

## CHAPTER III.

At that moment a heavy step was heard in the hall, a hand fumbled with the lock of the door. Miss Vane glanced apprehensively at Hubert.

"He is there," she said—"he is coming in. The London papers will arrive in half an hour. Hubert, don't leave him to learn the news from the papers or from his London lawyer."

"What harm if he did?" muttered Hubert; but, before Miss Vane could reply, the door was opened and the General entered the room.

He was a tall, white-haired man, with a stoop in his shoulders which had not been perceptible a year before. His finely-cut features strongly resembled those of his sister, but there was some weakness in the slightly receding chin, some hint of irresolution in the lines of the handsome mouth, which could not be found in Léonora Vane's expressive countenance. The General's eyes were remarkably fine, clear and blue as sea-water or the sky, but their expression on this occasion was peculiar. They had a wild, wandering, irresolute look which impressed Hubert painfully. He rose respectfully from his chair as the old man came in; but for a moment or two the General gazed at him unrecognisingly.

"Hubert has come to spend the day with us, Richard," said Miss Vane.

"Hubert? Oh, yes, Hubert Lepel!" murmured the General, as if recalling a forgotten name. "Florence Lepel's brother—a cousin of ours, I believe? Glad to see you, Hubert," said the General, suddenly awakening, apparently from a dream. "Did you come down this morning? From London or from Whitminster?"

"From London, sir."

"Oh, yes—from London! I thought perhaps that you had been"—the General's voice sank to a husky whisper—"to see that fellow get his deserts. Hush—don't speak of it before Leonora; ladies should not hear about these