

## **LATE FEBRUARY, 1735**

A fire of seacoal glowed dimly in the grate and a shaded candle flickered in one corner of the room. The sound of the sick woman gasping for breath woke her daughter, who was dozing fitfully in a chair by the bed, and Sarah leaned forward anxiously. When her mother sighed into sleep again, she leaned back, closing her eyes as worries chased one another round her mind. How would she manage once her mother died? The small annuity would die with her, and then Sarah would not only be alone in the world, but penniless.

She glanced down at her capable hands, a little reddened from all the washing, and spread them before her. Strong hands in a tall, strong body. Could they earn her a living? She fingered one strand of the honey-coloured hair lying loose about her shoulders, smiling wryly. Her mother said her hair was beautiful when it was curled and fussed with. Well, Sarah had no time for such frivolities these days, had hardly had time to do anything for the past few weeks but care for her mother.

‘Sarah. We must - talk.’

She glanced up again. ‘You need to rest, not talk, Mother.’

‘I need to - tell you something.’

Sarah knew it would do more harm than good to try to prevent her mother speaking, so she smiled at the figure in the bed, a loving smile which brightened her gaunt, anxious face for a moment. ‘Let me get you a drink first, then you shall talk.’

She limped across to the tiny fire and swung the kettle over the flames, rubbing her bad hip, which always ached in the cold weather. ‘Here, try the new cordial the apothecary mixed yesterday. He thought you might find it an improvement on the other.’ And that’s the strongest he can make, she thought. Pray God it will ease the pain for as long as need be!

‘When I’m gone . . . ‘

‘Ah, Mother, don’t!’

'I must! I worry for you. Afterwards, Sarah - you are to see the lawyer, tell him . . . '

'I saw Mr Peabody last month to get our money. He knows about your illness.'

'Not him!' Her fingers tightened on Sarah's hand. 'You must go and see my father's lawyer - Mr Jamieson - at the Sign of the Quill in Newbury Square - and you *must* ask him for help.'

Sarah's mouth tightened to a narrow, bloodless line. 'I want nothing to do with any of your family! If they disowned you when you married Father, then they disowned me, too!'

'No! No! You must see him! You *must*!'

'I won't ask for their charity!'

The thin fingers dug into her arm. 'You can't deny - my last wish. My father must be dead by now, but my brother will not refuse to help his niece. And you - you must accept - that help.' Her face was deathly white and tears were running down her wasted cheeks.

'*Promise me!*'

Sarah could hold out no longer. 'I promise.'

The grip on her arm relaxed and her mother let out a long sigh of relief. 'I can go in peace now. You will keep your promise to me, I know.'

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In Dorset, Will Pursely took the lawyer's letter out to the copse and sat on the fallen log where he often sought refuge when things grew hard to bear, for he did not wish to add to his mother's worries. The trees were leafless still, but the buds were getting fatter by the day and soon the tender green would burst forth. It was his favourite time of year. There was such promise in the surging growth of spring. Or there had been in other years.

For a moment or two he sat there, breathing in the cool, fresh air, enjoying the sound of the wind rustling the bare branches, letting the peace seep into his bones. Then, with a sigh, he unfolded the letter and studied it again. But no amount of reading would make the words say anything different.

*My dear Mr Pursley,*

*I am in receipt of your letter of the second of this month, and I deeply regret that I can offer you no longer lease upon the home farm than a yearly tenancy.*

*The will of Squire Bedham is still not resolved and in those circumstances no long-term plans can be made.*

*However, I sincerely hope that I shall be in a position to offer something more permanent by the time the new lease comes up for renewal.*

*In the meantime, I should be obliged if you would continue to act as our agent in Broadhurst, collecting the rents on the same terms as before.*

*Yours most sincerely*

*Samuel Jamieson*

'But what the devil do I do about the farm?' Will asked the piece of paper, shaking it angrily. 'I need some more cows and I see a chance to get them.' But that would mean taking a risk. He had already lost the main thing he cared about - his family's farm, where he had been brought up and had expected to bring up his own sons in due course. But after his father's death, it had been taken away from him by the new landowner, Matthew Sewell. He could feel anger stir in him at the mere thought of that man.

Will knew he was lucky to get this place at such short notice, but it didn't feel like *home* and it was small - heart-breakingly small after Hay Nook Farm. He slapped his palm against his thigh in frustration. What worth was a year's lease to a man who thought in terms of planting trees for the timber they would one day provide and breeding good stock over several generations of animals?

For a moment, bitterness scalded through him, then he tossed back the lock of dark hair that always fell across his brow and unfolded his long limbs. There was work to do done. No use sitting here feeling sorry for himself. But if his mother had invited that silly Jen Tapper to tea again, he would walk out, he surely would, and go down to the village inn till she'd left. He

hated young women mooning over him with foolish expressions on their faces. Didn't think much of Jen Tapper's face, anyway, come to that. She looked just like a cow he had had once, with her big eyes and heavy features. It had been a silly cow, but not near as silly as she was, however skilled she was in a dairy. A man married more than a pair of hands.

It would be a long time before he'd consider marriage again. Amy Barton hadn't wanted him any more once he'd lost the farm. Her father had come to see him the very next day to break off the engagement. And she'd married someone else so quickly that Will felt furious every time he saw her flaunting her full belly. One day, he'd have his own land again and she'd be sorry. And as for Sewell, why, that man was the biggest villain still unchanged.

With a growl of anger at the whole world, Will went back to dig the garden, slamming the spade into the ground and turning the soil until his arms ached. Soon be time to plant some vegetables. You didn't need more than a year's lease to grow those, at least.

The following day, he drove his mother into the village to sell her cream cheese and butter at the small weekly market, though she had little to offer nowadays compared to her former produce.

While he was strolling round the village green, looking at what else was on offer, he found himself facing his enemy.

Sewell blocked his path deliberately, arms akimbo. 'Still here, Pursley? I thought I told you not to renew your lease on that hovel? I don't want trouble-makers in my village.'

Behind him, the bully boy who accompanied him everywhere snickered.

Will folded his arms across his chest. 'I'm not answerable to you, Sewell.'

'*Squire* Sewell to such as you.'

'Bedhams have always been squires in this village,' Will retorted.

'There are no Bedhams left.'

'There's an heir still to be found. And he'll be squire, not you.'

Sewell slashed suddenly out with his cane. 'Less of your impertinence, fellow.'

Will felt the sting on his cheek and snatched at the cane, taking Sewell by surprise. He

sent it spinning across towards the duckpond and when the bully moved towards him, he smiled, 'Come on, then, fellow! I could fancy a turn-to just now. 'Tis a pity your master's a bit old for fighting, but I'll make do with you.'

The man hesitated, looking to Sewell for orders.

Thad Honeyfield pushed through the crowd which had gathered to watch and came to range himself at Will's side, hefting his blacksmith's hammer suggestively. A couple of other men moved forward from the crowd and stood behind them. Those owing their livings and cottages to Sewell, took care to move a step or two backwards, but lingered still.

After a moment's pause Sewell shook his head and gestured to his man to stand back. 'You have no place in this village now, Pursley. When will you recognise that?'

'Funny. I just had my lease on the home farm renewed, so it seems to me I do still have a place here.'

'Call that patch of muck a farm!' Sewell scoffed. Turning on his heel, he strode off, pausing once to toss over his shoulder, 'You'll regret this.'

Will watched him go, then turned to his friend. 'Thanks, Thad. But don't put yourself in danger for me.'

The blacksmith shrugged. 'I'm already in his bad books because I refuse to sell him my land - he can't bear that I have two whole acres to call my own, that one. He must own everything in the village, it seems.'

Both men watched Sewell climb into his coach and be driven off.

'What was he doing here today?' Will wondered aloud. 'He doesn't usually honour our small market with his presence.'

'Came to see Mr Rogers.'

'If he's been bothering Parson - '

'He hasn't. Mrs Jenks wouldn't let him in.'

They both smiled. Parson's housekeeper would rout the devil himself if he tried to disturb her beloved master, who was still recovering from a fever.

As his friend walked back to the forge, Will turned and glanced towards his mother, who signalled that she had sold her produce and wanted to go home. She was looking anxious and he knew the encounter with Sewell would worry her. Why could that man not let well alone? Hadn't he already turned the Pursleys out of their home? And done the same to one or two others. Did he want to grind the whole world under his heel?

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Elizabeth Mortonby lingered for another week, drifting mostly in a merciful haze of laudanum, then slipped away quietly in the night, so that Sarah woke to a silent room and a loneliness that seemed to surround her like a high wall.

Widow Thomas, the landlady, flew into a rage when told of the death and was loud in her complaints that she had been deceived as to her lodger's health. A death on the premises was bad for business. Heartless wretches, they were, to damage a poor widow's livelihood! They would not have got the room if she had known how ill Mistress Mortonby was, that was sure! And would Miss Mortonby *please* make the necessary arrangements as soon as possible, because a corpse lying around upset the other lodgers!

The vicar was sent for, but the curate came in his place, for it was a raw February day and the vicar was fond of his creature comforts. Mr Rawby, a studious young man recently ordained peered at the corpse, but seemed disinclined to approach it too closely. He offered up a cursory prayer for the soul of 'er - Elizabeth Mortonby', agreed to hold the funeral service the very next morning and volunteered to inform the sexton for 'Miss - er, Miss Mortonby'.

He always had trouble remembering their names, Sarah thought bitterly, but had no difficulty with the names of richer parishioners.

She had to brave the weather to make the practical arrangements for the coffin and its transportation to the church, and returned to a cheerless room, whose fire had gone out. Conscious of the still figure on the bed, she could eat nothing, but she did light the fire again and brew herself a dish of weak tea with some of the tea dust at the bottom of the caddy.

Later, two men came with the coffin, a poor affair of splintery wood and clumsy joints. The older one smiled sympathetically at Sarah. 'You sit down over there, miss, and we'll be as quick as we can.'

'Thank you.'

The younger man gazed stolidly round the room, but said nothing.

'Your mother, is she?' the older man asked, his eyes squinting at her from under his lank hair.

'Yes.' Sarah blew her nose and dug her fingernails into her palms, determined not to give way to her grief in front of these strangers.

'Pretty she must have been once,' the man went on. 'Here, Bill, you take the feet. That's it! Gently does it.' He arranged the body, then stepped back to study it with the eye of a connoisseur. 'They don't always look so peaceful. Some of them has a terrible look on their face, like they've gone straight to hell.'

Sarah knew he meant well, but she wished he'd finish what he had to do and go.

'Nail it down, shall I, miss?'

'Yes . . . no . . . I . . . just a moment!' She went over to the cheap, crudely-varnished box on the bed for a last look at her mother. Leaning over to kiss the wasted cheek, she noticed the locket round Elizabeth's neck and hesitated. It was gold and contained miniatures of her mother and father, not very good ones, but it was all she would have to remember them by. Steeling herself, she unfastened the locket and then, after further hesitation, slipped the gold wedding ring from her mother's finger. Her mother would understand her need.

She felt dreadfully guilty, as if she were committing a theft, but she had no choice. Poverty was a harsh mistress. Dropping the locket and ring on to the table, she watched bleakly as the coffin lid was secured.

In the morning, Sarah forced herself to toast and eat the last piece of stale bread, then put on her best dress, which she only wore to church on Sundays. The dark blue silk was faded and worn, and the dress offered little warmth on such a bleak day,

but it was all she had. On a sudden impulse, she threaded the ring on to the chain with the locket and fastened them both round her neck. They didn't show under her high-necked gown, but she could feel them and that comforted her. When the men came for the coffin, she was sitting ready, her features set in an expression of endurance.

After the funeral, at which she was the only mourner, she returned to Furness Road to find the door to her room, which she had locked carefully, standing ajar. That jerked her out of her lethargy. 'Dear heaven, no!' She pushed it open and sobbed aloud at what she saw.

The place had been ransacked and the thief seemed to have vented his annoyance at such poor pickings upon its meagre contents. Pieces of threadbare clothing were strewn around and her precious few books were tumbled on the floor, their spines broken, their pages spilling out. Worst of all, her mother's papers had been tossed into the hearth and had caught light. The grate was now full of ashes with only one or two singed corners remaining. Her mother's marriage lines, her father's letters, everything gone!

She choked on another sob and went to find Widow Thomas, who vowed she had seen and heard nothing, and grew angry when her lodger insisted on sending for the parish constable.

He came within the hour and examined the room, but could offer her little hope of catching the culprits. 'Times is very lawless and with no reward offered, well, who's to take an interest?'

When he had gone, the landlady came up to rap on Sarah's door. 'I shall be obliged, miss, if you will leave my house immediately.'

"But we've paid until the end of the month!"

'I want you out. Deaths and constables! What next, I ask!'

And suddenly it was all too much. Sarah took a step towards Widow Thomas, the pent-up anger exploding out of her in a rush of words. 'If you even *try* to turn me out before I'm ready, then I'll hire a bully-boy to come and smash your front door down - and I'll tell him to smash anything else he fancies while he's at it. See if I don't!'



Widow Thomas gasped and backed away, but Sarah was between her and the stairs, and she could only retreat to the end of the landing, stuttering in fright. 'Well, I - I - your mother just buried. A day or two - you shall have a day or two.'

'And the rent?'

'I shall refund what is not used.'

Sarah stood there for a minute longer, then laughed scornfully and moved away. 'I have to go and see my lawyer now. I trust you will keep an eye on my room while I'm gone? I should be very angry indeed if anything happened to what's left of our things. Who knows what I'd do then?' She held the woman's eyes for a moment longer, then walked out.

Even though the sky was heavy with clouds and she would be lucky to escape another drenching, she regretfully refused the shrill offer of a passing sedan chair. Her iron pattens were soon encrusted with mud and who knew what else. Since she did not dare spend even a halfpenny on paying one of the urchins to sweep a crossing for her, she picked her own way among the refuse and slops, crossing streets when she could behind some wealthier citizen who could afford to have a path swept clear.

Impatiently, she waved away the pie seller who accosted her, as well as the hawkers of ballads and newsheets, clasping her purse firmly inside her worn rabbit-fur muff, instead of leaving it hanging by a tape beneath her skirt. Pickpockets were everywhere. It had nearly broken her mother's heart to be reduced to lodgings in Furness Road.

After a while, Sarah came to a more respectable area, where the streets were cleaner and people better-dressed. She asked directions from a motherly-looking woman standing in a shop doorway, and so found her way at last to Newbury Square. Wearily she limped round it in the drizzling rain, studying the signs swinging above the doorways.

When at last she found the Sign of the Quill she did not let herself stop to think, but strode immediately up the steps and into the hallway, pushing open the door, anxious to have this humiliation over and done with. She was sure the lawyer would only tell her to go away, sure her uncle would refuse to do anything for her. But she had promised her mother to ask for his help -

and she would keep that promise.

Inside was warmth and order, with a cosy fire reflected in the gleaming oak panelling. She pushed her damp hood back and tried to think what to say. An elderly clerk was standing writing at a high, sloping desk by the window. The lad standing at the desk next to him did not even raise his eyes from his work, but kept his quill scratching across the paper as if his life depended upon the speed of it. The older man set his quill down on the inkstand and looked questioningly at the newcomer.

'I would like to see Mr Jamieson, please,' she said firmly. 'This is his place of business, is it not?'

'Is he expecting you, madam?'

'No.'

'Then I'm afraid Mr Jamieson cannot see you today. He's a very busy man. Perhaps you could leave your name and come back next week?'

She could see his glance straying back to the papers on his desk, so let the anger that had never really subsided since her confrontation with the landlady rise again. 'My business is urgent. I *must* see Mr Jamieson today!'

'May I inquire as to the nature of your business, madam?'

'No, you may not!'

They stood arguing for a while, with the clerk becoming less civil by the minute and Sarah standing her ground. She *would* carry out her mother's last wish.

Suddenly, a door on the other side of the room banged open, and a small stout gentleman came storming out. He had on a maroon waistcoat beneath his grey jacket, with grey knee-breeches, and an old-fashioned, full-bottomed wig crowning his rosy face.

'What is all this noise?' he demanded. 'Did I not expressly tell you, Pickersleigh, that I was not to be disturbed?'

Sarah stepped forward before the clerk could speak. 'Are you Mr Jamieson, sir?'

'I am, madam.'

'Sir, I beg you to grant me a few moments of your time.'

He frowned at her, lips pressed together.

'My name is Mortonby. I . . . ' She stopped in bewilderment as the room grew instantly still, even the lad by the window stopping work to gape at her openly.

'Mortonby? Did you say *Mortonby*?' Mr Jamieson took a step towards her, his expression eager now.

'Yes.'

'Your mother's name? Her maiden name?'

'Elizabeth Bedham. But . . . '

'Aaah!' Mr Jamieson let out a long exhalation of satisfaction. 'You have seen our notice, no doubt, madam? The broadsheet?'

'No.' Sarah was bewildered, the anger ebbing suddenly and a great weariness taking its place.

'Then how did you know we were looking for you?'

'I didn't, sir. My mother died yesterday. She made me promise to come and see you.' Sarah's voice trembled for a moment and she had to fight for self-control.

His voice became gentler. 'I'm sorry to hear that. But what am I thinking of, keeping you standing here like this? Pickersleigh, send out for a pot of chocolate and some pastries. The lady is wet and chilled, and could use some refreshment, no doubt. Leave your pattens by the door and come this way, my dear Miss Mortonby. I have a fine fire in my room. Dear me, have you hurt your foot?'

'No, sir. I've been lame since birth.' She was used to such questions, but he coloured and tried to hide his embarrassment by whisking out a handkerchief and blowing his nose loudly.

'Pray take a seat, ma'am! Pickering, the chocolate. The pastries. At once!'

Sarah sank into a huge, leather-covered armchair and held her hands out to the blaze, the muff dropping forgotten to the floor. Such an extravagant fire and sea coal four guineas the

chaldron this winter! It was a long time since she'd enjoyed such wonderful warmth. 'Why were you seeking me, sir?'

'First, can you prove who you are? I'm not doubting your word, my dear, but 'twould all be much easier if you could *prove* your identity. Papers, your mother's marriage lines, for instance? Anything, really?'

Her heart sank. 'My room was ransacked while I was at the funeral. They burned all the papers.' Perhaps he wouldn't believe her now.

'Then is there someone who knows you? A clergyman, perhaps, someone who could vouch for your identity?'

'Not a clergyman. We have moved about so much, but,' her face cleared, 'would a lawyer do? My father's lawyer? Mr Peabody has known me all my life. My mother had a small annuity, which he administered.'

Mr Jamieson beamed at her. 'Elias Peabody? Sign of the Red Seal, Hotham Gardens?'

'Yes. Do you know him?'

'I am not personally acquainted with the gentleman, but I know of him. His testimony would be quite acceptable. Ho there!' He sent the young man who answered his call off to find Mr Peabody, then turned to beam at Sarah. 'My dear lady, it is my pleasure, my very great pleasure, to tell you that if you are indeed Miss Mortonby, you have been left a legacy. Not a great fortune, you understand, but still . . . Miss Mortonby! Oh, my goodness! *Pickersleigh, come quickly!*'

For the first time in her life Sarah had fainted clear away.

She came round to a vile smell and feebly pushed away the burning feather, ruins of a quill, that the clerk was waving under her nose. 'I'm sorry.' She tried to sit up straight, but felt distant and dizzy still.

The outer door banged and the boy came in, staggering under the weight of an enormous tray containing a bulbous pewter chocolate-pot and a platter of sticky pastries.

Mr Jamieson brightened. 'There you are at last, Thomas! Put it down there, put it down! Now,

my dear Miss Mortonby, I shall pour you some chocolate and you will take a pastry, will you not? That will make you feel better, I'm sure.'

This was such a rare treat that Sarah found herself eating and drinking almost as heartily as her host. She would not now need to spend money on an evening meal . . . but perhaps that didn't matter any more? The tide of questions could be stemmed no longer.

'A legacy, you said, Mr Jamieson?'

'Yes, indeed. Not a fortune, but enough to provide for you in modest comfort, once the house is sold.'

'House! I've been left a house?' she asked, dazed at the prospect. All her life she had lived in rented rooms. The thought of owning a whole house of her very own was an astounding thing!

'On conditions. But those conditions need not concern us now.' He regretted the words as soon as he'd spoken them.

'What conditions? Why need they concern us no longer?' she asked quietly and a little grimly.

'My dear . . . '

'I must insist that you tell me.'

'Well, the bequest is from your grandfather and is upon condition you change your name to Bedham and - ' He hesitated.

'And?' she prompted.

'And that your mother does not reside in the house with you or - or ever visit it.'

She said nothing, but he heard the quick intake of breath and leaned forward to say earnestly, 'He was not a forgiving man, I'm afraid, and he grew quite strange after his son's death. Sad to say, the only reason you have inherited the house is because there is simply no other family member left.'

She banished her anger resolutely. No use being angry at a dead man. And at least her mother could no longer be upset by the conditions. 'He must have been very bitter.'

'Yes. With reason.'

'It seems like a miracle. Tell me about my house, if you please. Where is it and why must it be sold?'

'Well, the house is Broadhurst Manor, of course, your mother's old home. And it must be sold because it has been let run to rack and ruin, and is now scarcely habitable. The roof leaks, the place reeks of damp, the gardens are overgrown . . . Oh, it must certainly be sold! And very fortunately, I have a buyer already waiting - indeed, he is pressing for a sale. There is some land, you see, as well as the house. We shall get you a fair price, don't worry!'

She leaned forward, her expression eager. 'But surely the house, or part of it, could be made habitable? Broadhurst has belonged to my mother's family ever since the Great Queen's day - Elizabeth, you know.' She beamed at him, joy flooding through her suddenly. 'My mother used to tell me all about her home, but I never thought it would belong to me one day, never expected to see it. I - I still can't quite take it in. Surely it can be restored, at least in part . . . ?' She looked at him pleadingly.

'I doubt it, my dear. At least, not without great expense, and there is little money to spare until you sell. Mr Sewell is offering a fair price and might even be made to raise it a trifle.' He smiled at the thought, for he dearly loved to bargain.

'And what does this Mr Sewell intend to do with the Manor? Has he the money to restore it?'

Mr Jamieson sighed and avoided her eyes. 'I'm afraid he means to pull the house down. It's the land he wants, you see, to form a deer park. Even the cottages on the estate are to go - well, they're in poor condition, too, and the people surly. They say a bad landlord makes for bad tenants, do they not? Though it is not your grandfather's fault they've been sore plagued with cattle sickness in the district lately. No, that at least was not his fault. But as a result, some of the tenants have been unable to pay their rents in full for the last few quarters. You must not be thinking yourself a rich woman. There will be very little money until the place is sold, my dear.'

Sounds in the outer office announced an arrival. Mr Jamieson excused himself and left

Sarah to ponder on the news. It was a few moments before he returned, accompanied not only by Mr Peabody, who smiled at her warmly, but also by the young gentleman who had gone to fetch him. Even the clerk, Pickersleigh, came into the room. She felt embarrassed to be the object of their stares.

'This is the lady in question,' said Mr Jamieson in a formal tone very unlike his former manner. 'I would be obliged, Mr Peabody, if you would tell us who she is and what you know of her.'

'Her name is Sarah Mortonby and I have known her ever since she was born. I know her mother, too, Elizabeth Mortonby, née Bedham. I administer a small annuity which her husband set up for her soon after they married.'

'Ah!' said Mr Jamieson in tones of satisfaction. 'Then I shall call upon you all to witness this due and proper identification.'

'By Jove, yes!' exclaimed Mr Lorrimer enthusiastically, for he was still young enough to see the romance of it all.

'Certainly, sir,' said Pickersleigh more formally. 'Shall I prepare the deposition?'

'Naturally. Three copies, I think. No need to make it very long. All quite straightforward. You'll stay and take some chocolate with us, Mr Peabody?'

'Delighted!' Mr Peabody eased his ageing bones down carefully into one of the armchairs and nodded to Sarah. 'How is your mother, my dear?'

'She's dead. I buried her today.'

His face fell. 'Why did you not let me know? I would have wished to attend the funeral.'

Sarah flushed. 'I - it was a small affair - just myself. I could not afford more.'

'It will be necessary for you to come round to my rooms - when it is convenient, of course. There are certain formalities. And money is owing. One third of a quarter, to be precise.'

'I had not expected - I thought the annuity stopped at my mother's death.'

'And so it does - but not *before* her death! We are a full month into this quarter and the interest is accrued monthly, though it is only paid out quarterly.'

Sarah could not prevent herself from sighing in relief. 'I didn't know. I thought I was destitute.'

Her voice quavered on the last word and Mr Jamieson looked across at her anxiously. Was she going to faint again? Poor lady, she must have felt desperate! Imagine a Bedham reduced to such circumstances!

'I, too, have some money for you, my dear,' he said encouragingly. 'I have your rents, such as they are, from last year.'

'How much?' If it was unladylike to ask, Sarah did not care.

'I have in hand thirty-two guineas, eleven shillings and sixpence. I'm sorry it isn't more, but there is some other money outstanding, to be paid as times improve.'

'It seems quite a fortune to me!'

'My dear,' said Mr Jamieson gently, 'when we sell, I have every confidence that we shall get more than a thousand guineas for your estate. With such a sum, you will be able to buy a small house somewhere more convenient - Tunbridge Wells, for instance, is a fine healthy town - and then you can invest the rest, hire a maid and live comfortably for the rest of your life. Either Mr Peabody or myself would be happy to advise you on how best to invest your money.'

Sarah wasn't really listening to him. 'My mother has often told me about Broadhurst,' she murmured in a bemused fashion, 'though I had never thought to see it for myself.'

'But Miss Mortonby, I've just told you how it is! I cannot advise you even to visit the place. Let me arrange to sell it and -'

'Sell it!' She sat bolt upright and looked him full in the eyes. 'Sell Broadhurst! Oh, no, Mr Jamieson, I couldn't sell my mother's home, not without seeing it first, at least! And - and if it is at all possible, I should very much like to live there!'

'No, no, *no!* Believe me, *pray* believe me, it is not to be thought of! The place is a ruin!'

'It would seem very splendid to me, I'm sure, after Furness Road.'

He clicked his tongue. 'Furness Road! Dear me! I had not realised things were so bad.'



Tch! Tch! We must find you better lodgings immediately. Have you - er, have you *any* money left?’

Sarah laughed, fumbled for the muff and untied the strings of her purse, emptying its contents into her lap. ‘Oh, yes, sir. See - I have six shillings and fivepence three farthings.’ And she laughed again at the expressions of sheer horror on the two lawyers’ faces.