

# **Carding–Mill Valley**

Rosa Mackenzie Kettle

# Table of Contents

<b><u>Carding–Mill Valley</u></b> .....	<b>1</b>
<u>Rosa Mackenzie Kettle</u> .....	1
<u>Chapter 1</u> .....	2
<u>Chapter 2</u> .....	8
<u>Chapter 3</u> .....	12
<u>Chapter 4</u> .....	14
<u>Chapter 5</u> .....	18
<u>Chapter 6</u> .....	21
<u>Chapter 7</u> .....	24
<u>Chapter 8</u> .....	26
<u>Chapter 9</u> .....	29
<u>Chapter 10</u> .....	33
<u>Chapter 11</u> .....	36
<u>Chapter 12</u> .....	38
<u>Chapter 13</u> .....	42
<u>Chapter 14</u> .....	45
<u>Chapter 15</u> .....	47
<u>Chapter 16</u> .....	51
<u>Chapter 17</u> .....	53
<u>Chapter 18</u> .....	58
<u>Chapter 19</u> .....	60
<u>Chapter 20</u> .....	63
<u>Chapter 21</u> .....	66
<u>Chapter 22</u> .....	69
<u>Chapter 23</u> .....	74
<u>Chapter 24</u> .....	79
<u>Chapter 25</u> .....	82
<u>Chapter 26</u> .....	85
<u>Chapter 27</u> .....	89
<u>Chapter 28</u> .....	92
<u>Chapter 29</u> .....	96
<u>Chapter 30</u> .....	99
<u>Chapter 31</u> .....	103
<u>Chapter 32</u> .....	108
<u>Chapter 33</u> .....	112
<u>Chapter 34</u> .....	115
<u>Chapter 35</u> .....	118
<u>Chapter 36</u> .....	121
<u>Chapter 37</u> .....	124

# Carding–Mill Valley

Rosa Mackenzie Kettle

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- [Chapter 1.](#)
- [Chapter 2.](#)
- [Chapter 3.](#)
- [Chapter 4.](#)
- [Chapter 5.](#)
- [Chapter 6.](#)
- [Chapter 7.](#)
- [Chapter 8.](#)
- [Chapter 9.](#)
- [Chapter 10.](#)
- [Chapter 11.](#)
- [Chapter 12.](#)
- [Chapter 13.](#)
- [Chapter 14.](#)
- [Chapter 15.](#)
- [Chapter 16.](#)
- [Chapter 17.](#)
- [Chapter 18.](#)
- [Chapter 19.](#)
- [Chapter 20.](#)
- [Chapter 21.](#)
- [Chapter 22.](#)
- [Chapter 23.](#)
- [Chapter 24.](#)
- [Chapter 25.](#)
- [Chapter 26.](#)
- [Chapter 27.](#)
- [Chapter 28.](#)
- [Chapter 29.](#)
- [Chapter 30.](#)
- [Chapter 31.](#)
- [Chapter 32.](#)
- [Chapter 33.](#)
- [Chapter 34.](#)
- [Chapter 35.](#)
- [Chapter 36.](#)
- [Chapter 37.](#)

## Chapter 1.

O'ertaken,  
As by some spell divine  
Your cares fall from you, like the needles shaken  
From out the gusty pine.

Among the ancient British hills, not far from the Welsh Border, lies a lone tract of very romantic, almost mountainous country. Those who have looked down often on continental *moraines*, where arrowy rivers and rushing torrents sweep past, bringing with them all kinds of *débris*, will be reminded, in miniature, of scenes near the sources of mighty streams; even though it is only a brook that trickles between dark heaving slopes of heath; or that spreads itself out into shallow pools, blue with forget–me–nots growing among pebbles, and peeping out of the glancing water.

Be ye going to the Mountains? is the reply given by some passing shepherd if you ask your way; and, although these ancient heights do not rival Alps or Apennines, the traveller who has seen both and many other grand acclivities does not find fault with the term.

This winding vale is not so far away from the haunts of men as might be supposed when you have followed its intricacies for some distance. Children from old–fashioned houses and cottages in a straggling street, gather the flowers and water–cresses and paddle in the shallow water–course. Sheep are washed in the deep pool under the alders, and the trees of a noble domain, fringe the heights overlooking the entrance to the gorge.

But it is wild enough farther on. There, men have wandered despairingly, in danger of their lives, on snowy nights of gusty winter; warned, only just in time, by the sudden dash of the rivulet over a stony ledge, that they were on the verge of a precipice. Wide, inhospitable moors stretch away, with deep pits underlying their treacherous surface; while rugged cart–tracks and rough steep bridle–roads alone unite the little hamlets and solitary farms. The small town at the entrance of the Carding–Mill Valley is the capital of this secluded, beautiful wilderness.

At the end of its one long street overlooked by the tower of the Church, the houses form an irregular square, one side of which is partially open, excepting where a jutting ledge of rock starts forward as if on purpose to shut out the view. It does not, however, impede the advance of the traveller, for there is a wide path carried round the natural ledge of stone which forms a seat. Here the irrepressible children congregate, and almost equally numerous, and much bolder, large white pigs, sometimes seem holding a conclave. Only a few paces farther on the houses are lost to sight behind this stony promontory; and you are, or seem to be, alone with Nature. There, yes, there are the Mountains! you involuntarily exclaim. You cannot call them by any other name! Taking every casual tint of the atmosphere, peaked, crenellated, battlemented, storm–defiant, those rugged, weather–beaten summits command the smiling wooded ridges, pleasant field pathways, and emerald–green water–meadows, which surround the primitive dwellings of the children of the soil.

The last house in what would be called in the West of England the Church Town, to distinguish it from one or two other clusters of buildings, previously passed, turned its front quite away from the streets and towards the hills, receiving shelter from the jutting promontory which hid the view from other dwellings. On the opposite side of the white winding road a darkly wooded slope terminated at but a short distance, where the stone piers of a lofty entrance gateway marked the commencement of a very shadowy avenue. No building was visible, the mansion being approached by long wooded drives from each end of the village, and lying far back under the hills which gently folded round it.

High above these home–woods and smiling hills rose the peaks and cones of what the country people invariably designated as The Mountains. Their wild jagged outlines deserved the name, though perhaps they might be

## Carding–Mill Valley

more correctly called Moor–land Heights. Still, as the provincial appellation suited them well, we shall often use it. An opening in the lower chain of hills gave the cottage at the end of the street a prospect few English dwellings possess of these storm–rent acclivities. The slanting rays of the sun as it sank behind heavy clouds gave majesty to the view. Darkly grey against the amber sunset frowned the Mountains purple in the deeper shadows gold–flecked where salient angles caught the light.

Miss Derinzy's residence, except in situation, differed very little from other houses in the street, many of them being pleasantly set in the midst of gardens, shadowed by trees, thatched, and individualized by various ornamental appendages, in the shape of gables, verandas, and bay or bow windows. Indeed, it was much plainer than some villas or cottages of gentility belonging to the doctor's, the lawyer's, and several other respectable families. The windows were only sheltered and shaded by the deep projection of the thatch. Just now the small diamond–paned casements glittered in the low sunrays. A long row of beehives was ranged against the sunny south fence, and the entrance was straight from the little garden in front through a porch which was thatched, and in shape very much resembled the beehives.

All the rooms which the cottage contained were on one floor. At the back was a large garden filled with multitudes of common flowers, with straight walks passing among them; and, beyond, a well–stocked kitchen–garden, now looking verdant and prolific. Through the middle of the smaller plot of grass in front of the cottage a narrow gravel path led directly to the parlour–window, which also served the purpose of front–door; the entrance at the back being principally used by the tradespeople and numerous recipients of charity. The visitors, few in number, of the quiet Mistress of The Nest found their way unannounced into her presence by walking in at the open window in summer; or, if it were closed, by ringing a little bell which hung close by under the porch upon which it opened.

The glare of the afternoon sunshine lay on the flowers outside, but the room itself was in shadow, and the windows wide open, when a lady, who might have been seen coming down the avenue from The Hall, tapped with her parasol against the glass door, and upon hearing a gentle voice say, Come in, entered quietly. She was handsomely dressed, and there was an unmistakable air of refinement in her whole appearance; but all traces of beauty had vanished before their time from the pale face of Ursula Derinzy, the present mistress of Hagleth Hall. Once she had been very lovely, but she had faded prematurely.

Even in dress an alteration in style, which was not an improvement, had taken place. The soft blues and greys and lilacs, and even delicate–rose tints, in which she had once delighted were always sufficiently subdued to harmonize with, and might have brightened up and thrown a glow over, the at present wan hue of her complexion. A more decided contrast might have set off those delicate feminine features, and light hair more than tinged with silver; but Ursula preferred neutral tints, shadowy dull greens and brown and slate. Herself a shadow, her limp, trailing, dust–coloured garment, as she glided across the floor, made her seem spectral.

Miss Derinzy was in all respects the opposite to her cousin. Her tall figure was always attired in well–fitting graceful robes, adapted after a fashion of her own to the prevailing custom of the period. Though in reality they were contemporaries, she looked many years younger than her visitor. Her clear dark complexion was still pure as in her youth. Her eyes shone with a grave but tender lustre which could be compared to nothing more aptly than the evening star. Many a well–turned couplet and compliment, long since forgotten, had been offered at the shrine of Stella Derinzy's darkly beaming eyes.

She did not rise from the low beehive chair in which she was seated, but held out both her hands, dropping her needlework in her lap.

Welcome! she said warmly. I did not know you had come back to The Hall. How kind of you to walk here in this great heat, at once to see me!

## Carding–Mill Valley

Mrs. Derinzy received that frank kindly grasp and greeting as affectionately as her nature and habits permitted. She was one of those unfortunate people who cannot learn, and have not imbibed instinctively, the art of salutation. If she ever kissed anyone it was not usual for her to go so far even with her most intimate friends she always turned her head away just at the critical moment, and presented the side of her cheek, or the tip of her shell-shaped ear, instead of the small straight mouth. So, in shaking hands, her slender trembling fingers eluded a straightforward clasp, her little thumbs were always in the way.

However, after their several widely differing fashions, the two ladies shook hands; neither of them seeming to contemplate or desire a warmer embrace, though they were near relatives as well as intimate friends, and had been separated from each other for a considerable period.

We came home much sooner than was originally intended. As usual, everything here was going wrong, said Mrs. Derinzy, lowering her never loud tones to a confidential whisper. The girls naturally wished, after our return from the Riviera, to stay a little while in London, see the exhibitions, attend meetings and conversazioni, hear the great preachers, in fact, to enjoy, each in her own way, what are called the pleasures of the season; but Colonel Derinzy would not hear of it, and hurried us off at, literally, a moment's notice. You know, Stella, I *never* dispute his commands I only wish *others* were as obedient! No doubt he had good reason for saying that it was *best*, on *all* accounts, to leave Town without a moment's delay.

Had anything happened here, or did Colonel Derinzy think London unhealthy? I have heard great complaints of the heat there already this season, and of epidemics, measles and scarlatina. I hope the girls have not caught them.

Oh dear no, I hope not; I trust we brought them away in time to avoid those and *much worse* risks, said the mother of four handsome, healthy daughters with a sigh. Oh, Stella, how much you are to be envied! Here you live so contentedly in your sweet little cottage, with your two men and three model maid-servants! No carriage-horses to be always falling ill (that dear little poney is never out of condition) no boys getting into constant scrapes no girls developing all kinds of alarming peculiarities and inclinations, in danger of forming *most* undesirable connections with literally *no one* but yourself to think about! No domestic anxieties to worry you perpetually a handsome income and *perfect independence*. I always say you are the person I know in the world most to be envied.

Do you really think so, Ursula? said Stella, raising her grave, wondering, luminous eyes to her cousin's face. Well, perhaps you are right. At all events I am, at last, content, after long praying and trying to be so. But such is the perversity of human nature and the contradictoriness of women's hearts that I have often envied you the occupation of the lovely place where I was born; I have wished that the cool waving woods hung still over my own roof-tree, or belonged to one dearer than myself who would have shared everything with me that the fleet steeds my brother and I used to ride still carried us over the hills and through the valley. More than all I have longed for the love of children his or my own; I should have loved his boys and girls dearly, and could then contentedly have remained to the end of my days, Aunt Stella, watching over them; or I might have married and been as you should be, a proud happy mother, and been blessed with such a crown of joy as your bright loving beautiful daughters and brave sons are for you!

Mrs. Derinzy laid her tremulous hand on those which Stella had clasped together in her momentary excitement, but the limp fingers fell away again immediately.

Oh, of course, yes, I know, I remember what you must often feel; but, *please* do not let us talk about it. The past is gone beyond recall, the present is your own doing, and I am sure you are much too good to envy anyone. Circumstanced as we both are, it is best *never* to allude to those old times.

## Carding–Mill Valley

Then do not bring them before me by envying me my poor cottage, my lonely state, said Miss Derinzy, vainly trying to repress her feelings. I cannot bury my dead out of sight as you do, Ursula; and there are none but yourself to whom I can speak of persons and things that neither time nor absence, not even death, can make me forget.

Mrs. Derinzy gazed helplessly at her friend whilst this strong spasm of emotion lasted. Her hands shook more than ever, and there were fresh lines and nervous twitches round her thin lips; her white face grew yet more deathlike. Feelings seldom stirred swayed her like a leaf. She trembled from head to foot, and there was something sadder than sorrow in the expression of her tearless eyes. Stella did not look at her, but, nevertheless, she was aware that her cousin, as well as herself, had been, and still was, unusually agitated.

Forget what I have said, Ursula. You are quite right. I am content with my lot now, and thankful for its tranquillity, she said kindly. Tell me, what new troubles brought you home so suddenly!

Indeed, indeed, Stella, I did not mean to grieve you. A mother of many children like me is not always to be envied. Colonel Derinzy, though I am far from wishing to blame my husband, has his peculiarities, and so have all his and my sons and daughters, though they are unlike us both. Thea has a thousand whims and fancies, and wanted me to ask her father to allow her to become a nursing–sister, or assistant pupil, I know not what, in a great London Hospital! The next thing will be that she will take it into her head to be a Lady Doctor. I can't think where they get such ideas certainly not from me or their father!

No; I do not think you ever had any such eccentric inclinations, said her cousin. It is like a hen bringing up in her coop ducklings or game birds, or a hedge–sparrow with a cuckoo in her little nest. But I do not think Althea will develop into a cuckoo. All her instincts are kindly ones. As yet she is but groping in the dark to find her true vocation.

Leo has altered the services and changed the hymn–books. He actually has tall candles burning on the altar. I do hope he will discontinue his Ritualistic practices now that we are come back. His father, I am quite sure, will not tolerate them. He was always the most wilful of my children pursued his mother in a still more plaintive key.

Ah yes, she added in reply to a few quiet words of explanation. These innovations are only practised *as yet* in the little Chapel which you helped him and others to build. I wonder why people cannot be satisfied and worship with us in the old Parish Church. You have quite given up your own place, now, in the Hall pew. A movement of impatience on Stella's part cut short her murmurs, and she said hurriedly:

But these were not the troubles which you asked me about, Stella. Have you really not heard or cared about the infringement of our family rights and privileges by the stranger who is making a road at the upper end of the Carding–Mill Valley? Colonel Derinzy considers it an unpardonable liberty, and hurried home the moment he heard of it to put a stop to his proceedings.

Yes, I know that a gentleman Mr. Vansittart's tenant at the old burnt Mill was so sorry to see the horses so greatly distressed by the sharp pitch of the hill that he had gone to great expense in turning and levelling the road. Is there any harm in that? I look on him as a public benefactor!

My dear Stella, I wonder that you, a landed–proprietor, should say so! said her cousin. What business had this Manchester man Mr. Johnson or Thompson I hear he has been in trade and has loads of money to meddle with your road? Colonel Derinzy was furious about it and says he shall bring an action against the man. It is only by favour that carts pass that way; if the road is bad, let them go round the hill.

There was always a right of road through the valley, said her cousin thoughtfully. Tell Colonel Derinzy that *I* say so, and I knew our hills, and dales too, long before he did. Lawsuits about way–rights are tedious things. Why should we not have a good road instead of a bad one, since you cannot shut out the public?

## Carding–Mill Valley

Oh, you do not know what gentlemen think about these matters you must excuse me. I make a point of never interfering or giving an opinion. No doubt Colonel Derinzy knows best. He is quite sure to be right.

Let him try then, but not as my representative, said Stella carelessly. We must all buy our experience, and no doubt Colonel Derinzy is prepared, as the next proprietor of the Hall, to count the cost, and able to pay for it. I doubt whether the law will give judgment in his favour; although in most cases I admit him to be wiser in his generation than myself or our new neighbour, who seems to think more of other people's comfort and convenience than of his own interests.

Mrs. Derinzy sighed. You are very severe, Stella; less charitable to my husband than to this stranger. Let us say no more about these troublesome matters. Parish business is not at all in my way. The less ladies meddle in it the better. It is quite out of our sphere. Have you been suffering more than usual lately? You are certainly not in your usual good spirits to–day.

The heat is trying, replied her friend, as Mrs. Derinzy looked at her compassionately. She loved Stella better than anyone outside her own home circle, and the affection was mutual, though their pursuits, habits and characters were far as the poles asunder. Will you give me your arm as far as the gates of your avenue? I shall go and rest then on my favourite seat looking towards the hills. They always soothe me.

I wish you would come home with me, said her cousin affectionately. It is very little further than that uncomfortable stone chair, and the views of the woods and hills much pleasanter. My flowers are lovely; and we have brought down some delightful lawn–seats, and a tent which Leo and Hugo have already set up for their sisters. The young people will be delighted to see you. Stella, do you *never* mean to enter the old Hall again?

Miss Derinzy did not take any notice of this question. She was busy assuming her simple out–of–door costume, every article of which hung within her reach. Last of all she took up an alpenstock, marked with records of travel in other hands, but she did not make much use of it at first, accepting the arm of her friend as far as the way led in the same direction the shadowy approach to the domain of Hagleth.

It seemed strange to see the taller, apparently stronger, still handsome woman leaning on the slender, willowy, feeble Mistress of the Hall; but Stella Derinzy needed support. When she parted from her cousin her pace became slower and she leant more on her staff, often pausing for breath. Years before, in blooming girlhood, she had overtaxed her strength; and now the once fleet limbs had lost much of their power, though medical and surgical skill failed in discovering the cause or remedy.

Stella submitted to her fate, but it cost her a severe struggle to give up active exercise. She could only walk a short distance; riding, in which she formerly delighted, was forbidden; the motion of a carriage fatigued and pained her. Her friends believed, as well as the eminent physicians consulted, that the weight of a great mental sorrow, caused by the loss of an idolized brother, suddenly laid upon her when her bodily health first failed, conduced to make the strain and tension of the nerves almost intolerable; but she had a brave spirit and bore up against it.

It was probably the knowledge that many persons in her native village wanted friendly sympathy which made Stella Derinzy remain near her old home, although she never on any occasion or under any circumstances crossed the threshold of The Hall. Mrs Derinzy was too timid to play the part of Lady Bountiful; her husband considered charity as the root of pauperism and numberless ills; as perhaps, when injudiciously distributed, in some cases, may be true. He never went among the cottagers, nor would he suffer his wife to do so. As children the young girls of the family took exercise in the extensive and beautiful grounds. Their attendants were strictly forbidden to take them into the village for fear of infection; although in justice to him and to Stella, the Lady of the Manor, it must be said that all local affairs were attended to carefully. The dwellings were kept in decent repair, and a sufficient number of tolerably roomy, comfortable tenements were provided and at certain seasons put in order.



## Carding–Mill Valley

Colonel Derinzy was not a cruel, but he was by no means a tender nor a generous steward. He was the manager of Miss Derinzy's large property and her heir–at–law. Her tenantry were not insensible to his good qualities, and yet they heartily disliked the man who had succeeded, prematurely they thought, to the authority of the old–fashioned, kind–hearted Squire.

There were many persons who wondered (as neighbours will always wonder at the actions of those whom they have seen grow up without realizing their individual peculiarities) that Stella Derinzy should remain in the near vicinity of the place where she was born and might have continued to bear rule; but the broken–hearted girl clung even to painful associations. It was better, she said, to mourn among her own people than to hide her deep grief from strangers. A small cottage in the village which suited her taste and particularly belonged to her as part of the portion for younger children, had been, when she was quite young, fitted up according to her fancy. The gardener, housekeeper, and coachman were old servants from The Hall, friends from childhood, and their daughter had been her own maid ever since she was released from her nurse's thrall. With a small but well–ordered and sufficient establishment, and one little maiden from the village school, a promotion earnestly contemplated by the best scholar, Miss Derinzy contented herself; and, as her cousin said, she was free from home troubles.

Most part of her large income was spent in works of charity, in aiding old and young friends, and, in judiciously assisting those who tried to help themselves, but for whom life's changes and chances had proved too heavy. There are bounds even in the most loving and best–balanced spirits wearing mortal shape to Christian charity, and Stella Derinzy's stopped here. She did not love she tried not to hate her brother's successor at the old Hall, Arnold Derinzy, the representative of a younger branch, who had married her first cousin. Never did she knowingly and willingly cross his path.

It was easy to avoid him, for the Colonel disliked the village, and all the quiet rural paths, and in fact seldom walked at all. He rode into the neighbouring county–town almost every day, followed by his groom; and performed the usual duties of a country gentleman with exemplary regularity. No particularly arbitrary or cruel judgment as a magistrate had ever been brought home to him. He was not an over–strict game–preserver, but he was regarded as a hard man. No wife, sister, mother, or friend, would have tried to influence him towards deeds of mercy rather than strict justice. There was an iron rigidity about his straightly–cut features and upright figure which told of harshness as well as military discipline; and, through his more gentle wife, experience taught that it was useless to try and reach the gentler side, if it existed, of his nature. Ursula had no influence; and, as she said, made a point of never interfering.

Stella tried not to think about her enemy the only one she ever even imagined herself to have as she walked on after parting with his wife, but the tall straight figure haunted her. She thought, too, of the stranger at the Burnt Mill, as people still often called the place where he had unwisely settled. Many kind actions of his had been reported to her, and she had a strong fellow–feeling for the over–driven cattle the weary beasts of burden whose toil he had tried to lighten by turning and lowering the road, and placing a drinking–trough and fountain beside it. The man himself derived no benefit from his large outlay, but he was supposed to be rich and to have plenty to spare.

He had sacrificed the prettiest corner of his small recently–acquired picturesque grounds in order to give the new road a better turn and easier incline, and probably imagined other gentlemen in the neighbourhood would be equally accommodating. What a disappointing, souring effect the churlish opposition of the occupants of the Hall would have upon this good–natured individual if the threat of law–proceedings against him were actually to be carried out! It should not be done, at all events, under her name and sanction.

Stella forgot her troubles when the path by a sudden turn brought her out on a lone hillside overlooking the course of the brook. She could see the blue forget–me–nots growing among the pebbles in and beside the shallow stream, the grey boulders past which it meandered. High dark summits, many–hued, many–shaped, closed in the prospect. Could she but have wandered far enough, the path would lead into the recesses of the hills. She might

## Carding–Mill Valley

hear again the music of the waterfall, and gather ferns from its very ledge. But her strength failed, even while she thought of it. Hitherto shalt thou go, and no farther, had been impressed upon her during many an hour of pain and restlessness.

Opposite to the rocky recess in which she was resting was another stony ledge somewhat similar in character. She sat down thankfully, after lifting up and appropriating a bunch of flowers laid on the granite slab. She guessed that they were intended for herself; very seldom did she fail to find some little token of rural affection as the reward of her pilgrimage.

In olden times, this spot had been named the Lady's Chair, and the opposite shelf in the rock the Knight's Table, sole relics of some forgotten legend or superstition. Stella was empress of her people's hearts the sons and daughters of the soil adored her. These working men and women prayed for her children worshipped the ground on which she trod, and followed her bidding blindfold. Was it not worth while to have borne pain and conquered reluctance to win such wealth of love? Every day Stella rejoiced more and more that she had resolved to live down her trouble, her sore mortification, among her own people, under the shadow of her own hills. Feeble as she was, there were the skirts and crowns of the mountains, with the brook winding its way down the valley. No other place on earth could have the same hallowed though thrilling associations, or be so dear to her, even though she could no longer urge her light palfrey to carry her more fleetly through the passes of the hills by Hugh's side, or feel the warm clasp of the brotherly hand which had once helped her to reach on foot their boldest and loneliest heights.

## Chapter 2.

Let the poor and the needy God's blessings share,  
Spread above, round, below us everywhere  
Let the wayfarer halt by the sandy way,  
As our Lord once paused in the glare of day  
Ah, believe me, hid stream of the heathery hill,  
There are angels amongst us around us still.

R.M.K.

Accompanied by his eldest son, a young officer in a cavalry regiment, home now on long leave after several years absence, of whom he was excessively proud; both well mounted, and followed at a considerable distance by a groom, Colonel Derinzy on the following afternoon, contrary to his usual custom, more gaily than was his wont, rode up among the heath-clad hills. Like a war-horse he snuffed the battle from afar, and his arched nostrils expanded. His spirited steed responded to his ardour, and pranced and curveted along the narrow bridle-road; but a master's hand was on the rein, a firm foot rested in the stirrup, and a will of iron soon put a stop to any frolicsome exuberances of temper and spirit. Though the servant had fallen back respectfully out of earshot, very little conversation passed between the two gentlemen.

Colonel Derinzy was by nature silent and reserved, especially so in his own family; his children respected his will, but they never, under any circumstances, placed confidence in either of their parents. Ursula was a mere shadow of her husband, and, if not herself arbitrary, had become so as his reflected image. Of the two, the young people thought more of their father, and would rather have carried any tale of wrong or injury to him, if they dared, than to their feeble-minded mother.

Hugo Derinzy was satisfied with feeling himself, for the first time, on the footing of manhood and treated like a gentleman. There was no fault to be found with the young cavalry officer's management of his horse, and military bearing. Perhaps an uneasy sensation that his own style and manner of riding belonged to a past quarter of the

## Carding–Mill Valley

century, made the Colonel shy of offering hints and suggestions to his high–spirited, perfectly self–possessed representative. In the village, where Hugo, though he only returned home the day before, had already visited most of his old friends, for these young people were the exact opposites of their parents and universally popular, the young man was said greatly to resemble Stella Derinzy's ill–fated brother. The old people wished their present favourite a happier lot, but some shook their heads as he rode gaily past their doors with his father. It was a sight to see them together and in amity, but how long would it last?

The quick eye of the young officer travelled over well–known haunts of boyhood and noticed every feature of the secluded landscape, though his lips remained closed. What did it signify to his stern parent whether that steep slope or yonder scarp'd crag, the withies by the brook and the great golden marsh–mallows, reminded him of some boyish feat or prank? Who could say, even in his present calm mood, how any approach to a light jest or boast might be taken? It were wisest to let the sleeping lion alone.

The way pursued by the father and son, though it lay up the valley, was quite a different one to the footpath Miss Derinzy had taken when she parted with her cousin. Hugo glanced at the stone chair and ledge high above them, and perhaps thought of dear Cousin Stella, whom he had not yet had time to visit, as he wanted a long chat with her after his long absence. The Colonel rode straight on, looking neither to the right nor to the left, with the air of one bent upon a purpose and anxious to attain his end by the shortest and most direct road. He splashed through the brook, which had overflowed the road, treading down the forget–me–nots ruthlessly, whilst his son took pains to avoid injuring them. Hugo knew that his pale cousin liked to look down from her eyry upon the blue flowers which in childhood, boyhood, almost manhood, he had often clambered down the hill and gathered for her, or placed the first blossoms, beside the Lady's Chair, guiding her there himself with boyish gallantry.

When the road became wider, Colonel Derinzy drew in his rein and rode closer to his son, manifesting an intention of commencing a conversation. Hugo recalled his attention from the pleasantly scented elder hedges and dog–roses, which reminded him again of Stella, from the sheep flying frantically over the hillside at the sound of horses' hoofs, and a hawk hovering over some terrified song–birds, and became gravely attentive immediately. His manner was quite unexceptionable, and for a mile or two the father and son rode on, talking at intervals, more pleasantly than they had ever done before, on topics connected with the career long since closed for one, just opening to the other. The Colonel was gratified by the respect shown to his son by former comrades of his own, from whom he had been long separated, and who, having felt themselves chilled and repelled by his cold taciturn inhospitality, had been glad to transfer their friendship to his son. Hugo spoke with manly independence, but modestly, of the attentions he had received, ending with a cordial expression of gratitude to his father for the exceptional liberality of the pecuniary arrangements made in his favour. This acknowledgment was received graciously. The Colonel fell back into silence, and Hugo felt glad that it was satisfactorily over.

The hill stream flowed on more briskly as they proceeded on their way. Dark soft beds of heath not yet in flower marked the course of the rivulet past and over mossy grey boulders, which lay strewn across the track. It needed care to avoid them, and in hours of darkness the road was full of danger and difficulty, but eminently picturesque. Now, in the early summer, nothing could be more pleasant; but Hugo knew it well in months of wintry gloom and tempest, when the country carts and vehicles found it almost impassable, when the brook swelled to a torrent, and the water–courses flooded the valley, or heavy snow drifts totally impeded the traffic. This was, however the only mode of communication between several outlying farms and hamlets. The Church sheltered by his father's woods had been until quite lately the only place of public worship consecrated for the service of the Church of England, whither the peasantry from many far–off houses resorted when weather and roads permitted. His brother, the painstaking, energetic, zealous young Vicar, and the good Doctor, often found it difficult, well–nigh impossible, to reach the abodes of the sick and dying when their services were most needed.

Suddenly the hills opened, and at the head of the wild glen a waterfall became visible. The little stream brawled and foamed below, after flinging itself in mad haste over a fern–fringed ledge between dark tall boulders. A few acacia and birch trees grew up among the stones above the cataract; and, on the rocks below, their roots, catching

## Carding–Mill Valley

at every aperture in the rocky wall, made a sort of rough network.

Tall purple foxgloves and St. John's–wort, with masses of forget–me–nots, bugloss and comfrey, grew round the base of the fall, turning the space below into a kind of wild garden. It seemed to Hugo, who had visited the spot at all seasons, as if loving care had been recently expended upon it. There were plants flowering among the rocks which he did not remember to have noticed or gathered there in earlier days. If his father's stern eyes had not been upon him he would certainly have flung his rein to the groom and dismounted to pluck a nosegay for Stella of the blossoms congregated more lavishly than usual in the wild nook which had once been one of her favourite haunts. Colonel Derinzy, however, at that moment seemed in no mood for loitering or trifling. He urged on his horse, and passed at a quicker pace round the edge of the rocks below the fall, leaving it on the right hand of their track. Sounds had reached him which roused his anger, and he called to his son, who had stopped to look at the cascade, and made a sign to the groom to follow him quickly.

On the other side of the wall of rock, round which the cart–track or bridle–road passed, men were busily at work, who lifted up their heads in some consternation when the future lord of the soil they were upturning came suddenly upon them. A scene of busy industry was revealed. Through the valley wound a white, not wide, road, bordered with granite boulders and masses of thorn and elder, which had evidently been transplanted some time previously with great care and at the proper season, for they were now in bloom. Banks of turf and plots of wild flowers flourished beside the new road, which had already lost all painful symptoms of glaring freshness, and was indented by cart–tracks and horse–hoofs.

The present objects of labour were a drinking–trough for cattle and a rustic porch for wayfarers. The road in this part was completed, though farther on might be heard the pickaxes of labourers engaged in carrying it on, by an easier incline than the old cart–track, through the valley. Cousin Stella's Waterfall, as the children, whom she had taught to find it, called the neighbouring cascade, had not been in any manner interfered with. The seclusion of that garden among the hills was religiously respected, whilst at the same time the convenience and safety of the community had been consulted. The new road wound on its way clear of the brook and the rocks through an opening lower down among the hills, and higher up, passed through the private grounds of Millburn, the place now occupied by a stranger in the county, who bore the name of Forester.

The grey old house above the brawling stream had once been a hive of industry; but, like many a similar edifice, had been partially consumed by fire. Subsequently it had been repaired and fitted up as a shooting–lodge, and ultimately it had passed by a deed of gift from the late Squire into the possession of his old friend and legal adviser, Mr. Vansittart, who had let it to its present master during Colonel Derinzy's absence. Now it was converted into a sort of lodge in the wilderness on the outskirts of civilization; and as its present occupant, judging by his choice of an abode, was probably a lover of seclusion, it must have been an act of self–denial to allow the road to traverse the not over–large domain surrounding the house; but in no other manner could his benevolent purpose have been effected.

The dark walls of the old building were only here and there visible through trees, and a considerable distance still lay between it and the horsemen.

Colonel Derinzy looked round somewhat fiercely to see whether any person in authority was near at hand to whom he might express his objections to the liberties which had, undoubtedly, been taken with his own and his cousin's territorial rights, and from whom he might inquire what further aggressions were contemplated.

At that moment a bell rang out loudly, but not unmelodiously, from the house on the high ground, and the men left off working and began to gather together in groups on each side of the road; putting on their jackets, and assuming attitudes of rest and ease, as they laid aside the implements of labour and settled themselves complacently under the shade of the rocks and thorn trees, or in pleasant sunny spots fanned by summer breezes, as they best liked.

## Carding–Mill Valley

Down the white road came three or four serving–maidens carrying trays on their heads, which they set down near the workmen, who rose up again and doffed their caps to a lady who came slowly in the wake of the pretty, simply–attired girls; who, as soon as each had placed her burden on the grass, turned and flocked round their mistress. A short grace was sung, in which the men joined heartily; then a ringin cheer rent the air, three times repeated; after which the labourers partook heartily of the good–cheer provided for them.

The singularity of the scene had checked even Colonel Derinzy's hostile advances, but by no means had it appeased his wrath. He felt particularly angry at the little notice taken of himself; and still more affronted when, at a sign from their young mistress, one of the girls came shyly towards him and asked if the gentlemen would take some refreshment. Hugo, on the contrary, who had recognised in the young maiden one of Miss Derinzy's trained servants, thanked her; and drank contentedly from one of the classically–shaped goblets of bright red pottery–ware a draught of excellent cider, which the heat made doubly acceptable.

The lady herself did not draw nearer. She stood apart on a little mound under an old thorn–tree, which had not been disturbed. The fresh green leaves and snowy blossoms made a becoming canopy. She was tall and beautifully fair, simply but tastefully dressed in some light summer fabric, which rested on the ground when she stood still, and was gathered up with a quick, not ungraceful, gesture while she walked. Hugo thought he had seldom seen a prettier picture than that formed by the tall stately lady and her bevy of blooming attendants, who were all dressed alike in a sort of livery of white and violet striped print dresses. Her own dress, quite differently made, was of the same colour, unmixed with white. Among the green leaves the girls looked like white and purple violets.

Colonel Derinzy, after a brief halt, rode forward, and Hugo, anxious to gain a nearer view, did the same. Both gentlemen doffed their hats when they came in front of the bunch of violets.

Can you tell me, Madam, who has authorised these men to cut a road through my cousin Miss Derinzy's land? Shall I find anyone at the house yonder who can answer the question? I am Colonel Derinzy, the present occupant of Hagleth Hall.

The young lady came to the edge of the mound.

Are you displeased that the poor horses should be eased in the ascent? she said, with surprise. Oh, you cannot have seen them toil, as we did, in summer heat and winter snow! You were away. No one said you might object. I am sorry that just at present there is no one at home to receive you. My father is unluckily absent.

She drew back modestly amongst her maidens as she concluded her little speech. The girls closed round her like a flock of bright–hued pigeons, the wind fluttering and rustling their light skirts.

Hugo still sat his horse, bare–headed. His father had put on his hat, and looked bitterly disappointed.

It is of no use to go on to–day. We must take other measures to check this insolence, he said in a low tone to his son; as, after a slight salutation to the lady, he wheeled his impatient horse round. These fellows look very much disposed to rudeness, he added, still *sotto voce*, as several of the men, disturbed in their rustic meal, got up and drew nearer to the girls, as if to protect them, if necessary. Take notice, Hugo; there are several faces I ought to know, but we have been away so often. You used to be more familiar with the villagers. Tell Kershaw to put down the names of any whom he remembers, any people belonging to the place. This work will soon come to an end, and not one of them shall ever put spade into our land again, with or without my leave, if I can prevent it.

Colonel Derinzy rode away with a frowning brow. The pretty rural picture was quite lost upon him; but the young officer turned back in his saddle more than once to look at it, after raising his hat and bending low as a parting salute to the lady. More than one of the men murmured a word of welcome as he followed his irascible parent.

## Carding–Mill Valley

Hugo was a great favourite with all the country people, and there were, as the Colonel suspected, many among them who had known him from childhood.

When he reached the ledge of rock by the waterfall, though his father called him, Hugo came to a halt, and again held his hat in his hand, while the girls, after removing the empty trays, platters, and flagons, sang once more their simple thanksgiving; and, leaving the men at rest from their labour, the little troop wound their way up the valley. There was a very dark cloud in Colonel Derinzy's brow when his son rode quickly after and rejoined him, but Hugo was no longer a boy who would bear scolding. Silent displeasure he could not resent, and, after one or two vain efforts, he did not seek to interrupt his father's moody cogitations. Colonel Derinzy did not speak a single word in returning home, or when he dismounted at his own hall–door, threw the reins of his horse to his servant, and shut himself up alone in his library to write a letter to his lawyer.

### Chapter 3.

Voices from the spirit–land,  
So far off, yet so near,  
Breaking Death's dull leaden band,  
Fall upon my ear.

Do I hear some sweet bells ringing,  
Or the evening breeze at play;  
Or is it the heathbells swinging  
At the close of the dying day?

Father, mother, sister, brother,  
Methinks I hear them say,  
Ringing one into the other,  
As they swell and die away!

R.M.K.

In a small very plainly furnished room of the building which still went by the name of the Burnt Mill among the peasantry, a man was sitting writing at a deal table, quite alone. Through the open casement came the sound of Church bells, though it was not the Sabbath or any Saints' festival. Of late there had been a very simple service, which many of the road–makers attended, in a small chapel–of–ease high up the valley which had been built by Colonel Derinzy's second son, aided by Stella and some enthusiastic worshippers. There were no signs of devotion in the attitude of the person busily employed near the window, but every now and then he paused and listened to the bells reverentially. Perhaps the sound brought other chimes to his recollection, for he was a stranger until lately in this part of the country; and, excepting one only daughter, neither kith nor kin acknowledged his existence. There were dark experiences written on his brow; and, in spite of many good deeds done amongst them, it was said, even by those whom he benefited, that he had led a wild life, and was making expiation now for past sins of youth.

This surmise, though it lacked charity and might be utterly untrue, for nothing was known of the antecedents of the occupant of the old Mill and its surrounding premises, was not an unnatural or even an improbable one. Where there is mystery it is often taken for granted that there must be some evil thing requiring concealment, and in many cases this supposition is correct. Here was even more ground for it than usual; for this man shrank from the sight of his fellow–creatures, and there were visible tokens on his brow and in his deep–set eyes of something darker and sterner than sorrow, which might either have been left there by bitter resentment or life–long regret. He had arrived at home if home it might be called unexpectedly, as was his custom, a few hours before, and was

## Carding–Mill Valley

already, as was his wont, hard at work. On the threshold no welcoming word or glance had met him, for his child, ignorant of his intended return had gone to attend the evening service with her maidens, leaving the house empty and shut up. He had opened the door with his latch–key, and entered that was simple enough, and he was alone there now.

Alone yes, quite alone it was a word he often repeated softly to himself. Few men were more solitary! Some deed, whether evil or not time will reveal, had cut him off in early youth; and he had ever since, though for a brief space he had lived and loved, felt himself to be a solitary man. No matter; there was work for him as well as for others, even if he were never known to be the doer of it work which he could do, and which made existence less lonesome.

Do we not meet with, occasionally, some book or pamphlet or printed matter which seems not to be written by one of ourselves? Where everything is treated in a manner so utterly impartial, so disconnected with any feelings of social relation to those whom the writer would yet wish to serve and edify, that we wonder who could have taken so lofty, so intensely solitary, a stand–point, and yet so keenly sympathize in joys and sorrows with his fellow–mortals from whom he stands apart. Perhaps it is some abstruse theory of this description which is passing through his mind and forming itself into energetic language as the writer at the window bends over the page; and, ceasing to listen to any outward sound, throws his whole soul into his work. His are not idle, useless meditations or vain regrets. His past, be it what it may have been, has nerved him for the present and the future. Let his sufferings or even crimes, there are lines dark enough to have been furrowed by guilt, pass that man has done and is doing good work in his day work that will live after him; when whatever wrong or wretchedness, folly or vice, has marred his life will have been long since forgotten.

After the sound of the bells died away the landscape was utterly quiet. The hours of labour were over, and the workmen gone; all the valley was still. Without an interruption the writer finished his task, whatever it might be, and folded the sheets together, placing them ready for the domestic whose duty it was to post them at the proper time. Then the master of the house glanced round somewhat wearily; and, finding the aspect indoors of the empty house not to his taste, went out into the fresh, cool, evening twilight. Though there had been much pains and cost bestowed on the road now winding through the valley, and loving womanly hands had twined flowery garlands among the rocks by Stella's waterfall, very little expense had been incurred, or alteration made on the domain itself.

The dwelling–house had been at one time partially rebuilt, but scarcely ever since revisited. Nature had made the site very beautiful, but fire had scathed the building, and in parts laid it low. As it had been, so, almost, did it remain; partly charred and blackened, but with a fine group of ash–trees as a background, and lavish wreaths of bramble and honeysuckle twisting among the fallen stonework. Here were no garden–walks or flower–beds, no planned approach, no formal avenues. A rough bridle–road by the brook side, often in stormy weather covered with water, dark beds of heath not yet in bloom, blue forget–me–nots and nodding foxgloves, winding eglantines, and other wild sweet flowers, exhaling fragrance, and putting forth blossoms at their own sweet will, were the only ornaments of that rude dwelling. The long straight rows of windows in the part of the structure which had been rescued from destruction and made simply habitable, looked down upon the running water and green banks of turf just as they had done when, lighted up nightly for the workmen's labours, the Mill windows were reflected in the brook.

It was a surprise perhaps a shock to the man, standing at last at rest with folded arms, looking down the course of the stream, to hear the sound of youthful voices. He drew back into the deep shadow cast by the building, and watched the course of the path, ready to retire into the house if unable otherwise to avoid meeting strangers; but at a corner of the pathway voices and steps ceased to come nearer, and finally died away. Then, after a considerable interval, one figure was seen approaching, the only one which ever brought the light of joy to his eyes, and he stepped forward to meet his daughter.

## Carding–Mill Valley

Who were your companions, Violet? he said, after a warm but quiet embrace. I do not wish you to make acquaintances here. Above all, do not bring them home with you.

The young clergyman and his sister came to take care of me. It was so dark and lonely among the hills, said the girl, looking round timidly. He has never come farther than the waterfall before, and his sisters have been away for a year. They are strangers, like ourselves. Is there any harm, father, in my knowing them? It would make life here less lonely.

Does it seem so to you, Violet? I thought you liked it, and felt happy among your maidens. Why did they leave you to come back alone, or to receive attention from these strangers?

Oh, they were not far off I heard their voices, poor girls! They only loitered a little by the way, singing their Church hymns, and talking to their friends from the hills. But it was pleasant to have companions with whom I could exchange ideas. You have been longer away than usual, and I *have* felt lonely. When you are here I want no other company. Father, why is Colonel Derinzy angry with you for making the road more level and easy for the poor horses? He rode over here last week and threatened to stop the good work you have been doing for his people and cattle during his absence.

Her companion's dark brow lowered.

Let him try it, he said fiercely; I do not believe the men will obey him. If he goes to law I can light him with his own weapons. One like myself, who has few ties, and cares nothing for luxuries, can stand out against a rich man who has innumerable expenses and desires. But we shall never be friends. It is best therefore that you and this man's children should not meet. Violet, can I trust you?

Yes, if you demand the sacrifice, she said frankly; but I own it will cost a struggle. Father, these young people are not like me, who have nothing but love for my parent. They seem very much afraid of theirs. Even their mother they do not trust. Might I not teach them better a more loving childlike faith? While you are improving by your writings, by your exertions, by your example, men like yourself, and even the rough hinds of these hills; might I not do something to aid these young girls who are of my own age and station? I do not wish to go into their world, but if they cross my sequestered path may I not turn aside to help them?

The lonely man stood still and looked down the valley towards the opening in the hills where Hugo and his father had ridden.

Yes, he said; if God has put it into your heart to be the good guardian angel of these young creatures I will not forbid it. But do not seek them. On no pretence be tempted to cross the threshold of Colonel Derinzy's house. Remember this and do not break my solitude by bringing strangers home with you. On these conditions, Violet, I will trust to you, and still more to that Providence, which in your simple creed which I honour even when it is most perplexing to men of this world shapes our course through life, crookedly enough it seems sometimes, like yonder running brook; but in the end leading us all, let us hope, through the passes of the hills to better and clearer light.

## Chapter 4.

There have been days and weeks,  
Long months of vain regret;  
Each to each in soft murmurs speaks  
Of a time we can ne'er forget.



## Carding–Mill Valley

Flowers must bloom and fade,  
Green turf grow parched and brown;  
The Summer change, and Autumn's shade  
Darken to Winter's frown.

Thoughts of that long sad day  
Troop over yon wooded hill;  
With hopes and fears that have passed away,  
But are well–remembered still.

R.M.K.

Ursula Derinzy had retained, besides her maiden name, most of her girlish associations. She had been brought up in the old Hall among the Home–woods under The Crest by Stella Derinzy's parents; and the same old bells which summoned her and her household to Church on the first Sunday after her return from abroad, had rung out at her wedding. Few women had apparently enjoyed a more prosperous uneventful career. It was strange that her bloom and beauty should have faded prematurely. It was true that all her children were grown up. The eldest son, three–and–twenty, Leopold a year younger, Althea nearly two years older. Laura not long since introduced into society; her two youngest sisters just emancipated from the schoolroom. The second daughter was to have been presented at Court this season, had not Colonel Derinzy hurried them all away. As she was only nineteen, her father perhaps thought that it would do her no material injury to wait another year. Neither of the young girls cared much for the curtailment of their London gaieties and sight–seeing. They were longing to be at home again, free to range the woods and climb the hills, now that their arduous course of studies was relaxed; and yet still interested in their accomplishments and in their books and writings of various kinds. Each one had her own favourite separate pursuit, and as yet no foreign influences had interfered with the natural bias of their minds. They were very independent, very ardent, totally unlike their parents, but docile, well–trained, and modest. Althea, the eldest daughter of the house, was an especially good and dutiful child, helpful to all, particularly to her clerical brother, only too anxious, her mother considered, to do good in her generation. Laura was the acknowledged beauty of the family, though all were handsome, and a general favourite.

Though few persons would have supposed it, this lovely girl was the image of what her faded mother had been in early girlhood, when she was the constant companion of Stella and Hugh Derinzy. She had always lived with them before the death of their parents; and the villagers remembered the time when it was confidently expected that their young master, when he came back from the wars, would marry his pretty cousin. But it was not so decreed. When Hugh came home as the young heir, monarch in prospect of all he surveyed, he was accompanied by his cousin, Captain Derinzy, a much older man than himself, who fell a victim sooner than the young cornet to the attractions of their fair relative. Hugh was too busy a man just then to fall in love, and he was quite devoted to his sister. They rode, walked, drove, together, forming all kinds of plans for the future, but neither of them at that time thought of love and matrimony; they were all in all to each other.

Hugh's jesting gallantry often excited his cousin's jealous displeasure; whilst Ursula's coldness of manner, conscious timidity, and frequent evasions aggravated his distrust, laying the foundations of a mass of wrong and evil which could never now be thrown down. Had Colonel Derinzy stood by his young cousin at the crowning moment of his misfortunes, life and honour might have been saved, Stella always thought; and perhaps his wife shared the conviction, though she made no open sign then or afterwards of her feelings. Many years had gone by since that troubled time. Stella's parents had died; Ursula's children had grown up. Colonel Derinzy, when his military duties were over, returned to the Hall, as the next heir, and established himself there as a matter of course. But Stella, though she made no opposition, and had even consented to his assuming the management of the property which must one day be his own, had never liked or forgiven him. Soon after his arrival at Hagleth, where Ursula and her young family had resided during his absence, she quietly retired from the Hall and took up her abode at the Nest; still continuing to befriend and sympathize with Mrs. Derinzy and the young people, while

## Carding–Mill Valley

she carried out her brother's and her own youthful plans for the amelioration of the condition of the peasantry. In all these improvements Hugo, her godson named after her ill–fated brother had taken an active part, until he went abroad to join his regiment. When Stella was first incapacitated from prolonged active exercise, she had longed for a substitute an energetic messenger to carry her gifts and kind words to cottages far away among the hills and God had given her what she wished. As boys, Hugo and Leo had braved many a winter storm and flood, and they were known and beloved through all the countryside. Their 'young Master,' as the people still called the handsome cavalry officer, was welcomed home with a joy which did not burst forth spontaneously on the return of his father. It was said in the village that the parish church bells would not have been rung in welcome if Hugo had not met his parents in London and returned with them to Hagleth Hall.

There is a brighter light in Stella's eyes as she lifts them to the youth's beaming face on whose arm she has leant for support in her walk to the Lady's Chair this afternoon than was seen in them while she talked with his mother. He has been telling her of the marvellous good done by the stranger in the Carding–Mill Valley and his daughter; and of his own father's resolution to put a stop at once to his benevolent exertions in behalf of man and beast, and, if possible, drive him away.

Never fear, Hugo, such good deeds are not easily crushed, especially when they are done, as I believe they are in this ease, for the love of Christ and of God's creatures. Your father did *not* write to his lawyer. He thought better of it, no doubt; and I, though not the oldest inhabitant of these hills and dales, warned him that he could not stop the right of way through the valley; though he may say with truth that this stranger, probably ignorant of English customs, did not quite go the right way to work. Still, there are circumstances which I have pointed out to your father which he is sure to see in his calmer moments which would make it highly inexpedient for him to interfere. In the first place, if a suit were instituted, I should be the first witness on his enemy's side, and my word and opinion would do him good service in this part of the country.

Of course it would;' said the young officer. Cousin Stella, it would be an awful thing to have you against us. I am sure my father would not like it. Though you are scarcely friends, you always give him silent support in the parish. To have you openly arrayed against him would be death to his cause. But I do not quite understand why you say that my father is not the man who ought to interfere. Surely he is the proper person to vindicate your cause when your rights are infringed; and, next to yourself, he has the deepest interest in the welfare of the property.

The light faded out of Stella's expressive eyes as she looked sadly down on the brook winding among the forget–me–nots. She did not answer her young cousin's question. Hugo's frank brow clouded over.

It seems to me always, he said, as if we had no business at the Hall. It ought to have been yours. When I was a child, and you lived there, I always thought *you* were the Lady of Hagleth. Why did you leave us? It has never been such a happy place since.

That is because childhood and boyhood have passed away from you, even as my youth is long past, said Stella, with an effort. Your mother and I always lived there together, Hugo. She does not, any more than myself, remember any other home. It seemed natural when my parents, who had been like father and mother to her, died, and her husband was far away, that she should remain at the Hall.

But you had no other ties, Cousin Stella. We might have followed my father's fortunes soldiers are always wanderers. I always regretted his giving up his profession, and nothing ever grieved me more than hearing that you had left Hagleth. If it is ever mine I shall fetch you back again.

Stella smiled on the ardent youth.

## Carding–Mill Valley

There may be some one else to consult then, Hugo; but if you ask me, I think I shall not say you nay. No, I will not promise, she said, as he eagerly pressed her. I do not like engagements for the far future. None of us can tell what it may bring. Let us all do the best we can in the day or hour which is all we can call our own. Now, have you grown lazy, or will you run down the hill, as you used to do, and gather a bunch of those blue–eyed flowers by the brook–side for me? I miss my usual nosegay, but I am seldom here so early, and no one has placed one on the stone ledge for me.

Hugo sprang down the steep green face of the hill without waiting for a second bidding. Stella watched him till, without a pause, for the grass was slippery, he reached the path by the stream, and stooped to gather her azure favourites. In a few minutes he stood again beside her.

Tell me, she said, after thanking him while she arranged the flowers, was it only the unknown philanthropist at the Burnt Mill, or his lovely daughter, whose cause you pleaded so eloquently? Some people like violets even more than forget–me–nots.

The young man coloured.

She has one of your pretty little serving–maidens in attendance upon her, Cousin Stella. It was a festival yesterday in honour of the completion of the drinking–fountain, and the girls carried their dinners to the workmen. I wish you had seen the governor's countenance when they offered him refreshment, after breaking up the soil of which he considered himself, as your representative, and, at your will and pleasure, lord and master. For my part, I was very glad of a draught of cider, more especially when it was handed to me by my pretty little friend Lucy Langden. Her mistress did not even do me the honour of speaking to me.

I'm glad of it, said Stella. Remember, Hugo, that my hopes, as well as those of your parents, rest on you; and I hope you will see more of the world and of life than you have hitherto done, before you make up your mind which of its fair flowers will suit my knight's coronet best. If I am not very much mistaken, Leo, who has fewer opportunities of selection, has chosen the Violet, and I should not like to have rivalry between you.

Leo! exclaimed his brother in amazement. Surely he is not thinking of love and marriage! Why, I was asked the day before yesterday in the village whether my brother had not taken 'vows of celibacy,' and I replied that, to the best of my belief, he had. No, I cannot promise to let the lovely Violet wither on his cold breast. Cousin Stella, if you wished me to quit the lists you should not have told me this.

Nay, you have not entered them, said his cousin. Leo has been beforehand with you. Althea confided to me this morning that he had asked her to join him and to accompany the young lady from the Burnt Mill home after the evening service. She did so; and, from what passed, learnt that it was not the first time Leo had escorted the Violet part of the way home through the pass in the hills. I do not say that he has any more than yourself any serious views, but it would go hard with him, I feel certain, if his affections were engaged, to give up the woman he loved, even to a brother.

Well, I do not suppose that either of us can have what are called serious intentions at present, said Hugo; I, at all events, have barely seen, and never spoken to the young lady. Leo may have had more opportunities, but I doubt his making the most of them. Will you spare me one sprig of forget–me–nots? I promise not to give it away.

Stella picked out the prettiest and the bluest of the flowers and handed it over to him. Hugo gravely placed it in his pocket–book.

It is a pledge of our contract, Cousin Stella; though you will not promise to live with me at the Hall, I shall one day remind you that I asked you, and that you did not say me nay.

## Chapter 5.

Over the wind–swept plain  
Dark shadows come and go;  
Before the storm bends the golden grain  
As each wild gust lays it low.

Carry the roses away,  
Like the loved ones whom we mourn,  
Let us lay fresh wreaths to–day  
On the traveller's tranquil bourne.

Gather the golden corn,  
Bind it as fast as ye may,

And bear it home, lest to–morrow's morn  
Prove wintry and cold and grey.

R.M.K.

The youngest of Mrs. Derinzy's daughters, though named after her (Ursula), was generally called in the family, Nursy, from a sort of general supervision which she had exercised over her brothers and sisters. Even her mother usually in domestic matters owned her sway; and she was seated now at the head of the breakfast–table, waiting for the grey–headed butler to complete its arrangements. It was with some difficulty that the impatient girl curbed her impetuous desire to quicken his proceedings. She longed to jump up and cut short his several journeys from end to end of the long room, and to place the different articles required more speedily in readiness. But she knew by experience that it would not do to hurry Manning, and her own dignity necessitated her sitting still at the post of honour, which by common consent she had occupied for the last two years.

There was, in fact, not the least occasion to hurry, for the master of the house was occupied with his letters and newspapers, and as yet the rest of the family had not made their appearance, nor had the gong sounded to summon them. Mrs. Derinzy was always late, and slipped quietly into her usual place at the side of the table. A faint smile of recognition was by her own wish the only welcome she received, as she disliked causing any change of position and disturbing her husband. She was always languid and ill–at–ease in the morning, ate scarcely anything, and spoke very little. The family were none of them great talkers, especially in the presence of the master of the house.

Nursy was the most energetic spirit amongst them. She was her mother's chief helper in domestic management, and had an inborn genius for housekeeping. If Althea vexed her quiet mother's soul by anxious longings to benefit the wicked world labouring in sin and travailing in wickedness, this little home–bird would have stripped her own breast of feathers to re–line her nest. She was truly the house–mother thinking of and for everyone but herself and striving with all her might to make home brighter and more cheerful than it was its nature to be.

When the gong at last sounded, after Manning had completed, according to Nursy, his usual twentieth gyration, the family dropped in noiselessly and took their places at the table, none of them taking much notice of the others. Colonel Derinzy did not look up from his paper till the butler handed him his teacup and dry toast, and whatever else he was likely to require. Leo, the young Clergyman, said a low grace, to which no one responded, though there was a momentary respectful pause. Hugo made a little more noise, preferring to help himself from the side–table, and declining Manning's attentions. He tried to coax his mother to partake of some delicacy; but she declined everything, and remained silent and absorbed, as if anxious to avoid notice. No one spoke again until

## Carding–Mill Valley

Colonel Derinzy, having completed his breakfast, rose, and with a good deal of rustling and folding of newspapers, departed to his library. Then tongues were released from the icy spell his presence laid upon all innocent hilarity, and the young people laughed and chatted together, till Nursy rose with an air of authority, locked up the tea–caddy, and went to order dinner. Leo said grace, this time silently, after completing his repast, and went off on his rounds in the village. He had held an early service already at the Chapel among the hills, which Althea had attended. They went out of the breakfast–room together.

Hugo watched his clerical brother as he left the room; and noticed, as it appeared to himself for the first time, how exceedingly handsome he had grown since they had been last together at home. He even fancied that he looked less formal and ascetic, that there was more light in his dark eyes, that they had a likeness he had never seen before in them to Cousin Stella's. Leo Derinzy was tall and slender, with abundant, softly–waving dark hair, which grew low in his neck, and fell over the straightly–cut collar of his priestly garment, softening its rigidity. Surely there was some departure in this mode from the rules of the strictly Anglican costume but Hugo was too slightly acquainted with them to feel certain. At all events, it was more becoming than the closely–cropped style of his former *coiffure*. The young officer rather envied his brother those beautiful glossy tresses, and his one inch of superior height. After all, it was quite possible that the Violet might admire him, and women always idolized priests. Leo had been first in the field, as Stella said; and might have had precious opportunities of making himself agreeable, as yet denied to himself.

Hugo longed to inquire whether the young lady at the Burnt Mill had attended the service, from which his brother and sister had barely time to return previous to the usual breakfast–hour; which, whatever might be the duties or employments of different members of the family, was never altered. But in most households the example of the head of the establishment is to a certain extent followed, and the habits of the brothers and sisters were not usually confidential. When they departed from custom it was when any two of the family were quite alone. The little amount of conversation carried on when assembled together was almost always on general subjects. Perhaps Leo and Althea spoke on the serious topics near to their young hearts, when they took their way in the early morning or at nightfall to the Chapel among the hills. They might even wander then into other theories, but no one heard their more intimate communions. The stars reflected in the brook looking down from the summer Heaven were their only watchers. The winds playing over the heather and fern, and among the tendrils of honeysuckle and eglantine, could alone have betrayed their secrets.

Leo has improved wonderfully, said Hugo suddenly; turning away from the window at which he had been standing, and speaking to his mother, who still sat at the breakfast–table lost in a mournful reverie. I had really no idea he would be such a fine–looking fellow. When I left home he had just donned for the first time his strictly clerical garb, and it did not suit him. He always looked stiff and uncomfortable. Now he wears it more easily, and looks as if he thought more of the spirit and less of the letter of his holy calling. Mother, is he at all like the brother for whom Cousin Stella has mourned so deeply? I thought this morning for the first time that he resembled her.

Mrs. Derinzy started as he addressed her.

Like *him Leo!* she said, in a sort of bewilderment. Not in the least. Hugh was much handsomer, and as gay as yourself. What made you think of *him?*

I often do, said Hugo; and something Cousin Stella said yesterday reminded me of him more particularly. What a terrible blow it must have been to her to lose an only brother! He must have been in the very prime of his youth and beauty! Like Leo, I still fancy, as he walked away across the terrace with Althea, who is as fond of him as Stella was of her brother; and there were only those two. They were all in all to each other.

Yes; it was a terrible, a heart–rending stroke, said his mother, with more feeling than she often manifested. Neither Stella nor I have ever entirely recovered from it. Hugo, I would rather not speak about that sorrowful

time.

Her son came back to the breakfast–table, on which Mrs. Derinzy had laid her hands feebly, one on either side of her untouched plate.

Mother, you have taken nothing this morning, absolutely nothing. I thought Nursy took better care of you. I must look after you myself. Come out into the garden with me. The morning air will be refreshing after this hot room.

Mrs. Derinzy rose slowly and took her son's arm.

I was better when we were abroad, she said. I don't think this place suits me or your father. He is graver than ever. Do you know what is troubling him so much? I do not like to ask questions.

Oh, he is bothering about this stranger, and the new road through the valley. He rode there with me the other day, and talked of going to law with him; but Cousin Stella says nothing will come of it. She has written to him, and advised him to put up with the affront, and with having a good road instead of a bad one through his land made without expense or trouble. She says that there was always a right–of–way through the Carding–Mill Valley, and that if necessary she would come forward as witness against its being stopped up. Nothing, she is sure, will be done. In my opinion it would be much wiser to make friends with this gentleman and his daughter. This place, in spite of its beauty, is very dull. We want agreeable neighbours, and can ill afford to quarrel with them.

Oh, do not vex your father by saying anything of that sort, Hugo! Your visits are not frequent; you see plenty of the world and of society when you are away from us. The man who has settled at such a forlorn place as the Burnt Mill cannot be a fit person to associate with your sisters. I am certain your father would never sanction the acquaintance.

A half–smile flitted round Hugo's mouth as he reflected that one of the family, at all events, found the stranger's daughter a fitting associate for himself and his sister; but he would not betray his brother or Stella's confidences. He did not pursue the subject farther with his mother, but soothed her trouble by talking about things far removed from Hagleth as they walked arm–in–arm round the garden; until Mrs. Derinzy, soon tired, proposed returning to the house.

Like most large families, that of Derinzy divided itself into pairs. There were the husband and wife, who, if not a loving couple, showed much consideration for each other. Leo and Althea had the same lofty unworldly views. Hugo and Laura cared more for society, and for the beauties of nature, art, and poetry. Estelle and Ursula, the two youngest sisters, loved the quiet routine of out–of–door and in–door duties which make life pleasant; and shared these pursuits together, each giving up her peculiar taste by turns to help the other. Estelle was as devoted to the garden as Nursy was to her housekeeping labours, and they contrived between them to make Hagleth Hall a much pleasanter place than it would otherwise have been. The young people were all unselfish, good–tempered, and fond of each other, with as much love for their cold–mannered parents as could be expected, but perhaps, above all, for Cousin Stella, who was like a mother to them, and inspired less fear. Estelle and Hugo were her God–children, and especial favourites; but she loved them all.

At her sunny, tranquil cottage the happiest hours of their childhood had been spent, and they gathered round her again now at The Nest whenever circumstances admitted of their leaving home. Estelle brought plants from the Riviera for her cousin's garden, which she declared would not flower half as well at the Hall, where there were not such sheltered corners as in the dear old nook under the rock. Ursula confided her little housekeeping difficulties, respecting which she never troubled her mother, to the same kind friend. If Leo had become, as Hugo believed, more holy in heart, and less narrow in form, it was probably owing to Stella's large–minded piety. Althea, too,

was learning to bide her time, and to do her duty, in the place allotted to her by Divine Providence; and to seek for objects of care and kindness among her own people.

Many a wild cabin among the hills felt the benefit of Stella's loving counsels when gladdened by the presence of the young Pastor and his sister. There were sad and terrible cases of ignorance and neglect, suffering and sadness, to be dealt with in those cottage–homes without forsaking her own; and no small need of energy and youthful strength to fulfil the demand for loving Christian charity and instruction in that remote district. Places set deep among the lone hills, and seldom visited, where Stella could no longer penetrate, but where her messages and gifts were carried, often through storm and gloom, giving sunshine in the darkest hour to feeble human beings like herself.

## Chapter 6.

The sunset rays were streaming  
Through green and fragrant bowers;  
And gem–like rain–drops gleaming  
On brightly tinted flowers;  
But the queen–like lilies, fair and white,  
Caught not the flush of that fading light.

In the shadows of the dusky grove  
Those tall pale blossoms smiled;  
Where the sheltering boughs, like a parent's love,  
Guarded each favourite child:  
Not a pearly drop in their deep cups lay  
Of the brief fierce storm that had passed away.

R.M.K.

Mrs. Derinzy's flower–garden was looking as lovely as when she tried to tempt her Cousin Stella to visit the Hall. It was Estelle's turn to give orders; and having willingly helped her more domestic–minded sister, all the morning, in re–arranging store–closets and linen–presses after their long absence, she was now fairly entitled to Ursula's loving service among the beds and borders which contained her own especial treasures.

These two young girls perhaps loved their silent suffering mother best. They had not reached the age when her total insignificance in the household became most apparent when it would be felt that between them and the iron will of their father there was no firm, fearless, motherly love to interfere and to qualify its sternness. Their elder brothers and sisters viewed their timid parent with more wondering pity, and shrank from the conviction which they could scarcely banish, that in that timid nature there was a lack of truth as well as of courage. To them all, as long as they were children, Mrs. Derinzy was very indulgent, and her two youngest daughters had scarcely passed the bounds within which her feeble will was law.

Colonel Derinzy had made it a point not to interfere in certain departments. The nursery was one, and the flower–garden of his wife, another. Perhaps it was from the fear of departing from principle that he seldom set his foot in either. Never could his children remember their tall grave father unbending so far as to romp with them in nursery or garden. If he had penetrated there, all sports would have speedily come to an end.

On this account the mother's garden was a favourite haunt with the young people; and she, too, the pensive, ailing woman, loved its quiet precincts. Often she sat there for hours watching her children, with her pretty fancy–work, and embroidery or crochet–needle in her hands or in her lap, and a novel or poetry–book beside her, but generally

## Carding–Mill Valley

idle. There was a sunny green lawn, with gay flower–beds of all colours set in the turf, and riband borders, yet brighter, sloping away from her favourite seat, which was in a very shady arbour open to the south, but protected from every rude breath of wind by high trees. From the hills a clear stream rushed down over pebbles, and fell, at but a short distance, under a heavy mass of ivy which hung about portions of an ancient wall, over a ledge of dark rocks into a deep pool, whence it glided away rapidly and noisily down the side of the garden. Though but a tiny rill in summer, like most of the features of the surrounding scenery, it had the characteristics of its birthplace high up among the mountains. It was wonderful what a great deal of trouble mother's burn, as the children loved to call it, frequently gave. Solid masonry could not withstand its pressure when, swelled by sudden rains, it burst on its way with the force of a torrent.

More than once, when obliged to be told of mischief done by the brawling foaming rivulet in winter–time, Colonel Derinzy's brow was contracted, but he did not depart from the rule he had laid down. Orders were given if necessary; but he did not, as was his wont, superintend, perhaps impede, their execution. Once one of the tiny children rushed in and tried to pull him away to look at the stream all turned to ice and standing stock still, but the little rash pleader's invitation was not accepted. The brook was flowing on merrily and harmlessly now, under the old wall fringed and curtained with ivy. June, the month of roses, had blossomed out fairly. Every rare description of the flower cultivated so successfully by modern gardeners, was blooming freely, scenting the air deliciously, whilst a few of dear Aunt Stella's old favourites, carefully cherished, held their ground amongst more fashionable beauties. One large flowering perfumed blush–rose clung to the ivied wall and was mirrored in the stream. A few of its petals had fallen and were rapidly whirling down the swiftly–flowing water.

Mrs. Derinzy's wandering gaze followed their course, but they were not the subject of her thoughts. Hers was not a fanciful or poetical cast of character. It did not occur to her, as she sat in her low, lounging chair, with unoccupied fingers and listless air, how many hopes she had seen whirled away down the stream of life, like the fast–vanishing rose–leaves, since she came first, in her early girlhood, to Hagleth Hall.

On either side of the sunny bright–hued heart–shaped garden, which fell away in front of her, and was sheltered by belts of evergreen, and beyond these by lofty trees, were straight walks, dark in shadow; with, at intervals, groups of tall white lilies, and those yellow fleeting sisters of the same tribe whose beauty lasts but a day. No sunshine caught them, but still they gleamed out in their own golden or silvery purity under the dark canopy of foliage. Neither was the anxious–looking mother thinking of her children, though several of them were near her, and she spoke a few words kindly in answer to their remarks or inquiries when they occasionally approached her. Ursula and Estelle were busy gardening, though in that trimly kept *parterre* it was difficult to discover what they could find to occupy themselves with. No matter, if idle hands and thoughts find work in mischief, industrious souls will find some good to do, even under the most unpromising circumstances. Estelle and Nursy were as busy as the bees flitting from flower to flower.

Even in the best kept beds and borders there will from hour to hour occur little disturbances. The roses wither and die, the leaves begin to fall, even when all is or should be brightest and strongest: some inward canker, or the poison kiss of an insect on the wing, blights them suddenly.

Young hearts and wills are not always in unison with the dictates of modern culture. The girls after their long absence missed some old favourites, and were with difficulty convinced that they were past their best days and only cumbered the borders. The conversation between Estelle and the head–gardener, as he crossed the lawn and stopped to point out some newly–imported flowers, had a slight tone of acrimony which reached her mother's often inattentive ears. She called her daughter to her side and inquired what was the matter.

Oh, mother, it is only that I do not care as much for some of Ferguson's great rarities as for our own dear old flowering shrubs and famous roses. That one that Aunt Stella called the Hagleth Rose is gone, and I do not believe it had outgrown its strength. Look how beautifully its old companion is flowering alone this year on the wall the large pale rose that contrasts so well with these dark wreaths and masses of ivy; but the red one that used



## Carding–Mill Valley

to twine so lovingly round those thick stems has been taken away.

Perhaps it died, love, said her mother. It must have been quite an old tree, for I remember it ever since I came here, when I was but your age.

Then you must be even more sorry than we are, mother dear, to part with such an old friend. I am sorry I mentioned that it was gone, said Estelle; while her mother's gaze rested on the ivied wall as she relapsed into silence.

No oh no! It was time it should be taken away. No doubt Ferguson is right; he is sure to know better; and he is such a favourite with your father, who says truly that the place never was in such excellent order. I wish I could persuade Aunt Stella to come and see my roses. Do not find fault with the head–gardener. He might give warning, and assign that as a reason to your father.

No danger of that, I fancy, said Estelle lightly. He has an excellent situation, and he knows it. But I do not want to tease you; and I do wish Aunt Stella would come and see your garden whilst it is in full beauty. It never looks so well as when the roses are in bloom.

It is of no use wishing it, Estelle; though I do not believe it is farther than that uncomfortable stone seat where she spends so much of her time looking at the mountains. That can be no real rest.

I do not think I quite agree with you there, mother; said the girl, lifting her eyes gravely to the heights above the trees. Looking at the mountains is always restful, and there is nothing between her eyes and the highlands she so loves. When she is sitting in her favourite spot, I have seen quite a heavenly expression on her upturned face. Here the trees shut out half the view. I think they have grown much taller and thicker whilst we were away. Would it not be an improvement if the woods were thinned?

No; I do not think so. Nothing could suit me better than these sheltered, pleasant grounds. I do not like seeing too much of the mountains: replied her mother, with a shiver; turning away even from the prospect of their distant summits, and looking across the garden.

Well, we will say nothing about it, then, if you are satisfied. This is your own garden, and no one has a right to find fault or give orders in it without your leave, said the girl, kissing her. Now I must run back to Nursy and help her to train that beautiful honeysuckle. Ferguson was very good about that, and has left us to do what we like with it, provided it does not interfere with one of his new shrubs, which it has taken a fancy to clamber over and rest upon. It is a real pleasure to be allowed by these grand gardeners to do a little honest bit of work for one's self!

When her daughter had left the arbour, Mrs. Derinzy's eyes did not seem to follow her, but were turned in the direction of one of the long straight alleys of verdure, where Hugo and Laura were walking up and down, arm–in–arm, in earnest conversation.

I wonder what they are talking about, she said to herself. I hope he is not telling her of those strangers, and urging her to make acquaintance with them. Excepting in Church matters I can trust Althea, but Laura is so impetuous, and so fond of society. Oh, how I wish they could keep being children! Estelle and Ursula have scarcely outgrown their nursery ways, but these older boys and girls are so headstrong. Each in their own way so satisfied that what they do or wish to do must be wisest and best, that I am always in fear of a collision between them and their father.

She sighed and took up her book, but it failed to amuse; then tried work with the same ill–success. Meanwhile the sun passed off one side of the garden and began to gleam down the long vistas of the shrubberies, lighting up the

lilies in succession. The rays caught the white dress of the girl clinging caressingly to her brother's arm as they stood still in one spot for several moments; and the timid mother felt as if the sheltered, shadowy walks were no longer safe. Even there the glare and glitter of the world and its many temptations and pleasures could not be shut out. Her young brood would soon break the barriers which, as yet, had kept them and herself from the dangers which she half–foresaw awaited them, when in full manhood and womanhood they overstepped the hard, narrow limits assigned to them, and chose to take their share in the game of life.

## Chapter 7.

In Eden's shadowy, sunlit bowers  
Where God once walked with man,  
Each one of Earth's bright varied flowers  
Its gentle life began.  
Her cup of light the Tulip filled,  
Sweet Violets, hid from sight,  
Their precious odours round distilled:  
The Cereus bloomed by night.

The Lily raised her calm fair face,  
Wild flowers perfumed the wood:  
Each parent of some beauteous race  
God blessed pronounced them good  
They needed care they wanted love  
And both were given in showers  
Of rain and dew from Heaven above,  
Falling in twilight hours.

R.M.K. *The Two Gardens.*

In the wild tangled grounds of The Burnt Mill there was no lack of work for willing hands, and no grand gardener to monopolize it. Sometimes one or two of the labourers lent ready and willing service, and Viola and her maidens toiled unremittingly; but still it was such a wild garden as the Poet Laureate loved, on the edge of the moorland.

There were roses in plenty, white and pink, throwing wreaths over rock and stone, and honeysuckles allowed to climb as their own fancy willed up the stems of the mountain ash and birch trees, or to mat themselves among the lower growth of the thicket. Bright clumps of orange lilies and water–plants of all sorts and colours broad leaves resting on the surface of the pools formed by the river, and bearing up white crowns, worthy to be worn by queens, on their smooth dark surface.

Many rare and tender ferns flourished in cool damp nooks, which all the fostering care in the world could not cherish in my lady's flower–garden on the banks of Mother's Burn. The sun shone down too fiercely; and the little brawling stream, in its turbulent fretfulness, washed away those which Estelle planted there, treasures culled in many lands. They would not do at all, Ferguson said, in the open; the young ladies must come to him for delicate maidenhair and parsley ferns, for their bouquets, from the glass–houses.

But here, with the caprice which belongs as much to plants as to womankind or fine–ladyism, the ferns grew luxuriantly; fringing the banks of the stream and overhanging the little rills, where hundreds of tiny flowers peeped like stars out of the vivid green, specked with scarlet and white, of the cup moss. Within the bounds of the wild garden the rivulet flowed tranquilly, under deep banks which were never overflowed or undermined, without

## Carding–Mill Valley

making half the noise created by the turbulent brook. It wound round hazel copse and grassy knoll with a song–like murmur, or lay dark and tranquil beneath high rocks and ancient trees.

There were no sounds of labour in the valley excepting the tap of Viola's trowel against a stone, or the voice of one of the happy girls attending upon her. The men had finished the very last part of the work which had kept them contented during the past winter and spring; and were gone off to gather in the hay, which owing to a wet season was somewhat late in this mountain district. The owner of the lately purchased property had made no stay there, and the place was left with only its girlish mistress and her serving maidens within its walls. No male protector was needed; the young lady was as safe as if an armed guard had been left to take care of her.

Here were no playful attempts at keeping order, like those in the garden at Hagleth. It required all the strength of the merry girls, and a great part of their time, to keep the paths clear of weeds and straying boughs of brambles and nettles. They were all at work as busy as the bees which were rifling the bells of the honeysuckle, and their mistress was as much in earnest as the youngest among them. They were not in their purple and white striped holiday frocks now, but each and all arrayed in sober working suits of brown holland. Viola's only distinction was a wide belt of her favourite colour round her waist, and a narrower edge tipping her delicate white linen cuffs and collar. Nor was there any distinction in their zealous labour. Perhaps the young lady was a little the most energetic, but the country girls were more strongly built and did the most work. All were thoroughly in earnest.

It was some time before anyone noticed that they were watched from the opposite side of the river, where a gentleman, followed by two dogs, was walking very slowly past the scene of labour. He raised his cap respectfully when Viola at last perceived him, and she recognised that it was the more courteous of the two horsemen who had come suddenly upon the workmen in the glen at the hour of their mid–day meal.

Viola returned the salutation slightly, and tried to think no more of the intruder; but she did not resume her efforts to twist a straggling bough of one of the large old rose–trees round the fence of a rustic bridge which here spanned the stream. She knew it was too much for her strength, and did not wish to betray her ill–success, but it had not escaped the notice of the observant spectator. Before she could turn away to summon assistance, Hugo Derinzy was standing beside her, and the obstinate branch was fixed securely in the right place.

Forgive my trespassing, he said, smiling. This is undoubtedly *your* father's land, but I have been seeking an opportunity to tell you that mine has relented from the harsh purpose he expressed, when taken completely by surprise, last week. None of the men employed during his absence will be sufferers, and the new road will not be touched. As this is the case, may we not be friends?

Viola coloured deeply.

I am not allowed, she said, to form friendships easily. It is a sacred bond.

Neither have we many friends in this lone country–side, persisted Hugo. My sisters lead almost as quiet lives as yourself when at home. I think you already know one of them; and, he added, looking searchingly at his companion, my brother Leo.

The colour had faded as quickly as it rose, and Viola's glance met his frankly as she answered, without any embarrassment:

We all know our good pastor. He is kind to everyone, and he was at Hagleth through the winter. I have seen your sister once only, when she was good enough to take care of me on my way back from the Chapel. That scarcely made us friends.

## Carding–Mill Valley

No; but it may lead to friendship, said Hugo. She has said enough to make Laura, who must be nearer your age, most anxious to know you. The others are mere children. But I claim to know you through your courteous order, on that sultry day, that your little handmaiden should offer me some refreshment. I think she knows me, for I have often seen her waiting on our cousin Stella, with whom she is a favourite. I told her yesterday of her good fortune in being your attendant; and she, too, would like to thank you for your kindness to her little pupil.

I have heard a great deal of Miss Derinzy from her own people. I should like to see her; but indeed it is not possible for me to make acquaintance with others besides my good Pastor and, perhaps, his sisters. My father does not deny me that pleasure; but I am not permitted to visit anywhere.

Surely I am not especially excluded? I am a constant attendant at the Chapel. We must meet there, and you will not pass me by unnoticed.

There can be no reason for such discourtesy, said Viola simply. My father is never unreasonable; only it would not suit his love of retirement that I should have visitors or leave home unnecessarily. Thank you for your help with that refractory bough. I think we have done a good day's work, and I and my girls may leave off now. The sun is too much overhead for toil to be pleasant.

She bowed and retreated from the bridge on which they had been standing for a few minutes together, leaving Hugo no excuse for not pursuing his homeward way. Hugo Derinzy went very slowly and reluctantly up the path by the stream. His dogs, who had soon made friends with Viola, and were lapping the cool water, also seemed loth to depart. He did not whistle them away, but stood quietly, waiting for them to join him; still casting envious glances across the stream which seemed to divide him from a very garden of Eden.

Viola, on her part, though she moved at first more quickly away, did not put in practice immediately her threat of retiring indoors or quite out of sight. Perhaps she did not wish to disturb the busy maidens who were working away happily on the banks of the stream, under the shade, not at all, apparently, incommoded by the heat. She sat down beneath a spreading chestnut–tree and watched their progress; not looking across the water perhaps not aware of the furtive glances still directed towards her.

This young creature had led such an extremely secluded life that she was entirely free from even the least tinge of coquetry or affectation. It was pleasant to see and speak to persons of her own age and position; and she remembered with joy that her father, stern recluse as he was, had not prohibited limited intercourse with the family at Hagleth.

## Chapter 8.

Oh! who of us would have thought that it mattered  
Where fell the small seed from the beak of a bird,  
And who would believe what a blessing is scattered  
Aye, times out of nurnber, by one kindly word.  
A whisper of counsel, a stray admonition,  
May fall in rough places to bloom in contrition,  
And while God is preparing a gracious fruition  
We fancy it wasted or even unheard.

The seedling has touched the bare hill–top with beauty  
And yielded the wayfarer cheering delight;  
A word may enliven some stern path of duty,  
A smile make some sorrowful countenance bright.

## Carding–Mill Valley

*The wild geranium.*

Viola had not the slightest idea how long she had been sitting idle under the chestnut–tree, when suddenly the bell of the Chapel broke the spell of silent meditation. She looked round for her companions, but they had all gone indoors to change their dress preparatory for the evening service. She was quite alone in the garden, and the sun had sunk below the mountains.

When she came out of a side door in the mansion, prepared to follow her maidens, their young mistress had made also some alteration in her simple toilette.

She now wore a plain black silk dress and dark hat; and carried a light cloak over her arm, and her prayer and hymn book in her hand, as she went quietly along the narrow path up the valley towards the building where, since the young clergyman took possession of the family living, service had been performed every evening for some outlying parishioners. Occasionally there was a short discourse; at other times the children were questioned or practised their singing. Viola for the last nine months had been a constant and punctual attendant.

Though she had braved the storms of winter and spring, she for the first time hesitated and looked at the light clouds on the mountains' brow as if she rather desired an excuse for not performing her accustomed voluntary duty. But though twilight was beginning to gather, the evening was fine, and she resisted the impulse which for a brief interval had stayed her usually light, buoyant footsteps.

She was a little late almost for the first time. The girls of her household were all in their places, and the opening hymn had commenced. She fancied that the clergyman looked at her reproachfully as she passed timidly between the standing rows of the small congregation to her usual place. No other member of the family at the Hall was present.

It struck her as a startling coincidence when Leo gave out his text, that the sermon should be about a garden. She saw the green banks and tangled rose–thickets, the stream brawling beside the mossy path where she had lingered; for his picture was one not of trim parterres like the one at Hagleth Hall, but of a wild flowery wilderness. He might, perhaps, have first thought of it as he walked by her side a few evenings before under the sweetbriar hedges; for, in Scripture phrases, he alluded to groups which he had then pointed out to her, of lilies growing on the banks of the stream. There was a fervour in his words as he described the first sinless Eden.

The discourse deepened in fervour when he came to the entrance of the tempter and his insidious flatteries, and the change wrought in the bowers of Paradise by the woman's wilful act. Disobedience followed with expulsion from Eden, and the darkening of those happy paths where man once walked with God.

A slight sound disturbed Viola's thoughts, and caused her eyes, which were fixed upon the preacher, to turn in the direction whence it came. A hand had put back the curtain which hung in front of the Squire's seat, the only one which had any distinction from the rest. Now Hugo Derinzy was there with his sister Laura. Viola did not know when they had entered the Chapel by a private door kept solely for their use.

It was much more difficult to fix her attention with those two pair of bright eyes fixed upon her. She found herself, in fancy, back in the real garden at home, with Hugo Derinzy standing by her on the bridge; and she blushed at thinking how earnestly she had been looking at his brother, totally unconscious of any observation more critical than that of the rustics all around who were staring at him contentedly. Was this false shame the first–fruits of the tempter's teaching? Ought she not to blame herself much more for her present distraction?

However that might be, the spell was broken, and Viola could not again succumb to its influence. She listened, as if in a dream, to the conclusion of the sermon, which was in fact much less eloquent and heart–stirring than its commencement. The moment it was over, and the parting hymn sung, she put on her cloak and hastily left the

chapel.

But there were footsteps on the path behind her, and she felt that an unsuccessful attempt at flight would be undignified. Better not to hurry, and to let both the brothers and their sister accompany her part of the way home. The next moment they had overtaken her; and, her momentary embarrassment conquered, Viola found herself walking beside Laura Derinzy, and followed by Hugo and Leo. The scent of the sweetbriar came on the evening wind long before they reached the boundary of the recluse's garden.

There seemed to be no harm in allowing them to enter those precincts, though she knew that she must not invite them to set foot within her father's house. He was far away on a long journey, and this brief pleasant companionship, which he had not forbidden, was very precious to the usually solitary girl. Laura Derinzy, as Hugo had anticipated, suited her much better than the older and graver Althea, with whom she had spoken only about Church matters and Psalmody. Now the twilight garden, the sleeping flowers, poetry and romance, were more congenial topics.

Hugo stepped forward when they came to the rustic bridge; but he did not say to their companions that he had seen her there before earlier in the day, nor had Viola courage enough to allude to the circumstance. She wished that she had done so when he glanced half–laughingly, half–confidentially, at her as they passed it; and touched the rail to which he had fastened the rose branch, gathering a flower which he fastened carefully in his button–hole. The girl blushed and trembled, feeling that there was a slight secret understanding between them.

All the time Leo stood talking gravely, as was his wont, her thoughts were troubled, but she only sighed and made no sign. He imagined that his sermon had made her unusually pensive, and felt flattered. He confessed that he had drawn his inspiration from that very scene, a few evenings before.

On his way back after entering for the first time that lovely garden by the water–side, and in the watches of the night, the moonlight on the flowers and soft scent of the roses had haunted him; and he could not refrain from trying to reproduce that dream of Paradise.

My father came home that evening, said Viola. He often takes me by surprise, but never stays long.

Do you not find it very dreary here when you are quite alone? said Laura kindly. You must come up to the Hall when he leaves you.

No, said Viola. My father may return at any moment, and does not like me to pay visits or to receive visitors. I am afraid I cannot ask you to accompany me any farther. I am within sight of the house now. Thank you for your escort so far.

She stood still, just where, above a ledge of rock, the half–ruinous house, with its old dark grey walls perforated with many windows, became visible.

Laura looked at it with interest.

You really live *there* often quite alone? she said compassionately. Pardon me if I say that it seems cruel to leave you. I remember when we were children we were half afraid to run about in these long passages and empty rooms; but no doubt all is altered now.

I do not think there is much change, said Viola. The owner seems never to visit the place now, and half the rooms are empty still some are not inhabitable. My father does not care to spend money on furniture, and we require so little. He has his books and papers, with which, when at home, he is always busy; and often he is absent for weeks, sometimes for months. My rooms are full of pretty things which he has brought from different parts of

the world. I am never dull and lonely. Some day he may, perhaps, give me leave to show you my treasures. I dare not without permission; but he is very indulgent. See! there is a light in that end window, and it is mine, she added. One of my girls is there waiting for me. They are good little creatures, and like me to teach them. One of them was Miss Derinzy's pupil, and I should not like her to forget what she has learnt.

The light flickered near the open window for a moment; then blind and curtain were drawn across, concealing it. Laura and her brothers bade Viola adieu reluctantly, and the regret was mutual. She went back a little way along the path with them; and, for the first time in her young life, home seemed somewhat dreary when she returned to it.

Viola lingered on the doorstep, listening to the receding steps and voices of her recent companions. Was it true, as Laura Derinzy had said, that it was rather cruel to leave her alone in the old grey house the Burnt Mill about which, she well knew, hung many a dreary tradition? Never before had she felt inclined to question the wisdom of any of her father's arrangements. Had the tempter really taken possession of her Eden, raising up gloomy surmisings where hitherto all had been peace and perfect confidence? Viola turned away from the question, and tried to dismiss it from her thoughts; but it returned again and again as she sat alone, listening rather despondently to the many strange sounds which haunt such solitary buildings as the old house by the water, where once the mill–wheel went merrily round, and all was active industry.

## Chapter 9.

There is a pleasure which is born of pain,  
The grave of all things hath its violet;  
Then, why through days which never come again,  
Roams hope with that strange longing like regret;  
Why put the posy in the cold dead hand?  
Why plant the rose above the lonely grave?  
Why bring the corpse across the salt sea wave?  
Why deem the dead more near in native land?

Lord Lytton

Colonel Derinzy had at last put in practice the intention, several times announced, of going to London on business. It was not his custom ever to make his children acquainted with the nature of these mysterious occupations, but they always looked upon them as welcome deliverances from an almost insupportable oppression.

Even his pale timid wife woke up into rather brisker activity when the incubus of his presence was removed. When she felt that she could order her own carriage, or even invite some friends of the young people to the house, unquestioned and without fear of consequences; for every member of that household, from the highest to the lowest, had learnt from dire experience to keep their own and each others' secrets.

Though accustomed to a slight change of manner and a more decided purpose in their mother's usually languid movements, it was with surprise that Hugo and Althea heard her order the carriage without hesitation one afternoon, and express a wish that they should be her companions in a drive.

I have been thinking, she said, that, as it will not worry your father, I should like to see this new road, which Stella assures me is such a benefit to the district. We might, she added, if the weather continued fine, and I felt equal to it, go on as far as the old Mill. I should like to pass Stella's Waterfall I have not seen it for years and call upon the young lady who is, you say, so lonely and so pleasant.

## Carding–Mill Valley

She smiled, though there was a nervous contraction at the corners of her mouth as she stopped abruptly.

Well done, little mother, said Hugo; I am delighted to hear that you are inclined for a frolic in the Governor's absence.

Oh, you should not say that, said Mrs. Derinzy, shrinking into herself, terrified when her own boldness was put into fuller light by her son's laughing comment. Your father has not forbidden my calling on the young lady. In fact, I rather think, though I have not asked him, that on his account it may be better to propitiate these newcomers. The young lady, at all events. It would be such a blessing to have peace established. And I think, I hope, I may bring it about. If not if she is not to be conciliated if, in short, it seems advisable we can drop the matter one short visit from me cannot do much harm, and I own to a curiosity a desire to see her.

Harm! I should think not, mother, said Leopold, looking up from his book, and taking part for once in a domestic discussion. Peace is a blessed thing, especially between neighbours. I honour you, mother, for your kind resolution.

Oh, I don't know, I am not sure, said his mother, folding up her work nervously. I am glad you think me right, Leo; time will show whether what I propose is for the best.

She sighed as she left the room to prepare for her drive, followed by Althea. The young clergyman and his brother did not speak to each other on the subject; but they were both at the front door ready to arrange their mother's numerous wraps, sunshade and umbrella, in readiness for shower or sunshine, and to assist and encourage her before starting on a longer drive than usual. They both noticed that Mrs. Derinzy was dressed not in her usually trailing neutral–tinted garments, but in handsome sable robes, and that she looked remarkably well.

Her delicate complexion was flushed and her eyes sparkled as they drove through the lanes, with the soft summer air in their faces. Though she seldom spoke except in answer to some remark which Hugo turned round from his high seat to address to her, Althea thought that her mother noticed more than usual the objects by the wayside. They did not follow the rough bridle–road through the pass, but wound round the hills; taking the much easier course which the stranger had adopted in the construction of the new road. Mrs. Derinzy, who was very timid and easily fatigued by the motion of a carriage, felt all the advantage of the change.

Why, this is quite a blessing. What a pity your father does not see it in the same light, she said with unusual animation, when Hugo showed her at a distance the old steep road from which they had turned aside. So tormented and trammelled as he is about repairing roads and dwellings and hampered by restrictions and here without expense or trouble is this excellent road. I remember the last, the very last time, I came with Stella to see her waterfall I was terrified nearly to death. I walked nearly half the way though it was only a little pony–carriage the roads were quite unfit for wheels, and now I declare I have really enjoyed the drive.

Delighted with their mother's unusual cheerfulness, Althea and Hugo pointed out different features of the scenery, which every moment became more romantic; showing their mother glimpses which might have escaped her notice of the cataract in the glen, and telling her how carefully Stella's wild garden was tended.

Why should utter strangers take such trouble? said Mrs. Derinzy somewhat suspiciously. I do not understand what brought them to such a place as the Burnt Mill horrid name. Perhaps, after all, your father knows best! Hugo, do you think, are you quite sure that I am right? Had we not better turn back?

No, no, we are just at the place Millburn is its proper name; we cannot go back, you have passed the Rubicon, little mother. See how beautifully the stream winds under that bank crowned with white wild roses. Look at those splendid rocks starting up as if to stop its course. They *have* turned it, and now it foams and ripples at their base as if perpetually trying to undermine them. That is where I rode with my father, and we saw the last day of work



## Carding–Mill Valley

terminated by a rustic banquet. The young lady and her handmaidens stood under that May–tree, looking like a cluster of white and purple violets. How the men cheered after drinking their healths! It was strange that my father could see only the rough side of the affair. Perhaps the road–making was a trespass on his rights, but it has done him much more good than harm.

Oh, do not let us talk upon that subject, Hugo; no doubt it was a mistake a great infringement of your Cousin Stella's rights as Lady of the Manor; of course we are not going to give up that point. But the young lady had nothing to do with it, except taking out their dinner to the workpeople at least, her maids carried it, I think you said. I declare we are at the gates. And yet, perhaps, it is not too late. Shall we do you and Althea think we had better go in?

Certainly, mother; how strange it would seem if we drew back so rudely, said Althea gently. There is some one standing at the door now; and, oh, is not this wild garden pretty?

Mrs. Derinzy scarcely heard her remarks, but she made no further attempt to stay their course. Hugo's words she felt were true. She had crossed the Rubicon; and now, as she drove between dark beds of as yet unflowering heath under the interlacing boughs of an avenue of very ancient oaks, up to the half ruinous structure overhanging the brawling stream, memory was very busy recalling another day another companion, on whose strong arm she had rested but whom she would never in this life meet again; never again, never again, seemed to sound in the murmuring water, in the rustling leaves, in the sigh of the wind in the tree–tops.

Hugo sprang down from his seat as soon as the carriage stopped, as he perceived that the figure dimly visible under the portico was that of the young mistress of the house, Violet Forester. She came timidly forward to greet his mother.

Mrs. Derinzy, however, did not stir. The colour had faded from her cheeks, leaving them white as death. The young girl looked at her with tender compassion. It is very good of you to come and see me. I am afraid the long drive has been too great a fatigue. Do come in and rest.

Hugo seconded the entreaty, a little impatiently, holding out his hand to assist his mother to alight.

Wait one moment oh, I think I had better go home. It was very unwise of me to come Mrs. Derinzy, still immovable, faltered out this good young lady will excuse me No, mother, said Hugo, almost as imperatively as his father Miss Forester will not excuse you another day will not do you will be better inside this cool shadowy house. The motion of the carriage and the glare of sunshine on the white road has tired you, that is all. Besides, the horses must have half an hour's rest.

This argument, as he probably knew would be the case, had more effect than the reference to her own need of repose. Her husband was very particular about his fine carriage–horses, and Mrs. Derinzy, a most obedient wife, regarded Hugo as his representative in matters appertaining to the stables.

She laid a limp trembling hand in the one Violet extended, but shrank back nervously from the girl's warm clasp. Then, leaning on her son's arm, she alighted slowly and entered the house, pausing once more under the low–arched doorway.

Miss Forester led the way in silence to her own sitting–room, which had a large window, built out from the straight wall of the mill, overhanging the stream. Mrs. Derinzy sank into a chair near the fireplace, which was of dark oak, reaching almost to the ceiling, and quaintly carved, with a few old china ornaments on the shelf, high up, almost out of sight. Her indisposition was very real, and she struggled vainly to regain composure.

## Carding–Mill Valley

Something in that pale sad face the blighted aspect of the woman cowering in what had been her own mother's chair, awoke a strong feeling of tenderness in Viola's mind. She leant over her visitor, fanning her with a large plume of peacock's feathers which hung against the dark fireplace; tears stood in her eyes.

I am so grieved that you should suffer so much through your kindness she murmured in soft tones, which soothed Mrs. Derinzy's fluttered nerves. Then, kneeling beside her, she chafed her cold hands cold always, despite the summer sunshine and sprinkled scented water from a very old–fashioned cut flagon on the table over the small palms, pressing them tenderly. Suddenly Mrs. Derinzy bent forward and kissed her young hostess on the forehead. God bless you, child, she said, much more fervently than usual. I shall be better presently; leave me for a few moments to myself.

The young girl sprang to her feet gratified and relieved, while Mrs. Derinzy leant back, silently contemplating the old room, and recognising its distinctive features. It was very little altered since she had seen it last; when, after the fire, it had been fitted up for a sportsman's temporary occupation.

She remembered the look of the place well, and could almost have fancied that the same books and ornaments were scattered about; but no doubt had she examined more closely this would have been found to be an illusion. Certainly the American rocking–chair, in which she was slowly swaying to and fro, had not occupied the place by the hearth then.

It had been carved by Mr. Forester's own hand out of wood grown in the forests of the Far West for his dead wife, Viola's mother.

Neither was the book which Althea had taken up from the table, and which speedily absorbed her attention, any part of the old–world collection which had been displayed on a few shelves in the olden time works principally about the chase and the management of dogs and horses. The light volume, or rather pamphlet, she held was of quite modern date; and contained theories which would have startled old–fashioned readers.

Hugo and Viola at first kept up the conversation between them, but Mrs. Derinzy listened with unusual interest. Her eyes never moved from the face of her hostess, and every tone of her sweet voice seemed to inspire her with confidence. After a while she even joined in their discourse.

Hugo was quite surprised when he heard his shy downcast mother's low tones mingling with Viola's clearer utterances. He thought that the two voices chimed in with each other harmoniously, and he had no idea before how agreeable his mother could make herself to a perfect stranger. In fact, she scarcely seemed to feel that Viola was a stranger there seemed to be between them some strange link of connection.

As the girl again took her place on the footstool at his mother's knee, and held her hand unhidden, while Mrs. Derinzy looked down ever and anon upon her unclouded upturned brow with a yearning look of love that sought, and he saw had already found, a resting–place and a return, Hugo's heart beat quickly. He thought that none of his sisters had ever looked so much like his forlorn mother's own child as this motherless girl.

Viola's neat handmaidens brought in tea, and fruit and cakes with delicious cream; and her guests after their long drive partook of the slight refreshments with pleasure. Mrs. Derinzy seemed quite revived. She warmly thanked her young hostess for the care she had taken of her, and pressed her to return the visit, inwardly wishing it might be before the Colonel's return from London; but Violet did not promise to come to Hagleth. Her father, she said, was very uncertain in his movements. He might come home at any moment, and the last time he did so she was absent. That must not happen again.

Mrs. Derinzy looked round timidly and half rose from her low chair when Viola spoke of the possibility of her father's immediate return; but the girl's expressive countenance did not show any sign of the trepidation with

## Carding–Mill Valley

which such an event in the family inspired herself and her children. A glad light came into Violet's eyes, a soft colouring of pleasure to her cheek, at the thought of her absent father. His return was evidently a bright spot in the future.

Perhaps if more candidly treated, more warmly welcomed, Colonel Derinzy's colder nature might have expanded; but years of repression, cynical sarcasm and petty tyranny cannot but leave their mark. Crushed affections will not recover after years of neglect and restraint; as a man sows so must he reap; gusts of evil temper blighting suspicion adverse currents of arbitrariness and jealousy had withered the first springing shoots of love and confidence in his wife and children. No flower, no fruit, in that ungenial atmosphere ever came to perfection.

It is easy in such cases for a casual observer to say Oh, I would have treated that man differently, I would have charmed away suspicion and censure, and met doubt with the weapons of truth; but there are bitteresses with which no stranger intermeddleth, depths of trouble into which time only enables us to see to the very depths. Into these hope cannot penetrate these bitter waters may not be made sweet. Weariness, disappointment, and vexation have been too often the result of fruitless effort, and the man is left to his own unlucky self–imposed state, in loneliness and desolation, alone.

Whatever might be the faults of the father, who seemed to leave this young girl so much in solitude, and whose unknown life–history had certainly a dark shade of suspicion cast upon it by his mysterious and lengthened absences from home, there seemed no lack of confidence between Violet and her parent. She told Althea that the article she had been reading with such rapt interest was his contribution to the magazine, which contained writings of the first men of the day on scientific and philanthropical subjects, and allowed her to take it away with her to show to Aunt Stella after finishing it herself.

Viola went to the outer door with her friends, and stood long under the porch, watching the carriage as it drove down the winding road and through the glen. Hugo could see the slender figure beneath the archway, and his thoughts were not disturbed by any remarks on the part of his mother and sister.

Althea had gone back to the article, full of deep thought and learned research, which had so forcibly attracted and still riveted her attention. Now and then in spite of its gravity a half–smile played on her lips, as if she had made some discovery deeply interesting to herself respecting the anonymous author. Mrs. Derinzy lay back among her wraps and cushions, apparently worn out with fatigue, perfectly silent. Strange to say, it was of her that Violet Forester thought the most as she slowly re–entered the house. There was something in that sad, regretful countenance which irresistibly stirred her affections. She would have given the world to possess the key to that mournful woman's thoughts.

## Chapter 10.

Do you remember our home–woods in spring  
Where we walked long ago  
Ah! little things come back to me and bring  
Yearnings that none may know.  
Felled on the margin of a wooded fosse,  
An old oak giant lay,  
We stripped him of his robe of furry moss  
And bare our spoil away.

Upon the stream, in summer, brown and clear,  
Our boat would glide along;  
Or we would pause among the reeds to hear

The small sedge–warbler's song.

Sarah Dowdney

The time was long past when Stella Derinzy in her impatient girlhood had murmured at her lot. Now, when to the eyes of others she might seem more worthy of compassion than she was in her first hour of bereavement; with health impaired, activity curbed, alone and no longer in the pride of youth, she recognized and submitted faithfully to the wisdom of the decree which had so early laid her low. One of her chief gratifications was the never–failing confiding affection of her young cousins at Hagleth Hall. Not a day passed without bringing one or another of the girls to Stella's cottage. Sometimes it was Estelle, with some favourite scrap of poetry or a root of some choice flower which she had dug up in the woods to plant at The Nest; sometimes the young housekeeper begging for advice and assistance in some domestic difficulty, or Laura with some gay jest or anecdote about her last ball or dinner–party, all relied upon her, all entrusted her with their grave or merry secrets.

Althea, the eldest sister, was the most reserved, but between her and Stella there were grounds of thought in common. The benevolent, somewhat quixotic theories which had so greatly alarmed her mother, the aspirations after a wider sphere of usefulness than she could discern at home, were never checked at The Nest.

It was true that Stella's experience sometimes told her that the girl's schemes were impracticable, and she would urge her to do for the present more diligently what lay under her hand, before wandering into far–off questionable fields of enterprise; but this home rule of discipline and exertion was not pressed upon the young disciple with irksome iteration, nor were freer fuller prospects excluded. Only she was advised to use her wings, and test the strength of her good resolutions, before trying bolder freer flights.

There was never any lack of sympathy in Stella's reception of some grand new system or theory for benefiting her fellow–creatures. Her cheek is flushing now as Althea reads slowly, pausing to give each terse sentence its full weight, the eloquent article which had riveted her attention at Millburn. These are not enthusiastic fancies, nor are they embellished by flowers of rhetoric; and yet each word tells upon the listener, and every paragraph is fraught with meaning. The reasoning is clear and perfect, working conviction as its inevitable result; and the means pointed out practical and within the compass of human effort.

And yet, what is it that makes both the younger and older woman sigh and feel dissatisfied when they reach the end of the powerfully–written exordium? It is the utter hopelessness it breathes in God or man that causes the deep dejection, with which those who have full faith recognise the deficiency of trust in another; and most of all in one of those noble beings, who, but for this sad want, seem most akin to the divine most ready when the clouds shall pass away, as surely they will do to be satisfied with His likeness.

The want the blank which, after seeming to make all clear, spread darkness round was most evident to Stella. Fascinated by the beautiful clear style and accurate reasoning, Althea supplied from her own pure inner–consciousness the higher meaning; but the deep melancholy saddened her.

I do not like the end so well as the beginning, she said softly. It is not quite so clear and, oh, so sad! Why should not there be men found to do what he points out so well and, if so, God would bless their efforts. Surely, surely, the world is not so bad so hopelessly evil as those last sentences intimate, nor are we left in such utter darkness. He has missed the light, but he is groping for it, and it will it must dawn upon him at last.

In God's good time let us hope it may but I am afraid that writer is a long way from it yet, said Stella, closing the book with a regretful sigh. I almost wish we had not read that last page together, darling. It is so sad to think that one with such good and noble thoughts should be wandering astray. But he will be guided back to the fold. Althea, I would not, if I were you, dwell too much on those last thoughts of a great but erring soul. Did you say that it was our new neighbour the dweller at Mill–burn who wrote that article? It has a strange, powerful

charm.

Yes, the author is Viola's father, said Althea, I have read and copied pages of his writing; but never dreamt that I might one day meet him face to face.

Stella Derinzy had taken up the magazine again, and was looking over the beginning of the article. You must have read me your extracts then, Althea, and yet I do not remember them. There is something in the thoughts and language quite familiar to me.

No, I never read them to anyone not even to you; dear cousin Stella, I was half afraid they might be blamed, for there is in them all a want a mournfulness which makes one grieve. Mamma once took up my manuscript book and was quite shocked but, then, she does not always understand she said I ought not to copy out such passages, but I saw something good and great in them all; I put away the book, however, and showed it to no one. But, yesterday, when I read this grand beautiful theory, I felt, though it made me sad, that you would enter into it. I almost fancied that I had heard you say something like this opening sentence.

Althea pointed to the paragraph, and Stella as she read it felt tears springing to her eyes, while a warm blush mantled her cheek.

You are right, love! Oh, how those glowing words, the only enthusiastic paragraph in the whole article, recall to me some of my own early, visionary fancies. That is just what Hugh, my poor dead brother, and I used to long to do at Hagleth. If he had lived to be Master there, something like what this writer advocates might have been tried. We used to talk and dream about it; and, strange to say, that page to me rings with his clear, truthful voice. Yours, which has always some notes like his, brought it back to me. That was what made it sound familiar. The words are like his; but underneath all he said there was full faith unswerving confidence in God and man. His friends deceived, forsook him; but I do not, I will not believe that his heavenly Father failed him at his utmost need.

Stella stopped abruptly. Althea tried to comfort her for some time in vain. Seldom had she seen her so agitated.

Let us try to answer this doubter, she said, trying to change the theme. Help me, dear cousin, to show him where his reasoning falls short how he has just missed the connecting link. I am certain you have found it.

No, no, do not let us think or speak more about it, said Stella, with increasing agitation. What could our weak, womanly arguments effect with such a logical pleader? We feel, we believe, that all will be made right –let us remain firmly fixed in that belief; nor risk unsettling our own faith by plunging rashly into that bewildering vortex that unsettled sea of human woes and difficulty, in which many a gallant bark like his own has been wrecked, even perhaps within sight of the shore.

Althea looked unconvinced. Is it not cowardly to let him sink, we standing safe on land, for fear his struggles should draw us down? Even a weak, trembling hand, a woman's help, may be of avail in man's extremity. But I will not trouble you to–day, dear cousin Stella; forgive me for having agitated you already, and let me take away that disturber of your tranquillity.

Leave it with me for a while, said Stella, holding the slender book fast as it lay on the table. You said you had read it more than once. Perhaps if I do so I may discern more room for hope.

Althea acquiesced rather reluctantly. She seldom gainsayed her cousin's wishes. Bring me your manuscript extracts the next time you come here, and let us compare them together with this later effort of the writer's pen. You are better able to judge of his meaning, having read more of his writings; and perhaps the difficulties he has encountered in the execution of what I suspect is his life's dream, have embittered him. There may be more hopefulness in his earlier essays.

## Carding–Mill Valley

Althea promised to bring her book and departed, while Stella, in spite of the pain it cost her, read and re–read the words which had awakened vivid remembrances of her past youth. She then moved slowly across the room and took from an old bureau a number of sheets of boyish handwriting, with plans made out with a schoolgirl's neatness by a scale, correctly ruled and measured.

It was probably the effect of a strong imagination which made her still trace a resemblance in the glowing phrases of the young enthusiast, to the opening sentence of the wordly–wise cynical writer of the nineteenth century. She studied the boy's manuscript and the man's printed column again and again, but without convincing herself that the likeness was an illusion. Moreover, when she laid the carefully drawn plans before her, she perceived that several of the difficulties which the critic suggested were solved, the missing link had been found. Either the girl or the boy, in their enthusiastic search after truth and utility, had overleapt the barrier which baffled the inquiring philosopher.

When Althea returned with her book of extracts she found her cousin radiant and triumphant. Stella had been too generous to profit by her discovery alone, and perhaps the two friends made better use of it than one feminine intellect could have done. Stella Derinzy had friends who were still of paramount influence in the world of letters; and, at the beginning of the next month, an article was inserted in a leading periodical which carried out to their full extent the suggestions thrown out, and abandoned in cynical despair, by the learned contributor to the rival magazine. The missing link was supplied and shown to be sufficient to set to work the elaborate machinery condemned as useless. Still better, the doubting, distrustful, sceptical spirit was rebuked as clearly, as sharply, and yet, withal, tenderly, as if an angel's lance had touched its bold front.

No one would have suspected that the article, which created a profound sensation, and which led to the successful carrying out of a noble and useful project, was the joint production of a recluse invalid lady hidden in her quiet nest at the end of the village and a young woman under five–and–twenty at Hagleth Hall.

## Chapter 11.

Ilka state it has its blessings,  
Peevish dinna pass them by,  
But like choicest berries seek them  
Tho' amang the thorns they lie.

Lady Nairne.

No accession of cheerfulness attended Colonel Derinzy's brief visit to the metropolis. In general he enjoyed a fortnight in London more than most events, meeting old friends at his club and receiving hospitality at their houses. But it was late in the season, and the very warm summer weather had made the country attractive. A few of his military contemporaries lingered on, but the first time he dropped in at his club the conversation turned upon a topic so disagreeable to him that he well nigh resolved it should be the last.

Even his old colleagues took a different view to what had been the fashion of his day on the subject of duelling. A great wave of opinion had passed over men's minds; and he found himself so decidedly in the minority, when expressing sentiments which formerly would have been universally shared by military men, that he stopped abruptly; and finally slunk away to collect his thoughts, avoiding further discussion till he was better prepared to play his part in it and conform to the leading ideas of the time.

His own were decidedly out of date; and a sentence fell from a distinguished officer present which, though not uncourteous, showed strong disapprobation. Colonel Derinzy, as he pondered over words which he had allowed to pass unnoticed from sheer amazement, fancied that they contained a more direct personal rebuke than was

perhaps intended. Conscience makes cowards, and he applied that stern sentence to a passage in his own life which he did not care to look back upon which he hoped had been long forgotten. But circumstances had occurred of late, which were indeed the topic of conversation at more than one of the London Clubs, which made their members fall back upon and recall precedents which for a long time had been set aside.

It was no consolation when, in spite of Stella Derinzy's warning, he visited the family lawyer and inquired into the measure of his neighbour's transgressions in the matter of the new road cut through the Hagleth estate. Would it be wise to stir in the matter? Mr. Vansittart inquired. No doubt he had some cause of complaint; but if the road were useful to the community, especially if, as he admitted, Miss Derinzy favoured this trespass if trespass it was on her manorial rights might it not be better to submit? Questions might be raised which it would be difficult to meet or to answer questions which had not been mooted when Colonel Derinzy became the manager of his cousin's estate.

Colonel Derinzy might remember, his friendly legal adviser added, that at the time he had been warned that difficulties might occur. Nothing was so embarrassing as to deal with questions arising from the disappearance of an individual whose death had not been proved. He had chosen to run the risk of taking up his residence at the Hall, and hitherto, happily, no one had disturbed him in his occupation of the place.

Years had rolled by without bringing to light any cause for alteration. But it was best to let things connected with the property take their course. He was sorry to annoy Colonel Derinzy; but he must give the same advice now that he had given when he proposed to offer himself as a candidate for election as a representative of his division of the county not to put himself forward unnecessarily, above all not to act in opposition to Miss Derinzy's wishes in any matter where conciliation was possible.

Colonel Derinzy did not utter a syllable in opposition to this candid and honest statement of opinion. For once he did not attempt to maintain his own, but acquiesced at once, taking a formal leave of his adviser, and thanking him for the caution; but there was a darker cloud than ever on his brow when he left the lawyer's chambers.

He could not exactly say, he scarcely dared to think, that he was afraid, but his heart sank. The very air seemed to oppress him, and he returned home sooner than he was expected, and before his family were at all prepared to bid him welcome.

In his heart of hearts he would not have been at all annoyed if his wife had told him candidly of her visit to Millburn. He was prepared to institute propitiatory steps, and this one would have broken the ice without committing him; but, as usual, it was carefully concealed from him. Little did he imagine that his carriage–horses, could they have spoken, might have told him that the smooth new road was as agreeable to their slender hoofs as the weary cart–horses found it when going to fetch stone, and still more when carrying back heavy loads, from the quarries at the head of the glen.

No attempt was made to repeat the indiscretion, nor was the name of Forester ever mentioned in the gloomy presence of the master of the house. He once or twice tried to lead to the subject, but failed utterly. No one suspected his intention or was likely to meet him half–way. Nothing could be farther from the thoughts of his wife and children while he sat brooding over the fire after breakfast, or at the end of the long dinner–table from which they were dying to escape, that, in reality, he was meditating friendly and neighbourly overtures to one whom in his secret soul, without adequate cause, he feared and disliked.

The owner of Millburn meanwhile was known by the other members of the family at the Hall to have been, perhaps to be still, at his new home. Viola had been seen by none of them since Mrs. Derinzy's visit, which was quickly followed by her husband's return. A little note had been sent in return to a formal invitation, saying that she could not leave her father. Mrs. Derinzy was just reading it when her husband came back, and crushing it up in her hand, threw it, with a sigh of relief at the narrow escape, behind the ornaments in the grate.

## Carding–Mill Valley

In vain Colonel Derinzy, after he became once more settled at home, tried to shake off the incubus. Like the old man of the sea, it had settled heavily on his shoulders and he could not get rid of it. And yet he saw no definite cause for apprehension.

As he looked upon the broad lands and spreading woods on which he prided himself as next in succession at no very distant time in their full summer loveliness, all seemed securely prosperous. He could descry no worm i' the bud, no canker in the leaf, no blight likely to injure the growing crops. Never had the aspect of the season promised a more abundant harvest. If the fine growing weather lasted, with its alternate showers and sunshine, the rustics said there would be more grain than the old barns could carry. Should he feel disposed to build larger ones, to buy more flocks and herds, on his own responsibility, he knew there was a goodly sum as balance in his banker's book, and only one frail life between him and actual possession of the property.

But at present he was not disposed to make any additions or alterations. He kept the even tenor of his rigid way unchanged; or, if there was any sign of better grace, it was in his showing a rather greater inclination to yield on some points where hitherto he had been very unbending. About the new road, for instance, he even launched forth some rather grim jests to the effect that he should not hinder its being used, if people liked to go a mile round they must settle that question with the horses. He dropped the wearisome sarcastic objections which he had seemed to consider it a matter of duty and conscience to urge against the Chapel near the Waterfall, treating its services as Papistical and utterly unnecessary. The new people, he said, might like that sort of thing and were certainly a long way from the village Church. If Stella desired it he should not interfere, though for himself he preferred to worship after the fashion of his and her ancestors, rather than in an Idol temple. He even martyred himself one summer evening by rising from the dessert–table earlier than usual and walking to the evening service; which was so simple that if he had been ever so much disposed to criticise no fault could be found.

But if he expected to see his enemy there he was disappointed. Had he dared to ask the question, he would have been told that the owner of Millburn never attended the services, and on this occasion his daughter was not present. Colonel Derinzy sat for fully an hour in a Prie–Dieu chair, scorning to kneel, and with nothing more interesting to contemplate than a few rustics and children.

He walked back alone, the young Clergyman and Althea, not dreaming that for once he rather desired their companionship, having waited on purpose to leave him free. He pursued the path by the brook–side full of troubled thoughts and uneasy misgivings, utterly unmoved by the exhortation to cast trouble on One who will always bear it for us the subject of his son's discourse of which he had scarcely heard a syllable. As he looked up to the rocks which concealed Millburn from his view he thought, as Haman did of the Jew Mordecai, that he should never know peace while this stranger dwelt near his gates.

## Chapter 12.

Close at the base of my garden bower  
Springs many a careless, clinging flower;  
With delicate leaf and prostrate stalk,  
Creeping beside the gravelled walk;  
Yet lifting upward to the sky  
Its azure petals fearlessly.

No perfumed breath around them steals,  
No luscious scent their haunt reveals;  
Meekly their clasping tendrils cling  
Round root and stone, meandering  
O'er every chance–spread help to stay



Their faltering steps on Life's hard way.

R.M.K. *To the Periwinkle.*

Among those whom the summer heats had driven away from the Metropolis before the end of the season were some neighbours of Colonel and Mrs. Derinzy, who lived under the shadow of a long range of wooded hills at the lower end of the valley. Above the trees towered mountain peaks, and through the foliage what was in summer a mere brook rushed down in mid winter a turbulent cataract.

The villages which once attracted a monarch's observation from their curious similarity of name, and as tradition asserts were called by him jestingly Church Haddon, Little Haddon, and *All Haddon!* could be seen with intervals of woodland and parterre between them from the high ground on which stood the mansion belonging to General Sir Henry Balfour, who had not many years before the present time inherited his uncle's estate. The property was not nearly so large as that of Hagleth; but its present owner, a much younger man than Colonel Derinzy, and formerly an officer under his command, had risen rapidly to distinction, and had twice represented that division of the county in Parliament. His neighbour, yielding to the advice he had received, made no effort to oppose him; but there was jealousy between the masters of the two houses, which rose up among ancient trees under commanding heights at either end of the valley.

Colonel Derinzy thought himself deeply injured by his once subordinate officer being placed high above him in public estimation. He did not consider that whilst he had performed scrupulously to the letter the duties of his calling, wrapping up his talent in a napkin, General Balfour, whenever an opportunity occurred, soared above them and never shunned responsibility, or neglected occasions of bettering the condition of the soldier and elevating his mind.

He had retired from the service, invalided, bearing modestly the highest honours a grateful country could bestow, but he still took a deep interest in military matters; and most especially in all that affected the health and morals of the men who had often followed him with enthusiasm into battle, and suffered patiently the many miseries of life which fall to the soldier's lot in camp and in the trenches.

Every question on these subjects interested him, and he was always listened to in the House with attention. He did not speak often, or trespass upon time too far, but what he said was based upon thorough practical knowledge and was always to the point.

The uncle who had lately died, and whose interest in the county, gained by a benevolent active life as a country gentleman and magistrate, combined with his own military distinction and unimpeachable character, had aided him in his electioneering contests, had always lived at The Ashlets, so the old house was called from the graceful trees which waved in the valley and ascended up far on the hill sides. Harry Balfour, a young man and his acknowledged heir, had passed a great portion of his youth and early manhood under the shadow of the noble graceful mountain which overtopped the woods; and, from time to time, returned there with his wife, who was also his first cousin, and daughter of his guardian uncle. They had been brought up together, and had been attached to each other from childhood.

The course of their true love had for a time been neither straight nor smooth, and circumstances had thrown still deeper gloom than is proverbially necessary over their engagement; which was even for a time broken off. But after a while the path wound upwards again into light the dense clouds cleared away, as they often did from the mountaintops above. Lady Balfour, a beautiful, loving, and most engaging woman, had, since that troubled time, proved by the courageous devotion with which she shared all the perils and hardships of a soldier's career into which a wife can enter, and by her enthusiastic admiration for and participation in his higher aspirations and duties, that the love he had for some agonizing years distrusted was proof against every trial, and worth all the affection he had then and ever afterwards lavished upon her.

## Carding–Mill Valley

But the trial had been to both husband and wife very severe, and for a time it took away the brightness even of the beautiful home where he had first wooed her. After marriage they did not often revisit The Ashlets, until its owner's failing health made it a duty to return there. Now it was their own house, and years had passed away children, one darling tender girl and two sons, had grown up during their wanderings in many lands, and they had come back to the old place. There were, however, still, around those verdant woods and under those lowering heights, spots which recalled bitter memories and a sense of rankling injury.

Between the families at Hagleth Hall and The Ashlets there had been for some years a suspension of intercourse, dating from the period when deep trouble hung over both houses, involving the temporary break in Miss Balfour's engagement and Hugh Derinzy's disgrace and self–imposed exile. Since the return of its new owners to the mansion under the ashes the breach had been repaired. Formal visits had been exchanged, and had led on the part of the young people to a moderate degree of intimacy; but the parents were scarcely on terms of cordiality. Each party would willingly, if it lay in their power, avoid opportunities of meeting.

It was with a sigh of relief that Mrs. Derinzy gave her husband's and her own and her daughter's cards to the servant who informed her that Lady Balfour was not at home; nor can we positively affirm that the well–trained domestic, though strictly within the bounds of truth, would not, with the officious hospitality of an old family servant, have offered to go in search of his mistress, who was not far off in the grounds, had he not been perfectly well aware that she was only too glad to be out of the way of these visitors. Hugo, the young cavalry officer, was a favourite with the General, and he and his wife were also fond of the pretty sisters and their grave clerical brother. The experienced butler would have sent *them* at once to the Lawn Tennis Court or Archery ground without hesitation.

Mrs. Derinzy shivered and drew her soft wraps round her; though the day was warm and pleasant on which, soon after her husband's return from town, she had, in obedience to his express command, driven over to call at Ashlets. Her eyes wandered over the landscape from the blue waving outline of the mountain to the shrunken rivulet from the beautiful view of the villages nestling in the valley to the Hagleth woods, without taking in a single feature. All might, for any attention or admiration she bestowed on its charms, as well have been wrapt in a November fog.

Laura, who was her mother's companion, expressed her disappointment openly at having come so far in vain. I dare say they are in the grounds; that old man might have sent the page to inquire, she said, as they drove away. Lady Balfour and Marion seldom go out during the heat of the day I wonder you feel it cold, she added affectionately, as she placed another shawl round Mrs. Derinzy's thin form. I fear you are not well.

I am never well in these shivering ash groves I detest the sound they make. It is like a ceaseless dirge, said her mother sharply. Tell Hudson to drive home at once. I can pay no more visits to–day.

Laura did as she was told and relapsed into silence which remained unbroken. The lively girl felt that it would have been a pleasant change for her at least to have spent half an hour with Marion and her brothers in the grounds under the ash trees, with the soft summer wind murmuring through the drooping branches and the shadows creeping over the valley and up the mountain–side. Meanwhile, in a sequestered bower of their own at but a short distance, under the sighing ash–trees, Lady Balfour, who looked like her own daughter's sister, heard the retreating carriage–wheels.

Morgan has not taken the trouble to look for us, she said. Those old servants know their master's and mistress's whims and inclinations as well as we know them ourselves! I am sure that was Mrs. Derinzy's carriage. We have very few other visitors from that direction, and I expected her to call. Your father met the Colonel at the Club last week. Some of the members are turning the cold shoulder towards him, and he is too crafty in his generation not to try to keep his country connections when those in London are fast falling away from him.

## Carding–Mill Valley

Mother, why is it that you dislike our neighbours at Hagleth Hall so much? said her daughter, a pale, delicate, thoughtful–looking girl of nineteen, reclining on a couch carefully arranged for her beneath the trellised portico of a rustic summer–house. We have not too many people with whom to associate. It seems a pity to send any who are kind enough to come from a distance to see us, away from the door.

You are quite right, my little saint, and I am, I confess it, wrong, said her mother, but I cannot like Mrs. Derinzy and I detest her husband. Do not argue with me, Marion: there are reasons, which I cannot explain, why we can never really be friends.

I think I should be disposed to be kinder to the poor people if the London world gives them up, said her daughter. Of course I shall not ask questions which you do not wish to answer, but it must have been a long time since they gave you cause of offence. Now that their children and your own are grown up for the sake of those young girls and their brothers, would it not be well to forgive and forget past injuries?

I *have* forgiven the principal offender, long ago at least, the person who was said to be the principal offender; death has sealed my lips in that quarter, said Lady Balfour, with a deeply pained expression. But I cannot forget. The past was burnt indelibly into my memory, and Colonel and Mrs. Derinzy took part in it. Nay, I think your father and other military men now believe him to have been the most to blame. But be that as it may, Marion, they Marion, they are associated with the most painful period of my own and your father's existence. It cannot be pleasant for us to meet; but to prove that we are not uncharitable for the sake of those young people who are not guilty of the sins of their fathers we have laid aside our repugnance we have allowed them to visit here; and we have, seldom I own, but sufficiently for purposes of common courtesy, returned their visits. More, we need not, we cannot do.

Marion took her mother's hand seldom had she seen her so painfully agitated.

Forgive me, mother, I am quite sure that you and my father have good and sufficient motives for all your actions. You do not object to my being friendly to Laura and her sisters, and my father, I know, thinks highly of Hugo and Leopold.

Her mother nervously plucked some of the periwinkles growing among the pebbles that edged the border, trying to elevate themselves in life by throwing their tendrils in and over the lattice–work of the portico, hastily gathered, the frail stems and blossoms drooped in her grasp.

There, I have killed your favourite blue flowers, angel's eyes, you used to call them when you were a child some tender ligaments break when they are roughly pulled. Well, I am sorry for them. My child, I sometimes think they are like their young mistress, and that in rough hands you would fade as quickly. Do not form intimacies too quickly and rashly. I think, I hope, you will be more prudent than your mother; but you are a much more tender plant. You would never have borne what I did, and lived.

I do not wish to be at all different from my mother; I shall never be half so good and wise, exclaimed Marion, much more energetically than usual. Depend upon it, I shall not be in a hurry to leave the parent nest I am quite aware I shall never find another as tenderly lined and protected.

Lady Balfour kissed her daughter affectionately.

No, I will not be selfish, my one treasure. When the time comes for her to take flight, neither her father nor I will seek to stay her; the parent nest in time gets too narrow, and the young birds build others for themselves. Only be cautious. Choose as wisely as your mother did, there I own you cannot do better; and, when made, abide by your choice, and may it prosper as mine has done.

## Carding–Mill Valley

Marion did not answer, but the faint colour mantled in her cheek. Was it a sign that the decision was already made in the girl's mind?

She picked off her mother's lap the wounded periwinkles and laid them tenderly on one side.

Those pliant heart–strings rent in twain  
Can never reunite again,

she knew well; but like many of gentle nature, things inanimate, in her sweet creed, resented and suffered from rough usage or neglect.

Her health was not strong, and every thought of her parents' lives was bound up in her. The young men were robust and active, able to take good care of themselves, and, if need were, of their fragile sister; but this one fair girl, their youngest darling, seemed to Sir Harry and Lady Balfour almost too precious a gift from their Creator. All her tastes were studied every care prevented no rough winds ever suffered to assail her.

Above all they trembled for her future fate, and strove to guard their fair blossom from the cold frosts which had nipped their own bud of promised happiness, and retarded many a year the fulfilment of the glad hopes of their youth. They did not think, and they were perhaps right, that Marion could have endured as bravely as they had done, and fought out as successfully, the battle against calumny and misconception.

## Chapter 13.

Flowers that we lost in Spring  
Bloom again by Autumn ways,  
In their second blossoming  
Cheering sombre days.

Voices that we lost of yore  
Come when we are sad and lone,  
For the mother speaks once more  
In the daughter's tone.

The presence of the master of the house at Millburn made little difference in its somewhat desolate aspect, or in the simple ways and customs of its inmates. Only at times from one high window, whence it was said had first flashed the fire which had left so many tokens on the scarred walls of the building, a light might be seen at any hour of the night; if, in that lonely situation, there had been persons abroad to watch for it.

The rooms occupied by Mr. Forester when he was at home were one above the other, to ensure his not being disturbed either in his sleep or during his many hours of study. They had been in some measure restored though not by any means ornamentally decorated the injury this part of the structure had sustained rendering it necessary for the safety of the remainder that the walls should be strengthened. In fact, like many of the houses of the district, they were crossed with timber, and new beams had been inserted where these had taken fire. At the time of this reconstruction rude cases had been made, and the rooms above and below, from floor to ceiling, were lined with books. Rush mats calculated to deaden sound were laid down in the hall and passages adjoining, and swing–doors hung to cut off communication with the rest of the house so far as accidental noises were concerned.

Beneath the windows, over the grey stones, the brook rushed noisily enough the wind sang loudly, and rang its mighty chorus round the exposed angles and down the wide open fire–places calculated for burning wood. The oak boughs and pine branches split and crackled in the warm glow of the open hearths; where the wood ashes

## Carding–Mill Valley

were left to accumulate and smoulder in the master's absence, and would speedily kindle fiercely when his impatient hand cast fuel upon and stirred them.

Often on a winter night some chance–belated passer through the glen, upon the other side of the stream, would see in an instant a light break out from the sombre house which had been for so long empty, or hear the casement flung widely open. As he went on his way the wanderer might remember tales of old haunted buildings, and think how easily such fabulous legends might originate.

But to Viola the sense of her father's presence, even when invisible, imparted real substantial comfort. She was the only person who dared to intrude upon him; and whatever might be his occupation, she was sure of a welcoming smile. Certainly her movements were so quiet her step and voice so low in sound that they could scarcely disturb the most abstract calculations. She knew the exact place of every book on the shelves, and would spring lightly up the high steps to reach any that he wanted.

No hand but hers ever touched his papers. However unexpected his return, he was sure to find them classified and arranged in the most perfect order ready for his use. On the dark oaken table a cluster of wild roses, or some tender plant nestling among moss and ivy, would sweeten the atmosphere of the scholar's den, and gladden his spirit, often unconsciously. In that dark old room there was not one token of the loves and likings that when a man reaches middle–life must have bloomed and faded. No faint sketch on the wall no miniature or photograph on the table not a single memorial. The man seemed to have near him no receptacle for old letters or treasures of sentiment all was stern reality, matters of science, business, or philosophy alone seemed to concern him. The only softening influence was the filial love and duty which surrounded him, and made the atmosphere brighter and more wholesome than it might otherwise have become.

At the present moment, however, he is alone, and there is a heavy cloud on his brow. All those who live by the work of their own brain, or value its teaching, know how bitter it is to feel that thoughts cannot be commanded that the effort to free them is fatal, when work, and the work we love best, has to be done, and to be done in a given time, lucidly, and eloquently, and yet the words in which our meaning has to be clothed –nay more the very meaning itself suddenly fail us.

Again and again the student pondered over his subject without mastering it. What was there in what at first sight had struck him as a feeble flimsy argument which now seemed unanswerable? Why was his pen stayed? Why were his ideas bewildered? What had come between his eyes and the cold hard daylight in which usually he saw so clearly the easiest way to crush and expose an illogical antagonist?

Throwing aside the pen which, well nigh for the first time, refused to obey his will, Mr. Forester left the writing–table, and went to the window. What was the brook saying as it murmured past? What rang in those voices in the air, in the song of birds? and through Viola's voice in the garden with her busy maidens' at their pleasant work among the flowers, as they carolled an old world psalm melody? He forgot his papers and stood still, listening when had he heard those simple words? Not since his childhood, for he too had been a boy, though he kept no record of that time any more than of the past scenes of youth.

He closed the window, ashamed of idleness, and sat down by the hearth, resolutely fixing his mind on the paper which he held in his hand. Now that all sounds were excluded thought would be free, and he should be able to contradict nay, to annihilate the dreamer's fancies which had excited wrathful scorn when he first read them, and perceived that the writer was audacious enough to dispute the truth of one of his own boldly advanced theories. Nay, even to assert that there was more far more in Heaven and in earth than was even faintly shadowed forth in the narrow creed of the utilitarian philosopher.

As he gazed on the dark bindings of his favourite books on the opposite wall seeking for inspiration which would not come at his call he shivered, though it was the summer noontide. What was that writing on the dim leather?

## Carding–Mill Valley

Whose words were these which seemed to start forth as though he were reading between the lines? Had he asked for Truth, and was this the answer?

Again he opened the thin paper volume, and read the article he had glanced over the evening before slightly. What was there in the words that seemed to come strangely home to him; as though some voice out of the Past, which he was always striving to forget, were speaking to him, and to him only, in familiar phrases. Ah! he has found a clue to it now. In some such fancies in his bygone youth he and one very dear to him had revelled. Even so had they planned and longed to work for the regeneration of humanity in those foolish youthful days.

Was he wiser now? certainly not happier. The first four words seemed to flash out upon him, but he would not pursue that train of thought. Only he put aside books and writing for the present, feeling as if just now he could not do this thing; and a softer feeling of tender pity for the dreamer stole into his mind as he laid down the book, and went to work with his young daughter in the garden.

The wholesome exercise in the open air and frank interchange of simple thoughts with youthful minds were perhaps, even in an intellectual point of view, the best means Forester could have adopted to clear his brain. With the summer air breathing softly round him, and glad voices in his ear; as ever and anon during intervals of pleasant labour the girls whilst they rested raised up some simple melody, it was impossible to cherish any churlish thoughts; and the man was, after all, kindly natured. Circumstances had made him hard, suspicious, despondent of overcoming evil, but his spirit was buoyant and his inmost heart, almost in spite of himself, reverent and tolerant.

While with his young daughter he was always a better man than he felt when the dark book–lined walls of the old library closed grimly round him. Viola thought him the best man in the whole world, and if in reading his much admired writings her pure spirit felt a want, it was quickly supplied by her recollections of things he had said to her in their private conversations. He did not, she thought, ever give to the world such treasures as he lavished upon her. Through the richness of the language in the printed page before her, her eyes pierced to the truth, and perhaps she was more nearly right than the gifted author or his learned readers. He listened, half–unconsciously he joined in the Hebrew melody the girls were singing as they sat under the shade of a large plane–tree. His daughter had crept up close to him and listened unnoticed to the beautiful tones of his manly voice, low and fervent hushed yet powerful.

People of the living God,  
I have sought the world around,  
Paths of sin and sorrow trod,  
Peace and comfort nowhere found.

Now to you my spirit turns,  
Turns a fugitive unblest'd,  
Brethren, where your altar burns  
Oh! receive me into rest.

Lonely I no longer roam  
Like the cloud, the wind, the wave,  
Where you dwell shall be my home,  
Where you die shall be my grave.

As the strain ceased the daughter's hand stole into her father's, and he felt her tears dropping upon his closely–clasped fingers as she tenderly caressed them. No; even upon this earth, which had for long years seemed to have been so desolate where he had abjured all ties and made himself a castaway he was not alone. One heart at least responded to his own, and as he drew his child nearer to him, with the flickering light from heaven shining

down upon them through the leaves, and the stream murmuring past them, Forester bowed his haughty head involuntarily, in thankfulness for that gift, to Our Father which is in Heaven.

## Chapter 14.

Oh! breathes there one that hath not known  
The parting word the dying look  
Whilst in the soul grief walked alone,  
And every pulse with anguish shook?  
Some cherished one, that blessed him there,  
And passed like sunlight from the shore  
Woe! woe! the loved the young the fair  
They are no more!

The music of their lips hath fled,  
Their grace and beauty passed away;  
Yet lives the presence of the dead  
Within our souls, as light in day;  
A fresher light shall burst the tomb,  
And all the blessed lost restore,  
Unknown the words of wail and gloom  
They are no more!

Suddenly across the valley as the sun sank lower rang out the Chapel bells. Viola released her father's hand and rose to re–enter the house, as the maidens were flocking in to prepare for the evening service. She did not ask her father if he would accompany her. Habits of seclusion had grown upon him, and she was accustomed to them. Her obedient spirit did not question whether they were right or wrong. All that he chose to do was sacred to her.

When she came out of the house, and looked round to say farewell, Viola saw that her father had loitered on along the path beyond the gate, which he had left open for her. Her girls had gone on in front. Their merry voices could be heard in the still evening air.

Viola's heart beat as when she joined him her father drew her arm quietly within his own, and moved on still beside her. Very few words, and those indifferent ones, were spoken, but in that silence a deeper communion of spirit was established as they neared the small Church among the hills where she worshipped daily. Though she had never murmured or questioned the wisdom of his conduct, Viola felt a holy joy in drawing him onward with her into a presence where they had seldom stood and knelt together the presence of an unseen God. That presence which indeed is ever with us, and was with them in the hill pass, but which is more distinctly promised to be with us in God's own house.

The service was very short and simple. Being what it was probably made it touch the heart of the unfrequent worshipper more nearly. Forester had made his daughter take a place close to the entrance, under the deep shadow of the portal arch, and they were almost hidden by the creeping shadows of the closing in of evening. At the other end of the small edifice, and towards the end of the service, during the singing of some closing verses, lights were kindled; which flashed out brightly and fell especially on the fair face of a lady who was playing upon a small organ and leading the choir. Forester had followed the whole service with unwandering thoughts and devout gestures. It was quite plain that although of late years he had led a wild life in heathen lands, often quite out of the way of such observances, the habits of an English place of worship were familiar to him; and the plain brief discourse rather than sermon delivered by Leo Derinzy had fixed his attention. But when that light suddenly burst out, and the congregation rose and heartily joined in the last hymn, his eyes were irresistibly drawn to the same

## Carding–Mill Valley

luminous centre, and remained riveted to that bright figure which seemed to him that of an angel; but was in reality only the fair face and form of a young and lovely woman elevated by inward emotion, as well as by the place she occupied at the instrument, above the rural crowd.

There was indeed a sanctity in the attitude and expression of Althea which even the humblest of the worshippers acknowledged. Each toil–worn face was turned towards her, every man and woman there felt that the service would have been sorely wanting if her sweet yet powerful voice had not first uplifted the psalm or hymn. The gleam of the torches rested on the bright golden hair and blush–rose complexion on the simple white–clad form, on the uplifted face full of devout enthusiasm, while up to the dark rafters swelled and thrilled that lark–like joyful song of thankful praise.

The moment it was possible to leave the church after the benediction had been followed by a brief silent prayer; with the words of the last hymn and the tones of the singer's voice still in his ear, Forester again drew his daughter's arm through his own and they both rose and left the church. But his presence had not been as unperceived as he imagined. Most of the men who attended this service were of the number of those who had been employed at the road–making through the glen, and they pressed after him to bid him welcome.

Some of the hill–folk, too, were anxious to thank him for the benefit conferred on them by the easier mode of carrying their goods to market. He received these marks of good feeling with embarrassment, but not ungraciously; shaking hands with his rural neighbours, but anxious to pass on with as brief delay as was consistent with courtesy. Viola enjoyed his ovation, and would willingly have prolonged it.

The silence of the garden as the gate closed upon them was, on the contrary, very grateful to her father. All the voices and sounds soon died away, and lights within the lonely house showed that the maidens had gone inside and were occupied with their respective duties. The father and daughter were quite alone.

As the scent of the flowers stole upon him, borne by faint wandering breezes, for all was very still, Forester's somewhat chafed spirit became calmer. He did not seek his own solitary book–lined rooms, but remained with his daughter after their slight repast was ended. No questions were asked or answered respecting the church and its services or their attendants. Viola was too wise to press the subject or to start any theme that might interfere with the course of thought which led to his being her companion.

When she took leave of him for the night, he asked her what had become of her copy of the article he had written for a certain Review. He had one to prepare on the same subject which must be finished before he went to rest. It ought to have been done sooner, but he had not been in the mood, and felt all the better, and fitter for work, after the happy evening they had spent together.

Viola looked a little troubled as she confessed that she had lent the Review to Miss Derinzy the young lady who played the organ and led the choir she had been so much interested in the first pages that she had begged to be allowed to take it home with her, and as yet had not returned it.

Her father's brow slightly contracted, but he said only, No matter, I can do without it, then bade her good–night affectionately.

When she was gone he still did not go to his own rooms; but taking the writing materials nearest to him and some sheets of note–paper, after drawing round him some of Viola's favourite books, he wrote rapidly almost without a pause, a very genial, cordial article thanking his unknown critic, whom he believed to be a lady, for her excellent advice; and admitting that she had solved, by her simple but unanswerable logic, some questions which had long perplexed him.



## Carding–Mill Valley

Having made this acknowledgment gracefully, he went on in a much more hopeful spirit with the theme; throwing out hints and begging for suggestions to carry out the useful purpose which he was certain in different ways was their common aim. There was not one cynical word or curt sarcasm in the pages he penned that night; leaning over his young daughter's writing–table, long after her eyes were closed in peaceful, dreamless sleep.

The article (which created great attention, and ultimately led to the completion of a noble design of which the stable foundations were laid that night) ended with the simple words of the last hymn sung in the lamplight by Althea Derinzy and the people among the hills–

Change and decay in all around I see;  
Oh Thou, Who changest not, abide with me.

## Chapter 15.

In woods and glens I love to roam,  
When the tired hedger hies him home;  
Or by the woodland pool to rest,  
When pale the star looks on its breast.

But when the silent evening sighs  
With hallowed airs and symphonies,  
My spirit takes another tone  
And weeps that it is all alone.

Yet in my dreams a form I view  
That thinks on me and loves me too  
I start, and when the vision's flown  
I weep that I am all alone.

Kirke White.

Violet Forester had only awaited an opportunity for mentioning to her father the first neighbourly overture of civility on the part of the family at Hagleth Hall. It was not in her frank nature to make petty mysteries and trivial concealments, but she never disturbed him with what appeared to her unimportant communications when his mind was otherwise occupied. He spent a great deal of his time alone in his study with his books and papers, or in long solitary rambles among the mountains, on which he set forth early and returned late at night. His daughter thought that he strove to tire down or drive away vexing thoughts and wasting grief, for after these absences he often appeared jaded and pale, as though thoroughly worn out. It was not wholesome exercise he sought, but such excessive exertion and fatigue as might deaden acute remembrance of the past.

It was not often that the father and daughter spent an afternoon and evening together, as had been the case when Forester worked with her in the garden and accompanied Viola to Church; but no thought had arisen then in the girl's mind on the subject until the request for the magazine which Althea had borrowed brought back the memory of her last visit; and then she knew by her father's words and manner that it would be unwelcome to intrude upon the hours he was about to devote to study, matters totally irrelevant.

In the morning he was gone out early and alone when Viola came down to breakfast, and he did not return home until the evening. He had partaken of refreshment at mid–day, he said, with a farmer's family up among the hills, where he had been made heartily welcome, in spite of their being in trouble. It was, in fact, the knowledge of their calamity which had taken him so far away. He trusted it might be in his power to redress the wrongs they were

suffering.

Stella Derinzy has incurred a great responsibility, he said, by making over her own duties to a man totally unworthy of the trust. I found your little handmaiden, who was, you told me, once a favourite *protégée* of this capricious woman, crying bitterly this morning; her father having told her, as they walked together after the service, that he had received notice to quit his farm; and I walked across the Ridgeway to inquire into the matter. I find her report is quite correct. Why, this man and his forebears have held that land for generations! Never was there a farm in better condition. It would be a most unjust act to raise his rent, or, in default of his consent to pay a most outrageous increase of rental, to eject him. Why are women alike weak and arbitrary? giving power they are not inclined to exert into unworthy hands and upholding others in tyrannizing over those who would willingly be their devoted supporters?'

I do not think that Miss Derinzy is either capricious or arbitrary, said his daughter. Surely Lucy Langden did not say so?

Her father does, which is more to the point. Langden is bitterly indignant, and says that Colonel Derinzy would not venture to disturb the old tenants if Stella were not in the same mind. His lease has run out, but he never doubted its being renewed on the favourable terms he has hitherto enjoyed which had allowed him to make great improvements, of which now he hoped to reap the issue. Why, the place was little better than a sheep–run bare mountain pasturage scarcely fit for anything but goats, and now it is like a garden; and for this very reason the Colonel's new steward, who has been making a fresh valuation, wants to double his payment, and refuses to make any allowance for what he has expended and for years of labour. It is rank injustice.

He is a hard man. No one seems to like him, said Viola. But, father, Miss Derinzy may know nothing at all about this business. Everyone loves and speaks well of her. The poor people go to her in all their troubles. They say she has such a feeling heart, and that sorrow for the brother she lost, and whom she has never ceased to regret, has taught her to feel for all who are in distress. She is a great invalid and never goes far from her own home, a mere cottage in the village. Colonel Derinzy, who is the next heir, manages the property entirely.

It is a great misfortune for Stella Derinzy and others that her love for her brother should have wasted itself in idle tears, instead of urging her to respect his wishes and keep up the honour of the family. Violet, I have never told you that during my wanderings in many lands I once fell in with the unfortunate man, who for his own faults, and through the indiscretion of his relatives, was made to be a homeless exile. He did not die, as was supposed, soon after he threw up rank and position and left England. For ought I know he may be living still. If Stella Derinzy had shown one spark of the tender feelings with which you credit her, her own and only brother would have returned years ago; and, by this time, if he could not entirely clear away the clouds which obscured his honour as a soldier and his integrity as a man, might have lived them down and prevented rank injustice and tyranny being exercised over his trusted and faithful dependents.

Mr. Forester had risen from his seat and walked up and down the room in great excitement whilst speaking his daughter listened with rapt attention.

Oh, father, you must tell Miss Derinzy that her brother was living after the time when his friends imagined that he had perished, she said energetically. Are you not incurring also a fearful responsibility by concealing such a fact? I am sure she has endured fearful misery and that poor woman, Colonel Derinzy's unhappy wife, looks as if for years she had not known an easy hour.

You are right, Violet; her father always called her by her full name, pronouncing it as she thought more tenderly than any word he uttered. I have been, I am, incurring a great responsibility, but the time is not yet arrived for shaking myself free. I never felt the weight as I have done to–day. But what did you say about Mrs. Derinzy? Where and how often, and when, have you seen her? I know that you would obey my injunctions not to

## Carding–Mill Valley

visit at Hagleth Hall. Surely Ursula Derinzy has not been to my house?

Mrs. Derinzy came here once and once only, said Viola, with gentle firmness. I was about to tell you this last night, when you asked for the book *Althea* carried away with her; but your mind was pre-occupied, and I would not disturb you then about what seemed to me of little consequence. Father, whatever this poor lady's faults may be I know that she is not loved and trusted like her cousin, Miss Derinzy I could not bar our doors against her; she has not sinned against me, and her visit was undoubtedly kindly meant. Besides this, she seemed ill and suffering. I never saw a countenance so full of woe.

She *has* sinned deeply against you and all true women, as those of her sex always do who break down man's faith and loyalty. She is false to the heart's core. Never let me hear again that you pity her.

Never in her whole life had Viola heard her father speak to her so angrily. She did not answer him.

Forgive me, my child, he said, after a moment's silence, if I am unjust and severe to you. You do not, you cannot guess what reason I have for warning you against any overtures of friendship from or even any compassion for Mrs. Derinzy. In her youth she was fair and false false than your pure imagination can picture; and if now she is pale and sad, her tears are crocodile's tears. Do not heed them.

He rose, and walked up and down, trying to calm his ruffled temper and wounded feeling.

Stella's was as high and noble a character as your own till she fell under this evil influence, which warped her from her brother and from all the old habits and affections and virtues of her race. Why did she resign the old Hall to this Circe? How is it that I find the tenantry under *his* sway? Even the fact of her brother's death she has never been at the trouble to prove, but she has weakly resigned her rightful place and authority to these usurpers. If her brother is dead *she* is the owner of Hagleth. Langden knows this, and told Colonel Derinzy, to his face, that before making fresh valuations of the rental of the farms and cancelling old clauses hitherto held sacred, from father to son, by both parties landlord and tenant he must prove his right to make alterations. The Colonel stammered out in his wrath something about being the representative of Miss Derinzy.

'Aye, aye,' said Langden, 'but I am not speaking of Miss Derinzy. You must first satisfy us all that our landlord, Hugh Derinzy, is dead, and has left no child. We never heard that tidings of his actual death had reached England, and though none of us would stir in the matter against Miss Derinzy's wishes as long as she acted as Lady of the Manor it is not likely that we shall allow ourselves to be rack-rented or turned out of our homes like those poor fellows 't'other side of the Irish Channel with out making your honour *prove* in the law courts that you or even Miss Derinzy, if it must come to that have the right to eject us.'

The Colonel turned short round and left him without a word.

Violet listened with deep interest. You must go to Miss Derinzy at once, father, and tell her all you know or surmise about her brother. I have heard that she loved him so dearly that she feared to make efforts to discover his fate, which she was assured would only prove the sad reality to be worse than she supposed. No injustice has ever been practised, and though Colonel Derinzy nominally manages the estate, she is always referred to, as I understand was the case when he threatened you with a prosecution she interfered to prevent it, as she has often done before.

You are right, Violet; wise and good as your mother was before you, said Forester, sighing. I lost my best counsellor in her, but you will learn to supply her place. She was truthful in every act, else I could not have loved her as I did. Never conceal from your natural protector any action, even seemingly unimportant. Why, the cause which made Hugh Derinzy a banished man and probably consigned him to an early grave was in the first instance a trifle little more than a foolish trick played by a girl but not such a girl as you are, or as Stella was; it was in

## Carding–Mill Valley

fact an anonymous letter, written it may be with an evil purpose a jealous woman's freak to separate those whom she falsely imagined to be lovers.

The letter fell into hands not likely to deal lightly with aspersions on a woman's character; but, still, if at once confessed, the fault, being a woman's, might have been overlooked. But it was never confessed; and Hugh paid a fearful penalty. In those days duelling was regarded very differently from the light it now appears in. It was part of the creed of a gentleman especially of an officer to fight if his word was doubted, and no one not even his own sister believed Hugh's simple assertion of innocence.

Well, he did not believe it to be the duty of a Christian, he was a most sincere unaffected believer, to stand up with armed hand and take the life of another man or to risk his own where both parties were innocent of any real cause for quarrel. Even had there been vital wrong, it was not in that way that he would have guarded his honour.

The opinion of society, however, went against him. He found himself ostracised the officers of his own regiment looked coldly on him all doubted and misjudged him. In vain did he implore the vain girl whom he believed guilty to exonerate him by a frank avowal. Even to those who knew her to have been often guilty of tampering with private correspondence, cunningly opening letters, and counterfeiting writings, she positively denied the charge; so he left her withering under his scorn but unrepentant. Then he wrote to his sister, confident in her affection, and she too disowned him. I do not say that he was right, but he was young, inexperienced, and bitterly wronged. I do not think I should have judged better myself at two–and–twenty. He threw up his commission and left England. Where he may be now, or whether he is still living, time will show. Inquiries are being instituted, and until more is ascertained as to what his fate may have been it would be cruel to raise the question. If his sister still loves him which her conduct leads me to doubt it would be a fresh trial, and disturb what seem to be her present friendly relations with Colonel Derinzy and his family.

Again Violet was silent for some moments. Her father watched her with an attention which amounted to agony. At last she said:

I do not I cannot agree with you, my father; forgive me if I am presumptuous. To a sister to one like all I fancy Stella Derinzy to be doubt would be a blessed relief from the dire certainty which has weighed on her for years. I am quite sure there has been some mistake, some further concealment or treachery. She is the best judge what steps should be taken; and she ought, also, to be the first to move in this matter which concerns her so vitally.

Her father came close up to her, and bending down, kissed her forehead.

Be it so, then, Violet. I will see Stella Derinzy, if no better representative of her lost brother can be found; but it must be at my own time and in my own way, and both will require much consideration. Meanwhile, I know that I can trust you. Do not let a word I have now said pass your lips until I give you permission. Remember that if Hugh Derinzy wins back his place in society, Colonel Derinzy and his family will have to leave Hagleth Hall.

On our first arrival, before the return of the heads of the house, whom I neither pity, admire, nor respect, your account of the young clergyman's earnest exertions interested me. I liked his simple hearty discourse last night. That girl with the golden hair looks like an angel. These young people have grown up in the unquestioning belief that all the glory and beauty that surround them is their own fair and assured heritage. We must ascertain Hugh Derinzy's present position and intentions before raising reports before unsettling these youthful minds and dashing to the ground hopes and expectations which they have been brought up to entertain. Believe me, Violet, it is an evil thing, and very bitter, to have to give up the home of one's childhood; especially if it be such a home among the woods and mountains as Hagleth.

He turned away, and Violet fancied that there was in his voice and in his eyes an expression well–nigh of anguish. The next morning when she came downstairs she found on the table in the hall a little twisted note left by her

father. He had gone away on the business of which they had been speaking she was informed and might not return for some time. Was he gone in search of, and would he bring back with him the girl thought Hugh Derinzy?

## Chapter 16.

O'er crackling ice, o'er gulfs profound  
With nimble glide the skaters play;  
O'er treacherous pleasure's flowery ground  
Thus lightly skim, and haste away.

If the sparkling surface of the great lake, often covered, in the winter, by gay groups of pleasure–seekers, in the beautiful grounds of Hagleth Hall had suddenly split asunder and engulfed them, Colonel Derinzy could scarcely have been more startled than he had been, when the farmer from the Uplands called upon him to prove the fact of his cousin's death.

He had turned away without answering. He was never a man fluent in speech, and now words utterly failed him. He had not even sufficient spirit to reprove the man for his cool tone of defiance. But nevertheless his blood boiled within him as he rode silently homeward. The meeting had been entirely unpremeditated.

It chafed his temper still more when he found a large and gay party assembled on his own lawn. At this hour he was almost invariably absent, but the farmer's sullen words had given him a shock, which made him, like a wounded animal, turn back to his lair. Would that he could at once have found a quiet corner to retire into but he had forgotten that it was the afternoon on which his wife was at Home to their country neighbours, and a moment's reflection taught him that it behoved him to be courteous; the ground on which he trod was too slippery not to warn him to be cautious. An unwary step might prove fatal.

As he moved among the gay groups a sort of chill passed over them, as if a spectre stood in their midst. Colonel Derinzy was at no time a lively companion, and now his aspect was freezing. He was not himself aware of his ghastly paleness, but he felt that his presence did not inspire gaiety. The jest was stopped the mirth of the summer visitants suspended when, suddenly and unexpectedly, for on such occasions he was rarely present, Colonel Derinzy mingled among his wife's guests.

As Colonel Derinzy passed through the small crowd of players and spectators, and looked for a moment absently at the manoeuvres, none of which he understood, which formed the tactics of a fashionable game of the period, he seemed almost like a blind man needing some guiding hand. Instinctively he drew near his wife; for among the best traits of his character there still remained a strong affection for her who had been, and still was, the one only love of his life.

Mrs. Derinzy was sitting under a small tent at the upper end of the lawn, the one which she had said her son had brought from London, recently. It held seats for two or, at the most, three persons; her companion at the present moment, a very reluctant one, was the mistress of Ashlets. As the tall figure of her husband darkened the opening between the striped holland curtains, Mrs. Derinzy looked up nervously.

Has there been an accident? How pale you are, she said; oh, do sit down, and I will get you a glass of wine. I am certain something has happened.

Nonsense, said her husband curtly not, however, refusing the seat she offered. It is only the heat thunder in the air, I fancy; I came back to tell you that there is a storm brewing among the hills then, turning to Lady Balfour, he said, politely Forgive me, the glare prevented my recognising you at first we have become quite

## Carding–Mill Valley

strangers of late years. Allow me to bid you very heartily welcome to Hagleth.

Lady Balfour returned his greeting somewhat coldly. My wife is so timid in a thunderstorm that I make a point of not leaving her alone when there is a prospect of disturbance of that kind in the atmosphere. Is your daughter among the players? Instructions in this new game are more perplexing than the plan of a campaign.

No, May is not strong enough to play any outdoor games at present, said her mother, sighing; I confess I envy you and Mrs. Derinzy your bright, handsome, healthy girls. Our 'May–blossom' is very fragile.

Colonel Derinzy looked at the moving figures on the lawn without distinctly seeing any one.

Where are my girls? he said, absently; are they among the players? The light dazzles me.

Laura is coming here with the refreshments, which I am sure you greatly need, said Lady Balfour, her dislike giving way to a feeling of compassion. I am sure you have ridden too fast and too far; your kind wish to be at home, perhaps, made you hurry. Do you really think there is a storm coming on? I thought it such a delightful afternoon.

No, no, not at present, said the Colonel, drinking hurriedly the cool claret his daughter handed to him. We shall have it presently these hills attract storms. It will not harm you. It is, perhaps, passing over Hagleth.

He spoke so gloomily that Laura looked surprised.

Oh, father the sky is without a cloud! she exclaimed. Do not alarm our guests. We have not had such a pleasant gathering since we came back. I am sure it will be a fine evening.

It may be so storms often pass away, said her father, trying to rally. I have been on the higher land and fancied I saw it approaching, but it may never touch us. Go back to your game, and tell your mother that I am feeling better.

Laura went back lightly to her game. For a few moments there was silence. Lady Balfour wished that she had some excuse for following her, but it seemed uncivil to leave her host. It is a certain fact that when we most wish to avoid embarrassing subjects an unwelcome one is sure to be started. Did your ride over the hills take you near the new road people are talking about? she said at last. My husband was annoyed at first, and thinks a stranger should not have interfered with territorial rights; but, after all, I understand it is a decided accommodation.

No, replied Colonel Derinzy, very coldly; I always avoid seeing what is unwelcome. This new road is an infringement of my own and Miss Derinzy's rights; and I only wish I could stir up her spirit about it as wrathfully as my own. But she is, you know, sadly out of health rather supine and I do not care to act, in this matter, independently.

Of course not, said Lady Balfour drily. There was another and still more awkward pause. Miss Derinzy is not here, I think, to–day? she said, anxious not to prolong it. You are such delightfully near neighbours I hoped we might meet her. Is she suffering more than usual?

Stella does not even come here, said Mrs. Derinzy softly, as she put aside the curtain which partially obscured the entrance of the tent. We are sorry but it is one of her crotchets she is, you know, quite a privileged invalid. I often tell her that the Hall is quite within even her limited walking powers, and of course she has her poney carriage, though she scarcely ever uses it, or the boys would take our very easy carriage and bring her. They are all her slaves they worship her and no wonder Stella is my idol. There is no one like her so generous so unselfish thinking first of everyone excepting herself. We quite adore Cousin Stella.

This unusual burst of eloquence, which was, for a wonder, quite sincere, on his wife's part, was a great relief to Colonel Derinzy. He now relinquished his seat to her, declaring himself quite recovered, and anxious to take a lesson in the game, which was still being carried on with spirit. In less than an hour, however, it came to an end, and soon afterwards the different parties of guests were winding their way homewards to their several habitations by different routes.

## Chapter 17.

Blue as yon Heaven's o'erarching dome,  
Sweet as the thought of childhood's home  
Modest and pure as household ways,  
Serene and frank as summer days,  
Reflecting in wide open eyes  
Celestial tints of Spring's clear skies.

The clasp, though kind, must be with power,  
That plucks my gentle trusting flower;  
If from the stalk 'tis torn in strife,  
One gasp will end its tender life;  
Those pliant heart-strings rent in twain  
Can never reunite again.

*To the Periwinkle.*

May Balfour did not utter a single word during the first part of the long drive home. Her parents, on the contrary, talked with much animation. The restraint which always oppressed them both when under the shadow of the Hagleth, had passed off, like the impending storm prophesied by Colonel Derinzy, which appeared to have existed only in his imagination. The sultriness of which he complained, if not also a fiction, had been blown away by the light breeze which ruffled the feathers of May's drooping hat, and had perhaps called to her cheek the bright colour at which her tender mother often glanced admiringly.

Is she not looking well, Harry? Our darling is certainly stronger, she whispered, bending forward to speak to her husband, who sat opposite to her. Did you enjoy your afternoon, May? We have scarcely heard the sound of your voice, but you do not look as tired as I expected you would be. It is a long drive.

No, I am not tired. I was waiting till you and my father stopped speaking to ask a favour, said May hesitatingly; only I am half afraid you will not grant it.

Her indulgent parents looked at her with surprise. May had always been so delicate in health and so timid and unselfish, that it was but seldom she was denied anything. Indeed, her wishes were generally anticipated.

I did not know, she continued reluctantly, looking at her father, that you shared my mother's feelings about the pleasant people and lovely place, where, I confess, and with whom, I have just spent a very delightful afternoon. Laura Derinzy is my favourite friend. I like all her brothers and sisters, and I feel very sorry for their poor sickly mother. Why is it they are so unpopular? Half the people on the lawn were speaking unkindly of their entertainers all were cold or unfriendly. It seems so hard upon these young creatures of my own age to be cut off from all that should make life pleasant, for no sin of their own; and I am quite certain they know it and feel it. Whatever their parents may have done to merit such a punishment must have been long years ago.

## Carding–Mill Valley

Colonel Derinzy has never been a popular character, said her father. He was disliked in his Regiment, and without exaggeration I may say there is not a man at the Club who cares to exchange more than a few words with him. His wife is a poor creature of whom I never heard much good. Her manner is chilling enough to make the air even on a summer day like this, on her own brightly variegated lawn, disagreeably cold. But you are right, May; it *is* hard when the sins of the parents are visited upon their children. The girls are pretty, the boys fine, handsome fellows. It is a pity they cannot shift their quarters into another neighbourhood. They will always seem like interlopers here.

But why should that be? persisted May. Miss Derinzy is on the best possible terms with her relatives. It is her wish that they should reside at the Hall; and Colonel Derinzy, the next heir to the property, is surely, as she is such an invalid, its rightful manager. It seems such a natural arrangement.

Chacun à son gout, said Sir Henry, shrugging his shoulders, as he usually did after using one of the few French phrases he could muster. For my part I would not let him manage my dog–kennels. Hector always tries to fly at him and that surly brown retriever, when we pass each other on the road. But we have not heard your request yet, little woman. Is it that we should not speak evil of our neighbours? Especially, you would say, after partaking of their hospitality; which, by–the–bye, I did not do, for I touched neither tea, coffee, nor champagne. Well, I think she is right, and we must humour our little Madonna.

No, father, that is not the favour I wished to ask, said May, the delicate colour on her cheek deepening. I want you and my mother to spare me from home for a few days next week to stay with Laura Derinzy. I have promised, subject of course to your consent, that I would go to Hagleth Hall on Tuesday and remain over Thursday. There is a festival at the new Church near the waterfall in the glen the anniversary of the dedication, which I should much like to attend.

Was that Leo's suggestion? said the Colonel, laughing. I thought he seemed rather attentive. I like him and his soldier brother and there is certainly no harm about the girls. What do you say, Mary?

His wife looked at the hills they were leaving behind them, as if for an inspiration.

Well, I don't know, Henry; Mrs. Derinzy is, as May is well aware, not a favourite of mine, and I like her husband as little. It is not a happy home like ours not one at which I care that our darling should visit, or become too intimate.

Oh, mother, why should we cast another shadow where, as you say, there is not much brightness?

Suffer me to go this once. If there is anything at Hagleth of which I think you would not approve, I will never seek to go there again. A few days cannot injure me, and I am sure it would do them all good; and perhaps set an example inspire others with kindlier feelings. I should really like very much to go to Hagleth.

May knew that her point was gained when her father said he would talk the matter over with her mother. He was on her side, she felt certain; his extremely kind heart having felt the justice of her argument that it was hard that the general opinion of society should set itself against these young people.

Her mother was less inclined to be charitable, and she entertained a stronger prejudice against Colonel and Mrs. Derinzy. It was with great unwillingness that she was at last persuaded to give her consent that May should spend a couple of days at Hagleth. Never had she denied a request of her child before, but the place was associated with a very painful period of her life; and she could not shake off the impression that its present occupants had some share in the harm that had embittered years of her youth, and that their influence might work woe to her idolized daughter.



## Carding–Mill Valley

Sir Henry laughed at these evil auguries, which he begged her not to communicate to Marion.

Let the child go if she wishes it, he said. She may do good, and will derive no harm from our neighbours. Her gentle spirit will shake its wings and free itself, and perhaps others, from the gloom hanging over that house. It is her mission. Let us not oppose it. You have your instincts so has she, and I like to look to the bright side. Years have passed, good wife, since an evil blast passed over us from the Hagleth Hills. Let us hope the noxious vapours, if still brooding there, may clear off, and that our little May's serene influence may help to disperse them. I declare she has made me feel quite sorry for her young friends.

Though still unconvinced, the wife and mother yielded to these joint pleadings. May, under the escort of her two stalwart brothers, was suffered to depart; and the young men, on their return, in the evening, after a long pleasant day and an excursion with the young Derinzys into the mountain districts, gave such a cheerful account of their sister's reception and prospects of enjoyment, that her parents felt better satisfied than they had done when parting from her. May had thoroughly enjoyed riding to the waterfall, and seemed to feel no fatigue. The Highland air, her brothers thought, suited her better than the soft climate of the valley under the ash trees.

The next day was to be devoted to the decoration of the Chapel for the Saint's festival, and they had promised to take over an additional supply of flowers, and to assist in nailing up texts and garlands. Their mother helped actively in cutting the best or fairest blossoms, especially those which were entirely white, and therefore best suited for the service of the sanctuary.

A sort of vague alarm still possessed her, though nothing could be pleasanter than Fred and Alan's account of the house where they had left their sister. May had not seen much of Colonel and Mrs. Derinzy; the latter was very much fatigued after her garden–party, and kept her room till a late hour, and her husband was only visible during the time spent at the dinner–table, and then seemed tired and out of spirits. He had been occupied all the morning with his steward, visiting some distant hill farms.

Far from appearing sad and sombre, and in spite of the indisposition of its master and mistress, the old Hall under Hagleth seemed to the quiet girl very lively and interesting. Having no sisters of her own, the society of young girls of similar age and occupation was extremely pleasant. May felt roused and excited, wandering through the beautiful grounds, and farther away among the mountains than at home she would have been allowed to venture. As her brothers said, the mountain air braced her languid frame; she had not felt so well and strong, she said, since she was in Switzerland.

There was just the distance between the two houses which often makes places in one neighbourhood more unfamiliar than those lying at a much greater distance. Now the young girl was in the very heart of the mountain scenery, and she revelled in its beauty. Even while assisting her friends and taking part heartily in the floral decorations May kept from time to time her eyes upon the heights visible through the arched windows; and was glad of an excuse to go outside and gather fresh ferns and feathery grasses, that grew profusely among the crannies of the rocks near Stella's Waterfall.

She was standing looking at the bounding stream as it leapt on its course down the glen full of gladness, when Laura and her brother Leo joined her, and asked if she would like to walk with them as far as Millburn. There were on the banks of the river below the old house some large perfectly white flowers growing wild. Laura did not know their names, and had tried to cultivate them at the Hall in vain. Like many natives of the woodland or brook–side, they were very difficult to transplant. Not one of the roots she had moved would live, but Miss Forester was very kind, and if there were any flowers yet in bloom, would be sure to give them to ornament the Chapel, where she was a constant attendant.

May, who had scarcely even heard her name, but to whom all was new and pleasant, gladly consented, and they entered the wild lovely grounds round the old Mill; where at each moment fresh beauties met her delighted eyes.

## Carding–Mill Valley

Viola came to meet them from the house, but did not invite them to enter. She granted their request at once, and led them to the bank, which was covered with the same white blossoms, and large pendant leaves with modest buds, which Laura had coveted for her decorations.

It needed some agility to reach the finest flowers, for the bank was steep, and the plant loved moisture, and flourished most luxuriantly close to the water.

Viola knew its haunts, and before Leo could prevent it she ran down to the bed of the stream and gathered handfuls of the finest clusters. She did not profit by his assistance in returning, but, without noticing the young clergyman's outstretched hand, sprang, as lightly as she had descended, back to the pathway.

Miss Balfour had drawn back when Viola, who was quite a stranger to her, joined Laura and her brother. No introduction took place. The Foresters were known to be unwilling to make acquaintances in the neighbourhood; and although she had cordially granted their request, Viola's manner, even to the Derinzys, was shy even to coldness. She had turned away as if not observing Leo's offered hand, and after a very few sentences had been exchanged she bade them good morning and retraced her steps to the house. Leo stood still for a moment on the bank contemplating her retreating figure.

A very sharp, quick pain darted through May's heart, compelling her too to remain stationary. She leant against the trunk of an old tree, and for the first time wished herself at home again; without knowing why the strange new happiness of the last two days was suddenly overclouded. Her mother's anxious looks and doubtful consent recurred to her. Was there indeed always a shadow cast by the Hagleth?

Laura noticed her paleness immediately. You have been tiring yourself, she said. Leo shall take you home at once by the shady road through the valley. I must go back and arrange these flowers, before they fade, in the altar vases. But this is a much shorter way to the Hall if you do not go round by the Chapel.

All her protestations were vain. Laura had promised Lady Balfour that May should not fatigue herself; and the delicate girl felt that although her paleness was fast disappearing, the strength of which only yesterday she had boasted, was failing her. Leo, roused from his abstraction, agreed with his sister, adding that he should be glad to return home by the shortest route, as he had work to prepare for the morrow.

It would have been like affectation to make further difficulties. Laura wrapped some moss round the stems of her already drooping flowers, after dipping it in the stream, and turned away; leaving her brother and May Balfour to pursue their homeward walk together. For some little time they were both very quiet. Leo was probably thinking of his sermon for the festival, and May's spirits were very much subdued.

Presently he said, without any embarrassment, I wish you could teach me how to get on with those new parishioners of mine, Miss Balfour. There is about them some mystery, deeper than ordinary shyness, which I cannot fathom. Miss Forester's manner was colder than ever to-day, and her father absolutely refuses to know any of his neighbours. He did come to the evening service a few days since, which emboldened me to call upon him; but his daughter says he has left home, and the period of his return is quite uncertain. Evidently she did not intend that my visit should be repeated. And yet it seems absolutely barbarous for me, their Pastor, and for my sisters, to leave her in such absolute seclusion. The man is away for weeks and months, and she has no mother.

He stopped abruptly.

She is very lovely, May said, and so young. Does she live quite alone in her father's absence?

Absolutely so, said Leo, with interest. She has some young girls, but they are mere rustics not companions. She is very kind, and they are excessively fond of her. My mother has called upon her, but she expressly stated

## Carding–Mill Valley

that she could not return the visit, nor did she invite a repetition of it. Althea has sometimes accompanied her part of the way home after Evensong, but she has never asked her indoors. To–day her manner is colder than ever. Did it not strike you that she avoided asking us to go a step farther than the bank of the stream where the flowers Laura described were growing? I should have liked to show you the view of the valley from a point near the house, but I did not venture to propose it.

Oh no, you were quite right. I did not at all wish to go farther I saw quite enough, said May hurriedly. Her father is, I suppose, the person papa was speaking of, who had offended some of the gentlemen in the neighbourhood by carrying a new road across the head of the dingle. Had the carts to come this way it seems almost impassable except on foot or else to go miles round by the upper road? But I had no idea that he was such a person as the father of that young lady must be. I thought he was some low democratic agitator not a gentleman.

I scarcely know what he is, said Leo impatiently. The only time I have ever caught a glimpse of him was on the pathway before me leading from the Chapel, and it was dusk. He wore a light summer coat, or blouse, like the workmen; but there was something in his air and walk, still more in his voice, even at a distance, and though its tones were low, which told me that, though amongst, he was not of them. When I reached the gates of his dwelling, he had passed through; and the men, who had been thanking him for many favours, said he could not bear to have a word said about the obligations they were under to him. I called, as in duty bound, having seen him at my church, the next day; but as I told you, he was gone, and from the young lady's manner, I guess that if he had been at home he would in some way have avoided seeing me. Well, I suppose we must let them take their own way, but it grieves me not to be of use to those who seem to have no friends, at all events not in this part of the country.

You seem to have done all in your power, said May; while the similarity of the kind feeling Leo expressed to what she had felt about himself and his sisters involuntarily occurred to her, and seemed to draw them nearer together.

Just then, as the path became steeper, Leo slackened his pace and offered his arm to his delicate companion. Miss Balfour, he said, I know what is in your thoughts. You are saying to yourself, to your own kind heart, how well I understand that desire to make the stray sheep of a flock gather together. You are trying to make up for the coldness of our other neighbours by this visit; and I thank you in my sister's name and in my own. We are nearly as much pariahs or black sheep as the lonely dwellers in the old burnt house in the Carding–Mill Valley.

Oh, you cannot suppose that I was classing you with these strangers, of whom no one ever heard anything till last winter! exclaimed May in great embarrassment. I have known you and your brother and sisters ever since I was a child. Though we are not very near neighbours, we have all our lives dwelt in the same part of the county, and had the same old British hills looking down on our homes. Wherever, however, we met in after life, we should remember this winding river, which seems to link us all together. The Hagleth the Crest the ash trees in our valley. Why, I can almost see them from my window at the Hall.

Depend upon it you will never be forgotten, said Leo, whilst May felt a slight pressure of her arm to his side. I am glad we have one friend, though I must not call you an old one. But why is it, Miss Balfour, that we have no others? I am not conscious that we have done anything deserving ostracism and yet I feel myself almost as much cut off from friendly communion from intimacy with our neighbours of high degree as Mr. Forester and his daughter. They are willing recluses, but I confess I am not. Even if I did not care for society myself, my young sisters and my brother are not nuns and hermits. Nay more, we feel that there is some prejudice against us among our equals the poor we have always with us. They love us, and among them we are welcome visitors. My father's position is certainly somewhat anomalous. He is much restricted, and that perhaps makes his manner ungenial. My mother's health, like your own, is delicate; but if he is not exactly the master of the lands which must one day

be his own, he is our Cousin Stella's undoubted heir and representative.

May could not contradict him, though she did not like to admit that she knew and deeply compassionated the lonely position of the family with whom she was for a brief period domesticated. Her own parents were among those who held most aloof, and she had fought her first battle in life to obtain permission even to pass a few days under their roof.

Leo did not press the point, but its discussion had brought on a kinder feeling between them. In spite of her embarrassment and agitation, May's fatigue had passed off, and she looked better and happier after her walk than when she stood under the shadow of the old trees in the Carding–Mill Valley watching those whom she suspected to be lovers. Now she felt that Leo's sentiments about the beautiful lonely girl partook in a great measure of the divine charity which had regulated her own actions, and for the present she did not care to look deeper either into his heart or her own.

Her thoroughly girlish simplicity was unsullied by any thought of self or by jealous misgivings. If her own motives were not as entirely disinterested as she imagined them to be, May was not aware of the incipient dawning of other affections than those hitherto centred at home. Enough that she and Leo had between them a bond of common interest, and that her hitherto unoccupied heart and mind was stirred with generous emotion like his own. With the ardour of youth perhaps of first love though neither of them as yet acknowledged its existence, they were ready to throw over all near and dear, and even over those beyond that circle, the magic of their own fresh–springing happiness.

## Chapter 18.

I often think their name was taken  
From the Pen at heaven's gate forsaken;  
When, twinkling in some sudden shower,  
Gemmed with bright rain–drops gleams my flower;  
Like Angel–eyes with tears bedewed,  
Or midnight skies with stars bestrewed.

Yet storms that rend the lordly Pine,  
Scarce stir these leaflets, frail and fine;  
Sharp, piercing blasts of wind and hail  
Vainly their modest bloom assail;  
While mirrored in their azure eyes  
Returning sunshine gladly lies.

*To the periwinkle..*

The August morning which dawned upon the Festival of St. Laurence, to whom the chapel near the waterfall was dedicated, was not more unclouded than May Balfour's humour. She had quite forgotten her mother's fears and discarded her own misgivings. For the present she had repressed self–examination, and was resolved to enjoy the passing hours without looking backward or forward. The dew was still trembling on the grass, as, full of innocent happiness, the troop of young girls from the Hall went lightly, but silently, along the pathway through the Carding Mill Valley to the early service, which was attended by many of the country folk, and the eastern sun–rays streamed in from the oriel window upon Laura's garlands, and the large white flowers; which had lifted up their heads and opened their spotless petals more fully since she placed them in the vases upon the altar.

## Carding–Mill Valley

Violet and her maidens were all present, but the moment she rose from her devotions the young mistress, who sat close to the entrance, left the Chapel, followed closely by her attendants. Laura had not time to thank her, as she had intended: for, after her own labours had ceased, Viola had taken up the loving task, and greatly increased the beauty of the decorations. The nearness of her dwelling and the luxuriant foliage on the river bank, together with the beautiful varieties of fern and moss, in their damp freshness, had furnished ample materials; with which the country maidens, under her tasteful directions, and assisted by her skilful hands, had done wonders in the coolness of the evening and first hours of daylight.

For this assistance Viola had not wished or waited for thanks. A sudden shyness of her friends at the Hall seemed to have come over her, and yet, hitherto, they were the only persons whose advances the retiring girl had not entirely shunned. It was true they had a visitor, and one connected with the county families, into whose society neither Mr. nor Miss Forester sought or was likely to find entrance; but May Balfour's aspect was not alarming. She had, by her manners, invited rather than repelled the introduction which Violet unmistakably declined.

It was impossible to press further these kindly meant overtures, and May must rest content without seeing the view from the platform in front of the old house. Even the young Clergyman's Christian charity and forbearance could not prevent his feeling somewhat aggrieved as he followed his sisters and their young friend home, after seeing the gates of Millburn closed behind the flock of youthful creatures, whose light garments could just be seen fluttering among the trees like doves' wings.

When she had effected her purpose, and banished from her solitary dwelling the only semblance of youthful and congenial companionship and sympathy which it had yet afforded her, Violet did not feel at all happier for the success of her efforts. She sent the girls indoors to their several occupations, but lingered herself in the garden, tending her flowers and watching the sun rise higher above the valley with sorrowful eyes. Her time was usually so fully occupied that it was almost the first occasion on which she had looked forward with something like dread to having a longer day than usual before her. There was no chance of her father's return. It would have to be spent, in all human probability, alone.

Would it not be so with the rest of her life? The solemn thoughts inspired by the service in which she had reverentially taken part, and which mostly filled her heart with pure unalloyed joy, now turned involuntarily to the deepest sadness. Even her father's return, to which she had always looked forward, inspired her with terror; and she dared not look beyond it.

It was true that she had urged him to throw light upon the mystery of Hugh Derinzy's disappearance if he was still living to bring him back to the enjoyment of dwelling among his own people in the house of his forefathers. It seemed as if she now realized for the first time the misery which this long–delayed restitution of rights if, indeed, it could be brought about must bring, as her father had said, on those who unconsciously had taken a position not lawfully their own, but who, nevertheless, in so doing, had committed no fraud; had been, in fact, more sinned against than sinning, since there was no doubt that his relations had all believed that the real owner of the Hagleth estate had died long years ago.

What manner of man could this be, if he were really still in the land of the living, who had allowed himself to pass for more than twenty years as an inmate of the tomb who had suffered his only sister to weep unconsolated, and his nearest of kin to incur such a fearful debt? Was he, could he be, worthy of re–establishment in his former place? Was it not much more likely that if, as her father seemed to surmise, he had been so stung by the sense of injury and misconstruction, as to cast off all ties, and wander away into the backwoods or to some Californian haunt of heedless gold–diggers, or any other lawless abodes of men as desperate and hopeless as himself, he would long before this time have conformed himself to their ways and mode of life? Could the principles and habits of an English gentleman have survived such an exile; even if, as her father imagined, they had once been his guiding motives of action?

## Carding–Mill Valley

The bright yet reverential faces and gestures of the young girls whom she had seen that very morning, from the distance at which she stood in her distressed humility, now came before Viola like a vision of angels. Very fervently had she prayed for them, for herself, and for her father, when she returned to her own place. Viola had no mother, and her father was often, as now, far away all her troubles, great and small, were confided to her Heavenly Father to Him who is always near every one of us and who in his earthly form bade us lay our cares upon Him. She had ventured humbly to ask that it might not be laid upon herself or her earthly parent to become the instrument to right this grievous wrong. When on the preceding day her glance, instantly averted, had caught the half–tender, half–reproachful looks of Leo as he offered to help her, her very soul had shrunk away from him. How could she take his proffered hand, or avail herself of any assistance from one whose prospects might soon be darkened by the intervention of the strangers to whom he had striven to be uniformly kind? What would they think of her and of her father if it proved to be through their instrumentality that ruin was to fall upon their hearth? Leo would certainly not care to be patronized by a cousin who must have strong reasons for disliking his supplanters, otherwise the truth would long since have been made known.

Mrs. Derinzy's pale face, the timid clinging clasp of her trembling fingers the sad tone of her voice haunted the girl's memory. Was she indeed false to the very heart's core, as her father accused her of being; or was there still some deeper sin some more bitter misery yet unsuspected which had kept back this unknown mysterious wanderer from claiming his own fair possessions?

Viola tried to picture him to herself in vain. Her father had said nothing that placed him plainly before her, or could even make her certain of his positive existence. It must have been years since they met, for he seemed to have been then young, and still suffering from the sting of fresh injuries. She could not bring his image before her, though she pitied his sufferings, at all in the same life–like, vivid colouring as the Derinzy girls and their grave, holy–minded young brother the Priest at the Altar who had blessed her that very morning. The girl's thoughts flew last, but rested longest, on Hugo, the gallant, buoyant young officer, heir of his cousin's and father's pretensions, Stella Derinzy's god–son and favourite. What would his feelings be when robbed of his life–long expectations, and with a cloud cast upon the honour of his house? Would it be for him as sad a destiny as had befallen his cousin, and totally unmingled on his part with blame?

As she stood, lost in thought, on the bridge, leaning on the rail which Hugo had assisted her to replace, from which the roses had all dropped away, a thorn accidentally pierced her hand. Viola started, and looked up with a sudden conviction that she was not alone, and saw on the opposite side of the stream approaching her the object of her thoughts. More slowly, more gravely than he had, earlier in the summer, advanced to meet, and made an excuse for accosting her. It was as if the anguish of her remorseful thoughts had conjured up a spectre the pallid image of the man who then stood before her in the very prime and pride of youthful manly beauty.

## Chapter 19.

I do not ask that flowers should always spring  
Beneath my feet:  
I know too well the poison and the sting  
Of things too sweet.  
For one thing only, Lord, dear Lord, I plead:  
Lead me aright,  
Though strength should falter, and though heart should bleed,  
Through peace to light.

Adelaide Anne Procter.

## Carding–Mill Valley

There were so few visitors at Millburn that Viola, when she wandered away, caring just then to see no one, had not even thought it possible that after her coldness to the only family who had sought her friendship, any person would call again to see herself or her father. Consequently, when Captain Derinzy inquired for Mr. Forester, Lucy Langden, who had known the young master from her childhood, told him that Miss Forester was in the garden, and could no doubt give him what he desired, namely, her father's address.

Hugo followed the girl's directions, which led him to the bridge across the stream, on the farther side of which Viola was standing. How well he remembered seeing her there before, and lingering over the pleasant opportunity of doing her a slight service. Yet now, when he had a definite purpose and plea for accosting her, words seemed to fail him.

Hugo raised his cap respectfully as he approached.

I have been at your door inquiring for your father, who is, I find, absent, and not immediately expected back, he said. Will you have the kindness to give me his address?

Viola hesitated. He may return at any moment, she said timidly. My father has not left any sign of where he may at present be wandering. When he leaves home he wishes to be undisturbed. He does not like to have letters following him about the country.

But you must surely know, said Hugo hurriedly, almost involuntarily. Your father does not leave you here alone without the power of appealing to him in any sudden emergency? I beg your pardon, he added, I ought not to have presumed to say this; but you look so young, so helpless, and you seem to have only girls about the place. Are you never afraid of its utter loneliness?

No, said Violet simply. I have no fear of that kind. There is nothing to tempt robbers. The place *is* lonely, but I think I am safe. My girls have fathers, and brothers, and friends near them who would take care that no harm came near us in my father's absence. There are several kind strong men who come and see, night after night, that all is well with us.

It is a pleasure to be so loved and cared for, said Hugo, with a sigh. My mother is very timid, and if we did not draw bolt and bar at the Hall, though there are several men with fire–arms at hand if need were, on the premises, she would not sleep. It is fortunate that you have a more courageous spirit.

He stopped, but Viola made no answer. She was not feeling at all brave just then. Her very soul seemed dying away within her as she waited to hear his next words, to learn with what purpose he sought to meet her father.

Mr. Forester, he said, at last, has won for himself the respect and confidence of his humbler neighbours, though he will not condescend to mingle with his equals. I have been with my father and his new steward visiting some of the outlying farms, and I am sorry to say there is a bad spirit rising among their occupants against the landed gentry here as in other places. Mr. Molineux thinks the land is held at too low a rental, and as the term of several of the leases has expired he wishes to have it re–valued. The tenants declare they will not submit to this step, and one and all seem disposed to acts of violence. My father, of course, could not give way to insolent rudeness, but he is anxious to act rightly. He is a stern lover of justice; no man need fear to be wronged by him.

Violet listened to him with interest, but silently.

After visiting these hill folk in company with my father, at his express wish, Hugo continued, I went again, alone, on my own responsibility. The men have mostly been my friends in boyhood. I have shot over their farms, fished in their waters, and taken many a hearty homely meal when I was a lad at their hospitable boards. I wanted to see what their real feelings, wants, and wishes were in fact, to hear what they had to say on their side of the

## Carding–Mill Valley

subject. Mr. Molineux is not a favourite of theirs, nor do I especially like him. He is a stranger, and does not understand our independent mountaineers. The result of my investigation was that the hill–folk have wonderful reliance on your father's judgment and knowledge of their condition, of their rights and wrongs; and I called, entirely on my own responsibility, to ask him whether he will mediate between landlord and tenant. If he complies with my request I think my father will agree, and that a better understanding may be brought about.

What is Miss Derinzy's opinion? said Violet. She knows the wants and wishes and ways of her very poorest neighbours, and is familiar with the customs of the district. Is it her wish that the rental of these hill farms should be raised? Lucy Langden tells me it will ruin her father, and that the place was but poor land when he took to it. He has laid out money and strength to improve it, and the new agent refuses compensation.

He is a hard man, and it is, as he considers, his duty to think principally of his employer, said Hugo. My father, I am certain, will refuse no man his just rights. He is not quite as liberal in his views as might be wished of the old school but his situation is a trying one. Miss Derinzy does not interfere unnecessarily. She leaves the management, except in extreme cases, to my father. Of course, action will not be taken without her consent; but, as yet, she has not been troubled about what probably may, by judicious management, be easily and satisfactorily arranged with justice to all parties. But I am intruding too long on your patience. Is there any chance of your father's speedy return, or will you communicate to him the object of my visit? No doubt you have the clue to find him wherever he has wandered.

No, I have no clue; nor do I know when he may come back, said the girl somewhat sadly. I am sure he will be interested in this question; but, like Miss Derinzy, he does not like interfering in the concerns of his neighbours. We are strangers here still.

The country people look upon you as friends, true friends, said Hugo. I only wish we were as popular not I, personally for the hill folk have known and loved me from very childhood, and my sisters go about among them fearlessly. Leo too is respected and liked; but they persist in regarding my father as a kind of middleman. Unfortunately he has a cold manner and does not easily sympathize, and never could fraternize, with persons of a different class. He is inflexibly just, but not genial. Even we, his own children, have never been exactly on easy terms with him; but we should all rally round him in any case of serious difficulty. We all have perfect confidence in his integrity, and respect his authority; nor has it ever with us been pushed too far.

His colour rose as he spoke, and he lifted his head proudly, as if willing to do battle with all men if the honour of the head of his house were assailed.

My father, he continued, has had through life to play a difficult part, but he has done his best to perform it honourably. The trust Miss Derinzy reposed in him after her brother's death has been a heavy responsibility; but it has been discharged to the best of his abilities. We all wish that our Cousin Stella had lived at the Hall and had managed the property herself, but she was too much cast down by sorrow and ill health to undertake it. To my mother I know that this has always been a deep source of regret, and now that I have arrived at manhood I see great cause to lament the course that, out of regard to Miss Derinzy's feelings, has been pursued. It is difficult, but not perhaps impossible, to alter it. I believe we should all have been happier if Stella had kept her proper place at the Hall; and my father might have saved her trouble by acting as her steward, which is in reality the part he has performed, without placing himself in a position which has probably excited jealousy and caused misapprehension.

You are right, said Violet. It is always a bad thing to occupy a false position. I will do all I can, she added softly, to persuade my father to be a peace–maker; of this you may rest assured.

Hugo drew nearer and extended his hand. Ten thousand thanks, he said, more cheerfully. With your help I have no fear of failure. Tell Mr. Forester that my father will act justly by all men, without fear or favour; for that I



will vouch with my life.

Violet gave him her hand, which trembled in his grasp.

If my father cannot do all that you wish, believe that it is not my fault, she said gently. You and your kind brothers and sisters have tried to be my friends and I am not ungrateful. Forgive me for not responding more warmly, but I too have a difficult part to perform. Our duty to our parents must be set before what we owe to society. My father does not wish me to make friends.

Hugo, who still retained her hand; gazed at her compassionately. That is a hard fate, he said; but you are right. Duty, whether for a soldier or a young girl like yourself, must come first, and obedience to orders; when not manifestly unjust and incompatible with yet higher obligations. Let us hope that in our cases these may not clash. Time may throw light on what at the present moment I must confess looks hopelessly perplexing. Farewell.

He released her hand after a quick, sudden pressure, as though unwilling to relax his strong clasp, and turning away without further leave–taking, was soon out of sight. Violet's glances followed him, but he did not turn or even look back.

## Chapter 20.

What is thought? in wild succession,  
Whence proceeds the motley train?  
What first stamps the vague impression  
On the ever active brain?  
What is thought, and whither tending  
Does the subtle phantom flee?  
Does it, like a moonbeam ending,  
Shine, then melt to vacancy?

Conder.

Sleeping or waking, the same idea haunted Colonel Derinzy, assuming widely different forms. Sometimes the stranger at Millburn, for as yet they had never met, wore the aspect of a censor and an enemy; at others the shape of a friend who might extricate him from difficulties, which he felt were gathering thickly round him. Though they had not exchanged a sentence on the subject, it was a chance word uttered by his father which had suggested to Hugo that he would accept the good offices of his new neighbour, a man of the people, to mediate between himself and the refractory hill farmers.

Hugo was right in affirming that Colonel Derinzy, though a severe, was by no means an unjust steward.

Stella Derinzy's affairs had prospered under his guardianship, and the estate was in excellent order. He would not persist in the new measures recommended by his bailiff if they were proved to be unfair; nor was he in the habit of pressing the yoke hardly on the necks of his inferiors, but he was a hard man and very unpopular.

Though his wife's manner was softer, she was at heart an arrant coward, and like most cowards, inclined to selfishness and falsehood. Not one of her dependents, or of the peasantry, ever thought of appealing to Mrs. Derinzy. Even her children, though checked by their father's coldness, went to him in their childish trials sooner than to their weak–minded mother. They did not love him more, and they feared him greatly; but underneath his harsh exterior and illiberal sentiments they felt there was a substratum of truth. Their mother was less worthy of trust. They had seen, unwillingly, too many small evasions, too many misleading excuses, to be able to dwell

confidingly on her soothing platitudes.

The only person intimately acquainted with Ursula Derinzy, who trusted her, was her husband. Though often harsh, he was never untrue to the loyalty he had sworn to her. Ursula had not spoiled his faith in women. She was the only one whom he had ever loved, and though they had been married five–and–twenty years, he loved her still.

Her entire submission suited his arbitrary nature. A higher–minded being would either have broken her heart or rebelled against his narrow rule, but Ursula did neither. She went stealing on along her own way, never thwarting or contradicting him openly never striving to improve him, never suggesting loftier motives or larger creeds concealing whatever might rouse his faulty temper, sacrificing even her children's welfare rather than disturb the quietude of their dull home leaving him to degenerate, as all lower natures are apt to fall, unless quickened by the incentives of emulation and the promptings of a purer principle. Often opportunities had occurred when he might through love or shame have been impelled or driven to take an upward course; but in her abject cowardice his wife left him unwarned, unaided, and let them one after another pass by.

Had Mrs. Derinzy mentioned her visit at Millburn, confessing, simply, that she was moved by womanly compassion to make acquaintance with the forlorn girl, her husband would have thanked, and blessed her; but she was so little in the habit of telling the truth that such a natural course never occurred to her. It was not the first time that by imposing secrecy on herself and her household about trifles Ursula had involved herself in a toilsome web of deceit. Even when her husband threw out a hint that it might be as well not to make enemies of these strangers, nay, even to pay them some slight attention, she was so afraid of his discovering that she had acted independently, that she refrained from uttering her usual quiet meaningless phrases of acquiescence.

Did not you hear me, Ursula? he said after a moment's silence. Might it not be as well to conciliate this man, who seems likely to be somewhat of an authority among us? Molineux is a new man, a complete stranger in our country. I do not think he will ever get on with the people, and if Stella Derinzy asks you any questions, I wish you would say that I think him unsuited to the place. I don't care for the fellow; and Hugo positively dislikes him. As for the tenants, he is already at open war with them, and they swear by this new man, and say he is a friend of the people. How I hate such jargon! but in these days one must not utterly ignore their claim to be heard.

What can this stranger know about the hill–farms? said his wife, turning pale. Oh, I hope we are not going to have a revolution! I was looking at the dreadful pictures in the Illustrated News last Sunday I suppose it was the great Revolution in France, which we used to hear of in my childhood; only I saw nothing like poor Marie Antoinette's beautiful face.

Why, there have been half a dozen revolutions in Paris since your childhood. Those pictures were of an *émeute* the other day how can you be so unconcerned, Ursula? All the papers were full of it; but no matter. No, I am not afraid of a revolution our Jacquerie are a loutish set but I do not want Stella to be frightened. That black–visaged fellow Langden is a regular Chartist, and his daughter is, or was, a favourite at the cottage. She is living at Millburn now, and they say that the young lady is very kind to her.

She cannot be much of a lady, I should think, said his wife, associating only with Lucy and the farmers' daughters. No one knows anything about her or her father. I suppose he is a Chartist or a Socialist, or something dreadful! What can there be in him to make him set himself up as an authority in a county neighbourhood. I should think it would be far better to steer quite wide of him. In a little while, if no one visits them, they will perhaps go away.

No, they do not want any visitors. They are not people I should wish you to invite to a garden–party like that ridiculous assemblage on your lawn last Wednesday. But, Ursula, could you not manage to show some interest, to take some womanly notice, of this young girl? That might lead the way to a better understanding between her

father and myself. Think the matter over.

Mrs. Derinzy fixed her eyes on the empty grate. She did not look at her husband, or she might have seen a kindlier expression than usual on his face, mingled with perplexity, which might have emboldened her to confess that unknown to him she had made the first overtures. But she stopped short at that point. She had acted without consulting him had ever since carefully concealed the circumstance and she dared not take the risk of an avowal.

Well, I don't know of course I will do whatever you wish. Perhaps I had better ask Stella.

I do not wish you to say a word on the subject to Stella, said her husband. Ursula, a great, a growing dread is stealing over me. I cannot shake it off, and only to yourself would I confess it. Those men grossly insulted me when I went to inspect the upland property. They made me feel that our position is fearfully insecure. They dared to say to my face that neither I nor Stella Derinzy had the right to alter the terms on which they hold their leases. They insinuated that proper steps had never been taken to prove that their own master, Hugh Derinzy, was really dead!

At last Ursula was completely roused her artificial placidity dispelled. She gasped for breath, and her husband, shocked at the effect of his hasty words, kindly strove to reassure her.

Hugh Derinzy not dead! she exclaimed when the power to speak returned, putting aside the restoratives offered. Why, it is years and years since we heard of him. Everything was done. *You* cannot be expected to bring him back.

No, no, there is no doubt he has been long dead, poor fellow. I wish I could have saved him from the sad consequences of his folly. But it is an awkward rumour nothing more, trust me, dear. This is what I am afraid may come to Stella's ears if these rude farmers are provoked into greater violence. You know how it would distress her, bringing up the past.

Can anything bring back the past the long lost? said his wife faintly. Oh, Arnold, this is indeed a terrible perplexity. Do you think this dreadful stranger the man at the Burnt Mill, knows anything about Hugh? Did *he* set this report abroad?

He knows nothing there is nothing to be known, said Colonel Derinzy contemptuously. I am sorry I frightened you, Ursula, I only wished to prevent your speaking to Stella of what would agitate her even more than yourself. Of course it is only an excuse for not choosing to pay the rent their land is really worth, but under the circumstances it is best to make no disturbance. If the men, as Hugo, I suspect, believes, wish to name Mr. Forester arbitrator, I think I had better not refuse.

Oh, I would not have anything to do with that horrid Chartist at the old Mill, exclaimed his wife, possessed by a sudden panic, a strange, unreasoning terror. I cannot bear the idea of your having anything to say to him a bushranger a complete vagrant. I do not want you even to meet. He is sure to have a revolver or some of those horrid explosive machines about him. Promise me that you will not go near the Burnt Mill.

I am not going there tranquillize yourself, said the Colonel, inwardly flattered by his cold–mannered wife's unusual demonstration of anxiety. It is a simple question between me and Stella's tenantry. I wish it to be settled justly for all parties, but I am not going to yield to angry violence. Still, I confess I should be glad to draw back quietly. In spite of Molineux's arguments, I think the men have the best of it, and I am no tyrant no tragic oppressor, there is nothing melodramatic about me. I want nothing but justice.

Mrs. Derinzy still looked unsatisfied. She was deadly pale, and trembled from head to foot.

## Carding–Mill Valley

*You cannot be blamed*, she said thoughtfully; Hugh Derinzy suffered from no fault of yours, and you have never doubted that he met his fate years ago.

Have *you* ever doubted it? said her husband, a bright yet dark glance suddenly flashing from beneath his straight eyebrows. Ursula, I do not quite understand your meaning.

Oh, I had none nothing particular; of course Hugh died soon after we lost sight of him. Where could he have been all this time?

There is no more doubt that he is dead than that we are living, said her husband; his momentary impulse of jealousy towards the man whom he had once suspected of being a favoured rival subsiding. But, none the less, this vague rumour is very annoying. Strange to say, I heard of it in London, when I wanted to institute proceedings against Vansittart's tenant for trespassing on our rights by carrying his new road across Stella's land. I desisted, as you know, at her request; but I now remember that Mr. Vansittart, who knows all the ins and outs of her affairs, warned me in somewhat ominous language that I had better not put myself forward. There were, he said, always difficulties in such questions where death had not been clearly proved.

I dare say he meant nothing, said Ursula, who had now in some measure recovered her composure. Lawyers are always alarmists. I shall never forget how terrified I was when that very man came to talk about our settlements; you are quite right about making friends, or, at least, not to exasperate these rough hill–farmers. They always frightened me when I rode about with Stella, and she paused I have never cared to go up among the mountains since.

Well, well, think no more about it I will not expose myself to revolvers and blunderbusses, said Colonel Derinzy, smiling gravely. We shall settle this business quietly enough, after all, I dare say. By–the–bye, I wished to tell you that Hugo, our eldest born, is a monstrously fine fellow. He took my part through thick and thin; whilst, at the same time, there was so much good sense in his remarks, and such good feeling, too, that the roughest of that rather unruly assemblage at the Farmer's Inn listened to him respectfully. I shall consult him, and I doubt not all will go well. We may, I think, congratulate ourselves on having him for our heir and representative.

Colonel Derinzy kissed his pale wife's forehead; and, with a brow much lighter, relieved by the confidence he had reposed in her, though unenlightened by any suggestions as to his future conduct, left the house.

## Chapter 21.

Good–bye: it has a heavenly sound  
When spoken from the heart;  
A fervent prayer for blessings on  
The friends from whom we part.  
We wish them well, where'er they dwell,  
Or be it far or nigh;  
For God be with you is the thought  
Of every true good–bye.

Unconscious of the deep causes for anxiety which weighed on the spirits of her host and hostess, May Balfour's last evening at Hagleth Hall passed pleasantly. The younger members of the family greatly enjoyed her society and that of her brothers, who came over to dine and sleep by invitation, and were to take their sister back early on the morrow. Lady Balfour had refused to grant the extension of leave which had been earnestly sued for, but she had not opposed the wishes of her sons. The boys, she said, were well able to take care of themselves, but she was

## Carding–Mill Valley

never happy when her Peri was out of her sight. May was their one precious girl–blossom, and, as fragile, as she was, to her parents, priceless.

There was even some unusual semblance of gaiety, for Hagleth was not an hospitable house. Two of Hugo's brother officers, on their way to the Moors, were spending the day and night under his father's roof. They had asked young Derinzy to accompany them and take a share in their anticipated sport, but he had declined. He did not wish to leave his father alone to face what he feared were impending troubles.

Hugo had said nothing on this subject even to Leo and his sisters. They were quite unconscious of any source of peculiar anxiety, and too much accustomed to their mother's dejection and their father's gravity to take much thought of either. They were glad, too, their eldest brother was not going to leave the Hall as he had intended; and quite believed that he preferred partridge–shooting in September to the glorious northern Moors, towards which however he scarcely liked to glance. It had been a sacrifice, but he was very unselfish and uttered no regret.

His friends were full of rapture at the prospect before them, and teased him about his laziness. How could he compare walking up and down the turnip ridges, or even sporting in the covers, to the freedom of the wide moors? Hugo said very little, but firmly withstood the temptation. He saw that his family, even his undemonstrative parents, were pleased, and he kept firm to his resolution.

Laura, who liked society in general and was glad of the visit of the two strangers, exerted herself to make the rather dull house agreeable. Her sisters and May seconded her exertions. Leo, who saw no sin in cheerfulness, when he found that his elder brother was graver than usual, came forward more than he was wont to do.

Colonel and Mrs. Derinzy took little part in the lively conversation at the dinner–table, but their silence was covered by the mirth of the younger people present.

Hugo is not himself to–day, said one of his brother officers, Captain Maynard, addressing Laura, whom he greatly admired, in the course of the evening; is he in love? I have been looking at him and your pretty friend, Miss Balfour, but if I am not greatly mistaken she does not care for military honours. Your clerical brother has a better chance of winning her favour.

Oh, there is nothing serious in either quarter, said Laura gaily; I do not think we are a marrying family, or in the least given to falling in love. There are too many of us at home, and we are always busy we never feel dull, and I think dulness and indolence make people rush into folly. We should all laugh at each other, and ridicule is fatal to sentiment.

Your time is not come yet. Wait till the grouse–shooting is over, at all events, said her admirer, joining in her laugh. Hugo and your father have kindly asked Marjoribanks and me to stop here on our way back from the Moors to test the comparative pleasure of a week of tamer sport, and the wilder and wider range of the Highland Hills. It is a great pity Hugo will not accompany us, but it is some compensation for luckless waifs like ourselves to drift again into such pleasant quarters as your beautiful home. I scarcely wonder at your not being in a hurry to leave it; and your own large family circle affords delightful society which we thoroughly appreciate.

Laura, who was very truthful, looked up in his face doubtfully. Hagleth is not always as lively as it looks to–night. We scarcely see any company usually. My mother's health is very delicate, and neither she nor my father cares for society. They never accept invitations, and, unless my brothers are at home and willing to chaperone us, we go nowhere. This is by no means a gay neighbourhood at least, she added, colouring, we do not find it so.

It must indeed be a dull one if you are neglected, said the young officer hastily; then, seeing that Laura's colour rose higher, he said confusedly, at least, I mean, not of course neglected, but if the few neighbours you have do

## Carding–Mill Valley

not find some way of drawing you and your sisters from your retreat. But I suspect it is your own fault.

No, said Laura firmly. We should like to go out more, but you will scarcely believe me when I say that Althea and I have never been to a ball, scarcely even to a dance, in our lives; except in London, and when we were in the Riviera, last winter, on account of my mother's health. Whilst we were children neither of our parents cared to go into society, and I suppose their friends learnt to do without them. It is very difficult to alter the habits of a life–time, so I dare say we shall never make this house what I believe it used to be, but that was long before I was born, the gayest and most hospitable in this part of the county.

She turned away as she spoke, feeling that she had been more candid than was necessary or perhaps wise with one nearly a stranger; but there was deep sympathy in Sidney Maynard's eyes as they followed her retreating figure.

Mrs. Derinzy retired early, and the Colonel soon followed her example, but the young people sat up late, some of them playing at a round game, the others clustered near the pianoforte. May had a sweet voice, and the young Derinzys were all musical, and sang glees and catches in perfect harmony. Sidney Maynard, too, had some knowledge of music and a very expressive way of singing old English ballads. Altogether the hours passed pleasantly away, and Althea started when the deep–toned clock in the hall struck twelve.

She then gave the signal for separation, but the girls sat up long afterwards in May Balfour's room, pretending to assist her in finishing her packing, as she had sent her maid to bed, and regretting that her pleasant visit had come to an end. May was much graver than she had been during her stay, for however true and sincere was the wish expressed soon to see her there again, and however heartfelt her own desire to occupy once more her pretty room, with its projecting gables and dressing–closet in the turret, she doubted whether she would ever be permitted to revisit Hagleth Hall for longer than a fleeting hour, and in the company of her mother.

The sportsmen were far away on their road to the Moors before the usual breakfast time, Hugo having driven his friends to meet an early train at a distant station. He was not expected back till the evening, as the horses would require rest before starting on the return journey. Leo did the honours, neither Colonel nor Mrs. Derinzy being present.

May expressed a wish to see the Chapel again, and to show the finished decorations to her brothers, who had assisted in the earlier part of their arrangement. They all walked down the ravine together. Fred and Alan Balfour, who were mere youths, keeping with Estelle and Ursula, Leo and Laura following more sedately with Miss Balfour. The moss, ferns, and evergreens, and many of the garlands, having been liberally sprinkled with water, retained their first freshness, and had even expanded; but the large white flowers in the vases on the altar had faded.

Laura looked on them regretfully, and began rearranging her nosegays, whilst May and Leo, after completing their circuit of the Chapel, waited outside till she was ready to join them. The decorations will be much more beautiful on All Saints' Day, Leo said. You must come over and spend that season with my sisters, and give us your help again.

May looked down the glen sorrowfully. If I am permitted, she said. My father and mother do not like parting with me even for a day. But I am quite sure being with your sisters has done me good.

They will have to accustom themselves to that trial, said Leo. I can quite understand that it will be a severe one. But you will not always be allowed to remain under the ash trees. A will as imperative as your parents' must one day win you away from them.

May did not reply immediately, or to the point. She looked up the stream in the direction of Millburn. I think Miss Forester had been watering the flowers and leaves, she said, rather coldly. The ivy sparkled as if with

## Carding–Mill Valley

dew, or 'the pride of the morning,' as the people of the hills call those misty showers which often fall at daybreak.

Leo's glance did not follow hers. It rested on her fair and graceful bending figure as she stooped to gather a flower. A more steady allegiance was growing upon him than the passing interest and admiration he had felt for the modest Violet in the sheltering wood walks.

What is your token–flower? he said. Every one has a favourite; mine, I think, is the drooping lily of the vale.

Mamma calls me her periwinkle, said May, laughing. it is, I believe, because a careless grasp tears the life out of their frail stems; but she and my father take such care of me that they hope to keep me with them a long time, if they preserve me in a tall old China vase with plenty of water, shaded from sunshine or foul weather.

But the periwinkle is a free growing plant, and likes to throw its clasping tendrils over stone and stem. It flourishes in the cool spring time, and braves many a shower and blast. If your parents shut it up in a glass case it will never flourish. Tell Lady Balfour I say so, and that I recommend her not to put trammels on a loving, obedient nature. You look twice as well since you have been at Hagleth, and have quite a colour.

May blushed excessively. I am afraid I dare not deliver that message, but indeed I think you are right, and I should like to come again and to attend the service here on All Saints' Day. We have none at our old–fashioned Parish Church, and no flowers even at Easter; only a few sprigs of holly, which the clerk sets up in the corners of the high pews at Christmas.

Laura had finished her task, and now came out to join them. On their way home they met the boys and girls laden with wild–flowers and ferns. Sir Henry's carriage was at the door when they all got back, after many pleasant loiterings, to Hagleth. May had very little time for saying her adieus, as the coachman brought a note from her mother desiring her to make no unnecessary delay.

Mrs. Derinzy came down only just in time to bid her young guest farewell. She had not made as favourable an impression on May as she had done on Viola during her clandestine visit at Millburn. Whatever pleasure Miss Balfour had found in her stay at Hagleth was not owing to its cold, timid mistress. Nor did she press her to return when her children eagerly solicited another visit.

She shrank back within the portal, as if, instead of the soft balmy breath of August, a chill north–easterly wind had met her, and put out her little hand in her usually uncomfortable manner, leaving the girl to do with the nerveless fingers as she liked best. May dropped them hastily, after an attempt at pressure, which met with no response. It was very different to the warm parting embrace of her friend Laura, and the kind clasp of Leo's hand, firm and close, as he put her into the carriage with her brothers. He was the last of the group at the door of the old Hall to bid May Balfour farewell and to whisper *Au revoir*.

## Chapter 22.

In the silence of the wilderness  
Awhile I dwelt alone;  
For weeks and months on my dulled ear  
Fell no peculiar tone.  
I had not prized God's gift until,  
The precious blessing gone,  
Stricken and sad I seemed to stand

A statue turned to stone.

R.M.K.

Since the time when Stella Derinzy, in the very prime of her blooming beautiful youth, had been stricken down by one of those sad mysterious maladies, which stay the bounding step and sap the vital powers, without giving the physician outward signs to guide his healing power, there had been many variations in her state of health, but she had never ceased to be an invalid. Of late she had been suffering more than usual, and, entirely secluded in her darkened chamber, her head throbbing, and all her pulses vibrating, she had heard nothing of the change with which the people of the hills were threatened in her name.

The first day that she was well enough to attempt to traverse even the short distance which limited her accustomed walks, she managed to reach her favourite seat looking towards the mountains. Dismissing the servant, on whose arm she had leaned, with injunctions to come and fetch her in an hour's time, at the corner where the path turned off from the public road, she went slowly and alone, enjoying the glorious prospect, leaning on her lost brother's alpenstock, towards her usual resting–place.

Although Stella had not reached her favourite spot for weeks, and could scarcely have been expected to come so far on this particular morning, she saw that some offering had been laid ready on the stone ledge. She was too much fatigued at first to examine it, but after a few moments spent in thankfulness for being again permitted to inhale the mountain breezes, Stella lifted her weary eyelids and took up the bunch of flowers, carelessly and roughly knotted together with reeds, and somewhat faded, as if it might have lain there some days waiting for her tardy arrival.

What was there in the rather dull dead white and bluish green of leaves and flowers, which seemed as if frost had fallen on them in the coarse weeds which wrapped them round, which made Stella start and tremble? It was probably from some nervous access of pain, for she put her hand to her forehead with a look of bewilderment, while memory, sharp and quick, darted back with a pang of mental as well as physical agony to the very first return home of the young brother, for whom she had wept so much, from foreign travel; when he had brought her, together with the alpenstock she always carried, a sprig of the chamois–hunter's flower, which grows on Alpine heights the Edelweiss.

Stella remembered that, in one of their longest rambles on their own hills, Hugh had discovered a sort of cottony plant, with a flower which reminded him of the hero's token of successful mountaineering; and had brought it to her triumphantly. The flexible stems had been wound round then, in just the same careless manner as now, with a kind of reed, which grew like the cotton–plant, in marshy ground beneath the mountains.

Tears filled her eyes at the thought that perhaps one of her brother's companions or followers, the peasants or farmer's sons from the upland country, might have brought her this token of remembrance. As she gathered together and fastened more firmly the bending stalks, something, she knew not what, seemed to pass by it might have been the shadow of a cloud or a bird when she looked round nothing was visible above or around her the path was empty, but just opposite, by the ledge called the Knight's Table, gone before she could plainly distinguish it, she thought she saw the figure of a tall man, roughly dressed, stand for an instant and then pass away.

She almost regretted that she had dismissed her attendant, feeling too ill and nervous for perfect solitude to be agreeable, and unable to retrace her steps alone. Stella, though physically weak, was no coward, and she had never been superstitious; but there was something in the sight and touch of that white funereal–looking flower, and in the cold blast and ominous shadow which had passed over her, that chilled her to the heart.



## Carding–Mill Valley

Whilst she was striving to tranquillize her throbbing nerves, a firm step came round the angle of the rocks, and a man in rough country garb accosted her respectfully. Stella's senses cleared. She knew both voice and footfall, and greeted the intruder upon her solitude courteously. Generally the country people, when they saw her sitting in the Lady's Chair, took a path lower down in the valley, not to disturb her, but she was glad that on this occasion less consideration for her supposed love of retirement was shown. Her own thoughts were well nigh insupportable, and she meant to ask for the support of this strong man's arm back to her own home.

Did you find these flowers for me, Langden? Miss Derinzy said, touching the blossoms tenderly I know that they grow not far from your farm, only in one place, under the Crest, and are not easy to get at across the bog. I have not seen them for years.

No, Madam, said her tenant from the hills; I take no great heed of flowers or weeds, for such they look like, except to wish we had fewer of them on our land. It was a chance visitor I had the other day that picked them, but I *did* mind your liking them when Master Hugh scrambled across the bog to get them for you years ago. He told me a story of some like these grey flowers that grow on the high Alps, which the goat–hunters sometimes risked life and limb to gather, and I don't forget stories *he* told me. They make more mark than book–learning. I'm glad to see ye back at the old place. You'll have had a bad bout last week. You do look terrible poorly.

He gazed compassionately at Stella as he spoke.

Yes, I have been ill worse than usual lately, said Miss Derinzy quietly. I do not think even the mountain air will set me up to–day, and I am going to ask you to give me your arm back to my own door.

To be sure it would not be the first time I've carried you about, if it came to that but I hope you can walk that bit of road presently; I mind when you were a little lass, and tired like, lifting you up and carrying you home, with the good old Squire and Master Hugh walking in front of us; and you don't look much heavier, though you are a sight taller. Ah, those were good times for us up among the hills. The man placed himself firmly with his back against the rock and waited. He was evidently in the vein for a little conversation, and Stella humoured him.

You do not look quite well yourself, Langden, she said kindly, as the farmer stood looking away up among the hills where his home lay, and sighed heavily. I hope nothing is the matter?

There's a deal that might be better if we had the old Squire back again or Master Hugh or if you, Madam, took more heed to what's going forward. But there, I did not mean to trouble you when you look so white, though I did come down hoping to get speech of you. But it must wait till you are better able to listen.

I am always able to hear the troubles of old friends like yourself, said Stella, rousing herself. I quite well remember your carrying me home after we had been over to see what a pretty place you had made of your hill farm. My father said it did you great credit.

Did he? Heaven bless his Honour and you too, Madam, and all that's left of the old stock. Yes, the Squire did us justice, and gave us encouragement to put our hearts as well as our hands to anything we had to do for him. He did not grudge a man his reward, when age was coming upon him after a long life's honest work. He let us sit easy, so to speak and rest after our labour. It's differently ordered now in the old country, and I suppose I'm past my work. It's time I made a flitting. Some folks say a man like me, with all the years I carry, could yet manage to make a living on the other side of the Atlantic.

Are you thinking of emigrating? It seems a pity when you have made your home so comfortable; and I think you hold it at an easy rental on account of having been a good tenant and made many improvements.

## Carding–Mill Valley

Yes, Madam, that's just it *you think so*, but you don't know it nor half that goes on that's what we feel. If the Squire, or Master Hugh, or yourself were to come to us and say the land was too low rented, and fairly put it to us whether we could not afford to pay more, it would be a different thing altogether. We know we should have justice. But when a stranger like this new bailiff comes, and just looks right and left, and pulls a bit of a note–book out of his pocket, and, without regard to bygones, puts me down at double the rental I have paid for the last two–and–thirty years, and my neighbours perhaps at treble, without looking to what's gone before or what's coming upon us, or listening to a word we have to say, it's hard to bear; and me and others would rather go, though we love the land we've reclaimed, mostly from bog and mountain, than be treated like a herd of paupers.

This shall be looked to, said Miss Derinzy gravely; I will speak to Colonel Derinzy. There must be some mistake. He never acts in important matters without consulting me.

Langden's brow cleared. That's it, Madam. If you take the trouble to inquire you'll find it's about as I have told ye. I've been a good deal out of favour with the Colonel since I lent my waggons to the gentleman at Millburn, who was making the new road, which is a blessing to us and the poor horses; he told the men when they were at work that we should all suffer for it, and Colonel Derinzy is a gentleman who keeps his word, be it for good or evil. It's a pity you let the reins fall into his hands.

Perhaps you are right, said Stella, but it is too late to take them back into my own, and probably ere long he will have the right to manage everything. But at present I am and will be mistress when I choose to exert my authority. Now I am too tired to talk more. Let me have your arm back to the village; and leaning on her faithful though unceremonious friend, Miss Derinzy walked slowly back towards her house, along the path which entered the straggling street not far from her own door.

Langden drew back respectfully when they reached the jutting rock which shut out the view and hid the stone seat from the windows of the house.

You'll be all right now, Madam, and maybe you'd as lieve go on alone. But you'll not forget us hill folk in the matter of the leases. We should all be satisfied with Forester's arbitration. That's the gentleman at Millburn. Him as turned and levelled the road. Master Hugo the Captain, I mean, God bless him! let drop a hint that he might be consulted; and he knows what's right between man and man, but I'm afraid that the Colonel is dead against him.

I shall not forget, said Stella gravely, but you had better come on to my house and take some refreshment. Have no fear, Langden none of my father's arrangements about your leases shall be altered. You shall not have cause to wish for the old days back again on that account whilst I am able to keep something like the old rule. I have been too supine, but it is perhaps not too late to mend. I am glad the Captain said a good word in your favour.

Aye, aye, he's a chip of the old block, said Langden heartily. If so be as you and Mr. Forester and he agree that the land doesn't fetch its value, none of us are minded to stand out against its being a bit higher rented. But seasons have been bad, and labour is costlier, since so many fine young chaps have emigrated and 'listed or gone to sea. I won't say the Colonel is an unjust steward, but he's a hard man hard as nails and he never overlooks even a slight offence. There's many a one who might turn over a fresh leaf if the master spoke to him, or gave some encouragement for a fresh start; but it's the house of correction, or may be hard labour, or prison fare for all offenders if *he* sits on the bench. Why the old Squire, or Master Hugh, would have given a fellow a chance of mending. I know that well, for I've been a bit of a poacher in my day, but they made me see 'twasn't right, and put me on a better track. Now there's no turning back, and after a man's been in prison, he's never the same. 'Taint likely when he's marked for a jail–bird 'tis like one of these burrs that will stick.

The man, with a gentleness that seemed inconsistent with his rough dress and manner, and a smile which broke over his face like sunshine among the rude hills where he lived, lifted the hem of Miss Derinzy's dress, and

## Carding–Mill Valley

disengaged from it some of the prickly burrs which had caught the soft material. Stella thanked him with a smile as cordial as his own.

No, we want no arbiter between us, Langden; and, as you say, Colonel Derinzy might not like references to be made to the new comer at Millburn with whom he has had already some dispute about the right of making the road. Leave it to me. I will speak to Captain Derinzy. I am the Lady of the Manor, and when I choose to assert my right, Colonel Derinzy never makes any opposition.

Stella bade her companion adieu at the gate of her own flower–garden, which she passed through slowly, alone, and looking neither to the right nor to the left, though it was in all the bright warm glow of August beauty. She knew that the duties of hospitality would be performed by her servants, who belonged to the old *régime*, and were old friends of Langden. He was sure to be well received by the housekeeper and her spouse, the gardener.

The mistress of the Cottage entered the pretty cool shadowy parlour, after hanging up her hat and bournouse in the alcove which formed porch and front entrance to her dwelling. Utterly wearied, she lay down upon a sofa at the farther end of the room, close to a table on which books and writing materials were conveniently arranged, but she felt too much exhausted for any employment. As her glance wandered round the low–ceilinged picturesque room, simply furnished, but replete with comforts, it seemed for the first time to strike her that its bounds were too narrow. Stella felt as if the trellise–papered walls were closing in prison–like upon her. Through the open casement windows the scent of the heliotrope, jessamine and honeysuckle, outside, came upon her overpoweringly. The noises from the village street, where children were passing on their way home from school, seemed to increase in volume till they bewildered her faculties. She felt too tired even to put out her hand to ring the bell, or to raise her voice, which would, as no great distance intervened, have speedily brought her attendant.

A murmur rose up from the depth of her heart against herself and her self–chosen life. Why had she given up the cool chambers, the spacious halls of her ancestors, the unbounded freedom of the hills and groves of Hagleth, to be cabined in these miserable walls, caged among these tiny borders and narrow grass plots; above all, why had she surrendered duties and obligations, which she was bound to fulfil herself, into unworthy hands?

A thousand thoughts rushed over Stella as she lay faint and motionless in that low, sweetly scented room. Thoughts which had either been put away forcibly, or had never visited her solitude before. Her memory went back to the days when she and her idolized brother had laid plans for the future prosperity of their tenantry for rewarding the meritorious old age of some, and leading others to yet higher aims, and more enlightened courses of industry. Why had she not carried out these purposes? Might not her life have been worthier and happier, if, instead of yielding to the weakness brought upon her by sorrow and ill health, she had struggled against both; and laboured alone, since Providence had taken away her mainstay and coadjutor, to carry on the schemes which Hugh Derinzy had originated, and which they had even as children played over, and in early youth more seriously proposed to execute?

Stella Derinzy had not intended to give up the management of the Hagleth estate; but she felt now that it had been gradually stolen from her. Only, at intervals, perhaps somewhat capriciously and fancifully, had she taken the trouble to interfere. Satisfied that the condition of the estate was prosperous, and the tenantry apparently contented, she had let things go on, reserving for herself the part of Lady Bountiful, which Ursula did not attempt to take from her. The young people were all she could desire, and they had constantly referred to her for advice and directions in their various charities and good deeds. Leo had always treated her with deep respect; all of them with the sincerest affection. She had nothing to complain of or to desire altered in them. But the Colonel, with his masterful ways, had sorely encroached upon her prerogative; and, though she was formally consulted in matters of business, Stella felt that the reins of power were in other hands.

Was it too late to alter now? How her brain throbbed and her pulses beat as the feeble heart–stricken woman thought over the consequences which would follow any steps she might take to regain her proper position, and

resume the sway she had resigned. After all, was it worth while? What was her fragile hold of life a life that seemed slipping from her worth in comparison with the abounding health and strength of the young occupants of Hagleth Hall? A few years and in that weary hour she longed for a speedy end of her painful existence and she would rest beside her parents in the Churchyard, whilst he, the wandering son and heedless cause of so much suffering, rested in some far–away unknown burying–ground. How could she, alone, unaided, carry out difficult projects and incur serious responsibilities? No the time was past better to let all rest, excepting the remedying of wrongs which, as now, came tangibly within her power to grasp and rectify.

Having come to this conclusion, and somewhat recovered from her faintness, Stella drew her writing materials nearer to her couch, and wrote a brief letter to Captain Derinzy, which she desired might be submitted to his father. She began with saying that, although sincerely obliged to Colonel Derinzy for his wish to make the most of her property, it was not consistent with other motives of action that the tenantry should, in times like the present, have any additional burden laid upon them. Circumstances, with which he might possibly be unacquainted, had regulated the terms on which the upland farms were leased out to men who, besides being valued dependents nay, almost friends of her own and her loved brother's childhood had for some years had trying times, and had spent health and strength in the cultivation of what were at first barren lots. If, now, they were smiling pastures, it was but fair that those who sowed full crops should reap good harvests.

From all she could learn, Stella added, the new bailiff's measures did not meet with her approbation. It would be better to appoint to the office, which should be quite subordinate, a person better acquainted with the habits and customs, wants and ways, of her people; but she trusted herself soon to be feeling stronger and better, and to be able to take a more active part than illness had lately permitted in the management of the estate. Meanwhile, she trusted that Hugo, whose kind feeling and excellent judgment, she understood, had been singularly manifested in the late difficulties; which, on account of her indisposition, had only just reached her knowledge would exercise his discretion in settling the affair quietly.

It was by no means her wish, Miss Derinzy said, in conclusion, that Colonel Derinzy should suffer any annoyance such as would ensue if a stranger were called into their counsels. No arbitrator could be needed between landlord and tenant, since whatever might be her rights or pecuniary interests it was not her wish to alter existing regulations. It would be time enough to do this when Colonel Derinzy was bona–fide Master; but she had sufficient faith in his character to hope that, even when that not probably distant period arrived, he would respect what he now knew to be her wishes; and what she knew had been the intentions of her father and brother; especially with regard to the hill farms held by old retainers, and in some instances trusted dependents, of the owners of the Hagleth estate.

Stella added yet a few more tenderly loving words to her young favourite and godson, explaining the circumstances to which she had alluded in the message to his father. Langden was particularly mentioned as having been an especial ally of her brother's. He had been (as well as his father and grandfather) born on the land, and intimately associated with the young heir. The sight of him that day had brought back to her mind numerous occasions, and acts of trustfulness, and kind fellowship, and she had given her word that he and his family should not be disturbed in the occupation of the home which he had made and fashioned, almost literally with his own hands, on the mountain–side.

## Chapter 23.

I may not mourn I cannot grieve  
O'er woes that all must share;  
Each wears a cross the best, I know,  
Our feeble strength can bear:  
But all rejoice in some good gifts,

In Earth made bright and fair;  
The music of kind words, brave looks  
God's mercies everywhere.

R.M.K.

May Balfour had returned home looking so much better for the slight change of air and scene, and fresher stimulants to exertion afforded by the companionship of active, healthy associates of the same or nearly similar age, that her father and brothers refused to attend to her mother's Cassandra–like warnings. It did not appear that she had over–exerted herself, or that she would find home dull on the contrary, she was decidedly stronger and in better spirits.

It is wonderful when young people feel a mutual inclination to meet how many occasions occur for bringing them together. In spite of Lady Balfour's objections to intimacy with the owners of Hagleth (which were partly shared by her husband, though time and man's more active occupations had deadened the force of early impressions, which on her part had grown into yet stronger prejudices), the young Balfours and Derinzys found, or made, opportunities for gliding from acquaintance into intimacy.

May was her brothers' darling, and as far as possible associated with them in all their home pastimes and pursuits. Indoors they read with their sister, or played at billiards, bagatelle, and other games. She was never too busy or too much interested in her favourite books to attend to their wish to have her with them, nor could they bear her to be absent when weather permitted her to share in, or, at least, act as umpire and spectator of, their more active amusements in the grounds.

The boys had with their own hands constructed a summer–house, where she could overlook and keep the score of their cricket matches, or witness their exploits in archery. Sometimes she shot with them, whilst they picked up her arrows and carried her folding–chair across the ground. Sir Henry was a great advocate for cricket, and the youth of the neighbourhood often met and played matches on the old bowling–green, under the great ash trees. In these conflicts Leo Derinzy, who was the best cricketer for miles round, often joined; and Laura came over with him occasionally, with one or other of the younger sisters.

Even a mother's anxious fears could not resist the frank and winning manners of the young Derinzys. Lady Balfour yielded to the spell whilst they were present, and strove in vain to steel her kind heart against it. But still, deep down in her heart lay the dislike she had always entertained towards Mrs. Derinzy, and the vague fear of some evil influence some boding shadow, projected by the crested hill overhanging the smiling Hagleth valley. On no account would she suffer May to repeat her pleasant visit, nor would she consent to invite Laura or her brothers to pay more than brief passing visits in return. Sir Henry's hospitable invitations were nipped in the bud; and May could not but feel that these her chosen friends were not received with the warm welcome in her own house which their reception of her had merited.

As usually happens in such cases, Lady Balfour's vigilance defeated its own aims. What might have been a mere girlish intimacy deepened on May's part into something warmer even than friendship. A sense of injustice, a feeling for the first time in her petted existence of restraint and oppression, gave a charm to each chance meeting with Leo Derinzy and his sisters, which closer communion and more open intercourse might have destroyed. Even with her mother keeping guard by her side in the latticed arbour overlooking the cricket–ground, the girl umpire, as she kept the score, felt her heart beat and her cheeks glow as she heard the rustic hurrahs when Leo Derinzy's graceful bowling or steadfast guard of his wicket excited applause, while she carefully and triumphantly recorded his success.

Nor was Lady Balfour unobservant of these danger signals. She began to be in utter despair, and when she found that Sir Henry had gone over to the side of her enemies, she felt inclined to surrender, and admit that the bright

## Carding–Mill Valley

truthful glances of Leo and his sisters certainly bore no resemblance to their mother's downcast looks; but early prejudices are almost unconquerable, and hers had been long brooded over. Before giving up her game she resolved, at all events, to play one final stroke, and, since caution was of no avail, to try perfect candour.

It was her motherly custom always to spend the last half–hour before retiring to rest with her daughter. Many were the little confidences which, at the witching time of midnight, for these long conversations often wiled away much more than the allotted period, had been exchanged between the still young mother and her daughter. Of late Lady Balfour had thought, with reluctance, that May was becoming more reserved, which was undoubtedly the case. A consciousness had arisen in her mind that the thoughts which occupied her most would not be agreeable to her hitherto indulgent sympathizing parent. A stranger might have taken the two fair women, with lightly flowing hair, sitting in May Balfour's pretty dressing–room, for sisters, on that warm September night. The moon at the full shone in at the open casement. The lights had been removed to the farther end of the chamber, that they might enjoy the radiance which fell through the shimmering leaves of the ash trees down upon the winding river. Sir Henry was absent from home, staying with a neighbouring proprietor; and her mother was entirely given up to thoughts of her young daughter; but May's thoughts were not so completely fixed on one object. She moved restlessly about the room, arranging the lamps and looking out of the window, whilst Lady Balfour sat by the just kindled fire, the first of the season. In that old house it was chilly after the sun's decline, and its rays left the valley early.

Come and sit by me, darling; I want to talk to you, said Lady Balfour, rousing herself from deep thought. It is a long time since we have had one of our old conversations. There is nothing like a wood fire for inspiring confidence. I want to tell you something that happened to me in my very early girlhood. May I have never told it before to any one. Nobody except your father knows what I am going to speak about. Do you not care to listen?

May came back obediently. But there was a silent fear at the girl's heart. She did not sit down.

Is it anything that will grieve you, mother dear? she said, bending down and kissing her forehead. You sometimes sleep so badly when my father is from home. Had you not better wait till the morning before you speak of what may agitate you? It is such a lovely calm September night. I was thinking it quite a pity that you had ordered a fire for me to–night.

Lady Balfour shivered. I feel it chilly. No, do not shut the casement. It is not that, though these September moonlight nights are not so warm as those of summer. Besides, I like to look at the logs and to hear them crackling. Come nearer to me, May, close; sit at my feet as you did when you were little. I want love, I want comfort. My child, do not keep me at a distance.

May's warm heart melted. She embraced her mother, and drawing her long hair like a veil round her, sat down in a little velvet chair close to her knee, on which she fondly laid her arm.

I was not so old as you are, May, when I became engaged to your father. I do not remember the time when I did not love him. We were brought up together as children, constantly associating with each other. We read the same books, played at the same games, thought the same thoughts. I was not delicate in health like you, but very strong and active I am afraid, something of a tomboy. But it did not matter. There was no one to interfere or criticise. Henry was an orphan, and his home was at my father's house. We were always destined for each other, and our fate and our inclinations, for once in a way, coincided.

May forgot all about herself, or her own troubles and anticipations, as she listened to her mother's words. She had always felt a great interest in the imperfectly–understood, sometimes slightly indicated, narrative of their youth and strong affection for each other, and longed to know more. This was not in the least what she had expected to hear.

## Carding–Mill Valley

All went merry as a marriage–bell as the birds building their nests in summer, continued Lady Balfour. Our nest among the ash trees was ready for us, and your father only waited for a step of promotion before urging that our marriage should take place; feeling that he could leave me behind more happily in the parent nest, when duty called him, if I were his wife. We little thought how many years would pass before those hopes were realized! Our engagement, long understood between us, was not known abroad. We were just like brother and sister. It was too sacred a thing for either of us to speak of it. Even Stella Derinzy, my most intimate friend, and her brother did not know of it. May, I was not at all like you in any respect, except that we have the same loving, constant natures. I was a gay madcap girl full of life and spirit. Perhaps the consciousness of my deep, deep love made my manner more free than is the case with most girls. I cannot tell. I meant no harm and suspected none. The world seemed brim–full of happiness, and everybody in it conspiring to make me the happiest of the happy.

It is during your father's absence with his regiment that I became very intimate with Stella Derinzy; and I often stayed at the Hall with her and her cousin now the mistress in that house, though it belongs to my early friend. I never liked Ursula, nor was she fond of me. Girls can scarcely disguise their natural propensities from each other; and I, being open as the day, except on one important point, soon perceived that she was not equally candid. Over Stella she possessed great influence, as she had done with her parents. Her home had been always at Hagleth, and many people expected that she would marry her cousin. I do not think that Hugh Derinzy ever cared for her. He had a great horror of craft of all kinds, especially of little unnecessary concealments, such as were constantly practised by Ursula; who would play us all tricks, sometimes cruel ones, and then never minded little subterfuges and evasions in bringing them to pass. She was clever, but frivolous and cowardly. Stella never saw through her artifices, but I think that Hugh did; and that if he ever cared for her which I doubt they had alienated him from her. He and my husband and Colonel Derinzy were in the same regiment. They all came back from abroad at the same time and joined the depôt at the County town.

Again a slight convulsive shudder ran through Lady Balfour's whole frame, and she paused for a moment. May, without further question rose and shut the window, lingering one moment to watch the moon silvering the hills. But her attention was riveted to her mother's earnest words, and she resumed, without speaking, her childlike attitude.

I spent a very pleasant time at Hagleth Hall after its young master's return, Lady Balfour continued. He paid me a good deal of attention; but not more than I considered to be my due as a young lady staying in his house. For my part I was true in word and thought to my, as yet undeclared, but surely affianced lover. We met frequently, as the presence of so many officers made the neighbourhood unusually gay. Stella and I, for I cannot undertake to give any account of Ursula, behaved much as other gay young girls, well brought up, are in the habit of doing. I am certain there was no evil in either of our hearts, though in mine no little folly, and we loved each other tenderly. At this time old Mr. Balfour was living, but he was in delicate health. My father had preceded him to the tomb, and I was his acknowledged heiress. Among other valuable articles which I did not covet, and which I thought ought to belong to his sister, who had offended him by an undesirable alliance with a foreigner, was an antique silver tea–service, which, with difficulty, I persuaded him to give her, as a token of reconciliation.

I was very much afraid of his changing his mind, and during my stay at Hagleth I had consulted Hugh Derinzy, who had lately visited the sea–port town in the Mediterranean where my aunt resided, and knew her husband, the Consul, slightly, as to the best means of transmitting this costly present. We had often spoken about it, and he fully understood and entered into my reason for considering the gift important, as well as my wish to confirm my uncle's amicable intentions. Having received my uncle's full consent, I wrote a brief note to Captain Derinzy, asking further information respecting the best way of sending this peace–offering; inquiring whether he, or any of his brother officers who might be disposed to trouble themselves so far, were likely to be going to Malta within a reasonable time. I did not wish to suffer too long a delay to intervene, as I feared the feeble flame of brotherly love which I had kindled might, if much space were allowed for reflecting, die away.

## Carding–Mill Valley

Judge of my intense amazement when I received, in answer to my matter–of–fact epistle, an impertinent, not to say insolent, reply. If I had offered myself instead of my uncle's silver tea–service as a 'compagnon de voyage' for any officer inclined to take me to Malta, the expressions would have better suited the occasion. It was not a love–letter, but rather a most ill–advised, jesting commentary on my perhaps imprudent communication. Yet I vainly ransacked my brain to find any excuse, in what I had written, for the levity of the retort.

In utter bewilderment I carried the letter to Mr. Balfour, who was much more angry than I had been. He seemed to read between the arrogant lines meanings unperceived by me; and declared that no gentleman ought to have taken such liberties, or would have written that letter. I sustained a very severe cross–examination as to my exact relations with Hugh Derinzy, and I was forbidden ever to speak to him again. Stella took her brother's part very warmly, but was quite unable to account for the language he had used. Ursula insinuated that I must have given some encouragement. I have never spoken to Stella Derinzy since that cruel morning. Ursula, whom I cared little for, apologized abjectly, and a hollow reconciliation was patched up; but in my heart of hearts I fear I have never quite forgiven her. But the worst, which was far worse than could have been anticipated, was yet to come. My affianced husband, your father, soon perceived that something weighed on my spirits; and having learnt from Mr. Balfour that I had received a letter which annoyed me from one of his brother officers, insisted on my showing it to him. Never shall I forget his rage and he, too, like Ursula Derinzy, though nothing could be more dissimilar than their natures, accused me in his bitter wrath of having encouraged Hugh Derinzy, or he never could no gentleman could have written such a letter! Unfortunately he had not seen my innocent epistle, and though I had commissioned Stella to procure it for me, it could not be found. I was very young and hasty, May, and I knew that I had never been untrue to my plighted word; but your father, quick–tempered also, as you know, would not hear what I had to say on my own behalf. We parted in anger, and for five long years he kept away. What I went through in that long separation no one can guess.

May tenderly soothed her mother, who wept at the recollection.

And Hugh Derinzy, how did he excuse himself? she said anxiously. Had this strange sad story any connection with his early death?

There have been times when I have felt myself to be his murderess, said Lady Balfour. When my husband himself put the question to him plainly, acting the part of my brother we were first cousins Hugh simply denied the fact, and said that he had not written to me. When the letter was produced, he scanned every line carefully, and again denied its authorship when asked if he knew of any person who could so adroitly have counterfeited his handwriting as to deceive his own sister, he refused to answer; except saying that he had not written the letter, and that if any of his friends believed him to be capable of inditing such a farrago of nonsense, they were welcome to hold the conviction.

My husband, greatly incensed, said that he did believe him to be the writer, and should do so until he produced the real culprit, who should receive the punishment he richly deserved. No farther explanation was vouchsafed; our engagement was cancelled, and Hugh was challenged, but refused to fight. He had no cause of anger, he said, against Captain Balfour, and would not raise his hand against him. In those days this was accounted disgraceful, and he was cut by his brother officers. He threw up his commission, and left England never to return. May, do you wonder that I cannot even now enter, or even think of, Hagleth Hall without a shudder?

Lady Balfour rose as she ceased speaking. She was wise in judging that any word she might utter would weaken rather than strengthen the strong impression her narrative had made on her young daughter.

She bade her good–night very tenderly, bidding May not to follow her. She should sleep better if left for a time alone. She was glad that she had unburdened her mind and met with sympathy. Nevertheless, May did follow, and listened anxiously at her door. She heard her mother's quick light tread going to and fro for a time, then all was still.



She did not enter, but crept back to her room, and knelt before the fading embers of the wood fire, feeling chilled, and penetrated with the impression that there was a bar between Hagleth and The Ashlets. However innocent the younger members of both houses might be, it was more than certain that the anger and ill–feeling of the parents would be visited upon the children. At present, certainly, it was but a hollow peace that existed between them.

## Chapter 24.

'Tell me have days, or months, or years gone by,  
Since we were hand in hand?  
My dream was clearer than reality  
There in a foreign land.

'Far clearer than those wide Australian plains  
And strange gigantic trees,  
Were visions of our hawthorn–scented lanes,  
And cowslip–sprinkled leas.'

*Exiled.*

The sequestered garden at Millburn had been Violet Forester's chief solace during her father's absence. She very seldom left its precincts. Even her visits to the neighbouring Chapel with her maidens were, though not less frequent, circumscribed. The instant the brief services ended she quitted the sacred building, without waiting to exchange even a few courteous words with the Derinzys. Not one of them received the least encouragement to join her; still less to accompany her to her lonely home.

The solitary girl could not help envying the young creatures who flocked after her along the wooded bank, when she heard them laughing and talking merrily together; or saw them stop beside the stream to bid good–even to parent, friend, or lover. No one ventured to detain her; though, as she swiftly passed the rustic groups, a kind word, sometimes a murmured blessing from those she had befriended in times of need, fell on her ear. But she had become more shy than was natural to her afraid, she scarcely knew of what, and hurried on her way.

Late and early she toiled among her flowers, wishing to keep the garden gay as in summer. She was sorry to see a few fading leaves among the foliage, to miss some of her sweetest favourites. They were succeeded by others more brilliant in colour; as yet there was little if any diminution of beauty in that wild garden by the water's side. Winter was still far off but autumn, its harbinger, was stealing away each day some fragrance from the dewy, grassy coverts.

Where the wild roses had twined smiling in the summer air, cold, hard glistening berries studded the briers where lilies of the valley had glimmered white, only the dark cool beds of leaves remained, and innumerable flowers were crushed and hidden by the wild growth of the fern and French willow–herb in moist shady recesses of the reedy banks. Among the ferns, though as yet untouched by frost, some of the tall fronds had been broken by the wind and had faded on their stalks; whilst others flashed like burnished gold, or were bronzed into a rich but more sombre autumnal tint as they bent over the stream, which ran with a fuller cadence down its deep channel through the rocky glen.

Although her father had never before thought it necessary to announce his intended return home, or shown any sense of the necessity for preparation on the part of his young housekeeper, it scarcely surprised Viola when she received a letter informing her when she might expect him back; combined with the still more unwonted intelligence that the master of the house was bringing a guest home with him. Some instinct in the girl's mind had warned her of coming changes. She felt sure that their quiet life was about to be in some strange manner broken in

upon and interrupted.

But the friend who accompanied Mr. Forester did not look in the least like a hero of romance. Viola could scarcely help smiling when she remembered the trouble she had taken to arrange flowers and give this stranger's room an inviting aspect; how she had directed that some of the pictures, including one of Stella Derinzy and her brother, should be moved from their usual places, and hung in this favoured guest's chamber and yet her girlish trepidation and anxiety to please were not thrown away. No one could have seen the glance full of storied memories cast round Hugh Derinzy's former room at the old house, which he had sometimes used as a shooting–lodge, and accused its present temporary occupant of indifference.

No! if he were not the rose, at least he had once lived near it. Mr. Vansittart was in fact the owner of Millburn; Forester, his tenant. In years gone by his father had been the trusted friend, agent, and family lawyer of the owners of Hagleth; and the old Squire, who was the most generous of mortals, after the Mill was burnt down, had made him a present of the lovely bit of property which he coveted, and had put the old house situated at the head of the glen into habitable condition.

The Squire and his trusted man of business were both gone to their long rest, full of years and honours gained in their several estates; but Mr. Vansittart had left a son who succeeded him in his profession, as he had done in his kind feelings and hereditary friendship. Hugh Derinzy and he had been allies at home and at college, and the happiest days of his youth had been spent by the prosperous but overworked lawyer at the little property which lay in the very heart of the Hagleth estates. Often and often had Colonel Derinzy murmured at the old Squire's madness in parting with Millburn; and he had been more than ever incensed when, on his return from abroad, he found the place occupied by one whom he regarded as a most objectionable tenant. The lawyer and his son, he said, were bad enough; but who could have supposed that they would let the place, without the slightest consideration for their neighbours, to this Chartist demagogue?

Mr. Vansittart had not despised Violet's choice of an autumn nosegay, for he came down with the gayest of its flowers in his buttonhole, and thanked her cordially for the tasteful arrangement of his apartment. No one but a lady, he said, with old–fashioned courtesy, could have made the place look so cheerful; and in his room all the ornaments he cared for most seemed gathered together. The *tout ensemble* was charming. How had she guessed his exact taste in every minute particular?

Violet smiled as she answered. She liked him much better because he was so fond of the old family of the friends of his youth who had, as he went on to explain to her, first made him acquainted with the wild beauties of the valley when he came on a visit to the Hall with his father; and ended with giving them that little gem of a property in perpetuity.

Your neighbour at the Hall will never forgive me for winning this prize; and really I do not much wonder at his grudging me the loveliest bit of the whole domain, he answered, as he gave Violet his arm to conduct her to the dining–room. When he called upon me in London to complain about the trespass which had been committed by my tenant's workpeople, I saw that the old offence still rankled. There was no remedy in law, and I advised him, as Miss Derinzy had already done, to keep quiet. By the way, has she bestirred herself yet to make your acquaintance?

No; she goes nowhere and I Violet hesitated. My father does not care for new acquaintances. Mrs. Derinzy and her daughters have called; but he does not wish me to go to the Hall.

Well, well, not just at present. We bide our time shall that be our motto, Forester? Mr. Vansittart said, as he took his place at table. But Miss Derinzy should have called it is no distance. Ah, she has let that fatal hypochondria, that mental lethargy, grow upon her, and neglected all her duties.

## Carding–Mill Valley

No, indeed, said Violet warmly. Miss Derinzy is ardently loved. The people go to her in all their difficulties. My little handmaiden, Lucy Langden, has just been telling me, with tears, how good she has been, and that the rents of the hill farms are not to be raised. This is her doing.

I am glad to hear it, said her father. When I saw Langden's farm, and heard his story of all he and his neighbours had done to improve the land, I pitied him sincerely. No doubt you recollect the place in its former condition. We will go up the marsh and under the Crest to–morrow, and see what it looks like now. Violet, you shall take little Lucy with you, and come at least part of the way with us.

I cannot quite forgive Miss Derinzy for not calling upon my fair tenant,' said the lawyer, turning from Violet, who gladly acquiesced in her father's proposal. I made the request, though we have never been so cordial of late years as I was in days gone by with my friends at the Hall. Say what she likes and Miss Forester says it very prettily about Miss Derinzy's fine feelings, I would rather see proofs of active womanly kindness. So the lady at the Hall has been more attentive. I must own I thought she showed the most feeling of the two when the news of my old college–friend's misfortune reached the Hall. I shall not easily forget her wild distress, though she was not his sister 'only a cousin,' as people say. Perhaps that may account for the difference.

His host manifested some impatience.

Stella Derinzy is a woman worth a hundred of her foolish little cousin nay, one in a thousand. How can we judge her? Perhaps she thought him unworthy; perhaps but what use is it to talk of people's hidden motives? Some day all will come to light, and we shall know our real friends and foes. For my part, I should prefer counting the fair, false lady at the Hall among my enemies.

You are and always were prejudiced against Mrs. Derinzy. For my part, I rather liked her, said Mr. Vansittart. She showed much feeling when I privately cross–examined her put a few leading questions to her about that most unfortunate letter to Miss Balfour, which caused such misery to both families. I shall not easily forget her agitation. It was easy to see that the Captain, not the Colonel (for whom afterwards I had the honour to draw her marriage settlements), was the chief favourite. Ah, she was wonderfully pretty then, and very fascinating. Has she preserved her beauty? he added, again addressing Viola, as his host remained persistently silent. I always wondered at her marrying that stiff martinet, who looked as if he would rule her with a rod of iron.

Mrs. Derinzy looks profoundly unhappy, answered Viola. She has some traces of beauty left; her features are refined and delicately outlined, but her face is seamed with anxious lines, and deadly pale. Her manner to me was very kind, and she seemed to feel revisiting this place, which must be full of painful associations. I am sure it cost her a great effort.

I wonder she had the audacity to cross the threshold, said Forester hastily: then, recollecting himself, and perhaps ashamed of having shown want of charity towards a woman, and one who had wished to be kind to his daughter, he added, You are right, Vansittart I am prejudiced against Mrs. Derinzy unreasonably, it may be. I cannot affirm what I say, but from circumstances known only to Hugh Derinzy and myself, I do not believe that she acted fairly or truthfully in the matter to which you have alluded. She certainly had a share in casting a cloud over the present Lady Balfour's early life. Depend on it, she knows more than she would confess about the writer of the letter which purported to come from Hugh Derinzy.

No; you are quite wrong. She said to me most positively that she knew nothing about it; nor did she seem half as well convinced that the writing was really her cousin's as Miss Derinzy had been. She hesitated and wept poor thing! how she cried and trembled, and grew red and white by turns, looking prettier than most women in tribulation, and said it was like his hand, but did I think the Is and the Bs were quite the same. Then, with a blush, she pulled out of her work–box, or her bosom, I forget which, a little note, which I am sure had been treasured, and gave it to me that I might compare the handwriting. I declare the girl was more quick–sighted than I had been.

There *was* a slight difference in some of the letters, but not more than a change in the pen, paper, or mood of the writer might occasion. When that failed her she said, 'After all it was only a jest. There was no harm in the letter. She supposed there had been some joke about the old service of plate.'

Yes, she always stuck to her colours, said his host grimly. Ursula Derinzy was the one person who insinuated that that abominable letter was the product of circumstances, and warranted by some light behaviour on the part of Miss Balfour. *That* caused the greatest mischief.

Well, I do not know what she thought or surmised about Miss Balfour, but I am quite sure she wished to get Hugh out of the scrape, said the lawyer. Of course, she was frightened, not being very strong–minded, when she felt that, though privately, I was cross–examining her closely. I dare say she preferred making out that another pretty woman, whom she perhaps believed to be her rival, ought to suffer, rather than one whom, I will swear, she loved better than her present lord and master. Stratagems are allowable in love or war. If she is unhappy, as is most likely, for her husband is a cross–grained fellow, I am sorry for her.

Forester did not pursue the subject farther, at least, not in his daughter's presence. Whether it was renewed when he and Mr. Vansittart were sitting up together in his library need not be told. The long lines of light from those wide windows shone down into the water till far into the night, but their consultation, now entirely unreserved, was strictly private.

## Chapter 25.

Man worked to tend those borders fair,  
And woman's gentler hand  
Upreared each timid flowret there,  
Sheltering that glorious band.  
From insect swarms and fowl decay,  
Those happy bowers rest free;  
While through the leaves soft breezes play,  
Like voices from the sea.

R.M.K. *The Two Gardens*

Though they had sat up till morning, Mr. Forester and his landlord were awake and abroad early. Violet found her father at work busily in the garden, and the Londoner trying, in a rather unskilful way, to render assistance. Both were enjoying themselves extremely. The wild nature of the ground, and its secluded situation, gave the place a peculiar charm to the man whose life was usually spent in a crowded city; and it also possessed for him associations of youth and old friendship which no other spot on earth could boast.

He remembered well the love his father had felt and expressed for the site of the burnt Mill, when he had visited it from the Hall, immediately after the calamity which stayed the busy work carried on there; and the ardent gratitude with which Mr. Derinzy's offer of the few acres he admired had been accepted. From time to time the father and son had visited the place together; but this was the first occasion on which, since his parent's death, Mr. Vansittart had been able to make up his mind to come without him to Millburn. He had said more than once that he could not bear ever to go there alone. It was most probably during one of these desponding moods that the lawyer had agreed to allow Mr. Forester to rent the property during Colonel Derinzy's absence with his family on the Continent. He had not thought it necessary to make any formal communication of the event to him; but, as a matter of courtesy, he had written on the subject to Miss Derinzy, and suggested that she should pay some neighbourly attention to the young girl, who was likely often to be alone.

## Carding–Mill Valley

Stella had struggled in vain with her reluctance to visit a spot intimately connected with her brother's memory, and the scene of many pleasant episodes in her youthful home life. Like many unfulfilled intentions, this one lay heavy on her conscience; and always meaning some day to perform this duty, she yet put it off indefinitely.

Violet's work in the garden during her father's absence was not thrown away. He noticed kindly many little improvements, and commended her industry. They had a pleasant excursion to Langden's farm among the hills, where all was happy tranquillity. Stella had formally made known her intentions respecting maintaining the present tenure in the leases about to be granted, and the upland farmers were all ready to do their very utmost to show that they were grateful and contented.

Mr. Vansittart was well known to many, and he and his host met with a warm reception. Especially Mr. Forester seemed regarded as a friend; and his judgment was consulted in every practical and scientific agricultural question.

On their way back, after parting with Violet and Lucy, who took a shorter route to the valley, Mr. Vansittart intimated a wish to call on the present occupants of the Hall, Colonel and Mrs. Derinzy. Respect for the family, and old-fashioned notions of politeness and propriety, imposed this duty upon him; though he owned he would quite as soon have been spared the forms of society for a brief season. Mr. Forester offered no suggestion on the subject, and they parted at the turn of the pathway leading towards the village.

Colonel Derinzy's horse was at the door, the rein held by his groom, who was mounted ready to accompany him on his daily ride; but the master of the house was in the drawing-room when the visitor was announced. Mrs. Derinzy was also present. There was not much trace of her former girlish beauty in the face, which grew a shade paler even than usual, as she recognised the lawyer whose interrogations years ago had frightened her. Ursula's early life came before her in an instant, in the old home now her own, and she trembled as if she were in the presence of an inquisitor.

Mr. Vansittart's manner, on the contrary, was peculiarly calm and soothing. He looked at the fragile form and wasted features he remembered gay and blooming, with compassion; and accosted the lady of the mansion with the most punctilious respect.

This time he asked no questions, even as to her health, but conversed pleasantly on ordinary topics of the day, until Ursula had recovered her manifestly disturbed self-possession. It was Colonel Derinzy who first broke the smooth surface of commonplace remarks.

What sort of tenant is this that you have set down amongst us, Vansittart, at Millburn? A terrible fellow, it appears to me. Are you staying with him? In that case we must conclude he is a gentleman.

Well, I don't think he is the style of man exactly to suit you and the other county magnates, said the lawyer. He is a complete citizen of the world, and rather indifferent to the opinion of society; but I like him, I have known him all my life, and think very highly of him.

Indeed, said Colonel Derinzy meditatively. I wonder you did not give him any introductions. No one called upon him, I fancy. Country gentlemen do not much like to have these Socialistic firebrands set alight among them, stirring up the embers of revolt, and instilling radical notions. My wife has been frightened to death, and was entreating me when you came in not to ride up among the hills. I believe she expects a revolution a sort of Jacquerie massacre.

I have just come back from the foot of the Crest, and among the lower hills the country looked remarkably quiet, said Mr. Vansittart, smiling. I think Mrs. Derinzy might venture there in her poney carriage. All is peaceful contentment.

## Carding–Mill Valley

Yes, yes, for the present, said Mrs. Derinzy faintly. They have got all that they wanted, and seem satisfied. Stella has yielded to their murmurs, but when people find that by clamouring they can succeed, there will be no rest. Colonel Derinzy has been grievously insulted.

I must say I have not been treated quite as I expected by our cousin, said Colonel Derinzy stiffly. But no matter we must do our devoir, as we used to say in my old military days our duty to our Queen and country without looking for gratitude. Miss Derinzy is our Queen hereabouts. It is easy to confer benefits and make yourself popular when all disagreeable responsibilities are laid on other people's shoulders. I hope mine are broad enough and strong enough to bear their burden.

He reared his tall, thin, angular form, and raised his high shoulders, as if the weight sat upon them somewhat uneasily. That fellow Langden, he continued, got hold of Miss Derinzy, our Lady of the Manor, when she was just out of her sick–bed, where I had not dared to disturb her about business, and persuaded her to promise an extension on the same terms of the old leases. Perhaps I should have offered the same suggestion myself in due time. I have no wish to carry measures too far, though the permanent improvement of the estate must be my paramount consideration. Mrs. Derinzy is naturally a little hurt that I was not treated quite with Miss Derinzy's usual consideration, but it is of no consequence. All is, no doubt, satisfactorily settled.

I hope so, said Mr. Vansittart drily. The farmers, at all events, seem perfectly satisfied, and I saw no signs of insurrectionary disturbances up among my old friends, the ancient British hills. What glorious prospects are to be obtained there! I am sorry you do not like my choice of a tenant.

Not I, said the Colonel. He is a regular nuisance. I cannot think what induces you to let the place at all. I thought you thoroughly enjoyed country quiet, and wished to keep it as a retreat. Had I, or any of my neighbours, who are always grudging you that coign of vantage, known that you were tired of it, you would have had plenty of offers for it.

Thank you, said Mr. Vansittart, still more coolly. No, I have no wish to part with it, though you may have noticed that since the death of my father and other changes principally the loss of my earliest and best friend Hugh Derinzy's society, I have never cared to set foot in the ravine.

Unconsciously needing, perhaps, a woman's sympathy, cool man of business as he was, Mr. Vansittart had turned during the last sentence towards Mrs. Derinzy; but her nervous start and evident discomfiture made him avert his penetrating gaze. Colonel Derinzy did not speak.

My tenant suits me, and I like his pretty daughter. He gives me *carte blanche* to come when I like has a room ready for me, which Miss Violet calls mine, and fills it with pretty flowers and fancies. I think it probable, now that the spell which kept me away for years is broken, that I shall be a good deal at Millburn.

Well, that is one way of letting your house, said the Colonel, with a rather disagreeable smile. You enjoy it more at least, so you seem to imply and shift the onus of proprietorship, or, at least, of occupancy, to others! But may it not involve you in disagreeable complications? Your host is by no means a popular character among the higher classes. His demagogical notions do not recommend him to us; and those who would wish to show attention to you, as an old and valued friend, as your father's son, as well as for your own sake, will shrink from being brought into contact with a Radical upstart like your tenant, even though he be your host.

Possible, but not probable, replied Mr. Vansittart. I do not care for society when I am in the country; and Forester detests it, and if visits were paid to him would not return them. His daughter he paused, struck by a mute appeal in Mrs. Derinzy's glance, and took care not to betray what he fancied was a kind action clandestinely committed. Violet, I call her, it is such a pretty, innocent name, just suited to her is happy in her garden, and obeys her father's will. So long as they stay at Millburn, you need apprehend no inconvenience.

## Carding–Mill Valley

Colonel Derinzy looked at him with haughty surprise. Oh, it signifies nothing to me; your tenant cannot in anyway interfere with my convenience, except in so far as by upsetting the minds of the country bumpkins by his Chartist theories. But they are going out of fashion. They will never take deep root in the agricultural districts. Are you disposed to ride, this fine afternoon? You used to be fond of equestrian exercise. There is a good horse in the stable always at your service.

Mr. Vansittart thanked him but declined, receiving the kind offer as a hint not to prolong his visit. Do not let me detain you, he said, rising. Your horse was at the door when I came in. I promised to return to help Miss Forester in her very Paradisiacal garden. But we shall meet again.

Mrs. Derinzy rose also from her chair. Will you care to look first at my flower–garden? she said; it is thought to be in great beauty.

Mr. Vansittart did not refuse; and the Colonel, without further ceremony, was free to set off on his afternoon ride. It was only a few minutes' walk through the conservatory, full of beautiful exotics, to the heart–shaped garden, sheltered by the hills, and full of beautiful flowers. September, the gayest month for bedding plants and riband–borders, had robed them with loveliness, and Mrs. Derinzy's younger daughters were as busy as Violet, cutting off overblown blossoms and gathering large nosegays for the decoration of the dinner–table and drawing–room. Nothing could be brighter than the whole scene, animate and inanimate.

But among the flowers of her garden, tenderly supported by the loving arms of her yet lovelier daughters, the pale Mistress of Hagleth Hall moved like a spectre. Mr. Vansittart felt a cold shudder run through his veins as he looked at or spoke to her, though both were studiously courteous towards each other.

No private conversation passed between them; though there were questions near the lips of each, which they severally longed to ask and have answered. But Ursula was too timid to utter one of them, and the lawyer, long trained in cautious habits, did not on this occasion deviate from them. He saw and noted many things silently.

With Ursula Derinzy one thought, one fear, was predominant. She was not an imaginative person, but she was carried out of herself by one wild, weird apprehension. What had brought this man, before whom she had once before quailed in abject cowardice, to Hagleth? Why did he look at her with that compassionate yet searching gaze, that seemed as if it would bring forth from her very inmost heart thoughts which for years she had feared to call up, even in solitude? Why, after long years, had he come to the old burnt house to visit the new–comer his tenant at Millburn? and why, above all, did he care to investigate her misery? Every word he uttered seemed to have a double meaning.

She did not guess that he had admired her in her timid, girlish beauty, and pitied her now in her forlorn maturity. As he walked by her side, trying to win her confidence and to show her his sympathy, deeming her the one true friend of a being inexpressibly dear to him, Ursula looked upon him as an enemy; and it was with a sigh of intense relief that she saw the gate at the end of the garden close upon him, and heard his steps die away in the distance.

## Chapter 26.

'They know th' Almighty's power;  
Who, wakened by the rushing midnight shower,  
Watch for the fitful breeze  
To howl and chafe among the bending trees,  
Watch for the still white gleam  
To bathe the landscape in a fiery stream,  
Touching the tremulous eye with sense of light,

## Carding–Mill Valley

Too rapid and too pure for all but angel sight.'

Keble.

Those members of Colonel Derinzy's household, and they were few in number, who were able and willing to attend the Evening Service at the Chapel of St. Laurence, were in the habit of withdrawing themselves from the rest quietly. The young Clergyman and one or two of his sisters would leave the dining–room silently, and some of the numerous domestics generally followed their example, work for the day being over. It was with extreme surprise that Althea, who was a constant attendant, as she conducted the musical part of the service, heard her mother say in a whisper at the end of dinner:

Wait, love, for a moment. There is no hurry the carriage is ordered I am coming with you and Leo.

A few moments afterwards Mrs. Derinzy rose, and, followed by her daughters, left the room. The Colonel, imagining them to be anxious to profit by the shortening daylight for a stroll in the garden, took up the newspaper, after a few remarks addressed to his eldest son, and retired, as was his wont, to the library.

Mrs. Derinzy laid a trembling hand on her daughter's arm when she reached the bottom of the staircase attended by her maid, who carried her cloak and umbrella. No need to disturb your father. He will not even miss us, since he never takes tea or coffee in the evening. I have a fancy *for once* to go with you and Leo to the Evening Service. We will get into the carriage at the end of the avenue.

Althea, who disliked petty mysteries, did not speak. Leo had walked on before them, the distance through the avenue being short. He preferred having a little time for reflection and preparation before addressing his rural congregation, and generally preceded his sisters.

The girls are not coming, said her mother. It is only just ourselves and Marie. I want her to carry my cloak and Prayer–book. We can walk home. Oh, I hope it is not going to rain! The sky is quite overcast.

Indeed, mother, I think the weather is doubtful, said Althea, as they went down the avenue, followed by the abigail. It is too far for you to walk home, and should it rain, the path through the ravine may be slippery. The ponies can be put up at the little farm near the Chapel.

No, no, I have made all my arrangements. You need not trouble yourself about me, said Mrs. Derinzy pettishly. Marie will take care of my things, and in coming home I shall have Leo's arm. I do not wish to keep the ponies and the carriage out late your father might be displeased.

Althea, who was anxious to get to her place at the instrument, which stood at the farther end of the Chapel, did not interfere any more with her mother's wishes. Mrs. Derinzy released her daughter's arm as they entered the sacred building, and stood still for a moment. Then she signed to her maid to sit down near the entrance, and took her own place, not in the cushioned and curtained recess appropriated to the family from the Hall, but among the humbler worshippers near the door, close to Miss Forester and her girls. The service, which commenced with a voluntary played by Althea, seemed to engage her whole attention.

The sudden darkening of the Chapel disturbed her devotions. A wild gust blew the dead leaves on the outside pathway far up the aisle, with a weird rustling sound, immediately followed by a flash of lightning and a peal of thunder. Mrs. Derinzy shivered with terror her thoughts flew back to the Hall and to her husband, not exactly with that tender pleasure which might have been inspired by the conviction that Arnold was quite sure to look for her when there was a thunderstorm in prospect, but with the painful sense that all her little precautions had been taken in vain. He was certain to seek, and sure not to find her.



## Carding–Mill Valley

That physical terror which prostrates many whose nerves are stronger than Mrs. Derinzy's, and whose sense of the Divine nearness is more comforting, yet does not altogether bear them up against alarm, was upon her. Human companionship and sympathy were absolutely indispensable, and Mrs. Derinzy's fluttering fingers touched Violet's arm.

Oh, is not this awful? she whispered. What will become of us are you not frightened?

No, I am not afraid of thunder, she replied in the same low tones. I think the storm will pass away soon.

Another, more vivid, flash, followed by a louder peal, contradicted her comforting assertion. Mrs. Derinzy crept closer to her, and the more courageous girl, moved by an irresistible impulse of loving compassion, passed her arm tenderly, protectingly, round her.

Meanwhile the service proceeded. Lights had been kindled near the preacher and the organ. Mrs. Derinzy could see her two tall, handsome children plainly; Althea's fair hair gleaming in the lamp–light, and Leo's calm features illuminated. The rest of the Chapel was dark. She could not see a line in her hymn and prayer book.

Nearly at the close of the service there was a slight movement near her in the porch. She looked out timidly; and saw, dimly, the forms of two men wrapped up in waterproof cloaks with slouching South–American sombreros pulled low on their brows. They did not enter, but stood quietly, listening to the concluding hymn in perfect silence.

It is my father and his London friend, Mr. Vansittart, said Viola softly, after rising from her knees. They have come to take care of me home. Where is your carriage? Let me help you with your cloak.

Mrs. Derinzy submitted silently. She was trembling from head to foot, and seemed unable even to lift a hand to draw the rather heavy folds round her. Her maid was quite as much overcome with terror, and seemed utterly helpless; almost crying, as she told Miss Forester that the carriage was sent back and they had to walk home, in all the rain, through the ravine.

Viola turned to her father. She dared not in the face of his injunction and bitter disapprobation invite the half–fainting woman to take shelter at Millburn, neither could she obey his rather impatient summons and leave her.

It is Mrs. Derinzy father, she said appealingly. She is so frightened at the storm that I fear she will faint. Let me wait till her daughter comes out.

No; leave her to me. Go home with Vansittart, said her father, in a low stern voice, not a syllable reaching any ear but his daughter's. You are no coward, unless her fears have infected you already. The storm is nothing. That woman will do you ten times more injury.

He drew his daughter forcibly away, commending her to his friend, but he did not take her place. Leaving the maid, who was now recovering, to attend to her mistress, he stood still in the porch; apparently watching the different groups as, hooded and cloaked, they hurried out into the gathering night.

Leo and Althea were still detained in the chancel. Forester stamped his foot impatiently, as the last lingering group, after sheltering themselves for a few moments whilst they made such preparations as circumstances allowed before facing the tempest, left the shelter of the porch. The storm, as he prognosticated, was passing off, but the rain descended heavily.

## Carding–Mill Valley

Mrs. Derinzy lifted her languid form with difficulty, and came a step nearer to him. Just then the clouds again opened, and a pale quivering gleam, the last of the lightning flashes, broke forth, illuminating the tall figure standing in the porch, completely. The poor nervous creature shrank back and caught the arm of the girl who was close behind her. She covered her eyes with her hand. Althea, who came up at the moment, feared that the lightning had blinded her mother.

Did it strike her? she said in terror, addressing the man who stood apparently unmoved and now in obscurity near them. Oh, sir, what can we do? it is impossible for my mother to walk home through the ravine in such weather; it might kill her!

There is no house near us but mine, said the stranger, for Althea had never seen and did not guess that it was Mr. Forester. Otherwise I should not offer it as a shelter, but there seems no help for it. You must come to Millburn.

Althea shrank back; his manner was even more cold and haughty than his words. My brother is coming, she said. He will tell us what to do.

Mrs. Derinzy had not spoken. She was leaning back on the bench nearest to the door, supported by her maid. No one ventured to make any suggestion.

Leo came forward presently. He was shocked at his mother's condition, and at once accepted Mr. Forester's proposal, which was repeated by his sister in rather more courteous terms. It would take him very little time to run back home by the short path through the dingle and to bring the carriage for his mother and sister.

Althea hesitated as the stranger offered her his arm. Had you not better help her? she said timidly.

No, he said shortly. The girl can do that, and doubtless is accustomed to rendering assistance to her mistress. Believe me, it is best to leave her quiet.

Mrs. Derinzy motioned to them to proceed, and gathering up her feeble energies, followed them, clinging to the arm of her servant. Althea, who knew how timid her mother was in the society of strangers, thought that their new acquaintance was right. Though his words were roughly spoken, they might be meant in kindness; at all events, no choice was left for her, as Leo had accepted Mr. Forester's unwilling offer of hospitality. Resting her hand lightly on his offered arm, she passed from under the shelter of the porch out into the cheerless darkness of the clouded moonless autumn night. The rain still fell, but not so heavily, and the rising wind swept down the pass, stirring the wet branches of the trees.

Though it was in most respects a dark, comfortless walk so, at least, it appeared to Mrs. Derinzy and Marie as they toiled, laden with their heavy cloaks, along the slippery walk Althea did not find it absolutely disagreeable. There was something kind and friendly in the firm support accorded to her, and the path was far too familiar to offer much difficulty to her light tread. Even the mournful swoop of the rain-laden branches sounded harmoniously to her musical ear, like the refrain of a melody; the gusts that shook the drops in her face forming deeper cadences as they went on their way down the valley. It was not absolutely dark, only heavily overcast; and, now and then, a bright bit of sky was visible overhead through the trees, and eccentric lights, coming from she knew not where, shone out on the face of the otherwise darkened water, rushing fast on its course.

Althea stopped more than once as she heard her mother's feeble complaints and tones of weariness; but her companion only waited long enough to see that all was safe, and that Mrs. Derinzy was following them slowly but surely. Her daughter knew that her attendant was kind, faithful, and strong, and well acquainted with the path. When the maid and her mistress were within a short distance, she yielded to the slight but authoritative pressure which drew her on, past all the intricacies of the way, to the spot where, from the windows of the old house, lights

## Carding–Mill Valley

were shining steadily down into the swiftly–running water.

Mr. Forester did not allow her to remove her hand from his arm until they stood on the platform whence Leo had longed to show May Balfour the view of the stream winding through the valley.

I did not, he said, expect to bring you here; but you are welcome to Millburn.

He held out his hand frankly, and Althea accepted the proffered greeting, laying hers gently in his clasp. He did not say a word, or offer any salutation, to Mrs. Derinzy; but turned abruptly away, saying that he must find his daughter, and would send her to them. When his tall form had passed out of sight, Mrs. Derinzy gave a sigh of relief; but Althea thought that the small, low–roofed hall, which at first, under the influence of that cordial hand–clasp, seemed to bid her welcome, appeared to grow forbiddingly gloomy.

She felt tired and oppressed after her rapid walk, and, as is often the case after facing the wind, the interior of a house, especially of an old building, seemed airless and overpowering. It did not surprise her to see her mother sink down on one of the roughly–twisted wicker chairs, after one glance cast around her. Mrs. Derinzy seemed even more depressed than herself by their cheerless reception.

Oh, what a den of poverty this is compared to the Hall, she said, in a low, desponding tone. What would life be worth if one had to pass it in such low rooms, and with such miserable appointments? This place was all very well for a shooting–lodge, or for that London lawyer; but it is not fit for ladies. I told Hugh so when he brought me here years ago, and I have never altered. It is not a fit abode for people of our class and ideas. I hope Leo will not be long in bringing the carriage. What will your father say when he finds that I was out in a thunderstorm? I only wish he may not think it necessary to come here to fetch us home.

## Chapter 27.

'They know th' Almighty's love,  
Who, when the whirlwinds rock the topmost grove,  
Stand in the shade, and hear  
The tumult with a deep exalting fear,  
How in their fiercest sway,  
Curb'd by some power unseen, they die away,  
Like a bold steed that knows his rider's arm,  
Proud to be check'd and sooth'd by that o'er-mastering charm.'

Keble.

That virtue of savages, hospitality, seemed to exercise its sway over the rough manners of the master of Millburn; or, perhaps, the presence of his young daughter threw a charm over his rude dwelling. Violet's appearance with her father reassured even Mrs. Derinzy's coward spirit, and Mr. Vansittart also did his best to bring together their somewhat uncongenial visitors and their misanthropic entertainer. Some appearance of cordiality was introduced under their auspices, and topics of conversation common to all the world were started by the Londoner.

Refreshments, simple enough, but very neatly arranged, were brought in by Violet's pretty hand–maidens, and handed round the long, low drawing–room. Gradually the storm had moaned itself out among the hills, and from the window at the far end of the apartment, which was open and uncurtained, a few stars might be seen twinkling in rifts of pale blue sky between the heavy clouds.

## Carding–Mill Valley

Anxious, on her mother's account, for the return of fair weather, Althea Derinzy was looking out into the night. Below the window she could see and hear the stream brawling and foaming among the rocks; with gleams, such as always seem to catch the bubbles of running water, marking its course. Above rose solemnly the ancient hills, and through the trees, yet more majestically, came sweeping the gusts of strong wind which had blown away the storm. There was to the listening ear of the tall, fair woman, gazing from the casement, a threat, a menace, in the song of the gale; and yet she did not fear it: her heart's paean went up to Heaven in thankfulness for their deliverance from the tempest; she trusted and was strong.

You are not afraid, said a deep voice near her, of the elemental war. For my part, I love to watch storms and tempests to catch the weird gleams and glamour of the lightning dancing on the stream, and to hear the shriek of the coming gale as it wakes up among the mountains. Will you come with me where you can see more of the aspect of night as it broods over the valley?

Althea rose at once. Something of protection of affinity seemed to dwell in the words, few and strong; in the simple demeanour of her host. She followed him without the slightest hesitation up the steep, winding stair which led to the library.

Lamps, always kept burning, scarcely illuminated the large, sombre room, lined with gravely-bound books. Here, too, the window at the farther end was wide open, and a telescope stood near it. Mr. Forester arranged the focus, and they stood together for some moments, surveying by turns the clouded heavens. He knew the names of all the stars which were visible; and told Althea of several curious discoveries and observations which he had made during his night-watches.

In many lands, under another hemisphere, this man had watched the stars in their courses, and now that they were alone he spoke freely and well of what he knew. Althea, who was a great lover of books, looked at the names of the scientific and philosophical volumes on the shelves.

No, they are not books suitable to your taste; Violet has a much better collection, said their owner hurriedly. Miss Derinzy, you have taught me more than I have learnt from these musty volumes. I shall henceforth eschew such dangerous learning. You brought me back to the best lore my childhood's unerring faith and hope.

I, said Althea wonderingly. That would, indeed, be a subject for rejoicing. But I do not even know what you mean; I never spoke to you before this evening.

Mr. Forester placed in her hand a light, thin book which lay on the table just in front of his own reading chair and lamp.

Did you not write this sentence and that page? he said, pointing to certain passages. I have acknowledged my obligation to the writer publicly, and bowed down my pride, making full recantation of my errors. They were more of the head than the heart. Though led astray for a time, bewildered by false learning, false lights, like yonder *ignis fatuus* running along the bog-land, after the tempest, I have never been able to quench the true light which shone into my boyish mind. More shame for me that I confess I tried to follow other guides worse teachers! But my child's pure faith and humility your sweet voice in the hymns sung at the Chapel, to which I often listened when you knew not that any mortal ear heard your communings with God have brought me back to what I learnt in infancy, from loving women like yourself. You have caught much of Stella's spirit, he paused and hesitated, while Althea looked at him in yet deeper wonder. I mean, he added, my daughter told me that you and Miss Derinzy answered my cynical musings and inquiries, teaching to me and to the world a truer knowledge.

It is strange, he went on, how to us students living in dim corners apart from our fellows, those who like ourselves open their thoughts in written characters to the public to us among many others seem to become dear

friends. Have you not felt this yourself?

Yes, said Althea, almost involuntarily. The writer of those articles, which I admired, which I blamed, *did* become like one well known. It seems presumptuous, and yet I must say it. I often wondered how a mind so clear, so thoughtful, could be so mistaken! How a spirit which seemed as if it must with its Ithuriel spear pierce through all mists, and reach the Eternal truth, shining clearly for humble souls like mine in the heavens, should have just missed it why such a child of light should prefer to walk in darkness. Every problem you stated each mystery and inconsistency which you deplored seemed to me to have its answer, and only one possible solution; and yet, clear-sighted as the writer appeared to be on all other subjects, here he seemed perversely to grope in darkness.

You are right, said her host gravely. Right and wise wise for all future generations. 'The fool has said there is no God.' No truer word has ever been written. Do not turn away or think that I ever went so far in unbelief, or strove so to mislead others. My errors were not so grave. A deep disappointment in early manhood warped my spirit. For years I could not see the meaning of God's ways with his creatures; or acknowledge, as you do, that my finite senses could not comprehend infinite love and wisdom. The why, the wherefore, are still a mystery but I submit I bow my head in humility, and I will try for thy sweet sake to forgive, even as I hope to be forgiven.

He drew her hand within his arm, and, without another word, led the way back to the dimly-lighted drawing-room. Mr. Vansittart was talking in low, eager tones to Mrs. Derinzy, as she reclined on the sofa with her hand in Violet's, who was sitting close to her in a little velvet chair.

No one had missed Althea and her host. They were supposed to be still occupied with the study of the stars and the clouds at the farther window. Very soon the sound of wheels announced the arrival of Mrs. Derinzy's carriage. Both her sons had come to escort her home, but, to her great relief, they were not accompanied by their father.

Violet's attitude, sitting at his mother's knee, caught the notice of Hugo, as he entered the room, before she had time to change it by rising to receive him and his brother. He came close up to the sofa, and tenderly inquired after Mrs. Derinzy, who seemed now much more calm and contented than he had hoped to find her. The storm had quite passed off, he told her, completely clearing the air. The stars were shining brightly. They would have a pleasant drive home.

At the last word Mrs. Derinzy slightly shivered. Was your father angry? she asked in a low tone.

No, no; he was greatly surprised and alarmed when he found that you were not in the house. My father, he added, addressing Violet, always for the last five-and-twenty years, perhaps longer, but certainly ever since their marriage has, whenever it was possible, not left my mother alone when there was thunder in the air, or during a violent storm.

Over and over again he has turned his bridle-rein and ridden home, as he did last month when he felt, or fancied he felt, that there was a tempest brewing. I have seen him, and wondered at it when I was an impatient boy, sit for hours by her side holding her hand, as you were doing when we came in. Judge of his distress after we had sought for her ineffectually in her own room, in the garden, everywhere. At last, on our return, wet through, to the house, a servant informed us that his mistress had gone to Church with my brother and sister. Of course, nothing could be more simple and natural, when explained; only it had not occurred previously to either of us. My father said directly that he hoped you might take shelter at Millburn. The carriage was ordered before Leo returned.

Mrs. Derinzy looked surprised, but much relieved. She rose languidly almost, it seemed, regretfully and bade adieu to her young hostess; again inviting her to Hagleth. Violet glanced at her father, but either Mrs. Derinzy had not courage to press the request, or despaired of his consent. There was certainly, so far as she was concerned, no encouragement in his manner, for he devoted himself exclusively to Althea; leaving to her two sons the duty which, as master of the house, ought to have been assumed by himself of conducting their mother to her

carriage. Even as they stood at the door he did not notice in any way Mrs. Derinzy's awkward attempt at offering her hand; and the limp fingers trembled more than ever as she drew back, feeling that her overtures of peace were rejected. Althea's hand was warmly, cordially clasped; and she returned the grasp trustfully. Forester bowed somewhat carelessly to the rest of the party, and returned immediately to the library without inviting his London visitor to accompany him.

## Chapter 28.

'Oh, it was well to be free, and go;  
Our good God led him the easier way;  
And I thought, in the first of my bitter woe,  
It could not be long I should have to stay.  
But there's some who break in the soft Spring air,  
And some who weather the winter wind;  
There comes a strength to the hearts that bear,  
A blessing for those who are left behind.

'For 'tis the same old sun that set  
O'er far off fields long years ago,  
When two walked side by side and let  
The happy hours unheeded flow;  
And it's the same sweet breeze that stirred  
The trees beside the meadow walk,  
I love it for the words it heard,  
When two paused there in earnest talk.'

The gentlemanly instinct which prompted Colonel Derinzy's immediate announcement, when he welcomed back his wife to her home with unusual emotion after the storm, that he should call on the morrow at Milburn, and thank Mr. Forester for the shelter he had afforded to her and Althea, was successfully combated by his wife. Ursula did not respond cordially to the suggestion, and argued that it had far better not be carried into action. Mr. Vansittart's tenant was a moody cynic, who would, as the lawyer had told them, not thank his country neighbours for breaking in upon his solitude, and might even resent the intrusion.

Mrs. Derinzy did not, as a more quick–tempered woman might naturally have done, manifest any remembrance of the neglect she had certainly experienced, or say that Mr. Foresters' had been a grudging hospitality. It was not her habit to be candid, and she feared to increase the animosity previously existing between her husband and the present occupant of Millburn. She only said enough, as she had often done before, to damp Colonel Derinzy's unusually generous impulse; and to prevent a meeting taking place which might involve risks of a nature on which she dared not speculate.

She exercised great influence unconsciously to himself over her husband, and he yielded to her wish; consenting that Hugo, who was already acquainted with the father and daughter, should act as his representative. Just at the last moment, when he was mounting his horse to ride in another direction, Ursula let fall a hint, so obscure that Colonel Derinzy mistook it for an idea entirely his own, that she should accompany his eldest son and make all proper acknowledgments personally. In this Ursula acquiesced graciously, after a moment's hesitation; and her husband, before he rode away, ordered her poney–carriage to be brought round to the door.

Not entirely satisfied with himself, Colonel Derinzy rode moodily away. He was on his road to call on Stella, but he took a much longer circuit than was necessary among the hills instead of proceeding straight to her cottage. His thoughts were of the most sombre description. Mind and body had been out of sorts for several days. His state of

## Carding–Mill Valley

health always acted upon his temper and spirits, even more powerfully than is the case with most men. It was perhaps his consciousness that he was in the very worst of evil humours which made him yield to his wife's representations. He was in a mood to quarrel with his best friend. It was wiser to avoid coming in contact with one whom hitherto he had regarded as an enemy. And yet, had he on that dull autumn day shaken off the weight of oppression under which he now pursued his way, all might have gone better with him. If in pursuance of that manly generous impulse he had gone to Millburn, and frankly extended his right hand to its recluse occupant, thanking him for what after all had been, though he did not guess it, scant courtesy, Colonel Derinzy might have ridden homeward rejoicing, no longer at war with his neighbour. But the opportunity, like many another, was suffered to slip away, accelerated in its retreat by Ursula's false words, and each opportunity of amendment thus wasted leaves us farther back from good than it found us.

The Colonel was not a passionate man, but he was apt to be sullen, and his wrathful ideas were brooded upon until they grew into a still but fierce glow, very difficult to extinguish; which did not scatter sparks abroad, but gathered, like a red fire–brick at the back of a fierce fire, into a deadly, concentrated heat. His present fit of ill–temper had been gaining strength ever since the defeat of his policy about the upland farms, and the dismissal, at Miss Derinzy's request, of the Bailiff who had suggested the measure. Perhaps it might be said to date still further back; since the raising of Langden and his neighbours' rents had been a reprisal for the help they had given in making the obnoxious new road at the head of the valley. At all events, it had smouldered long, and reached its height on the day when Mr. Vansittart, in compliance with his old–fashioned notions of etiquette, had called on the successors of his father's and his own best friends the old Squire and Hugh Derinzy at Hagleth Hall.

It was very seldom that Colonel Derinzy stopped at the gate of Stella's cottage. Still more unfrequently that he dismounted at any of the houses in the village. On this day, however, contrary to his wont, he rode in from the further end of the place, past all the various dwellings; and found or made an excuse for stopping to speak to a person at work in one of the numerous gardens. There he got off his horse and dismissed his groom, telling him to take the two animals back quietly. He had another visit to pay where he might be detained, and should walk home.

Stella Derinzy was sitting in the garden when the movement of the latch by an impatient, unaccustomed hand made her look up from her book. She knew that Colonel Derinzy had called at the gate to inquire after her during her late illness, and expected that, after performing once more this courteous duty, he would pass on; but he entered the small domain and came close up to her, saying that he had some business matter to talk over if she now felt well enough to attend to him. She rose at once and led the way indoors through the honeysuckle and jasmine–covered porch.

Colonel Derinzy drew from his pocket a roll of parchments the new leases and laid them on the table. They only required Stella's signature, which she affixed after reading them over; while her visitor sat quietly surveying her, with his thin, straightly–cut, obstinate lips pressed against the ivory handle of his riding–whip.

When her task was concluded, Stella gave the papers back, thanking him for the unexpected promptitude with which he had complied with her request.

If a thing must be done it had best be done quickly, said Colonel Derinzy. This London lawyer whom you, I suppose, have sent for to quicken the wits of the country bumpkins, like myself, who have tried to serve you faithfully, must not catch us napping.

Miss Derinzy looked surprised. Of whom are you speaking! she said quietly. I do not understand.

I mean, replied Colonel Derinzy, the London solicitor who, in cases of difficulty, has acted for your and my family not always, in my opinion, judiciously, but that is as you may think Mr. Vansittart, the owner, according to your father the Squire's good pleasure, of Millburn. I conclude that you sent for him.

## Carding–Mill Valley

I! said Stella, her eyes growing bright with unshed tears. What gave you that impression?

Well, it was at all events a fortunate coincidence which brought him on a visit to his Chartist friend at the old burnt house, when the Conservative Ministry was out of favour. Am I to give up my portfolio to him?

I still fail to catch your meaning, said Stella, somewhat haughtily; not choosing to answer his first angry, and as she deemed it, arrogant question.

It is not very difficult to guess, answered Colonel Derinzy, whilst a dark glow mounted to his cheek. When a Minister feels that he has lost the confidence of his Sovereign, or of a nation, he gives back the insignia of office. Of late none of my measures appear to have given satisfaction; and it has occurred to me, after much consideration, that you have summoned the legal adviser of your family to look into my stewardship, and the condition of your property.

It was never my intention, Colonel Derinzy, to surrender all authority into your hands or that of any living man, Stella answered haughtily. I have myself carefully studied the case of the upland farmers, and I came to the conclusion that they were hardly used. Whilst thanking you sincerely for the care you have taken of my interests, I felt it to be my duty, in this matter, to interfere and protect what I hold to be their rights. I have been too supine.

You wish to be more than the Constitutional Queen. You prefer absolute authority, said her visitor sarcastically. I must try to learn the lesson of submission; but, I confess, at my age, in my position as next heir to the Hagleth estate, and, therefore, deeply interested in the well-being of my future tenantry, and responsible to my children for the condition of the land I think I am entitled to confidence.

You will not deny that I am at present Mistress of Hagleth and Lady of the Manor, said Stella, in her turn flushing angrily. Would that it were not so would that my brother, or a child of my lost Hugh I will not, I cannot, even now call him dead stood near me stood between me and this hated authority but since that cannot be, as long as it is mine, I must use, not abuse, my rights.

Colonel Derinzy's eyes glowed with rage, the longer subdued the more unconquerable. That is a hard word, Miss Derinzy. So I, who have neglected my own lands and people after wearing out my life in this thankless service in this weary stewardship am to be told that I have abused my authority!

It was of myself that I complained, said Stella. I have neglected duties, and avoided incurring responsibilities laid upon me by Providence. For this I, not you, am grievously to blame. I did not mean to call your judgment in question. I believe that you have tried to act for the best, and honourably fulfilled the difficult task which I have suffered to devolve upon you. But I am not a child or a girl I am only a suffering woman, aged before my time, but still capable of independent action. I do not wish to annoy or to distress you, but I must reserve to myself in whatever concerns my late brother's property, freedom of action.

It has always been yours, said Colonel Derinzy. At your request in the first instance when you were almost at death's door I assumed serious responsibilities; which I have discharged faithfully to the best of my ability. But you have never answered my first question. Why did you suffer Vansittart to put this demagogue into the old house by the brook, and to run that abominable road across the head of the glen; and why do you now rely upon him instead of upon me, your nearest relative and natural protector?

Colonel Derinzy, said Stella, rising, you have overshot the mark, whatever it may be, at which you aimed. I did not send for Mr. Vansittart, nor have I ever, to my knowledge, seen or spoken with his tenant. The road is a good road and a benefit to my tenants, who, one and all, helped to make it, and regard it as a benefit. For aught I know, the man is a lover of his fellow creatures; and judging by the way in which he has acted, a benefactor to



them and to their cattle. Mr. Vansittart has always been honoured and respected by our family, as was his father before him. I would rather not hear any more unfavourable remarks about my neighbours.

Colonel Derinzy rose also with a burning brow. He perceived that Stella was offended, and he also, knowing her perfect truthfulness, believed that she had not summoned to aid her counsels Mr. Vansittart or his obnoxious tenant. But he had never done justice to her abilities or feelings. Not being himself possessed of acute sensibilities, or conversant with a high type of womanly character, he rather despised her for the supposed weakness on which he had presumed, very far beyond her original intentions, making himself her master instead of an honoured and trusted coadjutor. He began gathering the papers scattered on the table together, whilst he said somewhat arbitrarily:

Since I am not superseded, I suppose I may take back my portfolio. No one is likely to grudge me a position which, believe me, is not without its disadvantages. Had you been provided with a qualified adviser I might have asked leave to resign it. My own tenantry often complain of my being an absentee. But I thought you could not manage these complicated affairs without my assistance.

Stella still remained standing, though compelled by physical weakness to lean upon the back of her carved chair.

Let us understand each other, she said calmly. I feel stronger and better than I was before my illness. Since you, like myself feel that you have neglected duties which are ill performed by deputies, would it not be better that you should resign some of your arduous labours here, at all events temporarily? Hugo and Leo are both of them good men of business, and I respect their judgment. You have yourself expressed a wish to engage a subordinate; one better qualified for the post than the late bailiff may easily be found, and in this manner you would be free to visit your own estates in Warwickshire more frequently.

Colonel Derinzy drew the strap round the roll of parchment, with a vicious snap, together.

So be it, he said proudly. I at least understand your meaning fully, Miss Derinzy. But let us have no half measures. Either I am or I am not your steward, your conscience–keeper the manager of the Hagleth estate which, at a distant time, let us hope, reverts to me and to my heirs. But I must have your entire confidence. Of course your will would be, as it has ever been, law; but there must be no interlopers no dallying with other men's measures.

That I cannot promise, replied Stella. I shall seek advice when and where I think proper. My conscience is not in your keeping. After what you have said, Colonel Derinzy, I think it better until the time, probably not very distant, to which you have alluded, when you come into possession of this property arrives to release you from all responsibility respecting the Hagleth estate.

Stella removed her hand from one of the high chairs, as if no longer needing support, and extended it to her somewhat crestfallen visitor. She looked taller than usual; but there was neither passion nor unkindness in the expression of her pale face. It was evident that she meant to part in a friendly manner from her cousin.

Colonel Derinzy was not completely master of himself. He stammered out some words of apology, feeling that he had said more than was wise under the influence of jealous passion. But he made no offer to take back the responsibilities of whose weight he had complained, and which had been so unexpectedly removed from his shoulders. If Stella had retracted her suggestion, he would probably have acceded, but he was too proud to propose it. His circumstances were quite independent, and his wife had a large fortune in money; his own resources were in land lying in one of the Midland shires; not equal to the revenue he had enjoyed even as next heir and manager of the Hagleth estate, but sufficient to place him in easy circumstances.

He had not refused Stella's offered hand, nor did he reject her thanks for his careful administration of the property, well knowing that he had deserved them. But after what had just passed, both soon began to feel that no cordial re-establishment of relationships could be effected on the same footing. They might be friends, but it would be distant ones.

As yet all the contingencies involved in the step she had been urged on to take had not even entered into Stella's mind; but they rose clearly and plainly before Colonel Derinzy, in so far as regarded the first steps to be pursued. Before they parted he informed her that with his resignation into her hand, at her own express desire, of all charge of the estate, Colonel Derinzy would give up his occupation of the Hall; and return with his family, at the earliest possible period, to his own old Manor House in Warwickshire.

## Chapter 29.

'A faded leaf! and need the hand that drew  
Say why from Autumn's store it made this choice?  
Stranger, the reason would not interest you,  
And friends, to you the emblem has a voice.

'I might have plucked from rich October's bower,  
A fairer thing to grace this chosen spot;  
A leaf still verdant, or a lingering flower  
I might have plucked them, but they pleased me not.'

Jane Taylor.

The wind was whirling the fading leaves down the valley when Hugo Derinzy and his mother were on their way up among the lonely hills. Very little conversation passed between them; for although neither of them suspected what would be the result of the Colonel's visit to Stella, both were feeling uneasy. Mrs. Derinzy seldom talked much during a drive, and the breezes that ruffled her feathers and disturbed her numerous soft wraps distracted her attention.

Hugo's looks and thoughts wandered from the track, though he took pains in driving to avoid ruts and stones, which might jar his mother's delicately strung nerves. At last he said, drawing in the reins:

It is not much use to go farther. Do you see, mother, up there near Stella's Waterfall, something white a fluttering shawl, I think. If I am not very much mistaken, two figures, of which I caught sight a moment ago, are those of Miss Forester and her little handmaiden.

Oh, I cannot bear turning back. It is so unlucky, said Mrs. Derinzy in a tone of vexation. This is a merely complimentary visit, paid by your father's orders, to Mr. Forester. He may be at home.

I do not suppose that he will receive us, said Hugo. His daughter is a more civilized being, and would pave our way to his august presence; but we will go on if you like, and we can but leave cards if the Hermit declines to admit us.

That will never do your father would be quite disappointed I cannot take all this trouble for nothing, said Mrs. Derinzy; whilst her son, who seemed equally dissatisfied, drove slowly on to the entrance of Millburn. Do not drive in, she said, laying her hand on his arm as he tightened the reins while the groom jumped down to open the gate. Let Mark take the ponies to that pretty little stable under the rocks and wait there; and I will loiter about here or in the garden, or perhaps in the house, if anyone invites me to enter. Do you go on to the Waterfall and tell

## Carding–Mill Valley

that sweet girl that I am tired, and that I am resting.

The plan did not sound disagreeable to the young man, though it rather surprised him. Are you sure that you do not mind my leaving you alone? then he added in a whisper that you are not afraid of the Ogre?

No, no. What harm could he do me? said Mrs. Derinzy. It seems quite sheltered in Violet's garden. I am so tired of battling with the wind, I really cannot drive back without a little change of posture. I am cramped. My hands quite ache with holding my shawl together. Go at once, or you may miss her; and do not hurry. I shall be quite comfortable sitting on that bench under the rocks. No one can even see me from the windows.

Hugo assisted his mother to alight, and then, after watching her slow progress towards the goal she had indicated, he sprang up the rocky path which led to Stella's Waterfall. The servant took the carriage and ponies to the stables. Mrs. Derinzy, perhaps, found the wind, light as it was, troublesome in the safe-looking, solitary recess under the rocks. She did not sit there more than a few moments, and after wandering up and down the gravel path, in a sort of aimless manner, she went to the front-door and rang the bell. When the servant attended to her gentle summons, she gave her a little twisted note, which she had written in pencil, folded in a very peculiar, intricate manner, and desired her to take it to her master. The girl invited her to walk in and sit down. She was not sure whether she could find Mr. Forester, but she would go and look for him.

Mrs. Derinzy turned with a faint sigh into Viola's long, low drawing-room, of which the door stood open. She did not appear to take notice of anything, but sank wearily down on a couch near the window.

Whatever words she had written must have been well chosen, for a very short space of time elapsed before the master of the house entered the room and crossed it, stopping in front of her.

Mrs. Derinzy put out her small, trembling hand. You cannot suppose for a moment, she said faintly, that I do not know you.

Mr. Forester did not touch her hand or speak.

Hugh Derinzy, she said in a firmer tone, I am here to make atonement for all the harm I have done you. You cannot think that I meant to inflict such a deadly injury upon the being I loved best in the whole world.

Forgive me, if it is still more difficult to believe that at last at last, Ursula you consent to do me justice; that you will come forward to clear my reputation, at the cost of your own good name, for the sake of truth and equity.

Mrs. Derinzy shrank back into herself. It is not that. If I do what you wish it is for *your* sake, Hugh; and oh, be merciful to your poor cousin! Remember how your parents loved me, and that Stella and my husband have always trusted me.

No, I can remember nothing spare you nothing until I am relieved of the intolerable load which has weighed me down to earth; which made me a wanderer from my home and kindred an exile with a brand on my brow. Ursula, are you prepared to confess, now, what you once denied even to me, that you were the writer of that letter?

Yes, said Mrs. Derinzy in her soft tones; I wrote it. I never thought that anyone would make such a ridiculous fuss about a mere joke a trifle; oh, how unkind everybody was, and so angry! I could not face the storm. But now it has blown over. Only you must not betray me to my husband. That is why I have come now, alone, to throw myself upon your mercy. To ask you not to degrade me utterly in the estimation of my husband and children. And still more above all dear Cousin Hugh to ask you to forgive me. I have never known one happy

moment since we parted.

Tears flowed plentifully from the weary eyes, which looked as if their youthful brilliancy had been long washed out.

What can I do to spare you from the consequences of your own errors of this long tissue of deceits which has blasted my life? Ursula, the truth must be spoken, cost what it may.

After all, it was only such a little sin like saying one is not at home instead of that one is engaged, which always sounds so unfriendly, persisted Ursula. I found Miss Balfour's silly note; at least, it seemed foolish to me, she added, when the face looking down upon her darkened. I did not understand what it meant; and, Hugh, I confess it, I did not like her having written to you. I had been angry for a long time with you both. You know how cleverly I could counterfeit handwriting; ah yes, I recollect how angry you were with me, for what you actually told me were mean tricks. I have not forgotten, though I have long since forgiven, those unkind words. But I really never thought I had done it so well, that even Stella did not detect my imitation. I told the lawyer that some of the letters were not like your handwriting. I really tried to get you out of what I thought was only a little dilemma. Who could have supposed the Balfours would make it into such a dreadfully shocking case against you? How could they, or anyone, imagine you would have acted in an ungentlemanly manner?

One word would have cleared me, Ursula; but you would not speak it. How can I forgive your duplicity?

Oh, you must and shall forgive and pity me, dear, dear Hugh. You and Stella never could understand how impossible it is for such a person as I am to stand up and tell the horrid truth and 'shame the Devil' as we were taught in our childhood, with everybody looking so grave and awful. If friends would give a little encouragement just a smile and kind word now and then; but no, all the world is against you set in array to judge a poor, feeble girl like me; and then, when one has not spoken at first it becomes so much more difficult. One thing after another has to be confessed, until one would be left at last without a friend, or a hiding–place, in the world.

Do you mean that Colonel Derinzy, that my sister, have been always kept entirely ignorant of every circumstance? I confess I have thought you fellow culprits; or, at least, indifferent to my wrongs to my banishment, perhaps to my death.

Stella, Colonel Derinzy; oh Hugh, they knew nothing! Your sister never believed you guilty, but she was utterly in darkness. I must vindicate them, even if it brings on me yet heavier punishment. If Stella had ever received that cruel letter which you bade me show to her how could you think I should have the courage? she would have followed you to the world's end. But I could not give it to her. I was sure she would guess the truth from some of your expressions; so I burnt it. She never read a line of it; and as to my husband, he loves me better than I deserve; and, even now, I doubt whether he would believe a word against my truthfulness and honour. If he did, I am quite certain it would break his heart.

That is the best argument you could use, Ursula. I would fain spare you from being humiliated in his eyes, and in those of your children. On one condition I will remit part of your punishment. It is that I never look upon your false fair face again. That you leave this part of the country at once and for ever. But you must give me your written confession before we part, that it was you, not I, that framed that insulting letter; and I must show it to my sister and to Sir Henry and Lady Balfour. In their eyes my honour *must* stand clear. Other opinions are of less importance, and my right to be the owner of Hagleth, and to dwell in the Halls of my ancestors, will not be disputed. Vansittart has known all along that I was living. Langden of the Uplands recognised me immediately.

Oh, I do not want to keep you out of your own house; and no more will Arnold, when he is told that you are in England. I have never been happy at Hagleth. I will go away next week willingly, and never, never trouble you

more. Only, dear Hugh dear, dear cousin let us not part in anger.

Again she put out her trembling hand, and this time Hugh Derinzy did not refuse to take it. Memories of the old home where they had been brought up together, and of his parents who had loved her, softened his just wrath; but he did not let her go until she had placed in his hand the document which avowed her guilt, and fully exonerated him from the ungentlemanly action for which he had paid so severe a penalty.

When she had signed her name to the paper he drew up, Mrs. Derinzy put on her gloves, and looking sadly round the old room, bade him farewell. The voices of Hugo and Viola, below, in the garden, made her hurry down stairs, as she did not wish her son to see her and the tenant of Millburn together. It was a pardonable concealment that she said nothing on the way home to Hugo of their interview; leaving him to believe that she had spent the rather unreasonably long period of his loitering by the waterfall with Viola, and their by no means rapid walk home, in perfect solitude.

When the Hall came in sight, at the end of a long vista through the trees, Mrs. Derinzy could not altogether conceal her agitation. She drew her veil and her cloak closely round her, and sank back in the corner of her carriage, as she looked at the home of her infancy, girlhood, and womanhood. For the first time she saw in its true light, as if revealed by some sudden flash of light, her own erring conduct; and thought what a wreck she had made, in her cowardly wilfulness, of the happiness of her whole life.

Colonel Derinzy was at the door to help her to alight. He generally did come out for the purpose when at home, and he had returned an hour before. His first glance showed him that his wife had been weeping; and he hesitated as to the best manner of breaking to her what he feared would give her much pain, the intelligence of his having resigned the superintendence of Stella's property, and announced his intention of leaving Hagleth.

His heart smote him when he heard her say, while she paused at the door before entering the house, that she had never seen the old Hall look so beautiful as it did that day, under the last golden gleam of the autumnal afternoon light.

## Chapter 30.

A flower, though drooping, far too gay were found;  
A leaf still verdant; oh, it would not do!  
But Autumn shed a golden shower around,  
And gave me this, and this I give to you.

But should these tints these rich autumnal dyes,  
Appear too gay to suit the emblem well,  
They are but dying tints, the Muse replies,  
A withered leaf that faded ere it fell

It was not without considerable difficulty and delay that Colonel Derinzy could make up his mind, or fashion his phrases, in such a manner as he imagined would convey with least pain to his nervous, delicate wife the intelligence that she must prepare to leave Hagleth Hall. It was the house where he had wooed and won her to be his bride where their children had been born and he believed that the old place was very dear to her.

Moreover, though he had a small estate, and a comfortable, old-fashioned red-brick mansion in a pleasant Warwickshire village, to which he could take her, it had none of the wild beauty of the ancient Hall, hid among woods under the Crest, to recommend it; nor would their income, style of living, and position in society, when thrown on their own resources, at all equal what they had enjoyed since their marriage.

## Carding–Mill Valley

Little did he suppose the relief his guarded, hesitating communication afforded to the trembling woman, who was wearying herself with conjectures how she could best fulfil her somewhat rash promise to Hugh Derinzy. Ursula recollected with dismay, when she returned home, that she was pledged to leave the neighbourhood without delay; and she feared to arouse the impatience of the man she had so deeply wronged, by any procrastination in performing the terms of her engagement.

Mrs. Derinzy could hardly suppress an ejaculation of thankfulness when she gathered from her reluctant husband, after a good deal of unnecessary circumlocution, the facts of the case. As it was, he was quite astonished at her calmness, and thanked her with unusual warmth for so cordially entering into his feelings of injured dignity.

Of course you could do nothing else. You were perfectly right, she said; and I dare say we shall be happier in a smaller place. It will be our very own, and we shall be quite independent. Here we were, in a manner, always in rather a false position.

Well, I do not know that I quite agree with you as to the past, though I am glad you take it in such a sensible light, said her husband doubtfully. As long as Stella's confidence was mine I felt myself, as the heir to this large property, quite in my proper place. Until yesterday she never gave me a hint that she wished to take more upon herself. It would not in the least surprise me if, when she found out all the work and worry she has rashly undertaken, she were to wish for me back again to manage the estate.

Oh, you would not humour her, said his wife anxiously. I always say it never answers to take back even a domestic. There is never the same comfortable understanding again. I think Stella has sometimes regretted leaving the Hall. She would do it, and declared her tiny cottage in the street was little short of perfection; but I dare say she did not like it so well afterwards. I was always distressed by her refusing to visit us at the Hall, and I am sure people noticed it. Depend upon it, all is for the best.

I think Lady Balfour did expect to meet Stella at that foolish garden–party of yours, said Colonel Derinzy. Our neighbours give us little to regret in leaving them; they have been anything but cordial.

Mrs. Derinzy, who did not wish to press that part of the subject, answered him more fluently than usual.

I am quite sure I shall like Mottisford better than the Hall; and we shall find much more sociability in the village than among these dreary hills.

Yes, I was fond of them once, she continued, seeing that her husband looked surprised. But, of late, I have become tired of their monotony. One peak just answering to another, with just the same sort of green valley running up between them. I never willingly go beyond my pretty flower–garden. I shall be sorry to leave that, I confess; but we must make another. We will lay it out, as we did this one when we were first married, together. There was nothing at all like it nothing half so pretty here before. It will be quite like a second honeymoon.

His usually cold undemonstrative wife's flattering manner and cordial acquiescence in the proposed change delighted her husband. They had not had such a pleasant conversation for years. It was indeed like a renewal of their youth.

I only hope the young people will take this news as philosophically as you have done, he said. It will be a change for them, and they are all fond of Hagleth. Of course, as far as Leo is concerned, it makes no difference whatever. Stella expressed the highest opinion of his judgment, and of Hugo's, who will be her heir. She wishes them to assist her in business matters; and she has several times expressed a wish that Leo should marry, and offered to fit up the old Vicarage for him whenever he had chosen a bride.

## Carding–Mill Valley

No, it makes no difference to Leo, said his wife somewhat absently and slowly, as if meditating on the future fortune of her sons; but Hugo, Arnold; it will be a sad change for him!

Oh Stella will never marry she always speaks of our eldest son as her heir. He is a prodigious favourite, said Colonel Derinzy, whilst a sharp pang shot through his wife's heart. I only wish our own future was as well assured as his. Ursula, shall you not regret the old Hall where you have lived so long, I trust, happily? I vow, when I thought of the sacrifices such a parting would entail upon you, I could almost have taken back my proud words. You are showing a very noble indifference to what would cost many women very dear.

Mrs. Derinzy did not speak for several minutes. She was still thinking about her eldest son, and the change which she foresaw in his prospects. Hugo always said that Stella ought to live at the Hall, she said gravely. It was not my fault that she went away. We might all have been happier not parted. But she had always a proud spirit.

She looked proud enough yesterday, said her husband, laughing. How her eyes sparkled; as they used to do when that Spanish friend of Hugh's wrote verses to them, which you translated so prettily. I only recollect the first line: 'Oh, starry eyes divine!' and something ending, 'So that on me you shine.' It came into my head when she put herself into such a state of excitement.

The idea of your remembering my poetry. I never knew you quote a line before in my life, said his wife, flattered in her turn. The sooner we tell the young people what has happened the better; and they must learn that what cannot be cured must be endured. Will you tell them or shall I?

Colonel Derinzy, who was not in the habit of having confidential interviews with his children, gladly left the discharge of this duty to his wife. He had succeeded so well, he said, in the part he had undertaken, and was so much more than satisfied with her reception of the unexpected tidings, that he would not venture to spread them wider. Very soon the whole neighbourhood would be gossiping over their last nine days' wonder.

Mrs. Derinzy thought in her own innermost heart that their surprise would soon be superseded by a yet greater shock; but she said nothing. Her daughters were by no means as indifferent to the idea of leaving the Hall as she had shown herself. Laura especially, not long introduced into society, and feeling that it had appreciated her, however coldly it had closed its ranks against her parents, disliked excessively the idea of a narrow village circle. Her younger sisters wept bitterly when told that the beautiful gardens and grounds which they had looked upon as their own were no longer to be their haunts. Each corner of the old house and gardens was dear to them, and connected with the memories of childhood.

Althea was at once invited by her clerical brother, to whom she was devotedly attached, to share his new home. He could not get through his duties without her to help him. She was better than a curate. For the present the three elder children would remain at the Hall while the Parsonage was being prepared for their reception. The rest of the family, it was settled, were to leave Hagleth as soon as possible.

Stella had cordially invited Mrs. Derinzy to prolong her stay as long as might suit her convenience; but, for the first time in her life, there was no hesitation or uncertainty in Ursula's response. She thanked her cousin, but declined to prolong her stay. It was far better, she said, as her husband had done, that what must be gone through should be done quickly. Her whole time was occupied with preparations for departure, and the families at the Hall and the cottage saw very little of each other. The girls could not help feeling somewhat hurt; and scarcely yet realized the fact that they were really leaving Hagleth, as a home, for ever.

Hugo Derinzy, though, as his mother well knew, the most affected by impending changes, troubled himself the least of them all, about them, at present. He had always disliked his father's position, and wished that Stella had retained her proper place and authority at the Hall. She treated him with great consideration now, and in the settlement of accounts and affairs he acted as mediator between them; assisted by Mr. Vansittart, whose

## Carding–Mill Valley

knowledge of the property, and of the family business, which he and his father had always conducted, made his presence alike useful and desirable.

Colonel Derinzy had laid aside his jealousy and made no unnecessary difficulties. On the whole, as Ursula did not mind it and youth loves change he began to think it a good thing that he should be relieved from arduous responsibility. When they returned in the course of years, which he by no means wished to shorten, he should be his own master; and, meanwhile, he should be living on his own land, and working for his own benefit.

I told you those dead leaves blowing upon me would bring bad luck, when you drove me through the valley in that high wind; said his mother, one day when she and her eldest son were talking over many things past, present, and to come. By–the–bye, Hugo, you never told me what you and Violet were talking about at Stella's Waterfall, that day. You were a long time coming back.

You might as well ask me where all those dead leaves that plagued you so much were drifting to, or inquire, as some one does in Laura's pretty song not very wisely 'What has become of last year's snow?' said Hugo, laughing and colouring.

He did not pursue the subject; nor did he confess that a bright brown leaf, picked up and thrown carelessly away by Violet Forester, had been treasured by him ever since that windy autumn day's ramble among the hills.

The girl's manner that day had puzzled him, causing more anxious thought than he had ever before bestowed on any young lady. There was something sad, almost, if he had been more vain, tender, in her looks and words; especially when, he told her that his mother wished to thank her father for the shelter he had given her and his sister. Viola seemed to shrink at first from their gratitude, and, then, almost to beg for their continued friendship. Her father, she said, sometimes spoke harshly; but his heart was tender and true. If in the future any unkindness should arise, she hoped that they would all try to judge him and herself leniently.

Hugo had tried to reassure her, but Violet only became more sad the more he sought to sooth her. She said she wished that they had never come to Millburn. There was some evil fate pursuing them, which she feared would involve others. Even the wind had an ominous moan, and the waterfall with its plaintive echo seemed to be mocking her.

He wondered, now, whether she could have heard anything through their guest, Mr. Vansittart, or from the hill folk, among whom she often wandered with Lucy, relative to and forewarning her of his father's approaching removal from the stewardship; which, even at that very moment, was being settled. She certainly seemed to know or to guess something which gave her a deeper interest than he had hoped to see her manifest in the fate and fortunes of himself and his family.

It seemed unaccountable and very perplexing to the young people at the Hall to see their mother, who had never within their recollection been active and cheerful, comparatively so on what they considered so sad an occasion. They dared not question their father as to the reason of the sudden change; and experience had taught them that they were not likely to receive enlightenment from their mother, beyond what had been vouchsafed in a few studied phrases, dictated, they believed, by Colonel Derinzy. His sole interference with their preparations for leaving their much–loved home had been a stern injunction not to take anything with them except their own absolute personal property. They were desired not to remove a flower–root from the large gardens, or any books from the shelves, unless they could prove that they had purchased the volumes, or brought the plants with them from the Riviera.

Mrs. Derinzy superintended and accelerated her faithful Marie's preparations for departure. She was consumed by a feverish impatience to get away before Stella knew the secret she had kept locked in her own bosom so many years. Though she knew that her cousin would keep his word, and hoped that even to those whom he had



excepted from his promise to shield her from humiliation, he would not hastily accuse her, she did not know how or when he might reveal himself to his sister.

Under this impression she proposed to her husband that they should precede the rest of the party, and travel together, quite alone, to Mottisfont; leaving her daughters to complete the packing and to pay a few farewell visits. She herself did not mean to say good–bye, even to Stella. It was a trial she could not endure; and Miss Derinzy's conduct to her husband quite exonerated her from the necessity of paying what, with her present feelings, would be a mere formal exercise of politeness.

Her repetition of the idea, which she saw had pleased him, that it would be like a second honeymoon, won over Colonel Derinzy; who was himself very indignant with Stella, though he paid her all possible deference, and kept up, in their necessary meetings for the discharge of business, a calm haughty dignity. He gave a message from his wife, principally of his own invention, but suggested by her, to the effect that she felt too keenly the want of confidence shown in him to be able to bear a farewell interview.

Miss Derinzy, who was much grieved by the precipitate measures adopted, and yet not inclined to retract, made no answer at the moment; but the next morning, at an early hour, she drove to the Hall the first time she had entered it since her departure years before and broke through all the defences which Ursula still strove to erect between them. But after all it was but a pretence at cordiality. Ursula wrapped herself up in a mantle of reserve, and was impervious to all arguments. She had made up her mind to leave Hagleth at once, and longed to begin life afresh. She never wished or intended to see the place again. It had been a mistake, their remaining there so long; and she should be much happier in a house, however humble, of her own.

At the last her feigned composure gave way, and she threw herself, weeping copiously, into Stella's arms; urging her always to love and to forgive her silly little cousin. The promise, was given readily. They had been, in spite of their very dissimilar characters, companions and friends from their childhood, and many links of association still existed between them which could never in either case be entirely broken.

Colonel Derinzy, though unexpectedly and greatly relieved by his wife's apparent bravery and confidence, did feel the parting from his stately home very deeply. He knew that his position in his native county, though highly respectable, would be very inferior one to the one he had held as the heir–at–law, and during Stella's lifetime the manager, of the wide lands of Hagleth. He loved the beautiful place dearly, as is the wont of men whose affections do not diverge into many channels. He was very proud of the ancient house where he had, in her youthful beauty, courted his wife. No other place, and no other woman, had ever inspired the same feelings; and he was not one to change easily.

It needed the soft blandishments to which Ursula almost for the first time in her married life had recourse, to reconcile him to the alteration in their prospects. A stern regret darkened his features as he passed through the high–arched portal; having gone back for a moment to cast one parting look round the large hall, full of family pictures and memories of the past. After a time, he muttered to himself, all will be mine. When that proud woman sleeps with her ancestors, Ursula and I will reside here with our children, and then we shall really be master and mistress of Hagleth.

But it was in a softer mood and with better thoughts in his mind that he rejoined his wife, and took his seat in the travelling carriage; ordering the coachman to drive slowly through the grand woods, and to pause on the bridge, at the spot where the last view was to be obtained of the old Hall under the crested hill.

## Chapter 31.

## Carding–Mill Valley

The strong have bowed down, the beauteous are dead;  
The blast through the forest sighs mournfully;  
And bowed is full many a lofty head;  
But there's fruit on the lowly wild–brier tree!

It has cheered you bird that, with joyous swell,  
Sings, 'What are the gaudy flowers to me?  
But here will I build my nest and dwell  
By the simple, faithful, wild–brier tree.'

A keen autumn wind had swept the leaves from the trees, and a touch of night–frost had blighted the flowers alike in Mrs. Derinzy's heart–shaped parterre at Hagleth, and in Stella's cottage borders; but the sheltered banks of the stream which flowed through the ravine were bright with the berries of the wild roses, and gorgeously–tinted ferns. Violet wandered about the garden listlessly, scarcely noticing its beauty. Something, she knew not what, had sprung up betwixt herself and her father, marring their perfect union. Never before, when they were together, had she felt that, little as he had told her of the past, there was any lack of confidence on his part; but now a shadow of mistrust had fallen over them.

She had heard, but not from him, that Colonel and Mrs. Derinzy were about to leave the Hall, and only a few days later that they were gone; and she could not help fancying that her father had exercised some power over events which had brought this change about. But he said not a word to her of what was on everyone else's lips.

Mr. Vansittart, who doubtless possessed his confidence, might, perhaps, have enlightened her; but Violet was too honourable to question him. Hers was no light, eager, frivolous curiosity. The girl dreaded, whilst she could not help longing, to know the truth. She felt quite certain that, in some manner quite incomprehensible to herself, she and her father were responsible for the breaking up of the household at Hagleth Hall; which she guessed must be causing bitter grief to the young hearts which had at one time yearned for her friendship.

Did Laura and Leo, Althea and Hugo, now regard her as their enemy? What was the mystery which enveloped them all, and why did it press upon her so heavily? Hugo had not shown any distrustfulness, or any fear of the future, on the day when he had found her by Stella's Waterfall; but Mrs. Derinzy's eyes were blinded by tears, and her tone of voice more plaintive than ever, when she bade her what proved to be a last farewell. She recollected the sad look which the Mistress of Hagleth had cast back at the old house, as if she knew that it was a final leave–taking; and the manner with which she had gathered a flower and put it in her pocket–book, saying that she should never part with it.

Lucy had told her young mistress that Mrs. Derinzy had asked for the master, and that he had gone to the drawing–room and stayed there for nearly an hour. What could have passed in that long interview between him and the woman he had so sedulously avoided with whom he had forbidden her to hold any intercourse? Had he told her that Hugh Derinzy, whom he accused her of having injured past forgiveness, was on his way home? Was it at his bidding that she and her husband and children had quitted their home?

As yet no one but herself seemed to think the departure of Colonel Derinzy was more than a temporary absence. Stella had spoken of it in that light, and tried so to regard it herself, though Mrs. Derinzy, in their leave–taking, had spoken of the change as more lasting; but she was apt to exaggerate. At all events, a time must come most likely soon, her cousin thought when Arnold, Ursula, and their children would return and be happy at the Hall.

Stella shivered as she looked back at the place, once so dearly loved, after that painful farewell visit to her cousin. Ursula's flood of tears had melted the stronger–minded woman's long maintained reserve. For the moment she had forgotten all her errors, her paltry subterfuges and evasions, and saw but the playmate of her childhood, the companion of her youth, the sunny little blossom of her home, and the favourite of her own parents. Had she done

## Carding—Mill Valley

well to drive her away from Hagleth? She would have given the world to have restrained the outburst of pride which had offended Colonel Derinzy, and to have put everything on its former footing! Was it worth while, at her age, and with her weak health, to begin to fight life's battle anew; with not a strong arm, scarcely even a loving glance, to sustain her?

She had seen none of the young people that morning. Under other circumstances they would have flown to meet and been delighted to welcome her; but now she felt that the family held together, and that she was regarded by them as an alien.

If the Hall, with numerous packing-cases standing about full, half-filled, and empty, and that indescribable air of discomfort which the approaching departure of its inmates gives to a house, had appeared desolate and forbidding, the aspect of the Cottage chilled her to the soul. She almost regretted having announced that no change would be made at present, and longed to take refuge with her young cousins. After their father and mother were gone, they would surely reopen their hearts to her!

Weary and disheartened, with the wind sweeping in dreary gusts down the village street, carrying the dead leaves before it, Stella surveyed the tiny domain where she had lately been contented, with sometimes an approach towards happiness, almost despairingly. She looked at the accounts and business papers sent over to her by Colonel Derinzy, who had purposely and pompously magnified the amount of trouble she was likely henceforward to have to undergo, and pushed them all on one side with a shudder.

Neither heart nor brain seemed fitted for the task she had undertaken; and she remained for hours in the same place, chilled with mental and physical pain, entirely unoccupied. One wild cry went up to Heaven for aid. Oh for a friend, a child, a *brother*, to help her to bear the load of responsibility for one strong loving arm to which she might cling, one true heart on which she might rest her throbbing heart and be at peace!

In the silent watches of that utterly sleepless night, while she communed with her own spirit and was still, Stella found comfort and strength, beyond her own, on which she knew that she could rely. Towards morning she fell into a calm, dreamless, restful sleep, from which her faithful attendant took care not to rouse her till it had done its healing work. When she awoke, Stella felt stronger and better; she did not regret that she had taken upon herself duties which had been appointed for her performance, and felt sure that all was ordered for the best.

Stella determined to send for Hugo, and fully to explain all that had passed between herself and his father. She knew that for a long time the young officer had felt impatient of his parent's position, and that he had more than once urged her to return to the Hall. Now she resolved to do so, after a brief interval, keeping him with her to afford counsel and support; and also detaining Althea and Leo, at least for a time, as her companions. It was right that they should have stood by their parents during the first shock of their impending banishment, but she felt convinced that she had still a warm corner in each of their hearts ready to receive her (when they understood her motives of action more clearly) as their dear Cousin Stella. None of them would long resent her resumption of her undoubted rights; or wish to remain, against her will, in what she was sure they would all soon perceive, as Hugo had already done, to be a false position.

After passing the morning in writing and arranging various matters, principally of a domestic nature, leaving the business connected with the property to wait till she could take counsel with Hugo and Mr. Vansittart, Stella put on her hat and cloak; and, taking her alpenstock, walked slowly towards her favourite seat, commanding a view of the mountains. The wind had gone down; it was a clear, bright autumnal afternoon, with a delightful feeling of crispness in the air. Many of the cottages, like her own dwelling, were covered with the bright Virginia creeper, and the hedges were full of scarlet hips and haws. Near the turn to the Hall some large holly trees were glowing in the sunlight. There were no children at play, and the long street was quiet.

## Carding–Mill Valley

A profound sense of peaceful resignation, like the clear weather after the gale, fell upon Stella's overwrought mind as she went on her way. An elderly woman, sitting at her cottage door, looked after her, but she did not stop to speak to any one; and her people knew that she had recently been ill, and did not trouble her. Though she was quite alone she did not feel solitary or helpless; a strength above her own seemed to abide upon her.

When she turned round the corner of the rock she saw laid on the stony ledge a bright–berried garland, such as children make for some village or church festival. It was quite fresh; not like the withered bunch of the cotton plant, resembling edelweiss, gathered by some stranger, as Langden had told her, in the marshes under the crested hill.

Feeling a little tired, Stella sat down and looked at the mountains, which seemed as if the storm of the night before had washed away all stains from their bright brows. Many leaves had fallen from the woods since she last sat there, revealing more plainly their peculiar formation and characteristics. She knew every spot touched by those bright rays, each line that curved so gracefully against the blue sky. The sun shone dazzlingly; but she fancied, as she had done before Langden approached her, that the recess on the opposite side of the valley was not empty. Some stranger, some wandering artist, might often be seen there wrapt in contemplation of the winding valley and wonderful panorama of mountain scenery.

This time, neither cold blasts nor superstitious tremors assailed her, as had been the case when so recently risen from a sick couch. Her anxieties were laid aside, she felt younger and stronger, at rest with the world and herself. Surely she had acted rightly in taking back a trust which had never been intended to lead to complete abandonment of her natural claims and binding duties.

Whilst occupied with these reflections Stella had looked away from the opposite niche in the rocky wall of the ravine, and forgotten that for a moment she had seen or fancied it occupied. When she again lifted her gaze, which had rested on the brook, winding far below through the valley, she saw plainly a man's tall figure standing in front of the Knight's stony table.

Why did her heart beat so wildly, and her eyes strive more plainly to distinguish that distant form? Often and often had she seen her beloved brother stand just in that attitude, looking down the valley. She had started more than once when Hugo, or Leo, who each possessed some of his ways of bearing himself, suddenly confronted her; but theirs were lighter, more buoyant forms, more like what Hugh's had been in times long gone by.

The stranger now standing motionless, backed by the grey wall of granite, was taller, older, and stouter than either of the young Derinzys, or than her brother. Neither did he at all resemble the men of the hills, stalwart yeomen, like Langden; or any dilettante artist, or careless sportsman. His attitude was easy, and yet commanding. There was something of ownership, even in his way of standing. The steady gaze, proudly cast around, might have denoted him lord of all he surveyed.

Stella trembled, and laid her hand on the rough shelf near her, intending to take up the humble offering prepared for her, the bramble–wreath with its blood–red berries, and to return home; but a spell seemed laid upon her. She felt as weak as when just risen from her sick bed; and watched with growing emotion the stately figure, now moving slowly away from the Knight's Table. She saw him turn round the ledge of rock, and mount some steps cut in the stone; then a clump of trees hid him from view. Again he emerged from their shade; and, for the first time, looked across towards her. Had it been Hugo or Leo, a few bounding strides would have brought them within speaking distance if it were a stranger he would probably descend into the valley but the man she was watching pursued neither of these courses. He stood still for a moment, gazing at her, and then turned away slowly; taking a somewhat circuitous path, which led round, above her station, to the village.

She breathed more freely when she thought he had gone past; but again her pulses throbbed as her ear caught the sound of crackling leaves, and a broken branch in the thicket overhead. She must be dreaming, but she fancied

## Carding–Mill Valley

that a well–remembered voice said softly, Stella.

More than once, in her far off almost forgotten girlhood, had her brother, in that very spot in that same manner taken her by surprise. The track was grown over with grass, clothed with brambles, might be said to exist no longer, was never used; yet she now distinctly heard the boughs parting, leaves rustling, a stone disturbed by an impatient tread, and she felt that she was not alone.

Stella, said that voice again, in hurried but unmistakable accents do not be frightened. It is I it is your brother.

Miss Derinzy tried to speak or move, but could not accomplish either. Her eyes were fixed on the jutting angle of rock which hid the pathway.

No, it was not madness not the delusion caused by over–wrought nerves, which formerly, before she gave up hope, had sometimes brought that face before her. It was Hugh, her long–lost brother; altered, indeed, by the years which had passed over him, but still it *was* Hugh Derinzy, who the next moment stood before her.

Not a doubt crossed her mind. In a moment Stella was in his arms. She did not faint or weep, or even tremble. The frail feeble woman seemed suddenly to have the strength of her youth with its untiring love revived in her; as suddenly as she had lost both, God's good gifts were in that moment restored to her, together.

She lifted herself up, and stood unsupported gazing at him. Her whole soul was in her beaming eyes. Years and weakness had, for the time at least, passed from her; she looked and felt like the loving girl from whom he had parted five–and–twenty years before.

Can you forgive me, Stella, for my cruelty? I never knew till now how much you loved me. Alas! there has been more of treachery than I guessed to keep us apart. You did not believe me guilty?

I? said Stella. Never for one moment. I told you so in every letter I wrote, but you never answered one of them.

It was the loss of confidence in you that broke the last bond that drew me homeward, said Hugh. I never received a line from you after fortune turned against me. Our wicked little cousin deceived us both. She has not, I suspect, confessed half her treason even now; but I am possessed of Ursula's written admission that she, in jest, out of jealousy, wrote the letter which Balfour challenged me for sending to his affianced wife. I suspected our domestic traitor, but she would not own to it; and, without proof, I could not brand her with such an accusation. She has paid the penalty of a blighted life for her cowardice and deceit; and on condition that she cleared my honour to you and the Balfours, I have allowed her to escape farther punishment. But had I known how far the duplicity had been carried, I doubt whether I would have spared her deeper humiliation, and forgiven her; with the proviso that I was never to see her face again.

Stella's newly–regained strength forsook her, and she sank down on the rocky ledge.

Is it possible that Ursula could so deceive me she exclaimed; that all these years she has had falsehood in her heart and on her lips?

It is beyond a doubt that she played you false. At first it did not occur to her how much harm her wicked practical joke might do. Afterwards she was involved in such a web of deceit that the poor little cowardly soul could not free herself. For the sake of those dear to us both (who loved her, and who are gone to their rest), and of her husband and children, let the matter rest. What matters it whether she told one lie or a dozen, since we are reunited?

## Carding–Mill Valley

Stella looked unsatisfied. I little knew how much she had sinned against us when she made me promise, previous to her departure from Hagleth, that I would always love and forgive my silly little cousin. I did not understand what she meant, or why she was so unwilling to see me. Hugh, I am very sorry for her children.

Yes; and for her husband, who was merely a narrow–minded martinet, and believed what she chose to insinuate. He might have stood up for me like a man; but it was not in his nature to overstep the bounds of red–tape and War–Office conventionalities. They are gone. Let us say no more than is absolutely necessary about them. Stella, I have not even told my child who I am, or why I came here. You were the first to whom I owed the revelation of my long–hidden secret.

You shall take me to see your Violet to–morrow, said Stella. I ought to have gone sooner; but Mr. Vansittart never understood me, and I did not I could not bear to go to the Carding–Mill Valley, the scene of our old walks and rides. I think I could get there now on foot if I had your arm to lean upon.

We will not trust your newly–regained strength too far. Let me now assist you on your way home, said her brother, drawing her hand fondly through his arm. There is much to be told by each of us before we can even believe in our great joy. But I shall not let you have any more excitement this evening. We part for the present when we reach the village street. Oh, Stella, how could I ever have supposed that you would prefer that creeper–covered cottage in the street to the dignity of being Mistress of Hagleth?

Stella pressed his hand fondly. How could I find pleasure in a place which reminded me, at every turn of the winding wood–walks, that I had lost its master, my own and only brother? But you are right. We will not to–day revert to the past, or look forward to the future. It is enough for me to feel that the burden of honours and duties which I had not strength to bear is taken from me; and that whenever we return to the home of our youth, we shall re–enter the gates of Hagleth together.

## Chapter 32.

Their groves of sweet myrtle let foreign lands reckon,  
Where bright–beaming summers exalt the perfume;  
Far dearer to me yon lone glen of green bracken,  
Wi' the burn stealing under the long yellow broom;  
Far dearer to me are yon humble broom bowers,  
Where the bluebell and gowan lurk lowly unseen:  
For there, lightly tripping among the wild flowers,  
A–listening the linnet, oft wanders my Jean.

Burns.

Hugo Derinzy the young soldier laddie who had spent a great portion of his brief life in sultry climes, thought that no flowers of the tropics, or the sunny skies of the Mediterranean, equalled the sweet, modest English violet, as he looked across the stream into the secluded garden at Millburn. It did not occur to him that the step was less buoyant, the fair face less cheerful, and the air of his bonnie flower more listless than usual, until without hesitation he had crossed the stream and stood beside her in the pathway.

Circumstances had given him an excuse for frequent visits to Mr. Forester's guest. His father had delegated to him the transaction of business respecting the management of the estate with Mr. Vansittart even before his departure; and, now, Colonel and Mrs. Derinzy were gone, and Hugo was left to act as his father's representative.

## Carding—Mill Valley

The young man's heart too was sad within him; for, although as yet neither he nor Violet knew how important was the change in prospect, both were instinctively conscious that the course of events was drawing them, on blindly and wildly, as yet they scarcely knew or guessed whither. In curt, manly phrases Hugo confided to Violet as they slowly walked together beside the stream, which brawled more noisily than in summer, how deeply he sympathised in his father's regret at leaving Hagleth. Although he had never altogether liked their position since Stella abandoned the Hall to them entirely, he yet felt how much it must cost a man of earnest character and steadfast industry like his father to be transplanted, and to find the labour of a life—time unvalued and rejected.

Hugo's cheeks flushed. I would give the world, he said, that we had never settled at Hagleth; and that, above all, my father had not prematurely given up his profession. But he acted, as he always does, conscientiously; firmly believing, when the care of two helpless ladies rested upon him, that it was the right, indeed the only, course to pursue. Over and over again I have urged Cousin Stella's return to the Hall; but she would have her way, and it has brought us all into a false position. Though I am glad my father has *at last* set himself free, I am very sorry to see him, at his age, cast adrift?

I have never spoken but once to your father, said Viola, while the colour rose to her cheeks. It is of your mother I have been thinking all yesterday and this morning. How she must feel leaving her home, the beautiful garden your sisters have described! Why, even this wilderness of rocks and brambles has charms for me. I should grieve very much if I thought that Mr. Vansittart wanted to live here, and that all the trouble I have taken would be lost to us.

Yes; it must be a trial, but my mother bears it bravely, said Hugo. She was more energetic last week than I ever remember to have seen her. Women are much more heroic than we are; sooner get acclimatized, and even like the transplantation. It is men like my father who cannot endure change. Some day you will wonder how you could bear this rugged solitude, even though you have contrived to make it a fitter bower than even Dame Nature formed for you.

No, I shall always love Millburn. It is more like a home than any of my former resting—places, said Viola. I do not remember my birthplace or my mother, and since her death we have been wanderers.

She spoke very sadly, and looked round as if to take leave of her wild garden and favourite flowers. Hugo came a step nearer.

Will you think me very presumptuous if in the far—off future, he said, I ask you to make your home where mine must one day be, Viola? I am nothing but a soldier, who must go where duty calls him. My first step will be to give up the over—liberal allowance my father has hitherto afforded me. I shall exchange into a less expensive regiment, and the next few years must be spent in active service; but some day I shall be master here; and, long before, I hope to have made myself independent. You say you do not care for state or luxury you are used to lead a wandering life. Could we not cast in our lots together, and be happy even with moderate means now; having, if we live, a certain prospect of affluence before us in the future?

Viola's head drooped lower, she did not speak. Hugo ventured still nearer, and passed his arm round her slender form. He saw that she trembled.

You told me that the best watchword was 'duty.' Let it be ours for a time, until these troubles lighten. Look how clear the sky is over the Crest. Let us look forward to dwelling in the old Hall, under the shadow of the woods and hills. My mother already loves you, Cousin Stella is sure to do so, and my sisters and brother will be like your own. You will never have to complain of loneliness again.

And my father ! what will he do without me exclaimed Viola; shocked at the momentary forgetfulness of which she felt conscious of having been guilty. If I, guarded by his care, surrounded by marks of affection, have been

## Carding–Mill Valley

often lonely what would it be for him to be left solitary to be forsaken by his only child?

But, dear one, he must be prepared to part with you. He cannot hope long to keep you with him.

As it is, he leaves you for weeks nay, months as much alone as if you had no ties. This fact made me long to protect and cherish the fluttering white–winged dove in the thicket, deserted by her mate. Nay, I will not press you for an answer now all is dark and unsettled but when the clouds break when I see my way through life more clearly I shall plead for it; and with such energy that I feel sure I shall win my suit. Till then, give me a ray of hope to cheer me, on what, for a time, will be a stony, desolate track.

He took from her unresisting hand a tiny ring of little value, and fastening it to his watch chain, concealed it in his vest, replacing it with an onyx seal, the gift of his mother when he first left home to join his regiment. Viola hastily bade him adieu, and he yielded to her agitated entreaties that he would leave her. Her father might return at any moment; and, although he was too manly and upright to dream of concealing what had passed between them, he felt that he must have time to reflect on the best mode of revealing what would doubtless be unwelcome news to Viola's only surviving parent.

Viola had so little time in which to recover from her agitation before her father and Mr. Vansittart came into the drawing–room, that they must have perceived her embarrassment, had not both been preoccupied. The lawyer was the first of the trio to reveal what was weighing upon his mind.

Upon my word it is too provoking to have lost the enjoyment of such a fine afternoon; and this must positively be my last week in the country, he said testily. Business is business, and ought to be attended to but what is to be expected from a gay young cavalry officer, eh, Miss Violet ? I like the old English name and flower much the best. Of course it does not matter, but why that fine–looking fellow should entirely forget an appointment, and keep me waiting for hours and never come near the place, passes my comprehension. An appointment, too, of his own making.

Captain Derinzy was here, said Viola, who had been brought up to speak the truth at all hazards, feeling as if it had never before cost her such an effort. But he only stayed for a very short time, talking to me in the garden. He did not come into the house.

Did he leave no message? said the lawyer, still too much occupied with his own annoyance to notice her embarrassment. What did he say?

Viola seemed trying to recollect. No, I do not think he left any message. We were speaking principally about Colonel Derinzy and his regret at leaving Hagleth. It seems a very hard case, after he has devoted his life to the management of the property, that he should be turned off almost at a moment's notice, like a defaulter.

Her father looked up from the paper he was reading.

Was that Hugo Derinzy's opinion or yours, Viola? he said, looking quickly at his blushing daughter.

Mine, she said promptly, not quite sure whether his manner did not express disapprobation, and unwilling to have drawn it upon Hugo. It does seem rather cruel of Miss Derinzy, after a life service, to part in anger, which must cast a slur upon her cousin, from him and his family. Captain Derinzy did not blame her, but I think he felt hurt. He only said that he wished they had never settled at Hagleth, or that Miss Derinzy had remained at the Hall.

More sense than might have been expected from a young fellow, said Mr. Vansittart. I have always considered that Miss Derinzy was much to blame in giving up her post, and now we see the result. Of course,



## Carding–Mill Valley

Colonel Derinzy will always be supposed to have abused his trust; though, upon my word, I do not believe him otherwise than strictly just, narrow–minded, and ill–tempered, but honest, and a gentleman to the backbone. It is her own fault if he was not equal to the responsibility most unwisely laid upon him.

Let no one blame Stella in my presence! Vansittart, you have been grossly deceived. That little false lady, who bewitched you four–and–twenty years ago, and who still must retain some of her subtle power, has *confessed* that she did her best to ruin Hugh Derinzy by robbing him of his last best earthly good his sister's trustful affection. Not one of her letters was permitted to reach him, and his were destroyed. So much for legal acumen and discrimination of character.

You don't mean it! said his old friend, with surprise. Well, I give up all hope of making my fortune as a detective. You seem to have brought matters to a crisis without me. I was just going to ask where you had been all the afternoon.

With my sister with Stella Derinzy. Violet, it is time you should know the whole truth. *I* am the owner of the Hagleth property, the self–exiled Hugh Derinzy.

His daughter turned pale. The truth, thus suddenly revealed, evidently inflicted pain.

Many years ago, as you already know this brother and sister parted: they have never met since, until to–day. Violet, do you feel no sympathy for them in their gladness or sorrow?

The girl, already secretly agitated, burst into tears. For several minutes she could not speak; her father vainly strove to soothe her.

Then *we have* been the cause of the banishment of Colonel Derinzy's family? she said wonderingly. It was the knowledge of her brother's return that made Miss Derinzy resolve on asserting her independence? Forgive me, she added imploringly; it is all so sudden. I am trying to understand. It seems too great a responsibility.

No, said her father gently. It was Colonel Derinzy's arbitrariness which made him go beyond his rights; and his bad temper, when Stella strove to check him, which made the rupture. She did not know till to–day that I was living.

And it is not the first time that Derinzy has lost his own cause, said the lawyer. Such ungracious fellows never get on in the world. It is a good thing that he overshot his mark, and instead of being made dictator, was deposed from his seat of judgment. The best thing Miss Derinzy has done for a long time. Allow me to congratulate you, my dear, he added, turning to Violet. Now we may drop the mask and welcome you to Hagleth, not as my tenant's daughter, but as your father's only child. I declare, business *must* wait. I shall not leave the shelter of the hills until I see you installed in the great house.

Oh, there is no hurry, said Viola, shrinking from the idea. The old family I mean Colonel and Mrs. Derinzy's sons and daughters are not yet gone. Surely it would be unmannerly to disturb them.

There is no need, said her father quietly. Neither is it necessary that you or Stella should remain longer out of your proper places. My sister will be the Mistress of Hagleth before the world is many days older, and Violet will be to her in place of a daughter. No one will dispute my claim to take possession of my home; for you, Vansittart, can fully establish the fact that I did not die five–and–twenty years ago, as I have been in communication with you ever since. Until the Parsonage is ready, Leo and Althea will be our guests; and I reckon also you, my dearest friend, as another for some time to come. There is room and to spare in the old house for us all.

The colour was gradually returning to Violet's cheeks, and smiles played round her eyes and lips. She seemed disposed to take a more cheerful view of the situation, and tenderly kissed her father.

Hugo is the only real sufferer, he said. Mind, little one, I do not love you the less for thinking more of others than of yourself. I shall leave you to break this terrible news to him compassionately, and he will always have a home at Hagleth. His interests will always, next to your own, be my chief consideration. Although I cannot promise that he will be my heir, I shall always regard him and treat him as a much–loved younger brother.

Violet accepted the task offered to her demurely. The shy sweet smile still lingered at the corner of her mouth as she withdrew herself from her father's arms, saying there was scarcely time left to change her dress. As she stood before the mirror, fastening a bright wreath of berries and autumn leaves in her hair, a light danced in her eyes and illuminated her expressive face; even whilst still the tears hung on her long lashes, and her half–parted lips quivered with subtle feelings, some of which were of mirth, others sorrowful.

## Chapter 33.

The soldier turned him from the feast  
When its mirth waxed loud and high;  
The pride of valour in his glance,  
Light laughter in his eye:  
For a softer spell than the wine–cup wreathes  
Is over his senses cast;  
And a woman's voice more witching breathes  
Than the song by the breeze borne past.

R.M.K.

In compliance with his daughter's earnest request, Hugh Derinzy allowed a few days to elapse before taking any further steps towards assuming his rightful name and station. The younger daughters of Colonel and Mrs. Derinzy, under the care of the head gardener, who disliked the soil and climate of the hill country, and had elected to follow the fortunes of the family to the rich land near the Warwickshire Avon, had left Hagleth for Mottisfont Grange, bearing with them, in spite of their father's prohibition, several choice relics of the flower–garden. Honesty not being usually as prevalent among flower–fanciers as it ought to be, and the temptation being too strong for resistance either on the part of the gardener or his young mistresses.

Laura, for the present, remained at the Hall, Hugo having undertaken to bring her home when Cousin Stella could spare him. She had joined them, and felt as though she was with her own children; but her brother, Viola, and Mr. Vansittart were still at Millburn. Reports, many and various, were current in the country, but they seemed vague and to lack foundation so long as the present position of the real master of the Hall remained unaltered. Langden kept his own counsel; and no one but Stella, Viola, and the lawyer had been as yet formally admitted to share the long well–kept secret.

One reason for its not being as yet divulged was that Hugo's brother officers were again staying at Hagleth Hall. They had met with indifferent sport; and on their return from the Moors, as had previously been arranged, they turned out of their direct route to visit their old comrade, arriving somewhat suddenly after a telegraphic message. The absence of the taciturn master and mistress of the house scarcely caused much surprise and occasioned no disappointment. It was easily accounted for, not untruly, on the plea of urgent business in a neighbouring county.

There was an unusual amount of gaiety afloat, and Laura and Hugo accompanied their lively guests to a county ball and some military festivities, to which the officers were a welcome addition. But all remarked that Hugo was

## Carding–Mill Valley

not in his usual spirits. Gladly would he have left those festive scenes when their mirth was at its highest pitch. Far rather would he have wandered with Viola by the river–side under the autumn moon, than have seen its soft light through the half–drawn curtains of a sultry banquet hall.

No opportunity had as yet been found for revealing his feelings to the father of their object, and only a few hasty words had been exchanged between these young lovers. But she had begged him to be patient in a voice which did not banish hope; and she wore his ring well guarded on her small finger the day when he called to apologize to Mr. Vansittart for his forgetfulness of their appointment. Mr. Forester, his daughter said, was from home.

Again the old Hall had assumed an unusually festive aspect to welcome Hugo's friends; and Laura had done the honours on behalf of her quiet cousin Stella with much grace and modesty. Leo and Althea were now living at the Parsonage; but they dined at the Hall, where Miss Balfour and her brothers were staying, Lady Balfour not having offered any opposition when she found that Colonel and Mrs. Derinzy had left the neighbourhood.

Sir Henry readily acquiesced in whatever contributed to his children's amusement; and did his best to reconcile her mother to Marion's temporary absence. It was good for her to be staying with younger companions for a time. He was sure her first visit away from home and alone had done May a world of good.

There was no drawback now to the quiet girl's perfect enjoyment no need to fear a rival in Viola, as they stood together on the platform in front of Millburn, with Leo pointing out different objects in the wide–stretching view as far as the first group of ashes in the valley or whilst they aided Laura in decorating the Chapel for the All Saints' Festival, or practised hymns with Althea. All apparently was in harmony above and around them, while the clear, youthful voices lifted up their songs of praise; and yet, like the crevasses hidden under the hard crust of the night's snow, these very beams of joy, like the sunrays of morning, might at any moment melt the treacherous surface on which their light feet were treading.

Hugo was not at all sorry when his friends' visit came to an end, after a gay cricket–match and dance, to which he accompanied them. The distance was too great for the ladies of his family, though invited to accompany him and Leo; and, for once, it was the gay young officer who was ready and eager to depart before the evening was over. He drove home rapidly, scarcely speaking; whilst his usually more sober–minded brother, elated by having greatly distinguished himself and carried his bat off the field, was still discussing the events of the day. Well, it was a comfort to think, if Hugo was not listening, that bright eyes would gleam at home when he narrated his successes, and yet softer blue eyes than those of his sister's beam in glad appreciation of his triumph.

Neither was he disappointed when he walked up to the Hall after breakfast the next morning. Laura and Marion were to the full as much excited as himself, and made him tell his story over and over again. They knew all the ins and outs of the noble game, and were acquainted with most of the players. Under those circumstances, and especially when the most skilful player is one very dear to them, ladies find cricket a most interesting game.

Hugo, meanwhile, freed from the necessity of entertaining his guests, had walked over to Millburn on the pretext of having business matters to discuss with Mr. Vansittart. In reality, he was dying to know his fate, and weary of suspense. It was full time that Violet's father should know how presumptuous were his aspirations. As he approached the lonely house his heart misgave him, and his hopes fell to zero. In what words could he ask this lonely man who had buried himself and his lovely daughter in this solitude, as if, like some Eastern king, he desired to seclude her from the approach of man to give up to him, a stranger, this one treasure?

The soldier's step grew less buoyant his usually bright fearless glance was dimmed his open brow became overclouded as he thought that, in all human probability, the dweller in the dark grey old house, now frowning down upon the water beneath the shadow of the rocks on the opposite side of the stream, would prohibit his paying any further attention to the modest Violet, blooming in the wilderness of ferns and brambles, unseen by other eyes than his own and those of her parent.

## Carding–Mill Valley

He could not catch sight of Viola or even of her maidens as he stood on the bridge, soldier–like in aspect, yet lacking courage to cross over. Hugo felt an arrant coward; almost like a thief lurking in ambush to beguile the one pet lamb belonging to this forlorn stranger. He, the heir of Hagleth for so Stella had often called him, and the coolness between her and his father had seemed to make her place more trust in him how could he have the hardihood to confess that, without one coveted possession, the lands and fortune, which must one day be his own, were utterly worthless? And yet it was sweet to have this prospect to offer her to think that the modest Violet was in all respects worthy of it; and that Stella must, when she knew her, be satisfied with the sweet womanly wife he had chosen.

Hugo Derinzy was still standing undecided, with his hand on the rail of the bridge across the stream, when a shadow fell upon the path; and the tall figure of a man came round the angle of the rocky pathway which led down from the house. He had only once, in the half–darkness of the night of the thunderstorm, been face to face with the owner of Millburn, but he recognised him instantly. His was not a form easily to be forgotten. He strode across the bridge, and went to meet him.

No thought of his purposed visit to Mr. Vansittart, the excuse he had made to his sisters, now occurred to him. There was but one word on his lips one cry in his heart, as he advanced bareheaded to meet her father: that word was, Viola.

As the young man stood still, extending his hand, with the morning sunshine falling on his light brown locks, and a flush of eager expectation on his cheeks, while the breath came quick and his heart beat almost audibly, the snow melted from the heart of the recluse. His own youth seemed to come back his spirits rose the dark cloud passed from his brow. He clasped warmly the young officer's outstretched hand; and in a cheery tone, with a glad voice and a manner as far as possible removed from what Hugo expected, heartily bade him welcome.

Come, he said, you have only been admitted to my house once, reluctantly, storm–driven, now I bid you cross its threshold as my friend. Nay more in the full clear morning sunlight Hugo Derinzy, my nearest of kin, next to my own child and my sister, I bid you welcome to Millburn.

I do not understand you, Mr. Forester, said the young man, full of his own thoughts, and noticing more the kind tone and glance than the exact meaning of the words. I hope that when I have said my say you will repeat your invitation, but I cannot enter your house on false pretences. Perhaps when I have spoken you will drive me from your presence. But, still, the truth must be told at all hazards. I love your daughter, your precious secluded Violet. I have even dared to tell her so. Is there any chance, any prospect, however distant, of my winning her?

You love my child Violet is nothing else, said her father, startled and frowning heavily. You have told her so! What was her answer?

She would give me none without your sanction, said Hugo, feeling brave now that the truth was spoken. All I can venture to say is that she did not absolutely forbid my appealing to you, and I have lost no time in doing so.

That was right so far though I think you should have spoken first to me. But no matter Violet shall decide for herself. She is no child, though, at first, I could scarcely realise that she is already a woman to be wooed and won; and she has sense to know what will be the best for her happiness.

He went round the house, leaving Hugo standing near the stream, and returned with Viola hanging on his arm, quite unconscious of her lover's presence.

Violet, her father said gently, as she seemed half inclined to retreat on seeing Hugo I have perhaps not been so attentive a parent as I should have been. In my frequent absences have I been superseded? Have you learned to watch for another's coming; to love, and to be loved? Answer me truly.

## Carding–Mill Valley

Viola could not for the moment speak. Her nature was too truthful for even an evasion when appealed to thus solemnly. She stood silently by her father's side, clinging to his arm, her eyes cast down.

Let me speak, said Hugo warmly. It was I who learnt that lesson. If I have taught it to the woman I love, let me alone be blamed. I saw her alone unprotected yet fearless, loving, and to be trusted in absence; and I longed to pluck this sweet flower of the wilderness and hedge it round in a cultivated sheltered garden. Speak, Viola; your father is no tyrant. He has been young like ourselves he has loved, too, I will be bound; and he will feel, dare I say, for us. Look up, my sweet one and say whether you ever could return my love.

Viola raised her dark blue eyes, not to his face, but to her father's. Still she was silent. There was an eloquent meaning in her silent gaze.

No, he knows nothing, said her father in a low voice as he bent over her. His love is perfectly disinterested and I do not think it will alter under any circumstances; not even if he knew you were to supplant him. Speak the truth fearlessly, my child choose between us, he added, in a different tone.

That I can never do, said Viola. My duty to my father comes next to that I owe to God; and cannot be superseded; but, she added, gently turning towards her lover, if I ever add to it the love a wife should give her husband, I would willingly yield it to my cousin Hugo.

The young man started. Her words brought back those of her father. He looked from one to the other in surprise.

She is right, Hugo, said her father. It is impossible to keep up this useless mystery. I am your cousin, Hugh Derinzy, the owner of Hagleth, and if I give you the hand of my only child if Violet wishes to leave me you must submit to certain conditions. Hugo, he added, turning to his daughter, must not, as I did, abandon a noble profession. Let him go and battle with the world, not confiding too much on his presumptive heirship, for I will bind myself with no rash vows: at present I am unfettered, and I promise to provide for you both adequately, come what may. You will always be my children, and as such will be cared for now and in the future.

He drew Viola's arm within his own, and led her back into the old house; inviting Hugo to follow them. It was not without difficulty that the young officer could enter into the new relationship thus established. But if Viola was his cousin, she was also his promised bride; and it was an easy task to reconcile himself to a change of fortune, which might otherwise have been bitter, when coupled with the assurance that he had won the heart of the woman he loved, and the esteem and approbation of her father, who had long silently studied his character and watched over his career.

Mr. Vansittart very cordially received the news of his young favourite's betrothal, which was communicated to him at once by his early friend. Even should the Hagleth estate not prove to be their portion, he was resolved the young couple should not be without a home. Millburn he silently resolved should be his present to the bride, reserving the right to occupy occasionally the rooms she had prepared for him so tastefully; thus restoring to the family what Colonel Derinzy had truly said was the loveliest bit of the property.

## Chapter 34.

Thou wilt be near, and not forsake,  
To turn the bitter pool  
Into a bright and breezy lake,  
The throbbing brow to cool;  
Till left awhile with Thee alone  
The wilful heart be fain to own

That He by whom our bright hours shone,  
Our darkness best may rule.

Keble.

Stella Derinzy had found it easy, so far as outward circumstances were concerned, and without any painful explanations, to re–establish herself in the home of her childhood and youth. But it was much more difficult to take up again and re–unite the thread of life which had been suddenly, years ago, snapped asunder.

The temporary strength given by her great joy at meeting once more her beloved brother did not last long; and the reaction made her feel for a time more helpless, weak, and incompetent than ever. Perhaps this stood her in good stead at Hagleth Hall, where for some days she lay utterly prostrated by illness. Althea and Laura watched over her tenderly; the slight irritation on their father's account was forgotten when they saw their kind friend and relative in so much suffering. It seemed natural after a short time, when she was able to take her place quietly among them to go to Cousin Stella for advice and sympathy; and no one dreamed of questioning her undoubted right to be the lady of Hagleth.

But the inward struggle with her own wayward will was very bitter. Had this great, this most Un–looked–for joy been given to her too late in life? Was it beyond her feeble power to be her brother's fitting companion and associate; leading him on to the highest aims, and pressing onward and upward beside him? What would she not have given for one year of the strength which, in her rash, joyous youth, she had wasted of the girlish spirits which made life one whole thanksgiving of the beauty which she had prized chiefly because he was a man fond above everything of things comely and winsome.

As she looked in her mirror in the dull solitude of her convalescence, always more trying when anxiety for us is laid aside, Stella was quite unaware how rich a flush, how bright a flash, genius and feeling can lend to eyes and cheeks from which the light of youth has faded. In reality, to those who loved her and few could resist her charm of manner and expression she was still a beautiful woman; but she did not know it.

In spite of her brother's tender words and looks, she feared that she no longer possessed the spell which had once made her paramount in his affections. Surrounded by younger, fairer creatures himself, as she partially deemed, in the pride of manhood, for Stella saw not the changes in him which she felt painfully in herself how could she hope to reknit the half–obliterated associations, and re–awaken the bright, pure flame of brotherly love sweetest of all affections when cemented by years passed together, hopes shared, and trials lightened by participation; would that chastened fire ever be rekindled after such long years of separation, of entirely alien occupations and interests; after he had loved and married a stranger, and reared to womanhood a daughter, whom instinctively she loved, as Hugh's child, yet feared to meet?

There was certainly no lack of warm love in the letter Hugh had sent her, as soon as the Hall was free from stranger guests, in which he desired her to prepare for his joining her. He meant to tell Hugo himself of the change in his prospects, and had reason to expect an opportunity of doing so that very morning; as was the case. To her he left it to acquaint Leo and Laura and Althea, with the truth, in whatever way she deemed most advisable. May Balfour, who was still at Hagleth, had a right to participate in the intelligence; which he meant to transmit immediately yet more fully to her parents; together with Ursula's tardy confession of her sin against them, against him and Stella, and against truth.

This letter at once plunged Stella into a fresh vortex of perplexity. It was not easy to prepare the Hall for its rightful master; and she set at once to work with but feeble energy to try to obliterate what she knew would be most obnoxious, the many traces of Ursula's occupation of their early home. But the marks of a woman's sway and taste hang long about a place; and Stella was much too good and kind to wound by hasty measures the feelings of her children; so mother's garden and mother's fountain and burn were left shrouded in greenery;

## Carding–Mill Valley

which should have been cleared away to open prospects of the mountains, and allow freer course for the wind to play over the still blooming parterre.

Some alterations indoors were effected, while the young people were enjoying their out–of–door amusements. Old pictures which had been banished to the gallery, were replaced in their former places of honour; and others carefully packed for removal to Mottisfont Grange. Stella's strength failed her before she had satisfied herself that the old home wore again something of its former aspect in days long gone by. She was standing, in a very mournful, dissatisfied mood, surveying the result of her morning's labour; after dismissing the servants who had executed her orders; with their paraphernalia of steps, hammers, wood and nails, when Laura and May, who had been lunching at the Parsonage, returned; bringing Althea with them. The two Derinzy–girls noticed immediately that a large picture of their father and mother, taken at the time of their marriage, which was usually reflected in a glass at the opposite end of the room, had been taken down and replaced by a landscape. The pictures of Stella's father and mother occupied a conspicuous place on the wall, and many others were hung differently. In several respects the appearance of the room was changed.

You will like to have your family portraits at Mottisfont, said Stella kindly, as the girls surveyed the apartment gravely, in silence. They will be sent at once, and will make it seem homelike. Althea, Laura, Marion you must listen to me without bias or prejudice. Your mother, May, was my first and dearest friend, until fate threw a blight upon our lives. She will be my friend again now for it has been granted to me, at last, to be able to clear up the mystery in which for a time we have been shrouded. By this time or very soon full particulars will have reached her, into which now I have not strength to enter which, indeed, are best left untold. You must take me at my simple word. My brother, my long lost Hugh, has been restored to me, and will be here to–night. I have put the old Hall in order for him.

Stella sank back trembling into the old carved oak chair, from which, in her excitement, she had risen. The young faces, over which many shades of emotion had passed, grew bright with sympathy. Every personal feeling was merged in deep joy for her. Each pressed upon her, in their several ways, marks of love and congratulation.

I did not know that my brother was living when circumstances roused me to the conviction that I had sorely neglected my duty as his representative. That alone led to my resumption of power. But the step was taken just in time, said Stella, smiling through her tears, to prevent my being called to account for my bad stewardship. Now I am thankful to resign it into abler hands.

Whilst Laura and Marion fluently uttered their sentiments, Althea stood a little apart, her cheeks flushed, her heart beating quickly. It is Mr. Vansittart's tenant at Millburn, she said. The writer of that article which *we* answered. Cousin Stella, you said that the phrases sounded familiarly, as if you had heard them in a dream, or long, long ago.

You have guessed rightly, said Stella. Many a youthful project was recalled when I read those sentences. We may live to see them carried out yet at Hagleth at least, you may. I feel strangely altered aged. Since my late illness I have, for the first time, felt that youth and strength have left me for ever.

The young girls contradicted her affectionately, and gradually Stella became herself again.

Nothing could be less melodramatic than the return to power of the long–absent Master of Hagleth. The servants and tenantry had all been expressly warned that any demonstrations of rejoicing would be unwelcome; but though no church bells were rung, and no healths were formally drunk either in the dining–room or servants' hall, on the quiet autumn evening when Hugh Derinzy took possession of his own again, there was deep fervent joy in every heart throughout his wide–spread domains.

At last it seemed real even to Stella, and as she caught sight of herself in one of the old–fashioned mirrors in the drawing–room, she could not deny, with the light flashing from her eyes and the warm blood flushing her pure complexion, that she still had some of the fire and pride of her youthful beauty left. In her brother's estimation, the tall, dark, stately, yet etherealised woman, had lost nothing through suffering, and she had gained in intellectual, thoughtful expression. Even his fair young daughter paled beside her Marion Balfour looked frail, Laura merely pretty and fashionable. The only person who could bear a comparison that evening with Stella was the "divinely fair" Althea, also tall and dignified, and with the soft wild–rose tint on her cheeks, which gave peculiar beauty to her complexion; still youthful, but no longer a girl, and with the same spark of genius illuminating her smiles, and lending deeper meaning to her musical speech.

## Chapter 35.

The scent of waters far away  
Upon the breeze is flung:  
The desert pelican to–day  
Securely leaves her young;  
Reproving thankless man, who fears  
To journey on a few lone years,  
Where on the sand Thy step appears  
Thy crown in sight is hung.

Keble.

Scarcely conscious that to a man like her brother, travel–worn, and often weary in spirit, though retaining youthfulness of aspect and muscular strength and activity in no common degree, there was a charm in her weakness and weariness, Stella still often felt very dissatisfied with herself. She tried not to be jealous of the bright young girls, with whom Hugh talked and laughed freely; beating them and his cousins Hugo and Leo in all games of skill, and contests of strength, and heartily enjoying all their sports and pastimes.

But it was to the sister, whom he had loved and protected in infancy and girlhood, that his heart turned back. With her alone the exile had memories in common, priceless associations, never–ending regrets. Again and again he strove to draw her out, to revive her energies, to renew her youth; even when she thought him entirely engrossed by the interest he undoubtedly showed and felt in the young lives springing up briskly around them.

Althea was Stella's favourite companion, and in her sympathy she found unflinching comfort. There had always been a great similarity in their characters, and all her mournful yearnings had in time past been confided to her freely. Now she found an equal satisfaction in her ready response to her pride and triumph in her brother. Laura was a little jealous of the family honour, a little suspicious that something derogatory was unrevealed, and very regretful for the station they had lost; but Althea had not one thought of self. Her mind was full of pure joy on account of Hugh's return; and she told Stella she now felt at liberty to devote herself entirely to the pursuits which had always pleased and interested her most, the interests of the poor around her.

Leo had quite adopted her as his Curate, and they meant to work hard to make Hagleth a model community. Every hour she originated fresh plans, and she had full faith in Hugh's cordial support. He and Stella she and Leo would work in concert; the old institutions would be revived, the ancient ways and customs made smooth like the new road; and all difficulties were, in imagination at least, rapidly cleared away by the zealous enthusiast.

Once more Stella's brow cleared her health improved a little of her old walking power returned when urged to exertion by those she loved; and many of the old plans and ideas, improved by modern practical science, were



## Carding–Mill Valley

brought to bear upon the somewhat backward condition of the village; more healthy dwellings and schoolrooms, baths and library were projected, and certain in due time with ample means to be carried into effect.

Stella sometimes felt jealous on Althea's account of Hugh's devotion to his younger cousins. She wondered that he was not as well aware as herself of her superiority to them in all things. But Hugh jested and talked, rode and walked with Leo and Laura, Hugo and Violet; leaving Althea to be her principal solace and companion. Perhaps they were both of them not so well adapted to win men's fickle fancies as the gay girls who seemed to carry all before them?

Althea meanwhile went quietly on her way; rejoicing in pure, unalloyed gladness over the return of the rightful Lord of the Manor. She owned now for the first time to Stella what possession of her senses the idea of her long–lost brother's return had taken. In every cottage she met with sympathy, and found an opportunity of telling the same tale again and again. She had always known that he would some day come back and enjoy his own once more. She felt not the least dissatisfaction, as Stella did, at his seeming to take no especial notice of herself. Her gladness was perfectly disinterested, for himself, for Stella, and for his dependents.

When she took her high seat at the organ in the Chapel her very heart swelled with thankfulness. She carolled like a bird in her sunny paradise of delight; and her blush–rose complexion grew more vivid as she saw that he took his place regularly among the humble worshippers. Happiness had brought him back in child–like humility to thank the Giver of all good gifts for his mercies. He had said one day that her voice in song her written words and they were hers, her very own, as he had guessed, though joined with Stella's stronger arguments, had revived his childhood's reverence, had brought back the memories of holy things and sanctified them afresh.

Oh, if she might confirm complete the good impressions! Bring him back heart and soul to the sanctuary. Cast him like a little child at the foot of the great white throne, to ask forgiveness for his many sins and omissions of sacred duties! Then, indeed, she would feel that she had done good work, that she had not wasted and abused the precious gifts of her Creator.

When these thoughts were in her mind, Althea sang better. Her voice rose clearly above others, with that plaintive thrill which swells the throat of the bird of night, distinguishing it from all songsters of the grove. She never on any occasion lingered or hastened on her way never marred her own purpose by an unwise effort at proselytising by comment or exhortation. She dropped her sweet liquid notes, as the princess in the fairy tale shed jewels on her path from her rosy lips, and left the treasure either to be neglected or gathered in.

She was several years older than her sisters, and her grave looks and ways made her seem older than she was. It had been a great disappointment to her mother that Althea had not married brilliantly when she was first introduced to society; but she had never entertained any particular preference, and judged it to be wrong to marry without one. All her thoughts had been lofty and serious, and she never mingled things of heaven with those of earth. At home she was all simplicity, and in Church she was God's child. There was no medium no tampering with vanity in holy places. Those pure eyes were fixed upon her book, or lowered in devotion, or uplifted in prayer; they never cast idle, wandering glances abroad and around.

But nevertheless, and without intention, Althea had shot one shaft strong and straight; and her arrow quivered in the living centre of the mark at which she had *not* aimed a noble, erring, human heart. Several weeks had elapsed since Hugh Derinzy had made himself known to his sister. He had been welcomed back to his native country with all the honours he would allow to be displayed, for he shrank from anything like ostentation or public notice. Sir Henry and Lady Balfour had been the first to congratulate him on his return home; and more than the old friendly relations had been established between the families at Hagleth Hall and The Ashlets. Though not yet an acknowledged engagement, it was plain to all persons not wilfully blind that there was a mutual liking and complete understanding between May Balfour and Leo Derinzy; and the parents of the young and petted only daughter did not manifest any anxiety respecting her future destiny. Probably they were among the few who did

## Carding–Mill Valley

not see what yet was plainly manifest to other eyes.

Hugo had fulfilled his promise of escorting Laura into Warwickshire Viola, at her own earnest desire and theirs, being their companion to visit his father and mother. Leo and Althea were living at the ivy–covered Vicarage, doing all the good in their power. Hugh and Stella were at last alone at the Hall. They were spending their time very happily and quietly together. Stella was feeling stronger, but still her tranquillity was disturbed by the thought that she could no longer be her brother's companion in all things. In vain he moderated his pace and checked his overflowing ardour, that she might not feel the impossibility of keeping pace with him, mentally or physically. The delicate invalid felt that he required a younger and more energetic partner.

Autumn gales and early frosts had robbed Mrs. Derinzy's garden of its gay borders of flowers, which were now left dug up in their wintry brown repose. The burn rushed noisily on its way, and the mountains, more open to the view, had slight wreaths of snow, the first of the year, on their summits; but it was sheltered and warm in the wood walks, where Hugh and his sister were walking together. Her hand rested on his arm, and his steps were measured to suit her. A soft colour was on her cheek, and a pleasant light in her eyes.

And so you really are not dull now we are all alone together? she said, in reply to his assurances. All your wanderings have not rendered you unfit for this quiet life with me at Hagleth. Oh, Hugh, I am afraid it is I who am spoilt! I who am still unsatisfied.

What is it you want, Stella? is it anything I can do for you? said Hugh, affectionately. Will you yield to my wish and try those American springs where, as I told you last night, miracles of healing are said to be constantly wrought? Or the German Baths Mr. Vansittart has such faith in? They seem already to have cured his rheumatism.

No, no, said Stella impatiently. I have no faith no hope in a miracle being wrought to cure me. All has been done. I am not murmuring at my lot, and would rather bear it quietly at home. It is you of whom I am thinking. I am not content that you should wear out your life in waiting upon an invalid sister. Have you never thought, dear brother, of marrying again now that you are once more at Hagleth?

Yes, said Hugh, with a suddenness which, in spite of her assumed composure, almost startled Stella into dropping his arm. *I have* thought of it, but scarcely seriously. I do not like second marriages, and I am no longer young. I could not love an old woman, and a young one would probably laugh at me.

You have only one child, and she will soon leave you to follow the wandering fortunes of her soldier laddie, said Stella, bravely. Mr. Vansittart says that Viola will be his heiress, and that he shall give her Millburn as a wedding present. I do not see that there is any reason why you should keep solitary for her sake.

Neither do I, said Hugh, briefly. It is more on your account that I should hesitate. Stella, we are only just restored to each other. Are you already weary of me?

Tears filled his sister's eyes. They walked on for some moments silently, her arm pressed close to his side.

If you were not so infatuated about extreme youth, she said, at last, rather pettishly, If you were not so bent upon admiring mere girls as unlike me as possible, I think I could have pointed out a suitable wife. One who would be a companion for us both; but as she never plays at silly romping games, or conducts herself like a school–girl, you would say she is too staid and elderly for your taste.

Very likely, said her brother, smiling not attracted by the picture for Heaven's sake do not name your admirable friend. I am quite sure I should dislike her. Let us say no more on the subject. Do you think it would tire you to walk by this sheltered path to the Vicarage? Leo wants me to see the plans for the new

school–houses.

Stella dared not press further what appeared to be an unwelcome suggestion. She was a little afraid of her brother and not always sure whether he was in jest or earnest. Perhaps he had meant to tease her by implying that he had thought of marriage. She had not the remotest idea of any one to whom his unexpected remark could bear especial application.

It was rather a relief when, while she rested after her pleasant quiet walk in the Vicarage parlour, she saw that her brother was completely absorbed in the plans and calculations which Leo and Althea had prepared for his consideration. Not one of the three seemed to be thinking of anything but the future comforts and advantages of the scholars, and the subordinate but tasteful consideration how well the pretty cottages Althea had drawn would look among the trees of the village.

Hugh gave *carte blanche* for expenses, and highly approved of the plans, thanking them for the trouble they had taken. They went together to inspect the site, and when the matter was concluded her brother hastened Stella away as the November twilight was creeping on. It was very sweet to the scarcely tired woman to lean lovingly on that strong arm, but she tried not unsuccessfully to quench the selfish wish to keep his love all her own. Hugh did not say much, but he listened as reverently as he had often done when he was a boy to the words his sister murmured, as they sat down for a few moments to rest on a sheltered bench in the woodlands.

So be it, Lord; I know it best;  
Though not, as yet, my wayward breast  
Beat quite in answer to Thy voice,  
Yet surely I have made my choice;  
I know not yet the promised bliss,  
Know not if I shall win or miss;  
So doubting, rather let me die,  
Than close with aught beside, to last eternally.

## Chapter 36.

Then keep the softening veil in mercy drawn,  
Thou who canst love us, though Thou read us true;  
As on the bosom of the aerial lawn  
Melts in dim haze each coarse ungentle hue.

Keble.

In another county, as Lady Balfour had prophesied, Colonel Derinzy's family speedily became popular. The mistake, as she also truly said, had been their settling at Hagleth. The old Manor House, called Mottisfont Grange, the village under the Warwickshire elm trees, the Church with its lofty spire, and the stream meandering through the meadows and girding the walled gardens and red–brick mansion, once a real moated Grange, were all pleasant to look upon, though far from being as romantic as the Hall under the Crest. The neighbourhood was excellent, and the addition of three young pretty girls, likely to be often visited by their brothers, and military or clerical friends, occasioned quite an access of gaiety. Laura and her sisters were invited constantly into society, and universally *fêtted* and courted.

Even Colonel and Mrs. Derinzy became more genial and expansive. Ursula agreed as usual with her husband that it was quite necessary to put the best face on the matter, lest unfavourable comments should be made on their sudden removal from Hagleth Hall. But in fact their new world troubled itself in no way about the cause, which

## Carding–Mill Valley

brought agreeable occupants to the Manor House. Colonel Derinzy had long been an absentee landlord: the sooner he acknowledged the rights of his native soil, of his own home and deserted acres, the better the Warwickshire Squires and peasantry were disposed to think of him. It was in his case decidedly not too late to mend.

What had seemed to Arnold Derinzy, when looking upon it from his eyrie among the old British hills, a crushing descent, appeared to his neighbours in the rich lower levels on the other side of his own trout stream, an elevation. They cared nothing about Hagleth Hall and the mountains; but the snug little estate, on the flat wooded land within sight of their Church spire, had a wonderful air of respectability. It was his own; had belonged to his ancestors; whose tombs were in the chancel and churchyard in their own village, where they had lived and died, and been honoured in their generation.

In the same way Mrs. Derinzy's merits, which she had contrived to hide in a nut shell, even as she had compressed her still abundant fair fine locks into the smallest compass, and attired herself in the limpest, dullest, and dreariest garments, now seemed to find room to spread themselves abroad. To please her husband, to prevent his asking troublesome questions, Ursula dressed better, looked brighter, and made herself more generally agreeable. The shadow which, as she often said, she always felt and saw resting on the mountains, did not hang over her in the fertile, well–watered plain where she now resided.

There was no need for evasions and concealments in her present life, and the past had gone by like a dream. It was almost as if it had never existed. Willingly she did not allude to it, and her children a little wounded by the change in their prospects, a little doubtful about its cause, were ready to drop the subject. Novelty always has charms for the young, and all around them was new and cheerful.

The younger girls felt the loss of the beautiful park and garden more than Laura; and were less keenly alive to the mortifications which had embittered her spirits and the minds of their brothers. No! the walled–gardens and shrubbery–walks were not, could never be, made like to the beautiful grounds at the Hall. There were plenty of cupboards for the young housekeeper, but Estelle shook her head angrily over the monotony of the level garden–walks, the ha–ha, spiked fence, and endless brick walls.

Everything in and around Mottisfont became brighter when Hugo brought his promised bride amongst them. She and Laura had become great friends, and Viola had not forgotten, herself, nor failed to remind her father, that he had sanctioned her mission. Her bright, thankful spirit broke the bonds of reserve and shed its rays abroad far and wide. It was impossible to resist her sunny smile.

Even the stiff–mannered Colonel yielded to its charm, and Ursula had never been insensible to it. All the love, and in spite of her many faults, she did love and had always loved Stella and Hugh, centred in his child, and found an abiding place there. She sometimes, with Viola, alluded to bygone days in a hesitating, fluttering manner; just as a bird or a squirrel escaped from captivity will return and alight, or flutter round the cage, peck at some green meat through the bars, or indulge itself in a swing, but rushes away if any attempt is made to detain it. So Ursula would hover round the self–chosen theme, and then dart away, or shrink up into herself like a sensitive plant if the leaves are touched.

As she had said to Stella, it was much the best not to talk of old times not to dwell on the past and yet, she could not help hanging now and then over the vase which still kept the scent of its, for her, long perished roses.

But she never even to Viola mentioned any of the circumstances which now made her an exile from her old home nor in truth did she really wish to return there. Stella and Hugh yes, she liked to think of them in delicate circumlocutory phrases to circle round the forbidden theme then she would start, as if suddenly awakened on the edge of a precipice which she had unadvisedly approached too nearly, and retreat into the regions of commonplace things, as flat and uninteresting as the tame scenery visible from her drawing–room windows.

Yet, though fully alive to her weakness and faulty character, Hugo's future wife loved while she pitied his timid mother. Viola remembered that she had kindly sought her out in her loneliness and obscurity; and she felt, without quite understanding its nature, that from the very first some hidden subtle attraction had drawn out towards herself fibres of affection from this shy, overclouded nature. Her own heart had responded to the call, and did so still. Unquestioningly, unreasoningly, she loved and cherished this feeble nature; and her affection brought from it much that had seemed dead all the best parts of her being warped by cowardice, dulled by habits of reserve. There were still gentle, womanly impulses which sprang into life whenever she came in contact with the fresh–springing charities and amenities which dwelt on the smooth brow and soft lips, and shone in the love–light of Viola Derinzy's eyes.

It was but a short visit she paid now to the Grange, but it was often repeated, and her influence always remained the same. Some spell wrought in her early youth still worked within Ursula's heart when she was with Hugh Derinzy's daughter, and gradually it did its work. Not that there was any great outward alteration, but, inwardly, truth prevailed. The trivial excuse the plausible pretext the flattering sophistry were less frequently uttered; and though a life's habit of reserve was never quite laid aside, the shock and the lesson, aided by Viola's gentle, silent teaching, by example in word and look, caused a better and truer spirit to prevail in the household of which she ere long became a member; and rendered the dark low rooms at Mottisfont, with their quiet prospects, more cheerful, and the atmosphere clearer, than the lofty halls and grand mountain views had afforded when Ursula was the Mistress of Hagleth Hall.

Sir Henry and Lady Balfour responded cordially to Hugh Derinzy's overtures. His explanation of the treachery which had been practised upon them was a much greater surprise to the Baronet than to his more quick–sighted wife; who though unable to prove it, or even to assign reasonable grounds for the accusation, had always mistrusted Stella's cousin. It was a great pleasure to these true–hearted women once more to draw together, and the Balfours were frequent visitors at Hagleth. May and Leo became before very long acknowledged lovers, and both families joyfully acquiesced in the contract.

For the present it was only an engagement, May's parents considering her much too young to think of marriage for the next year or two; but on the sterling qualities and lofty Christian principles of Leo Derinzy they acknowledged that their tender plant might reasonably be trusted to rely with every prospect of future happiness. It was rather a severe trial to Althea who had learnt dearly to love her new home and its duties, when she found that she was likely to be superseded in both. Not that Leo suffered her to believe that he should love her less, or that her presence would be less desirable; but she knew that she would not be so necessary a guest at the Parsonage. Somehow the Warwickshire Grange had not grown to be like home to Althea; but she believed it might be her duty to live there with her parents and younger sisters when Laura married, an event which sundry visits paid by Hugo's friend, Captain Maynard, warned her was by no means an improbable circumstance, though as yet unannounced.

Hugh Derinzy meanwhile pursued the even tenour of his way apparently disturbed very little by rumours or certainties of love and matrimony. He had given his young daughter's hand without a tremor to his cousin, Captain Derinzy, and was quite satisfied that she had chosen well and wisely. The young couple passed part of their time at the Hall, part in Warwickshire, when on leave from military duty; but their home was to be at Millburn, which Mr. Vansittart was fitting up for their occupation at considerable cost. The straight walls of the Burnt Mill had assumed more picturesque forms, and high peaked gable ends and mullioned windows rose above the trees in the ravine.

Viola had begged that the wild ground might be left untouched; so the stream still rushed along its rocky channel bordered by ferns and wild roses. Laura's white–cupped flowers mirrored their beauty in the running water, and the blackberry and bramble bushes had never been uprooted.

Very often the families from the Hall and The Ashletts met in the ravine near the house or at Stella's Waterfall, and spent the afternoon or evening there, being joined by Leo and Althea; and the bells of St. Lawrence's Chapel sounding across the water for the Evensong would break up their happy rural fellowship, to be followed by a yet nearer and more hallowed communion in worship in the rustic sanctuary, where Althea still led the chorus of song and thanksgiving.

## Chapter 37.

Wait, yet I do not tell you  
The hour you long for now,  
Will not come with its radiance vanished  
And a shadow upon its brow.  
Yet far through the misty future,  
With a crown of starry light,  
An hour of joy you know not  
Is winging her silent flight.

A.A. Procter.

Under her brother's constant watchfulness Stella Derinzy had resumed many an employment and recreation; but she had not recovered strength and health completely, as he had, when they were first reunited, hoped might be the case. Hugh was still sanguine, but Althea sometimes feared that her delicacy rather increased than lessened as time went on.

It was true that she took more exercise on foot and in a carriage, and he often drew her about the grounds in a garden chair, purposely constructed for her use; avoiding every chance stone or inequality of surface which might jar her delicate nerves. His careful driving enabled her to find pleasure again in accompanying him for some distance in a very easy carriage, carefully hung, which he had ordered, and superintended the building of it according to some fashions of his own.

It might be only the reaction of a great joy which made her seem to retrograde, but certainly she made little or no progress towards complete recovery. Althea, who watched over her not less anxiously than her long absent brother, and who had done so from her earliest girlhood, having been Stella's almost constant companion, knew well that any increased exertion cost her hours of suffering, patiently borne and heroically concealed.

When pain and weariness passed off, Stella's life was a much happier one; full, she declared, of quiet enjoyment. To recline on her spring cushions, with Althea's fair face beside her, full of love and care, while Hugh often looked back and talked to them, as he drove his willing, easy-paced steeds with consummate skill along the winding level road past the head of the ravine, through the hill pass, was one of her greatest enjoyments; and he never failed to bring the carriage round to take her to the chapel in time for the Evensong, during the summer season. It had been one of her chief deprivations seldom to be able to attend public worship. But Hugh's good driving, the excellent road, and the mildness of the weather, now enabled her to enjoy these short daily services.

It was on one of the most beautiful evenings of an exceptionally fine August, in the year following Hugh's return to Hagleth, that Althea, after parting from the brother and sister at the door of the chapel, walked back to the vicarage, alone, through the ravine. After the service she generally stayed to practice hymns and chants with the girls and boys who composed her choir, and to give a word of advice or sympathy to some of the hill folk, whilst Leo held a class in the vestry. Sometimes they walked home together; but to-day he had been obliged to return to the village immediately after the conclusion of the service, and she was quite alone.

## Carding–Mill Valley

Alone and not in good spirits. Many thoughts troubled her, as she walked slowly and sadly beside the brook and over the stepping stones. There were no forget–me–nots in bloom now, but the heather was beginning to purple the hill–sides, and wreaths of honey–suckle and clematis hung about the rocks the abundant wild flowers of spring and early summer had faded. The ground was carpeted with fern and moss, freshened by the trickling rills of water which gushed out of the crevices of the rocks below the waterfall.

Althea sat down to rest on the rustic seat, which Hugh had fashioned in his boyhood for Stella, just opposite to the cataract. The murmuring water soothed as it fell, not very noisily; for the evening was calm and still, and the autumn rains had not as yet quickened its flow, which made a plaintive rhythm. The sound was tranquillizing, but not cheerful. Gradually, as she sat listening to it, softer thoughts rose into her mind, but not less sad ones.

Tears had come into her eye, and threatened to impede her utterance, when she was singing in the chapel. Very often of late she had struggled to control emotions which had never before troubled her calm, lofty nature. Sometimes it seemed to her that she was striving to silence the voice of conscience.

Was it right that she should so entirely relinquish her home duties, and abandon her parents and younger sisters? Ought not her place, as the eldest daughter, to be at Mottisfont Grange? Was not the ground for remaining at Hagleth being cut away, inch by inch, beneath her feet; and were not all her excuses for choosing the estate in life which she liked best one after another failing her?

Leo had spoken more than once, somewhat impatiently, about the delay of his promised happiness; and Althea saw there were signs of yielding on the part of Sir Henry and Lady Balfour. May would take her place, probably, before very long, at the Vicarage; and although Althea knew that she could be of much use still, that her brother's delicate young wife earnestly desired and might need his sister's co–operation, still they might they would in time learn to do without her services which would not be, as now, absolutely indispensable in the parish.

Stella would miss her dreadfully but she had her brother; and he, too, would not like her to leave Hagleth, where they were constantly acting together, and engaged in a thousand interesting pursuits. Yes, she ought to stay, if only on his account; for Althea knew and felt that over him she had great influence.

But might she not have influence over others, to whom she was bound by closer family ties? Laura had confided to her that she had accepted the offer of Sidney Maynard's hand, and agreed to share his fortunes. In less than a year she would accompany him abroad; and the letter which had cast such trouble into her sister's lot contained a very earnest, very natural entreaty that Althea would, at least, soon come home and spend some months at Mottisfont before she began her preparations for departure; she must be her bridesmaid next October.

And if she granted this petition, what would follow? Might it not then seem to be her bounden duty to remain and take Laura's place at Mottisfont Grange? Ursula might be a capital little housekeeper; Estelle had done wonders in making the formal gardens pretty; but they were very young, and Colonel and Mrs. Derinzy were not exactly adapted to train the minds of their girlish daughters. No one knew this better than their eldest born; for Althea was older than her brothers just five–and–twenty.

She had never, since her childhood, experienced much of a mother's care. All her tastes and feelings were antagonistic to Mrs. Derinzy's, who had been bitterly disappointed by her not marrying. Althea and Leo had clung to each other, and to the high and holy aspirations and duties in which they both took delight. But there are duties everywhere, less exalted, perhaps more prosaic, but none the less imperative. Might not her real call for usefulness be, now, at the home of her parents?

Althea shrank back, shuddering at her own thoughts, when she found how much her spirit rebelled against this view of the situation. She hated the idea, and tried to put it from her as impossible utterly unnecessary a mere wanton self–sacrifice; but, as she sat listening unconsciously to the slow fall of the water, it returned again and

again.

The quiet green meadows, with a sluggish branch of the river flooding them in winter the cropped hedgerow elms, the cawing rooks, the red brick walls and slated roofs of the cottages in the village; the monotonous voice of the aged Rector, the very tiresome nature of his languid discourse, and all that the girls had told her of the Parish psalmody and services, seemed humming and buzzing in her ears. Everything was wanting; yet it seemed to be a place where nothing was ever, could ever, be done to infringe upon old–fashioned ways, however mouldy and obsolete. Nor would their position entitle the Derinzys to interfere; they were only members of the community, nothing more.

Althea had been accustomed to organize to reconstruct; of late, fuller powers had been given to her. How could she give up all her projects, all her wise and good improvements, and sit down contentedly among people who did not wish or choose that the old order of things, even when they knew it to be faulty, should be in any manner disturbed?

Even under Colonel Derinzy's rule she and Leo had been able to do much good; and now each day, every hour, fresh capabilities were opening before them? Must she, could she, leave the mountains the people of the hills the chapel, where no one would replace her, for May's voice, though sweet, was feeble, and all the beauties and advantages she could command at Hagleth, to dwell in the dull, moated Warwickshire Grange?

Althea sighed yet more heavily when, despite all her arguments, which she feared were sophistries, she still felt the yoke of filial duty and sisterly love pressing upon her. How could she refuse to grant Laura's request? and then, oh, then if she once yielded if she went to the place, which after all was her home if she found there a position waiting for her which she ought to occupy if others assumed her duties at Hagleth how could she ever win her way back again to the hills?

Would there really be any room for her at Mottisfont? Had she not already stayed away too long, and left all to learn that they could do without her? That was her only chance; but Laura denied it. She said, with her usual practical good sense, that Althea was much wanted, not only by herself, but by her younger sisters; and, though they did not complain, by her parents. They were growing older, and the duties of society had never been very congenial to them, but of late they had exerted themselves to make the house pleasant. She feared that when she was gone their efforts would relax, unless they were kept up to the mark. It would be hard upon Ursula and Estelle if the family again relapsed into dulness, just when they were of an age to be introduced into society. Her mother, do what she might and could, would never make an efficient chaperone; nor was their father well adapted to be the sole guardian and adviser of two young girls. It was, in Laura's opinion, absolutely necessary that when she married, Althea should resume her proper place at home; and, meanwhile, she ardently longed for her sisterly companionship and sympathy. Would she not, at all events, come, if only for a short time, and see what their new home was like?

The sharpest pang to heart and conscience lay in the lack of love, of sweet home feelings towards her parents. Was it her fault, surely it must be, that she felt no desire to see her mother; whilst at the thought of parting from Stella tears came to her eyes unbidden? Then again Althea blamed herself for seeming set apart from her family; and it struck her forcibly, for the first time, that she had taken refuge in the enemy's camp just when the fortunes of the day turned against her father, and had not stood by him! that even now she was a traitor to her allegiance.

She had just arrived at this culminating point of self–reproach, when she heard approaching footsteps, without surprise, for she had rather expected that Leo might come to meet her, but this was a firmer tread.

Stella has sent me to look for you, said Hugh Derinzy, as he came round the angle of the pathway. We went to the Vicarage, and found that you had not come back from the service. What is the matter?



## Carding–Mill Valley

Althea struggled vainly to compose herself. There were traces of tears on her pale cheeks.

Hugh came nearer, and sat down beside her.

My poor child, tell me what vexes you; he said, I have seen for the last two days that you were not happy. Your voice showed it in the hymns. Is there anything that I can do to comfort you?

No, oh no, said Althea, in a low tone; whilst the kindness of his manner, the deep tenderness of his voice, speaking as he might have done, she thought, to Viola, to his own child, increased her agitation.

You have been only too kind already. You and Stella and Leo have completely spoiled me. I believe I was wicked enough to be wretched at the idea of going back to live at home, and to do my duty to my own father and mother.

Home! where may that be? said Hugh with a return of the roughness acquired during his wild wanderings, which had lately disappeared from his manner. Dismiss that idea your duties lie here all round us. Have I failed in making them easy? You have no home but Hagleth.

Indeed I have other duties nearer ties; though I confess I had almost abjured and forgotten them. But a letter from Laura has reminded me of these claims. She says, and I am afraid she is right, that when Leo marries I ought to live at home; and, meanwhile, she earnestly entreats me to come and see how homelike they have made the old family mansion.

It may suit them you will never like it, Althea, it is out of the question. You shall not leave us.

His dictatorial manner fired the girl's spirit.

But if I wish to do so, cousin Hugh, I hope I am not a prisoner. I am not a hostage, am I, for my parent's good behaviour? I do not exactly know how they displeased you. Sometimes I cannot help connecting my father's sudden dismissal, which was almost a disgrace, from an office which I am sure he discharged honourably, and to the best of his abilities, with your equally unexpected return. I do not know the reason, but you often say bitter things about the old *régime*, which I think you mean to apply to my father. I ought to have noticed them sooner. I feel very guilty as a daughter. But your kindness and confidence disarmed me. Now, I confess, I have often thought that my father was hardly treated.

You are right, Althea, your father, though I owe him no great debt of gratitude, *was* hardly used. It could not be avoided.

His frank avowal disarmed Althea. She was silent. The consciousness of a great wrong done to me for which I paid the penalty of years of banishment, but for which I now admit he was not responsible made me unmerciful. He did not do all he might have done to prevent the misfortune which blasted all my prospects, but for the wrong itself he was not responsible.

Was it my mother? said Althea with trembling lips; you never mention her name.

Nor shall it pass my lips now, sorely as you provoke me, said Hugh. Not unless you drive me to madness; but, Althea, there are bounds to all human patience, and I am no saint. Say that you will never leave us for them for your parents. Believe me they would not value They are not worth the sacrifice.

Althea drew back from him. They are my parents. I feel more than ever that I have done wrong in forsaking them to share the more prosperous lot of those who hate them so bitterly. Your words have strengthened my

## Carding–Mill Valley

feeble resolution. I shall go home to my father and mother.

Hugh started up from his place beside her. This is the climax of all they have made me bear, he exclaimed.

Althea, on one condition I promised your mother that I would not reveal the circumstances which sent me into exile on one condition, and she fulfilled it that I never looked upon her face again. I must keep my word. But I cannot give you up to her. I will not part from my best guide and teacher. Do you not know that you have led me back into the right path, and kept me there. Without you I should go astray again.

No, I have no faith in such feeble erring guidance. I cannot keep my own footsteps, much less yours, said Althea, mournfully. One thing is certain, I must leave Hagleth. I cannot stay continually with one who despises and abhors my own mother. Whatever may have been her early errors, her reputation is sacred to me.

Do not fear that I shall injure name or fame of one belonging to you, Althea, even were it in my power. For once only, to you, I shall mention Ursula Derinzy's name. Hereafter it shall never pass my lips. She sinned against me fearfully, but she has made atonement so far as lay in her power; has confessed, and repented. I, therefore, grant her absolution, as far as the deep injury to myself was concerned. One thing I cannot forgive, nor can her tardy repentance atone for it. I lay Stella's ruined life her blasted youth and beauty through sorrow for my loss at your mother's door. Nothing can blot that from my memory for all else, let by–goners be by–goners, provided she does not rob me of my last best treasure of yourself.

Althea drew back the hand he had taken.

My mother has not asked me to return home. Perhaps, she added bitterly, as you said, she will not appreciate the sacrifice it costs me to leave Leo, Stella, Hagleth, yourself, all that is best and dearest to me. I have suffered my place to remain empty too long. I have been a neglectful child, a careless sister; while taking upon myself duties which others might have performed, I have disregarded natural claims. But it is not too late. I must try to reknit the old bonds, and cement new ones. I must try to work in the new field where our allotment has been cast.

Althea, said Hugh, more quietly and persuasively, listen to what I can and dare say to you. Respect for you seals my lips, and will always seal them, sooner than spoken words of mine should grieve your tender heart. But say no more about leaving Hagleth. It *cannot* be. Neither Stella nor I can let you leave us. I do not know what these other claims may be worth, but I do know that we cannot live without you. I am certain it would kill Stella, and I should become again a wanderer on the face of the earth. When Leo marries, your place is at the Hall.

No, no! that cannot be, said Althea, drawing back; that would be like the coward who, shrinking from fancied dangers, dies a thousand deaths in anticipation of one which must come which cannot be avoided. I own that it will be painful I know that Stella will miss me, but I have made up my mind to do what is right. I *must* go to Mottisfont. Do not make the struggle harder than it is at present.

You have your work set out for you here, Althea, work which you have begun which no one else can complete. What can a child like May Balfour, a delicate girl in her teens, at the best, who dares not set her foot out of doors when the mist is on the hills, what can she know or do about the school about the cottagers? Who will take your place at the organ? Do you think I could bear to hear another voice than yours lead the chants and hymns? Child, what you have begun you must finish you cannot turn us over to others incompetent to take your place! You must live and die, as I hope to do, when my time comes, bravely, in harness.

Althea turned deadly pale. She felt as if she were already drawing near to the end of life's trials.

Spare me, she said, leaning back against the rock; I cannot bear this struggle.

## Carding–Mill Valley

Then give it up, said Hugh. Let me bear it for you. Here by Stella's Waterfall, where, in my lonely days of exile, I have often come to muse upon the past, for Stella's sake for mine I intreat you to stay with us. She is not fit to bear my sometimes rough or careless ways, and I am not always able to suit myself to one so delicate. It is through my fault that she suffers; and, do what I will, I cannot make up to her for the past. We need a sympathising medium, one who is strong and at the same time gentle. Strong to bear, gentle to mediate. In short, we want *you*, Althea. Stella has hinted to me that she has a friend, a woman of about my own age and hers, who might be a suitable helpmate; but, Althea, there is only one woman whom I could love whom I wish to marry that woman is yourself! Nay, do not laugh at me. I know it is presumptuous. I fear it is utterly vain; but let me plead my cause. Young, lovely as you are, I believe you have not given away your heart. Is there any chance that I might win it that you would overlook the difference in years, and become my wife?

Althea's cheek flushed the smile Hugh had detected played once more about her lips; I do not think Stella has selected a more elderly wife than I am for you, dear Cousin Hugh, she said softly. She thinks you consider me too old and staid.

Whatever other words she might have said were not uttered. Hugh kissed her trembling lips; and there, beside Stella's Waterfall, he won her consent to dwell with him and her life–long friend, in the old Hall under the crested hill, and to be the mistress of Hagleth.