

**HE THAT WILL NOT
WHEN HE MAY**

VOLUME III.

BY
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**HE THAT WILL NOT WHEN
HE MAY.**

CHAPTER I.

IT was late, quite late, when Mr. Gus was “got to go away.” And it might have proved impossible altogether, but for some one who came for him and would not be denied. Mr. Scrivener was sitting alone with him in the library, from which all the others had gone, when this unknown summons arrived. The lawyer had done all he could to convince him that it was impossible he could remain; but Gus could not see the impossibility. He was hurt that they should wish him to go away, and still more hurt when the lawyer suggested that, in case of his claims being proved, Lady Markham would evacuate the house and leave it to him.

“What would she do that for?” Gus cried. “Did I come here to be left in a great desert all by myself? I won’t let them go away.”

Between these two determinations the lawyer did not know what to do. He was half-exasperated, half-amused, most reluctant to offend a personage who would have everything in his power as respected the little Markhams, and might make life so much happier, or more bitter, to all of them. He would not offend him for their sake, but neither could he let him take up his abode in the house and thus forestal all future settlement of the question. When the messenger came Mr. Scrivener was very grateful. It left him at liberty to speak with the others whose interests were much closer to his heart. To his surprise the person who came for Gus immediately addressed to him the most anxious questions about Lady Markham and Alice.

“I daren’t ask to see them,” this stranger said, who was half hidden in the obscurity of the night. “Will you tell them Edward Fairfax sends his—what do you call it?” said the young man—“duty, the poor people say: my most respectful duty. I stayed for to-day. I should have liked to help to carry him, but I did not feel I had any right.” His eyes glimmered in the twilight as eyes shine only through tears. “I helped to nurse him,” he said in explanation, “poor old gentleman.”

At this moment Gus, helped very obsequiously by Brown, who had got scent of something extraordinary in the air, as servants do, was getting himself into his overcoat.

“Have you anything to do with *him*?” the lawyer replied.

“No further than being in the inn with him. And I thought from what he said they might have a difficulty in getting him away. So I came to fetch him; but not entirely for that either,” Fairfax said.

“Then you never did them a better service,” said the lawyer, “than to-night.”

“I don’t think there is any harm in him,” Fairfax said.

The lawyer shook his head. There might be no harm in him; but what harm was coming because of him! He said nothing, and Gus came out, buttoned up to the throat.

“You’ll not go, I hope, till it is all settled,” he said.

“Settled—it may not be settled for years!” cried the lawyer, testily. And then he turned to the other, who might be a confederate for anything he knew, standing out in the darkness, “What name am I to tell Lady Markham—Fairfax? Keep him away

as long as you can," he whispered; "he will be the death of them." He thought afterwards that he was in some degree committing himself as allowing that Gus possessed the power of doing harm, which it would have been better policy altogether to deny.

Thus it was not till nightfall that the lawyer was able to communicate to his clients his real opinion. All the exhaustion and desire of repose which generally follows such a period of domestic distress had been made an end of by this extraordinary new event. Lady Markham was sitting in her favourite room, wrapped in a shawl, talking low with her brother and Alice, when Mr. Scrivener came in. He told them how it was that he had got free, and gave them the message Fairfax had sent. But it is to be feared that the devotion and delicacy of it suffered in transmission. It was his regards or his respects, and not his duty, which the lawyer gave. What could the word matter? But he reported the rest more or less faithfully. "He thought there would be a difficulty in getting rid of our little friend," Mr. Scrivener said, "and therefore he came. It was considerate."

"Yes, it was very considerate," Lady Markham said, but, unreasonably, the ladies were both disappointed and vexed, they could not tell why, that their friend should thus make himself appear the supporter of their enemy. Their hearts chilled to him in spite of themselves. Paul had gone out; he was not able to bear any more of it; he could not rest. "Forgive my boy, Mr. Scrivener," his mother said; "he never was patient, and think of all he has lost."

"Mr. Paul," said the lawyer coldly, "might have endured the restraint for one evening, seeing I have waited on purpose to be of use to him."

The hearts of all three sank to their shoes when Mr. Scrivener, who was his adviser, his supporter, the chief prop he had to trust to—who had called the young man Sir Paul all the morning—thus changed his title. Lady Markham put out her hand and grasped his arm.

“You have given it up, then!” she said. “You have given it up! There is no more hope!”

And though he would not allow this, all that Mr. Scrivener had to say was the reverse of hopeful. He was aware of Sir William’s residence in Barbadoes, which his wife had never heard of until the Lennys had betrayed it to her, and of many other little matters which sustained and gave consistence to the story of Gus. They sat together till late, going over everything, and before they separated it was tacitly concluded among them that all was over, that there was no more hope. The lawyer still spoke of inquiries, of sending a messenger to Barbadoes, and making various attempts to defend Paul’s position. After all, it resolved itself into a question of Paul. Lady Markham could not be touched one way or another, and the fortunes of the children were secured. But Paul—how was Paul to bear this alteration in everything, this ruin of his life?

“It is all over now,” Lady Markham said to her daughter, as after this long and terrible day they went up stairs together. “Whatever might have been, it is past hoping now. He will go with those people, and I shall never see my boy more.”

What could Alice say? She cried, which seemed the only thing possible. There was no use in tears, but there is sometimes relief when no other outlet is possible. They wept together, thankful that at least there were two of them to mingle their tears. And Paul had

not come in. He was wandering about the woods in the moonlight, not caring for anything, his head light, and his feet heavy. He had fallen, fallen, he scarcely knew where or when. Instead of the subdued and sad happiness of the morning, a sense of wounding and bruising and miserable downfall was in him and about him. He did not know where he was going, though he was acquainted with every glade and tangled alley of those familiar woods. Once (it was now September) he was seized by the gamekeepers, who thought him a poacher, and whose alarmed apologies and excuses when they discovered that it was Sir Paul, gave him a momentary sensation of self-disgust as if it were he who was the impostor. "I am not Sir Paul," was on his lips to say, but he did not seem to care enough for life to say it. One delusion more or less, what did it matter?

He walked and walked, till he was footsore with fatigue. He went past the Markham Arms in the dark, and saw his supplanter through the inn window talking—to whom?—to Fairfax. What had Fairfax to do with it? Was it a scheme invented by Fairfax to humble him? Then the unhappy young fellow strayed to his father's grave, all heaped up and covered with the flowers that shone pale in the moonlight, quite detached from the surrounding graves and upturned earth. He sat down there, all alone in the silence of the world, and noticed, in spite of himself, how the night air moved the leaves and grasses, and how the moonlight slowly climbed the great slope of the skies. When the church tower came for a little while between him and the light, he shivered. He dropped his head into his hands and thought he slept. The night grew tedious to him, the darkness unendurable. He went away to the woods again, with a vague sense that to be taken for a poacher, or even shot by chance round the bole of a tree, would be the best

thing that could happen. Neither Sir Paul nor any one—not even a poacher: what was he? A semblance, a shadow, a vain show—not the same as he who had walked with his face to heaven in the morning, and everything expanding, opening out around him. In a moment they had all collapsed like a house of cards. He did not want to go home; home! it was not home—nor to see his mother, nor to talk to any one. The hoot of the owl, the incomprehensible stirring of the woods were more congenial to him than human voices. What could they talk about? Nothing but this on which there was nothing to say. Supplanted! Yes, he was supplanted, turned out of his natural place by a stranger. And what could he do? He could not fight for his inheritance, which would have been a kind of consolation—unless indeed it were a law-fight in the courts, where there would be swearing and counter-swearing, and all the dead father's life raked up, and perhaps shameful stories told of the old man who had to-day been laid in his grave with so much honour. This was the only way in which in these days a man could fight.

But it was only now and then, by intervals, that Paul's thoughts took any form so definite. He did not want to think. There was in him a vague and general sense of destruction—ruin, downfall, and humiliation which he could not endure. But, strangely enough, in all this he never thought of the plans which so short a while ago he had considered as shaping his life. He did not think that now he could go back to them, and, free from all encumbrances of duty, pursue the way he had chosen. The truth was, he did not think of them at all. In the morning Spears and his colleagues had come to his mind as something from which he had escaped, but at night he did not think of them at all. They were altogether wiped out of his

mind and obliterated by the loss of that which he had never possessed.

When he went home all the lights in the great house seemed extinguished save one candle which flickered in the hall window, and the light in his mother's room, which shone out like a star into the summer darkness. It was Alice who came noiseless, before he could knock, and opened the great door.

“Mamma cannot sleep till she has seen you,” said the girl. “Oh, Paul, we must think of her now. I sent all the servants to bed. I have been watching for you at the window. I could not bear Brown and the rest to think that there was anything wrong.”

“But they must soon know that everything is wrong. It is not a thing that can be hid.”

“Perhaps it may be hid, Paul. It may turn out it is all a delusion—or an imposture.”

“Let us go to my mother's room,” said Paul.

He said nothing as he went up the stairs, but when he got to the landing he turned round upon the pale girl beside him carrying the light, whose white face illuminated by her candle made a luminous point in the gloom. He turned round to her all at once in the blackness of the great vacant place.

“It is no imposture; it is true. Whether we can bear it or not, it is true!”

“God will help us to bear it, Paul; if you will not desert us—if you will stay by us——”

“Desert you—was there ever any question of deserting you?” he said. He looked at his sister with a half-complaining curiosity and surprise, and shrugged his shoulders, so foolish did it sound to him. Then he took the candle from her hand, almost rudely, and walked before her to their mother’s room. “You women never understand,” he said.

CHAPTER II.

AFTER this a sudden veil and silence fell upon Markham. Nothing could be more natural than that this should be the case. Paul went to town with his uncle Fleetwood and the family lawyer, and shortly after the boys went back to school, and perfect silence fell upon the mourning house. The woods began to be touched by that finger of autumn which is chill rather than fiery, notwithstanding Mr. Tennyson—a yellow flag hung out here and there to warn the summer world, still in full brightness, of what was coming; but no crack of gun was to be heard among the covers. The county persistently and devotedly came to call, but Lady Markham was not yet able to see visitors. She was visible at church and sometimes driving, but never otherwise, which was all quite natural too, seeing that she was a woman who had always been a tender wife. No whisper of any complication, of anything that made grief harder to bear had escaped from the house. Or so at least they thought who lived an anxious life there, not knowing what was to happen. But nevertheless by some strange magnetism in the air it was known from one end to another of the county that there was something mysterious going on. The servants had felt it in the air almost before the family themselves knew. When Brown helped “the little furrin gentleman” on with his coat on the evening of the funeral day do you think he did not know that this was his future master? The knowledge breathed even about the cottages and into the village, where generally the rustic public was obtuse enough in mastering any new fact. The young master who had been Sir Paul for one brief day sank into Mr. Paul again, nobody knowing how, and what was still more wonderful, nobody asking

why. Among the higher classes there was more distinct curiosity, and many floating rumours. That there was a new claimant everybody was aware; and that there was to be a great trial unfolding all the secrets of the family for generations and showing a great many respectable personages to the world in an entirely new light, most people hoped. It was generally divined and understood that the odd little foreigner (as everybody thought him) who had made himself conspicuous at the funeral, and whom many people had met walking about the roads, was the new heir. But how he came by his claim few people understood. Sir William was not the man to be the hero of any doubtful story, or to leave any uncertainty upon the succession to his property. This was just the one evil which no one, not even his political enemies, could think him capable of; therefore the imagination of his county neighbours threw itself further back upon his two brothers who had preceded him. Of these Sir Paul was known to have borne no spotless reputation in his youth, and even Sir Harry might have had antecedents that would not bear looking into. From one or other of these, the county concluded, and not through Sir William, this family misfortune must have come.

One morning during this interval, when Paul was absent and all the doings of the household at Markham were mysteriously hidden from the world, a visitor came up the avenue who was not of the usual kind. She seemed for some time very doubtful whether to go to the great door, or to seek an entrance in a more humble way. She was a tall and slim young woman, dressed in a black alpacca gown, with a black hat and feather, and a shawl over her arm, a nondescript sort of person, not altogether a lady, yet whom Charles, the footman, contemplated more or less respectfully, not feeling equal to the impertinence of bidding her go round to the servants'

door; for how could any one tell, he said? there were governesses and that sort that stood a deal more on their dignity than the ladies themselves. Mrs. Fry, who happened to see her from a window in the wing where she was superintending the great autumn cleaning in the nursery, concluded that it was some one come about the lady's-maid's place, for Alice's maid was going to be married. "But if you get it," said Mrs. Fry mentally, "I can tell you it's not long you'll go trolloping about with that long feather, nor wear a bit of a hat stuck on the top of your head." While, however, Mrs. Fry was forming this rapid estimate of her, Charles looked at the young person with hesitating respect, and behaved with polite condescension, coming forward as she approached. When she asked if she could see Lady Markham, Charles shook his head. "My lady don't see nobody," he replied with an ease of language which was the first symptom he showed of feeling himself on an equality with the visitor. It was the tone of her voice which had produced this effect. Charles knew that this was not how a lady spoke.

"But she'll see me, if she knows who I am," said the girl. "I know she'll see me if you'll be so kind as to take up my name. Say Miss Janet Spears—as she saw in Oxford—"

"If you've come about the lady's-maid's place," said Charles, "there's our housekeeper, Mrs. Fry, she'll see you."

"I haven't come about no lady's-maid's place. You had better take up my name, or it will be the worse for you after," cried the girl angrily. She gave him such a look that Charles shook in his shoes. He begged her pardon humbly, and went off to seek Brown, leaving her standing at the door.

Then Brown came and inspected her from the further side of the hall. "I don't know why you should bother me, or me go and bother my lady," said Brown, not satisfied with the inspection; "take her to Missis Fry."

"But she won't go. It's my lady she wants, and just you look at her, what she wants she'll have, that's sure; she says it'll be the worse for us after."

"What name did you say?" asked Brown. "I'll tell Mrs. Martin, and she can do as she thinks proper." Mrs. Martin was Lady Markham's own maid. Thus it was through a great many hands that the name of Janet Spears reached Lady Markham's seclusion. Charles was very triumphant when the message reached him that the young person was to go up stairs. "I told you," he said to Mr. Brown. But Brown on his part was satisfied to know that it was only "a young person," not a lady, whom his mistress admitted. His usual discrimination had not deserted him. As for Janet, the great staircase overawed her more than even the exterior of the house; the size and the grandeur took away her breath; and though she felt no respect for Charles, the air as of a dignified clergyman with which Mr. Brown stepped out before her, to guide her to Lady Markham's room, not deigning to say anything, impressed her more than words could tell. No clergyman she had ever encountered had been half so imposing; though Janet from a general desire to better herself in the world, and determination not to lower herself to the level of her father's companions, had always been a good churchwoman and eschewed Dissenters. But Mr. Brown, it may well be believed, in the gloss of his black clothes and the perfection of his linen, was not to be compared with a hardworking parish priest exposed to all weathers. By the time she had reached Lady Markham's door her breath was coming quick

with fright and excitement. Lady Markham herself had made no such strong impression. Her dress had not been what Janet thought suitable for a great lady. She had felt a natural scorn for a woman who, having silks and satins at her command, could come out in simple stuff no better than her own. Mrs. Martin, however, had a black silk which “could have stood alone,” and everything combined to dazzle the rash visitor. Now that she had got so far her knees began to tremble beneath her. Lady Markham was standing awaiting her, in deep mourning, looking a very different person from the beautiful woman whom Janet had seen standing in the sunshine in her father’s shop. She made a step forward to receive her visitor, a movement of anxiety and eagerness; then waited till the door was shut upon her attendant. “You have come—from your father?” she said.

“No, my lady.” Now that it had come to the point Janet felt an unusual shyness come over her. She cast down her eyes and twisted her fingers round the handle of the umbrella she carried. “My father was away: I had a day to spare: and I thought I’d come and ask you——”

“Do not be afraid. Tell me what it is you want; is it——” Lady Markham hesitated more than Janet did. Was it something about Paul? What could it be but about Paul? but she would not say anything to open that subject again.

“It is about Mr. Paul, my lady. There isn’t any reason for me to hesitate. It was you that first put it into my head——”

Now it was Lady Markham’s turn to droop. “I am very sorry,” she said involuntarily. “I was—misled——”

“Oh, I don’t know as there’s anything to be sorry about. Mr. Paul—I suppose he is Sir Paul, now?”

As Janet’s gaze, no longer shy, dwelt pointedly on her dress by way of justifying the question, Lady Markham shrank back a little. “It is not—quite settled,” she said faintly; “there are some—unexpected difficulties.”

“Oh!” Janet’s eyes grew round as her exclamation, an expression of surprise and profound disappointment went over her face. “Will he not be a baronet then, after all?” she said.

“These are family matters which I have not entered into with any one,” said Lady Markham, recovering herself. “I cannot discuss them now—unless——” here her voice faltered, “you have any right——”

“I should think a girl just had a right where all her prospects are concerned,” said Janet. “It was that brought me here. I wanted you to know, my lady, that I’ve advised Mr. Paul against it—against the emigration plan. If he goes it won’t be to please me. I don’t want him to go. I don’t want to go myself—and that’s what I’ve come here for. If so be,” said Janet, speaking deliberately, “as anything is to come of it between him and me, I should be a deal happier and a deal better pleased to stay on at home; and I thought if you knew that you’d give up opposing. I’ve said it to him as plain as words can say. And if he will go, it will be your blame and not mine. It will be because he thinks you’ve set your face so against it, that *that’s* the only way.”

Lady Markham trembled so much that she could not stand. She sank down upon a chair. “Pardon me,” she said involuntarily, “I have not been well.”

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