till horse and rider together seemed well enough inclined to make the best of their way out of my reach ... God bless you, my dearest lady! the Duke of Wellington had no more to do in gaining the battle of Waterloo than you had ... I now leave you to judge what his feelings towards me are likely to be.'

'Full of envy and hatred, beyond all doubt!' solemnly replied Mrs. Barnaby; 'and I will not deny, Major Allen, that I think there is great danger in your situation. A person of such influence may do great injury, even to a man of your well-known noble character. But how extraordinary it is that no hint of this has ever transpired.'

'I beg your pardon, my dear madam; this is very far from being the case. At your peaceful residence beneath the shades of Silverton Park, it is highly probable that you may have remained ignorant of the fact; but, in truth, the Duke's

reputation among the people of England has suffered greatly; though no one, indeed, has yet proposed that his sword should be taken from him. The well-known circumstance of stones having been thrown at his windows⁵⁹ ... a fact which probably has never reached you ... is quite sufficient to prove that the people must be aware that what the English army did at Waterloo, was not done under his generalship ... No, no, England knows too well what she owed to that victory so to treat the general who achieved it; and had they not felt doubts as to who that general was, no stones would have been levelled at Apsley House.⁶⁰ Many of the common soldiers – fine fellows! – have been bold enough to name me, and it is this that has so enraged the Duke, that there is nothing which he has not taught his emissaries to say against me ... I have been called swindler, black-leg, radical, horse-jockey, and I know not what beside; and I should not wonder, my charming friend, if sooner or later your friendship were put to the proof, by having to listen to similar calumnies against me; but now, you will be able to understand them aright, and know the source from whence they come.’

‘Well, I never did hear anything so abominable in my life!’ said Mrs. Barnaby warmly ... ‘Not content with taking credit to himself for all that was gained by your extraordinary bravery, he has the baseness to attack your character! ... It is too detestable! ... and I only hope, that when I get among my own connexions in town, I shall not have the misfortune of meeting him often ... I am certain I should not be able to resist saying something to shew what I thought. Oh! if he were really the brave man that he has been fancied to be, how he must have adored you for your undaunted courage! ... And you really took Napoleon’s hat off his head? ... How excessively brave! ... I wish I could have seen it, Major! ... I am sure I should have worshipped you I do so doat upon bravery!’

‘Sweet creature! ... That devoted love of courage is one of the loveliest propensities of the female mind. Yes, I am brave – I do not scruple to say so; and the idea that this quality is dear to you, will strengthen it in me four-fold ... But, my dear, my lovely friend! I must bid you adieu. I expect the steward, of my property in Yorkshire to-day, and I rather think he must be waiting for me now ... Soften, then, the pain of this parting, by telling me that I may come again!’

‘I should be sorry indeed to think this was our last meeting, Major Allen,’ said the widow gently; ‘I am seldom out in the morning before the hour at which you called to-day.’

‘Farewell then!’ said he, kissing her hand with an air of mixed tenderness and respect, ‘farewell! ... and remember that all I have breathed into your friendly ear must be sacred; ... but I know it would be so without this injunction; Mrs. Barnaby’s majestic beauty conceals not the paltry spirit of a gossip!’

‘Indeed you are right! ... indeed you are right! ... To my feelings the communications of a friend are sweet, solemn pledges of regard, that it would be sacrilege to violate. Farewell, Major!^a – farewell!’

would have been played for a few shillings, at a club, half-crowns and crowns were a rich stake and this what he has in mind.

41. *rubber*: the best of three games of whist.
42. *enjouement*: French: cheerfulness, enjoyment.
43. *comme il faut*: French: properly.
44. *par impossible*: French: the impossible.
45. *Bacchante when tossing her cymbals in the air*: a priestess or female votary of Bacchus at a revel.
46. *habile*: French: clever.
47. *Carina*: Italian: dear, pretty one.
48. *aimable empressement*: pleasant readiness.
49. *vibrate in sympathy ... true feeling*: Trollope may be alluding to Samuel Taylor Coleridge's courtship poem, 'The Aeolian Harp' (1796).
50. *deigns to smile ... what a spectacle*: see Soame Jenyns's satiric poem, 'The Modern Fine Lady' (1751).
51. *as the immortal Byron says ... so dead*: Lord Byron (1788–1824) was an English poet who earned a scandalous reputation for his personal sexual relations and, equally shocking, his radical political leanings. In fact, Major Allen is quoting Walter Scott's poem, 'The Lay of the Last Minstrel', which begins 'Breathes there the man with soul so dead' (VI.i.1), directly referencing Persius's *Satires*: 'Lives there the man with soul so dead as to disown the wish to merit the people's applause, and having uttered words worthy to be kept in cedar oil to latest times, to leave behind him rhymes that dread neither herrings nor frankincense' (I.41).
52. *the Peninsula*: The Peninsular War (1807–14), so called because it was contained to the Iberian peninsula, was one of the key areas of conflict during the Napoleonic wars. Napoleon attempted to invade Portugal in 1807, the only country that would still openly accept British imports. The Peninsular campaign was to prove the forging ground for the British Army, the one front where the British won victories against Imperial France. For the French it became the 'Spanish ulcer' as Napoleon called it, draining resources both in troops and money.
53. *hors de combat*: French: incapacitated.
54. *bagatelle*: trifle.
55. *Los Ceurores Dolentes*: Spanish: literally, the grieving or doleful sisters.
56. *the battle of Waterloo*: a definitive battle in the Napoleonic War. Fought on 18 June 1815, in Waterloo (now in modern-day Belgium), the British and coalition forces under the command of the Duke of Wellington defeated the French under Napoleon's command.
57. *d'Estrada*: earlier 'd'Astrada.' This difference occurs in the 1857 edition as well. Thus, we must conclude it is the Major's error and a sign that the story is made up.
58. *The Duke of Wellington*: Arthur Wellesley, the first Duke of Wellington (1769–1852). His reputation in the period was exemplary as a soldier-statesman and less stellar as a politician. He served with distinction in the Peninsular Wars, the Netherlands and India. He was twice a Tory Prime Minister (1828–30; 1834); he remained Commander-in-Chief of the British Army until his death in 1852.
59. *stones ... at his windows*: The Duke was not a great prime minister. Unable to satisfactorily address the economic crises of the time, whenever the Duke appeared, a London mob would shout: 'No heroes! We want no heroes!' They threw stones through the windows of his residence, Apsley House. He had the windows boarded up but refused to replace the glass, leaving them as a reminder of how volatile popularity could be. The throwing