

# GEORGE MEREDITH

THE ADVENTURES OF  
HARRY RICHMOND.  
VOLUME 1

**George Meredith**  
**The Adventures of Harry**  
**Richmond. Volume 1**

*[http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio\\_book/?art=36092885](http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=36092885)  
The Adventures of Harry Richmond – Volume 1:*

# Содержание

CHAPTER I	4
CHAPTER II	21
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	30

# **George Meredith**

## **The Adventures of Harry Richmond – Volume 1**

### **CHAPTER I**

#### **I AM A SUBJECT OF CONTENTION**

One midnight of a winter month the sleepers in Riversley Grange were awakened by a ringing of the outer bell and blows upon the great hall- doors. Squire Beltham was master there: the other members of the household were, his daughter Dorothy Beltham; a married daughter Mrs. Richmond; Benjamin Sewis, an old half-caste butler; various domestic servants; and a little boy, christened Harry Lepel Richmond, the squire's grandson. Riversley Grange lay in a rich watered hollow of the Hampshire heath-country; a lonely circle of enclosed brook and pasture, within view of some of its dependent farms, but out of hail of them or any dwelling except the stables and the head-gardener's cottage. Traditions of audacious highwaymen, together with the gloomy surrounding fir-scenery, kept it alive to fears of solitude and the night; and there was that in the determined violence of

the knocks and repeated bell-peals which assured all those who had ever listened in the servants' hall to prognostications of a possible night attack, that the robbers had come at last most awfully. A crowd of maids gathered along the upper corridor of the main body of the building: two or three footmen hung lower down, bold in attitude. Suddenly the noise ended, and soon after the voice of old Sewis commanded them to scatter away to their beds; whereupon the footmen took agile leaps to the post of danger, while the women, in whose bosoms intense curiosity now supplanted terror, proceeded to a vacant room overlooking the front entrance, and spied from the window.

Meanwhile Sewis stood by his master's bedside. The squire was a hunter, of the old sort: a hard rider, deep drinker, and heavy slumberer. Before venturing to shake his arm Sewis struck a light and flashed it over the squire's eyelids to make the task of rousing him easier. At the first touch the squire sprang up, swearing by his Lord Harry he had just dreamed of fire, and muttering of buckets.

'Sewis! you're the man, are you: where has it broken out?'

'No, sir; no fire,' said Sewis; 'you be cool, sir.'

'Cool, sir! confound it, Sewis, haven't I heard a whole town of steeples at work? I don't sleep so thick but I can hear, you dog! Fellow comes here, gives me a start, tells me to be cool; what the deuce! nobody hurt, then? all right!'

The squire had fallen back on his pillow and was relapsing to sleep.

Sewis spoke impressively: 'There's a gentleman downstairs; a gentleman downstairs, sir. He has come rather late.'

'Gentleman downstairs come rather late.' The squire recapitulated the intelligence to possess it thoroughly. 'Rather late, eh? Oh! Shove him into a bed, and give him hot brandy and water, and be hanged to him!'

Sewis had the office of tempering a severely distasteful announcement to the squire.

He resumed: 'The gentleman doesn't talk of staying. That is not his business. It 's rather late for him to arrive.'

'Rather late!' roared the squire. 'Why, what's it o'clock?'

Reaching a hand to the watch over his head, he caught sight of the unearthly hour. 'A quarter to two? Gentleman downstairs? Can't be that infernal apothecary who broke 's engagement to dine with me last night? By George, if it is I'll souse him; I'll drench him from head to heel as though the rascal 'd been drawn through the duck-pond. Two o'clock in the morning? Why, the man's drunk. Tell him I'm a magistrate, and I'll commit him, deuce take him; give him fourteen days for a sot; another fourteen for impudence. I've given a month 'fore now. Comes to me, a Justice of the peace!—man 's mad! Tell him he's in peril of a lunatic asylum. And doesn't talk of staying? Lift him out o' the house on the top o' your boot, Sewis, and say it 's mine; you 've my leave.'

Sewis withdrew a step from the bedside. At a safe distance he fronted his master steadily; almost admonishingly. 'It 's Mr.

Richmond, sir,' he said.

'Mr. . . .' The squire checked his breath. That was a name never uttered at the Grange. 'The scoundrel?' he inquired harshly, half in a tone of one assuring himself, and his rigid dropped jaw shut.

The fact had to be denied or affirmed instantly, and Sewis was silent.

Grasping his bedclothes in a lump, the squire cried:

'Downstairs? downstairs, Sewis? You've admitted him into my house?'

'No, sir.'

'You have!'

'He is not in the house, sir.'

'You have! How did you speak to him, then?'

'Out of my window, sir.'

'What place here is the scoundrel soiling now?'

'He is on the doorstep outside the house.'

'Outside, is he? and the door's locked?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Let him rot there!'

By this time the midnight visitor's patience had become exhausted. A renewal of his clamour for immediate attention fell on the squire's ear, amazing him to stupefaction at such challengeing insolence.

'Hand me my breeches,' he called to Sewis; 'I can't think brisk out of my breeches.'

Sewis held the garment ready. The squire jumped from the

bed, fuming speechlessly, chafing at gaiters and braces, cravat and coat, and allowed his buttons to be fitted neatly on his calves; the hammering at the hall-door and plucking at the bell going on without intermission. He wore the aspect of one who assumes a forced composure under the infliction of outrages on his character in a Court of Law, where he must of necessity listen and lock his boiling replies within his indignant bosom.

'Now, Sewis, now my horsewhip,' he remarked, as if it had been a simple adjunct of his equipment.

'Your hat, sir?'

'My horsewhip, I said.'

'Your hat is in the hall,' Sewis observed gravely.

'I asked you for my horsewhip.'

'That is not to be found anywhere,' said Sewis.

The squire was diverted from his objurgations against this piece of servitorial defiance by his daughter Dorothy's timid appeal for permission to come in. Sewis left the room. Presently the squire descended, fully clad, and breathing sharply from his nostrils. Servants were warned off out of hearing; none but Sewis stood by.

The squire himself unbolted the door, and threw it open to the limit of the chain.

'Who's there?' he demanded.

A response followed promptly from outside: 'I take you to be Mr. Harry Lepel Beltham. Correct me if I err. Accept my apologies for disturbing you at a late hour of the night, I pray.'

'Your name?'

'Is plain Augustus Fitz-George Roy Richmond at this moment, Mr. Beltham. You will recognize me better by opening your door entirely: voices are deceptive. You were born a gentleman, Mr. Beltham, and will not reduce me to request you to behave like one. I am now in the position, as it were, of addressing a badger in his den. It is on both sides unsatisfactory. It reflects egregious discredit upon you, the householder.'

The squire hastily bade Sewis see that the passages to the sleeping apartments were barred, and flung the great chain loose. He was acting under strong control of his temper.

It was a quiet grey night, and as the doors flew open, a largely-built man, dressed in a high-collared great-coat and fashionable hat of the time, stood clearly defined to view. He carried a light cane, with the point of the silver handle against his under lip. There was nothing formidable in his appearance, and his manner was affectedly affable. He lifted his hat as soon as he found himself face to face with the squire, disclosing a partially bald head, though his whiskering was luxuriant, and a robust condition of manhood was indicated by his erect attitude and the immense swell of his furred great-coat at the chest. His features were exceedingly frank and cheerful. From his superior height, he was enabled to look down quite royally on the man whose repose he had disturbed.

The following conversation passed between them.

'You now behold who it is, Mr. Beltham, that acknowledges to

the misfortune of arousing you at an unseemly hour—unbetimes, as our gossips in mother Saxon might say—and with profound regret, sir, though my habit is to take it lightly.'

'Have you any accomplices lurking about here?'

'I am alone.'

'What 's your business?'

'I have no business.'

'You have no business to be here, no. I ask you what 's the object of your visit?'

'Permit me first to speak of the cause of my protracted arrival, sir. The ridicule of casting it on the post-boys will strike you, Mr. Beltham, as it does me. Nevertheless, I must do it; I have no resource. Owing to a rascal of the genus, incontinent in liquor, I have this night walked seven miles from Ewling. My complaint against him is not on my own account.'

'What brought you here at all?'

'Can you ask me?'

'I ask you what brought you to my house at all?'

'True, I might have slept at Ewling.'

'Why didn't you?'

'For the reason, Mr. Beltham, which brought me here originally. I could not wait—not a single minute. So far advanced to the neighbourhood, I would not be retarded, and I came on. I crave your excuses for the hour of my arrival. The grounds for my coming at all you will very well understand, and you will applaud me when I declare to you that I come to her penitent;

to exculpate myself, certainly, but despising self-justification. I love my wife, Mr. Beltham. Yes; hear me out, sir. I can point to my unhappy star, and say, blame that more than me. That star of my birth and most disastrous fortunes should plead on my behalf to you; to my wife at least it will.'

'You've come to see my daughter Marian, have you?'

'My wife, sir.'

'You don't cross my threshold while I live.'

'You compel her to come out to me?'

'She stays where she is, poor wretch, till the grave takes her. You've done your worst; be off.'

'Mr. Beltham, I am not to be restrained from the sight of my wife.'

'Scamp!'

'By no scurrilous epithets from a man I am bound to respect will I be deterred or exasperated.'

'Damned scamp, I say!' The squire having exploded his wrath gave it free way. 'I've stopped my tongue all this while before a scoundrel 'd corkscrew the best-bottled temper right or left, go where you will one end o' the world to the other, by God! And here 's a scoundrel stinks of villany, and I've proclaimed him 'ware my gates as a common trespasser, and deserves hanging if ever rook did nailed hard and fast to my barn doors! comes here for my daughter, when he got her by stealing her, scenting his carcass, and talking 'bout his birth, singing what not sort o' foreign mewin' stuff, and she found him out a liar and a beast,

by God! And she turned home. My doors are open to my flesh and blood. And here she halts, I say, 'gainst the law, if the law's against me. She's crazed: you've made her mad; she knows none of us, not even her boy. Be off; you've done your worst; the light's gone clean out in her; and hear me, you Richmond, or Roy, or whatever you call yourself, I tell you I thank the Lord she has lost her senses. See her or not, you 've no hold on her, and see her you shan't while I go by the name of a man.'

Mr. Richmond succeeded in preserving an air of serious deliberation under the torrent of this tremendous outburst, which was marked by scarce a pause in the delivery.

He said, 'My wife deranged! I might presume it too truly an inherited disease. Do you trifle with me, sir? Her reason unseated! and can you pretend to the right of dividing us? If this be as you say—Oh! ten thousand times the stronger my claim, my absolute claim, to cherish her. Make way for me, Mr. Beltham. I solicit humbly the holiest privilege sorrow can crave of humanity. My wife! my wife! Make way for me, sir.'

His figure was bent to advance. The squire shouted an order to Sewis to run round to the stables and slip the dogs loose.

'Is it your final decision?' Mr. Richmond asked.

'Damn your fine words! Yes, it is. I keep my flock clear of a foul sheep.'

'Mr. Beltham, I implore you, be merciful. I submit to any conditions: only let me see her. I will walk the park till morning, but say that an interview shall be granted in the morning. Frankly,

sir, it is not my intention to employ force: I throw myself utterly on your mercy. I love the woman; I have much to repent of. I see her, and I go; but once I must see her. So far I also speak positively.'

'Speak as positively as you like,' said the squire.

'By the laws of nature and the laws of man, Marian Richmond is mine to support and comfort, and none can hinder me, Mr. Beltham; none, if I resolve to take her to myself.'

'Can't they!' said the squire.

'A curse be on him, heaven's lightnings descend on him, who keeps husband from wife in calamity!'

The squire whistled for his dogs.

As if wounded to the quick by this cold-blooded action, Mr. Richmond stood to his fullest height.

'Nor, sir, on my application during to-morrow's daylight shall I see her?'

'Nor, sir, on your application'—the squire drawled in uncontrollable mimicking contempt of the other's florid forms of speech, ending in his own style,—'no, you won't.'

'You claim a paternal right to refuse me: my wife is your child. Good.

I wish to see my son.'

On that point the squire was equally decided. 'You can't. He's asleep.'

'I insist.'

'Nonsense: I tell you he's a-bed and asleep.'

'I repeat, I insist.'

'When the boy's fast asleep, man!'

'The boy is my flesh and blood. You have spoken for your daughter—I speak for my son. I will see him, though I have to batter at your doors till sunrise.'

Some minutes later the boy was taken out of his bed by his aunt Dorothy, who dressed him by the dark window-light, crying bitterly, while she said, 'Hush, hush!' and fastened on his small garments between tender huggings of his body and kissings of his cheeks. He was told that he had nothing to be afraid of. A gentleman wanted to see him: nothing more. Whether the gentleman was a good gentleman, and not a robber, he could not learn but his aunt Dorothy, having wrapped him warm in shawl and comforter, and tremblingly tied his hat-strings under his chin, assured him, with convulsive caresses, that it would soon be over, and he would soon be lying again snug and happy in his dear little bed. She handed him to Sewis on the stairs, keeping his fingers for an instant to kiss them: after which, old Sewis, the lord of the pantry, where all sweet things were stored, deposited him on the floor of the hall, and he found himself facing the man of the night. It appeared to him that the stranger was of enormous size, like the giants of fairy books: for as he stood a little out of the doorway there was a peep of night sky and trees behind him, and the trees looked very much smaller, and hardly any sky was to be seen except over his shoulders.

The squire seized one of the boy's hands to present him and

retain him at the same time: but the stranger plucked him from his grandfather's hold, and swinging him high, exclaimed, 'Here he is! This is Harry Richmond. He has grown a grenadier.'

'Kiss the little chap and back to bed with him,' growled the squire.

The boy was heartily kissed and asked if he had forgotten his papa. He replied that he had no papa: he had a mama and a grandpapa. The stranger gave a deep groan.

'You see what you have done; you have cut me off from my own,' he said terribly to the squire; but tried immediately to soothe the urchin with nursery talk and the pats on the shoulder which encourage a little boy to grow fast and tall. 'Four years of separation,' he resumed, 'and my son taught to think that he has no father. By heavens! it is infamous, it is a curst piece of inhumanity. Mr. Beltham, if I do not see my wife, I carry off my son.'

'You may ask till you're hoarse, you shall never see her in this house while I am here to command,' said the squire.

'Very well; then Harry Richmond changes homes. I take him. The affair is concluded.'

'You take him from his mother?' the squire sang out.

'You swear to me she has lost her wits; she cannot suffer. I can. I shall not expect from you, Mr. Beltham, the minutest particle of comprehension of a father's feelings. You are earthy; you are an animal.'

The squire saw that he was about to lift the boy, and said,

'Stop, never mind that. Stop, look at the case. You can call again to-morrow, and you can see me and talk it over.'

'Shall I see my wife?'

'No, you shan't.'

'You remain faithful to your word, sir, do you?'

'I do.'

'Then I do similarly.'

'What! Stop! Not to take a child like that out of a comfortable house at night in Winter, man?'

'Oh, the night is temperate and warm; he shall not remain in a house where his father is dishonoured.'

'Stop! not a bit of it,' cried the squire. 'No one speaks of you. I give you my word, you 're never mentioned by man, woman or child in the house.'

'Silence concerning a father insinuates dishonour, Mr. Beltham.'

'Damn your fine speeches, and keep your blackguardly hands off that boy,' the squire thundered. 'Mind, if you take him, he goes for good. He doesn't get a penny from me if you have the bringing of him up. You've done for him, if you decide that way. He may stand here a beggar in a stolen coat like you, and I won't own him. Here, Harry, come to me; come to your grandad.'

Mr. Richmond caught the boy just when he was turning to run.

'That gentleman,' he said, pointing to the squire, 'is your grandpapa. I am your papa. You must learn at any cost to know and love your papa. If I call for you to-morrow or next day

they will have played tricks with Harry Richmond, and hid him. Mr. Beltham, I request you, for the final time, to accord me your promise observe, I accept your promise—that I shall, at my demand, to-morrow or the next day, obtain an interview with my wife.'

The squire coughed out an emphatic 'Never!' and fortified it with an oath as he repeated it upon a fuller breath.

'Sir, I will condescend to entreat you to grant this permission,' said

Mr. Richmond, urgently.

'No, never: I won't!' rejoined the squire, red in the face from a fit of angry coughing. 'I won't; but stop, put down that boy; listen to me, you Richmond! I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll—if you swear on a Bible, like a cadger before a bench of magistrates, you'll never show your face within a circuit o' ten miles hereabouts, and won't trouble the boy if you meet him, or my daughter or me, or any one of us—hark ye, I'll do this: let go the boy, and I'll give ye five hundred—I'll give ye a cheque on my banker for a thousand pounds; and, hark me out, you do this, you swear, as I said, on the servants' Bible, in the presence of my butler and me, "Strike you dead as Ananias and t' other one if you don't keep to it," do that now, here, on the spot, and I'll engage to see you paid fifty pounds a year into the bargain. Stop! and I'll pay your debts under two or three hundred. For God's sake, let go the boy! You shall have fifty guineas on account this minute. Let go the boy! And your son—there, I call him your son—your son, Harry

Richmond, shall inherit from me; he shall have Riversley and the best part of my property, if not every bit of it. Is it a bargain? Will you swear? Don't, and the boy's a beggar, he's a stranger here as much as you. Take him, and by the Lord, you ruin him. There now, never mind, stay, down with him. He's got a cold already, ought to be in his bed; let the boy down!

'You offer me money,' Mr. Richmond answered.

'That is one of the indignities belonging to a connection with a man like you. You would have me sell my son. To see my afflicted wife I would forfeit my heart's yearnings for my son; your money, sir, I toss to the winds; and I am under the necessity of informing you that I despise and loathe you. I shrink from the thought of exposing my son to your besotted selfish example. The boy is mine; I have him, and he shall traverse the wilderness with me. By heaven! his destiny is brilliant. He shall be hailed for what he is, the rightful claimant of a place among the proudest in the land; and mark me, Mr. Beltham, obstinate sensual old man that you are! I take the boy, and I consecrate my life to the duty of establishing him in his proper rank and station, and there, if you live and I live, you shall behold him and bow your grovelling pig's head to the earth, and bemoan the day, by heaven! when you,—a common country squire, a man of no origin, a creature with whose blood we have mixed ours—and he is stone-blind to the honour conferred on him—when you in your besotted stupidity threatened to disinherit Harry Richmond.'

The door slammed violently on such further speech as he

had in him to utter. He seemed at first astonished; but finding the terrified boy about to sob, he drew a pretty box from one of his pockets and thrust a delicious sweetmeat between the whimpering lips. Then, after some moments of irresolution, during which he struck his chest soundingly and gazed down, talked alternately to himself and the boy, and cast his eyes along the windows of the house, he at last dropped on one knee and swaddled the boy in the folds of the shawl. Raising him in a business-like way, he settled him on an arm and stepped briskly across gravel-walk and lawn, like a horse to whose neck a smart touch of the whip has been applied.

The soft mild night had a moon behind it somewhere; and here and there a light-blue space of sky showed small rayless stars; the breeze smelt fresh of roots and heath. It was more a May-night than one of February. So strange an aspect had all these quiet hill-lines and larch and fir-tree tops in the half-dark stillness, that the boy's terrors were overlaid and almost subdued by his wonderment; he had never before been out in the night, and he must have feared to cry in it, for his sobs were not loud. On a rise of the park-road where a fir-plantation began, he heard his name called faintly from the house by a woman's voice that he knew to be his aunt Dorothy's. It came after him only once: 'Harry Richmond'; but he was soon out of hearing, beyond the park, among the hollows that run dipping for miles beside the great highroad toward London. Sometimes his father whistled to him, or held him high and nodded a salutation to him, as though they

had just discovered one another; and his perpetual accessibility to the influences of spicy sugarplums, notwithstanding his grief, caused his father to prognosticate hopefully of his future wisdom. So, when obedient to command he had given his father a kiss, the boy fell asleep on his shoulder, ceasing to know that he was a wandering infant: and, if I remember rightly, he dreamed he was in a ship of cinnamon-wood upon a sea that rolled mighty, but smooth immense broad waves, and tore thing from thing without a sound or a hurt.

## CHAPTER II

# AN ADVENTURE ON MY OWN ACCOUNT

That night stands up without any clear traces about it or near it, like the brazen castle of romance round which the sea-tide flows. My father must have borne me miles along the road; he must have procured food for me; I have an idea of feeling a damp forehead and drinking new milk, and by-and-by hearing a roar of voices or vehicles, and seeing a dog that went alone through crowded streets without a master, doing as he pleased, and stopping every other dog he met. He took his turning, and my father and I took ours. We were in a house that, to my senses, had the smell of dark corners, in a street where all the house-doors were painted black, and shut with a bang. Italian organ-men and milk-men paraded the street regularly, and made it sound hollow to their music. Milk, and no cows anywhere; numbers of people, and no acquaintances among them; my thoughts were occupied by the singularity of such things.

My father could soon make me forget that I was transplanted; he could act dog, tame rabbit, fox, pony, and a whole nursery collection alive, but he was sometimes absent for days, and I was not of a temper to be on friendly terms with those who were unable to captivate my imagination as he had done. When he

was at home I rode him all round the room and upstairs to bed, I lashed him with a whip till he frightened me, so real was his barking; if I said 'Menagerie' he became a caravan of wild beasts; I undid a button of his waistcoat, and it was a lion that made a spring, roaring at me; I pulled his coat-tails and off I went tugging at an old bear that swung a hind leg as he turned, in the queerest way, and then sat up and beating his breast sent out a mew-moan. Our room was richer to me than all the Grange while these performances were going forward. His monkey was almost as wonderful as his bear, only he was too big for it, and was obliged to aim at reality in his representation of this animal by means of a number of breakages; a defect that brought our landlady on the scene. The enchantment of my father's companionship caused me to suffer proportionately in his absence. During that period of solitude, my nursemaid had to order me to play, and I would stumble about and squat in the middle of the floor, struck suddenly by the marvel of the difference between my present and my other home. My father entered into arrangements with a Punch and Judy man for him to pay me regular morning visits opposite our window; yet here again his genius defeated his kind intentions; for happening once to stand by my side during the progress of the show, he made it so vivid to me by what he said and did, that I saw no fun in it without him: I used to dread the heralding crow of Punch if he was away, and cared no longer for wooden heads being knocked ever so hard.

On Sundays we walked to the cathedral, and this was a day

with a delight of its own for me. He was never away on the Sunday. Both of us attired in our best, we walked along the streets hand in hand; my father led me before the cathedral monuments, talking in a low tone of British victories, and commending the heroes to my undivided attention. I understood very early that it was my duty to imitate them. While we remained in the cathedral he talked of glory and Old England, and dropped his voice in the middle of a murmured chant to introduce Nelson's name or some other great man's and this recurred regularly. 'What are we for now?' he would ask me as we left our house. I had to decide whether we took a hero or an author, which I soon learnt to do with capricious resolution. We were one Sunday for Shakespeare; another for Nelson or Pitt. 'Nelson, papa,' was my most frequent rejoinder, and he never dissented, but turned his steps toward Nelson's cathedral dome, and uncovered his head there, and said: 'Nelson, then, to-day'; and we went straight to his monument to perform the act of homage. I chose Nelson in preference to the others because near bed-time in the evening my father told me stories of our hero of the day, and neither Pitt nor Shakespeare lost an eye, or an arm, or fought with a huge white bear on the ice to make himself interesting. I named them occasionally out of compassion, and to please my father, who said that they ought to have a turn. They were, he told me, in the habit of paying him a visit, whenever I had particularly neglected them, to learn the grounds for my disregard of their claims, and they urged him to intercede with me, and imparted many of their unpublished

adventures, so that I should be tempted to give them a chance on the following Sunday.

'Great Will,' my father called Shakespeare, and 'Slender Billy,' Pitt. The scene where Great Will killed the deer, dragging Falstaff all over the park after it by the light of Bardolph's nose, upon which they put an extinguisher if they heard any of the keepers, and so left everybody groping about and catching the wrong person, was the most wonderful mixture of fun and tears. Great Will was extremely youthful, but everybody in the park called him, 'Father William'; and when he wanted to know which way the deer had gone, King Lear (or else my memory deceives me) punned, and Lady Macbeth waved a handkerchief for it to be steeped in the blood of the deer; Shylock ordered one pound of the carcass; Hamlet (the fact was impressed on me) offered him a three-legged stool; and a number of kings and knights and ladies lit their torches from Bardolph; and away they flew, distracting the keepers and leaving Will and his troop to the deer. That poor thing died from a different weapon at each recital, though always with a flow of blood and a successful dash of his antlers into Falstaff; and to hear Falstaff bellow! But it was mournful to hear how sorry Great Will was over the animal he had slain. He spoke like music. I found it pathetic in spite of my knowing that the whole scene was lighted up by Bardolph's nose. When I was just bursting out crying—for the deer's tongue was lolling out and quick pantings were at his side; he had little ones at home—Great Will remembered his engagement to sell Shylock

a pound of the carcase; determined that no Jew should eat of it, he bethought him that Falstaff could well spare a pound, and he said the Jew would not see the difference: Falstaff only got off by hard running and roaring out that he knew his unclean life would make him taste like pork and thus let the Jew into the trick.

My father related all this with such a veritable matter-of-fact air, and such liveliness—he sounded the chase and its cries, and showed King Lear tottering, and Hamlet standing dark, and the vast substance of Falstaff—that I followed the incidents excitedly, and really saw them, which was better than understanding them. I required some help from him to see that Hamlet's offer of a three-legged stool at a feverish moment of the chase, was laughable. He taught me what to think of it by pitching Great Will's voice high, and Hamlet's very low. By degrees I got some unconscious knowledge of the characters of Shakespeare.

There never was so fascinating a father as mine for a boy anything under eight or ten years old. He could guess on Saturday whether I should name William Pitt on the Sunday; for, on those occasions, 'Slender Billy,' as I hope I am not irreverent in calling him, made up for the dulness of his high career with a raspberry-jam tart, for which, my father told me solemnly, the illustrious Minister had in his day a passion. If I named him, my father would say, 'W. P., otherwise S. B., was born in the year so-and-so; now,' and he went to the cupboard, 'in the name of Politics, take this and meditate upon him.' The shops being all shut on Sunday, he certainly bought it, anticipating me unerringly, on the

Saturday, and, as soon as the tart appeared, we both shouted. I fancy I remember his repeating a couplet,

'Billy Pitt took a cake and a raspberry jam,  
When he heard they had taken Seringapatam.'

At any rate, the rumour of his having done so, at periods of strong excitement, led to the inexplicable display of foresight on my father's part.

My meditations upon Pitt were, under this influence, favourable to the post of a Prime Minister, but it was merely appetite that induced me to choose him; I never could imagine a grandeur in his office, notwithstanding my father's eloquent talk of ruling a realm, shepherding a people, hurling British thunderbolts. The day's discipline was, that its selected hero should reign the undisputed monarch of it, so when I was for Pitt, I had my tart as he used to have it, and no story, for he had none, and I think my idea of the ruler of a realm presented him to me as a sort of shadow about a pastrycook's shop. But I surprised people by speaking of him. I made remarks to our landlady which caused her to throw up her hands and exclaim that I was astonishing. She would always add a mysterious word or two in the hearing of my nursemaid or any friend of hers who looked into my room to see me. After my father had got me forward with instructions on the piano, and exercises in early English history and the book of the Peerage, I became the wonder of

the house. I was put up on a stool to play 'In my Cottage near a Wood,' or 'Cherry Ripe,' and then, to show the range of my accomplishments, I was asked, 'And who married the Dowager Duchess of Dewlap?' and I answered, 'John Gregg Wetherall, Esquire, and disgraced the family.' Then they asked me how I accounted for her behaviour.

'It was because the Duke married a dairymaid,' I replied, always tossing up my chin at that. My father had concocted the questions and prepared me for the responses, but the effect was striking, both upon his visitors and the landlady's. Gradually my ear grew accustomed to her invariable whisper on these occasions. 'Blood Rile,' she said; and her friends all said 'No!' like the run of a finger down a fiddlestring.

A gentleman of his acquaintance called on him one evening to take him out for a walk. My father happened to be playing with me when this gentleman entered our room: and he jumped up from his hands and knees, and abused him for intruding on his privacy, but afterwards he introduced him to me as Shylock's great-great-great-grandson, and said that Shylock was satisfied with a pound, and his descendant wanted two hundred pounds, or else all his body: and this, he said, came of the emigration of the family from Venice to England. My father only seemed angry, for he went off with Shylock's very great grandson arm-in-arm, exclaiming, 'To the Rialto!' When I told Mrs. Waddy about the visitor, she said, 'Oh, dear! oh, dear! then I'm afraid your sweet papa won't return very soon, my pretty pet.' We waited a

number of days, until Mrs. Waddy received a letter from him. She came full-dressed into my room, requesting me to give her twenty kisses for papa, and I looked on while she arranged her blue bonnet at the glass. The bonnet would not fix in its place. At last she sank down crying in a chair, and was all brown silk, and said that how to appear before a parcel of dreadful men, and perhaps a live duke into the bargain, was more than she knew, and more than could be expected of a lone widow woman. 'Not for worlds!' she answered my petition to accompany her. She would not, she said, have me go to my papa there for anything on earth; my papa would perish at the sight of me; I was not even to wish to go. And then she exclaimed, 'Oh, the blessed child's poor papa!' and that people were cruel to him, and would never take into account his lovely temper, and that everybody was his enemy, when he ought to be sitting with the highest in the land. I had realized the extremity of my forlorn state on a Sunday that passed empty of my father, which felt like his having gone for ever. My nursemaid came in to assist in settling Mrs. Waddy's bonnet above the six crisp curls, and while they were about it I sat quiet, plucking now and then at the brown silk, partly to beg to go with it, partly in jealousy and love at the thought of its seeing him from whom I was so awfully separated. Mrs. Waddy took fresh kisses off my lips, assuring me that my father would have them in twenty minutes, and I was to sit and count the time. My nursemaid let her out. I pretended to be absorbed in counting, till I saw Mrs. Waddy pass by the window. My heart gave a leap

of pain. I found the street-door open and no one in the passage, and I ran out, thinking that Mrs. Waddy would be obliged to take me if she discovered me by her side in the street.

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.