All three turned and looked at the weatherbeaten side of the frame building adjoining the house—the store that for half a century had been known as “Harman’s.” It had been a great place in its day, had Harman’s. Almost the first recollections of all three children were connected with the store. They had played behind the counters, been weighed on the big scales; and the familiar, rich smell of molasses and tea and hardware and cloth was like an odor of home. Later they had helped to serve customers—it did not keep them very busy—and for the last year Carl had managed the business almost single-handed. It did seem impossible to give up the store.

The three orphans were holding a council on the front veranda of the old brick house where the Harmans had lived ever since they came as pioneers into Upper Canada. Once there had been three hundred acres of land, and capacious barns and stables, and stock, but all this had dwindled away, till the farm was represented by ten acres behind the house, and even this was rented to a neighbor.

The April sunshine was warm on the veranda, although the fields were still brown, and patches of snow lay here and there in sheltered nooks. The maples at the roadside were red, and in Alice’s garden green sprouts were bravely pushing up. On the south side of the fence were the twelve white-painted hives of her bees, and the hum of flying insects filled the air.

Nearly eighty years before the Harmans had been among the first pioneers who broke into the wilderness north of Lake Ontario. They had helped to open the roads; they had cleared land; and they had started a frontier store on the new highway. For two generations the hamlet that sprang up there was known as “Harman’s Corners.” It lay on the direct road to Toronto and it had its great days before the railway came. In winter the laden sleighs went past by scores, carrying wheat and meat and timber to the growing city, and the drivers all stopped at the cross-road. The Corners supported three taverns, all doing a thriving trade. The fourth corner was occupied by the store.

As there were no other stores in that district, Harman’s had a monopoly of trade, and its owner should have grown rich. But the Harman of that day lacked business enterprise. He was good-natured, slow, procrastinating, and spent more time at the taverns than behind his counter. The store lost ground, and when the railway was built and passed three miles away to touch at Woodville, the Corners received its death-blow.

Produce went to Toronto by rail instead of by sleigh or wagon. Harman’s was out of the line of traffic. The three taverns closed one by one. At Woodville the Elliott Brothers established an enterprising store, with all the modern tricks of trade. The farmers went thither to do their buying, and Harman’s stock grew shop-worn and out of date.

Still, Mr. Harman clung to the business, keeping no proper books, but cherishing a vague idea that the store was maintaining his family, while, in fact, it was losing money daily, and all but ten acres of the farm had to be sold. For the last two years he had been ill; for nearly a year Carl had had virtually entire management and had discovered the truth. During this time the Elliott Brothers had repeatedly offered to buy the store. They wished to run it as a branch of their Woodville establishment, and Carl had urged his father to sell. Mr. Harman, however, refused to entertain the idea for a moment, and remained firm up to that March day when he died.
I am by birth a Genevese, and my family is one of the most distinguished of that republic. My ancestors had been for many years counsellors and syndics, and my father had filled several public situations with honour and reputation. He was respected by all who knew him for his integrity and indefatigable attention to public business. He passed his younger days perpetually occupied by the affairs of his country; a variety of circumstances had prevented his marrying early, nor was it until the decline of life that he became a husband and the father of a family.

As the circumstances of his marriage illustrate his character, I cannot refrain from relating them. One of his most intimate friends was a merchant who, from a flourishing state, fell, through numerous mischances, into poverty. This man, whose name was Beaufort, was of a proud and unbending disposition and could not bear to live in poverty and oblivion in the same country where he had formerly been distinguished for his rank and magnificence. Having paid his debts, therefore, in the most honourable manner, he retreated with his daughter to the town of Lucerne, where he lived unknown and in wretchedness. My father loved Beaufort with the truest friendship and was deeply grieved by his retreat in these unfortunate circumstances. He bitterly deplored the false pride which led his friend to a conduct so little worthy of the affection that united them. He lost no time in endeavouring to seek him out, with the hope of persuading him to begin the world again through his credit and assistance.

Beaufort had taken effectual measures to conceal himself, and it was ten months before my father discovered his abode. Overjoyed at this discovery, he hastened to the house, which was situated in a mean street near the Reuss. But when he entered, misery and despair alone welcomed him. Beaufort had saved but a very small sum of money from the wreck of his fortunes, but it was sufficient to provide him with sustenance for some months, and in the meantime he hoped to procure some respectable employment in a merchant’s house. The interval was, consequently, spent in inaction; his grief only became more deep and rankling when he had leisure for reflection, and at length it took so fast hold of his mind that at the end of three months he lay on a bed of sickness, incapable of any exertion.

His daughter attended him with the greatest tenderness, but she saw with despair that their little fund was rapidly decreasing and that there was no other prospect of support. But Caroline Beaufort possessed a mind of an uncommon mould, and her courage rose to support her in her adversity. She procured plain work; she plaited straw and by various means contrived to earn a pittance scarcely sufficient to support life.

Several months passed in this manner. Her father grew worse; her time was more entirely occupied in attending him; her means of subsistence decreased; and in the tenth month her father died in her arms, leaving her an orphan and a beggar. This last blow overcame her, and she knelt by Beaufort’s coffin weeping bitterly, when my father entered the chamber. He came like a protecting spirit to the poor girl, who committed herself to his care; and after the interment of his friend he conducted her to Geneva and placed her under the protection of a relation. Two years after this event Caroline became his wife.

There was a considerable difference between the ages of my parents, but this circumstance seemed to unite them only closer in bonds of devoted affection. There was a sense of justice in my father’s upright mind which rendered it necessary that he should approve highly to love
It fell out as Wemmick had told me it would, that I had an early opportunity of comparing my
guardian’s establishment with that of his cashier and clerk. My guardian was in his room,
washing his hands with his scented soap, when I went into the office from Walworth; and he
called me to him, and gave me the invitation for myself and friends which Wemmick had
prepared me to receive. “No ceremony,” he stipulated, “and no dinner dress, and say to-
morrow.” I asked him where we should come to (for I had no idea where he lived), and I believe
it was in his general objection to make anything like an admission, that he replied, “Come here,
and I’ll take you home with me.” I embrace this opportunity of remarking that he washed his
clients off, as if he were a surgeon or a dentist. He had a closet in his room, fitted up for the
purpose, which smelt of the scented soap like a perfumer’s shop. It had an unusually large jack-
towel on a roller inside the door, and he would wash his hands, and wipe them and dry them all
over this towel, whenever he came in from a police court or dismissed a client from his room.
When I and my friends repaired to him at six o’clock next day, he seemed to have been engaged
on a case of a darker complexion than usual, for we found him with his head butted into this
closet, not only washing his hands, but laving his face and gargling his throat. And even when he
had done all that, and had gone all round the jack-towel, he took out his penknife and scraped the
case out of his nails before he put his coat on.

There were some people slinking about as usual when we passed out into the street, who were
evidently anxious to speak with him; but there was something so conclusive in the halo of
scented soap which encircled his presence, that they gave it up for that day. As we walked along
westward, he was recognised ever and again by some face in the crowd of the streets, and
whenever that happened he talked louder to me; but he never otherwise recognised anybody, or
took notice that anybody recognised him.

He conducted us to Gerrard Street, Soho, to a house on the south side of that street. Rather a
stately house of its kind, but dolefully in want of painting, and with dirty windows. He took out
his key and opened the door, and we all went into a stone hall, bare, gloomy, and little used. So,
up a dark brown staircase into a series of three dark brown rooms on the first floor. There were
carved garlands on the panelled walls, and as he stood among them giving us welcome, I know
what kind of loops I thought they looked like.

Dinner was laid in the best of these rooms; the second was his dressing-room; the third, his
bedroom. He told us that he held the whole house, but rarely used more of it than we saw. The
table was comfortably laid—no silver in the service, of course—and at the side of his chair was a
capacious dumb-waiter, with a variety of bottles and decanters on it, and four dishes of fruit for
dessert. I noticed throughout, that he kept everything under his own hand, and distributed
everything himself.

There was a bookcase in the room; I saw from the backs of the books, that they were about
evidence, criminal law, criminal biography, trials, acts of Parliament, and such things. The
furniture was all very solid and good, like his watch-chain. It had an official look, however, and
there was nothing merely ornamental to be seen. In a corner was a little table of papers with a
shaded lamp: so that he seemed to bring the office home with him in that respect too, and to
wheel it out of an evening and fall to work.