

# **IN TRUST**

*THE STORY OF A LADY AND HER LOVER*

BY  
M. O. W. OLIPHANT

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## CHAPTER I.

### FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

‘MY dear, the case is as plain as noonday; you must give this man up.’

‘The case is not plain to me, father—at least, not in your sense.’

‘Anne, you are very positive and self-opinionated, but you cannot—it is not possible—set up your judgment against mine on such a point. You, an inexperienced, prejudiced girl, a rustic with no knowledge of the world! What do you know about the man? Oh, I allow he is well enough to look at; he has had the usual amount of education, and so forth; but what do you *know* about him? that is what I ask.’

‘Not much, father,’ said Anne, steadily; ‘but I know *him*.’

‘Stuff! you, a girl not much over twenty, know a *man*! Does he tell you, do you suppose, all the adventures of his life? Does he confess his sins to you? A young fellow that has been trained at a public school, that has been at the university, that has knocked about the world—is he going to confide all that to *you*? He would be unworthy the name of gentleman if he did.’

‘Would he not be more unworthy the name of gentleman if he had done things which he could not confide to me?’ said Anne; then reddening suddenly, she added, ‘And even if it were so, father, if in those days he had done things unfit for my ears, let him be silent; I will not ask any questions: I know what he is now.’

‘Oh, stuff, I tell you! stuff and nonsense, child! You know what he is *now*! Yes, what he is when his best coat is on, when he is going to church with his hymn-book in his pocket and you on his arm; that is a very edifying aspect of him; but if you think that is all, or nearly all——’

Anne was silent. It was not that she was convinced, but that her indignation took words from her. She could not make any reply to such calumnies; and this was troublesome to her father, who preferred an argument to a distinct and unsupported statement. He looked at her for a moment, baffled, feeling himself cut short in the full flow of utterance—then picked up the thread again, and resumed:

‘You would be a fool to trust in any man in that unguarded way: and above all in a lawyer. They are all rogues; it is in them. When did you ever hear a good word spoken for that class of men? I will not consent to any such nonsense: and if you act without my consent, you know the consequence. I will not give your mother’s money to maintain in luxury a man who is—who will be—never mind! You shall not have it. I will give it to Rose, as I have the power.’

‘You would not be so unjust,’ said Anne.

‘Unjust! I will do it if you defy me in this way. Rose has always been a better child to me than you have been; and she shall have the money if you don’t mind.’

Whoever had looked at Anne Mountford then would not have given much for the chance of her submission. She said nothing, but her upper lip shut down upon the lower with an unrelenting, immovable determination. She would not even add a word to her

protest against the possibility of the injustice with which she had been threatened. She was too proud to repeat herself; she stood still, unbending, betraying no impatience, ready to receive with calmness everything that might be said to her, but firm as the house upon its foundations, or the hills that are called everlasting. Her father knew something of the character of his eldest child; he knew very well that no small argument would move her, but perhaps he was not aware how far beyond his power she was. He looked at her, however, with a passionate annoyance very different from her calm, and with something vindictive and almost spiteful in his reddish-grey eyes. Most likely he had felt himself dashed against the wall of her strong will before now, and had been exasperated by the calm force of opposition which he could make no head against.

‘You hear what I say,’ he repeated roughly; ‘if you insist, I shall exercise the right your mother gave me; I shall alter my will: and the fortune which is no doubt your chief attraction in this man’s eyes—the fortune he has been calculating upon—I will give to Rose. You hear what I say?’

‘Yes,’ said Anne. She bowed her head gravely; no doubt that she understood him, and equally no doubt that what he said had moved her as much as a shower of rain might have done, and that she was fully determined to take her own way.

‘On your own head be it then,’ he cried.

She bowed again, and after waiting for a moment to see if he had anything further to say to her, went quietly out of the room. It was in the library of a country house that this interview had taken place—the commonplace business room of a country gentleman of

no very great pretensions. The walls were lined with bookcases in which there was a tolerable collection of books, but yet they did not tell for much in the place. They were furniture like the curtains, which were rather shabby, and the old Turkey carpet—most respectable furniture, yet a little neglected, wanting renewal. Mr. Mountford's writing-table was laden with papers; he had plenty of business to transact, though not of a strictly intellectual kind. He was an old man, still handsome in his age, with picturesque snow-white hair in masses, clearly-cut, fine features, and keen eyes of that reddish hazel which betokens temper. Those eyes constantly burned under the somewhat projecting eyebrows. They threw a sort of angry lurid light on his face. The name of the house was Mount; it had been in the Mountford family for many generations; but it was not a beautiful and dignified house any more than he was a fine old English gentleman. Both the place and the man had traditional rights to popular respect, but neither man nor place had enforced this claim by any individual beauty or excellence. There was no doubt as to the right of the Mountfords to be ranked among the gentry of the district, as good as the best, in so far that the family had been settled there for centuries; but they were of that curiously commonplace strain which is prevalent enough among the smaller gentry, without any splendour of wealth to dazzle the beholder, and which rouses in the mind of the spectator a wonder as to what it is that makes the squire superior to his neighbours. The Mountfords from father to son had got on through the world without any particular harm or good, uninteresting, ordinary people, respectable enough, yet not even very respectable. They were not rich, they were not able; they had nothing in themselves to distinguish them from the rest of the world; yet wherever the name of Mountford appeared, throughout all the southern counties at least, the claims of its possessor to gentility

were founded on his relationship to the Mountfords of Mount. Most curious of all the triumphs of the aristocratical principle! Or rather perhaps it is the more human principle of continuance which is the foundation of this prejudice to which we are all more or less subject. A family which has lasted, which has had obstinacy enough to cling to its bit of soil, to its old house, must have something in it worth respect. This principle, however, tells in favour of the respectable shopkeeper quite as much as the squire, but it does not tell in the same way. The Mountfords felt themselves of an entirely different order from the shopkeeper—why, heaven knows! but their estimate was accepted by all the world.

Mount had the distinction of being entailed; it was not a large estate nor a valuable one, and it had been deeply mortgaged when the present Mr. Mountford, St. John by name, came of age. But he had married an heiress, who had liberated his acres and added greatly to his social importance. The first Mrs. Mountford had died early, leaving only one daughter, and at the same time her entire fortune in the hands of her husband, to do with it what he pleased. These were the days when public opinion was very unanimous as to the impropriety and unnecessariness of female rights of any kind, and everybody applauded Mrs. Mountford for resisting all conditions, and putting herself and her child unreservedly in her husband's hands. He had re-married two years after her death, but unfortunately had succeeded in obtaining only another girl from unpropitious fate. His first wife's daughter was Anne, universally considered as the natural heiress of the considerable fortune which, after clearing the estate, had remained of her mother's money, and which her father had kept scrupulously 'in a napkin,' like the churl in the parable, neither increasing nor diminishing the store. The

other daughter was Rose. Such was the household at Mount in the days when this history begins. The reigning Mrs. Mountford was a good sort of easy woman who did not count for much. She was one of the Codringtons of Carrisford—a ‘very good family’ of the same class as the Mountfords. Nothing could be better than the connections on both sides—or duller. But the girls were different. It is very hard to say why the girls should have been different—perhaps because the present new wave of life has distinctly affected the girls more than any other class of society. At all events, the point was indisputable. Anne perhaps might have taken after her mother, who was of an entirely new stock, not a kind which had ever before been ingrafted on the steady-going family tree. She had come out of a race partly mercantile, partly diplomatic; her grandfather had been Spanish; it was even suspected that one of her ancestors had been a Jew. All kinds of out-of-the-way sources had furnished the blood which had been destined to mix with the slow current in the Mountford veins; and probably Anne had inherited certain bizarre qualities from this jumble. But Rose had no such mixed antecedents. There was not a drop of blood in her veins that did not belong to the county, and it was difficult to see how she could have ‘taken after’ her sister Anne, as was sometimes suggested, in respect to peculiarities which had come to Anne from her mother; but if she did not take after Anne, who *did* she take after, as Mrs. Mountford often demanded?

Rose was now eighteen and Anne just over one-and-twenty. They were considered in the neighbourhood to be attractive girls. A household possessing two such daughters is naturally supposed to have all the elements of brightness within it; and perhaps if there had been brothers the girls would have taken their natural place as harmonisers and peacemakers. But there were no brothers, and the

girls embodied all the confusing and disturbing influences natural to boys in their own persons, with certain difficulties appropriate to their natural character. It is true they did not get into scrapes or into debt; they were not expelled from school or 'sent down' from College. Duns did not follow them to the paternal door, or roistering companions break the family peace. But yet Anne and Rose contrived to give as much trouble to Mr. and Mrs. Mountford as if they had been Jack and Tom. These good people had lived for about a dozen years in their rural mansion like the cabbages in the kitchen garden. Nothing had disturbed them. There had been no call upon their reasoning faculties, no strain upon their affections: everything had gone on quite tranquilly and comfortably, with that quiet persistence of well-being which makes trouble seem impossible. They had even said to themselves with sighs, that to have only girls was after all good for something. They could not be tormented as others were, or even as the rector, one of whose boys had gone 'to the bad.' The thing which had been was that which should be. The shocks, the discoveries, the commotions, which the restless elements involved in male youth bring with them, could not trouble their quiet existence. So they consoled themselves, although not without a sigh.

Alas, good people! they had reckoned without their girls. The first storm that arose in the house was when Anne suddenly discovered that her governess never detected her false notes when she played, and passed the mistakes which she made, on purpose to test her, in her grammar. 'I want some one who can teach me,' the girl said. She was only fifteen, but she had already made a great deal more use of that pernicious faculty of reading which works so much mischief in the world than Mrs. Mountford approved. Someone who could teach her! That meant a lady at seventy-five

or a hundred pounds a year, instead of thirty-five, which was what they had hitherto given. Mrs. Mountford nearly cried over this most unreasonable demand. Miss Montessor was very nice. She was of a family which had seen better days, and she was fully conscious of her good fortune in having gained an entry into a county family. After all, what did it matter about false notes or mistakes in grammar? It was a ladylike person that was everything. But when Rose too declared in her little treble that she wanted somebody who could teach her, Miss Montessor had to go; and the troubles that followed! To do them justice, the Squire and his wife did their very best to satisfy these unreasonable young people. They got a German governess with all kinds of certificates, who taught Rose to say ‘pon chour;’ they got a French lady, who commended herself to the best feelings of Mrs. Mountford’s nature by making her up the sweetest cap, but who taught the girls that Charles I. was all but rescued from the scaffold by the generous exertions of a Gascon gentleman of the name of D’Artagnan and three friends who were devoted to him. Mrs. Mountford herself was much pleased with this information, but Anne and her father were of a different opinion. However, it would be too long to follow them minutely through all these troubles. At seventeen Anne wanted Greek and to ‘go in for’ examinations—which gave a still more complete blow to the prejudices of the house. ‘The same as a young man!’ It was improper in the highest degree, almost wicked; Mrs. Mountford did not like to think of it. It seemed to her, as to some of our ablest critics, that nothing but illicit longings after evil could make a girl wish to pass examinations and acquire knowledge. She must want to read the naughty books which are written in Greek and Latin, and which deprave the minds of young men, the good woman thought. As for the certificates and honours, they might be all very well for the governesses of whom Mrs.

Mountford had such melancholy experience; but a young lady of a county family, what did she want with them? They would be things to be ashamed, not proud of. And on this point Anne was vanquished. She was allowed to learn Greek with many forebodings, but not to be examined in her knowledge. However, this decision was chiefly intended to prevent Rose from following her sister, as she always did; for to refuse Girton to Rose would have been more difficult than to neglect Anne's entreaties. For, though Anne was the eldest sister, it was Rose who was the princess royal and reigned over the whole demesne.

This desire of the higher education on the part of Rose, who still said 'pon chour,' and was not at all certain that two and two always make four, would have been enough to keep the house in commotion if there had not occurred just then one of the family troubles appropriate to girls after so many that could not be called feminine. It has already been said that the rector of the parish had a son who had 'gone to the bad.' He had two other sons, rocks ahead for the young ladies at Mount. Indeed these two young men were such obvious dangers that Mrs. Mountford had taken precautions against them while Rose was still in her cradle. One was a curate, his father's probable successor; but as the living was in Mr. Mountford's hands, and it was always possible that someone else might be preferred to Charley, some Mountford connection who had a nearer claim, that prospect did not count for much. The other was nothing at all, a young man at Oxford, not yet launched upon life. But fortunately these young men, though very familiar in the house, were not handsome nor dangerously attractive, and this peril is one which must always be encountered in the country, even by people of much higher pretensions than the Mountfords. The first trouble, however, did not come from this obvious quarter,

though it came through there. It was not one of the Ashleys; but it was a person still less satisfactory. One of the curate's friends arrived suddenly on a visit in the late summer—a young Mr. Douglas, a barrister, which sounds well enough; but not one of the Douglasses who have ever been heard of. They did not find this out for some time, imagining fondly that he belonged, at a distance perhaps, to the Morton family, or to the house of Queensberry, or at least to Douglasses in Scotland, of whom it could be said that they were of Lanarkshire or Selkirkshire or some other county. Indeed, it was not until the whole household was thrown into commotion by a morning call from Mr. Douglas, who asked for Mr. Mountford, and boldly demanded from him the hand of Anne, that it burst upon them that he was a Douglas of nowhere at all. He had been very well educated, and he was at the bar; but when he was asked what branch of the Douglasses he belonged to, he answered 'None,' with a smile. 'I have no relations,' he said. Relations can be dispensed with. There is no harm in being without them; but a family was indispensable, and he belonged to nobody. It was just like Anne, however, not to care. She did not in the least care, nor did she see any harm in her lover's countyless condition. And when Mr. Mountford politely declined the honour of an alliance with this Mr. Douglas of nowhere at all, she did not hesitate to say that she entirely disagreed with her father. This was the state in which things were at the time of the interview I have recorded. Mr. Mountford was determined, and so was his daughter. This struggle of wills had taken place before, but never before had it gone so far. In former cases Anne had given in, or she had been given in to, the one as much as the other. But now there was no yielding on one side or the other. The father had declared himself inexorable; the daughter had said little, but her countenance had said much. And the threat with which he wound up had introduced an entirely new

element into the discussion. What was to come of it? But that was what at this moment nobody could venture to say.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE REST OF THE FAMILY.

THE old house of Mount was a commodious but ugly house. It was not even so old as it ought to have been. Only in one corner were there any picturesque remains of antiquity, and that was in the back of the house, and did not show. The only thing in its favour was that it had once been a much larger place than it was now, and a detached bit of lime avenue—very fine trees, forming in the summer two lovely walls of tender shade—was supposed in the traditions of the place to indicate where once the chief entrance and the best part of the mansion had been. At the foot of the terrace on which these trees stood, and at a considerably lower altitude, was the flower-garden, very formally laid out, and lying along the side of the house, which was of dull brick with very flat windows, and might almost have been a factory, so uninteresting was it; but the lawns that spread around were green and smooth as velvet, and the park, though not large, was full of fine trees. Mr. Mountford's room was in the back of the house, and Anne had to go from one end to another to reach the common morning-room of the family, which was the hall. This had been nothing but a mere passage in former days, though it was square and not badly proportioned; but the modern taste for antiquity had worked a great change in this once commonplace vestibule. It had been furnished with those remains which are always to be found about an old house, relics of past generations, curtains which had been rejected as too dingy for wear a hundred years ago, but now were found to be the perfection of tone and taste—old folding screens, and chairs and tables dismissed as too clumsy or too old-fashioned for the sitting-rooms of the family. All these together made a room which strangers

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