Oliphant Margaret

The House on the Moor. Volume 3

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Mrs. Oliphant
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CHAPTER I

IT was still early, when Susan, somewhat flushed by her rapid walk, and somewhat tired to the boot – for, elastic and strong, and accustomed to exercise as she was, six miles of solitary road, with a bundle to carry, not to say the burden of her desolate circumstances, and the natural timidity which, after a while, replaced her flush of indignant vehemence, was rather an exhausting morning promenade for a girl of nineteen – arrived at Tillington. And, in spite of Peggy's injunctions and her own sense of necessity, it was only with lingering steps, and a painful reluctance, that she at last summoned courage sufficient to present herself at John Gilsland's open door. Once there, however, matters became easy enough, smoothed by Mrs. Gilsland's eager and ready welcome, and by an incident of which Susan had not thought.

"Eyeh, miss! but he's gone no moor nor half an hour since," cried Mrs. Gilsland. "Bless us awl! to have a young lady like you come as far, and o'er late, when awl's done! But he was in grit haste, was Mr. Horry. Come into the fire, and rest yoursel', for the like of them long walks at this hour in the morning, they're no

for leddy-birds like you. You'll have heard from the Cornel, miss? And how is he? – the dear gentleman! But you're not agoing to stand there, with that white face. Dear heart, sit down, and I'll get a cup of tea in a twinkling. She's clean done with tiredness, and the disappointment. John! if ye had the spirit of a mouse, ye'd goo after Mr. Horry, and bring him back to satisfy miss – there, do ye hear?"

"No, Mrs. Gilsland," said Susan, eagerly; "but, please, if John will get the gig, and drive me to the railroad, and perhaps we might overtake my brother. I'm – I'm – I'm – going to see my uncle to Scotland; and Horace would – might, perhaps – see me away."

"But, dear miss, your boxes?" cried Mrs. Gilsland, gazing at the young pedestrian with astonishment, and throwing her wonder into the first tangible thing that occurred to her, as she took the bundle out of Susan's hand.

"They are to come after me," said Susan, with a blush of shame; "but we had better make haste, and overtake Horace. He does not know I am going; but I think – thought – he would, perhaps, go with me to the railroad," added Susan, availing herself of that unexpected assistance, to cover her strange departure alone from Marchmain, yet blushing at the falsehood of the inference. "Oh, will you please to tell John? I have had breakfast. I could not take any tea, thank you, Mrs. Gilsland, but I want so much to overtake my brother."

This was so reasonable and comprehensible, that the good

woman left her guest immediately, to startle her husband into unusual speed, and urge him on to the harnessing of the horse, and preparation of the gig, with such wonderful expedition, that John, who, contrary to his usual habits, had no time whatever to think about it, was perfectly flushed with the exertion, and scarcely knew what he was doing. Susan, grateful to be left unquestioned, sat alone in the meantime in the little parlour, feeling half glad, and half guilty, in the strange relief afforded her by Horace's recent presence here, and the excuse it served to give for her own appearance. It saved her entirely from the halting and timid explanation of a sudden visit to her uncle, and there being nobody at Marchmain who could be spared to accompany her, with which she had been trying to fortify herself, as she approached Tillington; and the momentary rest and quietness was a relief to her tired and excited frame. Then the very room recalled to poor Susan recollections which warmed and strengthened her heart. Uncle Edward! – the only person in the world, save Peggy, who had ever looked with tender, indulgent eyes of affection upon her youth; and it was to him and his house she was going! She sat there motionless, in the dingy little inn parlour, too much fatigued and strained in mind even to unclasp her hands, but unconsciously recovering her courage, and feeling the light and flicker of a happiness to come about her heart.

This sensation of comfort increased when Susan was fairly seated in John Gilsland's gig, most carefully wrapped about with

shawls and mantles, and began to feel the exhilaration of that rapid passage through the free air and over the open country. The youth in her veins rose like mercury in spite of herself, and she was not sure that she was so very glad in her heart as she ought to have been when John Gilsland assured her of her certainty of overtaking Horace. She was not a very attentive listener to honest John's talk, profuse and digressive as that was. She made gentle answers, for it was not in Susan's nature to show even unintentional rudeness to anybody; but with so much to think about, and possessed by the thrill of novel excitement which their first necessity of acting for themselves gives to very young people, she made but a very indifferent listener in reality. Then her heart kept beating over the thought of this approaching interview with her brother, and leaped to her mouth, as people say, when any distant figure became visible on the road. She did not know the road, nor whether her conductor was taking her direct the nearest way to the railway. They *were* making progress on this earliest stage of her long journey; and it was still morning, and all the long spring day was before her; that was almost enough for Susan in her present state of mind.

She was roused at length, and startled into an instant access of renewed excitement and anxiety by a shout from John Gilsland.

"Holla, Mr. Horry! Holla, lad! hey! hear ye! Maister Horry! here's me and your sister fleeing after you this six or seven miles. Mr. Horry, I'm saying – holla!"

Horace was before them, at some little distance. He stopped

when the shouting reached his ear, and turned to look back. As they came up to him, Susan had full leisure to observe the changes which this year had wrought upon her brother's appearance, and a little sensation of affectionate pride gladdened her at the sight. But she was anxious, a thousand times more anxious, to make sure that he should speak to her with ordinary kindness, and without exposing rudely the nature of her sudden journey, which he was sure to guess, than she was to think how Uncle Edward would receive her when she went to throw herself penniless upon his charity; and felt herself approaching him close and fast with a degree of trepidation strange to see between two persons so nearly the same age, and so closely allied. He for his part stared at her with utter amazement as the gig approached closer. "Susan! what on earth has brought you here?" he exclaimed, with an astonishment which was by no means free of anger. Susan trembled and faltered in her answer, as if her father himself had asked the question.

"Oh, Horace! to ask you to go to the railway with me," she said, stooping closer towards him, and pressing the hand which he slowly extended towards her, significantly and closely, to make him understand that she had more to say: "I am going to Uncle Edward – will you come and see me away?"

He looked at her with a strange, half-envious, half-contemptuous smile. "So, he lets you go!" he exclaimed; "he has grown amiable all at once, it would appear."

"Oh, Horace, hush!" cried Susan, stooping closer, with a

sudden rush of tears to her eyes. “I will tell you all whenever we stop. Oh, Horace,” she added, in an inexpressible yearning for sympathy, and sinking her voice to a whisper, “don’t look so unkind and cold; he has sent me away!”

“The mare’s fresh and spankey,” said John Gilsland; “she’s enough to manage without any whispering in her lug. Jump up behind, Mr. Horry, and tawlk as we goo. It’ll be straight to the railroad now?”

“Have you not been going straight to the railroad?” asked Susan, in surprise.

“Straight! I trust you thought me of sufficient importance to bring you five miles out of your way,” said Horace, sharply, “and lose your train too, most likely. Why didn’t you drive as she ordered you, Gilsland? What good can I do her? Look sharp now, then, can’t you? Well, Susan, what’s this sudden journey about?”

“Oh, Horace! can’t you guess?” said Susan, looking at him wistfully. “But, hush! – never mind,” she added, as she encountered his angry stare of inquiry. “Oh, hush! I’ll tell you everything when we get there!”

And from that moment the most eager wish to get there moved poor Susan. His angry dissatisfaction at being stopped; his cold salutation; his apparent resentment at the idea that he could know anything about her journey or its cause; the tone in which he repelled her confidential whispers, and repeated aloud what she had said to him with all the little pantomimic exhortations to secrecy which were possible to her; brought a renewed chill upon

her heart. They went along at a great pace, the mare, however, being the only individual of the party who showed the least exhilaration or pleasure on the road. Would that John Gilsland had been less considerate of the sister's desire to overtake her brother! Would that he had gone the straight road, and made less demonstration of his kindly intentions! After all, the straight road is the best; but to hear Horace Scarsdale angrily insisting upon that plain fact, and upon the folly of making so long a detour to overtake him, was not calculated to raise anybody's spirits, or to make the drive more agreeable. John Gilsland's talk, which Susan had only half listened to, was much better than the sharp, dropping conversation which now went on at intervals; and Susan bought at a sufficiently hard price her momentary ease and relief.

"Where are you going, Horace?" she asked, with hesitation – "away from Kenlisle, Peggy said – "

"I am going to Harliflax," he said, shortly. "I have got a better appointment there. I have managed to make my own way so far, you can tell my uncle – without being obliged to any one," he added, with a sneer.

"And will you write sometimes, please, Horace?" said Susan. "There are only two of us in the world; and tell me, where shall I write to you?"

He laughed, as if this was an extremely unimportant matter. "I shall be with Mr. Stenhouse," he said – "Julius Stenhouse, Esq. I daresay your letters will find me, with his name."

"Stenhouse, said ye? Eyeh, Mr. Horry, will that be the

Stenhouse that was i' Kenlisle, in ould Pouncet's office?" asked John Gilsland, suddenly looking round.

"And if it should be, what then?" asked Horace, insolently.

"Oh, little matter to me," said honest John. "He's a great scoondrel, that's awl – and married that bit silly widow, poor thing! – her as didn't know when she was well off, and had good friends; though the Squire would have done for her, as I have reason to know, like a sister of his own."

"What widow?" demanded Horace.

"It's no concern of mine," said John Gilsland, touching the mare with his whip for a grand final dash up to the railway station. "She wasn't my widow, I reckon, nor belonging to me. Her first man was a sodger captain, another chance kind o' person, like his son, one Mr. Roger that was. What the deevil has a woman to do with a new husband, that has house and hyame o'er her head, and a likely son? Serve her right, as I aye said, and will say. They're away out of this country – but he's a great scoondrel, as I tell ye, wherever he may be."

In spite of himself Horace started, and was shocked, as well as astonished, for the moment by this information. While Susan gazed at the railway, glad, and yet trembling to reach it, with thoughts of launching forth by herself, without even those familiar faces near which she knew well, though they smiled little upon her, Horace was busy with this strange bit of news. It was somewhat astounding even to him to think that the man who had betrayed the interests and appropriated the estate of

the son, should be the husband of his mother. Running on with this contemplation, and biting his thumb, as was his custom when he addressed himself to the task of arranging something new among his stores, and finding out where it fitted best, his eye suddenly caught in the group before the railway-station the stooping and decrepid figure of his old pitman, carefully dressed in his "Sabbath clothes." Horace sprang from the gig, though it was still in rapid motion, with an impulse of alarm, and hurried up to his strange acquaintance. The mare drew up immediately after, with a great dash and commotion. John Gilsland helped Susan to descend, and finding some of his own friends immediately, while her brother's presence freed him from all responsibility concerning her, left the timid girl to herself. She stood alone for a moment, frightened and discouraged; then, seeing nothing better for it, followed Horace, who was in close conversation with the old man. She was not curious, nor even interested, in what they were saying; but she had never stood by herself before, exposed to the wondering gaze of strangers, and she felt secure when she could glide up beside her brother and stand close to him, even though he paid no attention to her, nor noticed she was there.

"Well, and what were you going to Armitage Park for, eh? What business have you there?" said Horace, imperatively, to the old man.

"My lad, that's no' the gate to speak to me," said the pitman, "that am owld enough to be your grandsire. I'm a-gooin' for awl

wan and the same reason as ye cam' to me, my young gentleman. Sir John he's at the Park, and we've ta'en counsel, the neebors and me – them as seen me sign the paper, at your own bidding – and what we've settled is, Sir John's young Mr. Roger's friend; and if it was worth a gold sovereign to you, it's maybe worth a 'nuity or a bit pension to the man himsel'; so I'm a-gooin' to the Park to see Sir John, and try my loock – and that's awl."

"Sir John? Do you think Sir John will see you?" cried Horace, "you impatient old blockhead! Do you think I can't manage for you? Why don't you trust to me?"

"I'm an ould man; if it's to be ony gud to me, there's little time to lose," said the pitman, stoutly. "You're a clever lad, I'm no' misdoubting, but ye're nouther the man himsel' nor his near friend. I hevn't ony time to lose, and a bird in the hand's worth twa in the bush – no meaning ony distrust of you, young gentleman. If the young Squire should find his advantage in knowing what I know, he mought weel spare a bit something by the week, ten shilling or so, to an owld man as won't be a burden upon nobody for lang."

"Don't you understand this is the very thing that I intended?" cried Horace, making – as Susan, who had gradually become interested, could perceive – the greatest effort to keep his temper. "To be sure, I'm trying all I can. I meant to let you know as soon as I could tell myself, but you'll spoil all if you interfere. Go back to Tinwood, like a sensible man; I'll see you in a day or two. A bird in the bush is better than no bird at all, I can tell you; and

do you think Sir John, with a score of servants about him, would see you? Trust to me, and you shall have what you want in two or three days. I give you my word – are you not content?"

The old man grumbled and hesitated, but Horace's arguments were strong, and at last overcame his opposition. Horace was not content, however, with the reluctant consent to give up his project which he at last extorted. He followed the tottering old figure out of the place, negotiated with a carter who was going that way to give him "a lift" on the road to Tinwood, and stood in the road watching till he was quite out of sight, with a total forgetfulness of Susan and the train by which she had to travel. Susan followed him at a little distance, and stood doubtfully behind waiting for him, not knowing what else to do. He had forgotten her totally in the stronger interest of this more important concern; and when he did turn round, with a vexed and thoughtful face, the start and frown with which he recognized her standing so near him were anything but flattering to his sister.

"What do you mean, following me about and listening to my private affairs?" he cried, roughly. "Eavesdropper! – but I suppose that's like all women," he added, with bitterness, and an adoption of his father's look and sentiment, which drove Susan to desperation for the moment.

"You are very wicked to say so," she exclaimed; "you! – do you not know why my father sent me away? Oh, Horace, is there no heart in you? – because of that letter; he said I took it – me!"

"And why not you? – you are so very virtuous, I suppose,"

said her brother, with a sneer; "you who can listen behind a man when he does not know you're there. However, this is not a place to cry and make a scene – come along, and get your train. If you are fortunate you can cry there, and make yourself interesting to somebody. Where is your money? I suppose you've got some money. I'll get your ticket for you; but remember, Susan," he said, turning back again, after he had proceeded a step or two before her on this errand – "remember! you may have heard something I'm concerned in without my knowing it – tell it to my uncle, if you dare!"

Susan made no reply – the menace and the insulting words roused her; she followed him, without the slightest appearance of that inclination to cry with which he taunted her, with a flushed cheek and steady step, and no intention or thought of yielding any obedience to him. Fortunately the train was expected instantly, and there was small leisure for further leave-taking. He shook hands with her slightly as he helped her into the carriage, turned his back at once, and went away. It was so that Susan parted with her two nearest relatives. Honest John Gilsland, waving his hat as the train plunged along on its further course, touched her into those tears which her brother had checked in their fountain, but she choked them up in her handkerchief, with the remembrance of his taunt strong upon her; and so went forth alone, upon her first voyage and enterprise into the world, which scarcely could be so cruel to her as those she had left behind.

But Susan, deeply wounded as she was, did not lose all the

long, silent, exciting day in tears or melancholy; her mind ran astray a little after the old pitman, and the story he had to tell to Mr. Roger, which might gain him an annuity; and then escaped into anticipations which roused her out of herself. Shy and quiet in her corner, too much excited to eat Peggy's sandwiches, too shamefaced to venture forward to the book-stand, when the train stopped, to provide herself with amusement, keeping still in the same seat at the same window; shyly remembering Peggy's precaution, and ready to change only if the "woman person" who occupied another corner of the same carriage did so; Susan arrived at Edinburgh. She got there while it was still daylight, to her great comfort; and having argued the question with herself for an hour or two previously, and recollected that Uncle Edward had once spoken of taking a cab at the railway and driving to Milnehill, proceeded with trembling intrepidity to do the same thing. The cabman, whom the poor girl addressed with humble politeness, conveyed her in somewhere about two hours, along the darkening country road, during which time the beating of Susan's heart almost choked her. But she got there at last – saw the little door in the wall opened, and recognised, in the perfumed breath of the atmosphere around her, the fragrance of those great, white turrets of chestnut-blossom, which built their fairy pinnacles in the garden of Milnehill. How she got through that darkling garden-walk Susan could not have told for her life; and the bright light and rejoicing welcome at the end of it; the start of delight, the warm embrace of the new house and

unaccustomed love, were too much for the traveller. She could not speak to her uncle, and neither saw nor felt anything but a vague sensation of unspeakable rest and comfort, as they half led and half carried her over the safe threshold of Milnehill.

CHAPTER II

WHILE the rapid railway, of which she was half afraid among all her other fears and excitements, carried Susan across the border, her brother hastened by himself along the country road to Kenlisle. It still wanted an hour of noon, but Horace was angry to be so late, and his thoughts were not of the most agreeable description. It was, to be sure, no personal loss to himself which could be brought about by the mission of the old pitman to Sir John Armitage, which he had stopped for this time, but might not be able to stop again; but if the story was actually told to Roger Musgrave's real friends, who would use it for the interests of the heir, there was an end of "the power" of Horace over the two attorneys, whose breach of trust could no longer be concealed. Then he was furious to think that his sister had heard something, much or little, of his conversation with the old man, and might have it in her power to give a clue to the secret. While mingled with this immediate concern was a renewed impression of the importance which his father attached to Colonel Sutherland's letter, or at least to the information contained in it; and the most eager anxiety to get to London to resolve his fate, if that was possible, by investigations at Doctors' Commons into the will. Whose will was it? Was he justified in believing that even the name of Scarsdale was the real name of the family, or at least of the testator who had willed a "posthumous punishment and

vengeance" upon his father? Horace could give no answer to these questions; he could not even resolve on hastening to town immediately, for his time was bound to the will of another, and his funds were exhausted. To wait was the only possibility which remained to him, and he did that with a sufficiently ill grace.

Mr. Stenhouse, however, was still at Kenlisle. As soon as he reached the office, and had ascertained that Mr. Pouncet was in his private room, in conference with his former partner, Horace lost no time in demanding an audience. He was received by the Kenlisle lawyer with the greatest evident reluctance and hesitation. Mr. Pouncet gave him the veriest little nod as he came in, and glanced from Horace to Mr. Stenhouse with an expression which seemed to say that he was the victim of a conspiracy, and that some new complot was hatching against his peace. He did not even ask the young man's business; the whole affair was growing unbearable to the man of character, who knew his reputation and credit to be in the hands of these two, yet who, frightened as he was, could scarcely veil his repugnance and impatience. Mr. Stenhouse, however, shook hands cordially with his new friend. "Well, Mr. Scarsdale?" he said, in his frankest tone, "any news?" He was not afraid; and to show that he had no occasion to be so, but that the whole burden of legal peril lay upon his unfortunate colleague, was a pleasure and refreshment indescribable to Mr. Pouncet's amiable "friend."

"Not very pleasant news," said Horace; "I have just seen old Adam Brodie, the pitman, and stopped him on his way to

Armitage Park. He has taken it into his head that Sir John might like to hear his story, and that it might be worth Mr. Musgrave's while to give him an annuity. He will make the whole public if his mouth is not stopped. I came instantly to let you know. He thinks the young Squire might give him ten shillings a-week; he thinks me a friend of the young Squire, so I have persuaded him to let me try what I can do."

"Ah! Pouncet, my dear fellow, this is your concern," said Mr. Stenhouse, with his broadest smile.

Mr. Pouncet grew graver than before; he raised his head a little from the papers over which he was bending, and spoke with the greatest hesitation, clearing his throat and stammering at every word.

"I – I don't see how it can be my concern," he said; "who is Adam Brodie? – I – I never – heard the name."

"Unfortunately I know him, and so does our young friend here," said Mr. Stenhouse – "the old fellow who happened to be present when – ah, I see you recollect now! Awkward business, very – and Sir John Armitage himself is a client of yours; how very provoking! I'm afraid you'll have to do something about it, Pouncet; it would not answer you at all to have this affair known."

Mr. Pouncet did not look up; rage and provocation almost beyond bearing had risen within him, but he durst not show them. His very integrity and honour in other matters made the bondage of this one guilt more intolerable; he was enraged to be compelled to bow to it, but he dared not resist.

“The matter can be easily arranged, if Mr. Pouncet does not object to the cost,” said Horace, trying the new rôle of peacemaker.

“If I do not object – what do you mean, sir?” cried Mr. Pouncet, with uncontrollable impatience; “what have I to do with it more than Stenhouse? This is a pleasant improvement, certainly. D – the whole concern! – I wish I had never had anything to do with it, with all my heart!”

“My dear fellow, compose yourself; it is too late for that; and, besides, it is you who are endangered,” said the bland Mr. Stenhouse; “think of your own interest, my excellent friend.”

Mr. Pouncet immediately betook himself to his papers as before, turning them over rapidly; he made no answer; habit had accustomed him to the civil taunts of Stenhouse – but he could not bear the same insulting inferences from a new voice.

“There is a very easy way of managing the matter,” said Horace, once more; “the man is old, and has been long in your service. He lost his son in an accident at the pit two years ago; it is perfectly practicable to pension him on that account.”

“And leave him free to seek another pension on the other,” said Mr. Stenhouse; “won’t do: no – they are rapacious, those people; that would only rouse his appetite, the old rogue. A man who gets one thing easily always hankers for another. He’d try Sir John immediately, and double his terms. No, no; if he gets anything, he must understand distinctly what he gets it for. If I were you, Pouncet, I’d lose no time, either. He can’t live long,

that's one good thing."

"I never have bribed any man!" cried Mr. Pouncet, vehemently – "I'll not begin now. I don't mind doing my share for any old servant; but I – I can't stand this, Stenhouse! What do you mean by turning it all on me?"

"Simply because he can do me no harm, my dear fellow," said the smiling Mr. Stenhouse. "Stop now! don't let us get impatient; here is our young friend has something to say."

Mr. Stenhouse was already benevolently aware that the remarks of "our young friend" were gall and bitterness to his old partner, and perhaps if anything could have made Horace's new patron more gracious, it was this fact.

"I was about to say," said Horace, with a little eagerness, "that the old man believes me a friend of the young Squire, as he calls him, and that I am quite willing to be made the channel of communication with him. If you trust it to me, he shall never know that the money does not come from Roger Musgrave; and my own opinion is that this will be the best arrangement. If he wants more money, at least he will come to you to seek it, and not to – "

The young man stopped short prudently, and went no further. Mr. Pouncet could not bear the emphasis upon that you, or the look of personal appeal which accompanied it, at least from any one but his old partner. He got up abruptly, and pushed his chair from the table.

"Stenhouse, will you settle this business? I'll agree to your

decision," he said, pushing hastily away. "I've – I've got an appointment at twelve o'clock. I'm rather too late already; you can settle it without me."

Mr. Stenhouse smiled as he went, and so did Horace, almost without being aware of it. They had both a certain pleasure in the sufferings of their victim – a pure amateur enjoyment, entirely distinct from any consideration of advantage; however, they settled the matter between them easily and rapidly enough. To be liberal with another man's means is no difficult matter. Mr. Stenhouse arranged that a sum sufficient for a year's stipend to the old pitman, at his own terms of ten shillings a-week, should be paid into the hands of Horace, who undertook to dispense it; and Horace, on his part, lost no time in demanding from his new employer a few days' leave of absence before proceeding to his post. Mr. Stenhouse was very curious to know why this sudden permission was asked from him – so curious, that he granted it only on condition that Horace should first be settled in his office, and ascertain the nature of his new duties. After he had spent a week in Harliflax, perhaps he might be spared for another week; and as he was going to London, as he said, why, Harliflax was so much nearer London than Kenlisle, and indeed on the way. With which decision Horace chafing considerably, but compelled to assent, had no alternative but to declare himself satisfied. It was so arranged accordingly. Mr. Pouncet, when he returned, put his name to the required check, which certainly committed him to nothing, and might indeed appear nothing but

a gratuity to the clerk who was about to leave him; and Horace put twenty pounds out of the six-and-twenty in his own pocket. Not that he meant to defraud the pitman, or anybody else, but he was completely indifferent whether the money he used for his own immediate purposes was his own, or Mr. Pouncet's, or the property of old Adam. He made full arrangement to have the weekly stipend paid to the old miner. He saw him indeed, paid him the first instalment himself, and persuaded the poor pensioner that his own bounty was the immediate source of this little income; his own bounty, subject to the approval of the young Squire. Then having done this Christian office, and procured for the ungrateful Mr. Pouncet the unwilling virtue of doing good by stealth, Horace, with Mr. Pouncet's twenty pounds in his pocket, started on his journey to Harliflax, full of hope, ambition, and expectation, with Doctors' Commons and the unknown will occupying most of his thoughts. But a week – no more – and he should know what was his "singular and unhappy fortune," and what the mysterious document which was supposed to have influenced him in his earliest childhood, and had broken all ties of nature between himself and his father, actually was.

CHAPTER III

MR. STENHOUSE, whatever his motive or purpose might be, received Horace, on his arrival at Harliflax, where the lawyer had preceded his new clerk by a few days, with great civility and kindness. Perhaps Mr. Stenhouse was not much more beloved in his present residence than he had been in Kenlisle; but he was now a man of some wealth and importance, and his house had other attractions, which kept "society" in Harliflax on very good terms with him. The lawyer's household was a little out of the common order of such dwelling-places. It was divided by a singular separation, but not divided against itself. Two distinct and incompatible phases of life went on within its walls; but the one displayed no antagonism, and fought no battles with the other; and any Quixote who had chosen to take up arms for a wife neglected and a mother set aside, would have been as completely in the wrong as ever Quixote was. The family consisted of three daughters, aged from fifteen to nineteen, and of one boy, a child five years younger than his youngest sister, a hopeless little invalid, born to suffering. The girls were the daylight surface of the family, the pride of their father, and the supreme influence in the house. Two of them were pretty, the eldest as near beautiful as it could fall to the fate of an imperfectly educated provincial belle to be; and all three expensive and extravagant to the very verge of their means and opportunities.

Over such a trio of young uncontrollable spirits – and the Misses Stenhouse were innocent of sentiment, and neither had nor pretended any devotion for their mother – the nervous and timid woman who was the nominal mistress of the lawyer's house could exercise no sway. Years ago, when Amelia, the beauty, was but just beginning to be conscious of her own perfections, and to assert herself accordingly, Mrs. Stenhouse had retired from the contest. The lovely young termagant had scarcely put off her last pinafore, when she found herself triumphant mistress of the drawing-room, while her mother fell back upon that never-failing interest and occupation which the poor woman wept over and believed one of the sorest afflictions of her life, but which was in fact its great preservative – the illness and weakness of her boy. Little Edmund and she lived together in a touching and perfect unity in the comfortable parlour downstairs, while the young ladies entertained their own friends and enjoyed their own pleasures above. Perhaps Mrs. Stenhouse did not do her duty by consenting to this tacit arrangement; but, like most weak people, she was so perfectly convinced that she could not help herself, that she was quite unable for the task from which she shrank, and would have done her daughters more harm than good by keeping up an unavailing contest, that her conscience did not disturb her in the loving performance of her other duty, her unwearied care of little Edmund, from which nothing ever diverted or withdrew the entire heart of his mother. This invisible fireside in the back parlour, where Edmund, despotic and imperious

as only a child-invalid can be, tyrannized over his constant companion, and shared every thought she had, seemed no very important influence in the family to a cursory observer; but the household itself was perfectly aware that any distinct desire proceeding thence from little Edmund's sharp, high-pitched, childish voice, was law even to Edmund's father; and that the decrepid child, who did not even particularly appreciate or return his affection, was the very apple of that father's eye; his son, his heir, his representative; though nobody, save the two most deeply interested, the father and mother, believed or expected that the child could ever live to be a man.

This second domestic centre of Mr. Stenhouse's affections and interests was, however, invisible and unknown to Horace Scarsdale, when the unusual distinction of an invitation to dinner opened his employer's house to him a day or two after his arrival. He saw, it is true, the silent mother seated at the head of the table, nervously and quietly impatient of the time occupied there; and he observed that she disappeared from the drawing-room very early in the evening, and took little or no part in what was going on there. But Horace had neither eyes nor curiosity for Mrs. Stenhouse: he was more agreeably occupied. He who entered the lawyer's house with all his usual disdainful indifference – except in so far as they might serve him – to the people whom he was about to meet, had encountered a new influence, which proved too much for him at that undreaded table. All unprepared and unarmed as he was, a sudden and alarming accident, altogether

beyond his calculations and out of his reckoning, happened to Horace; the young man fell in love!

This extraordinary and unexpected event took Horace much by surprise. It was the first time in his life that he had not scorned womankind and all its influences; but Amelia Stenhouse was an entirely new development of feminity. She was very – extremely handsome, in the first place, and she was authoritative and imperious, and had a kind of wit which her beauty made brilliant and successful. Used to homage and admiration, accustomed to believe that it became her, and was her privilege to do unusual things and make unusual speeches, and audaciously confident in her own powers, she shone upon Horace like a new species unknown and undiscovered before; and the contrast offered by her exuberant beauty, "dash," and presumption, was irresistibly piquant to the brother of Susan, on whom a tamer and sweeter beauty might have shone for years in vain. Horace neither knew the moment nor the means by which that amazing accident befell him; but it had happened long before the other people had eaten their dinner, transcending such common earthly occupations as much in speed as in importance. Neither did he know how the evening passed, in his sudden and strange intoxication. His new passion partook of the nature of all sublime and primitive emotions, so far, at least, as to blot out the little cross-bars of time from the young man's consciousness, and blur these hours into one exciting moment. He was transported even out of himself – a more remarkable result – and turned his back

upon Mr. Stenhouse, and forgot his own interest, in devouring with his eyes, and pursuing with his attentions, this new star called Amelia, whom already – arrogant even in his love – he determined upon appropriating, however she or any one else might choose to object.

Uncareful of either etiquette or propriety, Horace stayed as long as he could stay, and only took his leave at length in obedience to hints which there was no mistaking. He went downstairs hurriedly, wrapt in his dream, all the air before him filled with two objects, intensely visible, and eclipsing all the world besides; which two objects were, Amelia Stenhouse, and that unknown document in Doctors' Commons which was to reveal to Horace his fate; when his course was suddenly and singularly interrupted. He had just reached the foot of the staircase, when a door was timidly opened, a glow of firelight came flushing into the hall, and the quiet little woman to whom he had been presented a few hours before, but whose voice he had not yet heard, stood doubtful and hesitating before him. Only for a moment, however, for, urged by an exclamation from within, Mrs. Stenhouse hastily addressed the stranger: "Mr. Scarsdale! Oh, come in here for a moment, please!" she cried nervously. Taken by surprise, and scarcely knowing what he did, Horace followed her. The room was very warm, carpeted and curtained into a sort of noiseless, airless luxury, which was half suffocating to the healthy and vigorous senses of the unwilling visitor; and near the fire, in an easy-chair, sat a small boy, pale-

faced and sharp-featured, restlessly wide awake, as children are when kept up beyond their usual hour, and full of eagerness about something, with a whole volume of questions in his face. This was the little hermit of the luxurious seclusion into which Horace, who knew nothing about the boy, and had not even heard of his existence, was thus mysteriously introduced. The little fellow measured his visitor with those sharp inquisitive eyes, and addressed another adjuration to his mother. Edmund's "Now, mamma!" exclaimed somewhat impatiently, acted like a spur upon the timid woman. She started, and tremulously began a string of confused yet eager questions.

"Oh, Mr. Scarsdale! I beg your pardon! They told me you came from Kenlisle," cried Mrs. Stenhouse. "There is some one near there – Yes, Edmund, darling! wait an instant. Some one who – his name is Roger Musgrave. Did you ever hear of him? Do you know him? Could you give me any news of my – of – of – the young gentleman? Perhaps you may have heard of Tillington Grange, if you know the country. Do you think they have heard anything there of – of – . Oh, I beg your pardon! it is too much to expect that you should know."

"I used to know Roger Musgrave very well," said Horace. "I lived near Tillington when I was a boy."

"I say, sir, we've got a right to know," cried the sharp little voice out of the easy-chair. "He's my brother, *he* is; don't mind what mamma says. I am not afraid to ask for him. I've sat up on purpose. I want to hear all about Roger. How much is he bigger

than you?"

"Oh, my darling child, the gentleman will be angry! He's a sad invalid, Mr. Scarsdale; everybody indulges him," cried poor Mrs. Stenhouse. "Pray, pray, don't be displeased!"

"He's a good deal bigger than me," said Horace, half amused, and half spiteful, answering the question with an involuntary grudge, and increased impulse of dislike to poor Roger, whose additional inches – poor advantage though that was – it galled him for the moment to remember.

The child clapped his hands. "How much?" he cried, with a little childish shout of triumph. The sight would have been touching enough to any one who had the heart to be moved by it. But Horace saw nothing that was not ludicrous in the poor little dwarfish invalid's eager and exultant curiosity about the size and strength of his unknown brother. He laughed in spite of himself.

"About two inches, perhaps," he said; "I have not heard anything of Musgrave lately," he continued, turning to the mother; "you know, perhaps, that he enlisted and went abroad; but I have an uncle – Colonel Sutherland, you may have heard of him – who took poor Roger up; he is very likely to know."

The scant civility and supercilious tone of this reply lost all its effect upon Mrs. Stenhouse from the name contained in it – "Colonel Sutherland! Oh, Edmund, darling! the dear old Colonel who was so kind to Roger!" she said, with tears in her eyes; "and to think a relation of his should come here! Oh, Mr. Scarsdale, if there is anything we can do for you, I or my poor boy (and Mr.

Stenhouse will do anything to please Edmund), you have only to say it – oh, thank you, thank you, a hundred times! My dearest child, it is very late, we must not keep Mr. Scarsdale longer to-night; another time perhaps he will come in and see us and tell us more. Good night, good night! Say good night, darling, to the gentleman; and thank you a hundred times, Mr. Scarsdale. I am so very, very glad you have come here!"

Saying which, Mrs. Stenhouse preceded her visitor to the street-door, and opened it for him with her own trembling hands.

He went away with a smile on his lip; but it was only a smile of momentary ridicule, and bore no kindly meaning. That sad little secret romance of domestic life had neither charm nor sentiment for Horace. Without discovering what was in it, he plunged back into his own novel passion and excitement, in which, as was sufficiently natural, the young man passed that night and the remainder of his week in Harliflax as in a rapid and exciting dream. Falling in love was no softening enchantment for Horace; it did not involve affection, or respect, or tenderness, those sentiments and principles which act upon a man's whole nature. It made no difference on his opinion of other people, or his dealings with other people, that he had fallen in love with Amelia Stenhouse. No sweet imaginations of home or hearth clung round the object of his sudden passion; he neither endowed herself with imaginary perfections, nor thought better of his neighbours, for her sake; but still, according to his nature, he was "in love." His thoughts burned and glowed about the lawyer's beautiful

daughter; he wanted her, without inquiring what, or what manner of spirit she was – a sturdy principle of love on the whole, and one which perhaps wears better than a more sentimental preference; but its immediate influence upon Horace was not particularly elevating. If it had been necessary, however, to fix and intensify his anxious curiosity concerning that unknown document in Doctors' Commons, this sudden attachment was the sharpest spur which could have been applied; for here alone lay the means by which the beauty might be appropriated and taken possession of. And every circumstance concurred to convince Horace of the importance of the discovery he had made at Marchmain. He saw the position of affairs there without any mistake or self-deception; perceived, with perfect clearness, that the letter which he had taken had been missed from his father's desk, and coolly contented himself with the knowledge that Susan had been banished from home for his fault. "So much the better for Susan," he said to himself, with entire composure; and it did not trouble him in the least that both Susan and Peggy must be quite aware who was the real criminal. He hoped, indeed, to be able very shortly to make the consequences of that theft apparent enough; for in all Horace's calculations the thought of some immediate issue followed without pause his investigation of the will. The impatience of youth and inexperience – mingling with all the calculations and designs of his unyouthful and ungenerous intelligence, the foresight and cold selfishness of age – made his very imaginations covetous and grasping; but the youth in his

veins betrayed him into dreams of a conclusion as rapid as it was brilliant. He could form his schemes with all the coolness of an old man, but he could not wait for his fortune; like a young man, he was determined to have it now.

This point accordingly was one on which he concluded without doubt or hesitation. He did not know what fortune might have in store for him; he could not tell what mysterious inheritance lay waiting, till he should make his momentous discovery; but he felt convinced that to enter upon the immediate enjoyment of these unknown and concealed riches he had but to find this secret out. With all the cold blood of age, totally careless and indifferent to any results which did not affect himself, he leapt at the rapid conclusion of youth, and found wealth, love, and luxury in a sudden windfall of extraordinary fortune. So, happily unaware of his own inconsistency, Horace lived in a fever through the few tedious days which he was obliged to spend in Harliflax, in the monotonous occupations of Mr. Stenhouse's office, with only one other glimpse of Amelia before he could start on his important journey. Steady though his selfish intelligence was, the hours danced and buzzed over him in a dizzy whirl. He stood on the threshold of a dazzling and splendid fortune, the future of a fairy tale. He stood like a knight of romance, with his lady's name upon his lips, impatient to enter the charmed gateway, and read in the enchanted scroll the secret of his fate; but the talisman which should roll back these solemn gates of the future was no spell for the lips of a true knight; and romantic as his position might be,

Horace Scarsdale occupied it in no romantic frame of mind. The romance of his attitude was all unwitting and unwilling, the work of circumstances. And it was not to conquer fortune, but to hunt for a cruel bit of paper, that, burning with suppressed eagerness, he set out for that London which to him meant only Doctors' Commons, bent upon two ideas which occupied his whole being – Amelia Stenhouse and the Will.

CHAPTER IV

WHILE Horace made *his* beginning full of new emotions and interests at Harliflax, Susan entered into a kind of miraculous happiness and comfort, which her very brightest dreams had never ventured to imagine before. For none of the wonders of romance had happened to Susan; she had not “fallen in love,” nor entered even to the precincts of that charmed condition in which everything is possible to the youthful fancy. No gallant knight had dropped out of the skies or come across the moor, to transport her into that perennial garden of enchantment, which will always remain a refuge for young imaginations while the world lasts. Yet Susan, seated in Colonel Sutherland’s cosy dining-room, making tea at the round table, where the white tablecloth fell in fragrant shining folds over the crimson cover, and where all the *agrémens* of a Scotch breakfast showed themselves in dainty good order; with the windows open, the sun shining upon the garden, the birds singing, the sweetness of spring in the sweet morning air, which had found out all the hidden primroses and violets, and some precocious lilies of the valley beneath the trees, before it came in here to tell the secret of their bloom; and all those secondary delights, warmed and brightened by the face of love, beaming across that kindly board – the tender, fatherly face, indulgent and benign as the very skies – happy in all her pleasures, happy with a still dearer charm and unintended flattery

in the very sight of her, and the consciousness of her presence; Susan did not know how to contain the joy of her heart. To think of Marchmain sitting here safe in Milnehill dining-parlour; to think of all her past life, with its melancholy solitude and friendlessness! – to think how little account anybody had ever made of *her*, whom all this bright house brightened to receive, and whom everybody here looked to as the crown of comfort and pledge of increased happiness! Susan had cried over it a dozen times during these first wonderful days – now she began to grow accustomed to her happiness. It touched her still with a sweet amazement of gratitude, in which there mingled a certain compunction. It seemed scarcely right to feel so happy when she could still return by a thought to that dreary moor and melancholy house, and remember how her father lived miserably by himself in his austere solitude, and that she was an outcast, banished from her natural home. But it was difficult to give importance to the passion of Mr. Scarsdale, and the contempt of Horace, in the sunshiny presence of Uncle Edward. The old man inclining his deaf ear towards her with *that* smile upon his face, put Susan's troubles to flight in spite of herself; she could not entertain either pain or grief in those bright rooms, where she was installed so joyfully as mistress; she could not have the heart to spoil Uncle Edward's pleasure by a sad look, even if she had been able to preserve sad looks through so much astonishing gladness of her own.

Everything was new to her in this new home. The friends who

hastened to see her on the Colonel's invitation, and whom he took her to see; the young people like herself, who were pleased to make Susan's acquaintance, but of whose "education" and "accomplishments" Susan all unaccomplished and uninstructed stood in awe. The wonder of finding that her own ignorance, fresh and intelligent as it was, rather attracted than repelled many of her new friends; the very necessity of making an evening toilette, and having to interest herself in pretty fashions of evening dress; and to get Uncle Edward's Indian muslins, in their impossible delicacy, the things that she had once wondered over as ornaments of her drawers, but beyond all mortal use, actually made into ordinary gowns, and to wear them! – everything bewildered Susan into additional happiness. And that breakfast-table, with its post arrival, its letters and news – the epistles of her young cousins, the bits of pleasant gossip from the Colonel's old correspondents, all communicated to herself, with an evident pleasure in having her there to listen to them; the common family confidences and comforts which make up the daily life of most young people, made Susan's cup run over with unanticipated refinements of delight. At first every additional touch of domestic happiness was too much for her composure, and the spring skies were not more showery in their joy than those blue eyes, which could scarcely be convinced to believe themselves or acknowledge the reality of the sunshine and light around; but before the first week was over, Susan had begun to wonder how she could have managed to exist through the past,

and to feel as though she had *lived* only in those happy days, the first days she had spent in a home.

About the same day as that on which Horace set out for London, Susan sat making tea at Milnehill breakfast-table, while Uncle Edward read his letters opposite. One of these letters, as it happened, was from Roger Musgrave. Something had been doing among the Caffres, in which Roger had distinguished himself, and an account of the affair appeared that very morning in the *Times*, where a brief but flattering mention of the young volunteer delighted beyond measure his fast friend. Susan, it is impossible to deny, listened with unusual interest both to the letter and the newspaper report. It was wonderful how clearly she remembered Roger Musgrave, how he looked, and all about him. She even liked to continue the conversation in that channel, and keep her uncle from digressing to Ned or Tom, or old Sinclair of the Forty-second; and with this shy purpose suddenly bethought herself of Horace's encounter with the old pitman, of which she had been a witness, but which happier events had driven until now out of her thoughts.

"Had Horace anything to do with Mr. Musgrave, uncle?" she asked, somewhat timidly.

"Eh? Horace? Not that I am aware of," said the Colonel; "but your brother, my love, is inscrutable, and might have to do with the Rajah of Sarawak, for anything I know."

"I never heard they were friends," said Susan, musingly. "I wonder what Horace could mean? You would have thought he

was managing something for Mr. Musgrave, to hear how he spoke to that old man; and he told me – oh!" cried Susan, stopping abruptly, growing very red, and looking somewhat scared, in Uncle Edward's face.

"What, my dear child?" said the benign Colonel, with a smile.

"Oh, uncle! he told me not to tell you," said Susan, with a mixture of fright and boldness. "It must have been something wrong."

"Then perhaps you had better not tell me," said Uncle Edward, rather gravely. "I should be sorry to have a suspicion of either Roger or Horace. Never tell anything that seems to be wrong until you are sure of it, Susan. It may be safe enough to praise upon slight grounds, but never, my dear, to blame."

"That is how you treat me, Uncle Edward," said Susan, looking up brightly with recovered courage – "but this is different. What could anybody have to tell Mr. Musgrave, uncle, which would be worth paying a pension or an annuity for? – ten shillings a-week the old man said; and he was going to Armitage Park, but Horace would not let him. Horace seemed to be managing it all, as if it was for the young Squire: he said so even in words. Uncle, I wonder what it could be?"

"A pension of ten shillings a-week!" exclaimed Colonel Sutherland. The old man reddened with a painful colour. Unsuspicious of evil as he was, he had lived long in the world, and knew its darker side. The first idea which occurred to him was that of some youthful vice which this payment was to hide;

and he was grieved to his heart.

"It sounded like – " said Susan, who was perfectly ignorant of her auditor's thoughts, and innocently went on pursuing her own – "it sounded like as if something had been found out about Mr. Musgrave's property or something, and that it would do him good, and that he would be so thankful to hear it that he would give the money directly; and Horace must have thought so, too, for he promised to get it for the old man. I wonder what could have been found out; for all the land was sold – was it not, uncle? – and Mr. Musgrave was poor."

"I doubt if he has ten shillings a-week for himself of his own," said the Colonel, hastily.

"Then, uncle, something must have been found out!" cried Susan – "I am sure of it, from the way the old man spoke; and Horace promised to get him the pension, and would not let him go to Armitage. That was a little strange, wasn't it? – because Sir John, you told me, uncle, was Mr. Musgrave's great friend, and I never believed that Horace even knew him until that day."

"Odd enough, to be sure. I did not know it either, Susan. They don't look much like a pair of friends," said the puzzled Colonel; "and your brother – hum – Horace is very clever, my dear," said Uncle Edward, with a grieved look, and a slight sigh. He did not want to think any harm of his nephew, but the old man could not make the young schemer out.

"I hope, uncle, it is not anything very wrong," said Susan, faltering a little.

"I hope not, my dear," said the Colonel; but they concluded their breakfast much more silently than usual, neither of them looking very comfortable; and, for the first time, Susan was rather glad when the meal was over, and herself at liberty. She went out into the garden among the flowers, as was her wont, but even that sweet exhilarating spring atmosphere, the rustle of leaves and ripple of sound that gladdened the morning, did not withdraw her thoughts from that perplexing subject. The more she hoped that it was nothing wrong, the more settled became her conviction that it *was*, and that deceit, or treachery of some kind, was involved in the transaction. And then a battle ensued in her private heart. Roger Musgrave was nothing to Susan, and Horace was her only brother; was it her part to search into the secrets of her nearest relatives, in order to befriend a stranger? With an uneasy consciousness of undue interest in one so little known to her, Susan blushed, and shrank from this idea; yet her honest thoughts, once roused, were not to be put to rest even by a scruple of girlish delicacy. To see harm done, and stand by passive, was as impossible to this girl as to the strongest champion in existence. It was against her nature. She could not do it, were the wrong-doer her nearest and dearest friend.

An hour or two later Colonel Sutherland came into the drawing-room, where Susan sat at work, with her thoughts busy about this matter. The old soldier loitered about, poking his gray moustache into the pretty bookshelves, as though he had suddenly grown short-sighted, and impending with the stoop

habitual to his deafness over Susan's chair. He had something to say, but was reluctant to say it, lest he should wound, even by implication, the feelings of his young guest.

"Susan," said the Colonel, at last, abruptly – he thought he spoke as if the subject had suddenly occurred to him, while, in reality, it was most distinctly visible that he had been pondering nothing else since he entered the room; "thinking over what you told me this morning, I rather think it might be as well to write to Armitage – eh? Very likely it is nothing, you know; but still, if any one in that district *does* know anything that might be of service to young Musgrave – why, my love, it seems as well that we should know."

He looked at her doubtfully from under his gray eyebrows, laying a caressing hand upon her hair. He was afraid she would not like this proposal, and still more afraid that, alarmed in the quick and tender pride of family affection, she would guess and resent his suspicion of her brother. But Susan looked up quickly, without any shade of offence upon her face, which, however, had become very grave.

"I am afraid of Horace, uncle," she said, simply and sadly; "he is my own brother, and it is dreadful to say so; but I am not sure of him, as you are of my cousins. Since I think of it, I am afraid it is something wrong."

"Then you do not object, and I may write to Armitage?" said Uncle Edward. "Thank you, my dear child; perhaps we shall find it all a mistake, and Horace the most upright of us all. I trust so;

he is very clever, Susan, and clever boys are sometimes tempted into scheming – eh? And besides, poor fellow, he has had little justice in his own life. I will write, then, my love, and I hope everything will come perfectly clear."

So saying, the Colonel went away, to confide Susan's story to Sir John Armitage, and beg his attention to it. To seek out "an old man," who knew something to Roger's advantage, without either name or place to trace him by, was rather a hard task to impose upon the indolent baronet; and so Susan thought as her uncle left her. But still, it was a satisfaction to have the letter written. It is always satisfactory to transfer a portion of one's own personal uneasiness to somebody else. They hoped a little and wondered a great deal each in private, with very little communication on the subject, while they waited for Sir John's reply; and if Roger had wanted anything before of the requisites necessary for a hero in Susan's imagination, he had fully acquired it now. He was young, brave, handsome, generous, and *perhaps* he was injured – could any knight of romance require more?

CHAPTER V

FORGETTING totally for the time all lesser projects, and suffering Mr. Pouncet and old Adam, Roger Musgrave and his lost property, to fall behind him into complete oblivion, though it was the Kenlisle lawyer's sovereigns which paid his fare to London, Horace set out to seek his fortune. He had never been so confident in his expectations; and if any one had informed him during that journey of the suspicions which his uncle and Susan discussed slightly and pondered deeply, the doubts of his own honour and uprightness which both entertained, and the inquiries which were likely to be set on foot to satisfy them, he would have laughed his laugh of supreme disdain, spurning that past transaction as too insignificant to help or harm him. Adam Brodie, and the "power" over Mr. Pouncet and Mr. Stenhouse which his story gave, had been sufficiently important to Horace a short time before; but the young man was in an elevated and dizzy state of mind. He was going to find out an unknown fairy fortune; the crock of gold was almost visible; he did not feel sure that he should return to Harliflax in less than a coach-and-six, with an old-fashioned braggadocio of triumph; and what were all the previous schemes and expedients of his humble fortune to the exultant heir who was coming to his kingdom? By dint of constant thought on the subject and intense desire, he had succeeded in convincing himself that this kingdom only awaited

discovery, and was just about to fall into his full possession. A hundred Adam Brodies could not harm Horace, and what was Mr. Pouncet and his secret to him?

In this condition of mind, though growing somewhat anxious as the moment of certainty approached, Horace, in strong but restrained excitement, pale with the fire that burned in his veins and withdrew the blood from his cheek, hastened from the City tavern, where he had found a lodging, round the quiet side of St. Paul's, to that strange old den of fortune, where tragic family secrets by the thousand lie recorded, and where the domestic history of a whole nation accumulates in silence. He disappeared beneath the archway, anxious yet confident; the blaze of his triumph ready to burst forth, his thoughts rushing forward in spite of him to the splendours which lay almost within reach, to his marriage with Amelia, to all the pleasures and domination of sudden wealth. An hour or two afterwards he came out again a different man. He had found his fortune – but it was passion, and not triumph, that burned in his downcast eyes. His face was no longer pale, but red with a sullen flush of impotent resentment and hatred. He went through the crowd elbowing his way like a man who had a quarrel with all the world; he went straight across the crowded streets, and pushed his way among waggons and omnibuses with a certain fierce defiance of accident, and impulse of opposition. When he got to his tavern, the first thing he did was to call a cab, into which he flung his little carpet-bag, as if that homely conveniency had done him mortal injury, and

in a voice of passion desired to be driven instantly to the railway. Alas! that was no coach-and-six, either morally or visibly, in which Horace returned to Harliflax, and to the clerk's life in Mr. Stenhouse's office, which this morning he regarded with lordly and lofty disdain. He sat back, an image of silent and self-consuming rage, in his corner of the second-class railway carriage; rage which dried up every comfortable sensation out of his mind; rage at himself, who had been thus deceived; at the dead man who had left him, in the first place, this bitter vexation and disappointment, and at the living man, who lived to thwart him, and keep him out of his rightful possessions. Not a remorseful thought of the lifelong wrong which had soured his father's spirit and destroyed his life occurred to the congenial temper of his father's son. A true Scarsdale, Horace proved his legitimacy by the unmixed self-regard which plunged him into that sudden passion. From his own point of view he took up the expressions of his father's letter. They were rivals to the death. That event, long ago accomplished, which Horace knew for the first time to-day, had abrogated the bonds of nature between them at the very beginning of the son's life; and already a horrible impatience of the father's existence stole unawares over the mind of the young man. That lonely, miserable, misanthrope's life which the recluse endured at Marchmain kept the heir out of his inheritance – kept the youth from his will – the bridegroom from his bride; and Horace set his teeth, thinking of it. In that chain of resentful and selfish cogitations one idea followed another

too rapidly to be checked. Horace could not help it, and was scarcely aware at first how the thought, vexatious and galling, stole into his mind, that Mr. Scarsdale was still in the fulness of his days, and might live to thwart him for many a long year. The red colour flushed deeper to his face, and his hand clenched involuntarily as the idea occurred to him. Day after day, and year after year, till his own youth had died out of his veins; till Amelia Stenhouse was out of his reach, and life and wealth had lost half their charms; that unlovely existence might linger on at Marchmain, and keep him out of his inheritance. What sudden rush of breathless suggestion, not daring to breathe in shape of words or definite expressions, flooded his mind for one violent moment after that we will not venture to say; but the next instant Horace wiped his wet forehead, on which great drops of moisture hung, and threw open the window to draw breath, and hide himself from himself. When he looked in again, he had made a violent effort, and turned his mind into another channel. Crime or madness – heaven knows which – lay the way he had been going, and the first glance had sickened him with mortal terror. He turned away from the dread unwilling thought with the first conscious effort against evil which he had ever made. The evil was monstrous, and appalled him: he was not bad enough to cogitate *that*, even in his most secret thoughts.

But here stood the facts, certain and unchangeable. Fortune, as dazzling as he had ever hoped for, lay within Horace's sight, his lawful inheritance; but between him and that glorious vision

stood the black figure of the disinherited – his father, through whose lineal hands the family wealth ought to have flowed. What did he live for – that unhappy, solitary man? – what was the good of an existence which dragged its melancholy days out after such a fashion? Horace understood now what was the meaning of "posthumous punishment and vengeance," and what bitter effect the disappointed man had given to his father's cruel will; but the heir was not sorry for the hermit of Marchmain. Pity found no entrance into the self-absorbed mind of Horace; he saw his own position merely and no other, and thought as little of Mr. Scarsdale's lifelong tragedy as if the recluse had been a wooden image; a scarecrow to keep him off his enchanted land. Yet something more; though he resisted it, the dark thought would return to increase the turmoil of his mind. His father was still young, a strong man in the vigour and flush of life. Again and again that dark red flush rose to the young man's cheek, and the dew hung heavy on his forehead. Ten years, twenty years – who could prophesy how long that dreary life might hang and linger out yonder on the dreary moor? The good, the just, the lives most loved and prized, fade out of human ways; but the man accursed and excommunicated lives on. This man, perhaps, whose death would scarcely call a tear to any eye, would die most likely a very patriarch of disappointment, hatred, and misery; while his son, the heir, lingered out the blossom of his life in daily drudgery, unconsidered and poor.

This idea pertinaciously clinging to his mind might have

crazed a better heart than that of Horace; him it persecuted with a shuddering chill of inarticulate suggestions which paled his cheeks, yet stirred his mind with the wild excitement of temptation and crime. Crime! he was familiar enough with wickedness; but that ruffian whispering in his ear sickened him to the heart, yet moved his pulses with a tingle of passion. Wealth beyond his reckoning, power, riches, and Amelia, and only one desolate life standing between his strong arm and that threefold prize. The whisper which horrified him, but which he still listened to, stole into his heart as he went on; he had not closed his door against it. Already a fiercer excitement than he had ever known grew upon him and consumed him: he was innocent – he had never lifted his hand against life, nor shed blood; yet the passion and horror took hold upon him as if he were already guilty. How the hours and miles of his journey passed he was ignorant; when he had mechanically alighted at Harliflax he called himself fool not to have gone on; on, he did not know why, to that charmed spot, charmed by enmity and hostile passions, where his father, his hinderer, the bitter obstacle between him and fortune, dragged through his melancholy days. There was no influence upon the miserable young man to dispel the gloom of incipient murder from his heart; his very love, such as it was, urged him instead of staying him. He went on to the lodging which he had left yesterday with such different thoughts, in a brooding fit of hatred and disgust with himself and everybody else, afraid of the dreadful thought which made

his pulses leap and his veins tingle, yet yielding to its fierce excitement, and permitting its fire of hideous temptation to light his path. A ghastly light; but it strung his nerves so high, and excited his mind so intensely, that by-and-bye the intoxicating influence was all that he was aware of, and the idea growing familiar ceased to horrify him. What was it? – but not even in the deepest silence could the coward crime shape itself into words. It was there, and he knew it. That was enough for the devil who had led, and the spirit which followed. He went through the darkness and the peaceful streets with this deadly inspiration within him; his thoughts hovering like so many spies, and closing in dark battalions round the house on the moor, where childhood and youth had passed for Horace. He had still almost a week's freedom – what was he to do?

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