One

There was a twinkle in the Nonesuch's eye as he scanned the countenances of his assembled relations, but his voice was perfectly grave, even a trifle apologetic. 'I am afraid it is quite true, ma'am,' he said, addressing himself to his Aunt Sophia. 'I *am* the heir.'

Since the question, so indignantly posed by Lady Lindeth, had been rhetorical, this very frank and manly confession surprised no one. They all knew that old Cousin Joseph Calver had left his fortune to Waldo; and when Lady Lindeth had summoned him to account for himself she had acted on the impulse of the moment, and with no expectation of hearing the news denied. Nor had she had any very real expectation of Waldo's renouncing the bequest in favour of her only child. She naturally felt that no worthier heir to eccentric Cousin Joseph's estate existed than Julian; and she had done her best to introduce the noble orphan to him, even enduring the rigours of a week spent at Harrogate, when Julian had been an engaging child in nankeens and a frilled shirt, and she had tried (quite unavailingly) to gain entrance to Broom Hall. Three times had she driven out from Harrogate, the bored but docile little boy beside her, only to be told, twice, by Cousin Joseph's butler, that the Master was not feeling clever enough to receive visitors; and, once, that the Master would thank her not to come pestering him, because he didn't want to see her, nor her son, nor anyone else. Enquiry had elicited the information that the only visitor ever admitted into the house was the doctor. Local opinion was

divided, charitable persons maintaining that a disappointment suffered in his youth was responsible for this churlishness; others asserting that he was a muckworm who grudged every groat he was obliged to spend. Having had the opportunity to perceive the neglected condition of the grounds of Broom Hall, Lady Lindeth had ranged herself with the majority. A suspicion that Cousin Joseph might not be as plump in the pocket as was supposed had occurred only to be dismissed: Broom Hall, though greatly inferior in style and size to young Lord Lindeth's seat in the Midlands, was a very respectable house, with probably as many as thirty bedrooms. It did not stand in a park, but its gardens appeared to be extensive; and she was credibly informed that most of the surrounding land belonged to the estate. She had left Harrogate much inclined to think that Cousin Joseph's fortune was considerably larger than had previously been supposed. She did not grudge it to him, but she would have thought herself a very unnatural parent had she not made a push to secure it for her son. So she had swallowed her resentment at the treatment she had received, and had continued, throughout the succeeding years, to send Joseph small Christmas gifts, and periodical letters, affectionately enquiring after the state of his health, and regaling him with accounts of Julian's virtues, beauty, and scholastic progress. And after all her pains he had left his entire estate to Waldo, who was neither the most senior of his relations nor the one who bore his name!

The most senior of the three cousins gathered together in Lady Lindeth's drawing-room was George Wingham, the son of her ladyship's eldest sister. He was a very worthy man, however prosy; she was not particularly fond of him, but she thought she could have borne it better had Cousin Joseph made him his heir, for she was obliged to acknowledge that his seniority gave him a certain amount of right to the bequest. Not, of course, so good a right as Laurence Calver. Lady Lindeth held Laurence, the youngest of her nephews, in contempt and dislike, but she hoped she was a just woman, and she felt she could have supported with

equanimity his succession to a fortune which he would have lost no time in dissipating.

But that Cousin Joseph, ignoring the claims of George, and Laurence, and her beloved Julian, should have named Waldo Hawkridge as his heir was so intolerable that had she been of a nervous disposition she thought she must have succumbed to Spasms when she had first heard the incredible news. As it was, she had been unable to speak for a full minute; and when she did she had merely uttered Waldo's name, in a voice so vibrant with loathing that Julian, the bearer of the tidings, had been startled. 'But, Mama—!' he had expostulated. 'You *like* Waldo!'

That was perfectly true, but quite beside the point, as she crossly told her son. She was, in fact, much attached to Waldo, but neither her fondness for him nor her gratitude for his unfailing kindness to Julian prevented her from feeling positively unwell whenever she thought of his enormous wealth. To learn that Cousin Joseph's estate was to be added to an already indecently large fortune did make her feel for a few minutes that so far from liking him she detested him.

She said now, in a peevish tone: 'I can't conceive what should have induced that disagreeable old man to choose you for his heir!'

'There is no understanding it at all,' Sir Waldo replied sympathetically.

'I don't believe you ever so much as *saw* him, either!'

'No, I never did.'

'Well, I must own,' said George, 'that it was an odd sort of a thing to do. One would have thought—However, none of us had the least claim on the old fellow, and I'm sure he had a perfect right to leave his money where he chose!'

At this, Laurence Calver, who had been lounging on the sofa, and moodily playing with an ornate quizzing-glass, let the glass fall on the end of its ribbon, and jerked himself up, saying angrily: '*You* had no claim to it – or Waldo – or Lindeth! But *I'm* a Calver! I – I think it *damnable*!'

'Very possibly!' snapped his aunt. 'But you will be good enough not to use such language in my presence, if you please!'

He coloured, and mumbled an apology, but the reproof did nothing to improve his temper, and he embarked on a long and incoherent diatribe, which ranged stammeringly over a wide ground, embracing all the real and fancied causes of his sense of ill-usage, the malevolence of Joseph Calver, and the suspected duplicity of Waldo Hawkridge.

Until George Wingham intervened, he was heard in unresponsive silence. His oblique animadversions on Sir Waldo's character did indeed bring a flash into Lord Lindeth's eyes, but he folded his lips tightly on a retort. Laurence had always been jealous of Waldo: everyone knew that; and very ludicrous it was to watch his attempts to outshine his cousin. He was several years younger than Waldo, and he possessed none of the attributes which Nature had so generously bestowed on the Nonesuch. Failing to excel in any of the sports which had won for Waldo his title, he had lately turned towards the dandy-set, abandoning the sporting attire of the Corinthian for all the extravagances of fashion popular amongst the young dandies. Julian, three years his junior, thought that he looked ridiculous in any guise; and instinctively turned his eyes towards Waldo. They warmed as they looked, for to Julian Sir Waldo was at once a magnificent personage in whose company it was an honour to be seen, the big cousin who had taught him to ride, drive, shoot, fish, and box; a fount of wisdom; and the surest refuge in times of stress. He had even taught him something of his own way with the starched folds of a neckcloth: not the intricacies of the Mathematical or the Oriental Tie, but an elegant fashion of his own, as unobtrusive as it was exquisite. Laurence would do well to imitate the quiet neatness of Waldo's dress, Julian thought, not realizing that the plain, close-fitting coats which so admirably became Waldo could only be worn to advantage by men of splendid physique. Less fortunate aspirants to high fashion were obliged to adopt a more florid style, with padding to disguise sloping shoulders, and huge, laid-back lapels to widen a narrow chest.

He glanced again at Laurence, not so much folding his lips as gripping them tightly together, to keep back the retort he knew

Waldo didn't wish him to utter. From vapourings about the injustice of fate, Laurence, working himself into a passion, was becoming more particular in his complaints. Any stranger listening to him would have supposed that Waldo was wealthy at his expense, Julian thought indignantly: certainly that Waldo had always treated him shabbily. Well, whether Waldo liked it or not, he was not going to sit meekly silent any longer!

But before he could speak George had intervened, saying in a voice of grim warning: 'Take care! If anyone has cause to be grateful to Waldo, you have, you distempered young Jack-at-warts!'

'Oh, George, don't be a fool!' begged Sir Waldo.

His stolid senior paid no heed to this, but kept his stern gaze on Laurence. 'Who paid your Oxford debts?' he demanded. 'Who gets you out of sponging-houses? Who saved you from the devil's own mess, not a month ago? *I* know to what tune you were bit at that hell in Pall Mall! – no, it wasn't Waldo who told me, so you needn't cast any of your black looks at him! The Sharps tried on the grand mace with you, didn't they? Lord, it was all hollow for them! You were *born* a bleater!'

'That's enough!' Waldo interrupted.

'It is! More than enough!' said George rebelliously.

'Tell me, Laurie,' said Waldo, ignoring this interpolation, 'do you *want* a house in Yorkshire?'

'No, but – what do *you* want with it? *Why* should you have it? You've got Manifold – you've got a town house – you've got that place in Leicestershire – and – you ain't even a Calver!'

'And what the devil has that to say to anything?' struck in George. 'What have the Calvers to do with Manifold, pray? Or with the house in Charles Street? Or with –'

'George, if you don't hold your tongue we shall be at outs, you and I!'

'Oh, very well!' growled George. 'But when that ramshackle court-card starts talking as though he thought *he* ought to own Manifold, which has been in your family since the lord knows when—!'

'He doesn't think anything of the sort. He thinks merely that he ought to own Broom Hall. But what would you do with it if you did own it, Laurie? I haven't seen it, but I collect it's a small estate, subsisting on the rents of various farms and holdings. Have you a fancy for setting up as an agriculturist?'

'No, I have not!' replied Laurence angrily. 'If that sneaking screw had left it to me, I'd have sold it – which I don't doubt *you'll* do – as though you weren't *swimming* in riches already!'

'Yes, you would have sold it, and wasted its price within six months. Well, I can put it to better use than that.' The smile crept back into his eyes; he said consolingly: 'Does it comfort you to know that it won't add to my riches? It won't: quite the reverse, I daresay!'

Mr Wingham directed a sharply suspicious look at him, but it was Lady Lindeth who spoke, exclaiming incredulously: 'What? Do you mean to tell me that that detestable old man wasn't possessed of a handsome fortune after all?'

'Doing it rather too brown!' said Laurence, his not uncomely features marred by a sneer.

'I can't tell you yet what he was possessed of, ma'am, but I've been given no reason to suppose that he's made me heir to more than a competence – deriving, I collect, from the estate. And as you and George have both frequently described to me the deplorable state of decay into which the place has fallen I should imagine that the task of bringing it into order is likely to swallow the revenue, and a good deal more besides.'

'Is that what you mean to do?' asked Julian curiously. 'Bring it into order?'

'Possibly: I can't tell, until I've seen it.'

'No, of course – Waldo, you know I don't want it, but what the dooce do *you*—Oh!' He broke off, laughing, and said mischievously: 'I'll swear I know, but I won't tell George – word of a Lindeth!'

'*Tell* me?' said George, with a scornful snort. 'Do you take me for a flat, young sauce-box? He wants it for another Orphan Asylum, of course!'

'An Orphan Asylum!' Laurence jerked himself to his feet, staring at Sir Waldo with narrowed, glittering eyes. 'So that's it, is it? What ought to be mine is to be squandered on the scaff and raff of the back-slums! You don't want it yourself, but you'd rather by far benefit a set of dirty, worthless brats than your own kith and kin!'

'I don't think you are concerned with any of my kith and kin other than yourself, Laurie,' replied Sir Waldo. 'That being so – yes, I would.'

'You – you—By God, you make me sick!' Laurence said, trembling with fury.

'Well, take yourself off!' recommended Julian, as flushed as Laurence was pale. 'You only came here to nose out what you might, and you've done that! And if you think you're at liberty to insult Waldo under any roof of mine I'll have you know you're much mistaken!'

'Make yourself easy: I'm going, toad-eater!' Laurence flung at him. 'And you need not put yourself to the trouble of escorting me downstairs! Ma'am, your very obedient servant!'

'Tragedy Jack!' remarked George, as the door slammed behind the outraged dandy. 'Well-done, young 'un!' He added, with a grin that suddenly lightened his rather heavy countenance: 'You and your roofs! Try telling me *I* came to nose out what I might – and see what I'll do to you!'

Julian laughed, relaxing. 'Well, you did, but that's different! You don't grudge Cousin Joseph's property to Waldo any more than I do!'

'No, but that ain't to say I don't grudge it to those curst brats of his!' said George frankly. He was himself a man of substance, but he was also the father of a large and hopeful family, and although he would have repudiated with indignation any suggestion that he was not very well able to provide for his children, he had for years been unable to consider his unknown and remote cousin's problematical fortune without thinking that it would furnish him with a useful addition to his own estate. He was neither an unkindly nor an ungenerous man; he subscribed

what was proper to Charity; but he did feel that Waldo carried the thing to excess. That, of course, was largely the fault of his upbringing: his father, the late Sir Thurstan Hawkridge, had been a considerable philanthropist; but George could not remember that he had ever gone to such absurd lengths as to succour and educate the lord only knew how many of the nameless and gallows-born waifs with which every city was ridden.

He looked up, to find that Waldo was watching him, the faintest hint of a question in his eyes. He reddened, saying roughly: 'No, I don't want Broom Hall, and I hope I know better than to waste my time recommending you not to drop your blunt providing for a parcel of paupers who won't thank you for it, and, you may depend upon it, won't grow up to be the respectable citizens you *think* they will, either! But I must say I do wonder what made that old miser leave his money to you!'

Sir Waldo could have enlightened him, but thought it more tactful to refrain from divulging that he figured in his eccentric relative's Will as 'the only member of my family who has paid no more heed to me than I have to him.'

'Well, for my part I think it very unsatisfactory,' said Lady Lindeth. 'And not at all what poor Cousin Joseph would have wished!'

'You do mean to do that, Waldo?' Julian asked.

'Yes, I think so, if I find the place at all suitable. It may not be – and in any event I don't want it prattled about, so just you keep your tongue, young man!'

'Well, of all the abominable injustices –! *I* didn't prattle about your horrid brats: it was George! Waldo, if you mean to go north, may I go with you?'

'Why, yes, if you wish, but you'll find it a dead bore, you know. There will be a good deal of business to be settled with Cousin Joseph's attorney, which will keep me busy in Leeds; and whatever I decide to do with Broom Hall I must look into things there, and set about putting them in order. Dull work! In the middle of the Season, too!'

'Much I care! That's what *I* think a dead bore: going from one

horrible squeeze to another; doing the pretty to people I'd as lief never see again; showing-off in the Grand Strut –'

'You know, you're spoilt, Julian!' interrupted George severely.

'No, I'm not. I never did like going to parties, and I never shall – not these insipid ton parties, at all events. I like living in the country. I say, Waldo, I wonder if there's any fishing to be had near Broom Hall?' He saw that Sir Waldo was looking at Lady Lindeth, and added: 'Oh, Mama, you don't object! Do you, Mama?'

'No,' she answered. 'You must do as you please – though it seems a pity you should go out of town just now. There's the Aveburys' Dress-party, and—However, if you prefer to go to Yorkshire with Waldo I am sure I have nothing to say!'

There was a good deal of reluctance in her voice, which one at least of her audience recognized and appreciated. She was a devoted but not a foolish parent; and while, on the one hand, she was bent on thrusting her son into the heart of the ton, and (if possible) arranging an advantageous marriage for him; on the other, she had far too much wisdom either to try to drive him against his inclination, or to cast the least rub in the way of his allegiance to his cousin Waldo. It stood greatly to her credit that almost from the hour of her widowhood she had made up her mind that she must never keep Julian tied to her apron-strings. But although she had adhered strictly to this resolve she had suffered many qualms, fearing that the very sweetness of his disposition might be his undoing. He was a handsome boy, and one who had come into the world hosed and shod, as the saying was; and her dread was that he might be flattered and coaxed into such company as Laurence kept, with disastrous results. With Waldo he was not only safe but fortunate as well, since Waldo, taking him into his own circle, was introducing him to men of the first rank and character. That most of these gentlemen were addicted to the more dangerous, and (in her view) more degrading forms of sport, she did not allow to weigh with her. It was incomprehensible to her why any man should wish to risk his neck in the hunting field, or in a curricle race; or should derive the smallest satisfaction from *planting a flush hit* in

the face of some unoffending acquaintance, encountered in Jackson's Boxing Saloon; but she was fortified in her acceptance of these peculiar activities by the knowledge that no female was fitted to be a judge of such matters; and by the realization that nothing was farther from her ambition than to see her son joining the ranks of those who abjured violent sports. Furthermore, however many pangs of jealousy she might have been made to suffer when, having failed to turn Julian from some adolescent and ill-judged start, she had seen Waldo blight it by the mere lifting of an eyebrow, she could still be thankful to him. His ideas might not coincide with hers; she might resent Julian's devotion to him; but while she knew his influence over her darling to be strong no maternal apprehensions seriously troubled her.

She met his eyes, and saw the understanding smile in them. He said: 'I know, ma'am – but where's the use? I'll take good care of him!'

The annoying thing about him was that he did know, though never had she confided in him her ambition to see Julian achieve the social success to which his birth, his looks, and his fortune entitled him. She responded tartly: 'He is of age, and very well able, I trust, to take care of himself! A very odd idea of me you must have, my dear Waldo, if you think he is obliged to ask my permission for anything he may wish to do!'

The smile touched his lips; he murmured: 'No! the only idea I have of you, ma'am, is that you are a woman of great good sense.'

As he turned away from her, Julian, whose attention had been diverted by a question addressed to him by Mr Wingham, demanded gaily: 'Are you talking secrets? When do you mean to go to Yorkshire?'

'I haven't decided the precise date, but sometime next week. I shall be travelling post, of course.'

The expression of disappointment on Julian's face was ludicrous enough to make even his ruffled mother smile. He exclaimed impulsively: 'Oh, *no*! You can't wish to be shut up in

a stuffy chaise for—Oh, you're trying to gammon me, are you? Waldo, you're a—you're a—'

'Gull-catcher,' supplied George, on the broad grin.

Julian accepted this blithely. 'Yes, *and* a regular dryboots! Curricle, Waldo, or phaeton?'

'I don't see how we can go by either when I've no horses stabled on the Great North Road,' objected Waldo.

But Julian was not to be hoaxed twice. He retorted that if his cousin was such a nip-farthing as to grudge the expense of sending his cattle forward they would either hire job-horses, or proceed by such easy stages as could be managed by one team.

'I like young Lindeth,' said George, when, presently, he walked with his cousin in the direction of Bond Street. 'A very good sort of a boy: nothing of the rum 'un about *him*! But as for Laurence –! Upon my word, Waldo, I wonder that you should bear with him as you do! Well, I was used to think him more flash than foolish, but after listening to his damned insolence today I think him the most buffleheaded clunch I ever saw in my life! If there's *one* person anybody but a sapskull would have taken precious care not to rub against, it's you! Good God, where does he think he'd be, if you was to abandon him? Don't you tell me he hasn't cost you a small fortune, because *I'm* not a gapeseed! Why you didn't lose your temper and tell him he'd had his last groat from you I shall never know!'

'Yes, you will,' responded Sir Waldo calmly. 'I didn't lose my temper because that is precisely what I *had* told him.'

George was so much surprised that he halted in his tracks. 'You had? Waldo, you don't mean it!'

'No, probably not, but today's outburst shows that Laurie thinks I do. So now you know why I hadn't the smallest inclination to lose my temper. For how much longer do you mean to stand like a stock, attracting the attention of the vulgar? *Do* come out of your trance, George!'

Thus adjured, Mr Wingham fell into step again beside his tall cousin, saying earnestly: 'I was never more glad of anything in my life! Now, don't waver from it, I beg of you! Damme if I

wouldn't prefer to see you wasting the ready on a pack of ragged brats than on that young once-a-week man!'

'Oh, George, no!' expostulated Sir Waldo. 'Coming it *too* strong!'

'Oh, no, I ain't!' said George obstinately. 'When I think of the things he said today, and the gratitude he owes you –'

'He owes me none.'

'*What?*' George gasped, once more coming to a sudden halt.

His cousin's hand, gripping his arm, forced him onward. 'No, George: not again!' said Sir Waldo firmly. 'I've done very badly by Laurie. If you don't know that, I do.'

'Well, I don't!' George declared. 'From the time he was at Harrow you've positively *lavished* money on him! You never did so for Julian!'

'Oh, I've never done more for Julian than send him a guinea under the seal, when he was a schoolboy!' said Sir Waldo, laughing.

'So I knew! Of course, you may say he was pretty well-breeched, but –'

'I shan't say anything of the sort. I should have done no more for him whatever his circumstances might have been. By the time he went to Harrow I wasn't such a cawker as I was when Laurie was a boy.' He paused, slightly frowning, and then said abruptly: 'You know, George, when my father died, I was too young for my inheritance!'

'Well, I own we all thought so – made sure you'd play ducks and drakes with it! – but you never did so, and –'

'No, I did worse: I ruined Laurie.'

'Oh, come now, Waldo –' George protested, adding after a moment's reflection: 'Encouraged him to depend on you, you mean. I suppose you did – and I'm damned if I know why, for you never liked him above half, did you?'

'I didn't. But when I was – what did he call it? – *swimming in riches*, and my uncle was possessed of no more than an independence – besides being as big a screw as our cousin

Joseph, and keeping Laurie devilish short – it seemed so hard-fisted not to come to Laurie's rescue!'

'Yes, I see,' said George slowly. 'And having once begun to frank him you couldn't stop.'

'I might have done so, but I didn't. What, after all, did it signify to me? By the time I'd acquired enough sense to know what it signified to *him*, the mischief had been done.'

'Oh!' George turned this over in his mind. 'Ay, very likely! But if you think the fault is yours, all I can say is that it ain't like you to leave him to sink or swim now! What's more, I don't believe you would!'

'No, I was afraid he wouldn't believe it either,' admitted Sir Waldo. 'He seems to have done so, however, which makes me hopeful that the mischief has not gone beyond repair.'

George uttered a bark of sceptical laughter. 'He'll be gapped in some hell before the week's out – and don't tell me you've tied him up, because he ain't such a bottlehead that he don't know you'd never compel him to pay the forfeit!'

'I haven't, but I paid his gaming debts only on his promise that he would incur no more of them.'

'His promise –! Good God, Waldo, you don't depend on that, do you?'

'But I do. Laurie won't go back on his word: witness his rage today, only because I've compelled him to pledge it!'

'Once a gamester always a gamester!'

'My dear George, Laurie is no more a gamester than I am!' replied Sir Waldo, amused. 'All he wishes to do is to sport a figure in the world. Do believe that I know him much better than you do, and take that frown off your face!' He slipped his hand within his cousin's arm, grasping it lightly. 'Instead, tell me this, old chap! Do you want Broom Hall? Because, if you do – and you need not fly up into the boughs! – I hope you know you've only to –'

'I do not!' interrupted George, with unnecessary violence. 'Merely because I said I thought it an odd start in Cousin Joseph to have left his property to you—By the bye, my aunt didn't like it above half, did she?'

'No – most understandable! But I really can't feel that Lindeth stands in the least need of Broom Hall.'

'Oh, lord, no! – any more than I do! Bless the boy, he never gave it a thought! You know, Waldo, it's my belief he's going to cut up all her hopes! Ever since he came down from Oxford she's been trying to push him into the first style of fashion – *and* into an eligible marriage – and then, when there isn't a ton party he ain't invited to attend, what does he do but beg you to let him go with you into the wilds of Yorkshire! I promise you, I was hard put to it not to burst out laughing at the look in her face when young Julian said the Season was a dead bore! Mark me if she don't prevent his going with you!'

'She won't even make the attempt. She's by far too fond of him to try to thrust him down any path he doesn't wish to follow – and has too much commonsense as well. Poor Aunt Lindeth! I do most sincerely pity her! She was obliged to abandon her efforts to bring her husband into fashion, for he despised nothing more; and to discover now that Julian, who has all in his favour to blossom into a Pink of the Ton, is as bored by such stuff as ever his father was is really very hard.'

'I think the better of him for it,' declared George. 'To own the truth, I always looked to see him trying to follow in *your* steps! Well, if she does let him go with you next week, take care he don't fall into mischief – unless you have a fancy for getting your eyes scratched out!'

'None at all! Are you apprehensive that he will form an attachment to a milkmaid? Or set the countryside by the ears? You terrify me, George!'

'No, no!' George said, chuckling. 'It's you who will do that! Well, I don't mean you'll set 'em all by the ears precisely, but, lord, what a flutter there will be when they find the Nonesuch amongst 'em!'

'Oh, for God's sake, George – !' said Sir Waldo, withdrawing his hand abruptly from his cousin's arm. 'Don't talk such nonsense! If I were a betting man, I'd lay you odds against the chance that anyone at Oversett has ever heard of me!'

Two

Neither prophecy hit the mark, but, in the event, Mr Wingham came nearer to it than Sir Waldo. Broom Hall belonged to a country parish whose centre was the village of Oversett, situated in the West Riding, rather closer to Leeds than to Harrogate, and not above twenty miles from York; and although the majority of the Reverend John Chartley's parishoners knew nothing about Sir Waldo, and several elderly gentlemen, such as Squire Mickleby, took very little interest in any member of the Corinthian set, amongst the ladies, and the younger gentlemen, a good deal of excitement was felt. No one was acquainted with Sir Waldo; but several ladies had at some time or another spent a few weeks in London, and had had him pointed out to them in the Park or at the Opera as one of the leaders of the ton; and every budding young whip who prided himself on his light hands and the prime nature of his turn-out was torn between longing to see just how Sir Waldo did the trick and dread lest such an out-and-out top-sawyer should regard with contempt the efforts of his admirers to emulate his skill.

The first person to learn the news was the Rector, and it was his daughter who carried it to Staples, the most considerable house in the neighbourhood, where it was variously received. Mrs Underhill, who knew no more of Sir Waldo than the Rector's most illiterate parishioner, but understood, from the awe in Miss Chartley's face, that the news was remarkable, said, in a placid voice: 'Fancy!' Miss Charlotte, a bouncing fifteen-year-old, looked for guidance at Miss Trent, her adolescent

adoration of her young preceptress having led her to regard that lady as an authority on any subject which came under discussion; and Mrs Underhill's niece, Miss Theophania Wield, fixed her large, suddenly sparkling eyes on Miss Chartley's face, and uttered breathlessly: 'Is it true? Coming to Broom Hall? Oh, you're shamming it, Patience – I know you are!'

Miss Trent, though the announcement had caused her to look up from her stitchery, her brows raised in momentary surprise, resumed her work, volunteering no remark; but Mr Courtenay Underhill, who had lounged in to pay his respects to his mama's visitor, exclaimed in the liveliest astonishment: 'Sir Waldo Hawkridge? Old Calver's heir? Good God! Mama, did you hear? Sir Waldo Hawkridge!'

'Yes, dear. Well, I'm sure I hope he'll find it to his liking, though it will be wonderful if he does, the way Mr Calver let all go to rack and ruin! I don't seem able to recall him at the moment, but there! I never was one for remembering names – not but what you'd think I should keep that one in my head, for I never heard such a funny one!'

'They call him the Nonesuch!' said Courtenay reverently.

'Do they, love? That would be a nickname, I daresay. Depend upon it, it was given him for some silly reason, like the way your grandfather was used to call your poor Aunt Jane Muffin, all because –'

'Oh!' cried her niece, impatiently interrupting these amiable meanderings, 'as though anyone was ever called that for a stupid joke! It means – it means *perfection*! Doesn't it, Ancilla?'

Miss Trent, selecting a length of silk from her skein, replied, in her cool, well-bred voice: 'A paragon, certainly.'

'Fudge! It means being the greatest Go among all the Goers!' stated Courtenay. '*Particularly* on the roads – though they say the Nonesuch is a clipping rider to hounds too. Gregory Ash – and he knows *all* the Melton men! – told me that in harness and out no man can do more with a horse than the Nonesuch. Well, if he is coming here, I won't be seen driving that chestnut I had from old Skeeby, that's certain! Mama, Mr Badgworth has a neatish

bay he'd be willing to sell: beautiful stepper – carries a good head – just the right stamp!'

'Oh, pooh! As though anyone cares a rush for such stuff!' broke in Miss Wield scornfully. 'Sir Waldo is first in *consequence* with the ton, and of the first style of elegance, besides being very handsome, and *hugely* wealthy!'

'Elegant! Handsome!' jeered Courtenay, mimicking her. 'Much you know about it!'

'I do know!' she flashed. 'When I was at my uncle's house in Portland Place –'

'Yes, you were as thick as inkle-weavers with him, of course! What miff-maff you do talk! I don't suppose you've ever so much as clapped eyes on him!'

'I have, I *have*! Frequently! Well, *several* times! And he *is* handsome and elegant! Ancilla, he is, isn't he?'

Miss Chartley, who was a very gentle, prettily behaved girl, seized the opportunity to intervene in what promised to develop into a shrill quarrel, turning towards Miss Trent, and saying in her soft, shy voice: 'I expect you know more about Sir Waldo than any of us, for you were used to live in London, were you not? Perhaps you may even have met him?'

'No, indeed I have not,' Miss Trent replied. 'I never saw him, to my knowledge, and know no more of him than the rest of the world.' She added, with the glimmer of a smile: 'The company he keeps was quite above my touch!'

'I daresay you didn't wish for his acquaintance,' said Charlotte. 'I'm sure *I* don't: I hate beaux! And if he is coming here to hold up his nose at us all I hope he will go away again!'

'I expect he will,' said Miss Trent, threading her needle.

'Yes, that is what Papa says,' agreed Miss Chartley. 'He thinks he can only be coming to settle with the lawyers, and perhaps to sell Broom Hall, for he can't wish to live in it, can he? Papa says he has a very beautiful house in Gloucestershire, which has been in his family for generations. And if he is so very fine and fashionable he must think this a dull place, I daresay – though it is quite close to Harrogate, of course.'

'Harrogate!' said Courtenay contemptuously. '*That* won't fadge! He won't remain at Broom Hall above a sennight I'll be bound! There's nothing to make him wish to stay, after all.'

'No?' said his cousin, a provocative smile on her exquisite countenance.

'No!' he stated, revolted by this odious self-satisfaction. 'And if you think he has only to see you to fall in love with you you much mistake the matter! I dare swear he is acquainted with a score of girls prettier by far than you!'

'Oh, no!' she said, adding simply: 'He couldn't be!'

Miss Chartley protested involuntarily: 'Oh, Tiffany, how can you? I beg your pardon, but indeed you shouldn't –!'

'It's perfectly true!' argued Miss Wield. '*I* didn't make my face, so why shouldn't I say it's beautiful? Everyone else does!'

Young Mr Underhill instantly entered a caveat, but Miss Chartley was silenced. Herself a modest girl, she was deeply shocked, but however much she might deprecate such vain-glory honesty compelled her to acknowledge that Tiffany Wield was the most beautiful creature she had ever seen or imagined. Everything about her was perfection. Not the most spiteful critic could say of her that it was a pity she was too tall, or too short, or that her nose spoiled her loveliness, or that she was not so beautiful in profile: she was beautiful from every angle, thought Miss Chartley. Even her dusky locks, springing so prettily from a wide brow, curled naturally; and if attention was first attracted by her deep and intensely blue eyes, fringed by their long black lashes, closer scrutiny revealed that a little, straight nose, enchantingly curved lips, and a complexion like the bloom on a peach were equally worthy of admiration. She was only seventeen years of age, but her figure betrayed neither puppy-fat nor awkward angles; and when she opened her mouth it was seen that her teeth were like matched pearls. Until her return, a short time since, to Staples, where her childhood had been spent, Patience Chartley had been generally held to be the prettiest girl in the neighbourhood, but Tiffany had quite eclipsed her. Patience had been brought up to believe that one's appearance

was a matter of no importance, but when the parent who had inculcated one with this dictum said that it gave him pleasure merely to rest his eyes on Tiffany's lovely face one might perhaps be pardoned for feeling just a trifle wistful. No one, thought Patience, observing herself in the mirror when she dressed her soft brown hair, was going to look twice at her when Tiffany was present. She accepted her inferiority meekly, so free from jealousy that she wished very much that Tiffany would not say such things as must surely repel her most devout admirers.

Apparently sharing her views, Mrs Underhill expostulated, saying in a voice which held more of pleading than censure: 'Now, Tiffany-love! You shouldn't talk like that! Whatever would people think if they was to hear you? It's not becoming – and so, I'll be bound, Miss Trent will tell you!'

'Much I care!'

'Well, that shows what a pea-goose you are!' struck in Charlotte, firing up in defence of her idol. 'Because Miss Trent is much more genteel than you are, or any of us, and –'

'Thank you, Charlotte, that will do!'

'Well, it's true!' muttered Charlotte rebelliously.

Ignoring her, Miss Trent smiled at Mrs Underhill, saying: 'No, ma'am; not at all becoming, and not at all wise either.'

'Why not?' Tiffany demanded.

Miss Trent regarded her thoughtfully. 'Well, it's an odd circumstance, but I've frequently observed that whenever you boast of your beauty you seem to lose some of it. I expect it must be the change in your expression.'

Startled, Tiffany flew to gaze anxiously into the ornate looking-glass which hung above the fireplace. '*Do* I?' she asked naïvely. '*Really* do I, Ancilla?'

'Yes, decidedly,' replied Miss Trent, perjuring her soul without the least hesitation. 'Besides, when a female is seen to admire herself it sets up people's backs, and she finds very soon that she is paid fewer compliments than any girl of her acquaintance. And nothing is more agreeable than a prettily turned compliment!'

'That's true!' exclaimed Tiffany, much struck. She broke into laughter, flitting across the room to bestow a brief embrace upon Miss Trent. 'I *do* love you, you horrid thing, because however odious you may be you are never *stuffy*! I won't admire myself any more: I'll beg pardon for being an antidote instead! Oh, Patience, are you positively sure Sir Waldo is coming?'

'Yes, for Wedmore told Papa that he had received orders from Mr Calver's lawyer to have all in readiness for Sir Waldo by next week. And also that he is bringing another gentleman with him, and several servants. The poor Wedmores! Papa said all he might to soothe them, but they have been thrown into such a quake! Mr Smeeth seems to have told them how rich and grand Sir Waldo is, so, of course, they are in dread that he will expect a degree of comfort it is not in their power to provide for him.'

'Now, that,' suddenly interjected Mrs Underhill, 'puts me in mind of something I *should* like to know, my dear! For when my Matlock told me I couldn't credit it, for all she had it from Mrs Wedmore herself. Is it true that Mr Calver left them nothing but twenty pounds, and his gold watch?'

Patience nodded sorrowfully. 'Yes, ma'am, I'm afraid it is. I know one shouldn't speak ill of the dead, but one can't help feeling that it was very wrong and ungrateful, after so many years of faithful service!'

'Well, for my part, I never did see, and no more I ever shall, that being dead makes a scrap of difference to what you was like when you were alive!' said Mrs Underhill, with unwonted energy. 'A nasty, disagreeable clutchfist he was, and you may depend upon it that's what he is still! And not in heaven either! If you can tell me who ever said one should speak respectfully of those who have gone to the other place, you'll have told me something I never heard before, my dear!'

Patience was obliged to laugh, but she said: 'No, indeed, but perhaps one ought not to judge, without knowing all the circumstances. Mama, I own, feels as you do, but Papa says we can't know what may have been at the root of poor Mr Calver's

churlishness, and that we should rather pity him. He must have been very unhappy!'

'Well, your Papa is bound to say something Christian, being a Reverend,' replied Mrs Underhill, in a reasonable spirit. 'The ones *I* pity are the Wedmores – not but what they'd have left that old screw years ago, if they'd had a mite of sense, instead of believing he'd leave them well provided for, which anyone could have guessed he wouldn't, whatever he may have promised them! How are they going to find another situation at their time of life? Tell me that!'

But as Miss Chartley was quite unable to tell her she only sighed, and shook her head, thus affording Tiffany an opportunity to turn the conversation into another, and, in her view, far more important channel. She asked her aunt how soon after his arrival she meant to call on Sir Waldo.

Mrs Underhill's origins were humble; with the best will in the world to conduct herself like a lady of quality she had never managed to grasp all the intricacies of the social code. But some things she did know. She exclaimed: 'Good gracious, Tiffany, whatever next? As though I didn't know better than go calling on a gentleman! If your uncle were alive it would have been for him to do, if he'd thought fit, which I daresay he wouldn't have, any more than I do myself, because what's the use of leaving cards on this Sir Waldo if he don't mean to stay at Broom Hall?'

'Then Courtenay must do so!' said Tiffany, paying no heed to the latter part of this speech.

But Courtenay, to her considerable indignation, refused to do anything of the sort. Modesty was not one of his outstanding characteristics, nor were his manners, in his own home, distinguished by propriety; but the suggestion that he, at the age of nineteen, should have the effrontery to thrust himself on Sir Waldo affected him so profoundly that he turned quite pale, and told his cousin that she must be mad to suppose that he would be so impudent.

The urgency with which Miss Wield conducted the ensuing argument, and the burst of angry tears which ended it made Mrs

Underhill feel very uneasy. She confided, later, to Miss Trent that she did hope Sir Waldo wasn't going to upset them all. 'I'm sure I don't know why anyone should be in a fuss over him, but there's Tiffany as mad as fire, all because Courtenay don't feel it would be the thing for him to call! Well, my dear, I don't scruple to own that that's put me a trifle on the fidgets, for you know what she is!'

Miss Trent did know. She owed her present position to the knowledge, which had made it possible for her, in the past, to manage the wayward Beauty rather more successfully than had anyone else.

Miss Wield was the sole surviving child of Mrs Underhill's brother, and an orphan. The late Mr Wield had been a wool merchant of considerable affluence. He was generally considered to have married above his station; but if he had done so with social advancement as his goal he must have been disappointed, since Mrs Wield's brothers showed little disposition to treat him with anything more than indifferent civility, and the lady herself was too shy and too sickly to make any attempt to climb the social ladder. She had died during Tiffany's infancy, and the widower had been glad to accept his sister's offer to rear the child with her own son. Mr Underhill had already retired from trade with a genteel fortune, and had bought Staples, where his gentlemanly manners and sporting tastes were rapidly making him acceptable to all but the highest sticklers in the neighbourhood. Rejecting his elder brother-in-law's tepid offer to admit the little girl into his own London household, Mr Wield consigned her to his sister's care, thinking that if she and Courtenay, two years her senior, were one day to make a match of it he would not be ill-pleased. Contrary to expectation he had not married again; nor did he outlive Mr Underhill by more than a year. He died when Tiffany was fourteen, leaving his fortune, of which she was the sole heiress, in the hands of trustees, and his daughter to the joint guardianship of her two maternal uncles, the younger of these gentlemen having been substituted for the deceased Mr Underhill.

Mrs Underhill had naturally been much affronted by this arrangement. Like her brother, she had looked forward to a marriage between Tiffany and her son. Mr Underhill had left his family very comfortably provided for; no one could have said she was a mercenary woman; but just as Lady Lindeth coveted Joseph Calver's supposed fortune for Julian, so did she covet Tiffany's very real fortune for Courtenay. She said, as soon as she knew the terms of Mr Wield's Will, that she knew how it would be: mark her words if those Burfords didn't snatch the child away before the cat had time to lick its ear! She was right. Mr James Burford, a bachelor, certainly made no attempt to take charge of his niece; but Mr Henry Burford, a banker, residing in very good style in Portland Place, lost no time in removing Tiffany from Staples, and installing her in his daughters' schoolroom. The heiress to a considerable fortune was a very different matter from the motherless child whom Mr Burford had expected to see superseded by a half-brother: besides his two daughters he had three sons.

Mrs Underhill was an easy-going woman, but she might have roused herself to struggle for possession of the heiress if she had been able to suppress a feeling of relief at the prospect of being rid of a damsel crudely described by the rougher members of her household as a proper varmint. Neither she nor a succession of governesses had ever known how to control Tiffany, who, at fourteen, had been as headstrong as she was fearless. Her exploits had scandalized the county, and given her aunt severe palpitations; she led Courtenay and little Charlotte into hair-raising situations; she drove three of her governesses from the house in a state of nervous prostration; already as pretty as a picture, she could change in the twinkling of an eye from an engagingly affectionate child into a positive termagant. Mrs Underhill surrendered her without protest, saying that Mrs Burford little knew what she had undertaken.

It did not take Mrs Burford long to find this out. She said (with perfect truth) that Tiffany had been ruined by indulgence; there was nothing for it but to send her to school.

So Tiffany was packed off to Miss Climping's Seminary in Bath, to be tamed, and transformed from a tomboy into an accomplished young lady.

Unfortunately, Miss Climping's establishment included a number of day-pupils, with whom Tiffany soon struck up friendships. She was permitted to visit them, and once outside the seminary considerably extended her circle of acquaintances. It was not until a billet from a love-lorn youth, addressed to Tiffany, and smuggled into the house by a venial servant, fell into Miss Climping's hands that the good lady realized that the unexceptionable visits to schoolfriends masked far from desirable excursions; or that a girl not yet sixteen could embark on a clandestine love-affair. Tiffany was a valuable pupil, her trustees paying for every extra on the curriculum without a blink; but had it not been for one circumstance Miss Climping would have requested Mr Burford to remove from her select establishment a firebrand who threatened to ruin its reputation. That was the arrival, to assume the duties of a junior teacher, of Ancilla Trent, herself a one-time pupil at the school. Bored by the reproaches and the homilies of what she called a parcel of old dowdies, Tiffany took an instant fancy to the new teacher, who was only eight years older than herself, and in whose clear gray eyes she was swift to detect a twinkle. It did not take her long to discover that however straitened her circumstances might be Ancilla came of a good family, and had been used to move in unquestionably genteel circles. She recognized, and was a little awed by, a certain elegance which owed nothing to Ancilla's simple dresses; and bit by bit she began to lend an ear to such scraps of worldly advice as Ancilla let fall at seasonable moments. It was no part of Ancilla's duty to admonish the older pupils, nor did she do so. She appreciated the humour of certain outrageous pranks, but managed to convey to the heiress that they were perhaps a little childish; and when informed of Tiffany's determination to marry into the peerage not only accepted this as a praiseworthy ambition, but entered with gratifying enthusiasm into various schemes for furthering it. As these were

solely concerned with the preparation of the future peeress for her exalted estate, Tiffany was induced to pay attention to lessons in Deportment, to practise her music, and even, occasionally, to read a book; so that when she left school she had ceased to be a tomboy, and had even acquired a few accomplishments and a smattering of learning.

But she was harder than ever to manage, and nothing was farther from her intention than to submit to her Aunt Burford's plans for her. Mrs Burford, launching her eldest daughter into society, said that Tiffany was too young to be brought out. She might sometimes be allowed to join a small, informal party, or be included in an expedition of pleasure, but she was to consider herself still a schoolroom miss. She would attend concerts and dancing-lessons under the chaperonage of her cousins' governess; and she must spend a part of her time trying to improve her French, and learning to play the harp.

Mrs Burford had reckoned without her host. Tiffany did none of these things; and at the end of three months Mrs Burford informed her lord that unless he wished to be plunged into some shocking scandal, and to see the wife of his bosom dwindle into the grave, he would be so obliging as to send his niece back to Yorkshire. Not only was she so lost to all sense of propriety as to escape from the house when she was believed to be in bed and asleep, and to attend a masquerade at Vauxhall Gardens, escorted by a besotted youth she had met heaven only knew where or how: she was utterly destroying her cousin Bella's chances of forming an eligible connection. No sooner did a possible suitor catch sight of Bella's abominable cousin, said Mrs Burford bitterly, than he had eyes for no one else. As for a marriage between her and Jack, or William, even had she shown herself willing (which she most certainly had not), Mrs Burford would prefer to see any of her sons beggared than married to such a dreadful girl.

Mr Burford was ready enough to be rid of his tiresome ward, but he was a man of scruples, and he could not think it right to consign Tiffany to the care of Mrs Underhill, who had