

HARRY JOSCELYN.

VOL. I.

BY
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CHAPTER I.

THE WHITE HOUSE.

“MOTHER, I wish you would not make such a fuss. It is only Harry quarrelling with father; I am sure you ought to be used to that by this time. It is just as sure to happen when they get together as that night will come after day.”

“I never can be used to it if I should live a hundred years,” said the mother thus addressed. She was walking up and down a long low room, wringing her hands as she walked, her brow contracted with anxiety and alarm. Her daughter sat tranquilly knitting, following her with eyes full of calm disapproval as her figure crossed the glow of the firelight, and went and came into the gloom on either side. The occasional sound of their low voices, the faint rustle of the elder woman’s movements, the crackle of the fire burning brightly, with now and then a small explosion and sudden blaze, were all the sounds that broke the quiet here; and this made all the more apparent a growl of deep-voiced talk in an adjoining room, with now and then a high word, almost audible, quite comprehensible in its excited tone. Father and son were in the dining-room, mother and daughter were in the parlour, a pleasant division one might have thought. Outside the wind was blowing down the valley with a force which might have suggested storm in other localities, but was natural and ordinary here. It was April, but scarcely spring as yet in the north country. “As the day lengthens the cold strengthens,” is the rule under the Shap Fells. Joan Joscelyn, the elder daughter of the house, was seated near the fire with her knitting. She was quite still save for the twinkle of her

knitting needles, which caught the firelight, and her eyes, with which she watched her mother without turning her head. Her shadow upon the drawn curtains behind her was as still as though cut out of paper. She was not very young nor had she any traces of beauty in the somewhat worn and very fixed and steady lines of her face. Her dark hair was very smooth, her dress very neat, everything about her orderly and calm. A slight look of restrained impatience in her eyes, impatience mingled with disapproval, and that sort of faint contempt which children so often feel for their parents, was the only sign which the calm daughter of a nervous mother gave of her feelings. "I wish you would not make such a fuss, you ought to be used to it by this time," was written all over her, and perhaps there was in her aspect something of that conscientious superiority felt by Mrs. Hardcastle in the play when she said, "See me, how calm I am;" but all subdued by the natural spectatorship of her position. What could *she* do one way or another? Then why should she excite herself for nothing? This was Joan's sensible conclusion—and why her mother could not adopt it too was a thing she could not understand.

Mrs. Joscelyn was a pale woman of a very different aspect. She was, people thought at the first glance, not so old as her daughter, notwithstanding the advantage which a calm temperament is supposed to have over an excitable one. But it is not always true that the sensitive and self-tormenting grow old sooner than their more tranquil companions. Joan had never been young at all, so to speak. Her mother was young still in the freshness of a mind which would not be controlled by experience, which trusted every new promise and embraced every new hope, and was as bitterly disappointed by every failure of her hopes as if she had never known a disappointment before. How many pangs this

temperament brought to her it would be impossible to reckon; but it kept a sentiment of youth about her, a sense of living such as her daughter in her best days never knew. Both of them however agreed in believing that this temperament was a curse and not a blessing; the daughter with heartfelt astonishment at the power which her mother possessed of tormenting herself—if indeed it were not a fictitious torture which she rather liked than otherwise, as Joan sometimes imagined with instinctive contempt; while the mother as often sighed, Oh, that she could take things as quietly, give up making a fuss, bear her troubles with the same calm as Joan. But neither could the one bring herself to the level of the other, nor either understand the different conditions which made similar action impossible. Joan for her part followed Mrs. Joscelyn's restless movements with a wonder which she could never get over. What good could it do? Why couldn't she sit down and get her work, and occupy herself? Even, Joan thought, it would be better to get a book and read (though that was a waste of time) and "take her mind off," the thing that so troubled her. "Of course it was a pity that father and Harry should quarrel; but then, bless me," Joan said to herself, "boys so often quarrel with their fathers. Why should there be more fuss made about it here than anywhere else?" She was knitting a long worsted stocking which hung down from her hands like a big grey bag; now and then she gave it a momentary look, to see that the ribs were right and the "seam" kept straight; but for the most part did not look at it at all, but watched her mother while the needles twinkled in the firelight and the big stocking leg turned round in her hands with an occasional jerk.

Meanwhile Mrs. Joscelyn walked up and down wringing her hands. The room was not very light. There were two candles on the

table; but it was the brilliant glow of the fire which lit up the space in front, throwing a ruddy reflection even into the darkness of the corners. She paced all the length of the room, crossing periodically the bar of brighter light. She was rather tall, but stooped, her shoulders coming together with the ceaseless movement of her hands. Harry had put his hand into hers and vowed to her that he would avoid all subjects of quarrel, that he would give to his father the soft answer that turns away wrath. But, alas! he must have broken his word. It was not the first time nor the thirtieth time; but she felt astonished and disappointed as if up to that moment all promises had been kept to her. She was one who could not get used to suffering. It was as intolerable to her after so many years of it, so many pangs, as if she had lived the life of a spoiled child up to that moment and never known what contradiction was. The sound of the voices in the next room seemed to pierce into her heart. When they rose louder than usual she would give a low cry. Sometimes she stood still for a moment to hear the better, sometimes she spoke half to Joan, half to herself.

“I think I must go in—I must go in, I can’t let them go on like this. What if they were to lift their hands to each other, father and son, oh! father and son,” and then she made a sudden impulsive step towards the door; but paused again with a convulsive pressure together of her worn hands.

“Let them alone mother,” said Joan, “what good could you do? Only turn both of them upon yourself.”

“I know, I know,” moaned the poor lady. Then she stopped in the middle of the light. “Oh!” she said, raising her arms with a gesture which would have been theatrical had it not been so real,

“oh! what have I done, what have I done that I can never have peace in my house?”

Joan never took her eyes from this moving figure, but the long grey stocking jerked and turned round in her hands, and the needles twinkled without intermission.

“You expect too much,” she said; “bless me! there’s quarrels in all houses, and lads go wrong, and all sorts of things happen. Girls too, which is worse. We should be thankful nothing of that kind has happened to us. If Will and Tom have been a little wild in their time they’ve settled down; and I’ve always behaved myself. You have a deal to be thankful for, mother. As for sons at home when the father is a hale man like father, they’re always quarrelling. What young fellows want is their own way. Father’s too young to manage Harry, he’s too strong and likely, just as good a man as any of them. That’s my opinion; so are you a deal too young. Bless me, you’re not a bit older than I am. If I wasn’t so steady I shouldn’t like it, I’d rather have an old wife that would give in to me and admire me, whatever I did—”

Joan continued the monologue with a little curve at one corner of her mouth which did duty for a smile. It was not much more than a soliloquy, if truth were told. She knew very well her mother was not listening and did not hear her. Mrs. Joscelyn had recommenced the walk with which she was trying to subdue her restlessness. And now the voices grew louder than ever. There was a long volley of sounds, in the deepest tone, a sort of discharge of musketry, vituperation rounded off with a large mouth-filling oath or two; then a louder noise like the pushing back of chairs, one of which was thrown down with a heavy crash on the floor. Even Joan started at this noise, and her mother rushed trembling to the

door. But before she could open it the door of the next room was thrown violently against the wall, and some one plunged out, rushing across the hall and flinging forth at the outer door. Another volley from the deep voice accompanied this hasty retreat. The mother turned, and hurrying across the room to the window, disappeared behind the drawn curtain that covered it. She opened the shutter as softly and quickly as her trembling would permit, and looking out watched the owner of the hasty steps disappearing, with a clang of the garden gate, in the faint wintry moonlight, which made the landscape beyond look like a white mist. She stood and watched him, shaking her head with a low moan.

“Now he is away to the village,” she said piteously, “oh, my poor lad! the ‘Red Lion,’ that’s all the fireside my Harry will get. Oh, good Lord, good Lord! and me here breaking my heart; and neither sleep nor rest will I get this night till I hear my boy come home. But it is not his fault, it’s not his fault; and what is to be the end of it?” the poor lady cried.

Joan, though she was so tranquil, was not unsympathetic. She made a little remonstrative sound with her tongue in unison with the clicking of her needles.

“Bless me! dear me! but he’ll take no harm at the ‘Red Lion;’ don’t always be thinking the worst, and making things out more dreadful than they are,” she said.

Mrs. Joscelyn emerged from the heavy dark-hued curtains with a sigh, but yet there was a certain softening in her face. Her anxiety was changed, at least, if not relieved. She came and stood in front of the fire, holding up a thin shapely foot to the red glow.

“I am so cold,” she said, with a nervous shiver.

“That’s because you will fret so, mother, and make such a deal of everything,” Joan said.

Mrs. Joscelyn made no answer to this reproach.

“My feet are like lumps of lead,” she said. “It’s more like December than April. I think I will never be warm again.”

A little sympathetic moisture softened Joan’s steady eyes. She felt towards her mother as she might have felt to a tiresome but amiable child, impatient of her vagaries, yet sorry for the useless trouble and pain the poor thing gave herself.

“It’s all the fretting,” she said, “it’s not the weather. Sit down here by the fire and I’ll get you a shawl. Bless me! there’s father coming in.”

Mrs. Joscelyn retreated hastily from the fireside, and sat down by the table, where the candles were shining steadily upon a heap of linen to mend. She took up something hurriedly without appearing to notice what it was, and began to work, or to put on an appearance of working. It seemed at first a false alarm, but, after a minute or two of uncertain movement outside, the door opened and a tall and strong man came in. There was a great arm-chair standing by the side of the fire, which evidently, as soon as he appeared, proclaimed itself to be waiting for him, his harsh and big domestic throne; a hard, broad, uncompromising piece of furniture, with its two great wooden elbows thrust out. He stood for a moment at the door, looking round the room—perhaps to see whether his son had taken refuge there, perhaps only to find out any lurking offence. Ralph Joscelyn was a man whose habit it was to look out for offence meant or possible. He inspected the downcast faces of the women, for even Joan now, after one

momentary glance at him, turned her eyes upon her knitting—and the bright space before the fire, and all the darker corners round. Then his keen eye caught the ruffled curtain, and the slight whiteness behind of the moonlight showing through the shutter, which his wife had left half open. She had meant to go back when the rest of the house was quiet, and watch noiseless at that window till her son came back, and probably her husband divined this. He walked straight to the window, pushing the curtains aside, and with much demonstration closed the shutters, and with a heavy tug brought the curtains together again.

“There’s no order in this house, nor ever was,” he said, in a strong North country accent. Then he crossed the room again and threw himself into the big chair. The house was solidly built, and the parlour was on the ground floor; nevertheless, his step made the floor jar and creak as if it had found loose boards under the carpet, and shook the room as though it had been in a slim villa. The big chair creaked too as he threw himself into it. All other sounds had ceased as by magic, even the click of Joan’s needles, which only occurred at long intervals, though she worked on with more devotion than ever. Even the coals made no further explosions, sent out no little gay jets of gas, but burned soberly, stolidly under the master’s eye. Mrs. Joscelyn, in her agitation, was less silent. Her elbow knocked against the table, her needle stumbled and broke in her work, her reels of thread fell down and rolled about the carpet. All this the master contemplated with his keen spectator-eyes. He had altogether changed the character of the scene. The two very distinctly marked individuals, so unlike in nature, though so closely bound together, who had put forth unawares each her own phase of life in the household quiet, were now cowed into a sort of composed and alarmed opposition,

dumbly resistant, making common cause together; typical women merely, not individuals at all. The typical domestic tyrant who had worked this change looked round him with a glance in which contempt for them and a kind of pleasure in their subjugation were mingled with resentment against them for the distrust and sudden silence which he knew his appearance had produced. He crossed his long legs half way across the hearth, thrusting up his heavy boot almost in his daughter's face. Many men do this who mean no particular harm, but Joscelyn did mean harm, and did not care who knew it. In a moment the room had become full of him, and of his oppressive shadow. He took away and devoured, drawing into his capacious gullet, the very air they breathed.

“You are a nice cheerful lot for a man to come in to,” he said; “a nice pleasant home you make for me, with that click-clack. I don't wonder, not I, that men turn out to the ale-house, though I've got to punish 'em for it now and again. No, I don't wonder, not a bit. A couple of white-faced women filling up his rooms, taking the heat out of his fire and the light out of his lamp for their confounded stockings and rubbish—when there isn't an old woman in the dale but could do them a sight better and save all that pretence.”

Joan upon this raised her eyes. She was not timid, though she avoided strife.

“You don't mind, then, about the light and the fire of other men,” she said, “if we were to give your stockings to other women to knit for you. But you're none so fond of spending your money even for the yarn, let alone the knitting. You're a heavy man upon your feet, and wear out a deal of heels and toes. Some one's bound

to knit them for you. If you like better to pay, I don't mind, you may make sure of that."

"You!" cried her father, "a piece of stale goods that can't find a market; who cares for you? You should have been the plague of some other house these ten years, and not sucking the life out of mine, and setting up your face before your betters. *She* don't make any observations; and whatever else she is, she's my wife, and has some right to speak."

Joan's brown eyes gave out a flash. She was no longer cowed.

"I have had a good lesson," she said. "I can see how nice it is to be your wife, father, and I don't want to try it on my own account."

"Oh, hush! hush! Joan," the mother said, her hands coming together once more.

"*You* don't want to try!" said Joscelyn. "Who's given you a chance? that's what I'd like to know. If I had my own way I'd clear you all out of this house. I'd have no useless women here. When a man gets sense he knows what a fool he's been, burdening himself with a wife and children—a wife that gets old and ugly, and a set of children that defy him under his own roof. Good Lord! think of me, a man in my prime, with a middle-aged woman like that saying father to me! when I might have had my fling, and been a gay young fellow with the best of them. There's your son too, madam, just gone out of here shaking his fist in my face; and if I knock him down there will be a great hulabooloo got up because he's my son. Son! what's a son? or daughter either? A rebellious scamp that will neither do anything for himself nor do what you tell him to do. By the Lord Harry! when I think what a snug

comfortable life I might have been living here with nothing to trouble me. And now I can't stretch my legs under my own mahogany but there's a brat of a boy to contradict me, or come into my own parlour but there's a brat of a girl—— no, by Jove no," he added, with a coarse laugh, "there I'm going too far; not a girl, or anything like it—an old maid. That's what a man makes by marrying young, like a fool, as I was."

While he thus discharged his volleys on both sides, the women relapsed into absolute silence. Mrs. Joscelyn was too much afraid to interfere, while Joan shrugged her shoulders, with the philosophy that was natural to her. What does it matter to me what he says? she said to herself; I didn't choose him for a father, and she expressed her indifference as a Frenchwoman might have done by that shrug of her shoulders. He was allowed to talk on without any reply; and if there is one thing more exasperating than another to a violent temper, it is the silence of the natural antagonists who ought to furnish it with the means of prolonging its utterances. He thought, like all other bad-tempered men, that this was done "a' purpose," and his passion rose higher.

"Women," he said, snarling, with a furious fear that he was not really touching them to the quick, as he intended, "women! that are supposed to clean up a house and make it pleasant! a deuced deal of that we ever see here. Train up lads in rebellion, and in thinking themselves wiser than them that's before them, that's what you can do. And sit about in the warmest corners and clog up the whole space, so that a man can't move for them—that's women! And eat of the best like fighting-cocks, and dress themselves up like peacocks, that's all they think of. By Jove! I'd make a clean sweep of them out of this house if I had my way."

“Then you’d better have your way,” said Joan; “sweep as much as you please. Mother, will you mind what I tell you, and not make a fuss? I hope I’m worth my salt wherever I go: and he knows well enough I’m the best servant he has in the house, and work for no wages, and stand bullying like ne’er another. What do I care for that rubbish? Come along upstairs with me, and let him have his room to himself and his fire to himself. He should have his house to himself if it were not for you; but for mercy’s sake don’t you make a fuss, and clasp your hands like that. Come along upstairs with me, and let him talk.”

“Joan! Joan!” the mother whispered. “Joan! who will there be to let Harry in if you take me away? It’s too early yet,” she said faltering, aloud. “I’ve got the things to put away. I’ve got—many little things to do. I haven’t half finished my mending. Your father’s put out, he does not mean it. It’s too early yet to go to bed.”

“Then I’ll stay and let Harry in,” said Joan, aloud, scorning the whisper. “Go you and rest, you look more dead than alive. You may trust Harry to me.”

Then the master of the house, sitting in his chair with his legs stretched out in front of the fire, poured forth another volley of oaths.

“We’ll just see if you let Harry in,” he cried. “Harry, confound him! let him stay out, as he’s gone out. I’ll have none of his dissipations here, nor your conniving neither, you fools. Here, get off with you as you said. I’ll lock up your things, madam. I’ll take care of your keys, I’ll see the house shut up. It’s my business, and it’s my house, not yours. You’ll be cleverer than I take you for if

either one or the other of you let that confounded young scapegrace in here this night.”

“Oh, Joan! Joan! hold your peace! do not make things worse,” cried Mrs. Joscelyn, wringing her thin hands.

Joan stood confronting her father, looking him full in the face. She was of a short and full figure, shapely enough, but without a trace in it of her mother’s grace. She kept on knitting in the very midst of the controversy, standing between the fire and the table.

“It will have to come to a crisis one time or another. As well this night as another night,” she said.

CHAPTER II.

THE FAMILY IT BELONGED TO.

THE Joscelyns were of what is called an old family. Though they were of no higher degree at present than any other yeomen of the dales, they were of much greater pretensions. There were no very authentic records of this supposed historical superiority—a well-sounding name and a bit of old ruin in a corner of the land which remained to them were as much as they had to show in support of the tradition. But there were no other Joscelyns about, so that the family had evidently at one time or other been an importation from another district, and though nobody knew from whence the stock came, it was understood in the family that they had counted kin some time or other with very much finer folk. There were even old people still alive who remembered the time when the Joscelyns lived with much greater grandeur than now and gave themselves all the airs of gentlefolks. These traditions had dazzled Lydia Brotherton, who, though she was only the daughter of a clergyman, and not rich or accustomed to anything very fine, was still better bred than Ralph Joscelyn of the White House, and much more “genteel” and aspiring. The Brothertons were really “well-connected people,” as everybody knew. They had a baronet in the family. When there was any specially promising boy in the parish for whom an opening was wanted, the vicar knew whom to write to, and had written with such effect that one lad at least from the district had got an appointment in the custom-house in consequence. When a man can do that, he proves there is something in his claims of family. And Miss Brotherton had been brought up by a governess, which was to the homely people about,

a much finer thing than going to school: and could sing songs in foreign languages, and play upon the piano, both uncommon acquirements, when she came to the White House. As for Ralph in those days he had been a very fine young fellow—the tallest, the strongest, the most bright-eyed and high-coloured young man between Shap and Carlisle. He was first in all games, nobody venturing to contend with him in wrestling, or in any other exercise where sheer strength was an important particular. He was not “book-learned,” but what did that matter? Lydia had been accustomed all her life to curates who were book-learned, and her experiences in that kind had made her less respectful of instruction than might have been desired. She made a picture to herself of all the chivalrous qualities which “good blood” ought to confer; and the big limbs and pre-eminent strength of her lover, seemed to her the plainest evidence that he was a king among men. Nobody else could throw so far or jump so high. When he was on his big mare Meg, which was still bigger in proportion than himself, the two went through thick and thin, fearing nothing. He was a man that might have led an army; that might have cut down a troop of rebels—there was no limit to his powers. All the feats of the North-country ballads and heroes became possible, nay ordinary, to her when Ralph was by. Her own slim nervous figure, in which there was no muscular strength at all, made his fine embodiment of force all the more attractive to her. There were rumours that he was “wild,” which frightened her father and mother, but Lydia was not alarmed. The curates were prim and correct as well as book-learned; but she did not like them. And to big Ralph it seemed natural that there should be overflowings of his strength and vigour, that life in him which was so much more than the life of other men. Temper, too—no doubt he had a temper—could such a man be expected to be patient and velvet-mouthed like the Rev. John or

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