

MISS MACKENZIE

BY

ANTHONY TROLLOPE



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“ *Miss Mackenzie* was written with a desire to prove that a novel may be produced without any love ; but even in this attempt it breaks down before the conclusion. In order that I might be strong in my purpose, I took for my heroine a very unattractive old maid, who was overwhelmed with money troubles ; but even she was in love before the end of the book, and made a romantic marriage with an old man. There is in this story an attack upon charitable bazaars, made with a violence which will, I think, convince any reader that such attempts at raising money were at the time very odious to me. I beg to say that since that I have had no occasion to alter my opinion.”

ANTHONY TROLLOPE, *Autobiography*.

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MISS MACKENZIE

CHAPTER I

THE MACKENZIE FAMILY

I FEAR I must trouble my reader with some few details as to the early life of Miss Mackenzie—details which will be dull in the telling, but which shall be as short as I can make them. Her father, who had in early life come from Scotland to London, had spent all his days in the service of his country. He became a clerk in Somerset House at the age of sixteen, and was a clerk in Somerset House when he died at the age of sixty. Of him no more shall be said than that his wife had died before him, and that he, at dying, left behind him two sons and a daughter.

Thomas Mackenzie, the eldest of those two sons, had engaged himself in commercial pursuits—as his wife was accustomed to say when she spoke of her husband's labours; or went into trade, and kept a shop, as was more generally asserted by those of the Mackenzie circle who were wont to speak their minds freely. The actual and unvarnished truth in the matter shall now be made known. He, with his partner, made and sold oilcloth, and was possessed of premises in the New Road, over which the names of "Rubb and Mackenzie" were posted in large letters. As you, my reader, might enter therein, and purchase a yard and a half of oilcloth, if you were so minded, I think that the free-spoken friends of the family were not far wrong. Mrs. Thomas Mackenzie, however, declared that she

was calumniated, and her husband cruelly injured; and she based her assertions on the fact that "Rubb and Mackenzie" had wholesale dealings, and that they sold their article to the trade, who re-sold it. Whether or no she was ill-treated in the matter, I will leave my readers to decide, having told them all that it is necessary for them to know, in order that a judgement may be formed.

Walter Mackenzie, the second son, had been placed in his father's office, and he also had died before the time at which our story is supposed to commence. He had been a poor sickly creature, always ailing, gifted with an affectionate nature, and a great respect for the blood of the Mackenzies, but not gifted with much else that was intrinsically his own. The blood of the Mackenzies was, according to his way of thinking, very pure blood indeed; and he had felt strongly that his brother had disgraced the family by connecting himself with that man Rubb, in the New Road. He had felt this the more strongly, seeing that "Rubb and Mackenzie" had not done great things in their trade. They had kept their joint commercial head above water, but had sometimes barely succeeded in doing that. They had never been bankrupt, and that, perhaps, for some years was all that could be said. If a Mackenzie did go into trade, he should, at any rate, have done better than this. He certainly should have done better than this, seeing that he started in life with a considerable sum of money.

Old Mackenzie—he who had come from Scotland—had been the first-cousin of Sir Walter Mackenzie, baronet, of Incharrow, and he had married the sister of Sir John Ball, baronet, of the Cedars, Twickenham. The young Mackenzies, therefore, had reason to be proud of their blood. It is true that Sir John Ball was the first baronet, and that he had simply been a political Lord Mayor in strong political days—a political Lord Mayor in the leather business; but, then, his business had been undoubtedly wholesale; and a man who gets himself to be made a baronet cleanses

himself from the stains of trade, even though he have traded in leather. And then, the present Mackenzie baronet was the ninth of the name; so that on the higher and nobler side of the family, our Mackenzies may be said to have been very strong indeed. This strength the two clerks in Somerset House felt and enjoyed very keenly; and it may therefore be understood that the oilcloth manufactory was much out of favour with them.

When Tom Mackenzie was twenty-five—"Rubb and Mackenzie" as he afterwards became—and Walter, at the age of twenty-one, had been for a year or two placed at a desk in Somerset House, there died one Jonathan Ball, a brother of the baronet Ball, leaving all he had in the world to the two brother Mackenzies. This all was by no means a trifle, for each brother received about twelve thousand pounds when the opposing lawsuits instituted by the Ball family were finished. These opposing lawsuits were carried on with great vigour, but with no success on the Ball side, for three years. By that time, Sir John Ball, of the Cedars, was half ruined, and the Mackenzies got their money. It is needless to say much to the reader of the manner in which Tom Mackenzie found his way into trade;—how, in the first place, he endeavoured to resume his Uncle Jonathan's share in the leather business, instigated thereto by a desire to oppose his Uncle John—Sir John, who was opposing him in the matter of the will;—how he lost money in this attempt, and ultimately embarked, after some other fruitless speculations, the residue of his fortune in partnership with Mr. Rubb. All that happened long ago. He was now a man of nearly fifty, living with his wife and family—a family of six or seven children—in a house in Gower Street, and things had not gone with him very well.

Nor is it necessary to say very much of Walter Mackenzie, who had been four years younger than his brother. He had stuck to the office in spite of his wealth; and as he had never married, he had been a rich man. During his father's lifetime, and when he

was quite young, he had for a while shone in the world of fashion, having been patronised by the Mackenzie baronet, and by others who thought that a clerk from Somerset House with twelve thousand pounds must be a very estimable fellow. He had not, however, shone in a very brilliant way. He had gone to parties for a year or two, and during those years had essayed the life of a young man about town, frequenting theatres and billiard-rooms, and doing a few things which he should have left undone, and leaving undone a few things which should not have been so left. But, as I have said, he was weak in body as well as weak in mind. Early in life he became an invalid; and though he kept his place in Somerset House till he died, the period of his shining in the fashionable world came to a speedy end.

Now, at length, we will come to Margaret Mackenzie, the sister, our heroine, who was eight years younger than her brother Walter, and twelve years younger than Mr. Rubb's partner. She had been little more than a child when her father died; or I might more correctly say, that though she had then reached an age which makes some girls young women, it had not as yet had that effect upon her. She was then nineteen; but her life in her father's house had been dull and monotonous; she had gone very little into company, and knew very little of the ways of the world. The Mackenzie baronet people had not noticed her. They had failed to make much of Walter with his twelve thousand pounds, and did not trouble themselves with Margaret, who had no fortune of her own. The Ball baronet people were at extreme variance with all her family, and, as a matter of course, she received no countenance from them. In those early days she did not receive much countenance from any one; and perhaps I may say that she had not shown much claim for such countenance as is often given to young ladies by their richer relatives. She was neither beautiful nor clever, nor was she in any special manner made charming by any of those softnesses and graces of youth which to some girls

seem to atone for a want of beauty and cleverness. At the age of nineteen, I may almost say that Margaret Mackenzie was ungainly. Her brown hair was rough, and did not form itself into equal lengths. Her cheek-bones were somewhat high, after the manner of the Mackenzies. She was thin and straggling in her figure, with bones larger than they should have been for purposes of youthful grace. There was not wanting a certain brightness to her grey eyes, but it was a brightness as to the use of which she had no early knowledge. At this time her father lived at Camberwell, and I doubt whether the education which Margaret received at Miss Green's establishment for young ladies in that suburb was of a kind to make up by art for that which nature had not given her. This school, too, she left at an early age—at a very early age, as her age went. When she was nearly sixteen, her father, who was then almost an old man, became ill, and the next three years she spent in nursing him. When he died, she was transferred to her younger brother's house—to a house which he had taken in one of the quiet streets leading down from the Strand to the river, in order that he might be near his office. And here for fifteen years she had lived, eating his bread and nursing him, till he also died, and so she was alone in the world.

During those fifteen years her life had been very weary. A moated grange in the country is bad enough for the life of any Mariana, but a moated grange in town is much worse. Her life in London had been altogether of the moated grange kind, and long before her brother's death it had been very wearisome to her. I will not say that she was always waiting for some one that came not, or that she declared herself to be a-weary, or that she wished that she were dead. But the mode of her life was as near that as prose may be near to poetry, or truth to romance. For the coming of one, who, as things fell out in that matter, soon ceased to come at all to her, she had for a while been anxious. There was a young clerk then in Somerset House, one Harry Handcock by name, who had visited her brother in

the early days of that long sickness. And Harry Handcock had seen beauty in those grey eyes, and the straggling, uneven locks had by that time settled themselves into some form of tidiness, and the big joints, having been covered, had taken upon themselves softer womanly motions, and the sister's tenderness to the brother had been appreciated. Harry Handcock had spoken a word or two, Margaret being then five-and-twenty, and Harry ten years her senior. Harry had spoken, and Margaret had listened only too willingly. But the sick brother upstairs had become cross and peevish. Such a thing should never take place with his consent, and Harry Handcock had ceased to speak tenderly.

He had ceased to speak tenderly, though he did not cease to visit the quiet house in Arundel Street. As far as Margaret was concerned he might as well have ceased to come; and in her heart she sang that song of Mariana's, complaining bitterly of her weariness; though the man was seen then in her brother's sick-room regularly once a week. For years this went on. The brother would crawl out to his office in summer, but would never leave his bedroom in the winter months. In those days these things were allowed in public offices; and it was not till very near the end of his life that certain stern official reformers hinted at the necessity of his retiring on a pension. Perhaps it was that hint that killed him. At any rate, he died in harness—if it can in truth be said of him that he ever wore harness. Then, when he was dead, the days were gone in which Margaret Mackenzie cared for Harry Handcock. Harry Handcock was still a bachelor, and when the nature of his late friend's will was ascertained, he said a word or two to show that he thought he was not yet too old for matrimony. But Margaret's weariness could not now be cured in that way. She would have taken him while she had nothing, or would have taken him in those early days had fortune filled her lap with gold. But she had seen Harry Handcock at least weekly for the last ten years, and

having seen him without any speech of love, she was not now prepared for the renewal of such speaking.

When Walter Mackenzie died there was a doubt through all the Mackenzie circle as to what was the destiny of his money. It was well known that he had been a prudent man, and that he was possessed of a freehold estate which gave him at least six hundred a year. It was known also that he had money saved beyond this. It was known, too, that Margaret had nothing, or next to nothing, of her own. The old Mackenzie had had no fortune left to him, and had felt it to be a grievance that his sons had not joined their richer lots to his poorer lot. This, of course, had been no fault of Margaret's, but it had made him feel justified in leaving his daughter as a burden upon his younger son. For the last fifteen years she had eaten bread to which she had no positive claim; but if ever woman earned the morsel which she required, Margaret Mackenzie had earned her morsel during her untiring attendance upon her brother. Now she was left to her own resources, and as she went silently about the house during those sad hours which intervened between the death of her brother and his burial, she was altogether in ignorance whether any means of subsistence had been left to her. It was known that Walter Mackenzie had more than once altered his will—that he had, indeed, made many wills—according as he was at such moments on terms of more or less friendship with his brother; but he had never told to any one what was the nature of any bequest that he had made. Thomas Mackenzie had thought of both his brother and sister as poor creatures, and had been thought of by them as being but a poor creature himself. He had become a shopkeeper, so they declared, and it must be admitted that Margaret had shared the feeling which regarded her brother Tom's trade as being disgraceful. They, of Arundel Street, had been idle, reckless, useless beings—so Tom had often declared to his wife—and only by fits and starts had there existed any friendship between him and either of them. But the firm of

Rubb and Mackenzie was not growing richer in those days, and both Thomas and his wife had felt themselves forced into a certain amount of conciliatory demeanour by the claims of their seven surviving children. Walter, however, said no word to any one of his money; and when he was followed to his grave by his brother and nephews, and by Harry Handcock, no one knew of what nature would be the provision made for his sister.

"He was a great sufferer," Harry Handcock had said, at the only interview which took place between him and Margaret after the death of her brother and before the reading of the will.

"Yes indeed, poor fellow," said Margaret, sitting in the darkened dining-room, in all the gloom of her new mourning.

"And you yourself, Margaret, have had but a sorry time of it." He still called her Margaret from old acquaintance, and had always done so.

"I have had the blessing of good health," she said, "and have been very thankful. It has been a dull life, though, for the last ten years."

"Women generally lead dull lives, I think." Then he had paused for a while, as though something were on his mind which he wished to consider before he spoke again. Mr. Handcock, at this time, was bald and very stout. He was a strong healthy man, but had about him, to the outward eye, none of the aptitudes of a lover. He was fond of eating and drinking, as no one knew better than Margaret Mackenzie; and had altogether dropped the poetries of life, if at any time any of such poetries had belonged to him. He was, in fact, ten years older than Margaret Mackenzie; but he now looked to be almost twenty years her senior. She was a woman who at thirty-five had more of the graces of womanhood than had belonged to her at twenty. He was a man who at forty-five had lost all that youth does for a man. But still I think that she would have fallen back upon her former love, and found that to be sufficient, had he asked her to do so even now. She would have felt herself bound by her faith to do so, had he

said that such was his wish, before the reading of her brother's will. But he did no such thing. "I hope he will have made you comfortable," he said.

"I hope he will have left me above want," Margaret had replied;—and that had then been all. She had, perhaps, half-expected something more from him, remembering that the obstacle which had separated them was now removed. But nothing more came, and it would hardly be true to say that she was disappointed. She had no strong desire to marry Harry Handcock—whom no one now called Harry any longer; but yet, for the sake of human nature, she bestowed a sigh upon his coldness, when he carried his tenderness no further than a wish that she might be comfortable.

There had of necessity been much of secrecy in the life of Margaret Mackenzie. She had possessed no friend to whom she could express her thoughts and feelings with confidence. I doubt whether any living being knew that there now existed, up in that small back bedroom in Arundel Street, quires of manuscript in which Margaret had written her thoughts and feelings—hundreds of rhymes which had never met any eye but her own; and outspoken words of love contained in letters which had never been sent, or been intended to be sent, to any destination. Indeed these letters had been commenced with no name, and finished with no signature. It would be hardly true to say that they had been intended for Harry Handcock, even at the warmest period of her love. They had rather been trials of her strength—proofs of what she might do if fortune should ever be so kind to her as to allow of her loving. No one had ever guessed all this, or had dreamed of accusing Margaret of romance. No one capable of testing her character had known her. In latter days she had now and again dined in Gower Street, but her sister-in-law, Mrs. Tom, had declared her to be a silent, stupid old maid. As a silent, stupid old maid, the Mackenzies of Rubb and Mackenzie were disposed to regard her. But how should they treat this stupid old maid of an aunt, if it should now turn

out that all the wealth of the family belonged to her?

When Walter's will was read such was found to be the case. There was no doubt, or room for doubt, in the matter. The will was dated but two months before his death, and left everything to Margaret, expressing a conviction on the part of the testator that it was his duty to do so, because of his sister's unremitting attention to himself. Harry Handcock was requested to act as executor, and was requested also to accept a gold watch and a present of two hundred pounds. Not a word was there in the whole will of his brother's family; and Tom, when he went home with a sad heart, told his wife that all this had come of certain words which she had spoken when last she had visited the sick man. "I knew it would be so," said Tom to his wife. "It can't be helped now, of course. I knew you could not keep your temper quiet, and always told you not to go near him." How the wife answered, the course of our story at the present moment does not require me to tell. That she did answer with sufficient spirit, no one, I should say, need doubt; and it may be surmised that things in Gower Street were not comfortable that evening.

Tom Mackenzie had communicated the contents of the will to his sister, who had declined to be in the room when it was opened. "He has left you everything—just everything," Tom had said. If Margaret made any word of reply, Tom did not hear it. "There will be over eight hundred a year, and he has left you all the furniture," Tom continued. "He has been very good," said Margaret, hardly knowing how to express herself on such an occasion. "Very good to you," said Tom, with some little sarcasm in his voice. "I mean good to me," said Margaret. Then he told her that Harry Handcock had been named as executor. "There is no more about him in the will, is there?" said Margaret. At the moment, not knowing much about executors, she had fancied that her brother had, in making such appointment, expressed some further wish about Mr.

Handcock. Her brother explained to her that the executor was to have two hundred pounds and a gold watch, and then she was satisfied.

"Of course, it's a very sad look-out for us," Tom said; "but I do not on that account blame you."

"If you did you would wrong me," Margaret answered, "for I never once during all the years that we lived together spoke to Walter one word about his money."

"I do not blame you," the brother rejoined; and then no more had been said between them.

He had asked her even before the funeral to go up to Gower Street and stay with them, but she had declined. Mrs. Tom Mackenzie had not asked her. Mrs. Tom Mackenzie had hoped, then—had hoped and had inwardly resolved—that half, at least, of the dying brother's money would have come to her husband; and she had thought that if she once encumbered herself with the old maid, the old maid might remain longer than was desirable. "We should never get rid of her," she had said to her eldest daughter, Mary Jane. "Never, mamma," Mary Jane had replied. The mother and daughter had thought that they would be on the whole safer in not pressing any such invitation. They had not pressed it, and the old maid had remained in Arundel Street.

Before Tom left the house, after the reading of the will, he again invited his sister to his own home. An hour or two had intervened since he had told her of her position in the world, and he was astonished at finding how composed and self-assured she was in the tone and manner of her answer. "No, Tom, I think I had better not," she said. "Sarah will be somewhat disappointed——"

"You need not mind that," said Tom.

"I think I had better not. I shall be very glad to see her if she will come to me; and I hope you will come, Tom; but I think I will remain here till I have made up my mind what to do." She remained in Arundel Street for the next three months, and her

brother saw her frequently; but Mrs. Tom Mackenzie never went to her, and she never went to Mrs. Tom Mackenzie. "Let it be even so," said Mrs. Tom; "they shall not say that I ran after her and her money. I hate such airs." "So do I, mamma," said Mary Jane, tossing her head. "I always said that she was a nasty old maid."

On that same day—the day on which the will was read—Mr. Handcock had also come to her. "I need not tell you," he had said, as he pressed her hand, "how rejoiced I am—for your sake, Margaret." Then she had returned the pressure, and had thanked him for his friendship. "You know that I have been made executor to the will," he continued. "He did this simply to save you from trouble. I need only promise that I will do anything and everything that you can wish." Then he left her, saying nothing of his suit on that occasion.

Two months after this—and during those two months he had necessarily seen her frequently—Mr. Handcock wrote to her from his office in Somerset House, renewing his old proposals of marriage. His letter was short and sensible, pleading his cause as well, perhaps, as any words were capable of pleading it at this time; but it was not successful. As to her money he told her that no doubt he regarded it now as a great addition to their chance of happiness, should they put their lots together; and as to his love for her, he referred her to the days in which he had desired to make her his wife without a shilling of fortune. He had never changed, he said; and if her heart was as constant as his, he would make good now the proposal which she had once been willing to accept. His income was not equal to hers, but it was not inconsiderable, and therefore as regards means they would be very comfortable. Such were his arguments, and Margaret, little as she knew of the world, was able to perceive that he expected that they would succeed with her.

Little, however, as she might know of the world, she was not prepared to sacrifice herself and her new

freedom, and her new power and her new wealth, to Mr. Harry Handcock. One word said to her when first she was free and before she was rich, would have carried her. But an argumentative, well-worded letter, written to her two months after the fact of her freedom and the fact of her wealth has sunk into his mind, was powerless on her. She had looked at her glass and had perceived that years had improved her, whereas years had not improved Harry Handcock. She had gone back over her old aspirations, aspirations of which no whisper had ever been uttered, but which had not the less been strong within her, and had told herself that she could not gratify them by a union with Mr. Handcock. She thought, or rather hoped, that society might still open to her its portals—not simply the society of the Handcocks from Somerset House, but that society of which she had read in novels during the day, and of which she had dreamed at night. Might it not yet be given to her to know clever people, nice people, bright people, people who were not heavy and fat like Mr. Handcock, or sick and wearisome like her poor brother Walter, or vulgar and quarrelsome like her relatives in Gower Street? She reminded herself that she was the niece of one baronet, and the first-cousin once removed of another, that she had eight hundred a year, and liberty to do with it whatsoever she pleased; and she reminded herself, also, that she had higher tastes in the world than Mr. Handcock. Therefore she wrote to him an answer, much longer than his letter, in which she explained to him that the more than ten years' interval which had elapsed since words of love had passed between them had—had—had—changed the nature of her regard. After much hesitation, that was the phrase which she used.

And she was right in her decision. Whether or no she was doomed to be disappointed in her aspirations, or to be partially disappointed and partially gratified, these pages are written to tell. But I think we may conclude that she would hardly have made herself happy by marrying Mr. Handcock while such aspira-