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When the young gentleman strolling through the park with his gun on his shoulder and an elderly spaniel at his heels came within sight of the house it occurred to him that the hour must be farther advanced than he had supposed, for the sun had sunk below the great stone pile, and an autumnal mist was already creeping over the ground. Amongst the trees the mist had been scarcely perceptible, but when the gentleman emerged from their shelter on to an avenue which ran through undulating lawns to the south front of the mansion, he perceived that the vista was clouded, and became for the first time aware of a chill striking through his light nankeen jacket. He quickened his steps a little, but instead of pursuing his way to the main front, with its handsome colonnade of the Corinthian order, and cupola surmounting the central compartment, he turned off the avenue, and, traversing an elegant flower-garden, embellished with various classical statues, approached a side-entrance in the east wing.

The house, which occupied the site of an earlier building, destroyed by fire half a century before, was a comparatively modern edifice, designed in the classic style, and executed in stone and stuccoed brick. A four hundred and fifty foot frontage made it impressive, and its proportions being extremely nice, and its situation agreeable, it was held by every Travellers' Guide Book to be worth a visit of inspection on such days as its noble owner allowed it to be thrown open to the public. The enquiring traveller was informed that while the

park and the pleasure-grounds were sumptuously adorned with works of art, these embellishments were not obtrusive, scarcely any object occurring to violate the principles of modern taste in garden-arrangement. The park, very richly timbered, was also adorned by water; it measured above ten miles in circumference, and was traversed by an avenue three miles in length. The gardens, which were varied and extensive, bespoke the attentions of an extremely skilled gardener, with underlings who permitted no weed to show its head, and no hedge or border to grow ragged. Formal beds were arranged with propriety of taste, and even the wilderness, beyond the Italian Garden and the shrubbery, was kept under decorous restraint.

'*Sale Park,*' read the Guide Book, '*the principal seat of his Grace the Duke of Sale, is a spacious and handsome structure, with colonnades connecting the wings with the central elevation, and a grand portico supporting a richly ornamented pediment.*' The visitor was then adjured to pause awhile to admire the ornamental water, the luxuriant growth of noble trees, and the view to be obtained from the south, or main front, before turning his gaze upon the stately mansion itself and absorbing all the glories of Corinthian columns, pediments, cupolas, which rendered it worthy of study.

The Guide Book bestowed some very warm praise upon the Grecian Temple, erected at enormous expense by the fifth Duke, but the young gentleman in the fustian pantaloons and nankeen shooting-jacket passed it without a glance. Indeed, he seemed to be quite indifferent to the beauty and the grandeur of his surroundings, treading rather carelessly over neat grass borders, and permitting his spaniel to stray on to the flower-beds at will.

In his person as much as in his dress, which besides being of great simplicity included a shot-belt (an article of attire not at all in favour with gentlemen aspiring to elegance), he scarcely accorded with his stately setting. He was slightly built, and of rather less than medium height. He had light brown hair, which waved naturally above a countenance which was pleasing without being in any way remarkable. The features were delicate, the colouring rather pale, and the eyes, although

expressive, and of a fine grey, not sufficiently arresting to catch the attention. He carried himself well, but without any air of consequence, so that in a crowd it would have been easier to have passed him over than to have distinguished him. His address was well-bred, and a certain dignity attached to his bearing, but either from the circumstance of his being only twenty-four years of age, or from a natural diffidence, his manner, without being precisely shy, was quiet to the point of self-effacement. In fact, tourists to whom he had occasionally been pointed out generally found it impossible to believe that such an unassuming figure could really be the owner of so much wealth and magnificence. But he had owned it for twenty-four years, together with Sale House, his town residence in Curzon Street, and eight other country seats, ranging from Somerset to a draughty castle in the Highlands. He was the Most Noble Adolphus Gillespie Vernon Ware, Duke of Sale and Marquis of Ormesby; Earl of Sale; Baron Ware of Thame; Baron Ware of Stoven; and Baron Ware of Rufford, and all these high-sounding titles had been his from the moment of his birth, for he was a posthumous child, the only surviving offspring of the sixth Duke, and of the gentle, unfortunate lady who, after presenting her lord with two stillborn children, and three who did not survive infancy, expired in giving birth to a seven-months male child of such tiny size and sickly appearance that it was freely prophesied of him that he would join his little brothers and sisters in the family vault before the year was out. But the wise choice of a wet-nurse, the devotion of the Chief Nurse, the unremitting attentions of his doctors, the strict rule of his uncle and guardian, Lord Lionel Ware, and the fond solicitude of his aunt, had all combined to drag the seventh Duke through every phase of infantile disorder; and although his boyhood was rendered irksome by a delicacy of constitution that made him liable to take cold easily, and to succumb with alarming readiness to every infectious disease, he had not only survived, but had grown into a perfectly healthy young man, who, if not as stout as could have been wished, or of such fine physique as his uncles and cousins,

was yet robust enough to cause his physicians very little anxiety. The chief of these had more than once asserted his belief that the little Duke had a stronger constitution than was supposed, since his hold on life had throughout been so tenacious; but this was an opinion not shared by the anxious relatives, tutors, and attendants who had the Duke in their charge. It was some years since he had suffered any but the most trifling ailment, but his entourage still laboured under the conviction that he was a being to be cosseted and protected against every wind that blew.

It was therefore not with surprise that the young Duke, as he reached the east wing of his house, found that his approach had evidently been watched for. The door was flung open before he had set his foot upon the first of the stone steps that led up to it, and various persons were seen to have assembled in the passage to receive him. Foremost amongst these was his butler, an impressive individual whose demeanour gave the initiated to understand that if his Grace chose to demean himself by entering his house by a side door giving on to a narrow passage it was not for him to criticise such eccentric behaviour. He bowed the Duke in, and perceiving that he carried, besides his gun, a heavy game-bag, silently gestured to a footman to relieve his master of these unbecoming burdens. The Duke gave them up with a faint, rueful smile, but murmured that he had the intention of cleaning his barrels in the gun-room.

His head-keeper took the gun, a fine Manton, from the footman, and said reproachfully: 'I shall attend to it myself, your Grace. If I had known that your Grace was desirous of shooting today I would have sent up a loader, and —'

'But I didn't want a loader,' said the Duke.

Mr Padbury shook his head forbearingly.

'I think,' added the Duke, 'that I might now and then — just now and then, you know, Padbury! — clean my guns for myself.'

Even the footman looked shocked at this, but, being only an underling, could only exchange glances with the fellow footman who had accompanied him to the side entrance. The butler, the steward, and the keeper all directed looks of deep reproach at the

Duke, and the middle-aged man in the neat garb that proclaimed the valet exclaimed: 'Clean your guns for yourself, your Grace! I should think not indeed! And your Grace wet through, I daresay, with only that thin jacket!'

'Oh, no!' said the Duke. He looked down at the muddled spaniel, and added: 'But Nell must be rubbed down well.'

He was assured that this should instantly be done; the keeper began to say that he should lose no time in treating the damp gun-stock with a particular preparation of his own; and the steward, prefixing his intervention with a discreet cough, informed his master that my lord had been asking if he was not yet come in.

The Duke had listened rather absently to his valet's and his keeper's remarks, but this had the effect of claiming his attention. He appeared to abandon his intention of going to the gun-room, and asked in a slightly apprehensive tone if he were late for dinner.

The butler, who, although officially the steward's inferior, was a man of far more commanding personality, replied somewhat ambiguously to this question that my lord had gone upstairs to change his dress above half an hour ago.

The Duke looked startled, and said that he must make haste; whereupon the butler, relaxing his severity, assured him benignly that dinner would be held for him, and went in a stately way down the passage to open the door that led into the main hall of the house.

But the Duke again disappointed him, this time by electing to run up the secondary staircase at the end of the passage.

His bedroom was an immense apartment opening out of the upper hall, and as he crossed this to his door he encountered his uncle, a fine-looking gentleman in the early fifties, with an aristocratic cast of countenance, and rather fierce eyes set under strongly marked brows.

Lord Lionel Ware, who prided himself on belonging to the old school, had changed his customary country habit of buckskins and top-boots for the knee-breeches considered *de rigueur* in his

younger days, and carried an enamelled snuff-box in one hand, and a lace handkerchief. When he saw his nephew, his brows shot up, and he enunciated, in a sort of bark: 'Ha! So you are come in, are you, Gilly?'

The Duke smiled, and nodded. 'I beg pardon, sir! Am I late? I shall not keep you waiting above twenty minutes, I promise you.'

'No such thing!' said Lord Lionel testily. 'Dinner will await your convenience, but you are a great fool to be staying out after dusk at this season. I daresay you will have taken one of your chills!'

'Oh, no!' replied the Duke, in the same sweet, absent tone he had used to his valet.

Lord Lionel ran a hand down the sleeve of that nankeen jacket, and appeared to be not dissatisfied. 'Well!' he said. 'I don't wish to be for ever coddling you, boy, but I desire you will make haste out of those clothes. You will have got your feet wet in those half-boots. You had better have worn gaiters. Nettlebed! Has his Grace no gaiters to wear out shooting?'

'His Grace will not wear his gaiters, my lord,' said the valet, in condemnatory accents. 'And his Grace did not send for me to lay out his clothes, nor apprise me of his intention to go shooting,' he added, less in self-exculpation than in sorrowful blame of his young master's imprudence.

'I am glad you do not wish to be waited on hand and foot,' said Lord Lionel severely, 'but this habit you have of slipping off without a word said is nonsensical, Gilly. One would suppose you were afraid someone might prevent you!'

A gleam of humour lit the Duke's eyes; he said meekly: 'I think I must have a secretive disposition, sir.'

'Nothing of the sort!' said his lordship. 'It is high time you realised that you are of age, and may do as you please. Now, be off, and don't neglect to change your stockings! I hope you have been wearing flannel ones, and not —'

'Lamb's-wool,' said the Duke, more meekly still.

'Very well, and now make haste, if you please! Unless you wish to keep town-hours at Sale?'

The Duke disclaimed any such desire, and vanished into his bed-chamber, where Nettlebed had already laid out his evening dress. The room, although of vast size, was very warm, for a fire had been lit in the grate much earlier in the day, and the windows closed against any treacherous fresh air. Curtains of crimson damask shut out the fading daylight, and the great fourpost-bed was hung with the same stuff. Branches of candles stood on the dressing-table and the mantelpiece; and a silver ewer of hot water had been placed in the wash-basin, and covered with a clean towel. The room was furnished throughout in crimson damask, and mahogany, and hung with a Chinese paper of the style made fashionable some years previously by the Prince Regent, who used it extensively in his summer palace at Brighton. Everything in it seemed to be made on rather too large and opulent a scale for its occupant, but it was not an uncomfortable apartment, and, during the day, was generally flooded with sunshine, since it faced south, commanding a view of the avenue, the formal beds and lawns beyond it, the sheet of ornamental water which the Guide Book so highly commended, and, in the distance, the noble trees of the home park. The Duke had slept in it ever since the day when his uncle had decreed that he was too old for petticoat government, and had removed him from his more homely nurseries, and installed him, a small and quaking ten-year-old, in it, telling him that it was his father's room, and his grandfather's before him, and that only the head of the house might inhabit it. As his Grace had been further informed by various members of his household that the fifth Duke had breathed his last in the huge bed, he could only be thankful that his frailty made Lord Lionel deem it advisable to set up a truckle-bed for a reliable attendant in the adjoining dressing-room.

Nettlebed, who might have been considered by some to be rather too elderly a valet for such a young man, began to bustle about, scolding fondly as he divested his master of his coat, and shot-belt, and grey cloth waistcoat. Like nearly everyone else who waited upon the Duke, he had previously been employed by

the Duke's father, and considered himself privileged to speak his mind to his master whenever he was out of earshot of other, less important, members of the household, before whom he invariably maintained the Duke's dignity in a manner that daunted the Duke far more than the affectionate bullying he employed in private.

He said now, as he laid aside the shot-belt: 'I wonder that my lord should not have said something to your Grace, if he noticed you was wearing this nasty, low belt, more fit for a poacher, one would have thought, than for a Gentleman, let alone one that was born, as the saying is, in the Purple. But, there! tell your Grace till Domesday you'll never mend your ways! And why would you not take a loader, pray, not to mention Padbury? I can tell your Grace he was quite put out to think you should be off without him, and very likely needing a beater as well.'

'No, I didn't need a beater,' said the Duke, sitting down to allow Nettlebed to pull off his boots. 'And as for my shot-belt, I daresay you may consider it a very vulgar appendage, but it spares my pockets, and is, I think, as quick a way of loading as any that I know.'

'If you had taken a loader with you, as was befitting, your Grace would not have needed any such,' said Nettlebed severely. 'I could see his lordship was not best pleased.'

'I am sure he was not displeased for any such cause,' responded the Duke, walking towards the washstand, and lifting the towel from the ewer. 'He is a great advocate for a man's being able to do everything for himself that may come in his way.'

'That,' said Nettlebed, frustrating the Duke's attempt to pick up the ewer, 'is as may be, your Grace.' He poured the water into the basin, and removed the towel from the Duke's hand. 'But when his lordship takes a gun out, he has always his loader, and very likely a couple of beaters besides, for he is one as knows what is due to his position.'

'Well, if I do not know what is due to mine I am sure it is not for want of being told,' sighed the Duke. 'I think it would have

been very pleasant to have been born one of my own tenants, sometimes.'

'Born one of your Grace's own tenants!' ejaculated Nettlebed, in an astonished tone.

The Duke took the towel, and began to wipe his wet face with it. 'Not one of those who are obliged to live in Thatch End Cottages, of course,' he said reflectively.

'Thatch End Cottages!'

'At Rufford.'

'I do not know what your Grace can be meaning!'

'They are for ever complaining of them. I daresay they should all be pulled down. In fact, I am sure of it, for I have seen them.'

'Seen them, your Grace?' said Nettlebed, quite shocked. 'I am sure I do not know when you can have done so!'

'When we were in Yorkshire, I rode over,' replied the Duke tranquilly.

'Now that,' said Nettlebed, in a displeased way, 'is just what your Grace should not be doing! It is Mr Scriven who should attend to such matters, as I am sure he is willing and able to do, let alone he has his clerks to be running about the country for him!'

'Only he does not attend to it,' said the Duke, sitting down before his dressing-table.

Nettlebed handed him his neckcloth. 'Then your Grace may depend upon it there is nothing as needs attending to,' he said.

'You remind me very much of uncle,' remarked the Duke.

Nettlebed shook his head at him, but said: 'Well, and I'll be bound his lordship has told your Grace there isn't a better agent than Mr Scriven in the length and breadth of the land.'

'Oh, yes!' said the Duke. 'Nothing could exceed his care for my interests.'

'Well, and what more could your Grace desire?'

'I think it would be very agreeable if he cared for my wishes.'

A slightly weary note in his master's quiet voice made Nettlebed say with a roughness that imperfectly concealed his affection: 'Now, your Grace, I see what it is! You have tired

yourself out, carrying that heavy game-bag, and your gun, and you're in a fit of the dismals! If Mr Scriven don't seem always to care for your wishes, it's because your Grace is young yet, and don't know the ways of tenants, nor what's best for the estate.'

'Very true,' said the Duke, in a colourless voice.

Nettlebed helped him to put on his coat. 'Your Grace's honoured father had every confidence in Mr Scriven, that I do know,' he said.

'Oh, yes!' said the Duke.

Feeling that his master was still unconvinced, Nettlebed began to recite the numerous virtues of the agent-in-chief, but after a few moments the Duke interrupted him, saying: 'Well, never mind! Have we company tonight?'

'No, your Grace, you will be quite alone.'

'It sounds delightful, but I am afraid it is untrue.'

'No, no, your Grace, it is just as I tell you! You will find no one below but my lord, and my lady, and Mr Romsey, and Miss Scamblesby!' Nettlebed assured him.

The Duke smiled, but refrained from making any remark. He submitted to having his coat smoothed across his shoulders, accepted a clean handkerchief, and moved towards the door. Nettlebed opened this for him, and nodded to an individual hovering in the hall outside, who at once withdrew, apparently to spread the news of the Duke's coming. He was the Groom of the Chambers, and although more modern households might have abolished this office, at Sale Park a pomp belonging to the previous century was rigidly adhered to, and the groom continued to hold his post. During the long period of the Duke's minority he had had little scope for his talents, but he was now hopeful of seeing the great house once more full of distinguished guests, all with their exacting personal servants, and their quite incompatible fads and fancies, driving a lesser man to suicide, but affording Mr Turvey an exquisite enjoyment.

The Duke walked down the stairs, and crossed a vast, marble-paved hall to the double doors that led into the gallery. Here it

had been the custom of the Family to assemble before dinner since the Duke's grandfather had rebuilt the mansion. As the gallery was over a hundred foot long, it had sometimes seemed to the Duke that some smaller apartment might be a preferable assembly room on any but Public Days, but a mild suggestion made to this effect had been greeted by his uncle with such disapproval that with his usual docility he had abandoned any hope of making a change.

Two liveried footmen, who appeared to have been trying to impersonate wax effigies, suddenly sprang to life, and flung open the doors; the Duke, dwarfed by their height and magnificence, passed between them into the gallery.

Since September was drawing to an end, and the evenings were already a little chilly, a log-fire had been kindled in the grate at one end of the gallery. Lord Lionel Ware was standing before it, not precisely with his watch in his hand, but presenting the appearance of one who had but that moment restored the timepiece to his pocket. Beside him, and making a praiseworthy if not entirely successful attempt to divert his mind from the lateness of the hour, was the Reverend Oswald Romsey, once tutor to the Duke, now his Chaplain, and engaged in the intervals of his not very arduous duties in writing a learned commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews. On a straw-coloured brocade sofa, wholly shielded from the fire's warmth by her husband's stalwart form, was disposed the Duke's aunt, a lady fashioned in a generous mould which the current mode of high waists and narrow skirts could not have been said to have flattered; and sitting primly upright in a chair suitably withdrawn from the intimate circle was Miss Scamblesby, a spinster of uncertain age and nebulous relationship, who was always referred to by Lady Lionel as 'my cousin', and had been an inmate of Sale Park for as long as the Duke could remember, performing the duties of a lady-in-waiting. As Lady Lionel was extremely kind-hearted, she was not in the least overworked, or browbeaten, the only ills she had to endure being her ladyship's very boring conversation, and his lordship's snubs, which last,

however, were dealt out so impartially to every member of the household as to make her feel herself to be quite one of the family.

But the Duke, who had, his uncle frequently told him, too much sensibility, could not rid himself of the notion that Miss Scamblesby's position was an unhappy one, and he never neglected to bestow on her a distinguishing degree of attention, or to acknowledge a relationship which did not, in fact, exist, by addressing her as Cousin Amelia. When his uncle pointed out to him, not in a carping spirit, but as one who liked accuracy, that being only some kind of a third cousin to Lady Lionel her connection with the Ware family was of the most remote order, he merely smiled, and slid out of a possible argument in a manner rendered perfect by years of practice.

As he walked down the gallery, he smiled at her, and enquired after the headache she had complained of earlier in the day. While she blushed, thanked, and disclaimed, Lord Lionel crushingly remarked that he did not know why people should have headaches, since he himself had never suffered such an ill in his life; and Mr Romsey pleased nobody by saying: 'Ah, my lord Duke has a fellow-feeling, I daresay! I am sure no one has suffered more from an affliction we more hardy mortals are exempt from!'

'Stuff and nonsense!' said Lord Lionel, who very much disliked to have his nephew's delicacy of constitution mentioned by anyone other than himself.

Mr Romsey's well-meaning if unfortunate remark had the effect of arousing Lady Lionel from her customary lethargy, and she began to enumerate, with a surprising degree of animation, all the more shocking headaches her nephew had endured during his sickly boyhood. The Duke bore this patiently, but Lord Lionel pshawed and fidgeted, and finally broke in on a discourse that threatened to be never-ending, saying crossly: 'Very well, very well, ma'am, but this is all forgotten now, and we do not wish to be reminding Gilly of it! Were you hedgerow-shooting, my boy? Had you any sport?'

‘Three brace of partridges only, and some wood-pigeons, sir,’ responded the Duke.

‘Very well indeed!’ said his uncle approvingly. ‘I have frequently observed that for all it may not be real game, as we understand it, the wood-pigeon gives some of the hardest shots of all. What shot did you use?’

‘Seven,’ said the Duke.

This made Lord Lionel shake his head a little, and point out the advantages of a four or a five. His nephew, having listened politely, said that he would grant him an accidental shot at long distance with his heavier shot, but that a well-breeched and properly bored gun would shoot Number Seven better than any other. As the Duke was a very pretty shot, Lord Lionel allowed this to pass with no more than a glancing reference to newfangled fads, and asked him if he had taken one of his Purdeys out.

‘No, a Manton,’ said the Duke. ‘I have been trying Joseph Manton’s New Patent Shot.’

‘I have bought my shot from Walker and Maltby any time these thirty years,’ declared his lordship. ‘But the old ways will never do for you young men! I suppose you will tell me this New Patent has some particular virtue!’

‘I think the shot is more compact, and it is certainly cleaner to handle,’ replied the Duke.

‘I hope, Gilly, that you did not get your feet wet?’ said Lady Lionel. ‘You know, if you were to take a chill it will go straight to your throat, and I was thinking only the other day that I cannot recall the name of that very obliging physician who recommended electricity. You were only a child, so I daresay you might not remember, but it was very excellent, though your uncle disliked it very much.’

‘Does Borrowdale not know that you are ready for dinner?’ demanded Lord Lionel loudly. ‘It will be six o’clock before we sit down to it!’

‘There was quite a fashion for electricity at that time,’ pursued his wife placidly. ‘I am sure I know of a dozen persons who took the treatment.’

‘It was what the Captain calls all the crack,’ said Miss Scamblesby, prefixing her remark with the titter which never failed to irritate his lordship.

Lord Lionel was both fond and proud of his son, but he did not propose to submit to having his words quoted to him, and he immediately said that he had the greatest dislike of cant expressions. Miss Scamblesby’s subsequent confusion was only relieved by the entrance of Borrowdale, who came in at that moment to announce that dinner was served. The Duke then assisted his aunt to rise from the sofa, Miss Scamblesby draped a Paisley shawl round her shoulders, Mr Romsey handed her her fan and her reticule, and the whole party filed out into the hall, and across it to the dining-saloon.

Here the Duke took his place at the head of the table, in an immense carved oak chair, and Lord Lionel installed himself in a similar chair at the foot. Lady Lionel sat at her nephew’s right hand, and Miss Scamblesby and Mr Romsey established themselves opposite to her, with only one footman between the pair of them.

Lord Lionel being an advocate of what he considered a neat, plain dinner, only two courses were served at Sale Park when the family dined alone. The first of these consisted of a tureen of turtle, removed with fish, which was in its turn removed with a haunch of venison. Several side-dishes, such as pork cutlets with Rober sauce, larded fillets of beef, tenderloins of veal and truffles, and a braised ham, graced the board, but since his lordship was a moderate trencherman, and the Duke had a notoriously small appetite, the only person who did justice to the spread was Miss Scamblesby, who had (so his lordship had more than once remarked to his nephew) the inordinate appetite of all poor relations.

While the first course dragged on its way, conversation was of a desultory nature. The Duke looked tired; his aunt rarely troubled herself to make conversation; and Lord Lionel seemed preoccupied. When the first course was carried out in procession, however, he roused himself to say: ‘Well! You are all

very dull tonight!’ a remark which not unnaturally bereft the assembled company of any conversational ideas they might have had.

‘Well, Gilly!’ said his lordship, after a pause of which no one showed any sign of wishing to take advantage. ‘Have you nothing to say for yourself?’

A slightly apprehensive look came into the Duke’s eyes. Mr Romsey said kindly: ‘I fancy you are tired, my lord.’

‘No, no!’ Gilly disclaimed, almost shrinking from the imputation.

It had the effect of softening Lord Lionel. ‘Tired? I am sure I do not know why you must all be for ever supposing him knocked up by the least exertion! Let me tell you, it is very irksome to a young man to have such nonsense talked of him! You are bored, Gilly! Yes, yes, you need not trouble to deny it, for I do not wonder at it! You should have invited some few of your Oxford friends to come down and shoot with you. It is dull work for you here alone.’

‘Thank you, I am very happy, sir!’ Gilly stammered. ‘You – I mean, *we* have invited several parties for the pheasant-shooting, I believe.’

‘Well, well, that is looking some way ahead!’ said his lordship indulgently. ‘You will scarcely wish for any large shooting parties until November!’

The second course here made its appearance, and a fresh array of silver dishes was set out. Some pigeons and a hare constituted the main features, but there were besides a quantity of vegetables, and several creams, jellies, and cakes, including, as Miss Scamblesby was quick to perceive, a Gâteau Mellifleur, to which she was extremely partial.

Lady Lionel helped herself from a dish of artichoke bottoms in sauce. ‘I have been thinking,’ she said. ‘If you should care for it, Gilly, we could get up a rubber of whist after dinner. I daresay we might prevail upon our good Mr Romsey to take a hand, and if he does not care to, Amelia does not play so very ill.’

Her husband set his wineglass down rather hurriedly, and said with more haste than civility that she must know that Gilly

disliked whist. Then, perceiving quadrille in her eye, he added: 'Or any other game of cards. Besides, I have just recollected that Chigwell brought up the mails from the receiving-office this afternoon, and there is a letter for you from your Uncle Henry, Gilly. I will give it to you after dinner.'

The Duke's entertainment having been thus provided for, Lady Lionel was able to relapse into indolence, merely wondering in an idle fashion what Lord Henry could be writing to Gilly about. Miss Scamblesby said that it seemed a long time since they had had the felicity of seeing dear Lord and Lady Henry Ware at Sale; and Mr Romsey asked if Mr Matthew was not now a freshman up at Oxford.

'No, he is entering on his third year,' the Duke replied.

'But not, I fancy, at *our* college, my lord?' Mr Romsey said playfully.

As Mr Romsey was a Balliol scholar, and the Duke had been at Christ Church, the possessive pronoun could only be taken to refer to the circumstance of his having accompanied his pupil to Oxford, to keep a watchful eye on his health and his associates. The Duke, who had suffered as only a sensitive youth could under such an arrangement, found the reminder so irritating that he was obliged to close his lips on an unkind retort.

'My nephew is at Magdalen College,' said Lord Lionel shortly. 'As for not having seen my brother and his wife here, they spent six weeks with us in the summer, and brought all the children, as I for one am not likely to forget very readily! They cut up the south lawn with their cricket, and if they had been sons of *mine* –'

'But they asked my permission, sir, and I gave it,' Gilly said, in a soft voice.

Lord Lionel opened his mouth to utter a blistering reproof, recollected himself, shut it again, and, after a slight pause, said: 'Well, it is your lawn, and you may do as you wish with it, but I own I cannot conceive what you were about to give permission!'

A rather mischievous smile lit the Duke's eyes: he looked under his lashes at his uncle, and replied: 'I think it was perhaps

because I have wanted very often to play cricket there myself.'

'Yes! and you would thank me for it today, I daresay, had I allowed you and Gideon to ruin one of the finest pieces of turf in the county!' said his lordship.

Miss Scamblesby having by this time disposed of her portion of the *Gâteau Mellifleur*, Lady Lionel heaved herself up out of her chair. The Duke picked up such small articles as she dropped, the doors were held open, and both ladies withdrew to leave the gentlemen to their wine.

The covers having been removed, the cloth swept away, the decanters set upon the table, the servants left the room, and Lord Lionel settled down to enjoy his port in what he termed comfort, and his nephew thought great discomfort. The fire behind him was beginning to be unpleasantly hot, the ornate carving of his chair made leaning back in it a penance, and he was not fond of port.

Lord Lionel began to talk of some improvements to one of the Duke's estates, which the agent-in-chief thought might be advantageous. 'You should see Scriven yourself, Gilly,' he said. 'You know, you must not forget that in less than a year now you will have the management of everything in your own hands. I am very anxious you should acquaint yourself with all the business of your estates.'

'Dear me, yes!' said Mr Romsey, sipping his wine delicately. 'It is very true, though I may scarcely credit it! My dear lord, you will indeed be twenty-five next year! Yet it seems only yesterday that I was so fortunate as to be chosen to be your chief guide and preceptor!'

'I have never had the least doubt that I made a wise choice,' said his lordship graciously, 'but what I am saying is that my nephew must not look to be guided for many months more. You have a thousand amiable qualities, Gilly, but you lack decision of character!'

The Duke did not deny the accusation. He felt it to be true, but he could scarcely repress a shudder at the thought of the painful scenes that must have taken place at Sale had he been

endowed with the same forceful personality that distinguished his uncle. His cousin Gideon had it in some measure, and had certainly won his father's respect with it; but Gideon had always been a robust and pugnacious boy, and was quite untroubled by sensitive nerves. He had cared for being thrashed as little as for being rated. The Duke had never known which of the two fates he dreaded most. Fortunately for him, Lord Lionel had used him with far more gentleness than he showed his son, so that he was not really at all afraid of him. But a naturally sweet disposition, a dislike of quarrelling, and of loud, angry voices, combined with a rueful appreciation of the very real devotion to his interests and welfare that inspired his uncle's strict rule made him submit docilely where his cousin would have flamed into revolt.

'You are the head of the family, Gilly,' Lord Lionel said. 'You must learn to assert yourself. I have done all that a man may to train and educate you for the position you must occupy, but you are by far too diffident.'

Mr Romsey shook his head reminiscently. 'Indeed, there are few young men today who can boast of my lord Duke's advantages,' he said. 'But I for one feel sure, sir, that he will prove himself worthy of your unremitting solicitude.'

The Duke thought of the period of his boyhood, spent largely at his house near Bath, so that he might derive the benefit of the waters there; of three trammelled years at Oxford; of two more trammelled years upon the Continent, with a military gentleman added to his entourage, to teach him horse-manage, and manly sports; and suddenly he made up his mind to assert himself, even if only in a small matter. He pushed back his chair, and said: 'Shall we join my aunt now?'

'Really, Gilly, you must see that I have not yet finished my glass!' said Lord Lionel. 'Do not, I beg of you, get into a scrambling way of doing things! You should always make sure that the company is ready to rise before you give the signal.'

'I beg your pardon, sir,' said the Duke, abandoning the attempt to assert himself.

Two

When the gentlemen at last joined the ladies, they found them established before the fire in the Crimson Saloon, one of a handsome suite of reception rooms on the first floor. Lady Lionel had sent for some working-candles, and her embroidery-frame, upon which latter Miss Scamblesby was engaged in setting stitches in various coloured silks. Her ladyship rarely occupied herself with anything more fatiguing than the knotting of a fringe, but by constantly desiring to have her embroidery brought to her, choosing the silks, and criticising the design, she was easily able to persuade herself that she was an indefatigable worker, and would receive compliments upon her skill with perfect complaisance.

Mr Romsey went over to Miss Scamblesby's side, to observe what progress she had made; and while Lady Lionel informed him for perhaps the tenth time that the work was destined to form an altar-cloth for the Chapel, her husband gave Gilly the letter from his younger uncle, and waited expectantly for it to be handed over to him when Gilly had finished his perusal of it.

Gilly read it in some little surprise. Lord Henry, who was of a saving turn of mind, had managed to avoid the cost of an enclosure by compressing the intelligence he wished to convey on a single, crossed sheet. He wrote to inform his nephew of a very desirable connection he was about to form, through the betrothal of his eldest daughter to a scion of a distinguished family. He contrived to squeeze a number of details into his

single sheet, and ended by expressing the hope that the proposed alliance would meet with his nephew's approval.

The Duke gave up this letter to Lord Lionel in a mechanical way, and his lordship, casting his eye over it, said: 'Ha! I suspected as much! Yelverton's son, eh? Pretty well for a chit not out of the schoolroom!'

'I cannot conceive why he should write to tell me of it,' remarked the Duke.

Lord Lionel looked up from the letter to direct an admonishing frown at him. 'Naturally he would do so! It is a very proper letter. You will write your felicitations, of course, and say that you are very well pleased with the connection.'

'But he will not care a button whether I am pleased or not,' objected the Duke, with a touch of impatience.

'Pray do not let me have these odd humours!' begged his lordship irascibly. 'One would suppose you do not attend to anything that is said to you, Sale! I have been telling you for ever that you are the head of the family, and must learn to take your place as such, and now you talk rubbishing stuff to me of your uncle's not caring a button for your approval! If you are so lost to the sense of what is due to your position, you must perceive that he is not! A very pretty letter he has written you: expresses himself just as he ought! I must say, I had not thought he would have contrived such an eligible match for that girl – not but what it is not precisely what I should have cared for myself.'

'No,' agreed Gilly, taking his letter again. 'My cousin is not yet seventeen, and I am sure Alfred Thirsk must be forty if he is a day.'

'Well, well, that need not signify!' said Lord Lionel. 'The thing is that I have never fancied that brood of Yelverton's. There is a damned vulgar streak in them all: came into the family when the old man – Yelverton's father, I mean: you would not recall! – married some rich Cit's heiress. However, it is none of my business!'

The Duke said a little impishly: 'Very true, sir, but if it is mine

I think I should inform my uncle that I do not like the match. Poor Charlotte! I am sure she cannot wish for it!

Lord Lionel audibly drew a breath. In the voice of one restraining himself with a strong effort, he said: 'You will not, I trust, be guilty of such a piece of impertinence, Sale! Pray, what should a young man of your age know about the matter?'

'But you told me, sir, that I must learn to assert myself,' said the Duke meekly.

'Let me assure you, Gilly, that that kind of nonsense is beyond the line of being pleasing!' said Lord Lionel sternly. 'You must be perfectly well aware that this very proper letter of your uncle's is the merest formality, and not to be taken as an excuse for you to be putting yourself forward in a very unbecoming way! A fine state of affairs it would be if a man of your uncle's age and experience is to be told how he is to manage his household by a young jackanapes of a nephew! You will write to him as I have directed, and mind you write it fair, and not in one of your scrawls! You had better let me see the letter before it is sealed.'

'Very well, sir,' said the Duke.

Perceiving that he had quite banished the smile from his nephew's eyes, Lord Lionel relented, saying in a kindlier tone: 'There is no need to be cast into a fit of dejection because I am obliged to give you a scold, boy. There, we shall say no more about it! Give the letter to your aunt to read, and come into the library with me. I have something I wish to say to you.'

The Duke looked extremely apprehensive on hearing these ominous words, but he obediently handed over the letter to Lady Lionel, and followed his uncle downstairs to the library on the entrance floor. Since the candles had already been lit, and the fire made up, it was apparent to him that this interview had been premeditated. Insensibly he braced himself to meet it with becoming fortitude, wishing that he dared light one of the cigarillos which his cousin Gideon had very reprehensively bestowed on him. But as Lord Lionel objected strongly to the vice of smoking, both on the score of its being a vulgar, dirty habit, and of its being excessively injurious to the lungs, he did not dare.

‘Sit down, Gilly!’ said Lord Lionel, treading over to the fire, and taking up his favourite position before it.

This command was less unnerving than earlier ones (delivered in ferocious accents) to stand up straight and put his hands behind his back, but the prospect of having to sit in a low chair while his uncle loomed over him was almost equally daunting. The Duke’s apprehensive look deepened, and although he did sit down, it was with obvious reluctance.

Lord Lionel, who did not include the taking of snuff amongst the vulgar and dirty habits engendered by the use of tobacco, helped himself to a generous pinch, and shut his box with a snap. ‘You know, Gilly,’ he said, ‘that letter of your uncle’s comes remarkably pat.’

The Duke’s eyes lifted quickly to his face. ‘Yes, sir?’

‘Yes, my boy. You will be of full age in less than a year now, and it is high time we were thinking of settling your affairs comfortably.’

The Duke was aware of a sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach. He kept his eyes fixed on his uncle’s face. ‘Yes, sir?’

For once in his life, Lord Lionel seemed disinclined to come speedily to the point of his discourse. He opened his snuff-box again, and said: ‘I have always tried to do my best for you, boy. I daresay you may sometimes have thought me harsh –’

‘Oh, no!’ said the Duke faintly.

‘Well, I am happy to hear you say so, for I am very fond of you, Gilly, and always have been. I have no scruple in telling you that apart from your health, and a want of spirits in you, you have never caused me anxiety.’

The Duke, feeling that a response was expected, stammered: ‘Th-thank you, sir’

‘I don’t say that you are as wise as I could wish,’ said Lord Lionel, tempering his praise, ‘or that you have not a great many faults, but on the whole I fancy your poor father might have been not dissatisfied with his son, had he lived to see you today.’ Here he took another pinch of snuff. As Gilly was unable to think of anything to say, an uneasy silence prevailed. Lord Lionel broke

it. 'Your father left you to my guardianship,' he said, 'and I think I may say that I have in every way open to me followed out what I knew to be his wishes. I even had you christened Adolphus,' he added, a slight sense of grievance overcoming him, 'although it is one of these newfangled German names that I very much dislike. However, that was a small thing, and you know I have never called you by it. And I have never permitted your uncle Henry to interfere in your education, for all he has been one of your trustees. I have nothing to say against your uncle, and no doubt his notions do very well for his own sons, but they will not do for me, and they would not have done for your father either, and a thousand pities it was that his name should have been included in the Trust. But there is no sense in repining over that, and I hope I know how to deal with my own brother.'

The Duke, drawing upon his recollection, could not feel that this hope was misplaced, but he did not think himself called upon to say so. Instead he uttered an indistinguishable murmur.

'There is no reason why you should be treated like a child, Gilly,' said Lord Lionel, in a burst of candour, 'so I shall not conceal from you that I have a very poor opinion of your uncle's judgement! He does not want, precisely, for sense, but you must know that he never partook of your father's and my sentiments as one could have wished he might have done, and when he married that foolish woman – but I do not wish to dwell upon that, and if he chose to ally himself with a female out of a canting Methodist family, and to breed a pack of ill-conditioned brats who can think of nothing better to do than to ruin a lawn it has taken fifty years to bring to perfection, I am sure it was not for me to cavil. Although, mind you,' he added admonishingly, 'I told him how it would be at the outset. But Henry was never one to listen to those who might be supposed to be a little wiser than himself. I trust you will not turn out to be the same, Gilly.'

The Duke assured him that he would not.

'No, well, I fancy I have drilled a few proper notions into your head,' agreed his uncle. 'But all this has nothing to do with what I have to say to you!' He bent his austere gaze upon Gilly's

downcast face, and was silent for a moment. ‘I am speaking of your marriage, Gilly,’ he said abruptly.

The Duke looked up, startled. ‘My marriage, sir!’

‘There is nothing to be surprised about in that, surely!’ said Lord Lionel. ‘It is not, I fancy, unknown to you that I have already made certain arrangements on your behalf. I do not believe in making a secret of a very ordinary business, and since I am quite as much concerned with the question of your future comfort and happiness as with the very important one of securing the succession, I have been careful to choose for you a bride who will bring you, besides the necessary advantages of birth and fortune, a reasonable chance of harmony in your future life. In this, I hope you will realise, my boy, that I have had all these modern notions with which I make no doubt you are imbued in my head. You are not to suppose that my mind was irrevocably fixed upon the first and most obvious choice. I have had several young females in my eye, but I believe they will not do for you, and it is now some years since I have entertained any other idea than that you should, as soon as you had come of full age, marry Lady Harriet Presteigne.’

The Duke got up suddenly, and said in some little agitation: ‘Yes – no! It has not been unknown to me. But the succession cannot be in danger, sir, while my cousin Gideon, and, indeed, my Uncle Henry’s five sons –’

‘Do not talk to me of your Uncle Henry’s sons!’ commanded Lord Lionel wrathfully. ‘If they are all to take after the eldest of them, who, I am hearing, is for ever in some disgraceful scrape – as I have very little doubt they will do, for what can one expect, if a man will marry a Methodist? – I can only say that I am astonished you should entertain the notion of seeing one of them here in your shoes for as much as a moment!’

‘But I should not see them in my shoes,’ pointed out the Duke reasonably. ‘And really, you know, sir, Matt’s scrapes cannot be called disgraceful! And in any event I am sure that Gideon would fill my shoes far better than I could ever do. Surely –’

‘You may put that out of your head once and for all!’ said

Lord Lionel, in his sternest voice. ‘Understand me, Gilly, I have never thought to see my son in your place, and nothing could more distress me than the knowledge that it must come to that in the end! I venture to say that Gideon shares my sentiments to the full. I do not know what cause he can have given you to suppose –’

‘None! Oh, none!’ Gilly said hurriedly. ‘I only meant – I only wished to say – that it cannot be thought *necessary* for me to marry so soon!’

‘So soon?’ repeated his uncle, raising his brows. ‘My dear boy, it has been an understood thing between myself and Ampleforth any time these five years! I make no doubt the young lady herself is fully aware of it, for her mother is a woman of great good sense, and will have made it her business to prepare the girl for the position she is destined to occupy.’

‘You think that Harriet herself knows of it?’ the Duke said, in a stunned voice.

‘Certainly. Why should she not?’ replied his uncle. ‘If you have some romantic notion in your head, I advise you to rid yourself of it, boy. Romantic notions do very well in a trashy novel, and I daresay they may not come amiss amongst the lesser ranks of society, but they are not for persons of our order, and that you may depend upon. Yes, yes, you think me very unfeeling, I daresay, but you may believe me when I tell you that I have seen more unhappiness arising out of a so-called love-match than from any other cause in this world. I dare swear you, at twenty-four, and with your head full of nonsense, have not half as much idea of what will suit you as I have. But don’t imagine, Gilly, that I would tie you up to someone for whom you feel the least degree of dislike! You cannot have failed to notice that your aunt and I have taken every opportunity of inviting the Ampleforths to Sale. I have encouraged you to visit them, and you have not been backward in accepting invitations to Ampleforth. I have made it my business to observe you narrowly, and I own that I shall be surprised to learn that you are wholly indifferent to Lady Harriet.’

The Duke grasped the back of a chair. He looked even paler than was natural in him, and acutely unhappy. ‘No, indeed! I have the greatest regard – She has always been most amiable – But marriage – !’

‘Come, Gilly!’ said Lord Lionel, a little impatiently, ‘you do not mean to tell me that you had never considered the question! You knew very well that the matter was arranged!’

‘Yes,’ the Duke said, in a hollow tone. ‘Yes, I did know. Only I hoped – I thought –’

‘Well, and what did you think and hope?’

‘I don’t know,’ said the Duke helplessly. ‘Only that perhaps something would occur – or some other man offer – or – or that it might not be quite yet!’

His uncle looked shrewdly at him. ‘Have you a *tendre* for some other female, Gilly?’ he asked.

The Duke shook his head.

‘Well, I thought you had not, for you have never been in the petticoat-line, but you need not scruple to tell me so if I have been mistaken.’ He waited, but the Duke only shook his head again. ‘Then what is the matter? Be open with me, I beg of you!’

The Duke took out his handkerchief, and pressed it to his lips. ‘I hardly know. I do not mean to say anything in Harriet’s disparagement! I have always been excessively attached to her, ever since we were children. She is everything that is amiable and obliging. Indeed, she is all compliance and good-nature, and is very pretty besides, but – but I had thought that when I came to marry I should choose a wife for myself, a lady for whom I felt – with whom I might be in love, sir!’

‘Oho! Here is a high flight!’ said his uncle, rather amused. ‘And where is this fine lady?’

‘I have not met one. I –’

‘I am happy to hear it, for if any one thing is more to be depended on than another it is that she would be quite ineligible! We all have our youthful fancies, Gilly, but it will not answer to be fashioning our lives on them. Now, you are not a schoolboy. You have been about the world a little: I took care that you

should do so. You have been presented at Court, you have taken your seat in the House, you have travelled, you have had a season in London. Had you formed an attachment for some female it would not have surprised me in the least, and had your affections become fixed upon an eligible object you would not have found me unreasonable. But although you have met any number of young females of *ton*, none has succeeded in capturing your fancy. I do not feel that in urging you to come to the point with Ampleforth I am tying you up in matrimony before you have had time to know your own mind.'

'Do you mean that I shall never feel – a – a stronger degree of attachment for a female than – than –'

'My dear Gilly, this is being foolish without permission! In plain terms, the sort of passion you have in mind has little to do with marriage. I grant that to be obliged to live with a woman whom you held in aversion would be a sad fate, but we need not consider that. You own that you are not indifferent to Lady Harriet. For a female, I believe her to have a superior understanding. Her disposition is amiable, and if you mean to object that there is a want of spirits in her I would point out to you that you have very odd humours yourself, and would find less rational comfort with a woman of more vivacity than with a quiet girl who would, I am persuaded, partake of many of your sentiments, and study to please you.'

'Oh, yes, yes!' interrupted Gilly. 'But –'

Lord Lionel held up his hand. 'No, listen to what I have to say to you, my boy! You think I do not enter into your feelings upon this occasion, but you are mistaken. I shall be plain with you. In Lady Harriet you will not find yourself saddled with a wife who will expect more from you than you are inclined to give. She is a very well brought-up girl; and while, on the one hand, I am satisfied that she will conduct herself, as Duchess of Sale, with propriety and discretion, she will not expect you to be always at her side. If you choose to mount a mistress, she will know how to look the other way, and you will not be obliged to face the reproaches which might be levelled at you by a woman of lesser

breeding. In short, you may be assured of a well-conducted household with an amiable woman at its head, and may indulge what romantic fancies you please out of it.'

'Do you suppose, sir,' said Gilly, in an extinguished tone, 'that it is with such sentiments as these that Harriet thinks of marriage with me – or – or with another?'

'I have been acquainted with Augusta Ampleforth any time these twenty years,' responded Lord Lionel readily, 'and I entertain no fears that Harriet has been allowed to fill her head with romantical stuff and nonsense. I daresay Lady Ampleforth may have some faults –'

'I have always thought her the most unfeeling woman I have ever met!' the Duke said.

'Well, well, now you are in your high ropes again! She is an ambitious woman, but she has a great deal of common sense, after all.'

The Duke released the chairback, and took a turn about the room. He was evidently agitated, and his uncle allowed him to walk about for a few minutes before saying: 'If you dislike it so very much, Gilly, you should have told me of it earlier. To draw back at this late date will be as bad as to declare off.'

The Duke turned a startled face towards him. 'Oh, no, surely not!'

'It has been understood between the two families for some years, and from what I hear the announcement of your engagement is pretty widely expected.'

The Duke looked quite horrified. 'But it cannot be! I have never offered – never said a word to Harriet, or given anyone the least reason to suppose that my affections had become fixed!'

'My dear boy, in our world these affairs are generally known. Ampleforth has refused one offer for Harriet's hand already, and I have little doubt that her ladyship will have dropped a hint or two abroad. It would be a great piece of folly to pretend that you are not a splendid matrimonial prize, Gilly, so we will not indulge ourselves with any humbug about that. In fact, except for Devonshire, who must be nearing thirty by now and seems to be

a settled bachelor – besides, he is extremely deaf – I do not know of one to equal you. Depend upon it, Augusta Ampleforth will not have been able to resist the temptation of telling her friends – in the strictest confidence, of course! – that she has such large expectations for her daughter. She must be the envy of her acquaintance!’

The Duke passed a hand through his fair locks. ‘I had no idea of this! Do you tell me that the Ampleforths – Harriet – have been expecting me to declare myself?’

‘Oh, well, no, I do not say that,’ replied Lord Lionel. ‘In fact, I told Ampleforth I would not have you established too early in life. Your health was too uncertain, and I wished you to have time to look about you before making your choice.’

‘My choice!’ Gilly ejaculated. ‘It seems I have none at all, sir!’

‘You have certainly made none,’ said his uncle dryly.

There was a defeated silence. After a few moments, Gilly said: ‘I do not know what to say. I must see Ampleforth, and – and Harriet too. Until I am persuaded that she does indeed expect me to offer – Well, I must see her!’

‘Not before you have spoken with her father!’ exclaimed Lord Lionel.

‘Oh, no!’ Gilly said wearily.

‘There is no need for you to be in a hurry,’ said Lord Lionel. ‘I believe the Ampleforths are in London at present, but they will be removing into the country at any moment now, I should suppose. Ampleforth is bound to invite you to one of his *battues*, and you may then –’

‘No, no, I would rather by far visit him in town!’ Gilly said. ‘I had been thinking that I would go up to see my cousin. If you do not object, sir, I will do so.’

‘Object! Pray, why should you always be supposing that I may object to what you wish to do, Gilly?’ demanded Lord Lionel. ‘But you will find London very thin of company at this season, and I own I do not like the fogs for you, and they will soon be starting, you know. However, if you like to go for a few days it

can very well be arranged. I will send an express to Scriven, to warn him to have Sale House in readiness for you. Romsey may accompany you, and – ’

‘I should like to go alone – and to an hotel!’ said the Duke desperately.

‘Alone and to an hotel!’ repeated his uncle, thunderstruck. ‘Next I shall be told that you would like to travel to town on the stage-coach!’

‘No, I don’t wish to travel on a stage-coach, but I do not want Romsey!’

Lord Lionel eyed him speculatively. ‘Now, what mischief are you up to, Gilly?’ he asked, not displeased. ‘Do you mean to go raking in town?’

The Duke smiled rather perfunctorily. ‘No, sir, but I find Romsey very tedious, and I am very sure he will find me a dead bore, for I mean to see a good deal of Gideon, and you know that they could never agree! And I thought I might shoot at Manton’s, and look in at Tatt’s besides, and that sort of thing is not in Romsey’s line at all.’

‘No, very true,’ agreed Lord Lionel. ‘So you mean to buy another horse, do you? What is it you want? Something showy to lionise a bit, eh? You had best find out Belper, and desire him to go with you. Not that I mean to say you are not able to judge a horse for yourself, but Belper can advise you.’

The Duke was too thankful to have escaped the company of his clerical tutor to jeopardise his position by demurring at having his other bear-leader thrust upon him. Captain Belper might override him in the matter of choosing a horse, but he was not likely to moralise, and he would not be staying under the same roof as his erstwhile pupil, and so would not be able to keep his movements under strict surveillance.

‘You will tell Scriven to draw on Child’s for whatever money you may require,’ said Lord Lionel. ‘No need to trouble yourself about that. But as for staying in an hotel, certainly not, Gilly! I would not vouch for the way they air the sheets even at the Clarendon, and when you have a very good house of your own

it would be the height of absurdity not to use it. Borrowdale may go to London ahead of you –’

‘I do not mean to entertain largely. Should Borrowdale not remain with you, sir?’ said the Duke.

‘We shall do very well with the under-butler. Naturally Borrowdale and Chigwell go with you. You must not blame me for keeping only a skeleton-staff at Sale House, Gilly. While you were under age I should not have considered it proper to squander your fortune in keeping up several establishments as they of course must be kept up when you are married. And you have lived so little in London that it hardly seemed worth while – But that must all be looked into presently. And that puts me in mind of something else! You need not discuss the marriage settlements with Ampleforth, you know. He will not expect it of you. You are of age, but you will do very much better to leave all such matters in my hands.’

‘Yes,’ said the Duke.

‘I have nothing to say against your being with your cousin: indeed, I hope you will see as much of him as you may, but do not let yourself be drawn into that military set, boy! Gideon is older than you, and can be trusted to keep the line, but there are some fast fellows amongst them, such as I would not wish to see you associating with too freely. And you never know where that kind of society may lead you! Park-saunterers, and half-pay officers, hanging out for invitations: toad-eaters of that style! It will not do for you by any means.’

‘No,’ said the Duke.

‘And if you take my advice, Gilly, you will be a little on your guard with Gaywood!’ further admonished his lordship. ‘I hear that he is being very wild, and if once he gets it into his head that you are to marry his sister I should own myself very much astonished if he did not try to borrow money from you, or some such thing. I do not mean to be dictating to you, mind! But if he tries to introduce you to one of these pernicious gaming-houses, do not go with him!’

‘No,’ said the Duke.

‘Well,’ said his lordship, glancing at the clock, ‘I do not think there is anything more I wish to say to you at present, and I see that Borrowdale will be bringing in the tea-tray in a few minutes. We had better go back to join your aunt.’ He nodded graciously at his nephew, and added, a little inaccurately, but in great good-humour: ‘We have had a comfortable prose together, have we not?’

Three

*F*our days later, the Duke of Sale set out from Sale Park, in the Midlands, for London, driving in his own chaise, with liveried postilions, and outriders to protect his person and his chattels from possible highwaymen. He was followed by his valet, in a second coach piled high with baggage; and preceded by his steward, his butler, his head groom, and several underlings, all of whom were considered by his uncle and his steward to be absolutely necessary to his comfort. Upon the day following his decision to visit the Metropolis, a servant had been sent post to London, to warn his agent of his approaching arrival. The man had carried with him a letter addressed by Lord Lionel to one Captain Horace Belper, half-pay officer, desiring this gentleman to render his Grace all the advice and assistance of which he might be thought to stand in need, so that whatever plans the Duke might have entertained of escaping a visit from the Captain were foiled at the outset.

He had been seen off by his uncle, his aunt, his Chaplain, and his old nurse. His aunt and his nurse had confined their parting counsel to reminders to him to take James's Powders on the least suspicion of internal disorder; to beware of damp socks and over-rich foods; and not to hesitate to call in that eminent physician, Dr Baillie of Grosvenor Street, if he should chance to take a chill. His Chaplain recommended him not to miss the opportunity of attending a forthcoming lecture at the Royal Society on Developments of the Nebular Hypothesis, recently advanced by the Marquis de Laplace. His uncle, having testily informed his

other well-wishers that no young man setting forth for London on a visit of pleasure wished to receive a clutter of such foolish advice, said that he was to beware of French hazard, not to play billiards except in select company, or roulette in any company at all, and to make a point of visiting his dentist.

Fortified by this send-off, and aware that he had at least one person in his train who would do what lay in his power to persuade him to follow out all the more disagreeable orders laid upon him, the Duke left Sale Park, a prey to dejection, and a great many rebellious thoughts.

For the first half of the journey he indulged his fancy by forming several impossible schemes for shocking and confounding his relatives, but as soon as the absurdity of these struck him he began to be amused at himself, and his ill-humour, never very durable, lifted. He might chafe at his uncle's domineering ways, but he could not be angry with him. He thought it must indeed have been a wearing task to have reared such an unpromising specimen as himself, and for perhaps the hundredth time resolved that it should not be a thankless task as well. Lord Lionel might have been, in the past, a severe guardian; he might cling to strict, old-fashioned ideas, and insist on having these conformed to; he might often have been over-anxious, and have irked his ward with restrictions and prohibitions; but the Duke knew well that he had acted throughout on the highest principles, and had for him an affection perhaps as deep as for his own son. He had certainly taken far greater care of him, and shown him more partiality. It was Gideon who had received the blame for any boyish escapade – with a certain amount of justice, reflected the Duke, smiling to himself, as he recalled various instances of his elder and more enterprising cousin's exploits. Gideon was sent to Eton, but Lord Lionel dared not expose his sickly nephew to the rigours of public school life, and engaged for him a resident tutor, and any number of visiting instructors, from a French dancing-master to a Professor in the Art of Self-Defence. It had been solicitude, not mistrust, which had prompted him to send Gilly up to Oxford

under the ægis of Mr Romsey. He had previously tried the experiment of allowing Gilly to go on a visit to some relatives unattended by Mr Romsey, and Gilly had most unfortunately taken a chill which (owing, his lordship was convinced, to neglect) had developed into an inflammation of the lungs which had nearly carried him off. There could be no question after that of sending him up to Oxford alone.

Only his obstinate conviction that no gentleman who had not spent a few years on the Continent could be considered to be more than half-educated had prevailed upon Lord Lionel to take the hazardous risk of exposing his nephew, upon his coming down from Oxford, to the dangers of travel. But the long war with France having terminated in the glorious battle of Waterloo (in which action Gideon had sustained a wound that caused his father no particular anxiety), the Continent was once more open to English travellers, and Lord Lionel steeled himself to send Gilly on a tour which should conform as nearly as possible to the Grand Tours of his own young days. With this end in view, he engaged Captain Belper to share with Mr Romsey the duties and responsibilities of bear-leading the Duke through France, Italy, and such parts of Germany as had not been ravaged by war.

The Duke was well aware that in choosing Captain Belper to instruct him in all manly exercises Lord Lionel had meant to place him in the charge of one who, while old enough to hold authority over him, should not be too old or too staid to be a companion to him. Unfortunately, the quiet young nobleman found that he had little in common with the bluff soldier, sometimes came near to disliking him, and never accorded him more than the gentle courtesy he used towards Mr Romsey.

He had spent two years abroad, and although these had not been altogether enjoyable they had certainly done much to improve the state of his health. He wondered sometimes how any two persons could have been prevailed upon to undertake the task of following out the conflicting orders laid upon Mr Romsey and Captain Belper by Lord Lionel. He commanded them to indulge any reasonable wish their charge might express;