

**THE HOUSE ON THE
MOOR
VOL. III.**

**BY
Mrs. Oliphant**

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THE HOUSE ON THE MOOR.

CHAPTER I.

IT was still early, when Susan, somewhat flushed by her rapid walk, and somewhat tired to the boot—for, elastic and strong, and accustomed to exercise as she was, six miles of solitary road, with a bundle to carry, not to say the burden of her desolate circumstances, and the natural timidity which, after a while, replaced her flush of indignant vehemence, was rather an exhausting morning promenade for a girl of nineteen—arrived at Tillington. And, in spite of Peggy's injunctions and her own sense of necessity, it was only with lingering steps, and a painful reluctance, that she at last summoned courage sufficient to present herself at John Gilsland's open door. Once there, however, matters became easy enough, smoothed by Mrs. Gilsland's eager and ready welcome, and by an incident of which Susan had not thought.

“Eyeh, miss! but he's gone no moor nor half an hour since,” cried Mrs. Gilsland. “Bless us awl! to have a young lady like you come as far, and o'er late, when awl's done! But he was in grit haste, was Mr. Horry. Come into the fire, and rest yoursel', for the like of them long walks at this hour in the morning, they're no for leddy-birds like you. You'll have heard from the Cornel, miss? And how is he?—the dear gentleman! But you're not agoing to stand there, with that white face. Dear heart, sit down, and I'll get a cup of tea in a twinkling. She's clean done with tiredness, and the disappointment. John! if ye had the spirit of a mouse, ye'd goo after Mr. Horry, and bring him back to satisfy miss—there, do ye hear?”

“No, Mrs. Gilsland,” said Susan, eagerly; “but, please, if John will get the gig, and drive me to the railroad, and perhaps we might overtake my brother. I’m—I’m—I’m—going to see my uncle to Scotland; and Horace would—might, perhaps—see me away.”

“But, dear miss, your boxes?” cried Mrs. Gilsland, gazing at the young pedestrian with astonishment, and throwing her wonder into the first tangible thing that occurred to her, as she took the bundle out of Susan’s hand.

“They are to come after me,” said Susan, with a blush of shame; “but we had better make haste, and overtake Horace. He does not know I am going; but I think—thought—he would, perhaps, go with me to the railroad,” added Susan, availing herself of that unexpected assistance, to cover her strange departure alone from Marchmain, yet blushing at the falsehood of the inference. “Oh, will you please to tell John? I have had breakfast. I could not take any tea, thank you, Mrs. Gilsland, but I want so much to overtake my brother.”

This was so reasonable and comprehensible, that the good woman left her guest immediately, to startle her husband into unusual speed, and urge him on to the harnessing of the horse, and preparation of the gig, with such wonderful expedition, that John, who, contrary to his usual habits, had no time whatever to think about it, was perfectly flushed with the exertion, and scarcely knew what he was doing. Susan, grateful to be left unquestioned, sat alone in the meantime in the little parlour, feeling half glad, and half guilty, in the strange relief afforded her by Horace’s recent presence here, and the excuse it served to give for her own appearance. It saved her entirely from the halting and timid explanation of a sudden visit to her uncle, and there being nobody

at Marchmain who could be spared to accompany her, with which she had been trying to fortify herself, as she approached Tillington; and the momentary rest and quietness was a relief to her tired and excited frame. Then the very room recalled to poor Susan recollections which warmed and strengthened her heart. Uncle Edward!—the only person in the world, save Peggy, who had ever looked with tender, indulgent eyes of affection upon her youth; and it was to him and his house she was going! She sat there motionless, in the dingy little inn parlour, too much fatigued and strained in mind even to unclasp her hands, but unconsciously recovering her courage, and feeling the light and flicker of a happiness to come about her heart.

This sensation of comfort increased when Susan was fairly seated in John Gilsland's gig, most carefully wrapped about with shawls and mantles, and began to feel the exhilaration of that rapid passage through the free air and over the open country. The youth in her veins rose like mercury in spite of herself, and she was not sure that she was so very glad in her heart as she ought to have been when John Gilsland assured her of her certainty of overtaking Horace. She was not a very attentive listener to honest John's talk, profuse and digressive as that was. She made gentle answers, for it was not in Susan's nature to show even unintentional rudeness to anybody; but with so much to think about, and possessed by the thrill of novel excitement which their first necessity of acting for themselves gives to very young people, she made but a very indifferent listener in reality. Then her heart kept beating over the thought of this approaching interview with her brother, and leaped to her mouth, as people say, when any distant figure became visible on the road. She did not know the road, nor whether her conductor was taking her direct the nearest way to the railway.

They *were* making progress on this earliest stage of her long journey; and it was still morning, and all the long spring day was before her; that was almost enough for Susan in her present state of mind.

She was roused at length, and startled into an instant access of renewed excitement and anxiety by a shout from John Gilsland.

“Holla, Mr. Horry! Holla, lad! hey! hear ye! Maister Horry! here’s me and your sister fleeing after you this six or seven miles. Mr. Horry, I’m saying—holla!”

Horace was before them, at some little distance. He stopped when the shouting reached his ear, and turned to look back. As they came up to him, Susan had full leisure to observe the changes which this year had wrought upon her brother’s appearance, and a little sensation of affectionate pride gladdened her at the sight. But she was anxious, a thousand times more anxious, to make sure that he should speak to her with ordinary kindness, and without exposing rudely the nature of her sudden journey, which he was sure to guess, than she was to think how Uncle Edward would receive her when she went to throw herself penniless upon his charity; and felt herself approaching him close and fast with a degree of trepidation strange to see between two persons so nearly the same age, and so closely allied. He for his part stared at her with utter amazement as the gig approached closer. “Susan! what on earth has brought you here?” he exclaimed, with an astonishment which was by no means free of anger. Susan trembled and faltered in her answer, as if her father himself had asked the question.

“Oh, Horace! to ask you to go to the railway with me,” she said, stooping closer towards him, and pressing the hand which he slowly extended towards her, significantly and closely, to make him understand that she had more to say: “I am going to Uncle Edward—will you come and see me away?”

He looked at her with a strange, half-envious, half-contemptuous smile. “So, he lets you go!” he exclaimed; “he has grown amiable all at once, it would appear.”

“Oh, Horace, hush!” cried Susan, stooping closer, with a sudden rush of tears to her eyes. “I will tell you all whenever we stop. Oh, Horace,” she added, in an inexpressible yearning for sympathy, and sinking her voice to a whisper, “don’t look so unkind and cold; he has sent me away!”

“The mare’s fresh and spankey,” said John Gilsland; “she’s enough to manage without any whispering in her lug. Jump up behind, Mr. Horry, and tawl as we goo. It’ll be straight to the railroad now?”

“Have you not been going straight to the railroad?” asked Susan, in surprise.

“Straight! I trust you thought me of sufficient importance to bring you five miles out of your way,” said Horace, sharply, “and lose your train too, most likely. Why didn’t you drive as she ordered you, Gilsland? What good can I do her? Look sharp now, then, can’t you? Well, Susan, what’s this sudden journey about?”

“Oh, Horace! can’t you guess?” said Susan, looking at him wistfully. “But, hush!—never mind,” she added, as she

encountered his angry stare of inquiry. "Oh, hush! I'll tell you everything when we get there!"

And from that moment the most eager wish to get there moved poor Susan. His angry dissatisfaction at being stopped; his cold salutation; his apparent resentment at the idea that he could know anything about her journey or its cause; the tone in which he repelled her confidential whispers, and repeated aloud what she had said to him with all the little pantomimic exhortations to secrecy which were possible to her; brought a renewed chill upon her heart. They went along at a great pace, the mare, however, being the only individual of the party who showed the least exhilaration or pleasure on the road. Would that John Gilsland had been less considerate of the sister's desire to overtake her brother! Would that he had gone the straight road, and made less demonstration of his kindly intentions! After all, the straight road is the best; but to hear Horace Scarsdale angrily insisting upon that plain fact, and upon the folly of making so long a detour to overtake him, was not calculated to raise anybody's spirits, or to make the drive more agreeable. John Gilsland's talk, which Susan had only half listened to, was much better than the sharp, dropping conversation which now went on at intervals; and Susan bought at a sufficiently hard price her momentary ease and relief.

"Where are you going, Horace?" she asked, with hesitation—"away from Kenlisle, Peggy said——"

"I am going to Harliflax," he said, shortly. "I have got a better appointment there. I have managed to make my own way so far, you can tell my uncle—without being obliged to any one," he added, with a sneer.

“And will you write sometimes, please, Horace?” said Susan. “There are only two of us in the world; and tell me, where shall I write to you?”

He laughed, as if this was an extremely unimportant matter. “I shall be with Mr. Stenhouse,” he said—“Julius Stenhouse, Esq. I daresay your letters will find me, with his name.”

“Stenhouse, said ye? Eyeh, Mr. Horry, will that be the Stenhouse that was i’ Kenlisle, in ould Pouncet’s office?” asked John Gilsland, suddenly looking round.

“And if it should be, what then?” asked Horace, insolently.

“Oh, little matter to me,” said honest John. “He’s a great scoondrel, that’s awl—and married that bit silly widow, poor thing!—her as didn’t know when she was well off, and had good friends; though the Squire would have done for her, as I have reason to know, like a sister of his own.”

“What widow?” demanded Horace.

“It’s no concern of mine,” said John Gilsland, touching the mare with his whip for a grand final dash up to the railway station. “She wasn’t my widow, I reckon, nor belonging to me. Her first man was a sodger captain, another chance kind o’ person, like his son, one Mr. Roger that was. What the deevil has a woman to do with a new husband, that has house and hyame o’er her head, and a likely son? Serve her right, as I aye said, and will say. They’re away out of this country—but he’s a great scoondrel, as I tell ye, wherever he may be.”

In spite of himself Horace started, and was shocked, as well as astonished, for the moment by this information. While Susan gazed

at the railway, glad, and yet trembling to reach it, with thoughts of launching forth by herself, without even those familiar faces near which she knew well, though they smiled little upon her, Horace was busy with this strange bit of news. It was somewhat astounding even to him to think that the man who had betrayed the interests and appropriated the estate of the son, should be the husband of his mother. Running on with this contemplation, and biting his thumb, as was his custom when he addressed himself to the task of arranging something new among his stores, and finding out where it fitted best, his eye suddenly caught in the group before the railway-station the stooping and decrepid figure of his old pitman, carefully dressed in his "Sabbath clothes." Horace sprang from the gig, though it was still in rapid motion, with an impulse of alarm, and hurried up to his strange acquaintance. The mare drew up immediately after, with a great dash and commotion. John Gilsland helped Susan to descend, and finding some of his own friends immediately, while her brother's presence freed him from all responsibility concerning her, left the timid girl to herself. She stood alone for a moment, frightened and discouraged; then, seeing nothing better for it, followed Horace, who was in close conversation with the old man. She was not curious, nor even interested, in what they were saying; but she had never stood by herself before, exposed to the wondering gaze of strangers, and she felt secure when she could glide up beside her brother and stand close to him, even though he paid no attention to her, nor noticed she was there.

"Well, and what were you going to Armitage Park for, eh? What business have you there?" said Horace, imperatively, to the old man.

“My lad, that’s no’ the gate to speak to me,” said the pitman, “that am owld enough to be your grandsire. I’m a-gooi’n’ for awl wan and the same reason as ye cam’ to me, my young gentleman. Sir John he’s at the Park, and we’ve ta’en counsel, the neebors and me—them as seen me sign the paper, at your own bidding—and what we’ve settled is, Sir John’s young Mr. Roger’s friend; and if it was worth a gold sovereign to you, it’s maybe worth a ’nuity or a bit pension to the man himsel’; so I’m a-gooi’n’ to the Park to see Sir John, and try my loock—and that’s awl.”

“Sir John? Do you think Sir John will see you?” cried Horace, “you impatient old blockhead! Do you think I can’t manage for you? Why don’t you trust to me?”

“I’m an ould man; if it’s to be ony gud to me, there’s little time to lose,” said the pitman, stoutly. “You’re a clever lad, I’m no’ misdoubting, but ye’re nouthier the man himsel’ nor his near friend. I hev’n’t ony time to lose, and a bird in the hand’s worth twa in the bush—no meaning ony distrust of you, young gentleman. If the young Squire should find his advantage in knowing what I know, he mought weel spare a bit something by the week, ten shilling or so, to an owld man as won’t be a burden upon nobody for lang.”

“Don’t you understand this is the very thing that I intended?” cried Horace, making—as Susan, who had gradually become interested, could perceive—the greatest effort to keep his temper. “To be sure, I’m trying all I can. I meant to let you know as soon as I could tell myself, but you’ll spoil all if you interfere. Go back to Tinwood, like a sensible man; I’ll see you in a day or two. A bird in the bush is better than no bird at all, I can tell you; and do you think Sir John, with a score of servants about him, would see

you? Trust to me, and you shall have what you want in two or three days. I give you my word—are you not content?”

The old man grumbled and hesitated, but Horace’s arguments were strong, and at last overcame his opposition. Horace was not content, however, with the reluctant consent to give up his project which he at last extorted. He followed the tottering old figure out of the place, negotiated with a carter who was going that way to give him “a lift” on the road to Tinwood, and stood in the road watching till he was quite out of sight, with a total forgetfulness of Susan and the train by which she had to travel. Susan followed him at a little distance, and stood doubtfully behind waiting for him, not knowing what else to do. He had forgotten her totally in the stronger interest of this more important concern; and when he did turn round, with a vexed and thoughtful face, the start and frown with which he recognized her standing so near him were anything but flattering to his sister.

“What do you mean, following me about and listening to my private affairs?” he cried, roughly. “Eavesdropper!—but I suppose that’s like all women,” he added, with bitterness, and an adoption of his father’s look and sentiment, which drove Susan to desperation for the moment.

“You are very wicked to say so,” she exclaimed; “you!—do you not know why my father sent me away? Oh, Horace, is there no heart in you?—because of that letter; he said I took it—me!”

“And why not you?—you are so very virtuous, I suppose,” said her brother, with a sneer; “you who can listen behind a man when he does not know you’re there. However, this is not a place to cry and make a scene—come along, and get your train. If you are

fortunate you can cry there, and make yourself interesting to somebody. Where is your money? I suppose you've got some money. I'll get your ticket for you; but remember, Susan," he said, turning back again, after he had proceeded a step or two before her on this errand—"remember! you may have heard something I'm concerned in without my knowing it—tell it to my uncle, if you dare!"

Susan made no reply—the menace and the insulting words roused her; she followed him, without the slightest appearance of that inclination to cry with which he taunted her, with a flushed cheek and steady step, and no intention or thought of yielding any obedience to him. Fortunately the train was expected instantly, and there was small leisure for further leave-taking. He shook hands with her slightly as he helped her into the carriage, turned his back at once, and went away. It was so that Susan parted with her two nearest relatives. Honest John Gilsland, waving his hat as the train plunged along on its further course, touched her into those tears which her brother had checked in their fountain, but she choked them up in her handkerchief, with the remembrance of his taunt strong upon her; and so went forth alone, upon her first voyage and enterprise into the world, which scarcely could be so cruel to her as those she had left behind.

But Susan, deeply wounded as she was, did not lose all the long, silent, exciting day in tears or melancholy; her mind ran astray a little after the old pitman, and the story he had to tell to Mr. Roger, which might gain him an annuity; and then escaped into anticipations which roused her out of herself. Shy and quiet in her corner, too much excited to eat Peggy's sandwiches, too shamefaced to venture forward to the book-stand, when the train stopped, to provide herself with amusement, keeping still in the

same seat at the same window; shyly remembering Peggy's precaution, and ready to change only if the "woman person" who occupied another corner of the same carriage did so; Susan arrived at Edinburgh. She got there while it was still daylight, to her great comfort; and having argued the question with herself for an hour or two previously, and recollected that Uncle Edward had once spoken of taking a cab at the railway and driving to Milnehill, proceeded with trembling intrepidity to do the same thing. The cabman, whom the poor girl addressed with humble politeness, conveyed her in somewhere about two hours, along the darkening country road, during which time the beating of Susan's heart almost choked her. But she got there at last—saw the little door in the wall opened, and recognised, in the perfumed breath of the atmosphere around her, the fragrance of those great, white turrets of chestnut-blossom, which built their fairy pinnacles in the garden of Milnehill. How she got through that darkling garden-walk Susan could not have told for her life; and the bright light and rejoicing welcome at the end of it; the start of delight, the warm embrace of the new house and unaccustomed love, were too much for the traveller. She could not speak to her uncle, and neither saw nor felt anything but a vague sensation of unspeakable rest and comfort, as they half led and half carried her over the safe threshold of Milnehill.

CHAPTER II.

WHILE the rapid railway, of which she was half afraid among all her other fears and excitements, carried Susan across the border, her brother hastened by himself along the country road to Kenlisle. It still wanted an hour of noon, but Horace was angry to be so late, and his thoughts were not of the most agreeable description. It was, to be sure, no personal loss to himself which could be brought about by the mission of the old pitman to Sir John Armitage, which he had stopped for this time, but might not be able to stop again; but if the story was actually told to Roger Musgrave's real friends, who would use it for the interests of the heir, there was an end of "the power" of Horace over the two attorneys, whose breach of trust could no longer be concealed. Then he was furious to think that his sister had heard something, much or little, of his conversation with the old man, and might have it in her power to give a clue to the secret. While mingled with this immediate concern was a renewed impression of the importance which his father attached to Colonel Sutherland's letter, or at least to the information contained in it; and the most eager anxiety to get to London to resolve his fate, if that was possible, by investigations at Doctors' Commons into the will. Whose will was it? Was he justified in believing that even the name of Scarsdale was the real name of the family, or at least of the testator who had willed a "posthumous punishment and vengeance" upon his father? Horace could give no answer to these questions; he could not even resolve on hastening to town immediately, for his time was bound to the will of another, and his funds were exhausted. To wait was the

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