

and Stephen's vivid ambitions. And he was stolid.

Stephen had suffered his slight chastisement proudly — if not quite gladly — but with each faltering fall of his uncle's cane a seed of bitterness had entered the child's soul. He never had felt the same to "Uncle Dick" since — which was no small pity, for the orphan boy was love-hungry, and Richard Bransby his best friend.

The small punishment bred deceit but worked no cure. The men in the fowl-yard could have told sad tales of staid hens aggravated to indignant, fluttering flight, and the old gardener of peacocks goaded to rise from their self-glorified strutting and preening to fly stiff and screaming the few spaces which were their farthest. But neither the farm hands nor the gardener told. Why — it is not easy to say. They did not particularly like Stephen — few people did. But they feared him. He mastered their wills. A solitary child, not half so happy as childhood has every right to be, the boy met few he did not influence sharply. His was a masterful nature. Little altogether escaped his subtle dominance.

Stephen was not essentially cruel. His cruelty was corollary and accessory to his passion — a passion for power and for the secrets of aerial skill. He bore the birds no ill-will. He simply was obsessed to see their flight, and to study it, garnering up in his odd, isolated, accretive child's mind — and heart — every vibrant curve and beat of their wings, every angle and bend of their bodies.

Stephen usually was watching the flight of a bird, or scheming some mechanical imitation of it.