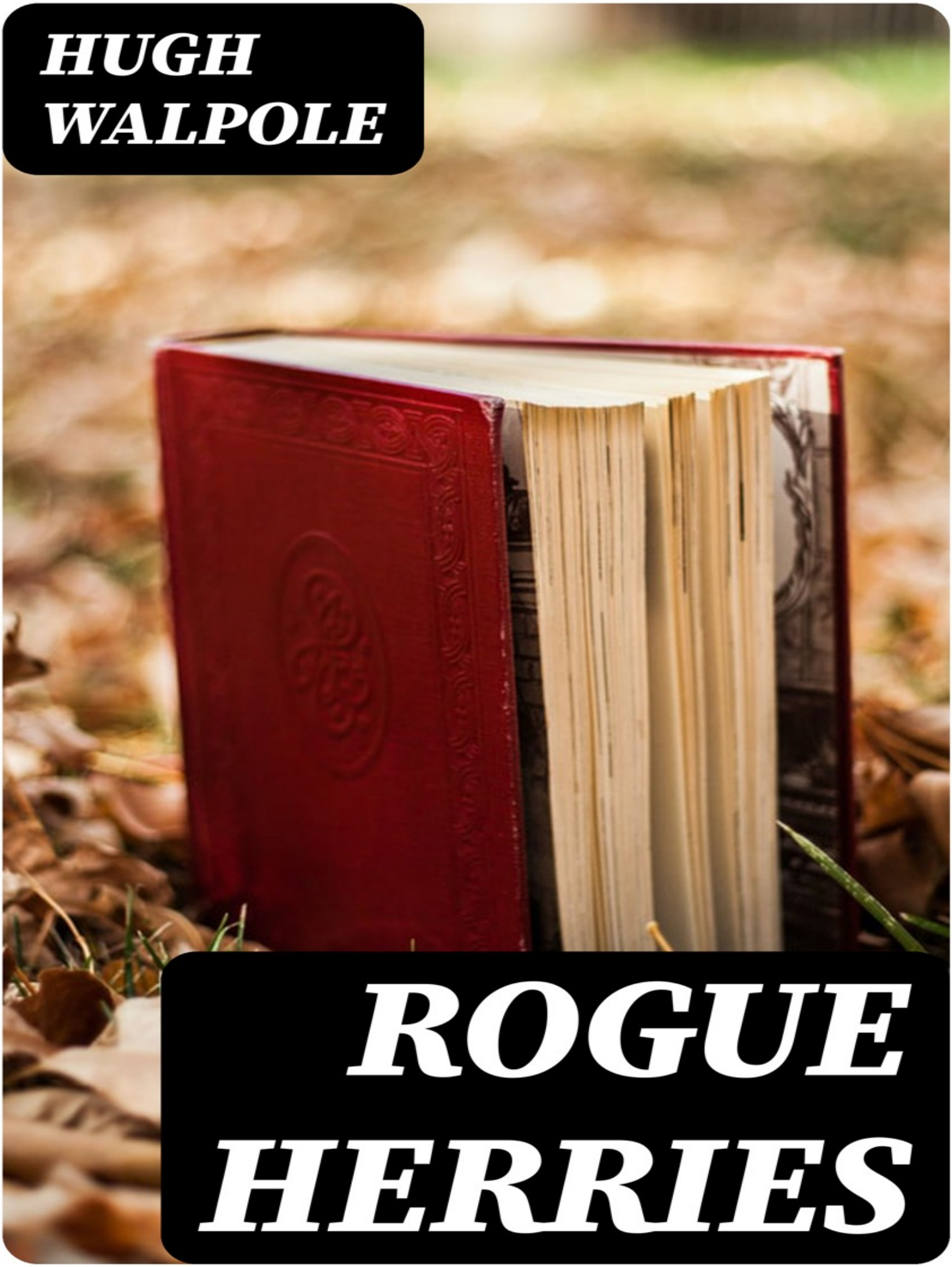
HUGH WALPOLE



ROGUE HERRIES

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Rogue Herries

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PART I

THE CUCKOO IS NOT ENCLOSED

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THE INN—THE HOUSE

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A little boy, David Scott Herries, lay in a huge canopied bed, half awake and half asleep.

He must be half awake because he knew where he was—he was in the bedroom of the inn with his sisters, Mary and Deborah; they were in the bed with him, half clothed like himself, fast sleeping. Mary's plump naked arm lay against his cheek, and Deborah's body was curled into the hollow of his back and her legs were all confused with his own. He liked that because he loved, nay, worshipped, his sister Deborah.

He knew also that he was awake because, lying looking up, he could see the canopy that ran round the top of the bed. It was a dull faded green with a gold thread in it. He could see the room too, very large, with rough mottled white walls and a big open stone fireplace; there was a roaring, leaping fire—the only light in the room—and he could see very clearly the big, shining brass fire-dogs with grinning mouths like dragons and stout curly tails.

He knew, too, that he was awake, because he could see Alice Press sitting there, her clothes gathered up to her knees, warming her legs. He did not like Alice Press, but she always fascinated him, and he wondered now of what she was thinking, so motionless, her head with its red hair pushed forward, her naked neck above her silver brocade.

He knew that he was awake, because he could hear the sounds of the inn, voices calling, doors banging in the wind, steps on the stair, and even the snap-snap of horses' hoofs

on the cobbles of the yard. He could hear the wind too, rushing up to the windows and shaking the panes and tearing away again, and then he shivered, pleasantly, luxuriously, because it was so warm and safe where he was and so cold and dangerous outside.

Then he shivered again because he remembered that he, with the others, must soon plunge out again into that same wind and mud and danger.

He would like to stay thus, in this warm bed, for ever and ever.

But, although he was awake enough to know all these things, he must be asleep also—asleep because, for one thing, the room would not stay still, but leapt and rollicked with the fire. All the things in it moved; the fire-dogs grinned and yawned; over a large arm-chair of faded red silk, oddly enough, some harness had been slung, and it lay there in coils of silver and dark brown leather, and these coils turned and stretched and slipped like snakes. Then against the wall there was a long, thin mirror in tarnished silver and, in this, Alice Press was most oddly reflected, the side of her face that was shown there being very thin and red, her hair tawny-peaked like a witch’s hat; her eyebrow jumped up and down in a terrifying manner.

Only David was not afraid. He was a very fearless boy. But he thought, as he lay there and watched, how ugly she was in the mirror, and that if his father saw her thus he would not chuck her beneath the chin and so make his mother unhappy. And, although he was not afraid, he was glad nevertheless that Mary’s warm arm was against his

cheek and the round shape of Deborah’s body against his back.

Because it might be that after all Alice Press was a witch. (He had always had his secret suspicions.) The way that she sat there now, so motionless, bending forward, was just as though she were making spells—and the silver harness blinked and the glass of the mirror trembled as the flame of the fire rose and fell again.

Then, again, it must be that he was still asleep because, although he knew that he was lying in his bed, he knew also that he was yet bumping and tossing in the coach. In that coach they had surely been for weeks and weeks, or so at least it had seemed to his tired and weary body.

At first when they had set out from Doncaster—how long ago?—he had been all pride and pleasure. It had been a fair and lovely morning—one of the last of the late summer days. The sun was shining, the birds singing, such gay bustle about the cobbled courtyard of the inn, the maids looking down from the windows, the hostlers busy about the horses, the postilions polite and eager to his father, all of them, Mother and Father Roche and Alice Press and Mary and Deborah fitting so comfortably into the soft warm inside of the coach, that had even pictures of hunting painted on the walls and little windows with gold round the edges.

Yes, it had been all gay enough then, but how miserable it had soon become! He could not now divide the days and nights from one another: moreover, he was still there in the coach, bumped up and down, thrown here and there, sleeping, waking with cramp and pins and needles, and Deborah crying and needing comforting, and Mary cross,

and his mother frightened, and Alice Press sulky. Only Father Roche, reading in his purple book, or looking steadily in front of him, never perturbed nor upset nor unhappy, always grave and kind, and miles and miles away from them all!

Then the Great North Road, which had sounded so fine and grand when he had first heard of it, how different it was in reality! Not fine and grand at all, but full of deep ruts and mud so fearful that again and again the coach was hopelessly stuck in it, and everyone had to pull and push, cursing and swearing. Once they were almost upset. The coach went right over on its side and the horses went down, and they were all on the top one of another. He, David, had a bruise on his right leg, and his mother's cheek was cut.

The further they went the colder it became. They seemed, almost at once, to leave summer right behind them.

Nor were the inns where they stopped fine and clean like the Doncaster one, but cold, draughty, and the floors and walls often crawling with spiders and other more evil things.

He seemed, lying there in the bed watching the leaping fire, to be transferred suddenly back into one of the worst of them—where, tired and bruised with the rough travelling, he had stumbled into the low-ceilinged, ill-lighted, ill-smelling room, huddled with his mother and sisters at a dirty table in a dim corner, and there stared out into the rude, confused babble—men, women, children, dogs, drinking, shouting and singing, the dogs waiting, mouths agape, while the food was tossed to them, four men playing at some game in a corner, a man with a fiddle and a monkey dressed in a crimson jacket dancing in the middle of the sandy floor, the heated

damp of the room rising to the ceiling and trickling in wet smeary streaks down the walls, a smell of straw and human breath and dung and animals and tallow—and in the middle of this his father standing, in his dark purple riding-coat, his high hat cocked, his waistcoat of silver thread showing between the thick lapels of his coat, his whip with the silver head in his hand—like a god, like a king, demanding a private room, aweing at last the fat landlord, round like a tub, causing all that coarse roomful to feel that a great man had come among them. There was little, tired though he was, that David had not that night noticed, from the painting of the King over the fireplace to a swinging gilt cage with a blue bird, and a man who said he was from the wars and crept to their table on his wooden stumps showing that his right hand had no fingers....

Yes, he remembered everything of that night (was not the man with no legs and no fingers over there now by the fire watching Alice Press, her back of stiff brocade?), because on that night a great happiness had come to him. He had slept with his father. His father and Father Roche and himself had slept in the one small, dirty room, all three on the low, dirty bed. At first it had been almost terrible because his father had been in one of his rages, cursing the place and the dirt and the cold, cursing his family, too, for persuading him to the expense and danger of a private coach, when they would all of them have been so much better on horseback.

Then, seeing his little son straight and sturdy there in his smallclothes, looking up and waiting for orders as to whether he should go naked to bed or no, with one of his

sudden gestures he had caught him up and hugged him, then thrown off only his outer clothing, then taken David and wrapped him, close up against himself, in his great riding-coat—and the two of them stretched out on the bed, Father Roche bodily beside them but spiritually a world away.

How wonderful that night had been! David had slept but little of it. He had lain close against his father's heart, his hands across his father's breast, feeling the great beat of the heart and the iron ribs beneath the thin shirt, his cheek against the smooth softness of his father's neck.

That had been a great happiness, but after that night there had been only trouble. On the high ground towards Kendal they had suffered a fearful storm of wind and rain. It had seemed to them that the end of the world had come; the coach had sunk into the mud so that for hours they could not move it. They had been warned, at the last town, that they must beware of footpads, and at every sound they had started. Quite a crowd of travellers had been accompanying them for safety—farmers, pedlars and other pedestrians. The weather perhaps had saved them. All the footpads were within doors, warm and cosy beside their fires.

In Kendal they had left the coach and had ridden the remainder of their journey on horseback. David, tired though he was, had found that glorious, riding in front of his father, mounting the hills, then dropping under the faint misted morning sun down beside the miraculous waters and mountains, a land of faery such as David had never dreamt

of, sheets of white and silver, the mountains of rose and amber and the trees thick with leaves of gold.

They had ridden into Keswick in the afternoon, quite a cavalcade of them, with their possessions on pack-horses, the women and children so desperately fatigued that they could scarcely keep their seats. So, in a dream, to the inn, and the children stripped of their outer clothing and flung into the great bed, the two little girls at once dropping off into heavy slumber.

So should David have done, but instead he had lain there in this strange state of waking sleep. It was, possibly, that he was too greatly excited. For months past, in their home outside Doncaster, he had been anticipating this journey. He had not been happy in the Doncaster home. His father had been so much away, his mother so unhappy, there had been no one save his sisters with whom he could play. He had hated the stuffy little house, the rooms so small and dark, the country surrounding it so dull and uninteresting. And always there had been this unhappiness, his father angry and rebellious, his mother often in tears, Alice Press, whom he hated, supposedly looking after the children but doing nothing for them, gentlemen arriving from Doncaster, drinking, playing cards, singing and shouting all night long. His only interest had been his lesson with Father Roche, who, while teaching him Latin and Greek, would talk to him about many wonderful things, about London with its palaces and theatres and gardens that ran down to the river, and Rome where England’s rightful King lived, and then of God and Heaven, and how one must live to please God—to obey

Father Roche in all things and to keep secret in his heart everything that Father Roche told him.

The only other entertainment had been the times when he was with Nathaniel and Benjamin, the men-servants. Nathaniel taught him the small-sword and cudgel, and Benjamin taught him to box and to wrestle, and he had been twice with Nathaniel to a cock-fight and once to the village to see a bear baited.

Nevertheless, had it not been for his father and Deborah the days would have been heavy indeed. He was a boy of passionate affections and his whole heart was given to his father and his sister. His love for his father was worship and his love for Deborah was protection.

His father was entirely a being from another world like St. Michael or St. George who came in the Christmas plays. His father who was so handsome and splendid could do no wrong, although when he was drunk he was hard to understand; when he beat Benjamin until the blood ran down Benjamin’s back David was sorry for the man, but yet was certain that his father was in the right.

But Deborah was of his own flesh and blood. So, too, was Mary, but he did not care for Mary. She, although she was so young, had already her own independent fashion of living and, because she was so pretty, could have her way when she pleased, which she very well knew. But Deborah was not pretty and was often afraid. Deborah believed that David could do anything, and she always came to him when she was in trouble and trusted him to help her. He could do no wrong in Deborah’s eyes, and so he loved her and guarded her as well as he could from every harm.

At the thought of Deborah he turned a little and put his arm about her, which she feeling, although deep in sleep, recognised by a little dreamy murmur of pleasure.

Just then he heard the door (which was behind the canopied bed so that he could not see it) open, and an instant later it was all that he could do to withhold a cry of pleasure. For it was his father who had entered, who was now standing quite close to them, looking down upon them. David closed his eyes—not because he wanted to be deceitful, but because he knew that his father wished that he should be asleep.

Nevertheless, one look had been enough. His father was resplendent! For days and nights now he had seen him soiled and disarrayed with the storms and struggles of that awful journey, muddied and blown and uncaring whether he were neatly kept or no. There were times when his father seemed to prefer dirt and disorder, and they were bad times too. An unkempt wig, tarnished buckles and buttons, a soiled cravat, and David had learnt to know that the disarray and rebellion were more than physical.

Only an hour ago David had seen him striding about the courtyard of the inn, mud-splashed to the thighs, raging and swearing. That had been his last thought before he had fallen into this half-slumber, that his father was still out there in the wind and rain ordering Benjamin and the rest, seeing to the horses that were to carry them the final stage of their weary journey. But now, how resplendent in the white-walled fire-leaping room! David in that one glance had seen it all.

The fine curled chestnut wig, the beautiful claret-coloured, gold-embroidered coat with the long spreading skirts, the claret-coloured breeches and grey silk stockings, the fluted grey-silk waistcoat stamped with red roses, the little sword at his side—ah! glory upon glory, was anything in the world anywhere so glorious as his father thus! No, nothing in London or Rome of which Father Roche had told him—nothing that China or India itself could show!

His heart swelling with pride and happiness he lay there, pretending to be asleep, watching through half-closed eyes. He saw then an odd thing. He saw his father, on tip-toe, approach the fire, steal upon Alice Press, she motionless gazing into the flame, lean forward, put then his hands, deep in their splendid white ruffles, lightly about her face, closely across her eyes. She gave a little scream, but David knew that at once she was aware who this was.

Laughing, Francis Herries withdrew his hands. She looked up, smiling that strange smile of hers, half pleasure, half rebellious anger.

‘Why, sir’ (she was, like David, greatly surprised at his grandeur), ‘what fine feathers we’re wearing!’

‘Hush,’ he put his fingers to his lips, ‘the children are sleeping.’

‘I fancy so. They sound still enough. Poor babies—after such a devilish journey!’ She turned again from him and stared back into the fire. ‘You are dressed to meet your brother?’

‘Why not to meet yourself, beautiful lady?’

He was laughing, that careless, jolly, kindly, good-to-all-the-world laugh that, as David knew, came only when he

was happy. So he was happy now! David was glad.

‘Myself?’ She turned to him fully, showing the deep swell of her bosom beneath the brocaded vest. ‘No, I think not. God! that I had not consented to come on this madcap journey.’

For answer he bent down and, still laughing, caught her head in his hands, brought his mouth to hers, kissed her on the lips, the cheeks, the eyes, then, almost violently, flung her away from him, straightening his body as he did so.

‘Do you like that better? Does that make you more content with your journey?’

‘No, why should it?’ She shrugged her shoulders, turning back to the fire. ‘Do you love me? No. Then what is a kiss?’

‘Love—and love.’ He laughed. ‘I am no captive to it, if that’s your meaning. I visit it, wish it good day, spend a pretty hour in its company—so I am never weary of it nor it of me. Love? And what do you mean by love?’

‘I mean,’ she answered fiercely, ‘those foul, filthy, beggarly days and nights of mud and dung and stinking beds; the pains and bruises that I have known on this journey and the idiocies of your wife and the wailings of your children and the evil dirty tempers of yourself.... And what do I receive in return for these things?’

She rose up suddenly and turned to him—a tall broad woman, with scarlet hair and a white face, who would soon be stout.

David, watching her, had never seen her like this, so alive, her big eyes with the fair, faint eyebrows staring, the big bosom under the silver brocade heaving, the big mouth in the pale face half open.

Francis Herries looked at her gently, kindly and with amusement. ‘What do you get?’ speaking low so that the children should not be waked. He put a hand on her shoulder, and she stood strong and sturdy without moving. David could see her full face now in the mirror and he watched absorbed because it was so awake. Always it had been yawning, the lazy eyes half closed, the cheeks heavy with indolence as she sleepily ate sugar-plums and cakes and sugar figs.

‘What do you get? … Something. Nothing. And what is there to get? A little hugging and fumbling, sweating and panting, and then satiety.’ He looked at her even with more earnest study, as though in truth he had never seen her before, and her eyes did not fall before his. ‘You elected to come—to the end of the world. No roads. Savages. A chill house with the rain always falling—and the ghosts of all your sins, my dear.’

She, with a sudden movement that surprised him, caught him round the cheek and with her white face against his ruddy brown one whispered eagerly, furiously in his ear. The fire leapt as though in sympathy with her urgency, and the figures swayed and swelled in the silver mirror.

Francis Herries withdrew from her slowly, carefully, as though he would not hurt her, no, neither her body nor her soul. But he was many, many miles away from her as he answered:

‘So that’s the way of it.… To leave them in the mud and rain and find sunshine, the two of us, alone—alone.’ He smiled—a beautiful smile, David, who did not understand the most of this strange conversation, thought. ‘Alone with

me, Alice, you'd be in despair in a half-hour. No one has been alone with me ever and not suffered the intensest weariness. I have suffered it with myself, recurring agonies of it. And you are not made to be wearied.

'Nevertheless, you will be infinitely dull. Days of rain and mud in a half-tumbled house cut off from everything but the savages. It's your own choice, my dear. And only my body to comfort you. My body without my soul, I fear. My soul has flown. I lost it a week back. I shall find it doubtless on a tree in Borrowdale.'

David saw that she did not understand him, that she gazed at him with a look that he himself did not understand, a look of rage, of love, of uncertainty, of disappointment. She was not very clever, Alice Press. Young though he was, David already had an instinct of that.

His father came softly to the bed and looked down on them. David, his eyes tightly closed, could nevertheless see him, the gold of his coat, the white silk of the lapels, the curling splendour of the chestnut wig. It was as though his father were weaving a spell over him—his eyes so fixedly closed that they burnt. A spell, a spell! The crystal in the silver mirror turning, Alice Press mounting her broomstick and riding through the dark heavy-hung sky, and his father riding on a silver horse into the moon and stars.... A spell! A spell!

'Wake up! wake up!'

It was Alice Press's soft white hand shaking his shoulder. He opened his eyes. His father was gone as though he had never been. They were to be up and have their clothes on

and see their good uncle and aunt—Uncle Pomfret and Aunt Jannice.

The two little girls, like little round fluffy owls bewildered by their sleep, dazed with the strange light of the leaping fire, fastened their own clothes. Mary was eight years of age, and Deborah seven, and they had been taught from a long time to do for themselves. They had been wearing their winter dresses these last days, and Mary's had dark fur edging the green velvet and Deborah's grey fur upon crimson. David was dressed in a short yellow jacket and long tight breeches, buff-colour, reaching down to his ankles. He tied Deborah's ribbons and points and fastened her shoes. She was very frightened. She was scarcely as yet awake. She did not know what this great room was nor where they were now going. She was terrified of her Uncle Pomfret and Aunt Jannice. She was weary, utterly weary after the days of the journey. She wanted her mother. She, like David, hated Alice Press. She was like a little downy bird, her head covered with soft flaxen curls. She stood there biting her lips so that she would not cry. Had David not been there she *must* have cried. But she stood near him looking up into his face. Where David was no harm could come.

It was now time for them to go down, but they had to delay because Mary must have her horn-book to carry with her. It was a fine one, and its back was of gilded and embossed leather, crimson with silver wire. David knew at once why Mary must have it. It was to show off before Aunt Jannice that she might notice how exceptional a child Mary was.

They searched here and there. Mary had had it with her before she fell asleep. Alice Press swore and threatened. It was of no use. Mary had a marvellous obstinacy when the purpose was concerned with herself. The horn-book was found beneath one of the fire-dogs, and Mary walked out, holding it virtuously by the handle, her head up as though she were leading a procession.

They went down the wooden staircase, which was from Elizabeth's time, very beautiful and broad, the newels thick and strong, the hand-rails framed into the newels, the balustrade beautifully arcaded, a lovely symmetry of delicacy and strength. In the hall below it was very dark, save in the doorway that looked out into the street where the light of the afternoon still gleamed in pale shadow against black cloud. Great gusts of the gale blew into the hall, at the end of which was a huge stone fireplace with a roaring fire. On broad tables candelabra held many candles that also blew in the wind.

Across the shining floor servants, drawers, maids, men from the kitchen were constantly passing into the wild light and out of it again. Uncertain though the light was, it was enough for David to see his father, standing very stiff and upright, his mother also, and a lady and gentleman who must, David knew, be his uncle and aunt.

The children were brought up to their parents. Mary at once went to her mother, caught her mother's hand, and so stayed, looking very pretty. David kissed his aunt's hand, bowed to his uncle, then stood straight and stiff beside his father. His uncle Pomfret was a big, broad, stout man with a very red face, large wide-open eyes and a little snub nose.

He was dressed in rough country clothes, his long boots were splashed with mud. He smelt strongly of wind, rain, liquor and the stables. He seemed good-natured and friendly, laughed much and struck his leg often with a riding-whip. Aunt Jannice was thin and tall, with a peaked face and a big brown wart in the middle of her cheek. She wore a broad hat and had a curly brown wig which sat oddly about her yellow leathern face. She was very composed, dignified and superior. She contrasted strangely with David's mother, who was always so stout and red and flustered and was given to breaking into odd little hummings of tunes from simple nervousness.

David knew that there was nothing that irritated his father so much as this habit of hers. But David's attention was fixed upon his father. He wished desperately—although he did not know why he wished—that his father had not dressed so grandly. Only half an hour before he had been so proud of his father's grandeur, now he was ashamed of it.

He was sure that Uncle Pomfret and Aunt Jannice were laughing at his father for being in such grand clothes. Not that his father would care, but he, David, cared for him. Uncle Pomfret was much older than his father (he was indeed twenty-two years older; he was the eldest, as Francis Herries was the youngest, he fifty-two years of age and Francis only thirty). He looked as though he might be David's grandfather.

There was indeed no physical resemblance between the two brothers. David discovered also another thing—that they were all striving to persuade his father of something, and his father was very obstinate. He knew how his father

looked when he was obstinate, he smiled and was haughty and said little. So it was now.

They were trying to persuade him to stay in his brother's house at least to-night and not to go on in the wind and wet and darkness into Borrowdale. But his father only smiled. He had planned to be in the house to-night and be in the house he would, and the others should be there too.

David saw that his mother was very near to tears, her round mottled face all puckered, and she bit continually at her lace handkerchief. She was desperately weary, poor woman, and afraid and very unhappy.

'Why, blast you and damn you, brother,' said Uncle Pomfret very heartily. 'You must stay with us to-night or prove yourself most unbrotherly. We had always expected it so—Had we not, Janny? There's no road over to Herries. You are going among the savages there, brother. I can swear you were dismayed enough at seeing this griddling little inn after your great Doncaster houses, but this is Paradise to what you're going to. Don't say I didn't warn you now. Damn me for a curmudgeon, brother, if I bottomed you into doing it—but to-night you shall stay with us. There's your lady sunk with weariness, and the babes too, damn me if they're not.'

He shouted all this as though across a windy common, and all that Francis Herries said to it was:

'Herries sees us all to-night, and we'll take our luck with the road.'

'You'll be the rest of this day on horseback,' his brother assured him. 'There's not a cart in Borrowdale, brother, nor a road to carry one. It's all horseback round here. Damn it,

you’re in Chiney in Borrowdale, but never say I didn’t warn you. You wanted cheap living and you’ve got it. Naked bottom and bare soil! that’s life in Borrowdale.’

David had never heard so rough and coarse and hearty a voice, and it seemed to him strange that this big red man should be his father’s brother. He jumped, too, from the sharp contrast when a moment later his aunt spoke:

‘Come now, Francis. Have some softness for the family. The children can scarce stand with their weariness. Margaret, persuade him. There is room enough with us for so long as you please to remain.’

Her voice was cold and thin like the steady trickle of a determined pump. When she spoke, she stared in front of her, looking neither to right nor left, as though she were reciting a set piece.

David’s mother, thus appealed to, very nervously and not looking at her husband, answered:

‘Indeed, it’s very kindly of you, Jannice. We are weary and ’tis late. To-morrow would be time enough.’

‘There, brother!’ Sir Pomfret broke in with a roar, ‘have you no tender parts? Your wife and the children at least shall stay with us. You shall ride alone if you are resolved—you and the priest,’ he added, suddenly dropping his voice.

‘There—that’s sufficient,’ Francis Herries answered sharply. ‘My wife will be thankful enough when she’s there and settled. In an hour’s time the horses will be moving and ourselves on them. Thank you for your goodwill, brother. And now for a meal. It is ready and waiting.’

It was now late for dining. To the children, indeed, it would, before this tremendous journey of theirs, have

seemed an incredible hour, for their dinner had been at three of the afternoon ever since they could remember, but now all their customs and habits were in ruin, and they accepted, poor things, blindly and without a murmur what came to them.

They were, however, all three, too tired to have an appetite. In the little private room they were crowded about the small table. David to his distress was next to his uncle, who roared and rattled and laughed as he helped the food, so that it was like being seated next an earthquake.

There was a good baked pie of a leg of mutton, and roasted chickens with pease and bacon, and a fine fruit tart that would, at another time, have made David’s mouth water. There was much wine, too, and of this Uncle Pomfret began to drink very heartily indeed, and shouted to the others to do the same. The noisier he became the more upright and magnificent was Aunt Jannice.

Very fine, especially, was she when she rose to wash her spoon in a bowl of water behind the table, so that, having just used it for pease and bacon, it should not now be soiled for the fruit tart. David’s mother, who had never seen anyone do this before, could not hide her staring wonder.

David, in spite of his weariness which made everything around him like a dream, fancied that his aunt was storing all things up in her mind, so that for many weeks she would be able to retail to her genteel friends all the strange things that this wild family had done. He did not love her the better for fancying this.

But he was in so dreamy a state that he could be sure of nothing. He, in his half-dream, saw—and he knew that his

mother saw this too—that his father was drinking in a defiance of his stout red-faced brother. He knew what his father was like when he was drunken, and he hated his uncle that he should tempt him. Throughout this journey his father had been very fine, drinking nothing, aware perhaps of the charge there was upon him. And in any case he drank little when Father Roche was there.

But in everything that he did, while his brother was present, there was defiance. There had been defiance in his grand clothes, defiance in his refusing to stay in Keswick, defiance now in every gesture. David, because he adored his father, knew all this with a wisdom beyond his years. Meanwhile, in this dreamy state, it was all that he could do with his wits to defend himself against his uncle, who was pushing pieces of meat and of pie on to his plate and even holding his head back and poking food into his mouth. But once when he was about to force some wine down his throat Francis Herries called out quietly:

‘Nay, brother, leave the boy alone. He shall have wine when he wishes for it. It shan’t be thrust on him.’ Pomfret broke out into a flurry of magnificent and filthy oaths. He then thrust David in the ribs and cried at him: ‘Why, damn thee, boy, dost thou not follow thy father? He’s a lecherous foul-dealing knave enough, I’ll be bound—no Herries, an he ain’t. Drink thy uncle’s health, boy, and be damned to thy father!’

‘Pomfret!’ said Aunt Jannice. It was enough. The uncle was cowed like a dog under a whip and took some sugar-plums from a plate and swallowed them, three at a time, like a confused child. David looked across to his father. It

seemed to him then, as it was to seem to him increasingly in the coming days, that they were younger and elder brother, not father and son. And, indeed, there was only the difference of nineteen years between them.

In his dreamy state it seemed to him that he and his father were circled round with light together, they two, and that his father's crimson and gold shone, and the room burnt against its panelling with a strange and sombre glow.

But his next thought was for Deborah. With every attention that his uncle had permitted him he had watched her and had seen that she was very unhappy. Poor child, with weariness and fear of her relations and her seated distance from David, she was nearly distraught. She did not understand what had happened to her, but it was something terrible. She understood that more terrible things were shortly to occur. David, watching her, could at last endure it no longer; her frightened eyes, the way that her head bobbed and nodded and then bobbed again, her fashion of pretending to eat and not eating, hurt him as though it were himself.

While his uncle was busy with a long and excited account of his country sports and pastimes, with vociferous curses on the French and praise of the Hanoverian succession, he stepped from his chair and went to her side, bending forward and whispering to her.

But, alas, this kind attention was too much for her; she broke into sobs, not loudly but with a soft titter-witter like a wounded bird.

Uncle Pomfret broke off his account of what he would do to a French Papist an he caught him, to tumble into a bellow

of laughter.

‘Why, pox on it, here’s a little master ... comforting your sister.... Why, damn it, boy, but I like your heart. There’s a good one for the ladies. He knows a thing or two, I warrant. But come hither, little Deb. Come to thy old uncle. He’ll buy thee a baby, one of your china sorts with pink cheeks, none of your stuffed rags. Come to thy uncle, Deb, and he’ll comfort thee.’

‘David.’ It was his father’s voice. ‘Leave Deborah. Come to me.’ He went up to his father, fearless, but not knowing whether a caress or a blow was to be his fate. Then he looked into his father’s eyes and saw that they were soft and humorous and knew that all was well.

‘Go, find Benjamin. We must shortly be starting.’ Then, turning to his brother, ‘She has babies enough, Pomfret; she is weary, and there’s a bed at Herries waiting for her.’

He did not hear his uncle’s retort, which was something fine and free about beds and ladies and general courtship. He was glad to be away, he didn’t care if he never saw his uncle or aunt again; he hated them and Keswick and the inn. But coming into the bustle of the kitchen where serving-men and maids were shouting and pushing, where dogs were waiting for chance pieces of food, and a man with a feather in his broad hat was seated on the corner of a table playing a fiddle, the stir and adventure of it all heartened him and he was glad that he was alive and pushing, shoving forward into this grand new world. The kitchen smelt of everything in the world—meat and drink and the heat of the great fire. He looked around him and found Benjamin seated

in a corner near the fire, his arm round a girl. She was feeding him with pieces of meat off his plate.

‘Benjamin,’ he said, ordering him as though he were a hundred years his master, ‘my father says that it’s time for the horses.’

Many of them heard him and turned laughing, and a big woman with an enormous bosom would have made him come to her, and a brawler wanted him to drink, but he fixed his eyes on the stout Benjamin, who put his plate down, gave the girl a kiss, and came without a word. So much power had Francis Herries over his servants.

Benjamin was plump and rosy; he should have been a fine figure of a man, but he could eat all day without ceasing. This was one of the reasons that he was beaten by his master, but he bore his master no grudge. Everything that came his way he took, and over the bad he shrugged his shoulders and over the good he laughed and grunted.

First of all he loved himself, then food, then women (all kinds, young, old, ugly and fair—there was not the ugliest woman in the country who was too ugly for him, and with his round, rosy cheeks, merry eyes, broad shoulders and stout legs he could do what he would), then cock-fighting, dog-fighting, football, bear-baiting, rat-hunting, witch-hunting, all kinds of sport (he was himself not a bad sportsman with the staff and cudgel, and boxing and running and swimming), then every kind of a horse, then young David, for whom he cared, perhaps, more than for any other single human being, but not for him very deeply, only lazily and with easy good-nature. He was from the

South, and had, as yet, no good word for this northern country.

He grumbled as they made their way into the dusky yard. ‘Pox on it,’ he said, ‘I’ll pepper my own legs with shot, but I thought his honour would give us another hour’s quiet and plenty. What’s he want riding on to-night for? There’s but few like the master for a restless spirit.... I’d match that white dog in the kitchen there,’ he went on irrelevantly, ‘for a hundred guineas against the grey bitch the master had in Doncaster. There’s a dog. You could see he never blinked a bird in his life. And you needn’t tell master I was kissing Jenny neither! They all say their name’s Jenny——’

‘I shall not tell him,’ said David proudly.

‘How many miles is it from this Borrowdale to Keswick?’ asked Benjamin.

‘Around seven, I fancy,’ said David.

Benjamin nodded his head but said nothing. ‘It’s a little inn as you might say, this,’ he remarked. ‘Small beside the south-country inns. Not much business in this little town. Kendal’s the way the business runs. Not but there won’t be some sport in Borrowdale. I may be a poor man and not bred for writing and accounts, but I know a dog when I see one.’

David missed many more of his remarks. For one thing Benjamin was always talking, not like the other man Nathaniel, who was a little spare fellow, very silent and grim, and anyone who was often with Nathaniel must accustom himself to think his own thoughts while Benjamin chattered. Besides this, David again was in his dream state. As he stood in the yard listening to the horses striking the