

I'm going to begin with chapters 28 and 29, and then take up Mary's story, starting with chapter 27 before moving on to Arabella's story.

### Ch28 Mounser Green

My first note on this chapter is a question; how do you pronounce Mr Green's first name? For the moment, I'll say it as it is written, but I'd be grateful to know both the pronunciation and the etymology.

There are two points to take from this short chapter set in the Foreign Office. Firstly, there is the conviction on the part of at least two of John Morton's colleagues, including Mounser Green, that the marriage to Arabella Trefoil will not go ahead. Do they know something we don't? This is a narrative hook. We must read on to find out.

The second point regards Mr Green, how he is introduced to us and what impact he makes during his conversation with the senator. Mounser Green is a gentleman. What does this mean? Despite the appearance of indolence and an almost insolent disinterestedness, he is actually very good at his job, seen by his colleagues as "invaluable". This is the gentleman amateur, the dilettante who can turn his hand to anything, and what's more, knows the right thing to say at the right time, an ability that cannot be taught. Thus Trollope's acerbic aside:

he had entered the service before competitive examination had assumed its present shape, and had *therefore* the gifts which were required for his special position.

Note that *therefore*.

We see this in performance, as it were, during the senator's visit. Firstly, the senator makes a crack about Green never seeming to have anything to do. This is the sort of comment that Morton always struggles to deal with; Green does so effortlessly. He then offers the senator a cigar, apologising for the absence of a spittoon

"but the whole fireplace is at your service." The senator could hardly have heard this, as it made no difference in his practice.

The senator has mostly had his way up till now, his objections to the way things are done here receiving no rebuttal. Is this the beginning of the case against?

Mounser Green makes quite an impact in this brief appearance, but that is the last we see of him in this section. I think he *must* reappear, though I'm not sure in what capacity. This seems one of the tenor roles, so I incline towards a romantic part.

### Ch29 The Senator's Letter

That the senator has aroused the antipathy of most of Dillsborough, if not with his blunt criticism of local ways, then certainly with his support for Goarly, has been made clear already and is made still clearer in this chapter. However, now, for the first time, we go beyond his effect on others and glimpse what is going on behind the observer's eyes. It is more nuanced, you could even say conflicted, than we might have imagined. He admits that he has been lured into an unwilling admiration of those figures whose injustice his money is battling - their manners, their ease in the world, their unflappable good humour have worked their charm on him, though he paints it as a sort of Babylonian temptation. Lord Rufford, though unnamed, is singled out for particular praise, despite the contrast between the exalted position he

holds and the pleasure-seeking uselessness of his existence. The nobleman seems to accept it all as his right and is inexplicably comfortable with it. Even more inexplicable is that those at the bottom of the heap seem to accept its rightness too. Gotobed's admiration does not extend to those he is helping at law - he is mystified, indeed almost repelled by them. And the suspicion is beginning to creep upon him that something essential is lurking as yet unrevealed to him, and as a result of which he may earn nothing but mockery from his troubles in this affair. He may well be right. It is revealed to us, but not to him, that "Nickem has got round Goarly". It's the last line of the chapter. Another hook. That's two now. How long will we have them in our flesh?

MARY, starting with Chapter 27

Ch27 'Wonderful bird!'

Mrs Masters doesn't question the order of things.

It was all that question of gentlemen and ladies, and non-gentlemen and non-ladies. They ought, Mrs Masters thought, to be kept distinct.

What riles her in Mary's behaviour is that the young woman doesn't even see the order of things, or at least its relevance to her. But the problem is another. It is true that Mary is by birth and social standing, a non-lady, but by education she is very much a lady. This is stated, though not in those terms, by Reginald in the train journey he and Mary are about to take together.

One of Trollope's greatest gifts is to be able to create dialogue in which each of the characters says anything but what they would really like to say, and each misunderstands the other leaving one or both offended, or believing that they have offended the other. This has happened twice already, at the bridge in Bragton, and when Reginald had brought the invitation to Cheltenham. But now, on the train, for the first time, they are not at cross-purposes. Finally, they speak with some ease and Reginald is able to say that he disapproves of the marriage to Larry, and why: the man is not worthy of her; he is inferior to her "in every respect".

It is clear even at this point what will come to be. Trollope more or less tells us before they get on the train and tells us as well that the characters themselves are not aware of it, even as a possibility. Now the conversation in the train is a moment when you would expect the scales to fall from their eyes, and it might well have happened, except for the parrot. Like Echo in the Narcissus story, it blurts back the last few syllables it has heard, is impossible to ignore and proves such a distraction that, though they have broken down one barrier, the others stay in place. It is good technique, this, amusing, believable and effective.

Ch30 At Cheltenham

Mary realises that, in granting a deadline for her reply to Larry, she has in the eyes of others implicitly given her consent. It is obvious to us interested bystanders that, as a player in the great game of love, she is far inferior to Arabella in aptitude and technique; she's B-team, a rank beginner. But one thing she has grasped. Reginald's

objections to the marriage have convinced her that she cannot marry Larry, though neither she, nor Trollope, spell out exactly why.

Reginald Morton is, we know, of the same conviction, though denies any involvement or influence in the matter. And no, he asserts to his aunt, he has *not* led her on. It is simply that it would be... a "degradation". Doesn't Lady Ushant agree? Lady Ushant does not want to interfere at all; she recommends that her nephew follow suit. She also reveals that Mary will share with him an inheritance of £5000, but fears telling her this because it "might do more harm than good". Why?

In her final week in Cheltenham, Mary confesses all to her hostess, and when, to her surprise, Lady Ushant does not condemn outright the idea of such a marriage, she tries hard once again to accept it, and, because she tries, the knowledge that it cannot be is strengthened into an iron certainty. Why? Because she could not look Reginald Morton in the face and say that she was going to become the wife of Larry Twentyman. Is this the moment of epiphany? Almost.

Then she asked herself the fatal question. Was she in love with Reginald Morton? I do not think that she answered herself in the affirmative, but she became more and more sure that she could never marry Larry Twentyman.

She is miserable going home.

### Ch33 The Beginning of Persecution

Mary is granted an evening's grace at home, but no more. Mrs Masters is even more determined than Arabella and is equally unscrupulous as to her methods. She drives Mary into confessing her intention to refuse Larry and drives herself into a fury.

"Did anybody ever see such an idiot since girls were first created?"

"This comes of Ushanting!"

Nothing daunted, Mrs Masters organises her forces to bring Mary to heel. The girl is to be ostracised, and even her father is browbeaten into participating, which, however much he might approve the end, weighs very heavily on him. Larry visits on Saturday evening as usual and senses at once that the heavy atmosphere does not bode well.

A couple of notes.

Firstly, Nickem tells Masters that Goarly had consented to take the 7s 6d that Lord Rufford has offered. And there is more... We are not told what. Is this the answer to the question in ch29? Well, the fact of Goarly's acceptance is restated, but we know nothing more as to the why and wherefore. And there is the added spice of a rumour that Goarly is going to turn evidence on Scrobby about the poison and cause him to be arrested.

Second. The expression used, presumably by Mrs Masters, for her treatment of Mary, is that she is "put into a sort of domestic 'coventry'". It occurs twice in this chapter both times in lower case, which makes me suspect that it had become such a common phrase then that the proper noun could be ignored, and that it was only after World War II and the bombing of the city that the capital C was restored and the fallacious belief took hold that the expression originated in that event.

### Ch34 Mary's Letter

The exile to Coventry has the opposite effect to that intended by Mrs Masters. Mary determines that all doubt must be removed from Larry's mind and writes a letter to that end. She shows it to her father, who is saddened, asks for reasons where none can be given, and wonders if there is someone else - he is thinking of the clergyman, Mr Surtees. Mary denies this with enough vehemence to convince him that Mr Surtees is not in the picture, but that there is someone else. Mary will say no more. One thing he does not even consider is to block the posting of the letter. Mrs Masters, having uttered in her fury a crescendo of insults at her husband, tries to do just that by taking it out of the Post Office's hands. She fails and the letter reaches Larry Twentyman on Monday morning. He is devastated, incapable of doing anything but wander across his fields. The only future he had ever imagined saw Mary Masters as mistress of Chowton Farm by his side, and he had made this known to all. Chowton Farm without Mary Masters would be Chowton Farm without Larry Twentyman.

I must pause this headlong rush to drag you back to a few lines in this chapter, lines that had me laughing for hours after I'd read them, and still do now after I've reread them several times. I noted that Mrs Masters failed in her attempt to get Mary's letter back. Well, it was actually a close-run thing.

The postmaster, half vacillatory in his desire to oblige a neighbour, produced a letter and Mrs Masters put out her hand to grasp it; but the servant of the public - who had been thoroughly grounded in his duties by one of those trusty guardians of our correspondence who inspect and survey our provincial post offices - remembered himself at the last moment, and expressing the violence of his regret, replaced the letter in the box. Mrs Masters in her anger and grief, condescended to say very hard things to her neighbour - but the man remembered his duty and was firm.

Trollope must have so enjoyed writing that.

### Ch35 Chowton Farm for Sale

Larry, inconsolable and wretchedly alone, has decided he will indeed sell Chowton Farm, and visits Bragton so that John Morton might make the first offer. John himself is almost as wretched as Larry. He has learnt that Rufford will be at Mistletoe with his fiancée, has spoken to Arabella's father, and has, as we know, decided that it is all over. Of course, the moment he takes that decision, all the good he had ever seen in her rushes back to taunt him. He and Larry Twentyman, unbeknownst to each other, are in similar states of mind when they meet. However, John's surprise at the sale of the farm and his questions about the motive bring Larry, who has no gift of reticence, to blurt out the whole story, and not only his misery, but his conviction that he is not good enough for Mary and that he respects her all the more for her refusal to be lured by a good position. The two men part as new friends, and John is left to contrast the sincerity of this other couple with the empty words and shadow boxing that characterise his relationship with Arabella. Am I wrong in thinking this the first open and frank conversation John Morton has been involved in?

### ARABELLA

#### Ch31 The Rufford Correspondence

The ways of Mary fumbling and stumbling her way in the dark towards self-awareness are not the ways of Arabella Trefoil plotting her strategy to capture Lord

Rufford. Like any good hunter, Arabella has a sure understanding of the obstacles in the field. They are formidable. Not only his friends and his family, but also the man himself, are united in their opposition to her campaign. She knows that the odds are against her. She knows that she must rely in part on his own folly. And she knows that her last and best chance of capture will be at her uncle's house, Mistletoe. It is imperative that Rufford be there. The correspondence reproduced in Chapter 31 is a record of their manoeuvres in relation to this objective. He is in it for the sport. At first, she feigns to be of like mind, as if her only care is to once more ride Jack, her mount at Rufford's hunt. But playfulness and charm are not up to the task. He is slippery and refuses to be landed. She is desperate. The alternative is frightful. It is to pack up everything and start for Patagonia, with the determination to throw herself overboard on the way there if she could find the courage.

In her final letter, she adopts a finely calculated tone of loving hurt cut with flashes of anger. And at this, although fully conscious of the danger, Rufford writes that he will not disappoint her - he will be at Mistletoe.

### Ch32 'It is a long way'

Rufford is not Arabella's only male correspondent in these days. And this other suitor, unlike the young sporting lord, is as anxious about the future as she is. John Morton simply wants to know one thing: will she be his wife or not? Also unlike Rufford, he must write twice to merit a response and when it comes, it does nothing to clarify his position. She says neither yay nor nay. We know she is hedging her bets, keeping him on the hook but unlanded until she has made her final attempt on Rufford. He determines on flight, as clean a break as possible. Hence the acceptance of the position in Patagonia, an offer he would not have taken up had she given him a clear yes or no.

Needless to say, John is dissatisfied with her, with himself, with his whole situation. He buries himself in estate business, even pays a surprised Mr Masters for a long-standing bill and finally returns his cousin's visit. Reginald disconcerts him by referring to his upcoming marriage with Arabella, and the visit is cut short.

### Ch36 Mistletoe

When Arabella arrives at Mistletoe for the campaign of her life, she is better prepared than she has ever been. Despite many obstacles, she has secured the invitation here; she has freed herself of her mother; and she has gone into potentially ruinous debt to clothe and equip herself for ballroom and hunt. In the days before Rufford's arrival, she goes out of her way to charm all and sundry, which largely seems to consist of being "much quieter than had been her wont". She succeeds so far that her aunt, who has never liked her, not only sends for her to go upstairs (for the first time ever), but offers to invite John Morton. Arabella must suppress her horror at this suggestion and ward off the idea with the usual excuse that he is not behaving well about money and that prudence must keep them apart for the moment. The aunt's brutal interrogation does not stop there. Patagonia? "I suppose you will go with him?" Arabella thinks not and says so, reflecting that her campaign has suddenly become so much more perilous, to be conducted under the eyes of her aunt, and no doubt others, who know about her relationship with Morton. Are the fates conspiring to destroy her? Hmm. Maybe they will tease her first. Rufford arrives

late, during dinner, and the only seat free is next to Arabella. "More than I deserve," he calls it. It may be precisely what he deserves.

The source for Morton's colleagues at the Foreign Office - was it Lady Drummond? She has the closest of connections there, her husband is Foreign Secretary, and she is at Mistletoe when Arabella tells her aunt that she won't be going to Patagonia.

### Ch37 How things were arranged

Arabella must work hard to get herself on a hunt with Rufford. Not that there's any shortage of occasions - the man is going to hunt virtually every day between now, Thursday, and the following Monday. But the meets are too far away to permit an unattached young lady to accompany him, at least until Monday at nearby Peltry. Timing is of the essence here, as it is in all sport. Quickly the duke is persuaded to arrange a carriage or two and other ladies to travel in them to watch, and by the time the duchess has found out, it is too late for her to veto the trip. She has no suspicion that her niece is intending to join the hunt and her niece is careful not to disabuse her. Since her aunt is now on to her, there's no point in carrying on the good girl act. As Trollope tells us:

... she resolutely determined to listen to no more twaddle. She read a French novel which she had brought with her..

A French novel. Say no more. A good start to the campaign, but more is required. As in their correspondence, she must force the pace. She makes Rufford agree to a secluded meeting on the Sunday. Despite his fear of the duchess, he agrees.

### Ch38 'You are so severe'

On Sunday, she goes to church in the morning, but despite her aunt's disapproval and in a clear demonstration of why women need more church than men, she refuses to return in the afternoon, and instead sneaks out a side door, pretends to take the air on the garden terrace, and slips to the woods to meet Rufford. The little scene that follows is like a sonatina, Arabella is the pianist and Rufford the piano. The first theme is anger - how dare her aunt try to force her into church! Theme 2 is frustration - there's a chance of frost and the Peltry meet may be called off. Intensity is ratcheted upwards in the main theme with her cry for help, her plea for rescue from the persecution of that "horrid man" (Morton). Rufford's sympathy awakened, there is a swift mood change with the re-evocation of a tender moment - "You remember that night after the ball?" His arm is around her waist. He uses the word "darling". Swiftly tenderness vanishes. Anger returns, now directed at him. "You don't care for me a bit. I know you don't. It would be all the same to you whom I married - or whether I died." Her waist is not released. This is the moment. "Leave me go, Lord Rufford. I won't let you, for I know you don't love me." She has provided the occasion, she has dressed the scene, she has given him the word to use and the stage on which to use it. Will he? He cannot. The play is interrupted. At that moment, the rustle of a dress is heard and the duchess is upon them.

Arabella must think quickly. Who dares wins. There was nothing improper in that tryst. We are engaged, she tells her. Rufford proposed in November. She broke off the engagement to Morton even before Rufford's proposal. Her mother knows. Her father doesn't. No, it's best that the duke doesn't speak to Rufford quite yet. Let's speak about it again tomorrow.

Do these bare-faced lies bother her? Yes, they do. But needs must.

That evening the duchess arranges that Arabella and Rufford sit together at dinner.

### Ch39 The Day at Peltry

There is no frost to freeze her hopes, the duchess feels unable to object to her hunting if her husband-to-be doesn't, they set out on time and Arabella plays Artemis for the day. Every element falls into the precise slot designed for it, including the last and most important: she finds herself alone with Rufford in a postchaise all the way back to Mistletoe. He calls her "the best girl in all the world"; he kisses her; he now asks if *she* really cares for *him* (a vital reversal of roles); he will do anything to make her happy. Finally,

"Then tell me that you love me honestly, sincerely, with all your heart - and I shall be happy."

"You know I do."

She has gone so far. Is this the decisive step? Does she need the time-hallowed declaration, or is it implicit in what he has already said? Is he captured? Instinct tells her to stop here. When at Mistletoe she goes to her room, she leaves him as the new owner of Jack, and the prospective owner of the title and estate of Rufford. Has there been an offer? Alarm bells, and his sisters' words and his own, have rung in Rufford's mind with her every advance into his territory, but he has been unable to resist. Has he fallen off the precipice?

Tune in, same time, same place, in two weeks' time.