



# One

The library at Fontley Priory, like most of the principal apartments in the sprawling building, looked to the south-east, commanding a prospect of informal gardens and a plantation of poplars, which acted as a wind-break and screened from view the monotony of the fen beyond. On an afternoon in March the sunlight did not penetrate the Gothic windows, and the room seemed dim, the carpet, the hangings, and the tooled leather backs of the books in the carved shelves as faded as the uniform of the man who sat motionless at the desk, his hands lying clasped on a sheaf of papers, his gaze fixed on a clump of daffodils, nodding in the wind that soughed round the angles of the house, and passed like a shadow over the unscythed lawn.

The uniform showed the buff facings and silver lace of the 52nd Regiment; it was as threadbare as the carpet, but for all its shabbiness it seemed incongruous: as out of place in this quiet room as the man who wore it felt himself to be.

He should not have done so: the Priory was his birthplace, and he owned it; but his adult years had been spent in very different scenes from the placid fens and wolds of Lincolnshire, and his transition from the grandeur of the Pyrenees had been too sudden, and attended by circumstances of too much horror to make it seem to him anything other than a bad dream from which he would presently be awakened by a call to arms, or by a stampeding mule brought down by the guy-ropes of his tent, or by the mere bustle of a camp at first light.

The letters from England had reached him on the last day of January. He had first read his mother's, written in the agitation of her bereavement, and conveying to him in a barely legible series of crossed and recrossed lines the news that his father was dead. He had been more shocked than grieved, never having enjoyed more than a casual acquaintance with the late Viscount. Lord Lynton, while bluff and good-natured when confronted with any of his offspring, had not been blessed with domestic virtues. A close friend of the Prince Regent, he had so much preferred the Prince's society to that of his family that very little of his time had been spent in his home, and none at all in considering what might be the hopes or characteristics of one surviving son and two daughters.

He had been killed on the hunting-field, in the first burst, taking a double at the fly: not a surprising end for an intrepid and frequently reckless horseman. What did surprise his son was to discover that contrary to advice and entreaty he had been riding a green and headstrong young horse, never before tried in the field. Lord Lynton was a bruising rider, but not a fool; his heir, knowing the wild hurly-burly of a first burst with the Quorn or the Belvoir, concluded that he had ridden his young 'un for a wager, and passed on to a maternal command to sell out instantly, and return to England, where his presence was most urgently needed.

The new Lord Lynton (but it was to be many weeks before he answered readily to any other title than Captain Deveril) could not find in his mother's letter any reason why he should pursue a course so repugnant to himself. The letter from Lord Lynton's man of business was less impassioned but more explicit.

He read it twice before his brain was able to grasp its horrifying intelligence, and many times before he laid it before his Colonel.

No one could have been kinder; to no one else, indeed, could Adam Deveril have borne to have disclosed that letter. Colonel Colborne had read it, his countenance unmoved, and he had offered no unwanted sympathy. 'You must go,' he had said. 'I'll

grant you furlough immediately, to expedite the business, but you'll sell out, of course.' Then, guessing the thoughts hidden behind Adam's rigid countenance, he had added: 'A year ago there might have been doubts which way your duty should have led you, but there are none now. We shall soon have Soult on the run in good earnest. I shan't say you won't be missed: you will be – damnably! – but your absence won't affect the issue *here*. There's no question about it, you know: you must go home to England.'

He had known it, of course, and had argued neither with his Colonel nor his own conscience. He had sailed on the first available transport, and, after a brief halt in London, had posted on to Lincolnshire, leaving his man of business to discover the extent of his liabilities, and his tailor to deliver with all possible expedition raiment suited to a civilian gentleman in deep mourning.

This had not yet arrived, but the news that his Regiment had distinguished itself at the Battle of Orthes had reached Fontley, making him at once exultant and wretched; and Mr Wimpering had presented himself at Fontley on the previous day. He had spent the night at the Priory; but the younger Miss Deveril was of the opinion that he could not have enjoyed more than two or three hours of sleep, since he had remained closeted with her brother until dawn. He was very civil to the ladies, so it was unkind of her to liken him to a bird of ill-omen. He was very civil to the new Viscount too, and very patient, answering all his questions without betraying that he found him lamentably ignorant.

Adam said, with a smile in his tired grey eyes: 'You must think me a fool to ask you so many stupid questions. I'm a Johnny Raw, you see. I've never dealt with such matters as these. I don't understand them, and I must.'

No, Mr Wimpering did not think his lordship a fool, but deeply did he regret that the late Viscount had not seen fit to admit him to his confidence. But the late Viscount had not seen fit to admit even his man of business wholly into his confidence: there had been transactions on the Stock Exchange in which

agents unknown to Wimmering had been employed. He said mournfully: 'I could not have advised his lordship to invest his money as he sometimes did. But his nature was sanguine – and I must acknowledge that on several occasions he was fortunate in ventures which I, as a man of affairs, could not have recommended to him.' He refreshed himself with a pinch of snuff taken from the battered silver box which he had been tapping with the tip of one desiccated finger, and added: 'I was well-acquainted with your honoured parent, my lord, and have for long been persuaded that it was his hope to have restored to its former prosperity the inheritance to which he succeeded, and which, he knew, must in the course of nature presently fall into your hands. The speculative, and, alas, unlucky enterprise upon which he entered shortly before his untimely demise –' He broke off, transferring his gaze from Adam's face to the line of swaying tree-tops beyond the gardens. To them he apparently addressed the rest of his speech, saying: 'It should never be forgotten that his late lordship's nature was, as I have remarked, sanguine. Dear me, yes! If I had a hundred pounds for every occasion on which his lordship suffered reverses on 'Change without the least diminution of his optimism I should be a wealthy man, I assure you, sir!'

No answer was vouchsafed to this. Adam, instead of seeking further reassurance, said in an even tone: 'In plain words, Wimmering, how do my affairs stand?'

Plain words, in situations of the utmost delicacy, were obnoxious to Wimmering, but, impelled by some quality in that quiet voice, he replied with unaccustomed bluntness: 'Badly, my lord.'

Adam nodded. 'How badly?'

Mr Wimmering set his fingertips exactly together, and replied evasively: 'It is in the highest degree unfortunate that your lordship's grandfather should have deceased before the coming of age of his late lordship. It was his intention to have resettled the estates. At that time, as I need not remind your lordship, my own revered parent stood in the same relation to the Fourth Viscount

as I have stood in to the Fifth, and – if I may be permitted to express the wish – as I hope to stand in to your lordship. When you, my lord, attained your majority, it was my earnest desire to have induced his late lordship to repair an omission rendered inevitable by the inscrutable workings of Providence. His lordship, however, did not consider the moment opportune for the prosecution of a design which, I assure you, he had very much at heart. *Your* presence, my lord, must have been essential: I can have no need to recall to your mind the circumstances which would have made it hard indeed for you to have applied for furlough just then. The Combat of the Coa! It seems but yesterday that we were eagerly perusing the account of that engagement, with the words of commendation bestowed by Lord Wellington on the officers and the men of your lordship's Regiment!

'The estates, I collect, were even then encumbered?' interpolated his lordship.

Mr Wimmering bowed his head in sorrowful assent, but raised it again to offer a palliative. 'But her ladyship's jointure was secured to her.'

'And my sisters' portions?'

Wimmering sighed. After a pause, Adam said: 'The case seems to be desperate. What must I do?'

'Serious, my lord, but not desperate, we must trust.' He raised his hand, as Adam made a gesture towards the mass of papers on his desk. 'Let me beg of you not to refine too much upon demands which were, under the circumstances, inevitable! None are immediately pressing. A certain degree of alarm in the creditors was to be expected, and to allay that must be – indeed, *has* been – my first concern. I do not by any means despair of composing all these matters.'

'I have no great head for figures,' Adam replied, 'but I think the debts total a larger amount than my disposable assets.' He picked up a paper, and studied it. 'You have set no value on the racing-stables, I observe. Those, I think, should be sold at once, and also the town house.'

'Upon no account!' interrupted Wimmering earnestly. 'Such

an action, my lord, would prove fatal, believe me! Let me repeat that my care has been to allay anxiety: until we see our way more clearly that is most necessary.’

Adam laid the paper down. ‘It is already clear to me. I am facing ruin, am I not?’

‘Your lordship takes too despondent a view. The shock has overset you! But we need not despair.’

‘No, if I had time enough, and the means, perhaps I could restore our fortunes. Surely Fontley was prosperous in my grandfather’s day? Since I came home I have been going all about with our bailiff, trying to learn from him in a week the things I ought to have learned when I was a boy. Instead –’ he smiled rather painfully – ‘I was army-mad. One doesn’t realize, or foresee – But repining won’t help me out of my difficulties. The land here is as rich as any in Lincolnshire, but so much needs to be done! And if I had the means to do it I should wish above all things to redeem the mortgages, and that I certainly have not the means to do.’

‘My lord, not all your lands are mortgaged! Do not, I beg of you –’

‘Mercifully, not all. The house, and the demesne-lands are unencumbered. Can you tell me what price we should set on them? Both have been neglected, but the Priory is generally thought to be beautiful, and has, besides, historic interest.’

‘Sell Fontley?’ exclaimed Wimmering, aghast. ‘Your lordship cannot be serious! You are speaking in jest, of course!’

‘No, I am not speaking in jest,’ Adam replied quietly. ‘I don’t think I ever felt less like jesting in my life. If you could show me how to pay off this load of debt, how to provide for my sisters, without selling Fontley – but you can’t, can you?’

‘My lord,’ said Wimmering, recovering his countenance, ‘I trust I may be able to do so. It might not be an easy task, but it has occurred to me – if I may speak frankly on a subject of an intimate nature?’

Adam looked surprised, but nodded.

‘Such unhappy situations as this are not of such rare

occurrence as one could wish, my lord,' said Mr Wimmering, intently scrutinizing his fingers. 'I could tell you of cases within my own experience where the sadly fallen fortunes of a noble house have been resuscitated by a judicious alliance.'

'Good God, are you suggesting that I should marry an heiress?' Adam demanded.

'It has frequently been done, my lord.'

'I daresay it has, but you mustn't expect me to do it, I'm afraid,' returned Adam. 'I don't think I'm acquainted with any heiresses, and I'm sure I shouldn't be regarded as an eligible suitor.'

'On the contrary, my lord! Your lineage is distinguished; you are the holder of a title; the owner of very considerable estates, and of a seat – as you have said yourself – of historic interest.'

'I never suspected that you had a turn for nonsense!' Adam interrupted. 'These possessions of mine are very fine-sounding until you tap them, when they have a hollow ring. In any event, I don't contemplate putting myself up for sale.'

There was a note of finality in his voice, and Wimmering bowed to it, content for the present to have instilled the idea into his brain. He might recoil from it, but Wimmering had formed a favourable opinion of his good sense, and he hoped that when he had recovered from the shock of finding himself on the brink of ruin he would perceive the advantages of what was, in his adviser's view, a very simple way out of his difficulties. It was fortunate that he was unattached – if he *was* unattached. Wimmering knew that a year previously he had fancied himself in love with Lord Oversley's daughter; but no notice of an engagement had ever appeared, and the connection had not met with the Fifth Viscount's approbation. The Fifth Viscount had been quite as anxious as Wimmering that his son should marry money; and from what he knew of Lord Oversley's circumstances Wimmering could not suppose that he either regarded with enthusiasm such an alliance. Miss Julia was an accredited Beauty; and if any man could have made an accurate guess at the extent of Lord Lynton's embarrassments it must have been his



old friend Oversley. No, Wimmering was inclined to think that his late lordship had been right when he had dismissed the affair as mere calf-love.

(‘And now there’s that cub of mine fancying himself in love with Oversley’s girl!’ had said his lordship, in one of his moments of exasperation. ‘All humdudgeon! never looked twice at the chit till he was sent home with a ball in his hip! He’s been living in the girl’s pocket ever since he could hobble round to Mount Street. A couple of green ’uns! I shan’t lose any sleep over such fiddle-faddling nonsense!’)

Wimmering would lose no sleep either. The new Viscount had repudiated with distaste the suggestion that he should hang out for a likely heiress, but he had given no indication that his affections were already engaged. It was not wonderful that he should have alleviated the pain and the weariness of the months he had spent in and out of the surgeons’ hands with a flirtation with the lovely Miss Oversley; still less wonderful that a romantic girl should have encouraged the gallantry of a hero of Salamanca. In Wimmering’s opinion, it would be more wonderful if so youthful an affair had survived separation.

As for his lordship’s doubt of his acceptability, Wimmering did not share it. Lord Oversley might not welcome the alliance, but it was not of such parents as Oversley that Wimmering was thinking. It had plainly not occurred to the Viscount that he should seek a wife in the ranks of the rich merchants: probably he would dislike that idea at first, but he seemed to be a sensible young man, and one who would probably go to almost any length to preserve the place which had for generations been the home of the Deverils. There would be nothing unusual in such a match: no need at all for his lordship to marry a vulgar mushroom’s heiress. Mr Wimmering could call to mind a dozen very gentlemanly persons engaged in trade who were anxious to thrust their offspring up the social ladder; but, on the whole, he was inclined to think that the ideal bride should be sought in one or other of the great banking-houses. That would be quite unexceptionable. The chances were, too, that unless the girl was

very hard to please she would take a fancy to his lordship. He was a good-looking young man, though not handsome in his father's slightly flamboyant style. His was a thin, sensitive countenance, rendered charming by his smile, which was of peculiar sweetness. He looked older than his twenty-six years, his face being a little lined through constant puckering of his eyes against a scorching sun, and his skin rather weather-beaten. He was of average height, well-built, but lacking his father's magnificent physique: indeed, had it not been for a certain tautness in his carriage, betraying the muscles in his spare frame, it might have been suspected that he was delicate, so thin was he. When he walked it was with a slight halt, but that legacy from Salamanca did not seem to discommode him much. He was lucky not to have had his leg amputated, though it was doubtful if he had thought so at the time. Wimmering did not know how many agonizing operations he had been obliged to undergo before the surgeons succeeded in extracting the ball and all the splinters of bone, but he thought that those weeks had set their ineradicable mark on his lordship's face.

He did not again mention the marriage-scheme, but devoted himself instead to the task of guiding the Viscount through the tangled maze of his father's affairs. He was genuinely grieved to see the look of care deepen in the young man's fine eyes, but he did not try to minimize the gravity of his predicament: the more fully my lord realized this the more likely would he be to overcome his reluctance to marry for the sake of a fortune. When Wimmering left the Priory it was in a hopeful mood, for his opinion of his new patron's good sense had mounted considerably. He had taken the shocking news well, not railing against fate, or uttering any word of bitterness. If he blamed his father it was silently: he seemed more inclined to blame himself. He was undoubtedly a little stunned; but when he had recovered he would think it over calmly, and, in his search for a solution to his troubles, remember the suggestion that had been made to him, and perhaps think that over too.

Mr Wimmering was not a very warmhearted man, but when

he took leave of Adam he was conscious of a purely human desire to help him. He was behaving beautifully: much better than his father had behaved in moments of sudden stress. When he saw Wimmering off in one of his own carriages, which would convey Wimmering to Market Deeping, on the first stage of his journey back to London, he said, with his delightful smile: 'You will be jolted to bits, I'm afraid! The road is as bad as any in Portugal. Thank you for undertaking such a tiresome journey: I am very much obliged to you! I shall be in town within a few days – as soon as I have settled some few matters here, and consulted with my mother.'

He shook hands, and waited to see the carriage in motion before going back to the library.

He sat down again at the desk, with the intention of arranging in some sort of order the litter of papers on it, but when he had gathered into a formidable pile the tradesmen's bills, he sat quite still for a long time, looking through the window at the daffodils, but not seeing them.

He was recalled from this abstraction by the sound of an opening door, and looked round to see that his younger sister was peeping into the room.

'Has he gone?' she asked, in conspiratorial accents. 'May I come in?'

His eyes lit with amusement, but he replied with due gravity: 'Yes, but take care you are unobserved!'

She twinkled responsively. 'I like you the best of all my family,' she confided, coming across the room to the chair lately occupied by Wimmering.

'Thank you!'

'Not that that's saying much,' she added reflectively, 'for I don't count aunts and uncles and cousins. So there are now only four of us. And to tell you the truth, Adam, I only loved Papa in a dutiful way, and Stephen not at all! Of course, I might have loved Maria, if she hadn't died before I was born, but I don't think I should have, because from what Mama tells us she was the most odious child!'

‘Lydia, Mama never said such a thing!’ protested Adam.

‘No, exactly the reverse! She says Maria was too good for this world, so you see what I mean, don’t you?’

He could not deny it, but suggested, with a quivering lip, that Maria, had she been spared beyond her sixth year, might have outgrown her oppressive virtue. Lydia agreed to this, though doubtfully, observing that Charlotte was very virtuous too. ‘And I am most sincerely attached to Charlotte,’ she assured him.

‘To Mama also, surely!’

‘Of course: that is obligatory!’ she answered, with dignity.

He was taken aback, but after eyeing her for a moment he prudently refrained from comment. He was not very well-acquainted with her, for she was nine years younger than he; and although, during his weary convalescence, she had frequently diverted him with her youthful opinions, her visits to his sick-bed had been restricted by the exigencies of education. Miss Keckwick, a governess of uncertain age and severe aspect, had rarely failed to summon Lydia from her brother’s room at the end of half-an-hour, either for an Italian lesson, or for an hour’s practice on the harp. The fruits of her painstaking diligence had not so far been made apparent to Adam, for although there was a good deal of intelligence in his sister’s lively face she had as yet vouchsafed no sign of the erudition to be expected in one educated by so highly qualified a preceptress as Miss Keckwick.

He was wondering why she was so much more taking than her elder, and far more beautiful, sister, when she emerged from some undisclosed reverie, and disconcerted him by demanding: ‘Are we ruined, Adam?’

‘Oh, I trust it won’t be as bad as that!’

‘I had better tell you at once,’ interrupted Lydia, ‘that although I have always set my face resolutely against Education, which I very soon perceived would be of no use to me whatsoever, I am not at all stupid! Why, even Charlotte has known that we stood on the brink of disaster for *years*, and no one could say that her understanding is superior! And also, Adam, I am turned seventeen, besides having a great deal of worldly

knowledge, and I mean to help you, if I can, so pray don't speak in that *nothing-to-do-with-you* voice!

'I beg pardon!' he apologized hastily.

'Is it ruin?'

'Something uncomfortably like it, I'm afraid.'

'I thought so. Mama has been saying for weeks that she expects at any moment to find herself without a roof over her head.'

'It won't be as bad as that,' he assured her. 'She will have her jointure – do you know what that is?'

'Yes, but she says it is a paltry sum, and that we shall be obliged to subsist on black-puddings – and that, Adam, will *never* do for Mama!'

'She exaggerates. I hope she will be able to live in tolerable comfort. She will have about eight hundred pounds a year – not a fortune, but at least an independence. With a little economy –'

'Mama,' stated Lydia, 'has never studied economy.'

He smiled. 'Have you?'

'Only Political Economy, and that's of no use! I may not know a great deal about it, but I do know that it has to do with the distribution of wealth, which is why I decided not to tease myself with it, on account of not having any wealth to distribute.'

'Didn't the learned Miss Keckwick teach you household economy?'

'No: her mind was of an elevated order. Besides, everyone knows what *that* means! It's having only one course for dinner, and not enough footmen, and making up one's own dresses, which is perfectly useless, because if you have no money to pay for anything it's the most idiotish waste of time to be learning how to save it! Mama won't – but I wasn't thinking of her: I was thinking of you, and Fontley.' She bent a serious gaze upon him. 'Mama says Fontley will be lost to us. Is it true? Please tell me, Adam!' She read the answer in his face, and lowered her gaze. After carefully pleating her muslin gown across her knees, she said: 'I find that a truly *detestable* thought.'

'So do I,' he agreed sadly. 'Too detestable to be talked of, until

I've grown more accustomed to it.'

She looked up. 'I know it is much worse for you, and I don't mean to talk of it in a repining way. The thing is that I'm persuaded we ought to make a push to save it. I have been thinking about it a great deal, and I perceive that it is now my duty to contract a Brilliant Alliance. Do you think I could, if I set my mind to it?'

'No, certainly not! My dear Lydia —'

'Well, I do,' she said decidedly. 'I can see, of course, that there may be one or two little rubs in the way, particularly the circumstance of my not yet being out. Mama had meant to present me this season, you know, but she can't do so while we are in black gloves, and I see that if I don't go into society —'

'Who put this nonsense into your head?' interrupted Adam.

She looked surprised. 'It isn't nonsense! Why, don't you know how hopeful Mama was that Charlotte would contract a Brilliant Alliance? She very nearly did, too, but she wouldn't accept the offer, on account of Lambert Ryde. And I must say that that put me quite out of charity with her! Anyone but a wet-goose would have known what would come of it, and it *did!* For *weeks* Mama talked of nothing but Maria, and how *she* would never have been so unmindful of her duty as poor Charlotte!'

'Ryde?' said Adam, ignoring the latter, and very improper, part of this speech.

'Yes, don't you remember him?'

'Of course I do, but I haven't seen him since I came home, and —'

'Oh, no! he's away. He had to go off to Edinburgh, because one of his Scotch aunts died, and he was a trustee, or some such thing. Adam, *you* won't forbid Charlotte to marry him, will you?'

'Good God, I've nothing to say in the matter! Do they still wish it?'

'Yes, and you have got something to say! Charlotte isn't of age yet, and I know you are our guardian.'

'Yes, but —'

'If you are thinking it wouldn't be proper to permit anything

Papa disliked I can tell you that it wasn't he, but Mama,' disclosed Lydia helpfully. 'He said that she must settle as she liked, but for his part he didn't care a rush.' She added, after a thoughtful moment: 'I shouldn't wonder at it if you are able to bring Mama round to the notion, now that we are ruined. She won't like it above half, of course – and I must own that it does seem shockingly wasteful of Charlotte to be squandering herself on Lambert Ryde! However, there's no need to despair! I'm not acquainted with many *young* gentlemen, but I do know that I take very well with the old ones, because whenever Papa entertained any of his friends here I went along with them famously! And, from all I can discover, it is the *old* gentlemen who have the largest fortunes. And I do *not* see what I have said to make you laugh!

'No, of course you don't – pray forgive me!' begged Adam. 'I think you must have been talking to Wimmering?'

'No! Why?' she asked, surprised.

'It is precisely the advice he gave me: to contract a Brilliant Alliance!'

'Oh!' she said, subjecting this to profound thought. She shook her head. 'No, not you. Charlotte says that when one has formed a connection the very thought of marriage to Another is repugnant.'

Adam, making the discovery that his young sister could be as embarrassing as she was amusing, replied with creditable coolness: 'Does she? Well, I expect she must know better than I do, so I shan't dispute the matter.'

'Did you see Julia when you were in London?' enquired Lydia, impervious to snubs. 'The Oversleys removed from Beckenhurst at the beginning of the month, you know.' She observed the slight stiffening of his countenance, and said anxiously: 'Ought I not to have mentioned it? But she told me about it herself!'

Realizing that only frankness would serve him, he said: 'I don't know what she may have told you, Lydia, but you'll oblige me by forgetting it. We did form an attachment, but we were

never betrothed. I haven't yet called in Mount Street, but I must of course do so, when I return to town, and – well, that's all there is to be said!

'Do you mean that Lord Oversley won't let Julia marry you now that you're ruined?' she demanded.

'He would be a very bad father if he did,' he answered, as cheerfully as he could.

'Well, I think it is wickedly unjust!' she declared. 'First you are obliged to settle Papa's debts, which are no concern of yours, and now you must abandon Julia! Everything falls on you, and you are less to blame than any of us! Mama thinks she is the one to be pitied, but that's fudge – and you may look as disapproving as you choose, Adam, but it *is* fudge! In fact, you are the only one of us to be pitied in the least! Mama will have her jointure, Charlotte will marry Lambert, and I have now quite made up my mind to marry a man of fortune!' She smiled warmly at him. 'Naturally it would be most disagreeable for you or Charlotte to be obliged to do it, but I shan't object to it, I assure you! You must know that I am a – a stranger to the tenderer emotions. Except,' she added, in a less elevated strain, 'for falling in love with one of the footmen when I was twelve, and that was *not* a lasting passion, besides being quite ineligible, so we need not consider it. Are you acquainted with any wealthy old gentlemen, Adam?'

'I'm afraid not. And if I were I should conceal them from you! I had liefer by far let Fontley go than see you sacrificed to save it, and though you haven't yet been in love there's no saying but what you might be one day, and then what a bore it would be for you to be tied to a wealthy old gentleman!'

'Yes,' she agreed, 'but one ought to be ready to make sacrifices for one's family, I think. And, after all, he might be dead by then!'

'Very true! And if he had survived – though I don't think it at all likely that he would! – we could always finish him off with a phial of some subtle poison.'

This appealed so strongly to Lydia that she went into a peal of



laughter, at which inopportune moment the door opened to admit Lady Lynton, trailing yards of crape, mobled with black lace, and leaning on the arm of her elder daughter. She paused on the threshold, saying in a faint, incredulous voice: '*Laughing*, my dear ones?'

Charlotte, who was as kind as she was beautiful, said: 'It was so delightful to hear! Lydia was always able to make dear Adam laugh, even when he was in pain, wasn't she, Mama?'

'I am glad to know that there is anyone at Fontley who is able to laugh at this moment,' said Lady Lynton.

There was nothing in her voice or mien to lend colour to this statement, but none of her dear ones ventured to cavil at it. Having completed the discomfiture of the guilty parties by heaving a mournful sigh she allowed Charlotte to support her to a sofa, and sank down upon it. Charlotte arranged a cushion behind her head, placed a stool under her feet, and retired to a chair on the other side of the wide hearth, directing a look of anxious enquiry at her brother as she sat down. There was a strong resemblance between them. Both favoured their mama, unlike the larger and darker Lydia, who took after her father. Lady Lynton's oft-repeated assertion that Charlotte was the image of what she herself had been strained no one's credulity, for although time had faded the widow's fair beauty, and domestic trials had implanted a peevish expression on her classic countenance, she was still a remarkably handsome woman.

'I collect,' she said, 'that That Man has departed. I might have expected, perhaps, that he would have thought it proper to have taken leave of me. No doubt I must accustom myself to being treated as a person of no account.'

'I'm afraid I must take the blame of that omission on myself, Mama,' said Adam. 'Wimmering was anxious to pay his parting respects to you, but I wouldn't permit it, knowing you to be laid down upon your bed. He charged me with the task of making his apologies.'

'I am only too thankful to have been spared the necessity of seeing him again,' stated her ladyship, somewhat irrationally. 'I

never liked him, never! And nothing will convince me that our misfortunes are not due to his management of your poor father's affairs!

Once again Charlotte intervened. 'May we know how matters stand, Adam? We feel they can't be worse than our conjectures, don't we, Mama? It can scarcely come as a shock to us, even if we are quite ruined.'

'Nothing could be a shock to *me*,' said her parent. 'After all I have undergone I have become inured to disaster. I only wish to know when I must expect to find the roof sold over my head.'

'I won't do that, I promise you, Mama,' Adam replied. 'Indeed, I hope that you at least may be able to live in tolerable comfort, even if we can none of us remain at Fontley.'

Charlotte said in a faltering voice: 'Must Fontley be sold? Can nothing be done to save it?'

He was looking down at the smouldering logs in the hearth, and answered only with a tiny shake of his head. Tears started to her eyes, but before they could spill over Lydia created a diversion by observing dispassionately that she rather thought Mama was suffering a Spasm.

The widow's aspect was certainly alarming, and although she revived sufficiently, when her vinaigrette was held under her nose, to express a desire for hartshorn, it was not until a dose of this cordial had been procured by her younger daughter, and held to her lips by Charlotte, that she was able to raise her head from the cushion, and to utter in brave, but failing accents: 'Thank you, my dear ones! Pray don't regard it! It was nothing – merely the agitation of having the dreadful tidings broken to me in *such* a way – ! You have been for so long a stranger to your home, dearest Adam, that you could not be expected to know how wretchedly worn down are my poor nerves.'

'You must forgive me, Mama: I had really no intention of oversetting you,' said Adam. 'It seemed to me to be cruel to conceal from you what you must learn, sooner or later.'

'No doubt you did as you thought right, my dear son. My first-born!' said the widow, extending to him one frail hand. 'But had

your brother been spared to me *he* would have understood how shattering this blow must be to me! Ah, my poor Stephen! always so considerate, so exactly partaking of my sentiments!

Since the career of her second-born, cut off while he was still up at Oxford, had been distinguished by a sublime disregard for any other considerations than those immediately concerning himself, this ejaculation caused her surviving children to exchange speaking glances.

It was when Adam was struggling to convince her that her jointure and the direst penury were not synonymous terms that Lydia suddenly exclaimed: 'So Dawes was right! I didn't think it in the least, but only see! These odious tradesmen are sending bills for things Papa never bought, Adam!'

He turned his head quickly to discover that she was engaged in studying the accounts he had left on the desk. Before he could intervene she had betrayed an embarrassing gap in her store of worldly knowledge. 'Papa never gave you a necklace of emeralds and diamonds, did he, Mama? But here are Rundell & Bridge demanding the most *outrageous* sum for one! Of all the wicked cheats!'

The effect of this disclosure on the Dowager was galvanic. Reduced to a moribund state by the efforts of her two elder children to portray in attractive colours her future existence, she sat bolt upright, demanding sharply: '*What?*'

'Lydia, put those papers back on my desk!' commanded Adam, a look of vexation on his face.

'But, Adam –'

'Flaunting it under my very nose!' said Lady Lynton. 'I might have known it! At the Opera, and very vulgar I thought it! Exactly what one would have expected of such a Creature! Oh, it's all of a piece! *We* might go in rags, but he would offer a *carte blanche* to any Cyprian that took his fancy!'

'Good gracious!' exclaimed Lydia, round-eyed with surprise. 'You can't mean that Papa – *Papa!* – had a –'

'Hold your tongue!' said Adam briefly, taking the bill out of her hand, and thrusting it into one of the drawers in the desk.

Perceiving that he was seriously displeased she at once begged pardon, but she was obviously so much less concerned with her own indiscretion than with the problem of how any female could welcome the attentions of a gentleman so stricken in years as her father, who had had no fewer than two-and-fifty in his dish, that Charlotte, amongst whose excellencies a sense of humour was absent, later felt obliged to point out to Adam that dear Lydia's impenitence argued innocence rather than depravity.

Lady Lynton had accepted her lord's vagaries with well-bred indifference for years, but the emerald necklace, for some cause which her children never discovered, exercised a powerful effect upon her. Indignation brought a flush to her cheeks, and she so far forgot herself as to recall several of his lordship's previous lapses, declaring, however, that those she had been able to condone. The emerald necklace, which she described as bread snatched from his children's mouths to hang round the neck of an abandoned female, was, she asserted, Too Much. It was certainly too much for Lydia, who uttered a choked giggle, and thus reclaimed her afflicted parent to a sense of her company. She was, she said, grieved that any child of hers could be so totally devoid of delicacy, or proper feeling. She seemed to derive some slight comfort from the reflection that Lydia had always been just like her father; but that damsel's imperfections naturally challenged comparison with the infant Maria's virtues, and led the widow to bemoan the cruelty of Fate, which had reft from her the two children who would have supported and consoled her in her hour of need. One thing leading to another, it was not long before Adam found himself convicted of gross insensibility; while as for Charlotte, who was doing her best to soothe her mama, Lady Lynton wondered that she could hold up her head after her wilful refusal to avail herself of the opportunity offered her to restore the fallen fortunes of her family.

'No word of censure will ever pass *my* lips,' she said magnanimously. 'I merely marvel at you, dearest, for anything in the nature of selfishness is wholly foreign to me. Poor child! I wish you may not live to regret that day's work, but, alas, I fear

you will find a sad falling-off in young Ryde's attentions now that we are beggared.'

But in this she was wrong. Not twenty-four hours after she had uttered the dismal prophecy Mr Ryde was wringing Adam's hand, and saying: 'By Jove, it's good to see you again, Adam, and looking pretty stout too! But you know how sorry I am for the cause of your being here! What a fellow you must have been thinking me! But I daresay Charlotte told you how it was: I've been away from home – one of my old aunts cut her stick, and I was obliged to post up to Scotland in a hurry. What with the other two clinging to my coat-tails, and all the lawyers' nonsense, I thought I never should be able to break free! But no use to run off before the business was settled: I must have gone back, you know, and *that* I don't mean to do, unless I take Charlotte there on our honeymoon!' He grinned, and added: 'You don't mean to forbid our marriage, do you? You'd better not, I can tell you, old chap!'

Adam laughed, and shook his head. 'I shouldn't dare! But I think you should know that matters are in very bad shape here, Lambert. I shall do what I can to provide Charlotte with some part at least of her dowry, but it won't be what she's entitled to receive, and what you might reasonably expect.'

'No?' retorted Lambert. 'Giving me a chance to cry off? Handsome of you – just like you, indeed! But come now! no more funning! I'm as sorry as I could be, but it's no surprise to me. I don't scruple to own that when Charlotte sent me the news the first thought that entered my head was that now at last we could be riveted! Membury Place don't compare with Fontley, but though my fortune's not handsome it enables me to be sufficiently beforehand with the world to support a wife in comfort – ay, and Lydia too, if she should choose to make her home with us!'

He asked Adam if he would be obliged to sell Fontley; and when Adam replied that he feared so he looked grave, and said that it was a bad business, and that Charlotte would feel it excessively. 'Living so close, you know, and seeing strangers

here. I wish I might help you, but it's out of my power. Except,' he added, with his ready laugh, 'by taking Charlotte off your hands!'

It was not to be expected that Lady Lynton would readily allow herself to be reconciled to her daughter's marriage to a mere country squire; but the alternative, which was to provide for Charlotte out of her jointure, won from her a reluctant consent. While reserving to herself the right to deplore the connection she was forced to own that it was not disgraceful: Lambert's birth was not noble, but it was respectable; and his fortune, which had previously seemed paltry, had been changed, in the light of her own miserable circumstances, into a considerable independence. She could never like the match, but she told her son that she must acknowledge that Lambert had behaved with generosity and kindness.

Lydia acknowledged Lambert's kindness too, but told Adam that nothing would prevail upon her to take up residence in his house.

'Well, of course you won't do that,' he replied. 'You will live with Mama.'

'Yes, and though it may seem strange to you I had liefer do so,' she said disconcertingly. 'I hope I value Lambert as I ought, but it would be anguish to be obliged to live in the same house with someone who is always jolly, and laughs so frequently! Depend upon it, if an earthquake engulfed us all he would discover a bright side to the disaster! Doesn't he sometimes set *your* teeth on edge?'

He could not deny it. He had known Lambert since they had been boys together, and liked him well enough; but he was quite as much irritated as Lydia by his unflagging cheerfulness. However, he recognized the worth of his character; and when he saw Charlotte going about in a glow of happiness he was able to look forward to the marriage, if not with enthusiasm, at least with relief. That her future was assured was the one alleviating thought he carried to London with him at the beginning of the following week.

## Two

The Lynton town house was situated in Grosvenor Street, and was a spacious mansion, considerably enlarged by its late owner, in the days of his affluence, by the addition of a ballroom, with several handsome apartments over it. It was furnished with old-fashioned elegance; but when Adam visited it he found holland covers on all the chairs, and the mantelpieces swept bare of their ornaments. Almost the only economy the late Viscount had practised had been the closing of his town residence during the winter months. When he had not been invited to stay at Carlton House, he preferred to put up, in the most expensive comfort, at the Clarendon.

Adam put up at an hotel too, but not at the Clarendon. When he was escorted all over his house by the retainer who acted as caretaker he knew that he could dispose of this one of his possessions without a pang. It was associated in his mind with weeks of suffering; he decided that the sooner he was rid of it the better he would be pleased.

The stables at Newmarket were already up for sale, with the hunting-lodge at Melton Mowbray, and the late Viscount's sixteen hunters. Wimmering did not think that any harm would come from selling the racing-stable, but he strongly deprecated putting the hunters up for sale. 'It will create a bad impression, my lord,' he said. 'I cannot like it!' Adam did not like it either, but he was adamant. They were being brought up to Tattersall's this week: Lynton's breakdowns. It was not a pleasant thought, and they wouldn't sell, at the end of the hunting-season, for

anything approaching the sums his father had paid for them; but he would be spared the heavy cost of their upkeep. Wimmering was still talking of the need to allay anxiety, but his further researches into the affairs of his late patron had revealed nothing that could encourage Adam to think that he had anything to gain by a postponement of the inevitable; and his reiterated entreaty that the former state of the Deverils should be maintained served only to exasperate an employer whose nerves were already stretched to the limit of their endurance. An engrained courtesy compelled Adam to listen to Wimmering with patience; but no argument which his man of business had as yet advanced caused him to swerve from the line of conduct dictated by his own judgement. He never knew how baffling his courtesy was to Wimmering, or with what relief that harassed man would have greeted an explosion of wrath.

Following his judgement, he had himself interviewed his banker, at Charing Cross. Wimmering begged him to leave such matters in his own, more experienced hands, but Adam said he thought he ought to see Drummond himself. 'My family has always banked with Drummond's,' he said. 'They have always dealt fairly by us, too. I think I should prefer to talk to Drummond myself.'

Mr Wimmering might pull down the corners of his mouth, but it was certain that he could never have achieved the accommodation which old Mr Drummond granted to Adam.

Drummond's was an old-established firm, and amongst its distinguished clients it numbered no less a personage than His Majesty King George; but the name of Deveril figured in its earliest accounts, and it had been with a heavy heart that Mr Charles Drummond had awaited the arrival of the new Lord Lynton. He feared that demands were going to be made which it would be impossible for him to grant. He was not entirely unacquainted with Adam, but he had had no opportunity to form an opinion of his character. He remembered him only as an unassuming young officer, quite unlike his magnificent father; and although that was admittedly a point in his favour it in no



way prepared Mr Drummond for a client who not only took him frankly into his confidence, but who said, with a smile that was as charming as it was rueful: ‘In these circumstances, sir, it must seem outrageous of me to ask you to let me continue drawing on an account which is already grossly *overdrawn*, but I hope I can satisfy you of my ability to pay off the debt. I have worked out, as well as I’m able – but the exact worth of some of my assets must be conjectural – a sort of balance between my debts and my expectations, which, naturally, you will wish to study.’

He had then laid papers before Mr Drummond, who had peered at them with misgiving. By the time he had recovered from the shock of discovering that Adam’s expectations were not dependent either upon a *sure thing* at Newmarket, or some speculation calculated to shorten a respectable banker’s days, he had made another discovery, which he later imparted to his son.

‘The young man’s like his grandfather. Same quiet ways, same cool head on his shoulders: he’ll do!’

From Charing Cross Adam took a hackney coach to Mount Street, and, with a heart beating uncomfortably fast, trod up the steps to the front door.

He was conducted to Lord Oversley’s book-room; and his lordship, exclaiming: ‘Adam, my dear boy!’ got up from his chair, and came quickly to meet him, grasping his hand, and scanning his face with shrewd, kindly eyes. ‘Poor lad, you look hagged to death! No wonder, of course! But you *are* well again, aren’t you? I see you limp a trifle: does your leg pain you still?’

‘No, indeed, sir: I’m very well. As for looking hagged, that’s the fault of my black coat, perhaps.’

Oversley nodded understandingly. He was a pleasant-faced man, rather more than fifty years of age, dressed fashionably but without extravagance, and distinguished by an easy affability. He pulled forward a chair for Adam. ‘I don’t mean to tell you how sorry I am: you must know how I feel upon this occasion! Your father was one of my oldest cronies, and though our ways fell apart we remained good friends. Now, I’m not going to stand on ceremony with you, Adam: how badly are things left?’

‘Very badly, sir,’ Adam replied. ‘I hope to emerge free of debt, and that, I’m afraid, is the best that can be said.’

‘I feared as much. I saw your father in Brooks’s, not a sennight before the accident –’ He broke off, and after a moment’s hesitation said: ‘I want to speak to you about that. It caused the deuce of a lot of talk: mere humbug to pretend it didn’t! It was bound to do so, and it was bound to bring his creditors down on you like a swarm of locusts.’ He cast another of his shrewd glances at Adam. ‘Ay, you’ve been having a devilish time of it. But that’s not what I want to say. I’ve thought about that accident a great deal. He didn’t mean it. He may have been all to pieces, but I’m as sure as I sit here that he wasn’t riding to break his neck. That’s what you’ve been thinking, isn’t it?’

‘I don’t know!’ Adam said. ‘I *try not* to think of it!’

‘Well, you’ll think of it now, my boy!’ said Oversley trenchantly. ‘If he had meant to put a period to his existence he’d have found a surer way to do it than that! Good God, no man knew better than Bardy Lynton that riding for a fall is no more likely to end in a broken neck than in a broken shoulder! No, no, he never meant it! I knew Bardy! He was too game to cry craven, and too much of a right one, for all his faults, to leave you to stand the roast!’ He paused, and laid his hand on Adam’s knee, gripping it slightly. ‘God knows you’ve cause enough, but don’t think too hardly of him! He came into his inheritance too young. When a lad of his cut is as well-breeched as he was, and has no check on him –’

‘Oh, no, no!’ Adam said quickly. ‘Good God, what right have I – ? I didn’t know how serious matters were, but I knew it wasn’t high water with him: he often said we should soon be under the hatches. I didn’t heed him – there always seemed to be enough money – and all I cared for was a pair of colours! If I had thought less of that, and more of Fontley –’

‘Now, that’s enough!’ Oversley interrupted. ‘You’re not a sapskull, so don’t sit there talking sickly balderdash to me! There was nothing you could have done, and if you’re thinking Bardy wanted you at home you’re out! Let alone that he was proud of

you – lord, you should have seen him when you were mentioned in one of the dispatches! – he didn’t want you to discover how far he had drifted into Dun territory. Always thought he could make a recover, and set all to rights! And I’m bound to own he had some astonishing runs of luck,’ added his lordship reflectively. ‘The pity was – But so it always is with your true gamester! Well, well, mum for that! But if you mean to set the blame for this after-clap at any other door than your father’s, set it at Stephen’s rather than your own! What that young rip cost Bardy, first and last – ! I tell you that, Adam, but we’ll say no more about it: the poor lad’s accounts are wound up now.’

There was a short silence. Adam broke it. ‘I don’t know. But there is one matter for which I must blame myself, sir – as much as you do, I daresay.’

Oversley replied with a heartiness assumed to conceal embarrassment: ‘No, I don’t. I’m not going to pitch any gammon about not knowing what you mean. The round tale is that I ought never to have let you make up to that girl of mine – and so I knew!’ He smiled wryly. ‘You know, Adam, there’s no one I’d liefer have for a son-in-law than you, if the dibs had been in tune, but I knew they weren’t, and I ought to have hinted you away as soon as I saw which quarter the wind was in. The fact is I thought it was just a flirtation, and the lord knows you needed something to divert you at that time! I never supposed it would last, once you’d rejoined. And it’s my belief it wouldn’t have done so – at any rate with Julia! – if it hadn’t been for this shocking business, because there’s no denying that Julia’s a taking little puss, and she don’t want for suitors. She’s had ’em all dangling after her, ever since she came out, and has had as many silly nick-names foisted on to her as poor William Lamb’s wife. Sprite – Sylph – Zephyr – ! Pshaw!’ said his lordship, imperfectly disguising his pride. ‘Enough to turn the chit’s head! Now, I don’t say she wasn’t cut up when you went back to Spain: she was. In fact, her mother would have it that she’d mope herself into a decline, but that was all flim-flam! A girl who has a dozen posies sent her in a day don’t go into a decline! And if you ask me

– and I don't say it to wound you, Adam! – she'd have forgotten that interlude if it hadn't been for some chucklehead calling her the Unattainable. That grassed us, of course. Took to thinking herself pledged to a gallant soldier, and made such a hero of you as would have made the hair rise on your scalp! And then poor Bardy was killed, and there was no keeping it from her that you were in the suds. So now she's declaring that she'll never give you up, which pretty well gaps me – or it would, if I didn't know you too well to think – Damme, Adam, this is a devilish hard thing to say to you, but –'

'You needn't say it, sir!' Adam interrupted, rising, and going with a quick, uneven step to the window. 'Of course it's impossible! I've known that ever since I first saw my father's man of business. I should have come to you immediately – I beg your pardon! I hoped things might not be as bad as Wimmering described. In fact, they are worse. I'm not in a position to offer for anyone. I never dreamed I could say it, but I wish – yes, with all my heart! – that she had forgotten me!' His voice shook; he made a gallant attempt to conceal his emotion, saying: 'I shouldn't then have been obliged to cry off, which I must do – and came here to do.'

Lord Oversley, rising also, and going to him to lay a hand on his shoulder, said: 'I know, my boy, I know! And if I were a rich man –'

He was interrupted. The door opened suddenly; a male voice was heard to exclaim: 'No, dash it, Julia, you can't – !' and he and Adam turned to see that Miss Oversley was standing on the threshold, one hand clasping the door-knob, the other holding her riding-whip and gloves.

For a moment or two she remained there, her lips parted in eagerness, her eyes, almost too large for her little delicate face, full of light. The picture she presented was lovely indeed. She was a slim creature, so fragile that it was easy to understand why her admirers called her Sylph. Even the feathery curls peeping from under a hat like a shako were ethereal; and her severely cut riding-dress seemed merely to emphasize her fairy-like charm.

Adam stood gazing at her, his heart in his eyes. She let her whip and gloves fall, and ran forward, uttering in a soft, joyful voice: 'I knew it! You couldn't be so close to me and I *not* know! Adam!'

Entering the room in her wake, her brother Charles interpreted this for his father's ear, saying in an undervoice: 'Saw the hat in the hall, and guessed how it was! Darted off before I knew what she meant to do.'

She would have thrown herself into Adam's arms, but he prevented her, catching her hands in a painful grip, and holding her at a distance. He was very pale, and could not command his voice to speak more than her name. He bent his head to kiss her hands, his own shaking.

Lord Oversley said bracingly: 'A little less in alt, Julia, if you please! We are all glad to see Adam home again, but there is no occasion for these transports. I don't think you and Charlie met when you were last in England, Adam, but I daresay you haven't forgotten each other.'

His heir, nobly seconding this attempt to create a diversion, said immediately: 'Lord, no! That is, *I* remember *you*, Lynton, though you might not remember me. How do you do?'

Adam released Julia's hands. He was still pale, but he replied with tolerable composure: 'Of course I remember you! I own, however, that I might not have recognized you again.'

'No, well, I was only a schoolboy when you first joined. Jupiter, how much I did envy you!'

'Adam!' Julia faltered. 'Oh, what has Papa been saying to you?'

'Now, for heaven's sake, Julia!' interrupted Oversley testily. 'I've said nothing Adam doesn't say himself, so —'

'Oh, *no!*' she exclaimed, turning her brimming eyes towards Adam. 'No, no, I don't believe it! You haven't changed! I know you have not!'

'No — not that, but —'

'For shame, Adam!' she said, showing him an April face. 'Oh, how vexed I am with you! What a scold you deserve! Did you

think *I* was fickle? Or that I care a rush for wealth? I think I *will* give you a scold!

She had stretched out her hands to him again, an enchanting smile trembling on her lips. He took them, but he dared not trust himself to look into her face, and said, keeping his eyes lowered: 'I could never doubt you. But when I – when we – when I had the presumption to ask your father –' He broke off rather hopelessly, and continued after a moment's pause: 'I thought then that I should be able to support you. The ugly truth is that I'm not even able to provide for my sisters. If I were to be thinking of marriage now I should be the greatest villain unhung – and your father as bad, if he so much as considered my suit!' he added, trying for a smile.

She directed an arch look at her parent, and said audaciously: 'Pooh! As though we couldn't bring Papa about our thumbs! *Stoopid!*'

Adam raised his eyes. 'Julia, you haven't understood. Dear love, this is no case of being obliged to live for a time in straitened circumstances. I – I *have* no circumstances. Within a very short space now I shan't even have a home to offer you.'

She stared at him incredulously. 'No home? But – but Fontley – ?'

'I am putting Fontley up for sale.'

There was a shocked silence. Charles Oversley directed a look of astonished enquiry at his father, but Oversley was looking under suddenly frowning brows at Adam. Julia cried, in a throbbing voice: 'Oh, no, no, no!'

Adam did not speak.

She pulled her hands free. 'You cannot mean that! Oh, how can you talk so? Dear, dear Fontley! All its associations – the home of the Deverils throughout the ages!'

'No, hang it, Ju!' expostulated her brother. 'Can't have been! I mean, it's a Priory! That's the same as a monastery, ain't it? Dissolution of the monasteries – well, I don't precisely remember when that was, but the thing is there can't have been any Deverils living there before it – unless, of course – No, that won't

fit!’ he decided, adding knowledgeably: ‘Celibacy of the clergy, you know. So that’s a hum!’

In spite of himself Adam laughed. ‘Yes, I’m afraid it is. The first Deveril of whom we have any very precise information settled in Leicestershire. There has been a Deveril at Fontley only since 1540 – and a shocking rogue he was, from all I can discover!’

‘Very likely,’ agreed Mr Oversley sagely. ‘Seems to me that most of those old fellows were regular thatchgallows. Well, only think of the Oversley who made *our* fortunes! When he wasn’t playing least in sight he was pretty well swimming in lard, wasn’t he, Papa?’

‘Alas, too true!’ said his father, twinkling.

‘Oh, don’t talk so, don’t talk so!’ Julia broke in. ‘How can you turn everything to jest? Adam, you didn’t mean it! Strangers at Fontley? Oh, no! every feeling revolts! The groves and the alleys! The Chapel ruins where I’ve so often sat, feeling the past all about me, so close that I could almost fancy myself a part of it, and see the ghosts of those dead Deverils who lived there!’ She paused, looking from one to the other, and cried passionately: ‘Ah, you don’t understand! Not even you, Adam! How is it possible? Charlie doesn’t, I know, but you –?’

‘I should rather think I don’t!’ said her brother. ‘If you ever saw a ghost you’d run screeching for your life! What’s more, I remember those ruins quite as well as you do, and very likely better! Whenever we stayed at Fontley we used to play at hide-and-seek amongst ’em, and capital sport it was!’

‘There were other days,’ Julia said, in a low tone. ‘You choose to pretend that you don’t care, Adam, but I know you too well to be hoaxed! You were used to partake of all my sentiments: this reserve has been forced on you by Papa!’

Adam replied steadily: ‘I do care. It would be absurd to pretend that I didn’t. If I seem to you reserved it’s because I care too much to talk about it.’

She said, with quick sympathy: ‘Oh, how horrid I am! how stupid! I understand you – of course I understand you! We won’t

speaking of it, or even think of it! As for repining, I shan't do so, I promise you! Could you be happy in a cottage? I could! How often I have longed to live in one – with white walls, and a thatched roof, and a neat little garden! We'll have a cow, and I'll learn to milk, and make butter and cheese. And some hens, and a bee-hive, and some pigs. Why, with these, and our books, and a pianoforte, we shall be as rich as nabobs, and want nothing to complete our felicity!

'Oh, won't you?' struck in her unappreciative brother. 'Well, if you mean to cook the meals Lynton will precious soon want something more! And who's to kill the pigs, and muck out the henhouse?'

This sardonic interpolation went unheeded. Julia was rapt in contemplation of the picture she had conjured up; and Adam, tenderly amused though he was, felt too deeply moved to laugh. He could only shake his head; and it was left to Lord Oversley to bring his daughter down to earth, which he did, by saying briskly: 'Very pretty, my dear, but quite impractical. I hope Adam can find something better to do than to keep pigs. Indeed, I have no doubt he will, and all the more easily without encumbrance! No one is more sorry than I am that things have turned out as they have, but you must be a good girl, and understand that marriage is out of the question. Adam feels this as strongly as I do, so you need not think me a tyrant, puss!'

She listened with whitening cheeks, and turned her eyes imploringly towards Adam. She read the answer in his face, and burst into tears.

'Julia! Oh, don't, my darling, don't!' he begged.

She sank into a chair, burying her face in her hands, her slender form convulsed by deep sobs. Fortunately, since neither her father nor her brother showed the smallest ability to contend with such a situation, Lady Oversley at that moment came into the room.

A very pretty woman, plumper than her daughter, but with the same large blue eyes, and sensitive mouth, she exclaimed distressfully, and hurried forward. 'Oh, dear, oh, dear! No, no,