

ought, of course, to have explained who it is who has the honour of speaking to you. i am lord blandamer, and wish to write a few words to mr westray on questions connected with the restoration of the church. here is my card. there was probably no lady in the town that would have received this information with as great composure as did anastasia joliffe. since the death of his grandfather, the new lord blandamer had been a constant theme of local gossip and surmise. he was a territorial magnate, he owned the whole of the town, and the whole of the surrounding country. his stately house of fording could be seen on a clear day from the minster tower. he was reputed to be a man of great talents and distinguished appearance; he was not more than forty, and he was unmarried. yet no one had seen him since he came to mans estate; it was said he had not been in cullerne for twenty years. there was a tale of some mysterious quarrel with his grandfather, which had banished the young man from his home, and there had been no one to take his part, for both his father and mother were drowned when he was a baby. for a quarter of a century he had been a wanderer abroad: in france and germany, in russia and greece, in italy and spain. he was believed to have visited the east, to have fought in egypt, to have run blockades in south america, to have found priceless diamonds in south africa. he had suffered the awful penances of the fakirs, he had fasted with the monks of mount athos; he had endured the silence of la trappe; men said that the sheik ul islam had himself bound the green knew a cut through the fields whata take us to wydcombe much shorter. we started off, and went a bit into the dark; and then the very next thing i knowd was something blowing in my face, and woke up and found a white heifer snuffing at me. twas broad daylight, and me lying under a hedge in among the cuckoo pints. i was wet through, and muddy for twas a loamy ditch, and a bit dazed still, and sore ashamed; but when i thought of the bargain id made for master, and of the money id got in my waistcoat, i took heart, and reached in my hand to take out the notes, and see they werent wasted with the wet. but there was no notes there no, not a bit of paper, for all i turned my waistcoat inside out, and ripped up the lining. twas only half a mile from beacon hill that i was lying, and i soon made my way back to the fair ground, but couldnt find my friends of the evening before, and the gaffer in the drinking tent said he couldnt remember as hed ever seen any such. i spent the livelong day searching here and there, till the folks laughed at me, because i looked so wild with drinking the night before, and with sleeping out, and with having nothing to eat; for every penny was took from me. i told the constable, and he took it all down, but i see him looking at me the while, and at the torn lining hanging out under my waistcoat, and knew he thought twas only a light tale, and that i had the drink still in me. twas dark afore i give it up, and turned to go back. tis seven mile good by the nigh by the others, and asked her as they went up side by side, is there a painter, titorelli, who lives here the girl, hardly thirteen years old and somewhat hunchbacked, jabbed him with her elbow and looked at him sideways. her youth and her bodily defects had done nothing to stop her being already quite depraved. she did not smile once, but looked at earnestly, with sharp, acquisitive eyes. pretended not to notice her behaviour and asked, do you know titorelli, the painter she nodded and asked in reply, what dyou want to see him for thought it would be to his advantage quickly to find out something more about titorelli. i want to have him paint my portrait, he said. paint your portrait she asked, opening her mouth too wide and lightly hitting with her hand as if he had said something extraordinarily surprising or clumsy, with both hands she lifted her skirt, which was already very short, and, as fast as she could, she ran off after the other girls whose indistinct shouts lost themselves in the heights. at the next turn of the stairs, however, encountered all the girls once more. the hunchbacked girl had clearly told them about k.s intentions and they were waiting for him. they stood on both sides of the stairs, pressing themselves against the wall so that could get through between them, and smoothed their aprons down with their hands. all their faces, even in this guard of honour, showed a mixture of childishness and depravity. up at the head of the line of girls, who now, laughing, began to close in around was the hunchback who had taken on the role of leader. it was thanks to her that found the