Oliphant Margaret

The House on the Moor. Volume 2

Маргарет Олифант

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Олифант М. У.

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Содержание

Mrs. Oliphant
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CHAPTER I

SAM returned victorious, with an Army List, and the Rector's compliments, who would call upon Colonel Sutherland presently, in time to wake up the excellent Colonel, who was a little amazed, and a little amused at himself, to be made aware of that unusual indulgence. Sam had his own word of advice and warning against the deceitful blandishments of the "Ould Hunderd," with which he went away, flattered and ashamed, but by no means cured of his passion for "sodgering." To the questions of his mother, the hopeful young man only responded, that "the Cornel said th' army was a noble perfession," and appended thereto a vow to "break the head of that thundering 'Ould Hunderd'" at the first opportunity, neither of which conclusions was satisfactory to Mrs. Gilsland. The Colonel had scarcely put on his spectacles, and begun to turn over the leaves of the professional beadroll, when the proprietor of the same made his appearance, very cordial and anxious that the Colonel should dine at the Rectory, where the mother and sisters of "my boy in India" were already preparing themselves with a hundred questions to ask the old Indian officer. Colonel Sutherland, however, had already tasted quite enough of the damp, out-of-doors air for one day. He made the most of his threatening rheumatism by way of apology. He was fatigued with a long drive, and taking leave of friends. The Rector was politely curious; he had no doubt that he had the pleasure of knowing Colonel Sutherland's friends?

"I think not," said the Colonel, decidedly; "my brother-in-law is a recluse, and, I fear, keeps his family in the same retirement; besides, it is five miles off."

"Five miles is nothing in the country," said the courteous and persistent Rector.

"My relations live at Marchmain," said Colonel Sutherland, who had still the "Army List" in his hand – "I want to find out if the Sir John Armitage of this neighbourhood is an old friend of mine – Captain Armitage of the 59th – do you happen to know?"

"The very same," said the Rector; "he succeeded six or seven years ago, but he has not been at the Park for a year back. Bad health, I believe, an unsettled mind – he has never taken kindly to his new position; he thinks it is his duty to marry, and is extremely nervous about it. I thought it proper to pay him a good deal of attention when he was here. Poor man, his anxiety about the young ladies of the neighbourhood, and his terror of them, is something ludicrous to see."

"You are so fortunate as to have daughters of your own," said the Colonel, without perceiving the inference, which the other, possibly from a little disagreeable consciousness, applied instantly.

"My daughters were very young at that time," said the Rector, quickly – "almost children; besides, there are many points in which, though I think it right to show him attention, I do not approve of Sir John. His opinions are not what could be desired, and the father of daughters requires to be very careful whom he commits them to, as perhaps you are aware, Colonel Sutherland."

Colonel Sutherland bowed very gravely; the appeal touched on griefs too profound to be exposed to the compassion of a stranger. "He was a very good fellow when I knew him," said the Colonel; "I hear he was on terms of very intimate friendship with a Mr. Musgrave – he who died lately – is that true?"

"Ah, Mr. Musgrave? – yes, I knew him very well; an unfortunate, imprudent man, lavish and foolish," said the Rector. "He had a very good fortune to begin with, but lived with the most entire recklessness, like a man of three times his means. He brought up a young man, a sort of distant relative, as his heir. Poor man, when the affairs were examined it turned out that the heir had nothing

but debt to enter upon; a very sad business altogether. Ah, yes, to be sure, Sir John, now that I recollect, had been to school with him, or something – there *was* a friendship between them."

"And does no one in the neighbourhood feel disposed to do anything for the young man?" asked the Colonel.

"For – Roger? Well, it is a very difficult question," said the bland Rector; "men with families of their own are so circumscribed in that way. There are no very wealthy men in our neighbourhood; and really, no one has felt warranted in incurring so great a responsibility. Sir John, indeed, might have done something for him; but then he is abroad, and of course no private individual likes to step forward, and perhaps excite expectations which could never be realized; besides, he has, no doubt, relatives of his own."

"And so, I presume, there is an end of him, poor fellow," said the Colonel, with the least outbreak of impatience; "is there anything known against the young man?"

"Nothing in the world," said the Rector, readily; "we all received him with pleasure, and found him really an acquisition; a young man not of much education, to be sure, but perfectly unobjectionable in a moral point of view. I remember urging strongly upon the late Squire the propriety of sending Roger to Cambridge, when my own boy went there, for we had no suspicion then of his unfortunate circumstances. He would not, sir; he was an unreasonable, old-fashioned person – what you call a John Bull sort of man. He said his Nimrod had no occasion to be a student. Poor man! – he would have acknowledged the wisdom of my counsels had he been living now."

"Is the young man, then, a Nimrod?" asked Colonel Sutherland.

"I understand – for of course such exploits are a little out of my way," said the gracious Rector – "that he is one of the best shots in the country; and I know from my boy, who was fond of athletic sports, that he excels in most of them. So much the worse for him now. It is a very sad thing, and one unfortunately too common, to see young men brought up to no other habits than those of a country gentleman, and then launched upon life with the sentiment of the unjust steward, 'To dig I know not, and to beg I am ashamed.'"

There was a little pause after this solemn and somewhat professional utterance, the Colonel not perceiving exactly how to answer this calm regret and sympathy, which never conceived the idea of helping, by a little finger, the misfortune it deplored. After a little silence, the Rector added, "You were acquainted with Mr. Musgrave, perhaps? – you feel an interest in the young man?"

"I do, certainly – though I had no acquaintance whatever with his former circumstances; he has been thrown accidentally in my way since I came here," said Colonel Sutherland.

"Let us never say anything is done accidentally," said the Rector, rising to take his leave with the most ingratiating smile – for he was low church, and evangelical in theology, however he might be in his actions; "everything has a purpose, my dear sir. Let us hope that it is *providentially* for poor Roger that he has been thrown in your way."

So saying, with many regrets that he should not have the pleasure of entertaining the stranger at the Rectory, the excellent incumbent of Tillington left him. The Colonel shrugged his shoulders when he was gone. The authoritative, insinuating professional manner with which his reverence corrected the expression of the old Christian stranger, who, coming "accidentally" to a knowledge of Roger's trouble, was after all the only neighbour whom the poor youth found in his extremity, made the Colonel both smile and sigh. "Right enough to correct me," said to himself the Scotch soldier, whose ideas of Providence wanted no enlargement by such advice; but once more the Colonel shrugged his shoulders, and remembered involuntarily the priest and the Levite who passed on the other side. He could not comprehend this entire want of all neighbourly and kindly feeling among the inhabitants of the same locality. The old man had been so long absent from home, and was so much accustomed to attribute the want of human kindness, which of course he had seen many times in his life, to the deteriorating effect of a strange country, and the entire want of home influences, that it amazed him now to perceive how even the primitive bosom of an English rural village held sentiments of self-

regard as cold and unneighbourly as anything he had met with in the faraway world to which he was accustomed. Why could not this Rector, the friend and consoler of his parish by right of his office, a man who (undeniable inducement to all tenderness in the Colonel's tender heart) had children of his own – why did not *he* take the matter in hand, and appeal to Sir John Armitage, if the baronet alone was to be expected to do anything on Roger's behalf? The Colonel shook his head over it, and took refuge in his dinner. No repetition of instances would make the generous old man adopt or believe in this as the way of the world; he had only stumbled unfortunately upon cold-hearted individuals. Heaven forbid that *he* should put such a stigma on his brethren and his kind!

CHAPTER II

HE had scarcely finished his dinner, when young Musgrave came to him, full of excitement and emotion, with a letter in his hand. The Colonel received him with all the more cordiality, that he had not yet quite lost the impression of the Rector's visit. The young man had evidently something to tell, and that something as evidently was of a nature to move him much.

"You are the only individual who has shown any interest in me," cried poor Roger; "I could not rest till I had come to tell you: I am not so entirely alone as I supposed I was. Look here, sir, a letter from my mother – my dear mother, whom I have never been able to forget, whom I have never ceased to love. I have done her injustice, Colonel; though she has only written it for my eyes, I bring it to you, because to you I have accused her unjustly. My mother has neither forgotten nor forsaken me!"

And with honest tears in his eyes, the young man thrust his letter into the Colonel's hands, half reluctant, it is true, to show his mother's expressions of love, but eager, above all, that she should be done full justice to, and acquitted of all unkindness. The Colonel took the letter with grave sympathy. It was not by way of conquering Roger's heart entirely that he put on his spectacles with so much serious attention, and applied himself to the hurried and half-coherent letter as if it were something of the gravest importance. He did naturally, and spontaneously from his own heart, this, which was the most exquisite compliment to the young man; and the Colonel's glasses grew dim as he read. It was the letter of a weak, loving woman, with too little strength of character to assert for herself any right of protecting or succouring her first-born, who was alien and strange to her husband and his family. One could almost see the gentle, broken-spirited woman over-ridden even by her own children, uncertain of her own mind, in weak health, and with nerves which everything affected, as one glanced over those hurried lines, which seemed to be written in absolute fear of discovery. There was little in them but the mother's yearning for her boy – her dear boy, her first-born, her own Roger, whom she prayed for on her knees every day, and thought of every hour. There was neither wisdom nor reason in the epistle – the poor woman had nothing to advise, nothing to offer. A cold observer might have thrown the whole away as affectionate nonsense, and desired to know what benefit that could be to the young man in his troubles. The Colonel knew better. "Therewithal the water stood in his eyes." He knew, without a word from Roger, how this tender touch had stanched the wounds of the young man's heart.

The only thing which he did not understand was a blurred and hasty postscript, to the effect that the enclosed was *her own*, and that her dear boy need have no hesitation in using it. This Musgrave explained to him by holding up, as he received back the letter, a twenty-pound note.

"And my mother enclosed this, sir," he said, looking up with an honest eagerness which twenty twenty-pound notes could not have produced – the poor lad was so proud to be able to show this evidence of his mother's concern for him. "I know she must have saved it up – spared it from her own necessities for me; I know she must, for she knows very well I would never receive an alms from *him*," cried poor Roger. "I – I daresay you think it's not very much to talk about, Colonel, but I could not rest till you had seen that I was wrong. To think I should have done her such injustice! – and you perceive, sir, that I can indeed take a week or two's leisure before I decide upon my future *now*."

"I am very glad of it," said the Colonel; "and still more glad that you have your mother's letter to comfort you. Take a lesson by it my boy, and never think you're forsaken. If we could know exactly our neighbour's circumstances, and see into their hearts, we would be slow to judge them, let alone dear friends. 'Can a mother forget her child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?' Ah! my young friend, God knows better than we do the nature he has made. Here are two things come at once – your heart is comforted, and you are content to wait?"

Roger hung his head for a moment at the last proposition; he felt a little ashamed of giving in to the dawn of expectation which his last interview with Colonel Sutherland had excited in him in spite

of himself; but the Colonel's unlooked-for kindness, and the affection of his mother, had warmed the young man's heart, and put him once more on good terms with the world. He began to believe in friendship and kindness, and to think that, after all, matters were not hopeless with him; but still his high spirit revolted from the idea of waiting till an application for aid had been made on his behalf, and doing nothing on his own account till that had been granted or refused.

"I can wait, and think it all over again for a few days," he said, with a little hesitation, "though indeed there is little to think of; for the case is not at all changed; but because you wish it, Colonel – you who have been so kind to me. I would be a poor fellow indeed, if I could not wait for a time for your pleasure."

"Very well," said Colonel Sutherland, with a smile; "we will let it stand on these grounds – it will please me. I have made a discovery also to-day. I find that your Sir John Armitage is an old friend of mine. I shall be very glad to seek him up for my own sake; they tell me he is invalid, and unsettled; but that should not make him less cordial to his fellow-creatures. We have been under fire together, and under canvas. He is an older acquaintance of mine than of yours. It will be odd if two old soldiers, when they lay their heads together, can do nothing to help on a young one. I have a little influence myself, and my own boy is secure. Some day you two may stand by each other when we old fellows are gone. I daresay, if you were together, you would not be long of making friends with my Ned. He is an honest fellow, though his father says it, and I think never gave me an hour's pain."

"But what can I say? I who have no claim whatever on your kindness, why are you so good to me?" cried Roger, astonished; "thanking you is folly; I have no words for it; it is beyond thanks; why are you so generous to me?"

"Tut, boy, nonsense! – I have sons of my own," said Colonel Sutherland; "and what is the good of an old man in this world? By-the-bye, tell me – have you ever sought or admitted the friendship of your neighbours since your grief? There are various families hereabout, I understand; your Rector for example – I am afraid you must have repulsed that good man in your first trouble – eh? – remember I am hard of hearing; you were too melancholy, too miserable for sympathy, and you have taken it into your head since that they had ceased to care for you?"

"I was thankful for all the sympathy I got; I trusted everybody then," said Roger, simply; "but – it does not matter," he said, after a little hesitation; "I found out the difference afterwards; no – it was not me."

"But the Rector – he has children, a son – was not he very friendly?" asked the Colonel, with persistence; he wanted to ascertain, as closely as he could, what was the real state of the case.

"Ah, Willy!" – said Roger; he paused a little, and grew red, and shook his head with a slight, involuntary motion, as if to shake off some disagreeable thoughts. "We were very good friends once," he said – "pah! why should I care – you will not think worse of me, Colonel Sutherland? I had rather not think of Willy. It is the greatest folly in the world, but I cannot help it; when I think of meeting him, perhaps, in my changed circumstances – I who used to be almost, if there was any difference, superior to him – I feel it painful; I don't like the idea; this is the plain truth. I had rather not go to India for the risk; forgive me! I had rather you knew the worst of me."

"If that is the worst I am glad to know it," said the Colonel. "It is a very natural feeling; to have been without it, would have proved you a different person from what I supposed. Now, tell me again; shall you stay here? you are still in your late friend's house – what is to be done with it? – who does it belong to? – and during this little interval shall you stay here?"

"The Grange is *mine*," said Roger, with a little pride; then he continued, with a slightly bitter smile – "next week everything is to be sold —*everything*– if they leave a wooden stool for poor old Sally in the kitchen, I will be grateful to them; but they cannot sell the Grange. It is entailed —*I* cannot sell it. Poor, dear old nest, it is the last wreck of all that ever belonged to the Musgraves; everything but that is gone already; yes, though it is empty and desolate I shall stay, till I leave all, in my own house."

"Then you are heir, not only of love, but at law," said the Colonel, gravely.

Somehow that changed the aspect of affairs a little. Useless though it was, that old house, empty and desolate, it gave still an indisputable point of inheritance and ancestry, upon which the young outcast could set his foot. It seemed more and more impossible to the Colonel, whose mind was not free of romantic prejudices, and upon whose imagination this circumstance made a great impression, that the young man should be left to his own forlorn devices; and he grew more and more angry at the neighbouring people, who could suffer not only "a worthy youth" to enter the world under circumstances so unfriendly, but could also permit the total extinction of an old family, whom such a young man, once aided to begin, might well resuscitate. However, he wisely kept these thoughts to himself. He exacted a promise from Roger to do nothing without letting him know, and to wait until he should be able to obtain an answer from Sir John Armitage; but, above all, to keep him advised of where he was, and what he was doing – a promise which the youth gave with a slight reluctance. Then a cordial farewell passed between them. They parted like old friends – the young man with grateful affection, the old man with interest and kindness quite fatherly. They had never met till three days ago, yet however long they lived, neither could ever cease now to feel the warmest interest in the other. In the meantime, the Colonel put up this matter of Roger Musgrave in the bundle with his most particular concerns, and gave himself, with the most earnest gravity, to his voluntary task of aiding and helping this stranger, nothing doubting to succeed in it; while Roger, on the other hand, went home to his solitary Grange, not knowing well what to make of it, struggling against the renewed hopes of his mind, fortifying himself against renewed disappointment by recalling his brief but sharp experience of the friendship of the world, and wondering whether he did right to trust, as he could not help trusting, the sincerity of his new friend. The young man paced in front of his house, among the dark trees, revolving over and over these questions which were of so much importance to him, and stimulated in all his hopes, without being aware of it, by that letter of his mother's, which he prized so much; and Colonel Sutherland sending out for paper, pens, and ink, and receiving in answer a dusty inkstand, a rusted steel pen, and two sheets of post paper highly glazed and with gilt edges, wiped his spectacles, lighted his low bedroom candle, that the light might suit his eyes, and sat down to write.

CHAPTER III

COLONEL SUTHERLAND was not very much addicted to correspondence: he wrote kind, wise, fatherly letters to his boys, but, except on extreme occasions, he wrote to nobody else, and was not easily moved to the exercise even in case of his oldest friends. It was therefore with a little importance that he opened out his gilt-edged paper before him, and smoothed the crumple, which Sam Gilsland's hand, not used to such delicate burdens, had left in the sheet, and, beginning with a most particular date, "Tillington Arms, 15th February, 184 – " made a pause, after having achieved that, to think what he should say. We need not linger over all the Colonel's cogitations and pains of production. Here is at last, in the best language he could think of, the most wise and careful statement of his case which he found it possible to make:

"My dear Armitage, – I congratulate you very cordially upon the accession of rank and fortune which I have just learned has fallen upon you. Living, as you know I used to do, very much engaged with my own duties, and hearing scarcely any news except what occurred in our own branch of the service, I had never heard of this till to-day, when I suddenly found my old comrade in the Sir John Armitage of a district quite unknown to me, but with which I have managed to establish a connection rather surprising to myself, by dint of a few days residence here. I came home six months ago, after more than thirty years' service, exclusive of leave and former absence from duty, and had the happiness to find my boys well and hearty, and making progress to my entire satisfaction. Ned, you will be pleased to hear, is already provided for, and goes *out* the summer after next, to enter upon active life, with, I trust, if the boy works as he promises to do, an appointment in the Engineers. My other boy, I think, will very likely take to the Church, and be the solace of my old age. He makes very good promise for it, at least now. These, you will be sorry to know, are all that God has been pleased to spare me out of my flock.

"You will think it odd, perhaps, that I should hasten to tell you this the very moment of hearing your whereabouts and discovering your identity; but, to tell the truth, I have another reason more urgent, which, in point of fact, made me aware that you now belonged to this neighbourhood. I have accidentally" (here Colonel Sutherland paused, looked at the word, remembered the Rector's reproof, and made a half movement of his pen to draw it through; but, stopping himself, he smiled and shook his head, and went on without changing the expression) "met a young man called Roger Musgrave in the village, a very fine young fellow, to the best of my judgment. I understand that you were intimately acquainted with his godfather, whom the people here call Squire Musgrave, of the Grange. *He* died lately – when it was found that all he had was insufficient to meet his debts, and that this poor youth, whom I don't doubt you remember, was left entirely unprovided for. I found the boy in conference with a romancing old rogue of a sergeant of my own regiment, who was filling his head with all kinds of ridiculous accounts of a soldier's life in India. You may suppose I made short work of the sergeant, but found the young man, on entering into conversation with him, entirely bent upon enlisting. He had evidently been treated very shabbily by your gentry here; and, having no money, and being too proud to seek help from any one, the lad had made up his mind that the only thing left him to do, was to go for a soldier, and never be heard of more. By dint of questioning, I discovered that *you* were his relative's (I don't know what is the degree of kindred – the boy calls him his godfather) closest friend, and made up my mind at once, believing you to be a stranger, to take upon myself the task of making an appeal to you, to prevent this sacrifice. To-day I have discovered who you are, which you may suppose does not diminish my inclination to claim your assistance for this young fellow, who has captivated me, and gained my warmest interest. I have some little influence myself, which, now that my boy is provided for, I have no personal occasion to use. Don't you think you and I together could get him a pair of colours without any great difficulty? You know him better than I do, and I am sure you are not the man to leave a youth of good blood and high spirit to throw himself into the ranks

in the romantic and vain hope of rising from them. I cannot profess to regret that so few chances of promotion are open to the private soldier, though I remember you have your own views on this subject; but I am most reluctant to see a youth, who would be a credit to the profession, throw himself away.

"I write this without the least idea where it will find you; but earnestly trust you will lose no time in answering. I need scarcely tell you, who I daresay have not forgotten the time when you were twenty, that the boy is very impatient, and quite likely to do something rash out of his own head, if he supposes himself neglected. Address to me at Milnehill, Inveresk, North Britain, where at all times you will find my solitary quarters, and a warm welcome, should you think of straying so far north. My dear Armitage, yours very faithfully,

"Edward Sutherland,
"Late Colonel, 100th B.N.I."

Having finished, read, and re-read this important epistle, the Colonel put it up, and writing in large characters, deeply underscored, *To be forwarded immediately*, put it beside him to be sent by express to Armitage Park. Then the old soldier's countenance relaxed. He laid his other sheet of paper lightly before him and dipped his pen in the ink with a smile. This time he was going to write to his boy.

"I have had no small vexation, Ned, since I came here," wrote the Colonel to his son; "you shall hear a circumstantial account of it. First, I was dismayed at the sight of the house – a melancholy place on the edge of the moor, without a scrap of garden or enclosure of any kind, and not a house within sight; fancy your poor pretty cousin Susan, at seventeen, shut up in such a prison, with never a face but her father's and brother's to cheer the dear child in her solitude! You have always heard that your uncle Scarsdale was a man of very peculiar character, and you will remember that I told you the very remarkable circumstances in which your cousin Horace stands. This, my dear boy, if you should happen to have any intercourse with Horace, you must do your best to forget. By some unaccountable perversion of mind, which I can excuse, perhaps, in a man of his character, but certainly cannot explain, your uncle has carefully concealed everything from his son which can throw the least light upon his position; and as he has at the same time refused all special training and education to the lad, and never encouraged or directed him to make any provision for his future life, you may imagine what an unsatisfactory state everything is in at Marchmain. First of all, you know, Ned, I am delighted with Susan. Please God, some day we'll have her at Milnehill, and let her see that there is something in life worth living for. It would make my old heart light to see her pleasant face about the house, and yet, Ned, sometimes I can scarcely look at her without tears. Heaven knows it should be our duty as well as our pleasure to do everything we can to brighten the life of this dear, pure-hearted little girl, who is the only woman in the family now.

"But, to begin at the beginning, I got a very strange account of the family from the man who drove me to Marchmain; then I was startled by the sight of the house; then, though greatly re-assured by the appearance of Susan, I was overcast again by seeing the cloud that came over her at the mention of her father. He never appeared to receive me, but sent for me to his study, where he made the request that I would keep his secret from his children in the most absolute terms, not without reproaches against me, and against – God forgive him! – my poor sister, because I knew it, which I confess rather exasperated me. I resolved at once not to stay in the house, nor to see him again, and accordingly came down here to this little inn – very poor quarters – where I have been for three days. Horace accompanied me here, and on the way broke out into rather extravagant protestations of his wish to leave home, and bitter complaints against his father. You may suppose I was confused enough, longing to let the poor lad know the secret which could have explained all to him, and hindered by my promise. I detest mystery – always abjure it, Ned, as you value my approbation; nothing can be honest that has to be concealed. This miserable, mistaken idea of your uncle's has gone far, I am afraid, to ruin the moral nature of his son. There is a shocking unnatural enmity between the two, which cuts

me to the heart every time I think of it. Of course, Horace has no clue whatever to the secret of his father's conduct. He thinks it springs out of mere caprice and cruelty, and naturally fumes against it. This is all very dismal to look at, though I suppose, by dint of usage, it does not seem so unnatural to them as it does to a stranger. Horace himself, I am sorry to say, does not quite satisfy me; with such an upbringing, poor fellow, who can wonder at it? He is very clever, but much occupied with himself, and does not seem to have the honest, spontaneous wishes and ambition of a young man. There is a look of craft about him which grieves me; and I fear he has got into indifferent company, according to his own avowal, and declares to me he despises them, which, in my opinion, does not mend the matter. Altogether, I am very much puzzled in my own mind about him; he is very unlike the young men I have been accustomed to meet with – and that with my experience, in thirty years of active life, is a good deal to say.

"However, with my advice, he has been led to conclude that he will adopt the law as a profession, and is anxious to be put in the way of it immediately, and do what he can to qualify himself for making his own bread in an honourable way. Can you believe it possible, my dear boy, that his father, on my appeal to him, absolutely refused either to help your cousin in his most laudable wish, or to explain to him why he did not? Oh, Ned, Ned, how miserable we can make ourselves when we get leave to do our own will! The man is wretched – you can read it in every line of his face; but he will not yield to open his heart to his boy, to receive him into his confidence, to make a friend of his only son. This miserable lucre – and I am sure in his better days, when your poor aunt was alive, nobody imagined that Scarsdale had set his heart much upon it – has turned his whole nature into gall. God forgive the miserable old man that left this curse behind him! – though, indeed, that is a useless wish, as he has been dead for fifteen years, and his fate determined long ago.

"So you perceive, on the whole, I have had a good deal on my hands since I came here. Now that nothing can be done with his father, I mean to make an appeal on behalf of your cousin to one of the trustees. To tell you the truth, Ned, I am almost afraid now of the secret being made known to Horace. Your uncle has so forgotten that word, 'Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath,' that it absolutely alarms me when I think what may be the consequences if Horace hears it suddenly from any lips but his father's. So, if you should chance to come in contact with your cousin, my dear boy, see that you forget it, Ned. Let never an *appearance* of knowledge be perceived in you – to be sure, this of itself is a kind of deceit, but it is lawful. If Scarsdale himself could be moved to disclose the whole to his son, a better state of affairs might be brought about – otherwise, I am alarmed to think of any discovery, more than I can say.

"Not content with this business, I have taken in hand, like an old fool as I am, another young fellow, whom I have fallen in with here; a fine, sincere, hearty lad, whom I hope to hear of one day as your brother-in-arms. I have just been writing on his behalf to old Armitage, of the 59th, whom you remember, I daresay, when you were a child, and who knows this young fellow, of whom I'll tell you more hereafter. To-morrow I go home (D.V.), and will post this in Edinburgh, as I pass through, that you may know I have had a safe journey. I had a letter from Tom the day before I left. The rogue has got five or six prizes at the examination; but of course he has told you all about that before now.

"God bless you, my dear boy; never forget the Gospel grace, and all we owe to it – nor your love and duty to our Father in Heaven.

"E. Sutherland."

After finishing this paternal letter, the Colonel leaned his head upon his hands for a little in silent cogitation. He was rather tired of his epistolary labours, and could not help thinking with a secret sigh of the carpet-bag, which had still to be packed up-stairs, and of the chilly journey which he had to undertake early next morning. Had he not better put off his other letter till he got home to Milnehill? "There is no time like the present," said the Colonel, with a sigh, and he rung the bell and commissioned Mrs. Gilsland to procure him another sheet of that famous gilt-edged paper. Having

obtained it, and fortified himself meanwhile with a cup of tea, which the landlady brought at the same time, the persevering Colonel thus indited his third epistle: —

"Sir, – It is a long time since I met you at the house of my brother-in-law in London, and it is very possible that you may have forgotten even the name of the writer of this letter. I am the brother of the late Mrs. Robert Scarsdale – late Colonel in command of the 100th Regiment, B. N. I., in the Honourable Company's service, and since retiring from active service have resided at Milnehill, Inveresk, North Britain, where any answer you may think proper to give to this communication will find me. I write to you now on behalf of my nephew, Horace Scarsdale. His father, to my great grief, has kept him entirely ignorant of his very peculiar and painful circumstances; and, at the same time, with a feeling sufficiently natural, but much to be deplored, declines to aid him in studying the profession which he has chosen, being that of the law. Under these circumstances, which, as his nearest relative, I have become aware of, I feel that my only resource is to apply to you. Mr. Robert Scarsdale, as you are aware, is still a man in the prime of life, and, so far as I know, in excellent health. To keep the young man without occupation, waiting for the demise of a vigorous man of fifty, would, even if my nephew were aware of all the circumstances, be something at once revolting to all natural feeling, and highly injurious to himself. I venture to ask you, then, whether you are justified in advancing to him, or, if you prefer it, to me, under security for his use, a sufficient sum to enable him to enter on the study of his profession? The matter is so important, that I make no apologies for stating it thus briefly. This would be of more importance than twice the amount can be when his youth is gone, and the best part of his life wasted. I beg you, for the young man's sake, to take the matter into your serious consideration, as trustee under the unhappy arrangement which has done so much harm to this family. I will be happy to enter into further details, or make any explanation in my power, on hearing from you; and trusting that your sympathy may be so far moved by my story as to dispose you to the assistance of my unfortunate nephew, of whose talents I have formed a very high opinion – I have the honour to remain, your faithful servant,

"Edward Sutherland."

This done, the Colonel put his letters together and retired into his arm-chair, with a satisfied conscience; as he sat there silent by the fire, the old man carried his pleadings to a higher tribunal. How could he have kept his heart so young all these years, except by the close and constant resort he made to that wonderful Friend, whom every man who seeks Him must come to like a little child?

CHAPTER IV

WITHIN a week after Colonel Sutherland's departure from Tillington a little flight of letters arrived from him – one to Susan, full only of her uncle's heart, and all the kind devices he could think of to amuse and give her pleasure; and a more business-like communication to Horace, who, during these seven days, had felt Marchmain more and more unendurable, and did not behave himself so as to increase anybody's comfort in the house. "I have appealed on your behalf to a person who ought to feel an interest in you," wrote the Colonel – "and as soon as I hear from him I will let you know immediately whether he can help me to put you in a satisfactory position. If not, my dear boy, we must try what my own means can do; and, in that case, I should propose that you come here to me, where it might be possible enough for a vigorous young man like yourself to pursue your studies in Edinburgh, and at the same time live with me at Milnehill. All this we can arrange by-and-bye. At present there is no resource but to wait, which I must advise you to do, my dear Horace, with as much cheerfulness as possible, for your own, and for all our sakes."

Horace put up this letter with a smile. There was one thing in it which should certainly have made the advice contained here palatable. The Colonel, remembering himself that very likely his nephew was kept without money, enclosed to him, with the merest statement that he did so, a five-pound note – the sight of which did bring a momentary pleasure, mingled with mortification, to the young man's face. But his bitter, ungenerous pride, made the kindness an offence, while it was a service. He never dreamed of rejecting it, but wiped off all necessity for gratitude by feeling the present an affront. It was a strange alchemy which Horace exercised; he made the most precious things into dross, putting them into the fire of his contemptuous philosophy. "Was it to please me my uncle did this, or was it to please himself?" he said, with that smile in which no pleasure was: and so made it out, instead of a natural act of kindness, to be a selfish piece of personal gratification on the part of Colonel Sutherland, who very likely had pleased himself mightily by this little exhibition of liberality and apparent goodness, at Horace's expense. With this miserable ingenuity Horace defended himself from all the influences of kindness, and stood coldly and bitterly superior to the devices which he supposed himself to have found out. Having thrust the note into his pocket with this satisfactory clearance of everything like thanks from his own mind, he turned to the letter itself, which was not at all agreeable to him. He had no more idea of waiting for the decision of the anonymous individual to whom his uncle had appealed, than he had of proceeding to Edinburgh, and living under the eye and inspection of Colonel Sutherland. He had unbounded confidence in himself, in his own abilities and skill in using them; he was not disposed to wait upon anybody's pleasure, or to be diverted from his own purpose, because some one else was labouring for his benefit in another fashion. He smiled as he read his uncle's letter, and thought upon his own scheme; but it never occurred to him to tell the Colonel that his pains were unnecessary, that he himself saw another way, and had resolved upon his own course. That was not Horace's way; he preferred to know of these exertions being made for him, and secretly to forestall, and make them useless, by acting for himself. Then it appeared to him as if he should recover his natural superiority to his uncle, and demonstrate triumphantly that he was not a person to be insulted with favours and kindnesses, or from whom thanks and gratitude were to be expected. With these sentiments he put up the letter in his pocket, and looked with disdainful amusement at Susan, who was still in the full delight of her excitement over hers; and went out, as was his wont, to ripen his own plans in his mind, and, secure in the possession of the Colonel's bank-note, to determine on his own independent movements, and decide when he should leave home.

Emotions somewhat like those of Horace, yet as different as their natures, were roused in the mind of young Roger Musgrave by a communication very similar. To him, afraid of startling the sensitive young man, the Colonel wrote with the greatest delicacy and tenderness. He told him that he had applied to Sir John Armitage for the aid of his influence, and had already put all his own in

motion; that he had very little doubt speedily to see his young friend bear Her Majesty's commission, and that all he had to beg of him was a little patience and confidence in his very sincere friend. Roger did not pause for a moment to suggest to himself that Colonel Sutherland was exercising a natural taste for patronage and affairs in thus befriending him. The young man started up in the solitary library of the Grange, where he sat that day for the last time, his cheeks crimson with excitement, and his eyes full of tears. He was confounded, troubled, touched to the heart by the friendship shown to him; and yet, as he thought over it alone in the silent house, felt it overmuch for him, and could scarcely bear it. Should he take advantage of this wonderful goodness, the busy devil whispered in his ear? Was it right to impose his misfortunes – which, after all, were not so bad as many others in the world – as a claim upon the tender compassion of the Colonel? Was it generous to accept services which, perhaps, another had more need of? He could not remain quiet, and resist this temptation; he rushed out, like Horace Scarsdale, into the bare woods, where the wind was roaring, and through the dark plantation of fir-trees, with all its world of slender columns, and the dark flat canopy of branches overhead, which resounded to the level sweep of the gale; and where, by-and-bye, the things around took his practical and simple eye, and won his heart out of the tumult of thoughts which he was not constituted to withstand, and which were very likely, in his unwonted solitude, to drive him into some irresistible but unpremeditated rashness, and make him break his promise before he was aware. Then he returned home, fatigued and exhausted, lost himself willingly, and of purpose, in an old romance, borrowed from the village library, and so kept out of the dangerous power of thought, till it was time to sleep. After that his imagination played strange freaks with Roger. We cannot tell anybody what his dreams were about; for though they seemed to himself wonderfully significant and vivid, he was mortified to find that he could not recall them in the morning so distinctly as he hoped. For he was not a poetical hero, but only a young man of very vigorous health and simple intelligence, whom grief and downfall, and melancholy change of circumstances, had influenced deeply, without making any permanent derangement, either of his mind or his digestion.

He had no need of dreams to increase the real pain of his position next morning. It was the day of the sale; a kind of simple heroical devotion to the memory of his godfather, an idea of being on the spot to repel any slight which might be thrown on his character, impelled him to be present in or near the house during the whole day. Very likely he was very wrong to expose himself to the trial, but in his youthful, excited feeling, he thought it his duty, and that was enough for Roger. The bland Rector, who came with his wife to buy some favourite china ornaments, which the lady had contemplated with longing eyes in the Squire's time, extended a passing hand to Roger, and recommended him, scarcely stopping to give the advice, not to stay. Some young men, warmer hearted, surrounded him with attempts, the best they knew, to divert him from the sight of what was going on, and scandalized the grave people by their jokes and laughter. The humbler persons present addressed Roger with broad, well-meaning condolences: "Ah, if th' ould squire had but known!" one and another said to him with audible sighs of sympathy. The poor youth's eyes grew red, and his cheeks pale; he assumed, in spite of himself, a defiant look: he stood on the watch for something he could resent. The trial was too much for his warm blood and inexperienced heart; and when the great lady of the neighbourhood passed out to her carriage, as the sale drew towards a close, and saw him near the gate with his colourless face and agitated look, she scarcely bowed to poor Roger, and declared, almost in his hearing, that the young man had been drinking, and that it showed the most lamentable want of feeling on his part to be present at such a scene.

Poor Roger! perhaps it was very foolish of him to expose himself unnecessarily to all this pain. When the night came, and the silence, doubly silent after all that din, he went through the rooms, where the moon shone in through all the bare, uncurtained windows; where the straw littered the floor; and where the furniture was no longer part of the place, but stood in heaps, as this one and that one had bought it, ready to be carried away to-morrow; with his heart breaking, as he thought. In a few hours the desolation of the Grange would be complete, although, indeed, emptiness itself would

be less desolate than the present aspect of the familiar place. Once more he read over the Colonel's letter, with all its good cheer and hopefulness. Only to have patience! Could he have patience? – was it possible that he could wait here, listless and inactive, while the good Colonel laboured for him? – and once more all his doubts and questions returned upon the young man. Should he accept so great a favour? – was he right to stand by and allow so much to be done for him, he who was a stranger to his benefactor? He buried his face in his hands, leaning on the table, which was the only thing in the apartment which had not been removed out of its usual place. Here exhaustion, and emotion, and grief surprised the forlorn lad into sleep. Presently he threw himself back, with the unconscious movement of a sleeper, upon his chair. The moon brightened and rose in the sky, and shone fuller and fuller into the room. The neglected candle burned to the socket and went out; the white radiance streamed in, in two broad bars of light, through the bare windows, making everything painfully clear within its range, and leaving a ghostly twilight and corners of profound shadow in the rest of the apartment. There he lay in the midst of his desolated household sanctuary, with the heaps of packed-up furniture round him, and the candle trembling and dying in the socket, and the white light just missing his white face – the last of the Musgraves, the heir of emptiness! – yet in his trouble and grief keeping the privilege of his years, and sleeping sweet the sleep of his youth.

CHAPTER V

WHILE the two young men responded thus to Colonel Sutherland's communications, Susan took her letter to her heart, and found unbounded comfort in it. All had not disappeared with Uncle Edward. Here was a perennial expectation, a constant thread of hope henceforward to run through her life. Never before had Susan known the altogether modern and nineteenth-century excitement of looking for the postman. It gave quite a new interest to the day – any day that unknown functionary might come again to refresh her soul with this novel delight. She could see him come across the moor, that celestial messenger! Not a Cupid, honest fellow; but bearing with him all the love that brightened Susan's firmament. She thought it would be quite impossible to be dull or listless now: even to be disappointed was something which would give a point and character to the day; and all was very different from the dead blank of her former life, in which she had no expectation, no disappointment, nothing to look for, and for entertainment to her youth only her patchwork and Peggy's talk, enjoyed by intervals. Her whole existence was changed. Uncle Edward's bundle of books, which had not captivated Susan at first sight, she found, after looking into them, to be more attractive even than her new embroidery frame. They were all novels – a kind of composition totally unknown to Susan. She had been very little attracted by literature hitherto; in the first place, because to obtain a book was a serious matter, necessitating a visit to her father's study, and a formal request for the undesirable volume, which had no charm for a young imagination when it came. But now Susan read with devotion, and amazement, and delight, each more vivid than the other. She entered into the fortunes of her heroes and heroines with a perfect interest, which would have won any story-teller's heart. She sat up almost all night, in breathless engrossment, with one which ended unhappily, and cried herself to sleep, almost frozen, with great indignation and grief at the last, to find that things would not mend. There, too, she found enlightenment upon many things. She learned, after its modern fashion, the perennial fable of the knight who delivers his lady-love. She found out how it is possible for a heroine to come through every trouble under heaven, to a paradise of love, and wealth, and happiness; and Susan's spirits rose, in spite of herself, into that heaven of imagination. Sometime or other nature and youth must come even to Marchmain; sometime it would be Susan's turn; sooner or later there would be some one in the world to whom she too would be the first and dearest. This inalienable privilege of womankind came to every Laura and Lucy in her novels, happily or unhappily; and the novels were not so far wrong either – so it does, to be sure, in life; but Susan did not take into her consideration the sad chance that liberation might be offered to the bewitched princess only by the wrong knight. The wrong knight only came in as a rival to make some complications in the story, as Susan read it; and somehow the girl adopted the tale by intuition, and fell into a vague delight of innocent dreams. Pursuing these at her needlework, after all her novels were exhausted, was almost as good as another romance; and this tale spun itself on inexhaustibly, a story without an end.

This spring in Susan's fresh heart developed itself unawares in her actions and life. She went about the house with a more sprightly step; she caught up Peggy's snatches of song, and kept humming and murmuring them, without knowing it. Sometimes her hands fell idle on her lap, as her new thoughts rose. Often she went out upon solitary rambles, with this pleasant companionship in her heart. It would not be right to say she was bolder, for the contrary was the case – she was shyer, more ready to shrink from any person whom she met; but somehow found a vague, delightful expectation, which gave a charm to everything diffused over her life.

A few days after she received Uncle Edward's letter, Susan had the good fortune to meet her friend Letty, her sole acquaintance – her secret intercourse with whom she had tremblingly revealed to the Colonel. Letty was delicate, and had not been permitted to be out of doors during the bad weather. She was a tall, meagre girl, who had outgrown her strength, and whose sallow cheeks, and prominent light gray eyes, made the greatest contrast possible to Susan's blooming health and simple

beauty. Letty was supposed to have received a wonderful education: she could play on the piano, and draw, and speak French – achievements which, in Peggy's opinion, made her a most desirable companion for poor Susan, who was ignorant of all these fine things. Besides her accomplishments, Letty was very sentimental, and wrote verses, and took rather a pathetic view of things in general. Her great misfortune was that in her own person she had nothing to complain of. She was the only child of her parents, who petted and humoured her, as old people are apt to do to the child of their old age, and who were correspondingly proud of her acquirements. Consequently, to her own great disgust, she did very much as she liked, and was contradicted by nobody. She threw herself, with all the greater fervour of sympathy, into the circumstances of her friend, not without a little envy of Susan's trials, and splendid imaginations, had she been in the same position, of what she should have done. After this long separation she flew upon Susan, throwing her long arms round her friend's neck with enthusiasm. Then the two, with arms interlaced, strayed along by the side of the high hedgerow in the winterly sunshine – the young buds opening out on the branches against which they brushed in passing, and the young grass rustling under their feet. There was not a single passenger on the road as far as they could see. They were free to exchange their friendly confidence, without the least fear of interruption.

"Oh! Susan, I have wanted so to see you! I have been so melancholy shut up at home," cried Letty; "and when I wanted to come out, mamma would not let me. I do not mind being ill. Why should not I die young like my cousin Mary? I think it must be very sweet to die young, when everybody will be sorry for you – oh, Susan, don't you?"

"I – don't – know," said poor Susan, who thought this was a great sign of Letty's superiority, and scarcely liked to confess her own worldlymindedness. "No; I should think it rather hard to die if I had a great many people who loved me like you."

"Ah, people may love one – but then, perhaps, they don't understand one," said Letty. "Mamma would not let me go to the Sabbath school, because she thought I might take cold! Ah, Susan, do you think that is an excuse that will do at the Judgment? – perhaps I might have said something to one of the children which she never would have forgotten all her life – and to think of the opportunity being lost, for fear I might take cold! I am sometimes afraid," said Letty, with a deep mysterious sigh, "that God will think it necessary, for poor papa and mamma's sake, that I should die very early; for I am so frightened that they are making an idol of me. We ought not to love anyone so very much, you know."

"I think I would not mind how much anyone loved me," said Susan, with a little boldness; "the more the better, I think; for indeed I am sure, Letty, that the Bible never says anywhere that it is sinful to be very, *very* fond of one's friends."

"We must never make idols of them," said Letty; "and when I see how mamma takes care of me, I tremble for her. I should not mind it at all myself, but she would be so lonely if I were to die."

"Oh, Letty, for pity's sake, do not speak of it!" cried Susan.

"Why shouldn't I speak of it? I feel quite sure that people who feel like me never live long," said Letty. "I am going to write my will in poetry, Susan – I did one verse the other night. I think it is rather a nice idea – it is about putting flowers on my grave."

"Oh, Letty, do be quiet! – for your mamma's sake!" cried Susan, in terror and dismay, holding fast by her friend's arm, as if afraid to see her vanish into the impalpable air.

Letty was not at all inclined, having made so great an impression, to give up the subject, and was about to resume it in a still more pathetic tone, when Susan, stimulated by her own livelier meditations, made an animated diversion.

"My Uncle Edward has been here!" said Susan; "he is the very kindest, dearest old man you ever saw. I did not think there was anybody like him in the world. He took me to Kenlisle one day in a gig, and bought me books, and I don't know how many things. Oh, Letty, such delightful books! – one is the 'Heiress;' I have just finished it; about a young lady that had a great deal of money left her, and did not know of it, and was brought up quite poor, and a gentleman fell in love with her, and they

went through *such* troubles; and at last they were – but oh, I forgot, I ought not to tell you the end. You don't know how nice it is to get frightened over and over again, and think something dreadful must happen, and yet everything comes all right in the end. I wish, I am sure – oh, Letty, do you think you could come, just come once, to Marchmain?"

"Yes, if you wish me, Susan," said Letty, with a little demureness.

"Wish you! Oh, if I could only have my own will! Would your mamma be pleased?" cried Susan; "and would you promise not to be frightened if you saw papa?"

"Frightened!" exclaimed Letty, repeating the word in her turn. "But if I saw him, it would perhaps be my duty to speak to him, Susan – for very likely if some one spoke to him *properly*, about being good to you, and about what people say, he would be kinder, I should like very much to see him – perhaps I might be the means of doing him good."

Susan was lost in unspeakable dismay. "Oh, Letty, what *are* you thinking of? – you don't know papa!" she said with a smothered voice; her desire to show Letty all her treasures fading before her terror at the thought of anybody attempting to "do good" to her terrible father. Unconsciously she quickened her pace, and hurried her companion farther from Marchmain. The idea terrified her out of her discretion. She forgot everything else in that dreadful thought. Lost in her apprehensions, she hurried her companion on towards Letty's own house, where she resolved to deposit her safely out of harm's way, telling meanwhile in elaborate detail the plot of another of her novels. Letty, who had no intention of making an immediate onslaught upon Mr. Scarsdale, turned the matter over in her mind, and thought it was "quite a duty," if she should see him, to remonstrate with her friend's unnatural father. The thought captivated Letty. As for the consequences, instead of being frightened, she would be pleased to be denounced and upbraided. That would be the persecution which she could not possibly find out in any other form in her life, and for which she longed as the seal of her Christianity. Notwithstanding, she inclined her ear to hear of the novel, and was not unmoved by Susan's promise to send it to her. They parted at a little distance from the little manse, which was Letty's home. "And remember, Susan," said Letty, kissing her affectionately, "that whenever you choose to send for me, I shall come."

Susan turned home again alone, with the sensation of having escaped from a great danger. She was quite sick with apprehensions. No wonder her father debarred her from society, when the issue was that a girl of her own age should take it upon her, without warrant from any one, to argue the question of his conduct with papa. She made haste to reach Marchmain, with an odd fear that Letty might possibly take another fancy and get there before her; and what with the fright and the ridiculous thought, Susan, half laughing and half crying, began to run to the defence of her home and her father. Who could the poor child trust if Letty failed her? When she came in sight of Marchmain, Susan stayed her steps; she did not want to betray her panic to any one there, though indeed nobody but herself ever looked out of these gloomy windows. There was some one, a rare event in that road, passing before the house. He went slowly along in front of Marchmain, looking at it. Susan looked at it too, with curiosity, wondering what could interest any stranger in her cheerless home. The sun shone once more on the gable as Colonel Sutherland had seen it, besetting the bare walls round and round, and printing off its naked outline against the moor, which stretched round it on every side. Familiar as she was with the house, Susan's heart sank as her attention fell involuntarily upon the strange nakedness and neglect which its unenclosed condition seemed to show. A bit of cottage paling, a yard of grassplot, the merest attempt at flowers, even a little paved yard, would have made a difference. No such thing was there; the doorstep descended upon the wayside herbage; around, the black whins and withered heather came close up to the walls. Here was no gracious life, active and affectionate, to beguile into verdure the stubborn yet persuadable soil. Nobody cared – that was the sentiment of the place: its unloveliness was of the merest unimportance to those who found a shelter within its walls. Who was this looking at it? When he had once passed the house, he turned back again, made a little pause, and then sauntered along the front of it once more, advancing to meet Susan, who felt

a little alarmed at so unusual an exhibition of interest. One of the little clumps of seedling trees in the moss interposed between them before they met. Coming out of its shadow at the same instant, they encountered each other suddenly, and without preparation. Susan half stopped, started, made a suppressed exclamation, for which she could have killed herself, and blushed over all her face. The young man was no less startled; he too grew crimson with a guilty and conscious colour; and as Susan hastened past him, stepped aside out of her way, and took off his hat, without attempting to say a word. Both not only recognized each other, but perceived, with a wondering sensation, something akin to pleasure, that they *were* mutually recognized. Both hurried off the scene precipitately, without looking behind them, and both somehow discovered that this sudden meeting had given a different direction to their several thoughts. Strange, unexplainable consequence of a natural accident! – why should not these two have met on a public road as well as any other two in the district? Yet somehow this sudden encounter had a certain extraordinary supernatural aspect to them both.

This person whom Susan was so unaccountably startled to see, was, of course, Roger Musgrave, walking here, as he walked everywhere within ten miles, because the poor fellow could not endure himself, and did not venture to battle with his own thoughts, and kept himself out-of-doors and in motion as a kind of safeguard. The only wonderful thing of the whole was that while Susan, without running, reached Marchmain with an incredible silent speed, and got in with her pulse high and her eyes shining, and the most profound amazement in her mind, Roger scarcely ever drew breath, on his part, till he had reached his own deserted house, though that was five miles off. Why they should have used such prodigious pains to get as far distant as possible from each other, in the shortest conceivable time, remains until this hour the mystery of that day.

CHAPTER VI

THAT day was an important one to Roger Musgrave. To live in that Grange, a great, empty, deserted house, where every desolate apartment echoed to his footstep as if he were a dozen men, and which contained through all its ample rooms nothing but a rude table and chair in the library, where he took his solitary food, a truckle bed where he slept, and some homely implements for poor old Sally in the kitchen, which the unfortunate young man had redeemed out of his mother's twenty pounds – became at last and once for all impossible to him. That day, setting out for the only refuge of his idleness, a long walk, it had occurred to him to turn his steps in the direction of Marchmain, more from a passing caprice than a serious intention. His kind old Colonel had been there – and there was the Colonel's niece, the pretty frank little girl, who had clapped her hands at his boyish exploit a year ago. The gratified vanity of that moment, his former curiosity to see Susan again, and her friendly mention of him to her uncle, warmed the young man into more earnestness as he approached the house. Seeing no one, and amazed at its utter solitude and sadness, he had turned away disappointed, when their meeting took place. Then, as we have already said, the young man hurried home. When he arrived there he kept walking up and down the empty library, till the old house rung again, and old Sally believed the young squire was "a-gooin' out of his mind." But he was not doing any such thing; he was only repeating to himself that it was impossible! – impossible! that it was against nature, and a discredit to his own character; that he could no longer wait for what other people were doing for him; that this very day he must leave the Grange. What his meeting with Susan had to do with hastening this resolution it is quite impossible to tell; he did not know himself; but the conclusion was beyond disputing. He felt a feverish restlessness possess him – he could not remain even another night, though the morning certainly would have seemed a wiser time for setting out upon his journey. He pushed aside the chop which old Sally, with much care and all the skill her old hands retained, had prepared for him, and began to write. He wrote to his mother, who had recovered all her original place in his affections, a short cheerful note, to say that he was going to London, and would write to her from thence. Then he indited less easily a letter to the Colonel, in which, with all the eloquence he possessed, he represented the impossibility of remaining where he was. He described, with natural pathos, the empty house, the desecrated home, the listless life of idleness he was leading. He said, with youthful inconsequence, strong in the feeling of the moment, that, thrown back upon himself as he had been all these lonely days, he no longer cared for rank, nor desired to keep up a pretence of superior station, which he could not support. "In what am I better than a private soldier?" he wrote, with all the swell and impulse of his full young heart: "worse, in so far that I am neither trained to my weapons, nor used to obedience – better in nothing but an empty name!" And with all that facile philosophy with which young men comfort the bitterness of their disappointments, the lad wrought himself up to a heroical pitch, by asking himself and the Colonel why he should not serve his country as well in the ranks as among their commanders. Why, indeed? The fever of his excitement mounted into his brain. When he finished his letter he was in all the fervour of that self-sacrificing sentiment which is so dear to youth. He went upstairs and packed his clean linen – a goodly store, all unlike the equipment of a private soldier – with some few other necessaries, into a travelling-bag. Then he went down to the great deserted kitchen, where poor old Sally sat "like a crow in the mist" by the chimney corner, her morsel of attenuated fire gleaming faintly across the cold floor. Sally got up and curtseyed when the young master entered. She was a little old woman, bent and feeble, but she had lived there almost all her life, and it would have broken Sally's heart to be sent away from the Grange. She stood before him with her withered hands crossed upon her white apron, wondering in her dim thoughts whether there might be something to complain of in the dinner she had prepared. Behind her spread all the hospitable provisions of the rich man's kitchen, the arrangements which spoke of liberal entertainment, assembly of guests above and crowd of servants below; all black, cold,

and desolate, unlighted save by the early wintry twilight from the windows and the superannuated glimmer of Sally's fire; and the emptiness and vacancy went with a chill and an ache to Roger's heart.

"Sally," said the young man, courageously, "I shall not give you any more trouble for a long time. You must keep the house as well as you can, and make yourself as comfortable as possible. Don't make the old place a show for strangers, now that it's desolate. See, Sally, here's for your present needs, and when I am settled I will send you more."

"I allays said it," said the old woman, "ye can ask Betty Gilsland. I said, says I, 'the young maister, take my word, 'll no bide here.' Ay, ay, ay, I allays said it – and you see it's coomed true."

Saying these words, Sally went off into a feeble little outburst of tears, and repeated her affirmation a third time, holding the money he had given her in her hand as if she did not know what to do with it. At last her ideas, such as they were, collected themselves. She made another curtsey.

"And where are you a-gooing, maister?" she said, looking earnestly into his face.

"To make my fortune, Sally," said the young man, with a smile which trembled between boldness and tears.

"And Amen – and grit may the fortin' be!" cried the old woman. "Have ye eaten your dinner?"

This was too much for the young man; he burst into a hysterical laugh, grasped her withered hand, shook it rapidly, and hurried away. The poor old body toiled up the stairs after him, to make sure that "the sneck was in the door – for them young things are that careless!" said poor old Sally; then she went back again to her kitchen, and looked at the money, and, after an interval, perceiving what had happened, fell a-sobbing and crying in her solitude, and praying "the Lord bless him!" and "the Lord be gude to him!" as she rocked herself in her wooden chair. He who, out of all that poverty and sadness, and stupor of old age, heard these ejaculations, is no respecter of persons, and it was not without a true benediction that Roger Musgrave left his home.

When he was out upon the high road he turned back to look at the Grange. The evening was dark and favoured him. The day had been mild, and early spring quickened and rustled among those trees, warming to the very tips of their branches with that invisible and silent life which should shortly make them green. There they stood clustering in mutual defence against the night wind, with the high-pitched gable-roof of the old house looking out from among them, and the black belt of firs behind filling up the breaks in their softer outline. By-and-bye, as Roger lingered in that last wistful look, he could see a small, unsteady light wandering from window to window. It was poor old Sally shutting the shutters, murmuring to herself that it was always so when the family were from home. There was something in the action symbolical and significant to Roger; it was the shutting up of the old house, the closing of the old refuge, the audible and visible sentence forbidding the return which up to that moment had been possible: he turned away with tears in his eyes, slung his travelling-bag over his strong shoulders, and setting his face to the wind, sped away through the dark country roads to the little new-built railway town, with its inns and labourers' cottages. It was quite dark when he got there; the lights dazzled him, and the noise of the coffee-room into which he went filled him with disgust in his exalted and excited state of feeling. Strangely enough as it appeared to him, a recruiting party had possession of the inn; a swaggering sergeant with parti-coloured ribbons went and came between the coffee-room and the bar, where a batch of recruits were drowning their regrets and compunctions in oceans of beer. Roger went out, with a strange mixture of disgust and curiosity, to look at them. He could not observe, and criticize, and despise as Horace Scarsdale could have done; he found no amusement in the coarse self-reproach of one, the sullen obstinacy of another, the reckless gaiety with which a third put off his repentance till to-morrow. The din of their pretended enjoyment was pathetic and melancholy to Roger; but, amid all, he could not help the thought which occurred to him again and again – "Am I to be the comrade of these unfortunate blockheads? – are these my brothers-in-arms?"

And then, quick as thought, another picture presented itself to him. He thought of the Colonel, with his kind solicitous face, his stoop of attention, and the smile which lighted up his fatherly eyes

when he spoke of his boy, whom he should hope to see Roger's brother-in-arms. For the moment he saw before him, not the flaring lights and clumsy figures of this rude company, but the dim inn-parlour, with its poor candles, and the benign old stranger with his paternal smile. The young man could not bear it. He said to himself sternly, "This must not be!" and dismissed the contrast which distracted him from his mind with a violent effort. Then he made his way into the half-lighted railway-station, where everything lay dark and silent, a stray porter making ghostly appearance across the rails, and an abysm of darkness on either side, out of which, and into which, now and then plunged the red-eyed ogre of a passing train. In answer to his inquiries, he found that the night-train to London stopped here to take up passengers in the middle of the night. He made a homely supper in the inn, and then came outside, to the station, to wait for it. There he paced up and down, watching the coming and going of short trains here and there, the hurried clambering up, and the more leisurely descent of rural passengers, upon whom the light fell coldly as they went and came. The roar and rustle with which some one-eyed monster, heard long before seen, came plunging and snorting out of the darkness, and all the rapid, shifting, phantasmagoria, of that new fashion of the picturesque which belongs to modern times. The wind blew chill from the open country, with a shrill and piercing concentration of cold through the narrow bar of the little station. By-and-bye the lights diminished, the noises stilled, nobody was left in the place but himself, a drowsy clerk in the little office, and some porters sleeping on the benches. Roger, for his part, could not sleep; he kept in motion, marching up and down the short, resounding, wooden platform, urged by the midnight cold, and by his thoughts, until his weary vigil was concluded by the arrival of his train. Then he, too, plunged like everybody else into darkness, into the mysterious midnight road, with dark London throbbing and shouting at the end; into life and his fate.

CHAPTER VII

ON the same day, and in a manner not very dissimilar, Horace Scarsdale left his home.

If that could be called home which had been for years a prison to the young man. With a secret feeling of exultation, he collected everything belonging to him into a trunk, which he confided, without much explanation, into the hands of Peggy. "When I send for this give it to my messenger," said Horace. Peggy was prudent, and nodded in assent, without asking any question. She had divined for some time that he meant to go away, and Peggy, who thought it the best thing he could do, prepared to remain in ignorance, and to have no information to give her master in case he should think of questioning her. Susan had not yet returned from her walk; there was no one in the house but Mr. Scarsdale, shut up as usual in his study, and Peggy looking out anxiously, but stealthily; unwilling to be seen, or suspected of watching her young master, when Horace left the house. He, too, carried a little bag – and he, too, when he had got half-way across the moor, turned round to look at the house in which the greater part of his life had been spent. Looking back, no tender images softened in the mind of Horace the harsh and angular outline of those unsheltered walls; he had no associations to make sweet to him the dwelling of his youth. He drew a long, deep breath of satisfaction. He had escaped, and he was young, and life was bright before him. As he stood there, too far off to be called back, with his bag lying at his feet among the brown heather, he could see Peggy steal out to the corner of the house and look up and down the road to see which way he had gone, with her hand over her eyes, to shield them from the sun: and then another lighter figure came quickly, with an agitated speed, to the door, and stood there in the sunshine, without looking round her at all, waiting for admittance. Horace contracted his eyebrows over his short-sighted eyes, and smiled to recognize his sister – smiled, but not with affection or pleasure. Perhaps it heightened for the moment his own sense of liberation to see that poor little bird going back to her cage; perhaps he imagined her consternation and alarm and amazement on finding him gone. When Peggy had gone in from her corner, and Susan had disappeared into the house, Horace took up his bag and pursued his way. He was not going any great distance; his destination, for this time at least, was only Kenlisle, where he arrived in the afternoon, after a long walk, made pleasant by the sense of freedom, which increased as step by step he increased the distance between himself and Marchmain.

Horace had not frequented the rural alehouses and listened to the rural talk for nothing. He knew, as far as popular report could tell him, all about the leading people of the district: he knew, what seldom comes to the ears of their equals, except in snatches, what their servants said about them, and all the details and explications which popular gossip gave of every occurrence important enough to catch the public eye. All this, long before he thought of making use of it, Horace noted and remembered by instinct; it amused him to hear of the follies and vices of other people; it amused him to distinguish, in the popular criticism upon them, how much of the righteous indignation was envy, and a vain desire to emulate the pleasant sins which were out of that disapproving public's reach. By this means he knew a great deal more about the social economy of the district than anybody who knew his manner of life would have supposed possible. He had heard, for example, numberless allusions made to a notable attorney, or solicitor, as he called himself, in Kenlisle, who managed everybody's affairs, and knew the secrets of the whole county. It was he to whom Horace intended addressing himself; a romantic idea, one would have supposed; for he was a prosperous man, and was not very likely to prefer a penniless individual in young Scarsdale's position to a rich townsman's son, with premiums and connections. However, the young man was strong in the most undaunted self-confidence – an idea of failure never crossed his mind. He made as careful a *toilette* as he could at the inn, had himself brushed with great care, and, pausing no longer than was absolutely necessary for these operations, proceeded at once to the solicitor's office. Here Horace presented himself, by no means in the humble guise of a man who seeks employment. Business hours were nearly over

– the young men in Mr. Pouncet's office had clustered round one desk, the occupant of which was performing some piece of amateur jugglery, to the immense admiration of his colleagues. These accomplished young men dispersed in haste at the appearance of a stranger. Mr. Pouncet was known to be disengaged, and Horace asked for him with a confidence and authority which imposed even upon the managing clerk. After a very little delay he was ushered into the attorney's sanctuary, where Mr. Pouncet himself, business being over, read the papers in his elbow-chair. Mr. Pouncet had none of Colonel Sutherland's objections to Horace's stooping shoulders. He bowed, and invited him to take a chair, without the least unfavourable comment on the appearance of his visitor. Then the lawyer laid down his paper, took off his spectacles, and assumed the proper look of professional attention. Horace saw he had made a favourable beginning, and rose in courage as he began to speak.

"I have come to consult you about some matters of much importance to me," he said. "I am forced to adopt a profession, though I ought to have no need for any such thing. I have determined to adopt yours, Mr. Pouncet. I have a long explanation to make before you can understand the case – have you time to hear me?"

"Certainly," said the lawyer, but not with effusion; for the preface was not very encouraging to his hopes of a new client.

"My father lives not very far off, at Marchmain, on the borders of Lanwoth Moor," said Horace, and made a pause at the end of these words.

A look of increased curiosity rewarded him. "Ah, Mr. Scarsdale? I remember to have heard the name," said the attorney, taking up his pen, playing with it, and at last, as if half by inadvertence, making a note upon a sheet of paper.

"He lives a life of mystery and seclusion," said Horace; "he has some secret which he guards from me; he says it is unnecessary for me to support myself, and yet his own establishment is poor. What am I to do? – life is insupportable at Marchmain. My uncle wishes me to proceed to London, to read for the bar. I confess my ambition does not direct me towards the bar. I see no necessity for losing my best years in labour which, when I discover all, will most likely be useless to me. Here is what I want to do: I wish to remain near; I wish to attain sufficient legal knowledge to be able to follow this mystery out. Such is my case plainly; what ought I to do?"

Mr. Pouncet gave a single, sharp glance at Horace, then resumed his scribbling on his paper, drawing fantastic lines and flourishes, and devoting a greater amount of attention to these than to his answer. "Really, I find it difficult to advise," he said, in a tone which meant plainly that he perceived his client had something more to say. "Take your uncle's advice."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.