

**SIR ROBERT'S
FORTUNE**

A Novel

**BY
MRS. OLIPHANT**

Table of Contents

CHAPTER I

CHAPTER II

CHAPTER III

CHAPTER IV

CHAPTER V

CHAPTER VI

CHAPTER VII

CHAPTER VIII

CHAPTER IX

CHAPTER X

CHAPTER XI

CHAPTER XII

CHAPTER XIII

CHAPTER XIV

CHAPTER XV

CHAPTER XVI

CHAPTER XVII

CHAPTER XVIII

CHAPTER XIX

CHAPTER XX

CHAPTER XXI

CHAPTER XXII
CHAPTER XXIII
CHAPTER XXIV
CHAPTER XXV
CHAPTER XXVI
CHAPTER XXVII
CHAPTER XXVIII
CHAPTER XXIX
CHAPTER XXX
CHAPTER XXXI
CHAPTER XXXII
CHAPTER XXXIII
CHAPTER XXXIV
CHAPTER XXXV
CHAPTER XXXVI
CHAPTER XXXVII
CHAPTER XXXVIII
CHAPTER XXXIX
CHAPTER XL
CHAPTER XLI
CHAPTER XLII
CHAPTER XLIII
CHAPTER XLIV
CHAPTER XLV

CHAPTER XLVI

CHAPTER XLVII

CHAPTER XLVIII

CHAPTER I

“WE are to see each other no more.”

These words were breathed rather than spoken in the dim recess of a window, hidden behind ample curtains, the deep recess in which the window was set leaving room enough for two figures standing close together. Without was a misty night, whitened rather than lighted by a pale moon.

“Who says so?”

“Alas! my uncle,” said the white figure, which looked misty, like the night, in undistinguishable whiteness amid the darkness round.

The other figure was less distinguishable still, no more than a faint solidity in the atmosphere, but from it came a deeper whisper, the low sound of a man’s voice. “Your uncle!” it said.

There was character in the voices enough to throw some light upon the speakers, even though they were unseen.

The woman’s had a faint accentuation of feeling, not of anxiety, yet half defiance and half appeal. It seemed to announce a fact unchangeable, yet to look and hope for a contradiction. The man’s had a tone of acceptance and dismay. The fiat which had gone forth was more real to him than to her, though she was in the position of asserting and he of opposing it.

“Yes,” she said, “Ronald, my uncle—who has the strings of the purse and every thing else in his hands——”

There was a moment's pause, and then he said: "How does he mean to manage that?"

"I am to be sent off to-morrow—it's all settled—and if I had not contrived to get out to-night, you would never have known."

"But where? It all depends upon that," he said with a little impatience.

"To Dalrugus," she answered, with a sigh; and then: "It is miles and miles from anywhere—a moor and a lodge, and not even a cottage near. Dougal and his wife live there, and take care of the place; not a soul can come near it—it is the end of the world. Oh, Ronald, what shall I do? what shall I do?"

Once more in the passionate distress of the tone there was an appeal, and a sort of feverish hope.

"We must think; we must think," he said.

"What will thinking do? It will not change my uncle's heart, nor the distance, nor the dreadful solitude. What does he care if it kills me? or any body?" The last words came from her with a shriller tone of misery, as if it had become too much to bear.

"Hush, hush, for Heaven's sake; they will hear you!" he said.

On the other side of the curtain there was a merry crowd in full career of a reel, which in those days had not gone out of fashion as now. The wild measure of the music, now quickening to lightning speed, now dropping to sedater motion, with the feet of the dancers keeping time, filled the atmosphere—a shriek would scarcely have been heard above that mirthful din.

“Oh, why do you tell me to hush?” cried the girl impetuously. “Why should I mind who hears? It is not for duty or love that I obey him, but only because he has the money. Am I caring for his money? I could get my own living: it would not want much. Why do I let him do what he likes with me?”

“My darling,” said the man’s voice anxiously, “don’t do any thing rash, for God’s sake! Think of our future. To displease him, to rebel, would spoil every thing. I see hope in the loneliness, for my part. Be patient, be patient, and let me work it out.”

“Oh, your working out!” she cried. “What good has it done? I would cut the knot. It would be strange if we two could not get enough to live upon—or myself, if you are afraid.”

He soothed her, coming closer, till the dark shadow and the white one seemed but one, and murmured caressing words in her ears: “Let us wait till the case is desperate, Lily. It is not desperate yet. I see chances in the moor and the wilderness. He is playing into our hands if he only knew it. Don’t, don’t spoil every thing by your impatience! Leave it to me, and you’ll see good will come out of it.”

“I would rather take it into my own hands!” she cried.

“No, dearest, no! I see—I see all sorts of good in it. Go quite cheerfully, as if you were pleased. No, your own way is best—don’t let us awake any suspicions—go as if you were breaking your heart.”

“There will be no feigning in that,” she said; “I shall be breaking my heart.”

“For a moment,” he said. “Weeping endureth for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.”

“Don’t, Ronald! I can’t bear to hear you quoting Scripture.”

“Why not? I am not the devil, I hope,” he said, with a low laugh.

There was a question in the girl’s hot, impatient heart, and then a quick revulsion of feeling. “I don’t know what to do, or to think; I feel as if I could not bear it,” she said, the quick tears dropping from her eyes.

He wiped them tenderly away with the flourish of a white handkerchief in the dark. “Trust to me,” he said soothingly. “Be sure it is for our good, this. Listen: they are calling for you, Lily.”

“Oh, what do I care? How can I go among them all, and dance as if I were as gay as the rest, when my heart is broken?”

“Not so badly broken but that it will mend,” he whispered, as with a clever, swift movement he put aside the curtain and led her through. He was so clever: where any other man would have been lost in perplexity, or even despair, Ronald Lumsden always saw a way through. He was never at a loss for an expedient: even that way of getting back to the room out of the shadow of the curtains no one could have performed so easily, so naturally as he did. He met and entered into the procession of dancers going out of the room after the exertions of that reel as if he and his partner formed part of it, and had been dancing too. People did not “sit out” in those days, and Ronald was famous for his skill in the national dance. Nobody doubted that he had been exerting himself with the rest. Lily was half English—that is, she had been sent to England

for part of her education, and so far as reels were concerned, had lost some of her native skill, and was not so clever. She was not, indeed, supposed to be clever at all, though very nice, and pretty enough, and an heiress—at least she was likely to be an heiress, if she continued to please her uncle, who was not an easy man to please, and exacted absolute obedience. There were people who shook their heads over her chances, declaring that flesh and blood could not stand Sir Robert Ramsay's moods; but up to this time Lily had been more or less successful, and the stake being so great, she had, people said, "every encouragement" to persevere.

But Lily was by no means so strong as her lover, who joined the throng as if he had formed part of it, with a perfect air of enjoyment and light-heartedness. Lily could not look happy. It may be said that in his repeated assurance that all would be right, and that he would find a way out of it, she ought to have taken comfort, feeling in that a pledge of his fidelity and steadiness to his love. But there was something in this readiness of resource which discouraged, she could not have told why, instead of making her happy. It would have been so much simpler, so much more satisfactory, to have given up all thoughts of Sir Robert's money, and trusted to Providence and their own exertions to bring them through. Lily felt that she could make any sacrifice, live upon nothing, live anywhere, work her fingers to the bone, only to be independent, to be free of the bondage of the uncle and the consciousness that it was not for love but for his money that she had to accept all his caprices and yield him obedience. If Ronald would but have yielded, if he would have been imprudent, as so many young men were, how thankful she would have been! She would have been content with the poorest living anywhere to be free, to be with him whom she loved. She would have undertaken

the conduct of their little *ménage* herself, without even thinking of servants; she would have cooked for him, cleaned the house for him, shrunk from nothing. But that, alas, was not Ronald's way of looking at the matter. He believed in keeping up appearances, in being rich at almost any cost, and, at best, in looking rich if he were not really so; and, above all and beyond all, in keeping well with the uncle, and retaining the fortune. He would not have any doubt thrown on the necessity of that. He was confident of his own powers of cheating the uncle, and managing so that Lily should have all she wanted, in spite of him, by throwing dust in his eyes. But Lily's soul revolted against throwing dust in any one's eyes. This was the great difference between them. I do not say that there was any great sin in circumventing a harsh old man, who never paused to think what he was doing, or admitted a question as to whether he was or was not absolutely in the right. He was one of the men who always know themselves to be absolutely right; therefore he was, as may be said, fair game. But Lily did not like it. She would have liked a lover who said: "Never mind, we shall be happy without him and his fortune." She had tried every thing she knew to bring young Lumsden to this point. But she was not able to do so: his opinion was that every thing must be done to preserve the fortune, and that, however hard it might be, there was nothing so hard but that it must be done to humor old Sir Robert, to prevent him from cutting his niece out of his will. Was not this right? Was it not prudent, wise, the best thing? If he, an advocate without a fee, a briefless barrister, living as best he could on chance windfalls and bits of journalism, had been as bold as she desired, and carried her off from the house in Moray Place to some garret of his own up among the roofs, would not every-body have said that he had taken advantage of her youth and inexperience, and deprived her of all the comforts and luxuries she was used to? That Lily cared nothing

for those luxuries, and that she was of the mettle to adapt herself to any circumstances, so long as she had somebody to love and who loved her, was not a thing to reckon with public opinion about; and, indeed, Ronald Lumsden would have thought himself quite unjustified in reckoning with it at all. To tell the truth, he had no desire on his own part to give up such modest luxuries for himself as were to be had.

The day of clubs was not yet, at least in Edinburgh, to make life easy for young men, but yet to get along, as he was doing precariously, was easier for one than it would be for two. Even Lily, all hot for sacrifice and for ministering with her own hands to all the needs of life, had never contemplated the idea of doing without Robina, her maid, who had been with her so many years that it was impossible for either of them to realize what life would be if they were separated. Even if it should be a necessary reality, Robina was included as a matter of course. How it might be that Lily should require to scrub, and clean, and cook with her own hands, while she was attended by a lady's maid, was a thing she had never reasoned out. You may think that a lady's maid would probably be of less use than her mistress had such service been necessary; but this was not Robina's case, who was a very capable person all round, and prided herself on being able to "turn her hand" to any thing. But then a runaway match was the last thing that was in Lumsden's thoughts.

It was a dance which every-body enjoyed that evening in the big, old-fashioned rooms in George Square. George Square has fallen out of knowledge in all the expansions of new Edinburgh, the Edinburgh that lies on the other side of the valley, and dates no farther back than last century. It also is of last century, but earlier than the Moray Places and Crescents; far earlier than the last

developments, the Belgravia of the town. There Sir Walter once lived, in, I think, his father's house; and these substantial, ample, homely houses were the first outlet of the well-to-do, the upper classes, of Edinburgh out of the closes and high-up apartments, approached through the atrocities of a common stair, in which so refined and luxurious a sybarite as Lawyer Pleydell still lived in Sir Walter's own time. These mansions are severely plain outside—"undemonstrative," as Scotch pride arrogantly declares itself to be, aping humility with a pretence to which I, for one, feel disposed to allow no quarter; but they are large and pleasant inside, and the big square rooms the very thing to dance in or to feast in. They were full of a happy crowd, bright in color and lively in movement, with a larger share of golden hair and rosy cheeks than is to be seen in most assemblies, and, perhaps, a greater freedom of laughter and talk than would have been appropriate to a solemn ball in other localities. For Edinburgh was not so large then as now, and they all knew each other, and called each other by their Christian names—boy and girl alike—with a general sense of fraternity modified by almost as many love affairs as there were pairs of boys and girls present. There were mothers and aunts all round the wide walls, but this did not subdue the hilarity of the young ones, who knew each other's mothers and aunts almost as well as they knew their own, and counted upon their indulgence. Lily Ramsay was almost the only girl who had nobody of her own to turn to; but this only made her the more protected and surrounded, every-body feeling that the motherless girl had a special claim. They were by no means angels, these old-fashioned Edinburgh folk: sharper tongues could not be than were to be found among them, or more wicked wits; but there was a great deal of kindness under the terrible turbans which crowned the heads of the elder ladies and the scarfs which fell from their bare shoulders,

and they all knew every one, and every one's father and mother for generations back. Their dress was queer, or rather, I should have said, it was queer before the present revival of the early Victorian or late Georgian style began. They wore puffed-out sleeves, with small feather pillows in them to keep them inflated; they had bare shoulders and ringlets; they had scarfs of lace or silk, carefully disposed so as not to cover any thing, but considered very classical and graceful, drawn in over the elbows, by people who knew how to wear them, making manifest the slender waist (or often the outlines of a waist which had ceased to be slender) behind. And they had, as has been said, a dreadful particular, which it is to be hoped the blind fury of fashion will not bring up again—turbans upon their heads. Turbans such as no Indian or Bedouin ever wore, of all colors and every kind of savage decoration, such as may be seen in pictures of that alarming age.

When young Lumsden left his Lily, it was in the midst of a group of girls collected together in the interval between two dances, lamenting that the programme was nearly exhausted, and that mamma had made a point of not staying later than three o'clock. "Because it disturbs papa!" said one of them indignantly, "though we all know he would go on snoring if the Castle Rock were to fall!" They all said papa and mamma in those days.

"But mamma says there are so many parties going," said another: "a ball for almost every night next week; and what are we to do for dresses? Tarlatan's in rags with two, and even a silk slip is shameful to look at at the end of a week."

"Lily has nothing to do but to get another whenever she wants it," said Jeanie Scott.

“And throw away the old ones, she’s such a grand lady,” said Maggie Lauder.

“Hold all your tongues,” said Bella Rutherford; “it does her this good, that she thinks less about it than any of us.”

“She has other things to think of,” cried another; and there was a laugh and a general chorus, “So have we all.” “But, Lily! is Sir Robert as dour as ever?” one of the rosy creatures cried.

“I don’t think I am going to any more of your balls,” said Lily; “I’m tired of dancing. We just dance, dance, and think of nothing else.”

“What else should we think about at our age?” said Mary Bell, opening wide a pair of round blue eyes.

“We’ll have plenty other things to think about, mamma says, and that soon enough,” said Alison Murray, who was just going to be married, with a sigh. “But there’s the music striking up again, and who’s my partner? for I’m sure I don’t remember whether its Alick Scott, or Johnnie Beatoun, or Bob Murray. Oh! is it you, Bob?” she said with relief, putting her hand upon an outstretched arm. They were almost all in a similar perplexity, except, indeed, such as had their own special partner waiting. Lily was almost glad that it was not Ronald, but a big young Macgregor, who led her off to the top of the room to a sedate quadrille. The waltz existed in those days, but it was still an indulgence, and looked upon with but scant favor by the mothers. The elder folks were scandalized by the close contact, and even the girls liked best that it should be an accepted lover, or at the least a brother or cousin, whose arm encircled their waist. So they still preferred dances in which there were “figures,” and took their pleasure occasionally in a riotous

“Lancers” or a merry reel with great relief. Lily was young enough to forget herself and her troubles even in the slow movement of the quadrilles, with every-body else round chattering and beaming and forgetting when it was their turn to dance. But she said to herself that it was the last. Of all these dances of which they spoke she would see none. When the others gathered, delighted to enjoy themselves, she would be gazing across the dark moor, hearing nothing but the hum of insects and the cry of the curlew, or, perhaps, a watchful blackbird in the little clump of trees. Well! for to-night she would forget.

I need not say it was Lumsden who saw her to her own door on the other side of the square. No one there would have been such a spoil-sport as to interfere with his right whatever old Sir Robert might say. They stole out in a lull of the leave-taking, when the most of the people were gone, and others lingered for just this “one more” for which the girls pleaded. The misty moonlight filled the square, and made all the waiting carriages look like ghostly equipages bent upon some mystic journey in the middle of the night. They paused at the corner of the square, where the road led down to the pleasant Meadows, all white and indefinite in the mist, spreading out into the distance. Lumsden would fain have drawn her away into a little further discussion, wandering under the trees, where they would have met nobody at that hour; but Lily was not bold enough to walk in the Meadows between two and three in the morning. She was willing, however, to walk up and down a little on the other side of the square before she said good-night. Nobody saw them there, except some of the coachmen on the boxes, who were too sleepy to mind who passed, and Robina, who had silently opened the door and was waiting for her mistress. Robina was several years older than Lily, and had relinquished all thoughts of a

sweetheart in her own person. She stood concealing herself in the doorway, ready, if any sound should be made within which denoted wakefulness on the part of Sir Robert, to snatch her young lady even from her lover's arms; and watching, with very mingled feelings, the pair half seen—the white figure congenial to the moonlight, and the dark one just visible, like a pop to a flower. “Lily's her name and Lily's her nature,” said Robina to herself, with a little moisture in her kind eyes; “but, oh! is he worthy of her, is he worthy of her?” This was too deep a question to be solved by any thing but time and proof, which are the last things to satisfy the heart. At last there was a lingering parting, and Lily stole, in her white wraps, all white from top to toe, into the dark and silent house.

CHAPTER II

LILY'S room was faintly illuminated by a couple of candles, which, as it was a large room with gloomy furniture, made little more than darkness visible, except about the table on which they stood, the white cover of which, and the dressing-glass that stood upon it, diffused the light a little. It was not one of those dainty chambers in which our Lilys of the present day are housed. One side of the room was occupied by a large wardrobe of almost black mahogany, polished and gleaming with many years' manipulation, but out of reach of these little lights. The bed was a large four-post bed, which once had been hung with those moreen curtains which were the triumph of the bad taste of our fathers, and had their appropriate accompaniment in black hair-cloth sofas and chairs. Lily had been allowed to substitute for the moreen white dimity, which was almost as bad, and hung stiff as a board from the valance ornamented with bobs of cotton tassels. She could not help it if that was the best that could be done in her day. Every thing, except the bed, was dark, and the distance of the large room was black as night, except for the relief of an open door into a small dressing-room which Robina occupied, and in which a weird little dip candle with a long wick unsnuffed was burning feebly. Nobody can imagine nowadays what it was to have candles which required snuffing, and which, if not attended to, soon began to bend and topple over, with a small red column of consumed wick, in the midst of a black and smoking crust. A silver snuffer tray is quite a pretty article nowadays, and proves that its possessor had a grandfather; but then! The candles on the dressing-table, however, were carefully snuffed, and burned as brightly as was possible for

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