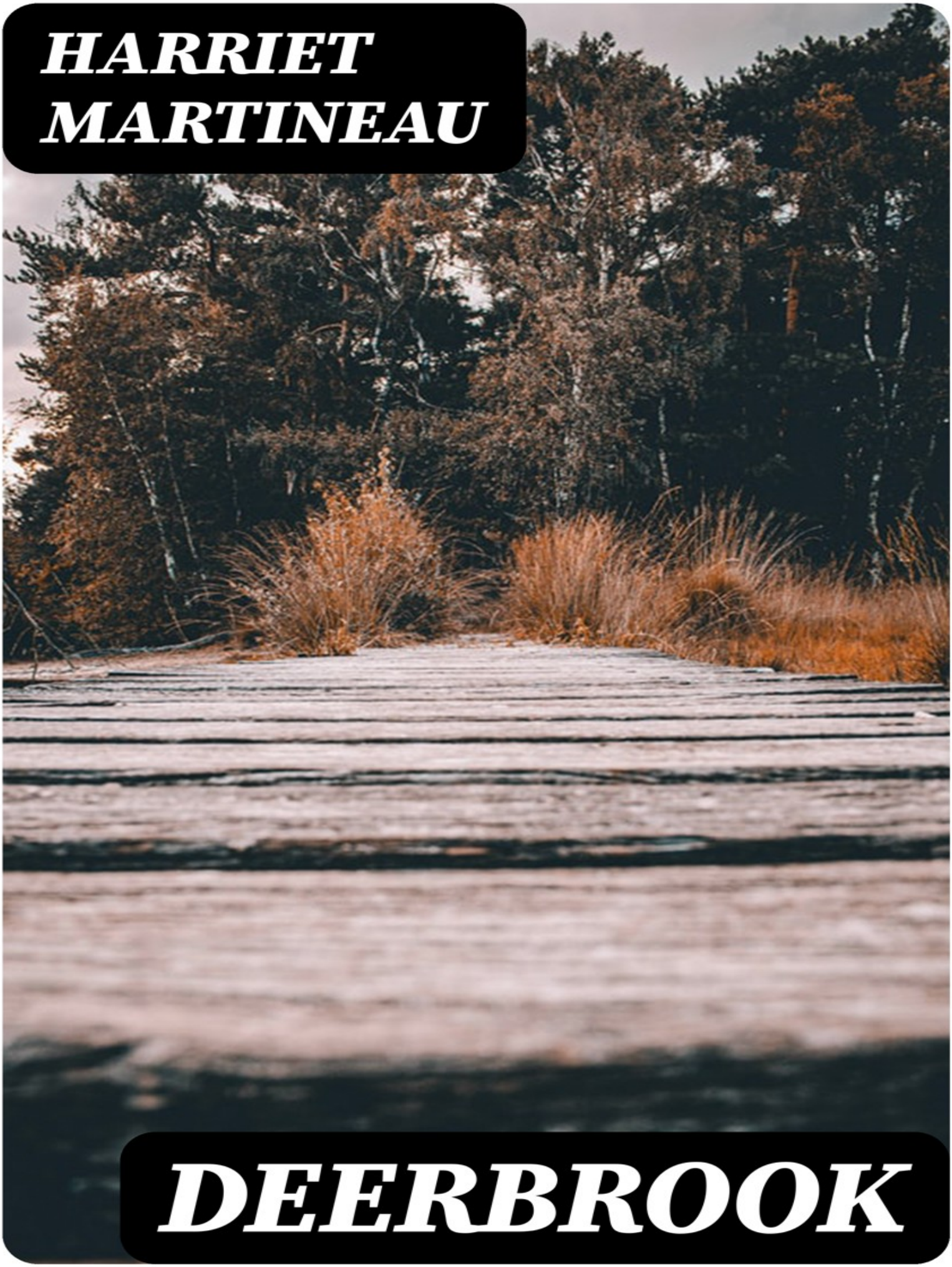
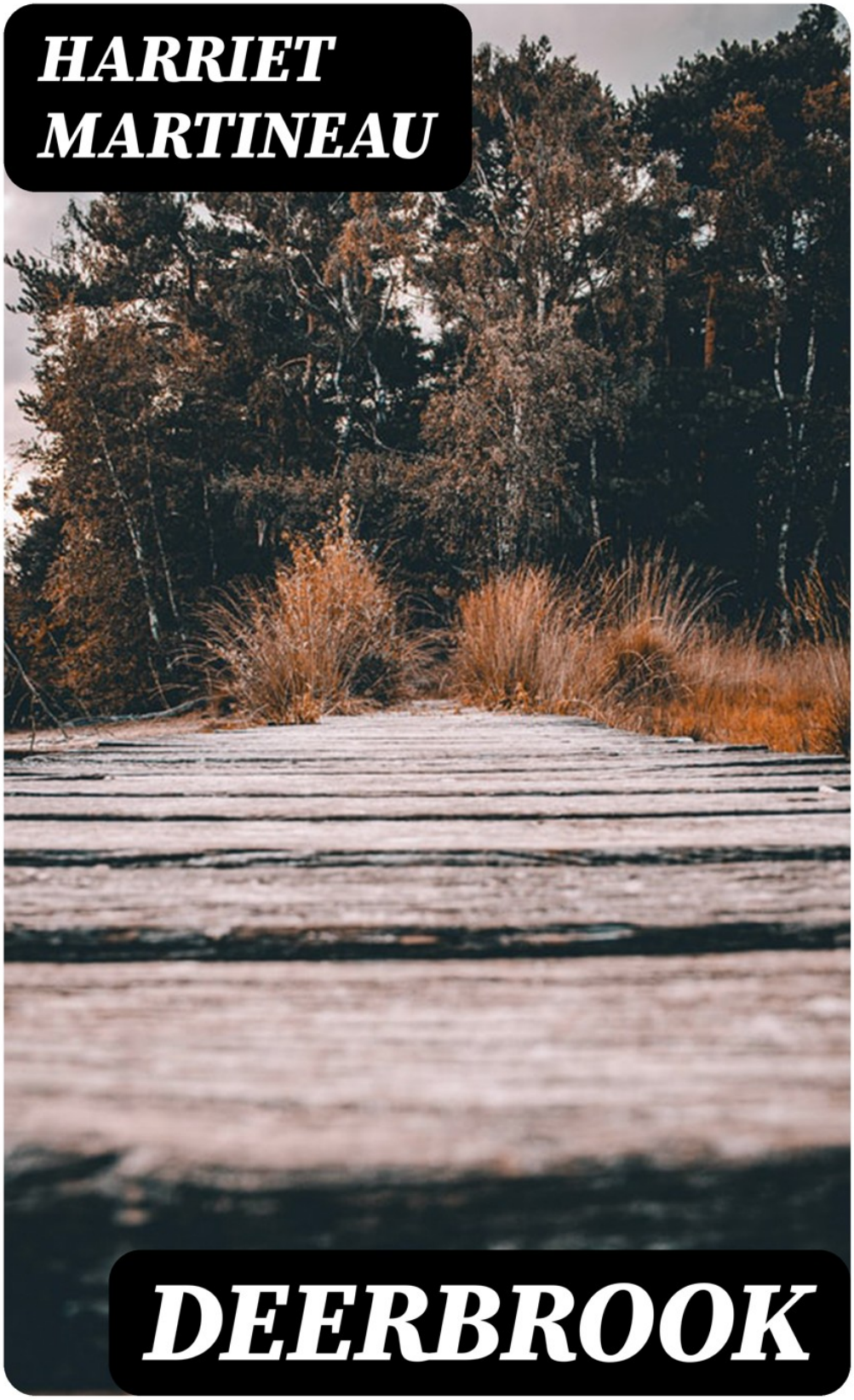
HARRIET MARTINEAU



# DEERBROOK

HARRIET MARTINEAU



# DEERBROOK

**Harriet Martineau**

# Deerbrook

EAN 8596547119500

DigiCat, 2022
Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

# Table of Contents

# Chapter One.

Table of Contents

## An Event.

Every town-bred person who travels in a rich country region, knows what it is to see a neat white house planted in a pretty situation,—in a shrubbery, or commanding a sunny common, or nestling between two hills,—and to say to himself, as the carriage sweeps past its gate, “I should like to live there,”—“I could be very happy in that pretty place.” Transient visions pass before his mind’s eye of dewy summer mornings, when the shadows are long on the grass, and of bright autumn afternoons, when it would be luxury to saunter in the neighbouring lanes; and of frosty winter days, when the sun shines in over the laurustinus at the window, while the fire burns with a different light from that which it gives in the dull parlours of a city.

Mr Grey’s house had probably been the object of this kind of speculation to one or more persons, three times a week, ever since the stage-coach had begun to pass through Deerbrook. Deerbrook was a rather pretty village, dignified as it was with the woods of a fine park, which formed the background to its best points of view. Of this pretty village, Mr Grey’s was the prettiest house, standing in a field, round which the road swept. There were trees enough about it to shade without darkening it, and the garden and shrubbery behind were evidently of no contemptible extent. The timber and coal yards, and

granaries, which stretched down to the river side, were hidden by a nice management of the garden walls, and training of the shrubbery.

In the drawing-room of this tempting white house sat Mrs Grey and her eldest daughter, one spring evening. It was rather an unusual thing for them to be in the drawing-room. Sophia read history and practised her music every morning in the little blue parlour which looked towards the road; and her mother sat in the dining-room, which had the same aspect. The advantage of these rooms was, that they commanded the house of Mr Rowland, Mr Grey's partner in the corn, coal, and timber business, and also the dwelling of Mrs Enderby, Mrs Rowland's mother, who lived just opposite the Rowlands. The drawing-room looked merely into the garden. The only houses seen from it were the greenhouse and the summerhouse; the latter of which now served the purpose of a schoolroom for the children of both families, and stood on the boundary-line of the gardens of the two gentlemen of the firm. The drawing-room was so dull, that it was kept for company; that is, it was used about three times a-year, when the pictures were unveiled, the green baize removed, and the ground-windows, which opened upon the lawn, thrown wide, to afford to the rare guests of the family a welcome from birds and flowers.

The ground-windows were open now, and on one side sat Mrs Grey, working a rug, and on the other Sophia, working a collar. The ladies were evidently in a state of expectation—a state exceedingly trying to people who, living at ease in the country, have rarely anything to expect beyond the days of the week, the newspaper, and their dinners. Mrs Grey gave

her needle a rest every few minutes, to listen! and rang the bell three times in a quarter of an hour, to make inquiries of her maid about the arrangements of the best bedroom. Sophia could not attend to her work, and presently gave information that Fanny and Mary were in the orchard. She was desired to call them, and presently Fanny and Mary appeared at the window,—twins of ten years old, and very pretty little girls.

“My dears,” said Mrs Grey, “has Miss Young done with you for to-day?”

“Oh yes, mamma. It is just six o’clock. We have been out of school this hour almost.”

“Then come in, and make yourselves neat, and sit down with us. I should not wonder if the Miss Ibbotsons should be here now before you are ready. But where is Sydney?”

“Oh, he is making a pond in his garden there. He dug it before school this morning, and he is filling it now.”

“Yes,” said the other; “and I don’t know when he will have done, for as fast as he fills it, it empties again, and he says he cannot think how people keep their ponds filled.”

“He must have done now, however,” said his mother. “I suppose he is tearing his clothes to pieces with drawing the water-barrel, and wetting himself to the skin besides.”

“And spoiling his garden,” said Fanny. “He has dug up all his hepaticas and two rose-bushes to make his pond.”

“Go to him, my dears, and tell him to come in directly, and dress himself for tea. Tell him I insist upon it. Do not run. Walk quietly. You will heat yourselves, and I do not like Mrs Rowland to see you running.”

Mary informed her brother that he was to leave his pond and come in, and Fanny added that mamma insisted upon it. They had time to do this, to walk quietly, to have their hair made quite smooth, and to sit down with their two dolls on each side the common cradle, in a corner of the drawing-room, before the Miss Ibbotsons arrived.

The Miss Ibbotsons were daughters of a distant relation of Mr Grey's. Their mother had been dead many years; they had now just lost their father, and were left without any nearer relation than Mr Grey. He had invited them to visit his family while their father's affairs were in course of arrangement, and till it could be discovered what their means of living were likely to be. They had passed their lives in Birmingham, and had every inclination to return to it, when their visit to their Deerbrook relations should have been paid. Their old schoolfellows and friends all lived there: and they thought it would be easier and pleasanter to make the smallest income supply their wants in their native town, than to remove to any place where it might go further. They had taken leave of their friends as for a very short time, and when they entered Deerbrook, looked around them as upon a place in which they were to pass a summer.

All Deerbrook had been informed of their expected arrival —as it always was of everything which concerned the Greys. The little Rowlands were walking with their mother when the chaise came up the street; but being particularly desired not to look at it, they were not much benefited by the event. Their grandmamma, Mrs Enderby, was not at the moment under the same restriction; and her high cap might be seen above the green blind of her parlour as the chaise turned

into Mr Grey’s gate. The stationer, the parish clerk, and the milliner and her assistant, had obtained a passing view of sundry boxes, the face of an elderly woman, and the outline of two black bonnets,—all that they could boast of to repay them for the vigilance of a whole afternoon.

Sophia Grey might be pardoned for some anxiety about the reception of the young ladies. She was four years younger than the younger of them; and Hester, the elder, was one-and-twenty,—a venerable age to a girl of sixteen. Sophia began to think she had never been really afraid of anything before, though she remembered having cried bitterly when first left alone with her governess; and though she had always been remarkable for clinging to her mother’s side on all social occasions, in the approaching trial her mother could give her little assistance. These cousins would be always with her. How she should read history, or practise music with them in the room, she could not imagine, nor what she should find to say to them all day long. If poor Elizabeth had but lived, what a comfort she would have been now; the elder one would have taken all the responsibility! And she heaved a sigh once more, as she thought, to the memory of poor Elizabeth.

Mr Grey was at a market some miles off; and Sydney was sent by his mother into the hall, to assist in the work of alighting, and causing the luggage to alight. As any other boy of thirteen would have done, he slunk behind the hall door, without venturing to speak to the strangers, and left the business to the guests and the maids. Mrs Grey and Sophia awaited them in the drawing-room, and were ready with information about how uneasy they had all been about

the rain in the morning, till they remembered that it would lay the dust, and so make the journey pleasanter. The twins shouldered their dolls, and looked on from their stools, while Sydney stole in, and for want of some better way of covering his awkwardness, began rocking the cradle with his foot till he tilted it over.

Sophia found the first half-hour not at all difficult to surmount. She and Margaret Ibbotson informed each other of the precise number of miles between Deerbrook and Birmingham. She ascertained fully to her satisfaction that her guests had dined. She assisted them in the observation that the grass of the lawn looked very green after the streets of Birmingham; and she had to tell them that her father was obliged to attend the market some miles off, and would not be home for an hour or two. Then the time came when bonnets were to be taken off, and she could offer to show the way to the spare-room. There she took Hester and Margaret to the window, and explained to them what they saw thence; and, as it was necessary to talk, she poured out what was most familiar to her mind, experiencing a sudden relief from all the unwonted shyness which had tormented her.

“That is Mr Rowland’s house—papa’s partner, you know. Isn’t it an ugly place, with that ridiculous porch to it? But Mrs Rowland can never be satisfied without altering her house once a year. She has made Mr Rowland spend more money upon that place than would have built a new one of twice the size.—That house opposite is Mrs Enderby’s, Mrs Rowland’s mother’s. So near as she lives to the Rowlands, it is shocking how they neglect her. There could be no

difficulty in being properly attentive to her, so near as she is, could there? But when she is ill we are obliged to go and see her sometimes, when it is very inconvenient, because Mrs Rowland has never been near her all day. Is not it shocking?”

“I rather wonder she should complain of her family,” observed Margaret.

“Oh, she is not remarkable for keeping her feelings to herself, poor soul! But really it is wonderful how little she says about it, except when her heart is quite full,—just to us. She tries to excuse Mrs Rowland all she can; and she makes out that Mrs Rowland is such an excellent mother, and so busy with her children, and all that. But you know that is no excuse for not taking care of her own mother.”

“Those are the Verdon woods, are they not?” said Hester, leaning out of the window to survey the whole of the sunny prospect. “I suppose you spend half your days in those woods in summer.”

“No; mamma goes out very little, and I seldom walk beyond the garden. But now you are come, we shall go everywhere. Ours is considered a very pretty village.”

The sisters thought it so beautiful, that they gazed as if they feared it would melt away if they withdrew their eyes. The one discovered the bridge, lying in shadow; the other the pointed roof of the building which surmounted the spring in the park woods. Sophia was well pleased at their pleasure; and their questions, and her descriptions, went on improving in rapidity, till a knock at the door of the room cut short the catechism. It was Morris, the Miss Ibbotsons’ maid; and her appearance gave Sophia a hint to leave her guests

to refresh themselves. She glanced over the room, to see that nothing was wanting; pointed out the bell, intimated that the washstands were mahogany, which showed every splash, and explained that the green blinds were meant to be always down when the sun shone in, lest it should fade the carpet. She then withdrew, telling the young ladies that they would find tea ready when they came down.

“How very handsome Hester is!” was the exclamation of both mother and daughter, when Sophia had shut the drawing-room door behind her.

“I wonder,” said Mrs Grey, “that nobody ever told us how handsome we should find Hester. I should like to see what fault Mrs Rowland can find in her face.”

“It is rather odd that one sister should have all the beauty,” said Sophia. “I do not see anything striking in Margaret.”

“Mrs Rowland will say she is plain; but, in my opinion, Margaret is better looking than any of the Rowlands are ever likely to be. Margaret would not be thought plain away from her sister.—I hope they are not fine ladies. I am rather surprised at their bringing a maid. She looks a very respectable person; but I did not suppose they would keep a maid till they knew better what to look forward to. I do not know what Mr Grey will think of it.”

When Hester and Margaret came down, Mrs Grey was ready with an account of the society of the place.

“We are as well off for society,” said she, “as most places of the size. If you were to ask the bookseller at Blickley, who supplies our club, he would tell you that we are rather intellectual people: and I hope you will see, when our friends

have called on you, that though we seem to be living out of the world, we are not without our pleasures. I think, Sophia, the Levitts will certainly call."

"Oh, yes, mamma, to-morrow, I have no doubt."

"Dr Levitt is our rector," observed Mrs Grey to her guests. "We are dissenters, as you know, and our neighbour, Mrs Rowland, is very much scandalised at it. If Mr Rowland would have allowed it, she would have made a difficulty on that ground about having her children educated with mine. But the Levitts' conduct might teach her better. They make no difference on account of our being dissenters. They always call on our friends the first day after they arrive,—or the second, at furthest. I have no doubt we shall see the Levitts to-morrow."

"And Mrs Enderby, I am sure," said Sophia, "if she is at all able to stir out."

"Oh, yes, Mrs Enderby knows what is right, if her daughter does not. If she does not call to-morrow, I shall think that Mrs Rowland prevented her. She can keep her mother within doors, as we know, when it suits her purposes."

"But Mr Philip is here, mamma, and Mrs Enderby can do as she likes when she has her son with her.—I assure you he is here, mamma. I saw the cobbler's boy carry home a pair of boots there this morning."

Sydney had better evidence still to produce. Mr Enderby had been talking with him about fishing this afternoon. He said he had come down for a fortnight's fishing. Fanny also declared that Matilda Rowland had told Miss Young to-day, that uncle Philip was coming to see the new schoolroom.

Mrs Grey was always glad, on poor Mrs Enderby's account, when she had her son with her: but otherwise she owned she did not care for his coming. He was too like his sister to please her.

"He is very high, to be sure," observed Sophia.

"And really there is no occasion for that with us," resumed Mrs Grey. "We should never think of mixing him up with his sister's proceedings, if he did not do it himself. No one would suppose him answerable for her rudeness; at least, I am sure such a thing would never enter my head. But he forces it upon one's mind by carrying himself so high."

"I don't think he can help being so tall," observed Sydney.

"But he buttons up, and makes the most of it," replied Sophia. "He stalks in like a Polish count."

The sisters could not help smiling at this proof that the incursions of the Poles into this place were confined to the book club. They happened to be well acquainted with a Polish count, who was short of stature and did not stalk. They were spared all necessity of exerting themselves in conversation, for it went on very well without the aid of more than a word or two from them.

"Do you think, mamma, the Andersons will come?" asked Sophia.

"Not before Sunday, my dear. The Andersons live three miles off," she explained, "and are much confined by their school. They may possibly call on Saturday afternoon, as Saturday is a half-holiday; but Sunday after church is a more likely time.—We do not much approve of Sunday visits; and I

dare say you feel the same: but this is a particular case,—people living three miles off, you know, and keeping a school. And being dissenters, we do not like to appear illiberal to those who are not of our own way of thinking: so the Andersons sometimes come in after church; and I am sure you will accept their call just as if it was made in any other way.”

Hester and Margaret could only say that they should be happy to see Mr and Mrs Anderson in any mode which was most convenient to themselves. A laugh went through the family, and a general exclamation of “Mr and Mrs Anderson!” “The Andersons” happened to be two maiden sisters, who kept a young ladies’ school. It was some time before Mrs Grey herself could so far command her countenance as to frown with becoming severity at Fanny, who continued to giggle for some time, with intervals of convulsive stillness, at the idea that “the Andersons” could mean Mr and Mrs Anderson. In the midst of the struggle, Mr Grey entered. He laid a hand on the head of each twin, observed that they seemed very merry, and asked whether his cousins had been kind enough to make them laugh already. To these cousins he offered a brief and hearty welcome, remarking that he supposed they had been told what had prevented his being on the spot on their arrival, and that he need not trouble them with the story over again.

Sydney had slipped out as his father entered, for the chance of riding his horse to the stable,—a ride of any length being in his opinion better than none. When he returned in a few minutes, he tried to whisper to Sophia,

over the back of her chair, but could not for laughing. After repeated attempts, Sophia pushed him away.

“Come, my boy, out with it!” said his father. “What you can tell your sister you can tell us. What is the joke?”

Sydney looked as if he had rather not explain before the strangers; but he never dared to trifle with his father. He had just heard from little George Rowland, that Mrs Rowland had said at home, that the young ladies at Mr Grey’s, who had been made so much fuss about, were not *young* ladies, after all: she had seen the face of one, as they passed her in the chaise, and she was sure the person could not be less than fifty.

“She saw Morris, no doubt,” said Hester, amidst the general laugh.

“I hope she will come to-morrow, and see some people who are very little like fifty,” said Mrs Grey. “She will be surprised, I think,” she added, looking at Hester, with a very meaning manner of admiration. “I really hope, for her own sake, she will come, though you need not mind if she does not. You will have no great loss. Mr Grey, I suppose you think she will call?”

“No doubt, my dear. Mrs Rowland never omits calling on our friends; and why should she now?” And Mr Grey applied himself to conversation with his cousins, while the rest of the family enjoyed further merriment about Mrs Rowland having mistaken Morris for one of the Miss Ibbotsons.

Mr Grey showed a sympathy with the sisters, which made them more at home than they had felt since they entered the house. He knew some of their Birmingham friends, and could speak of the institutions and interests of the town. For

a whole hour he engaged them in brisk conversation, without having once alluded to their private affairs or his own, or said one word about Deerbrook society. At the end of that time, just as Mary and Fanny had received orders to go to bed, and were putting their dolls into the cradle in preparation, the scrambling of a horse's feet was heard on the gravel before the front door, and the house-bell rang.

"Who can be coming at this time of night?" said Mrs Grey.

"It is Hope, I have no doubt," replied her husband. "As I passed his door, I asked him to go out to old Mr Smithson, who seems to me to be rather worse than better, and to let me know whether anything can be done for the old gentleman. Hope has come to report of him, no doubt."

"Oh, mamma, don't send us to bed if it is Mr Hope!" cried the little girls. "Let us sit up a little longer if it is Mr Hope."

"Mr Hope is a great favourite with the children,—with us all," observed Mrs Grey to the sisters. "We have the greatest confidence in him as our medical man; as indeed every one has who employs him. Mr Grey brought him here, and we consider him the greatest acquisition our society ever had."

The sisters could not be surprised, at this when they saw Mr Hope. The only wonder was, that, in the description of the intellectual society of Deerbrook, Mr Hope had not been mentioned first. He was not handsome; but there was a gaiety of countenance and manner in him under which the very lamp seemed to burn brighter. He came, as Mr Grey had explained, on business; and, not having been aware of the arrival of the strangers, would have retreated when his

errand was done; but, as opposition was made to this by both parents and children he sat down for a quarter of an hour, to be taken into consultation about how the Miss Ibbotsons were to be conducted through the process of seeing the sights of Deerbrook.

With all sincerity, the sisters declared that the woods of the park would fully satisfy them,—that they had been accustomed to a life so quiet, that excursions were not at all necessary to their enjoyment. Mr Grey was determined that they should visit every place worth seeing in the neighbourhood, while it was in its summer beauty. Mr Hope was exactly the right person to consult, as there was no nook, no hamlet, to which his tastes or his profession had not led him. Sophia put paper before him, on which he was to note distances, according to his and Mr Grey's computations. Now, it was one peculiarity of Mr Hope that he could never see a piece of paper before him without drawing upon it. Sophia's music-books, and any sheet of blotting-paper which might ever have come in his way, bore tokens of this: and now his fingers were as busy as usual while he was talking and computing and arranging. When, as he said, enough had been planned to occupy a month, he threw down his pencil, and took leave till the morning, when he intended to make a call which should be less involuntary.

The moment he was gone, the little girls laid hands on the sheet of paper on which he had been employed. As they expected, it was covered with scraps of sketches; and they exclaimed with delight, "Look here! Here is the spring. How fond Mr Hope is of drawing the spring! And here is the foot-

bridge at Dingleford! And what is this? Here is a place we don’t know, papa.”

“I do not know how you should, my dears. It is the Abbey ruin down the river, which I rather think you have never seen.”

“No, but we should like to see it. Are there no faces this time, Fanny? None anywhere? No funny faces this time! I like them the best of Mr Hope’s drawings. Sophia, do let us show some of the faces that are on your music-books.”

“If you will be sure and put them away again. But you know if Mr Hope is ever reminded of them, he will be sure to rub them out.”

“He did old Owen fishing so that he can’t rub it out if he would,” said Sydney. “He did it in ink for me; and that is better than any of your sketches, that will rub out in a minute.”

“Come, children,” said their father, “it is an hour past your bedtime.”

When the children were gone, and Sophia was attending the sisters to their apartment, Mrs Grey looked at her husband over her spectacles. “Well, my dear!” said she.

“Well, my dear!” responded Mr Grey.

“Do not you think Hester very handsome?”

“There is no doubt of it, my dear. She is very handsome.”

“Do not you think Mr Hope thinks so too?”

It is a fact which few but the despisers of their race like to acknowledge, and which those despisers of their race are therefore apt to interpret wrongly, and are enabled to make too much of—that it is perfectly natural,—so natural as to appear necessary,—that when young people first meet, the

possibility of their falling in love should occur to all the minds present. We have no doubt that it always is so; though we are perfectly aware that the idea speedily goes out again, as naturally as it came in: and in no case so speedily and naturally as in the minds of the parties most nearly concerned, from the moment that the concern becomes very near indeed. We have no doubt that the minds in Mr Grey's drawing-room underwent the common succession of ideas,—slight and transient imaginations, which pass into nothingness when unexpressed. Probably the sisters wondered whether Mr Hope was married, whether he was engaged, whether he was meant for Sophia, in the prospect of her growing old enough. Probably each speculated for half a moment, unconsciously, for her sister, and Sophia for both. Probably Mr Grey might reflect that when young people are in the way of meeting frequently in country excursions, a love affair is no very unnatural result. But Mrs Grey was the only one who fixed the idea in her own mind and another's by speaking of it.

"Do not you think Mr Hope thinks Hester very handsome, Mr Grey?"

"I really know nothing about it, my dear. He did not speak on the subject as he mounted his horse; and that is the only opportunity he has had of saying anything about the young ladies."

"It would have been strange if he had then, before Sydney and the servants."

"Very strange indeed."

"But do you not think he must have been struck with her? I should like very well to have her settled here; and the

corner-house of Mr Rowland's might do nicely for them. I do not know what Mrs Rowland would think of Mr Hope's marrying into our connection so decidedly."

"My dear," said her husband, smiling, "just consider! For anything we know, these young ladies may both be attached and engaged. Hope may be attached elsewhere —."

"No; that I will answer for it he is not. I—"

"Well, you may have your reasons for being sure on that head. But he may not like the girls; they may not like him:— in short, the only thing that has happened is, that they have seen each other for one quarter of an hour."

"Well! there is no saying what may come of it."

"Very true: let us wait and see."

"But there is no harm in my telling you whatever comes into my head!"

"None in the world, unless you get it so fixed there that somebody else happens to know it too. Be careful, my dear. Let no one of these young people get a glimpse of your speculation. Think of the consequence to them and to yourself."

"Dear me, Mr Grey! you need not be afraid. What a serious matter you make of a word or two!"

"Because a good many ideas belong to that word or two, my dear."

---

# Chapter Two.

Table of Contents

## Moonlight to Townsfolk.

The moment the door closed behind Sophia, as she left the sisters in their apartment, Hester crossed the room with a step very like a dance, and threw up the window.

“I had rather look out than sleep,” said she. “I shall be ashamed to close my eyes on such a prospect. Morris, if you are waiting for us, you may go. I shall sit up a long while yet.”

Morris thought she had not seen Hester in such spirits since her father’s death. She was unwilling to check them, but said something about the fatigues of the journey, and being fresh for the next day.

“No fear for to-morrow, Morris. We are in the country, you know, and I cannot fancy being tired in the fields, and in such a park as that. Good-night, Morris.”

When she too was gone, Hester called Margaret to her, put her arm round her waist, and kissed her again and again.

“You seem happy to-night, Hester,” said Margaret’s gentle voice.

“Yes,” sighed Hester; “more like being happy than for a long time past. How little we know what we shall feel! Here have I been dreading and dreading this evening, and shrinking from the idea of meeting the Greys, and wanting to write at the last moment to say that we would not come; —and it turns out—Oh, so differently! Think of day after day, week after week of pure country life! When they were planning for us to-night, and talking of the brook, and lanes, and meadows, it made my very heart dance.”

“Thank God!” said Margaret. “When your heart dances, there is nothing left to wish.”

“But did not yours? Had you ever such a prospect before,—such a prospect of delicious pleasure for weeks together,—except perhaps when we caught our first sight of the sea?”

“Nothing can ever equal that,” replied Margaret. “Do not you hear now the shout we gave when we saw the sparkles on the horizon,—heaving sparkles,—when we were a mile off, and mamma held me up that I might see it better; and baby,—dear baby,—clapped his little hands? Does it not seem like yesterday?”

“Like yesterday: and yet, if baby had lived, he would now have been our companion, taking the place of all other friends to us. I thought of him when I saw Sydney Grey; but he would have been very unlike Sydney Grey. He would have been five years older, but still different from what Sydney will be at eighteen—graver, more manly.”

“How strange is the idea of having a brother!” said Margaret. “I never see girls with their brothers but I watch them, and long to feel what it is, just for one hour. I wonder what difference it would have made between you and me, if we had had a brother.”

“You and he would have been close friends—always together, and I should have been left alone,” said Hester, with a sigh. “Oh, yes,” she continued, interrupting Margaret’s protest, “it would have been so. There can never be the same friendship between three as between two.”

“And why should you have been the one left out?” asked Margaret. “But this is all nonsense—all a dream,” she added. “The reality is that baby died—still a baby—and we know no more of what he would have been, than of what he is. The

real truth is, that you and I are alone, to be each other's only friend."

"It makes me tremble to think of it, Margaret. It is not so long since our home seemed full. How we used all to sit round the fire, and laugh and play with papa, as if we were not to separate till we had all grown old: and now, young as we are, here we are alone! How do we know that we shall be left to each other?"

"There is only one thing we can do, Hester," said Margaret, resting her head on her sister's shoulder. "We must make the most of being together while we can. There must not be the shadow of a cloud between us for a moment. Our confidence must be as full and free, our whole minds as absolutely open, as—as I have read and heard that two minds can never be."

"Those who say so do not know what may be," exclaimed Hester. "I am sure there is not a thought, a feeling in me, that I could not tell you, though I know I never could to any one else."

"If I were to lose you, Hester, there are many, many things that would be shut up in me for ever. There will never be any one on earth to whom I could say the things that I can tell to you. Do you believe this, Hester?"

"I do. I know it."

"Then you will never again doubt me, as you certainly have done sometimes. You cannot imagine how my heart sinks when I see you are fancying that I care for somebody else more than for you; when you think that I am feeling differently from you. Oh, Hester, I know every change of

your thoughts by your face; and indeed your thoughts have been mistaken sometimes."

"They have been wicked, often," said Hester, in a low voice. "I have sometimes thought that I must be hopelessly bad, when I have found that the strongest affection I have in the world has made me unjust and cruel to the person I love best. I have a jealous temper, Margaret; and a jealous temper is a wicked temper."

"Now you are unkind to yourself, Hester. I do believe you will never doubt me again."

"I never will. And if I find a thought of the kind rising in me, I will tell you the moment I am aware of it."

"Do, and I will tell you the moment I see a trace of such a thought in your face. So we shall be safe. We can never misunderstand each other for more than a moment."

By the gentle leave of Heaven, all human beings have visions. Not the lowest and dullest but has the coarseness of his life relieved at moments by some scenery of hope rising through the brooding fogs of his intellect and his heart. Such visitations of mercy are the privilege of the innocent, and the support of the infirm. Here were the lonely sisters sustained in bereavement and self-rebuke, by the vision of a friendship which should be unearthly in its depth and freedom; they were so happy for the hour, that nothing could disturb them.

"I do not see," observed Hester, "that it will be possible to enjoy any intimate intercourse with this family. Unless they are of a different order from what they seem, we cannot have much in common; but I am sure they mean to be kind, and they will let us be happy in our own way. Oh,

what mornings you and I will have together in those woods! Did you ever see anything so soft as they look—in this light?”

“And the bend of the river glittering there! Here, a little more this way, and you will see it as I do. The moon is not at the full yet; the river will be like this for some nights to come.”

“And these rides and drives,—I hope nothing will prevent our going through the whole list of them. What is the matter, Margaret? Why are you so cool about them?”

“I think all the pleasure depends upon the companionship, and I have some doubts about that. I had rather sit at work in a drawing-room all day, than go among mountains with people—”

“Like the Mansons; Oh, that spreading of shawls, and bustle about the sandwiches, before they could give a look at the waterfall! I am afraid we may find something of the same drawback here.”

“I am afraid so.”

“Well, only let us get out into the woods and lanes, and we will manage to enjoy ourselves there. We can contrive to digress here and there together without being missed. But I think we are judging rather hastily from what we saw this evening even about this family; and we have no right to suppose that all their acquaintance are like them.”

“No, indeed; and I am sure Mr Hope, for one, is of a different order. He dropped one thing, one little saying, which proved this to my mind.”

“I know what you mean—about the old man that is to be our guide over that heath they were talking of—about why

that heath is a different and more beautiful place to him than to us, or to his former self. Is it not true, what he said?”

“I am sure it is true. I have little to say of my own experience, or wisdom, or goodness, whichever it was that he particularly meant as giving a new power of sight to the old man; but I know that no tree waves to my eye as it did ten years ago, and the music of running water is richer to my ear as every summer comes round.”

“Yes; I almost wonder sometimes whether all things are not made at the moment by the mind that sees them, so wonderfully do they change with one’s mood, and according to the store of thoughts they lay open in one’s mind. If I lived in a desert island (supposing one’s intellect could go on to grow there), I should feel sure of this.”

“But not here, where it is quite clear that the village sot (if there be one), and Mr Hope, and the children, and we ourselves all see the same objects in sunlight and moonlight, and acknowledge them to be the same, though we cannot measure feelings upon them. I wish Mr Hope may say something more which may lead to the old man on the heath again. He is coming to-morrow morning.”

“Yes; we shall see him again to-morrow.”

---

# Chapter Three.

Table of Contents

## Making Acquaintance.

The sisters were not so fatigued with their journey but that they were early in the open air the next morning. In the

shrubbery they met the twins, walking hand in hand, each with a doll on the disengaged arm.

“You are giving your dolls an airing before breakfast,” said Hester, stopping them as they would have passed on.

“Yes; we carry out our dolls now because we must not run before breakfast. We have made arbours in our own gardens for our dolls, where they may sit when we are swinging.”

“I should like to see your arbours and your gardens,” said Margaret, looking round her. “Will you take me to them?”

“Not now,” answered they; “we should have to cross the grass, and we must not go upon the grass before breakfast.”

“Where is your swing? I am very fond of swinging.”

“Oh! it is in the orchard there, under that large tree. But you cannot—”

“I see; we cannot get to it now, because we should have to cross the grass.” And Margaret began to look round for any place where they might go beyond the gravel-walk on which they stood. She moved towards the greenhouse, but found it was never unlocked before breakfast. The summerhouse remained, and a most unexceptionable path led to it. The sisters turned that way.

“You cannot go there,” cried the children; “Miss Young always has the schoolroom before breakfast.”

“We are going to see Miss Young,” explained Hester, smiling at the amazed faces with which the children stared from the end of the path. They were suddenly seen to turn, and walk as fast as they could, without its being called running, towards the house. They were gone to their

mother’s dressing-room door, to tell her that the Miss Ibbotsons were gone to see Miss Young before breakfast.

The path led for some little way under the hedge which separated Mr Grey’s from Mr Rowland’s garden. There were voices on the other side, and what was said was perfectly audible. Uneasy at hearing what was not meant for them, Hester and Margaret gave tokens of their presence. The conversation on the other side of the hedge proceeded; and in a very short time the sisters were persuaded that they had been mistaken in supposing that what was said was not meant for them.

“My own Matilda,” said a voice, which evidently came from under a lady’s bonnet which moved parallel with Hester’s and Margaret’s; “My own Matilda, I would not be so harsh as to prevent your playing where you please before breakfast. Run where you like, my love. I am sorry for little girls who are not allowed to do as they please in the cool of the morning. My children shall never suffer such restriction.”

“Mother,” cried a rough little person, “I’m going fishing with Uncle Philip to-day. Sydney Grey and I are going, I don’t know how far up the river.”

“On no account, my dear boy. You must not think of such a thing. I should not have a moment’s peace while you are away. You would not be back till evening, perhaps; and I should be fancying all day that you were in the river. It is out of the question, my own George.”

“But I must go, mother. Uncle Philip said I might; and Sydney Grey is going.”

“That is only another reason, my dear boy. Your uncle will yield to my wishes, I am sure, as he always does. And if Mrs