

**THE STORY OF
A GOVERNESS**

BY

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CHAPTER I.

JANET SUMMERHAYES did not start in life with the feelings usually attributed to the young governess when beginning what is certainly a very thankless trade, with about as little prospect of continued prosperity as any in the world. Many representations of that sad and resigned young heroine have appeared before the world. We all know the appearance of the slight girl in deep mourning shyly coming into a strange house and a new world, shrinking alike from kindness and neglect; feeling that she is likely to be shut out there from everything that is agreeable, expecting humiliation, and, if not ready to take offence, at least quite aware that nobody is likely to take her feelings into consideration, or think that she is made of young flesh and blood like the others. There are many excuses for this frame of mind, and in many cases the worst prognostics are carried out. But I am very glad to say that this was not at all the idea with which the subject of this story prepared to go forth upon the world.

Her position up to this time had not been like that of the young and gentle governess of romance, an exceptionally sheltered and happy one. She had not been the only daughter of a doting father or mother, whose want of means to provide for her was only discovered upon their sudden death. On the contrary, Janet's experience was entirely that of a dependent. It is true the dependence was more or less a natural one. She was a relation of her patroness, and she had grown up from childhood in Miss Philipson's house, without any consciousness that it was not her home, and with much of the feelings of a child, always subject, always liable to be ordered about and reprov'd, and little

considered, but only in a way common to children. She had been very well educated on the whole, very well cared for, nicely dressed, since that was quite according to the fitness of things, and not allowed in anything to fall behind the neighboring girls of her age in any pleasure or accomplishment. It would have been contrary to Miss Philipson's credit, and it would have impaired her comfort, if Janet had not been on a level with the rest, or if she had not been cheerful and happy in her life. She was always kind to the girl, not being naturally unkind to anyone. She liked to have everything pleasant about her, and she had a conscience besides—both which things were very good for her little cousin. She did not provide for Janet, but that was all—and indeed, having done so much for her, and given her on the whole such a happy life up to her twentieth year, there was no failure of duty in this; and though some of Janet's friends were inclined to blame Miss Philipson, Janet herself was much more just, and neither felt nor expressed any blame.

“Aunt Mary was always good to me,” the girl said. “I had no right to that, but she gave it me freely, and we were very happy together, and certainly I had no right to expect any more.”

“My dear, I would not for the world impair your gratitude or your affection for your poor aunt,” said the vicar's wife; “in many things she deserved it fully, but——”

“There is no ‘but,’” said Janet. She was not perhaps quite so much overcome by grief as her friends would have liked to see her. There is a very simple standard in this respect which people like to see followed. They like to see a grief which is overwhelming for the moment, tears without measure, a sorrow which can take no comfort, all the better if it makes the mourner ill, and perhaps

confines her to bed for a few days in a shrouded room, without any occupation but that of brooding and weeping over her loss. And then they expect her to cheer up—not too quickly, but with a little visible advance every day, an advance which they can feel to be owing more or less to their own sympathetic kindness and good offices. Janet had to a certain extent followed this unspoken rule. She had cried a great deal, though her health had not at all suffered; but after the funeral she had perhaps too quickly regained her cheerfulness. When the doctor proposed to her, which was a thing that happened very soon after, it had been all she could do not to laugh at the droll idea that anyone should think it possible she would marry a middle-aged country doctor, she—Janet! She did laugh in the safety of her own room where nobody could hear her, recalling his look, and all the peculiarities of his unattractive person and his rough riding dress. He wanted to save her from the life of a governess by binding her to him, and his shabby house, and his busy, dry, joyless existence. How extraordinary, how ludicrous it was that anybody should think it was better to vegetate than to go out into the world and seek your fortune! Janet had lived at Clover all her life, and she liked the little place. The scenes were all so familiar, the people were all friends; but then she never for a moment supposed that she could be bound to such a seclusion. It had always been her expectation that one time or another she was to fling herself forth upon the world.

At the vicarage they were exceedingly tender of the girl who was going forth upon fate like this. Mrs. Bland made a survey of all her clothes, and mended some and condemned others with a pathetic tenderness.

“You must have all your linen in order,” she said, “for there is nothing a girl is so apt to forget. I was in rags myself when my first

wedding outfit wore out before I ever thought of getting a new set of things. A girl can see when she wants a new frock, but as for her under-things she always leaves that to her mother.”

“But you forget, Mrs. Bland, I have never had a mother,” said Janet.

“Ah, my poor child! but you were very kindly thought of, Janet, very kindly.”

“Do you think I meant any reproach to poor Aunt Mary? Oh, no, no! She liked me to have everything. She liked me to be the best dressed child in the parish. But as I grew up I saw to it myself. She thought it was best for me. But I shall always take the most care of the buttons you have sewed on. Fancy sewing on buttons and seeing after tapes for me!”

“It is the most natural thing in the world,” said the vicarress. “I only wish I could always take the charge of you, Janet; but we are old people, and we have little to leave, and it would only be putting off a little what would have to be faced at last.”

“Dear Mrs. Bland!” cried Janet, looking at her with something like tears in her eyes: they were real tears—and yet even while they sprang by instinct of nature, the little thing could not help the rising of a revolt against the thought of settling again at Clover after she had once been unseated from her corner. At Clover! when what she was thinking of was the world.

“But you must promise me, my dear,” said the old lady, with a tremor in her voice, “that as long as we live you will always look on the vicarage as your home. If this Mrs. Harwood should not turn out all you expect, you must not think it necessary to stay on, you

know, and fret yourself to death trying to make it do. You must always remember you have a home to come back to, Janet.”

“But the vicar thought Mrs. Harwood was very nice.”

“So he did, but in such cases a man’s opinion does not go for very much. If a woman looks nice and talks nicely, and has an agreeable smile, it is all the vicar thinks of: and most people are nice to him.”

“How could they help it, he is so delightful himself?”

“Well, I tell you, he is no judge; and in the best of places, Janet, there is a great deal to put up with. Every family has its own ways, and you will be a stranger, and it will be hard for you to be left out and to feel yourself always an outsider. There is a young lady, and she will go out to her parties and balls and you will be left behind. I don’t mean that you will feel it now, when your spirit is broken, but by and by, when in the course of nature——”

“It would be just the same at Clover,” said Janet; “there are neither balls nor parties.”

“Ah, but everything there is you are asked to. That makes such a difference: and it will not be the case there. My dear, I am frightened about you, for you are too bold. You don’t realize the difference. It will be a great difference,” said Mrs. Bland, shaking her head.

Janet could have laughed, but did not. She was very bold. The new life and the strange family had no terrors for her. Novelty was dear, an exhilaration not a terror, to this little girl. Her heart was beating high with expectation while all these prophecies were poured into her ear. But it would not have been in good taste (Janet

felt) to exhibit the real state of her feelings, so she answered, demurely, that she hoped she was not too bold.

“But, dear Mrs. Bland, when one has to do it, don’t you think one had better try to do it cheerily and think the best? Don’t you remember the old song in the play that the vicar likes so much—

“‘A merry heart goes all the way
A sad one tires in a mile, a’!”

“That’s true enough,” said Mrs. Bland, still shaking her head, “but men don’t know half that women have to put up with. Anyhow, Janet, my poor dear, you must always recollect this, that if it should ever become more than you can bear you must just give up the struggle and come back home. This is home so long as he and I are alive, and, if he goes first, whatever poor little cottage I may get to hide my old head in, you’ll just be as welcome there; and if I go first there will be all the more occasion, for he will sorely want somebody to look after him.”

At the mingled prospect of Janet’s need, and her own poor little problematical cottage as the vicar’s widow, and the vicar’s want of somebody to look after him, Mrs. Bland broke down entirely, and shed salt tears. Indeed, those things were all possible, though only one of the last two sorrows could be. But when an old pair come to the end of life, it is almost certain that one of them must be left one day to survive and miss the other, though, to be sure, it does happen now and then that they are so blessed as to die within a day or two of each other, which is by far the best.

Janet went to her old friend, and kissed her, and was, as Mrs. Bland said, very sweet, comforting the old lady with tender words and letting fall a few tears, as it is easy on any provocation to do at

nineteen. And immediately after it was tea-time, and the vicar came in from his study, where he was writing his sermon, and everything became cheerful again. Afterwards Mrs. Bland put all Janet's "things" together, and looked at them with affectionate, complacent eyes, patting each snowy heap.

"Now, Janet," she said, "you have a dozen of each, my dear, and not a button or a tape wanting, and all the trimmings nice and in good order. That will last you for a long time. You must keep an eye upon the trimming, which London washerwomen tear dreadfully. I've put our old-fashioned Buckinghamshire lace, made in my old parish where I was born, upon all the new ones. There is nothing that wears and washes so well. You never have had to think of these things till now; but you must promise me to look them over carefully every Saturday. You know, 'A stitch in time—
—'"

Janet gave the promise with all necessary earnestness, and the "things" were carried upstairs and carefully packed. It was a sad evening at the vicarage. The old people said all manner of sweet and pretty things to the neophyte, which Janet tried when she could to ward off by a little joke, or one of the merry little speeches which all the Clover people expected from her: but, though this might turn the edge of a piece of serious advice for a moment, the grave tone always came back. A sentence might be begun lightly, but it was sure to end with "remember, Janet——" The old people both kissed her and blessed her when she went upstairs to bed—"The last night," they said to each other with an interchange of sympathetic glances.

"And she takes it so easily. She is not a bit daunted," said Mrs. Bland, shaking her head.

“Perhaps that’s all the better,” said the vicar; but the old couple were almost alarmed, in spite of themselves, at Janet’s calm.

If they had but known! She went upstairs quietly enough with a composed step. But when she got to her own room, which was, happily, at the other end of the house, Janet threw down on her bed the things she was carrying, which were presents from her old friends—a writing-case from one, a work-basket from the other—and danced, actually danced a lively old hornpipe step, which she had learned when she was a child. She did it before the glass, and nodded and smiled at herself as she bobbed up and down. Then stretching out her arms, flung herself in the old easy-chair and, said, “Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!” softly under her breath “The last night,” said Janet to herself. The last of all this dull old life, which she knew in every feature, which never had anything new in it—no excitement, no change: but to do the same things at the same hours every day, and come in to meals and sit down in the same chair, and go to church and go to bed. She was not at all without affection for the people who were so kind to her, but to feel herself upon the edge of the unknown went to Janet’s head. It was like laughing gas, or champagne, or any other stimulant to gayety. The idea intoxicated her. As for all the dolorous pictures that had been placed before her, she believed none of them. To go off among people she had never seen, to plunge into the midst of a life she knew nothing about, to become a member of a family whose name alone she knew—it was like beginning a new world to Janet. She would have everything to find about them—their Christian names, their stories, if they had any; perhaps the family story, if there was one—the skeleton in the closet, the romance; whatever there might be. What fun! she said to herself, clapping her hands. Even the new

place would be something to begin with—the new home and customs, the new rooms.

It appeared to her altogether in a bright light of expectation—everything nice, everything new. The name of Mrs. Harwood, a widow lady with three children, living in St. John's Wood, will not, perhaps, appear exciting at the first glance. She was Mrs. Novelty, the gatekeeper of the new world, to Janet, and her three children were three romances about to begin, in each of which Janet would come by degrees to be the heroine. The house in St. John's Wood was the theatre, the stage on which she was to make her first appearance. She knew no more of that respectable (or disrespectable) region than she did of Timbuctoo. As for the naughtiness, that was all a sealed book to Janet. Her wildest thoughts were as innocent as a child's. She had absolute ignorance as a guard to her imagination, which is a guard always to be desired, and most so at nineteen. The life she longed to know was the common life of the world. Not even in her dreams had she thought of the transgression of any law. She expected to have her own merits recognized, to have adoration and homage laid at her feet, to find not only Prince Charming in the end, but, no doubt, many others whose sighs and glances would make existence very amusing. She expected that admiration would meet her, that she would be in the midst of a story before she knew. She expected to triumph all along the line. "The world's my oyster, which with this glance I'll open." That was the light in which Janet contemplated the life of a governess in St. John's Wood, which she was to begin next day.

CHAPTER II.

THE household at the vicarage was astir earlier than usual next morning, which was altogether unnecessary, for Jane did not leave Clover till after twelve o'clock; but that was a kind of tribute to the excitement in which everybody had a part. The morning was spent in investigations as to whether anything was wanting in Janet's little travelling work-case, where she kept (by special provision of Mrs. Bland) a reel of black silk and one of white cotton, needles, thimble, and scissors; or in her little writing-case, where (supplied by the vicar) she had two sheets of notepaper, two envelopes, two post-cards, the same of postage stamps, a pen on an ivory-holder, and a small travelling inkbottle. These little articles were quite independent of the handsome work-box and writing-case, severally given her by her kind friends, and were intended solely for the necessities of the journey, though, perhaps, as it was only three hours by railway to London such careful provisions were scarcely necessary.

Janet's box was not locked till ten o'clock, in case some one might recollect something that had been forgotten; but after every precaution had been taken, the last strap fastened, her railway rug and cloak neatly, nay, almost more than neatly, put up, her own hat put on, and her coat buttoned to the throat, not one detail left which had not been attended to, there was still one hour to spare before the train left. They went out into the wintry garden, where everything was bare, and strolled round the walks—the three together, the vicar in his greatcoat, prepared to accompany Janet to the railway, and Mrs. Bland with a large white shawl over her cap. It was a beautiful morning, the sun shining red through the mist,

and everything so warmed in color and sentiment by those ruddy rays that it was almost impossible to believe that it was a cold November day.

“I wish now,” said the vicar, “that I had insisted, as I always wished, on going up with Janet to town, and seeing her safe in Mrs. Harwood’s hands.”

“I almost wish you had, dear,” said Mrs. Bland.

“But I don’t,” cried Janet. “Oh, please don’t think of such a thing! How am I to learn to manage for myself if you pet me like this, as if I could do nothing? No, dear vicar, I should so much prefer to part with you here, in our own dear Clover, and to keep the—image quite unbroken.”

Janet was a little at a loss how to finish her sentence, but felt very successful when she thought of these words.

Mrs. Bland put up her handkerchief to her eyes.

“There’s something in that,” she said, “to leave us just as I hope you will find us when you come back. And always do remember, Janet, if any difficulty should arise, that here we are, always so happy to have you—only sorry that we can’t keep you altogether.”

“Always delighted to have you,” echoed the vicar, “and sorry above measure——”

“But I hope no difficulty will arise,” said Janet, very briskly; “I don’t intend there should. I am not quite like a little novice, am I? I have seen a little of the world. I remember watching how the governess at the Grange got on, or rather how she didn’t get on,

and thinking had I been in her place—! So you see I am not unprepared. And then it will be everything to know I may come back here for my holidays, when I have any.”

“We ought to have made a condition about that,” said the vicar. “I have been thinking so for some time. We should have put it down in black and white, so many weeks at a certain time, say Christmas or Easter, instead of leaving it to chance as we have done.”

“Not Christmas,” said Mrs. Bland, “nor Easter either, for that would not be so convenient; but in August, when every child has holidays.”

“Only then,” said the vicar—“for I thought of that—they might be going abroad, or to the seaside, or somewhere where it would be nice for Janet to go.”

“People very seldom take the governess with them when they go abroad,” said Mrs. Bland, shaking her head.

“But, dear Mrs. Bland,” said Janet, “you always used to say one should not think of holidays till one had done some work. And it will come all right about that. The grand thing is having a place to come to when one is free; a place,” she said, with a little moisture springing into a corner of her bright eyes—a little real moisture, which Janet was quite pleased and almost proud to feel, as it carried out every necessity of her position—“which will feel like home.”

“In every way, I hope, my dear child,” said Mrs. Bland, with a sob, enfolding Janet in her arms and her white shawl, which were both motherly, warm, and ample, like her heart. The vicar put his

hand upon her shoulder, and patted it tenderly as she was held against his wife's breast.

When the girl freed herself (and a dreadful thought about her hat darted into her mind as she did so, for it is so easy to crush crape) she gave a little laugh, and cried,

“You must not spoil me too much. I can't go away crying; it would not be lucky. Dear vicar, there is one bud left in the china vase beside your study window. Do get it for me to put in my coat, and that will be the last thing, and a cheerful thing: for it is nearly time for the train, and I must go now.”

Janet kept her point, and pinned the rose to her breast, after she had given Mrs. Bland her farewell kiss, and went away, looking back smiling and waving her hand till she was out of sight from the vicarage gate.

“Bless her, she do have a spirit to keep up like that,” said the vicarage cook, who stood behind her mistress to see the last of Miss Janet.

“It's all excitement,” said Mrs. Bland, drying her eyes. “I know she'll break down dreadfully as soon as she gets into the railway carriage by herself.”

“Now, Janet, you are sure you would not wish me to go with you: for there is time enough yet to get a ticket, and send Mrs. Bland a message?” said the vicar, at the carriage door.

“No, no. No, indeed. It is far better to begin at once—to begin when I am not forced to do it,” said Janet. “And perhaps next time I travel alone it will be to come home, which will make everything

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