

The Man



Bram Stoker

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Fore-word

'I would rather be an angel than God!'

The voice of the speaker sounded clearly through the hawthorn tree. The young man and the young girl who sat together on the low tombstone looked at each other. They had heard the voices of the two children talking, but had not noticed what they said; it was the sentiment, not the sound, which roused their attention.

The girl put her finger to her lips to impress silence, and the man nodded; they sat as still as mice whilst the two children went on talking.

The scene would have gladdened a painter's heart. An old churchyard. The church low and square-towered, with long mullioned windows, the yellow-grey stone roughened by age and tender-hued with lichens. Round it clustered many tombstones tilted in all directions. Behind the church a line of gnarled and twisted yews.

The churchyard was full of fine trees. On one side a magnificent cedar; on the other a great copper beech. Here and there among the tombs and headstones many beautiful blossoming trees rose from the long green grass. The laburnum glowed in the June afternoon sunlight; the lilac, the hawthorn and the clustering meadowsweet which fringed the edge of the lazy stream mingled their heavy sweetness in sleepy fragrance. The yellow-grey crumbling walls were green in places with wrinkled harts-tongues, and were topped with sweet-williams and spreading house-leek and stone-crop and wild-flowers whose delicious sweetness made for the drowsy repose of perfect summer.

But amid all that mass of glowing colour the two young figures seated on the grey old tomb stood out conspicuously. The man was in conventional hunting-dress: red coat, white stock, black hat, white breeches, and top-boots. The girl was one of the richest, most glowing, and yet withal daintiest figures the eye of man could linger on. She was in riding-habit of hunting scarlet cloth; her black hat was tipped forward by piled-up masses red-golden hair. Round her neck was a white lawn scarf in the fashion of a man's hunting-stock, close fitting, and sinking into a gold-buttoned waistcoat of snowy twill. As she sat with the long skirt across her left arm her tiny black top-boots appeared underneath. Her gauntleted gloves were of white buckskin; her riding-whip was plaited of white leather, topped with ivory and banded with gold.

Even in her fourteenth year Miss Stephen Norman gave promise of striking beauty; beauty of a rarely composite character. In her the various elements of her race seemed to have cropped out. The firm-set jaw, with chin broader and more square than is usual in a woman, and the wide fine forehead and aquiline nose marked the high descent from

Saxon through Norman. The glorious mass of red hair, of the true flame colour, showed the blood of another ancient ancestor of Northern race, and suited well with the voluptuous curves of the full, crimson lips. The purple-black eyes, the raven eyebrows and eyelashes, and the fine curve of the nostrils spoke of the Eastern blood of the far-back wife of the Crusader. Already she was tall for her age, with something of that lankiness which marks the early development of a really fine figure. Long-legged, long-necked, as straight as a lance, with head poised on the proud neck like a lily on its stem.

Stephen Norman certainly gave promise of a splendid womanhood. Pride, self-reliance and dominance were marked in every feature; in her bearing and in her lightest movement.

Her companion, Harold An Wolf, was some five years her senior, and by means of those five years and certain qualities had long stood in the position of her mentor. He was more than six feet two in height, deep-chested, broad-shouldered, lean-flanked, long-armed and big-handed. He had that appearance strength, with well-poised neck and forward set of the head, which marks the successful athlete.

The two sat quiet, listening. Through the quiet hum of afternoon came the voices of the two children. Outside the lich-gate, under the shade of the spreading cedar, the horses stamped occasionally as the flies troubled them. The grooms were mounted; one held the delicate-limbed white Arab, the other the great black horse.

'I would rather be an angel than God!'

The little girl who made the remark was an ideal specimen of the village Sunday-school child. Blue-eyed, rosy-cheeked, thick-legged, with her straight brown hair tied into a hard bunch with a much-creased, cherry-coloured ribbon. A glance at the girl would have satisfied the most sceptical as to her goodness. Without being in any way smug she was radiant with self-satisfaction and well-doing. A child of the people; an early riser; a help to her mother; a good angel to her father; a little mother to her brothers and sisters; cleanly in mind and body; self-reliant, full of faith, cheerful.

The other little girl was prettier, but of a more stubborn type; more passionate, less organised, and infinitely more assertive. Black-haired, black-eyed, swarthy, large-mouthed, snub-nosed; the very type and essence of unrestrained, impulsive, emotional, sensual nature. A seeing eye would have noted inevitable danger for the early years of her womanhood. She seemed amazed by the self-abnegation implied by her companion's statement; after a pause she replied:

'I wouldn't! I'd rather be up at the top of everything and give orders to the angels if I chose. I can't think, Marjorie, why you'd rather take orders than give them.'

'That's just it, Susan. I don't want to give orders; I'd rather obey them. It must be very terrible to have to think of things so much, that you

want everything done your own way. And besides, I shouldn't like to have to be just!"

"Why not?" the voice was truculent, though there was wistfulness in it also.

"Oh Susan. Just fancy having to punish; for of course justice needs punishing as well as praising. Now an angel has such a nice time, helping people and comforting them, and bringing sunshine into dark places. Putting down fresh dew every morning; making the flowers grow, and bringing babies and taking care of them till their mothers find them. Of course God is very good and very sweet and very merciful, but oh, He must be very terrible."

"All the same I would rather be God and able to do things!"

Then the children moved off out of earshot. The two seated on the tombstone looked after them. The first to speak was the girl, who said:

"That's very sweet and good of Marjorie; but do you know, Harold, I like Susie's idea better."

"Which idea was that, Stephen?"

"Why, didn't you notice what she said: 'I'd like to be God and be able to do things'?"

"Yes," he said after a moment's reflection. "That's a fine idea in the abstract; but I doubt of its happiness in the long-run."

"Doubt of its happiness? Come now? what could there be better, after all? Isn't it good enough to be God? What more do you want?"

The girl's tone was quizzical, but her great black eyes blazed with some thought of sincerity which lay behind the fun. The young man shook his head with a smile of kindly tolerance as he answered:

"It isn't that—surely you must know it. I'm ambitious enough, goodness knows; but there are bounds to satisfy even me. But I'm not sure that the good little thing isn't right. She seemed, somehow, to hit a bigger truth than she knew: "fancy having to be just."

"I don't see much difficulty in that. Anyone can be just!"

"Pardon me," he answered, "there is perhaps nothing so difficult in the whole range of a man's work." There was distinct defiance in the girl's eyes as she asked:

"A man's work! Why a man's work? Isn't it a woman's work also?"

"Well, I suppose it ought to be, theoretically; practically it isn't."

"And why not, pray?" The mere suggestion of any disability of woman as such aroused immediate antagonism. Her companion suppressed a smile as he answered deliberately:

"Because, my dear Stephen, the Almighty has ordained that justice is not a virtue women can practise. Mind, I do not say women are unjust. Far from it, where there are no interests of those dear to them they can be of a sincerity of justice that can make a man's blood run cold. But justice in the abstract is not an ordinary virtue: it has to be considerate

as well as stern, and above all interest of all kinds and of every one—'
The girl interrupted hotly:

'I don't agree with you at all. You can't give an instance where women are unjust. I don't mean of course individual instances, but classes of cases where injustice is habitual.' The suppressed smile cropped out now unconsciously round the man's lips in a way which was intensely aggravating to the girl.

'I'll give you a few,' he said. 'Did you ever know a mother just to a boy who beat her own boy at school?' The girl replied quietly:

'Ill-treatment and bullying are subjects for punishment, not justice.'

'Oh, I don't mean that kind of beating. I mean getting the prizes their own boys contended for; getting above them in class; showing superior powers in running or cricket or swimming, or in any of the forms of effort in which boys vie with each other.' The girl reflected, then she spoke:

'Well, you may be right. I don't altogether admit it, but I accept it as not on my side. But this is only one case.'

'A pretty common one. Do you think that Sheriff of Galway, who in default of a hangman hanged his son with his own hands, would have done so if he had been a woman?' The girl answered at once:

'Frankly, no. I don't suppose the mother was ever born who would do such a thing. But that is not a common case, is it? Have you any other?' The young man paused before he spoke:

'There is another, but I don't think I can go into it fairly with you.'

'Why not?'

'Well, because after all you know, Stephen, you are only a girl and you can't be expected to know.' The girl laughed:

'Well, if it's anything about women surely a girl, even of my tender age, must know something more of it, or be able to guess at, than any young man can. However, say what you think and I'll tell you frankly if I agree—that is if a woman can be just, in such a matter.'

'Shortly the point is this: Can a woman be just to another woman, or to a man for the matter of that, where either her own affection or a fault of the other is concerned?'

'I don't see any reason to the contrary. Surely pride alone should ensure justice in the former case, and the consciousness of superiority in the other.' The young man shook his head:

'Pride and the consciousness of superiority! Are they not much the same thing. But whether or no, if either of them has to be relied on, I'm afraid the scales of Justice would want regulating, and her sword should be blunted in case its edge should be turned back on herself. I have an idea that although pride might be a guiding principle with you individually, it would be a failure with the average. However, as it would be in any case a rule subject to many exceptions I must let it go.'

Harold looked at his watch and rose. Stephen followed him; transferring her whip into the hand which held up the skirt, she took his arm with her right hand in the pretty way in which a young girl clings to her elders. Together they went out at the lich-gate. The groom drew over with the horses. Stephen patted hers and gave her a lump of sugar. Then putting her foot into Harold's ready hand she sprang lightly into the saddle. Harold swung himself into his saddle with the dexterity of an accomplished rider.

As the two rode up the road, keeping on the shady side under the trees, Stephen said quietly, half to herself, as if the sentence had impressed itself on her mind:

'To be God and able to do things!'

Harold rode on in silence. The chill of some vague fear was upon him.

Chapter

1 Stephen

Stephen Norman of Normanstand had remained a bachelor until close on middle age, when the fact took hold of him that there was no immediate heir to his great estate. Whereupon, with his wonted decision, he set about looking for a wife.

He had been a close friend of his next neighbour, Squire Rowly, ever since their college days. They had, of course, been often in each other's houses, and Rowly's young sister—almost a generation younger than himself, and the sole fruit of his father's second marriage—had been like a little sister to him too. She had, in the twenty years which had elapsed, grown to be a sweet and beautiful young woman. In all the past years, with the constant opportunity which friendship gave of close companionship, the feeling never altered. Squire Norman would have been surprised had he been asked to describe Margaret Rowly and found himself compelled to present the picture of a woman, not a child.

Now, however, when his thoughts went womanward and wifeward, he awoke to the fact that Margaret came within the category of those he sought. His usual decision ran its course. Semi-brotherly feeling gave place to a stronger and perhaps more selfish feeling. Before he even knew it, he was head over ears in love with his pretty neighbour.

Norman was a fine man, stalwart and handsome; his forty years sat so lightly on him that his age never seemed to come into question in a woman's mind. Margaret had always liked him and trusted him; he was the big brother who had no duty in the way of scolding to do. His presence had always been a gladness; and the sex of the girl, first unconsciously then consciously, answered to the man's overtures, and her consent was soon obtained.

When in the fulness of time it was known that an heir was expected, Squire Norman took for granted that the child would be a boy, and held the idea so tenaciously that his wife, who loved him deeply, gave up warning and remonstrance after she had once tried to caution him against too fond a hope. She saw how bitterly he would be disappointed in case it should prove to be a girl. He was, however, so fixed on the point that she determined to say no more. After all, it might be a boy; the chances were equal. The Squire would not listen to any one else at all; so as the time went on his idea was more firmly fixed than ever. His arrangements were made on the base that he would have a son. The name was of course decided. Stephen had been the name of all the Squires of Normanstand for ages—as far back as the records went; and Stephen the new heir of course would be.

Like all middle-aged men with young wives he was supremely anxious as the time drew near. In his anxiety for his wife his belief in the son became passive rather than active. Indeed, the idea of a son was so deeply fixed in his mind that it was not disturbed even by his anxiety for the young wife he idolised.

When instead of a son a daughter was born, the Doctor and the nurse, who knew his views on the subject, held back from the mother for a little the knowledge of the sex. Dame Norman was so weak that the Doctor feared lest anxiety as to how her husband would bear the disappointment, might militate against her. Therefore the Doctor sought the Squire in his study, and went resolutely at his task.

'Well, Squire, I congratulate you on the birth of your child!' Norman was of course struck with the use of the word 'child'; but the cause of his anxiety was manifested by his first question:

'How is she, Doctor? Is she safe?' The child was after all of secondary importance! The Doctor breathed more freely; the question had lightened his task. There was, therefore, more assurance in his voice as he answered:

'She is safely through the worst of her trouble, but I am greatly anxious yet. She is very weak. I fear anything that might upset her.'

The Squire's voice came quick and strong:

'There must be no upset! And now tell me about my son?' He spoke the last word half with pride, half bashfully.

'Your son is a daughter!' There was silence for so long that the Doctor began to be anxious. Squire Norman sat quite still; his right hand resting on the writing-table before him became clenched so hard that the knuckles looked white and the veins red. After a long slow breath he spoke:

'She, my daughter, is well?' The Doctor answered with cheerful alacrity:

'Splendid!—I never saw a finer child in my life. She will be a comfort and an honour to you!' The Squire spoke again:

'What does her mother think? I suppose she's very proud of her?'

'She does not know yet that it is a girl. I thought it better not to let her know till I had told you.'

'Why?'

'Because—because—Norman, old friend, you know why! Because you had set your heart on a son; and I know how it would grieve that sweet young wife and mother to feel your disappointment. I want your lips to be the first to tell her; so that on may assure her of your happiness in that a daughter has been born to you.'

The Squire put out his great hand and laid it on the other's shoulder. There was almost a break in his voice as he said:

'Thank you, my old friend, my true friend, for your thought. When may I see her?'

'By right, not yet. But, as knowing your views, she may fret herself till she knows, I think you had better come at once.'

All Norman's love and strength combined for his task. As he leant over and kissed his young wife there was real fervour in his voice as he said:

'Where is my dear daughter that you may place her in my arms?' For an instant there came a chill to the mother's heart that her hopes had been so far disappointed; but then came the reaction of her joy that her husband, her baby's father, was pleased. There was a heavenly dawn of red on her pale face as she drew her husband's head down and kissed him.

'Oh, my dear,' she said, 'I am so happy that you are pleased!' The nurse took the mother's hand gently and held it to the baby as she laid it in the father's arms.

He held the mother's hand as he kissed the baby's brow.

The Doctor touched him gently on the arm and beckoned him away. He went with careful footsteps, looking behind as he went.

After dinner he talked with the Doctor on various matters; but presently he asked:

'I suppose, Doctor, it is no sort of rule that the first child regulates the sex of a family?'

'No, of course not. Otherwise how should we see boys and girls mixed in one family, as is nearly always the case. But, my friend,' he went on, 'you must not build hopes so far away. I have to tell you that your wife is far from strong. Even now she is not so well as I could wish, and there yet may be change.' The Squire leaped impetuously to his feet as he spoke quickly:

'Then why are we waiting here? Can nothing be done? Let us have the best help, the best advice in the world.' The Doctor raised his hand.

'Nothing can be done as yet. I have only fear.'

'Then let us be ready in case your fears should be justified! Who are the best men in London to help in such a case?' The Doctor mentioned two names; and within a few minutes a mounted messenger was galloping to Norchester, the nearest telegraph centre. The messenger was to arrange for a special train if necessary. Shortly afterwards the Doctor went again to see his patient. After a long absence he came back, pale and agitated. Norman felt his heart sink when he saw him; a groan broke from him as the Doctor spoke:

'She is much worse! I am in great fear that she may pass away before the morning!' The Squire's strong voice was clouded, with a hoarse veil as he asked:

'May I see her?'

'Not yet; at present she is sleeping. She may wake strengthened; in which case you may see her. But if not—'

'If not?'—the voice was not like his own.

'Then I shall send for you at once!' The Doctor returned to his vigil. The Squire, left alone, sank on his knees, his face in his hands; his great shoulders shook with the intensity of his grief.

An hour or more passed before he heard hurried steps. He sprang to the door:

'Well?'

'You had better come now.'

'Is she better?'

'Alas! no. I fear her minutes are numbered. School yourself, my dear old friend! God will help you in this bitter hour. All you can do now is to make her last moments happy.'

'I know! I know!' he answered in a voice so calm that his companion wondered.

When they came into the room Margaret was dozing. When her eyes opened and she found her husband beside her bed there spread over her face a glad look; which, alas! soon changed to one of pain. She motioned to him to bend down. He knelt and put his head beside her on the pillow; his arms went tenderly round her as though by his iron devotion and strength he would shield her from all harm. Her voice came very low and in broken gasps; she was summoning all her strength that she might speak:

'My dear, dear husband, I am so sad at leaving you! You have made me so happy, and I love you so! Forgive me, dear, for the pain I know you will suffer when I am gone! And oh, Stephen, I know you will cherish our little one—yours and mine—when I am gone. She will have no mother; you will have to be father and mother too.'

'I will hold her in my very heart's core, my darling, as I hold you!' He could hardly speak from emotion. She went on:

'And oh, my dear, you will not grieve that she is not a son to carry on your name?' And then a sudden light came into her eyes; and there was exultation in her weak voice as she said:

'She is to be our only one; let her be indeed our son! Call her the name we both love!' For answer he rose and laid his hand very, very tenderly on the babe as he said:

'This dear one, my sweet wife, who will carry your soul in her breast, will be my son; the only son I shall ever have. All my life long I shall, please Almighty God, so love her—our little Stephen—as you and I love each other!'

She laid her hand on his so that it touched at once her husband and her child. Then she raised the other weak arm, and placed it round his neck, and their lips met. Her soul went out in this last kiss.

Chapter

2 The Heart of a child

For some weeks after his wife's death Squire Norman was overwhelmed with grief. He made a brave effort, however, to go through the routine of his life; and succeeded so far that he preserved an external appearance of bearing his loss with resignation. But within, all was desolation.

Little Stephen had winning ways which sent deep roots into her father's heart. The little bundle of nerves which the father took into his arms must have realised with all its senses that, in all that it saw and heard and touched, there was nothing but love and help and protection. Gradually the trust was followed by expectation. If by some chance the father was late in coming to the nursery the child would grow impatient and cast persistent, longing glances at the door. When he came all was joy.

Time went quickly by, and Norman was only recalled to its passing by the growth of his child. Seedtime and harvest, the many comings of nature's growth were such commonplaces to him, and had been for so many years, that they made on him no impressions of comparison. But his baby was one and one only. Any change in it was not only in itself a new experience, but brought into juxtaposition what is with what was. The changes that began to mark the divergence of sex were positive shocks to him, for they were unexpected. In the very dawn of babyhood dress had no special import; to his masculine eyes sex was lost in youth. But, little by little, came the tiny changes which convention has established. And with each change came to Squire Norman the growing realisation that his child was a woman. A tiny woman, it is true, and requiring more care and protection and devotion than a bigger one; but still a woman. The pretty little ways, the eager caresses, the graspings and holdings of the childish hands, the little roguish smiles and pantings and flirtings were all but repetitions in little of the dalliance of long ago. The father, after all, reads in the same book in which the lover found his knowledge.

At first there was through all his love for his child a certain resentment of her sex. His old hope of a son had been rooted too deeply to give way easily. But when the conviction came, and with it the habit of its acknowledgment, there came also a certain resignation, which is the halting-place for satisfaction. But he never, not then nor afterwards, quite lost the old belief that Stephen was indeed a son. Could there ever have been a doubt, the remembrance of his wife's eyes and of her faint voice, of her hope and her faith, as she placed her baby in his arms

would have refused it a resting-place. This belief tinged all his after-life and moulded his policy with regard to his girl's upbringing. If she was to be indeed his son as well as his daughter, she must from the first be accustomed to boyish as well as to girlish ways. This, in that she was an only child, was not a difficult matter to accomplish. Had she had brothers and sisters, matters of her sex would soon have found their own level.

There was one person who objected strongly to any deviation from the conventional rule of a girl's education. This was Miss Laetitia Rowly, who took after a time, in so far as such a place could be taken, that of the child's mother. Laetitia Rowly was a young aunt of Squire Rowly of Norwood; the younger sister of his father and some sixteen years his own senior. When the old Squire's second wife had died, Laetitia, then a conceded spinster of thirty-six, had taken possession of the young Margaret. When Margaret had married Squire Norman, Miss Rowly was well satisfied; for she had known Stephen Norman all her life. Though she could have wished a younger bridegroom for her darling, she knew it would be hard to get a better man or one of more suitable station in life. Also she knew that Margaret loved him, and the woman who had never found the happiness of mutual love in her own life found a pleasure in the romance of true love, even when the wooer was middle-aged. She had been travelling in the Far East when the belated news of Margaret's death came to her. When she had arrived home she announced her intention of taking care of Margaret's child, just as she had taken care of Margaret. For several reasons this could not be done in the same way. She was not old enough to go and live at Normanstand without exciting comment; and the Squire absolutely refused to allow that his daughter should live anywhere except in his own house. Educational supervision, exercised at such distance and so intermittently, could neither be complete nor exact.

Though Stephen was a sweet child she was a wilful one, and very early in life manifested a dominant nature. This was a secret pleasure to her father, who, never losing sight of his old idea that she was both son and daughter, took pleasure as well as pride out of each manifestation of her imperial will. The keen instinct of childhood, which reasons in feminine fashion, and is therefore doubly effective in a woman-child, early grasped the possibilities of her own will. She learned the measure of her nurse's foot and then of her father's; and so, knowing where lay the bounds of possibility of the achievement of her wishes, she at once avoided trouble and learned how to make the most of the space within the limit of her tether.

It is not those who 'cry for the Moon' who go furthest or get most in this limited world of ours. Stephen's pretty ways and unfailing good temper were a perpetual joy to her father; and when he found that as a

rule her desires were reasonable, his wish to yield to them became a habit.

Miss Rowly seldom saw any individual thing to disapprove of. She it was who selected the governesses and who interviewed them from time to time as to the child's progress. Not often was there any complaint, for the little thing had such a pretty way of showing affection, and such a manifest sense of justified trust in all whom she encountered, that it would have been hard to name a specific fault.

But though all went in tears of affectionate regret, and with eminently satisfactory emoluments and references, there came an irregularly timed succession of governesses.

Stephen's affection for her 'Auntie' was never affected by any of the changes. Others might come and go, but there no change came. The child's little hand would steal into one of the old lady's strong ones, or would clasp a finger and hold it tight. And then the woman who had never had a child of her own would feel, afresh each time, as though the child's hand was gripping her heart.

With her father she was sweetest of all. And as he seemed to be pleased when she did anything like a little boy, the habit of being like one insensibly grew on her.

An only child has certain educational difficulties. The true learning is not that which we are taught, but that which we take in for ourselves from experience and observation, and children's experiences and observation, especially of things other than repressive, are mainly of children. The little ones teach each other. Brothers and sisters are more with each other than are ordinary playmates, and in the familiarity of their constant intercourse some of the great lessons, so useful in after-life, are learned. Little Stephen had no means of learning the wisdom of give-and-take. To her everything was given, given bountifully and gracefully. Graceful acceptance of good things came to her naturally, as it does to one who is born to be a great lady. The children of the farmers in the neighbourhood, with whom at times she played, were in such habitual awe of the great house, that they were seldom sufficiently at ease to play naturally. Children cannot be on equal terms on special occasions with a person to whom they have been taught to bow or courtesy as a public habit. The children of neighbouring landowners, who were few and far between, and of the professional people in Norchester, were at such times as Stephen met them, generally so much on their good behaviour, that the spontaneity of play, through which it is that sharp corners of individuality are knocked off or worn down, did not exist.

And so Stephen learned to read in the Book of Life; though only on one side of it. At the age of six she had, though surrounded with loving care and instructed by skilled teachers, learned only the accepting side of life. Giving of course there was in plenty, for the traditions of

Normanstand were royally benevolent; many a blessing followed the little maid's footsteps as she accompanied some timely aid to the sick and needy sent from the Squire's house. Moreover, her Aunt tried to inculcate certain maxims founded on that noble one that it is more blessed to give than to receive. But of giving in its true sense: the giving that which we want for ourselves, the giving that is as a temple built on the rock of self- sacrifice, she knew nothing. Her sweet and spontaneous nature, which gave its love and sympathy so readily, was almost a bar to education: it blinded the eyes that would have otherwise seen any defect that wanted altering, any evil trait that needed repression, any lagging virtue that required encouragement—or the spur.

Chapter

3 Harold

Squire Norman had a clerical friend whose rectory of Carstone lay some thirty miles from Normanstand. Thirty miles is not a great distance for railway travel; but it is a long drive. The days had not come, nor were they ever likely to come, for the making of a railway between the two places. For a good many years the two men had met in renewal of their old University days. Squire Norman and Dr. An Wolf had been chums at Trinity, Cambridge, and the boyish friendship had ripened and lasted. When Harold An Wolf had put in his novitiate in a teeming Midland manufacturing town, it was Norman's influence which obtained the rectorship for his friend. It was not often that they could meet, for An Wolf's work, which, though not very exacting, had to be done single-handed, kept him to his post. Besides, he was a good scholar and eked out a small income by preparing a few pupils for public school. An occasional mid-week visit to Normanstand in the slack time of school work on the Doctor's part, and now and again a drive by Norman over to the rectory, returning the next day, had been for a good many years the measure of their meeting. Then An Wolf's marriage and the birth of a son had kept him closer to home. Mrs. An Wolf had been killed in a railway accident a couple of years after her only child had been born; and at the time Norman had gone over to render any assistance in his power to the afflicted man, and to give him what was under the circumstances his best gift, sympathy. After an interval of a few years the Squire's courtship and marriage, at which his old friend had assisted, had confined his activities to a narrower circle. The last time they had met was when An Wolf had come over to Norcester to aid in the burial of his friend's wife. In the process of years, however, the shadow over Norman's life had begun to soften; when his baby had grown to be something of a companion, they met again. Norman, 'who had never since his wife's death been able to tear himself, even for a night, away from Normanstand and Stephen, wrote to his old friend asking him to come to him. An Wolf gladly promised, and for a week of growing expectation the Squire looked forward to their meeting. Each found the other somewhat changed, in all but their old affection.

An Wolf was delighted with the little Stephen. Her dainty beauty seemed to charm him; and the child, seeming to realise what pleasure she was giving, exercised all her little winning ways. The rector, who knew more of children than did his, friend, told her as she sat on his knee of a very interesting person: his own son. The child listened, interested at first, then enraptured. She asked all kinds of questions; and

the father's eyes brightened as he gladly answered the pretty sympathetic child, already deep in his heart for her father's sake. He told her about the boy who was so big and strong, and who could run and leap and swim and play cricket and football better than any other boy with whom he played. When, warmed himself by the keen interest of the little girl, and seeing her beautiful black eyes beginning to glow, he too woke to the glory of the time; and all the treasured moments of the father's lonely heart gave out their store. And the other father, thrilled with delight because of his baby's joy with, underlying all, an added pleasure that the little Stephen's interest was in sports that were for boys, looked on approvingly, now and again asking questions himself in furtherance of the child's wishes.

All the afternoon they sat in the garden, close to the stream that came out of the rock, and An Wolf told father's tales of his only son. Of the great cricket match with *Castra Puerorum* when he had made a hundred not out. Of the school races when he had won so many prizes. Of the swimming match in the Islam River when, after he had won the race and had dressed himself, he went into the water in his clothes to help some children who had upset a boat. How when Widow Norton's only son could not be found, he dived into the deep hole of the intake of the milldam of the great Carstone mills where Wingate the farrier had been drowned. And how, after diving twice without success, he had insisted on going down the third time though people had tried to hold him back; and how he had brought up in his arms the child all white and so near death that they had to put him in the ashes of the baker's oven before he could be brought back to life.

When her nurse came to take her to bed, she slid down from her father's knee and coming over to Dr. An Wolf, gravely held out her hand and said: 'Good-bye!' Then she kissed him and said:

'Thank you so much, Mr. Harold's daddy. Won't you come soon again, and tell us more?' Then she jumped again upon her father's knee and hugged him round the neck and kissed him, and whispered in his ear:

'Daddy, please make Mr. Harold's daddy when he comes again, bring Harold with him!'

After all it is natural for women to put the essence of the letter in the postscript!

Two weeks afterwards Dr. An Wolf came again and brought Harold with him. The time had gone heavily with little Stephen when she knew that Harold was coming with his father. Stephen had been all afire to see the big boy whose feats had so much interested her, and for a whole week had flooded Mrs. Jarrold with questions which she was unable to answer. At last the time came and she went out to the hall door with her father to welcome the guests. At the top of the great granite steps, down which in time of bad weather the white awning ran, she stood holding her father's hand and waving a welcome.

'Good morning, Harold! Good morning, Mr. Harold's daddy!'

The meeting was a great pleasure to both the children, and resulted in an immediate friendship. The small girl at once conceived a great admiration for the big, strong boy nearly twice her age and more than twice her size. At her time of life the conveniences are not, and love is a thing to be spoken out at once and in the open. Mrs. Jarrold, from the moment she set eyes on him, liked the big kindly-faced boy who treated her like a lady, and who stood awkwardly blushing and silent in the middle of the nursery listening to the tiny child's proffers of affection. For whatever kind of love it is that boys are capable of, Harold had fallen into it. 'Calf-love' is a thing habitually treated with contempt. It may be ridiculous; but all the same it is a serious reality—to the calf.

Harold's new-found affection was as deep as his nature. An only child who had in his memory nothing of a mother's love, his naturally affectionate nature had in his childish days found no means of expression. A man child can hardly pour out his full heart to a man, even a father or a comrade; and this child had not, in a way, the consolations of other children. His father's secondary occupation of teaching brought other boys to the house and necessitated a domestic routine which had to be exact. There was no place for little girls in a boys' school; and though many of Dr. An Wolf's friends who were mothers made much of the pretty, quiet boy, and took him to play with their children, he never seemed to get really intimate with them. The equality of companionship was wanting. Boys he knew, and with them he could hold his own and yet be on affectionate terms. But girls were strange to him, and in their presence he was shy. With this lack of understanding of the other sex, grew up a sort of awe of it. His opportunities of this kind of study were so few that the view never could become rectified.

And so it was that from his boyhood up to his twelfth year, Harold's knowledge of girlhood never increased nor did his awe diminish. When his father had told him all about his visit to Normanstand and of the invitation which had been extended to him there came first awe, then doubt, then expectation. Between Harold and his father there was love and trust and sympathy. The father's married love so soon cut short found expression towards his child; and between them there had never been even the shadow of a cloud. When his father told him how pretty the little Stephen was, how dainty, how sweet, he began to picture her in his mind's eye and to be bashfully excited over meeting her.

His first glimpse of Stephen was, he felt, one that he never could forget. She had made up her mind that she would let Harold see what she could do. Harold could fly kites and swim and play cricket; she could not do any of these, but she could ride. Harold should see her pony, and see her riding him all by herself. And there would be another pony for Harold, a big, big, big one—she had spoken about its size herself to

Topham, the stud-groom. She had coaxed her daddy into promising that after lunch she should take Harold riding. To this end she had made ready early. She had insisted on putting on the red riding habit which Daddy had given her for her birthday, and now she stood on the top of the steps all glorious in hunting pink, with the habit held over her arms, with the tiny hunting-hoots all shiny underneath. She had no hat on, and her beautiful hair of golden red shone in its glory. But even it was almost outshone by the joyous flush on her cheeks as she stood waving the little hand that did not hold Daddy's. She was certainly a picture to dream of! Her father's eyes lost nothing of her dainty beauty. He was so proud of her that he almost forgot to wish that she had been a boy. The pleasure he felt in her appearance was increased by the fact that her dress was his own idea.

During luncheon Stephen was fairly silent; she usually chattered all through as freely as a bird sings. Stephen was silent because the occasion was important. Besides, Daddy wasn't all alone, and therefore had not to be cheered up. Also—this in postscript form—Harold was silent! In her present frame of mind Harold could do no wrong, and what Harold did was right. She was unconsciously learning already a lesson from his presence.

That evening when going to bed she came to say good-night to Daddy. After she had kissed him she also kissed 'old Mr. Harold,' as she now called him, and as a matter of course kissed Harold also. He coloured up at once. It was the first time a girl had ever kissed him.

The next day from early morning until bed-time was one long joy to Stephen, and there were few things of interest that Harold had not been shown; there were few of the little secrets which had not been shared with him as they went about hand in hand. Like all manly boys Harold was good to little children and patient with them. He was content to follow Stephen about and obey all her behests. He had fallen in love with her to the very bottom of his boyish heart.

When the guests were going, Stephen stood with her father on the steps to see them off. When the carriage had swept behind the farthest point in the long avenue, and when Harold's cap waving from the window could no longer be seen, Squire Norman turned to go in, but paused in obedience to the unconscious restraint of Stephen's hand. He waited patiently till with a long sigh she turned to him and they went in together.

That night before she went to bed Stephen came and sat on her father's knee, and after sundry pattings and kissings whispered in his ear:

'Daddy, wouldn't it be nice if Harold could come here altogether? Couldn't you ask him to? And old Mr. Harold could come too. Oh, I wish he was here!'

Chapter

4 Harold at Normanstad

Two years afterwards a great blow fell upon Harold. His father, who had been suffering from repeated attacks of influenza, was, when in the low condition following this, seized with pneumonia, to which in a few days he succumbed. Harold was heart-broken. The affection which had been between him and his father had been so consistent that he had never known a time when it was not.

When Squire Norman had returned to the house with him after the funeral, he sat in silence holding the boy's hand till he had wept his heart out. By this time the two were old friends, and the boy was not afraid or too shy to break down before him. There was sufficient of the love of the old generation to begin with trust in the new.

Presently, when the storm was past and Harold had become his own man again, Norman said:

'And now, Harold, I want you to listen to me. You know, my dear boy, that I am your father's oldest friend, and right sure I am that he would approve of what I say. You must come home with me to live. I know that in his last hours the great concern of your dear father's heart would have been for the future of his boy. And I know, too, that it was a comfort to him to feel that you and I are such friends, and that the son of my dearest old friend would be as a son to me. We have been friends, you and I, a long time, Harold; and we have learned to trust, and I hope to love, one another. And you and my little Stephen are such friends already that your coming into the house will be a joy to us all. Why, long ago, when first you came, she said to me the night you went away: "Daddy, wouldn't it be nice if Harold could come here altogether?"'

And so Harold An Wolf came back with the Squire to Normanstand, and from that day on became a member of his house, and as a son to him. Stephen's delight at his coming was of course largely qualified by her sympathy with his grief; but it would have been hard to give him more comfort than she did in her own pretty way. Putting her lips to his she kissed him, and holding his big hand in both of her little ones, she whispered softly:

'Poor Harold! You and I should love each other, for we have both lost our mother. And now you have lost your father. But you must let my dear daddy be yours too!'

At this time Harold was between fourteen and fifteen years old. He was well educated in so far as private teaching went. His father had devoted much care to him, so that he was well grounded in all the Academic branches of learning. He was also, for his years, an expert in

most manly exercises. He could ride anything, shoot straight, fence, run, jump or swim with any boy more than his age and size.

In Normanstand his education was continued by the rector. The Squire used often to take him with him when he went to ride, or fish, or shoot; frankly telling him that as his daughter was, as yet, too young to be his companion in these matters, he would act as her locum tenens. His living in the house and his helping as he did in Stephen's studies made familiarity perpetual. He was just enough her senior to command her childish obedience; and there were certain qualities in his nature which were eminently calculated to win and keep the respect of women as well as of men. He was the very incarnation of sincerity, and had now and again, in certain ways, a sublime self-negation which, at times, seemed in startling contrast to a manifestly militant nature. When at school he had often been involved in fights which were nearly always on matters of principle, and by a sort of unconscious chivalry he was generally found fighting on the weaker side. Harold's father had been very proud of his ancestry, which was Gothic through the Dutch, as the manifestly corrupted prefix of the original name implied, and he had gathered from a constant study of the Sagas something of the philosophy which lay behind the ideas of the Vikings.

This new stage of Harold's life made for quicker development than any which had gone before. Hitherto he had not the same sense of responsibility. To obey is in itself a relief; and as it is an actual consolation to weak natures, so it is only a retarding of the strong. Now he had another individuality to think of. There was in his own nature a vein of anxiety of which the subconsciousness of his own strength threw up the outcrop.

Little Stephen with the instinct of her sex discovered before long this weakness. For it is a weakness when any quality can be assailed or used. The using of a man's weakness is not always coquetry; but it is something very like it. Many a time the little girl, who looked up to and admired the big boy who could compel her to anything when he was so minded, would, for her own ends, work on his sense of responsibility, taking an elfin delight in his discomfiture.

The result of Stephen's harmless little coquetries was that Harold had occasionally either to thwart some little plan of daring, or else cover up its results. In either case her confidence in him grew, so that before long he became an established fact in her life, a being in whose power and discretion and loyalty she had absolute, blind faith. And this feeling seemed to grow with her own growth. Indeed at one time it came to be more than an ordinary faith. It happened thus:

The old Church of St. Stephen, which was the parish church of Normanstand, had a peculiar interest for the Norman family. There, either within the existing walls or those which had preceded them when the church was rebuilt by that Sir Stephen who was standard-bearer to