

That Sunday evening, Mr Malone coming, as usual, to pass it with his Rector, Caroline withdrew after tea to her chamber. Fanny, knowing her habits, had lit her a cheerful little fire, as the weather was so gusty and chill. Closeted there, silent and solitary, what could she do but think? She noiselessly paced to and fro the carpeted floor, her head drooped, her hands folded: it was irksome to sit: the  
5 current of reflection ran rapidly through her mind: to-night she was mutely excited.

Mute was the room, - mute the house. The double door of the study muffled the voices of the gentlemen: the servants were quiet in the kitchen, engaged with books their young mistress had lent them; books which she had told them were 'fit for Sunday reading.' And she herself had another of the same sort open on the table, but she could not read it: its theology was incomprehensible to her,  
10 and her own mind was too busy, teeming, wandering, to listen to the language of another mind.

Then, too, her imagination was full of pictures; images of Moore; scenes where he and she had been together; winter fireside sketches; a glowing landscape of a hot summer afternoon passed with him in the bosom of Nunnely Wood: divine vignettes of mild spring or mellow autumn moments, when she had sat at his side in Hollow's Copse, listening to the call of the May cuckoo, or sharing the  
15 September treasure of nuts and ripe blackberries - a wild dessert which it was her morning's pleasure to collect in a little basket, and cover with green leaves and fresh blossoms, and her afternoon's delight to administer to Moore, berry by berry, and nut by nut, like a bird feeding its fledgling.

Robert's features and form were with her; the sound of his voice was quite distinct in her ear; his few caresses seemed renewed. But these joys being hollow, were, ere long, crushed in: the pictures faded,  
20 the voice failed, the visionary clasp melted chill from her hand, and where the warm seal of lips had made impress on her forehead, it felt now as if a sleety raindrop had fallen. She returned from an enchanted region to the real world for Nunnely Wood in June, she saw her narrow chamber; for the songs of birds in alleys, she heard the rain on her casement; for the sigh of the south wind, came the sob of the mournful east; and for Moore's manly companionship, she had the thin illusion of her own  
25 dim shadow on the wall. Turning from the pale phantom which reflected herself in its outline, and her reverie in the drooped attitude of its dim head and colourless tresses, she sat down - inaction would suit the frame of mind into which she was now declining - she said to herself - 'I have to live, perhaps, till seventy years. As far as I know, I have good health: half a century of existence may lie before me. How am I to occupy it? What am I to do to fill the interval of time which spreads between  
30 me and the grave?'

She reflected.

'I shall not be married, it appears,' she continued. 'I suppose, as Robert does not care for me, I shall never have a husband to love, nor little children to take care of. Till lately I had reckoned securely on the duties and affections of wife and mother to occupy my existence. I considered, somehow, as a  
35 matter of course, that I was growing up to the ordinary destiny, and never troubled myself to seek any other; but now, I perceive plainly, I may have been mistaken. Probably I shall be an old maid. I shall live to see Robert married to some one else, some rich lady: I shall never marry. What was I created for, I wonder? Where is my place in the world?'

She mused again.

'Ah! I see,' she pursued presently: 'that is the question which most old maids are puzzled to solve; other people solve it for them by saying, 'Your place is to do good to others, to be helpful whenever help is wanted.' That is right in some measure, and a very convenient doctrine for the people who hold it; but I perceive that certain sets of human beings are very apt to maintain that other sets should give up their lives to them and their service, and then they requite them by praise: they call them  
40 devoted and virtuous. Is this enough? Is it to live? Is there not a terrible hollowness, mockery, want,

craving, in that existence which is given away to others, for want of something of your own to bestow it on? I suspect there is. Does virtue lie in abnegation of self? I do not believe it. Undue humility makes tyranny; weak concession creates selfishness. The Romish religion especially teaches renunciation of self, submission to others, and nowhere are found so many grasping tyrants as in the ranks of the Romish priesthood. Each human being has his share of rights. I suspect it would conduce to the happiness and welfare of all, if each knew his allotment, and held to it as tenaciously as the martyr to his creed. Queer thoughts these, that surge in my mind: are they right thoughts? I am not certain.