

Weyman Stanley John

Sophia: A Romance



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CHAPTER I

A LITTLE TOAD

In the dining-room of a small house on the east side of Arlington Street, which at that period-1742-was the Ministerial street, Mr. and Mrs. Northey sat awaiting Sophia. The thin face of the honourable member for Aldbury wore the same look of severity which it had worn a few weeks earlier on the eventful night when he had found himself called upon to break the ties of years and vote in the final division against Sir Robert; his figure, as he sat stiffly expecting his sister-in-law, reflected the attitudes of the four crude portraits of dead Northeys that darkened the walls of the dull little room. Mrs. Northey on the other hand sprawled in her chair with the carelessness of the fine lady fatigued; she yawned, inspected the lace of her negligée, and now held a loose end to the light, and now pondered the number of a lottery ticket. At length, out of patience, she called fretfully to Mr. Northey to ring the bell. Fortunately, Sophia entered at that moment.

"In time, and no more, miss," madam cried with temper. Then as the girl came forward timidly, "I'll tell you what it is," Mrs. Northey continued, "you'll wear red before you're twenty! You have no more colour than a china figure this morning! What's amiss with you?"

Sophia, flushing under her brother-in-law's eyes, pleaded a headache.

Her sister sniffed. "Eighteen, and the vapours!" she cried scornfully. "Lord, it is very evident raking don't suit you! But do you sit down now, and answer me, child. What did you say to Sir Hervey last night?"

"Nothing," Sophia faltered, her eyes on the floor.

"Oh, nothing!" Mrs. Northey repeated, mimicking her. "Nothing! And pray, Miss Modesty, what did he say to you?"

"Nothing; or-or at least, nothing of moment," Sophia stammered.

"Of moment! Oh, you know what's of moment, do you? And whose fault was that, I'd like to know? Tell me that, miss!"

Sophia, seated stiffly on the chair, her sandalled feet drawn under her, looked downcast and a trifle sullen, but did not answer.

"I ask, whose fault was that?" Mrs. Northey continued impatiently. "Do you think to sit still all your life, looking at your toes, and waiting for the man to fall into your lap? Hang you for a natural, if you do! It is not that way husbands are got, miss!"

"I don't want a husband, ma'am!" Sophia cried, stung at length into speech by her sister's coarseness.

"Oh, don't you?" Mrs. Northey retorted. "Don't you, Miss Innocence? Let me tell you, I know what you want. You want to make a fool of yourself with that beggarly, grinning, broad-shouldered oaf of an Irishman, that's always at your skirts! That's what you want. And he wants your six thousand pounds. Oh, you don't throw dust into my eyes!" Mrs. Northey continued viciously, "I've seen you puling and pining and making Wortley eyes at him these three weeks. Ay, and half the town laughing at you. But I'd have you to know, miss, once for all, we are not going to suffer it!"

"My life, I thought we agreed that I should explain matters," Mr. Northey said gently.

"Oh, go on then!" madam cried, and threw herself back in her seat.

"Only because I think you go a little too far, my dear," Mr. Northey said, with a cough of warning; "I am sure that we can count on Sophia's prudence. You are aware, child," he continued,

directly addressing himself to her, "that your father's death has imposed on us the-charge of your person, and the care of your interests. The house at Cuckfield being closed, and your brother wanting three years of full age, your home must necessarily be with us for a time, and we have a right to expect that you will be guided by us in such plans as are broached for your settlement. Now I think I am right in saying," Mr. Northey continued, in his best House of Commons manner, "that your sister has communicated to you the very advantageous proposal with which my good friend and colleague at Aldbury, Sir Hervey Coke, has honoured us? Ahem! Sophia, that is so, is it not? Be good enough to answer me."

"Yes, sir," Sophia murmured, her eyes glued to the carpet.

"Very good. In that case I am sure that she has not failed to point out to you also that Sir Hervey is a baronet of an old and respectable family, and possessed of a competent estate. That, in a word, the alliance is everything for which we could look on your behalf."

"Yes, sir," Sophia whispered.

"Then, may I ask," Mr. Northey continued, setting a hand on each knee, and regarding her majestically, "in what respect you find the match not to your taste? If that be so?"

The young girl slid her foot to and fro, and for a moment did not answer. Then, "I-I do not wish to marry him," she said, in a low voice.

"You do not wish?" Mrs. Northey cried, unable to contain herself longer. "*You* do not wish? And why, pray?"

"He's-he's as old as Methuselah!" the girl answered with a sudden spirit of resentment; and she moved her foot more quickly to and fro.

"As old as Methuselah?" Mr. Northey answered, staring at her in unfeigned astonishment; and then, in a tone of triumphant refutation, he continued, "Why, child, what are you dreaming of? He is only thirty-four! and I am thirty-six."

"Well, at any rate, he is old enough-he is nearly old enough to be my father!" Sophia muttered rebelliously.

Mrs. Northey could no longer sit by and hear herself flouted. She knew very well what was intended. She was twenty-nine, Sophia's senior by eleven years, and she felt the imputation that bounded harmlessly off her husband's unconsciousness. "You little toad!" she cried. "Do you think I do not know what you mean? I tell you, miss, you would smart for it, if I were your mother! Thirty-four, indeed; and you call him as old as Methuselah! Oh, thank you for nothing, ma'am! I understand you."

"He's twice as old as I am!" Sophia whimpered, bending before the storm. And in truth to eighteen thirty-four seems elderly; if not old.

"You! You're a baby!" Mrs. Northey retorted, her face red with passion. "How any man of sense can look at you or want you passes me! But he does, and if you think we are going to sit by and see our plans thwarted by a chit of a girl of your years, you are mistaken, miss. Sir Hervey's vote, joined to the two county votes which my lord commands, and to Mr. Northey's seat, will gain my lord a step in the peerage; and when Coke is married to you, his vote will be ours. As for you, you white-faced puling thing, I should like to know who you are that you should not be glad of a good match when it is offered you? It is a very small thing to do for your family."

"For *your* family!" Sophia involuntarily exclaimed; the next moment she could have bitten off her tongue.

Fortunately a glance from Mr. Northey, who prided himself on his diplomacy, stayed the outburst that was on his wife's lips. "Allow me, my dear," he said. "And do you listen to me, Sophia. Apart from his age, a ridiculous objection which could only come into the mind of a schoolgirl, is there anything else you have to urge against Sir Hervey?"

"He's as-as grave as death!" Sophia murmured tearfully.

Mr. Northey shrugged his shoulders. "Is that all?" he said.

"Yes, but-but-"

"But what? But what, Sophia?" Mr. Northey repeated, with a fine show of fairness. "I suppose you allow him to be in other respects a suitable match?"

"Yes, but-I do not wish to marry him, sir. That is all."

"In that," Mr. Northey said firmly, "you must be guided by us. We have your interests at heart, your best interests. And-and that should be enough for you."

Sophia did not answer, but the manner in which she closed her lips, and kept her gaze fixed steadfastly on the floor, was far from boding acquiescence. Every feature indeed of her pale face-which only a mass of dark brown hair and a pair of the most brilliant and eloquent eyes redeemed from the commonplace-expressed a settled determination. Mrs. Northey, who knew something of her sister's disposition, which was also that of the family in general, discerned this, and could restrain herself no longer.

"You naughty girl!" she cried, with something approaching fury. "Do you think that I don't know what is at the bottom of this? Do you think I don't know that you are pining and sulking for that hulking Irish rogue that's the laughing-stock of every company his great feet enter? Lord, miss, by your leave I'd have you to know we are neither fools nor blind. I've seen your sighings and oglings, your pinings and sinkings. And so has the town. Ay, you may blush" – in truth, Sophia's cheeks were dyed scarlet-"my naughty madam! Blush you should, that can fancy a raw-boned, uncouth Teague a fine woman would be ashamed to have for a footman. But you shan't have him. You may trust me for that, as long as there are bars and bolts in this house, miss."

"Sophia," Mr. Northey said in his coldest manner, "I trust that there is nothing in this? I trust that your sister is misinformed?"

The girl, under the lash of her sister's tongue, had risen from her chair; she tried in vain to recover her composure.

"There was nothing, sir," she cried hysterically. "But after this-after the words which my sister has used to me, she has only herself to thank if-if I please myself, and take the gentleman she has named-or any other gentleman."

"Ay, but softly," Mr. Northey rejoined, with a certain unpleasant chill in his tone. "Softly, Sophia, if you please. Are you aware that if your brother marries under age and without his guardian's consent, he forfeits ten thousand pounds in your favour? And as much more to your sister? If not, let me tell you that it is so."

Sophia stared at him, but did not answer.

"It is true," Mr. Northey continued, "that your father's will contains no provision for your punishment in the like case. But this clause proves that he expected his children to be guided by the advice of their natural guardians; and for my part, Sophia, I expect you to be so guided. In the meantime, and that there may be no mistake in the matter, understand, if you please, that I forbid you to hold from this moment any communication with the person who has been named. If I cannot prescribe a match for you, I can at least see that you do not disgrace your family."

"Sir!" Sophia cried, her cheeks burning.

But Mr. Northey, a man of slow pulse and the least possible imagination, returned her fiery look unmoved. "I repeat it," he said coldly. "For that and nothing else an alliance with this-this person would entail. Let there be no misunderstanding on that point. You are innocent of the world, Sophia, and do not understand these distinctions. But I am within the truth when I say that Mr. Hawkesworth is known to be a broken adventurer, moving upon sufferance among persons of condition, and owning a character and antecedents that would not for a moment sustain inquiry."

"How can that be?" Sophia cried passionately. "It is not known who he is."

"He is not one of us," Mr. Northey answered with dignity. "For the rest, you are right in saying that it is not known who he is. I am told that even the name he bears is not his own."

"No, it is not!" Sophia retorted; and then stood blushing and convicted, albeit with an exultant light in her eyes. No, his name was not his own! She knew that from his own lips; and knew, too, from his own lips, in what a world of romance he moved, what a future he was preparing, what a triumph might be, nay, would be, his by-and-by-and might be hers! But her mouth was sealed; already, indeed, she had said more than she had the right to say. When Mr. Northey, surprised by her acquiescence, asked with acerbity how she knew that Hawkesworth was not the man's name, and what the man's name was, she stood mute. Wild horses should not draw that from her.

But it was natural that her brother-in-law should draw his conclusions, and his brow grew darker. "It is plain, at least, that you have admitted him to a degree of intimacy extremely improper," he said, with more heat than he had yet exhibited. "I fear, Sophia, that you are not so good a girl as I believed. However, from this moment you will see that you treat him as a stranger. Do you hear me?"

"Yes, sir. Then-then I am not to go with you this evening?"

"This evening! You mean to Vauxhall? And why not, pray?"

"Because-because, if I go I must see him. And if I see him I-I must speak to him," Sophia cried, her breast heaving with generous resentment. "I will not pass him by, and let him think me everything that is base!"

For a moment Mr. Northey looked a little nonplussed. Then, "Well, you can-you can bow to him," he said, pluming himself on his discretion in leaving the rein a trifle slack to begin. "If he force himself upon you, you will rid yourself of him with as little delay as possible. The mode I leave to you, Sophia; but speech with him I absolutely forbid. You will obey in that on pain of my most serious displeasure."

"On pain of bread and water, miss!" her sister cried venomously. "That will have more effect, I fancy. Lord, for my part, I should die of shame if I thought that I had encouraged a nameless Irish rogue not good enough to ride behind my coach. And all the town to know it."

Rage dried the tears that hung on Sophia's lids. "Is that all?" she asked, her head high. "I should like to go if that is all you have to say to me?"

"I think that is all," Mr. Northey answered.

"Then-I may go?"

He appeared to hesitate. For the first time his manner betrayed doubt; he looked at his wife and opened his mouth, then closed it. At length, "Yes, I think so," he said pompously. "And I trust you will regain our approbation by doing as we wish, Sophia. I am sorry to say that your brother's conduct at Cambridge has not been all that we could desire. I hope that you will see to it, and show yourself more circumspect. I truly hope that you will not disappoint us. Yes, you may go."

Sophia waited for no second permission. Her heart bursting, her cheeks burning, she hurried from the room, and flew up the stairs to shut herself in her chamber. Here, on the second floor, in a room consecrated to thoughts of *him* and dreams of *him*, where in a secret nook behind the bow-fronted drawer of her toilet table lay the withered flower he had given her the day he stole her glove, she felt the full wretchedness of her lot. She would see him no more! Her tears gushed forth, her bosom heaved at the thought. She would see him no more! Or worse, she would see him only in public, at a distance; whence his eyes would stab her for a jilt, a flirt, a cold, heartless, worldly creature, unworthy to live in the same world, unworthy to breathe the same air with Constancy.

And he had been so good to her! He had been so watchful, so assiduous, so delicate, she had fondly, foolishly deemed his court a secret from all.

The way to her heart had not been difficult. Her father's death had cast her, a timid country girl, into the vortex of the town, where for a time she had shrunk from the whirl of routs and masquerades, the smirking beaux and loud-voiced misses, among whom she found herself. She had sat mum and abashed in companies where her coarser sister ruled and ranted; where one had shunned and another had flouted the silent, pale-faced girl, whose eyes and hair and tall slender shape just redeemed her from insignificance. Only Mr. Hawkesworth, the Irishman, had discerned in her charms that in a

remarkably short time won his regards and fixed his attentions. Only he, with the sensibility of an unspoiled Irish heart, had penetrated the secret of her loneliness; and in company had murmured sympathy in her ear, and at the opera, where he had not the entrée to her sister's box, had hung on her looks from afar, speaking more sweetly with his fine eyes than Monticelli or Amorevoli sang on the stage.

For Sir Hervey, his would-be rival, the taciturn, middle-aged man, who was Hervey to half the men about town, and Coke to three-fourths of the women; who gamed with the same nonchalance with which he made his court—he might be the pink of fashion in his dull mooning way, but he had nothing that caught her eighteen-year-old fancy. On the contrary he had a habit of watching her, when Hawkesworth was present, at the mere remembrance of which her cheek flamed. For that alone, and in any event, she hated him; and would never, never marry him. They might rob her of her dear Irishman; they might break her heart—so her thoughts ran to the tremolo of a passionate sob; they might throw her into a decline; but they should never, never compel her to take *him!* She would live on bread and water for a year first. She was fixed, fixed, fixed on that, and would ever remain so.

Meanwhile downstairs the two who remained in the room she had left kept silence until her footsteps ceased to sound on the stairs. Then Mr. Northey permitted his discontent to appear. "I wish, after all, I had told her," he said, moving restlessly in his chair. "Hang it, ma'am, do you hear?" he continued, looking irritably at his wife, "I wish I had taken my own line, and that is a fact."

"Then you wish you had been a fool, Mr. Northey!" the lady answered with fine contempt. "Do you think that this silly girl would rest content, or let us rest, until you had followed her dear brother Tom, and brought him back from his charmer? Not she! And for him, if you are thinking of him, he was always a rude cub, and bound for the dogs one day or other. What does it matter whether he is ruined before he is of age or after? Eh, Mr. Northey?"

"It matters to us," Mr. Northey answered.

"It may matter ten thousand to us, if we mind our own business," his wife answered coolly. "So do you let him be for a day or two."

"It matters as much to Sophia," he said, trying to find excuses for himself and his inaction.

"And why not? There will be so much the more to bind Coke to us."

"He has plenty now."

"Much wants more, Mr. Northey."

"Of course the thing may be done already," he argued, striving to convince himself. "For all we know, the match is made, and 'tis too late to interfere. Your brother was always wilful; and it is not likely the woman would let him go for a word. On the other hand—"

"There is no other hand!" she cried, out of patience with his weakness. "I tell you, let be. Let the boy marry whom he pleases, and when he pleases. 'Tis no matter of ours."

"Still I wish this tutor had not written to us."

"If the knot was not tied yesterday, there are persons enough will tie it to-day for half a guinea!" she said. "It is not as if you were his only guardian. His father chose another elsewhere. Let him look to it. The girl is charge enough for us; and, for her, she benefits as much as we do if he's foolish. I wish that were the worst of it. But I scent danger, Mr. Northey. I am afraid of this great Teague of hers. He's no Irishman if he doesn't scent a fortune a mile off. And once let him learn that she is worth sixteen thousand pounds instead of six thousand, and he'll off with her from under our very noses."

"It's that Irish Register has done the mischief!" Mr. Northey cried, jumping up with an oath. "She's in there, in print!"

"Under her own name?"

"To be sure, as a fortune. And her address."

"Do you mean it, Mr. Northey? Printed in the book, is it?"

"It is; as I say."

"Hang their impudence!" his wife cried in astonishment. "They ought to be pilloried! But there is just this, we can show the entry to the girl. And if it don't open her eyes, nothing will. Do you get a copy of the book, Mr. Northey, and we'll show it to her to-morrow, and put her on the notion every Irishman has it by heart. And as soon as we can we must get her married to Coke. There'll be no certainty till she's wedded. 'Twould have been done this fortnight if he were not just such a mumchance fool as the girl herself. He may look very wise, and the town may think him so. But there's more than looking wanted with a woman, Mr. Northey; and for what I see he's as big a fool as many that never saw Pall Mall."

"I have never found him that," Mr. Northey answered with a dry cough. He spoke with reason, for he had more than once, as heir to a peerage, taken on himself to set Sir Hervey right; with so conspicuous a lack of success that he had begun to suspect that his brother member's silence was not dulness; nay, that he himself came late into that secret. Or why was Coke so well with that great wit and fashionable, Hanbury Williams? With Henry Fox, and my lord Chesterfield? With young Lord Lincoln, the wary quarry of match-making mothers, no less than with Tom Hervey, against whom no young virgin, embarking on life, failed of a warning? Mr. Northey knew that in the company of these, and their like, he was no favourite, whilst Coke was at home; and he hid with difficulty a sneaking fear of his colleague.

What a man so highly regarded and so well received saw in a girl who, in Mr. Northey's eyes, appeared every way inferior to her loud, easy, fashionable sister, it passed the honourable member to conceive. But the thing was so. Sir Hervey had spoken the three or four words beyond which he seldom went-the venture had been made; and now if there was one thing upon which Mr. Northey's dogged mind was firmly fixed, it was that an alliance so advantageous should not be lost to the family.

"But Sophia is prudent," he said, combating his own fears. "She has always been obedient and well-behaved. I am sure she's-she's a good girl, and will see what is right when it is explained to her."

"If she does not, she will see sorrow!" his wife answered truculently. She had neither forgotten nor forgiven the sneer about Methuselah. "I'll tell you what it is, Mr. Northey," madam continued, "she takes you in with her pale, peaky face and her round eyes. But if ever there was a nasty, obstinate little toad, she is one. And you'll find it out by-and-by. And so will Coke to his cost some day."

"Still you think-we can bend her this time?"

"Oh, she'll marry him!" Mrs. Northey retorted confidently. "I'll answer for that. But I would not be Coke afterwards."

CHAPTER II AT VAUXHALL

In a year when all the world was flocking to the new Rotunda in Ranelagh Gardens, Mrs. Northey would be particular, and have her evening party to Vauxhall. Open air was the fashion of the time, and it was from her seat at the open window in Arlington Street that she welcomed her guests. Thence, as each new-comer appeared she shouted her greeting, often in terms that convulsed the chairmen at the corner; or now and again, hanging far out, she turned her attention and wit to the carpenters working late on Sir Robert's house next door, and stated in good round phrases her opinion of the noise they made. When nearly all her company were assembled, and the room was full of women languishing and swimming, and of men mincing and prattling, and tapping their snuff-boxes, Sophia stole in, and, creeping into a corner, hid herself behind two jolly nymphs, who, with hoops six feet wide and cheeks as handsome as crimson could make them, were bandying jokes and horse-play with a tall admirer. In this retreat Sophia fancied that she might hide her sad looks until the party set out; and great was her dismay, when, venturing at last to raise her eyes, she discovered that she had placed herself beside, nay, almost touching the man whom of all others she wished to avoid, the detested Coke; who, singularly enough, had sought the same retirement a few moments earlier.

In the confusion of the moment she recoiled a step; the events of the day had shaken her nerves. Then, "I beg your pardon, sir, I did not see that you were there," she stammered.

"No," he said with a smile, "I know you did not, child. Or you would have gone to the other end of the room. Now, confess. Is it not so?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "As you please, sir," she said, "I would not venture to contradict you," and curtsying satirically she turned away her face. At any rate he should lie in no doubt of her feelings.

He did not answer. And, welcome as his silence was, something like contempt of a suitor who aspired to have without daring to speak took possession of her. Under the influence of this feeling, embittered by the rating she had received that morning, she fell to considering him out of the tail of her eye, but, in spite of herself, she could not deny that he was personable; that his features, if a trifle set and lacking vivacity, were good, and his bearing that of a gentleman at ease in his company. Before she had well weighed him, however, or done more than compare him with the fop who stood before her, and whose muff and quilted coat, long queue and black leather stock were in the extreme of the fashion, Sir Hervey spoke again.

"Why does it not please you?" he asked, almost listlessly.

"To do what, sir?"

"To be beside me."

"I did not say it did not," she answered, looking stiffly the other way.

"But it does not," he persisted. "I suppose, child, your sister has told you what my views are?"

"Yes, sir."

"And what do you say?" he murmured. "That-that I am much obliged to you, but they are not mine!" Sophia answered, with a rush of words and colour; and, punished as she had been that morning, it must be confessed, she cruelly enjoyed the stroke.

For a moment only. Then to her astonishment and dismay Sir Hervey laughed. "That is what you say now," he answered lightly. "What will you say if, by-and-by, when we know one another better, we get on as well together as-as Lady Sophia there, and-"

"And Lord Lincoln?" she cried, seeing that he hesitated. "Never!"

"Indeed!" he retorted. "But, pray, what do you know about Lord Lincoln?"

"I suppose you think I know no scandal?" she cried.

"I would prefer you to know as little as possible," he answered coolly; in the tone she fancied which he would have used had she been already his property. "And there is another thing I would also prefer you did not know," he continued.

"Pray, what is that?" she cried, openly scornful; and she flirted her fan a little faster.

"Mr. Hawkesworth."

The blood rushed to her cheeks. This was too much. "Are you jealous? or only impertinent?" she asked, her voice not less furious because it was low and guarded. "How noble, how chivalrous, to say behind a gentleman's back what you would not dare to say to his face!"

Sir Hervey shrugged his shoulders. "He is not a gentleman," he said. "He is not one of us, and he is not fit company for you. I do not know what story he has told you, nor what cards he has played, but I know that what I say is true. Be advised, child," he continued earnestly, "and look on him coldly when you see him next. Be sure if you do not-"

"You will speak to my sister?" she cried. "If you have not done it already? Lord, sir, I congratulate you. I'm sure you have discovered quite a new style of wooing. Next, I suppose, you will have me sent to my room, and put on bread and water for a week? Or buried in a parsonage in the country with Tillotson's Sermons and the 'Holy Living'?"

"I spoke to you as I should speak to my sister," Sir Hervey said, with something akin to apology in his tone.

"Say, rather, as you would speak to your daughter!" she replied, quick as lightning; and, trembling with rage, she drove home the shaft with a low curtsey. "To be sure, sir, now I think of it, the distance between us justifies you in giving me what advice you please."

He winced at last, and was even a trifle out of countenance. But he did not answer, and she, furiously angry, turned her back on him, and looked the other way. Young as she was, all the woman in her rose in revolt against the humiliation of being advised in such a matter by a man. She could have struck him. She hated him. And they were all in the same story. They were all against her and her dear Irishman, who alone understood her. Tears rose in Sophia's eyes as she pictured her present loneliness and her happiness in the past; as she recalled the old home looking down the long avenue of chestnut trees, the dogs, the horses, the boisterous twin brother, and the father who by turns had coarsely chidden and fondly indulged her. In her loss of all this, in a change of life as complete as it was sudden, she had found one only to comfort her, one only who had not thought the whirl of strange pleasures a sufficient compensation for a home and a father. One only who had read her silence, and pitied her inexperience. And him they would snatch from her! Him they would-

But at this point her thoughts were interrupted by a general movement towards the door. Bent on an evening's frolic the party issued into Arlington Street with loud laughter and louder voices, and in a moment were gaily descending St. James's Street. One or two of the elder ladies took chairs, but the greater part walked, the gentlemen with hats under their arms and canes dangling from their wrists, the more foppish with muffs. Passing down St. James's, where Betty, the fruit woman, with a couple of baskets of fruit, was added to the company, they crossed the end of Pall Mall, now inviting a recruit, after the easy fashion of the day, and now hailing a friend on the farther side of the street. Thence, by the Mall and the Horse Guards, and so to the Whitehall Stairs, where boats were waiting for them on the grey evening surface of the broad river.

Sophia found herself compelled to go in the same boat with Sir Hervey, but she took good heed to ensconce herself at a distance from him; and, successful in this, sat at her end, moody, and careless of appearances. There was singing and a little romping in the stern of the boat, where the ladies principally sat, and where their hoops called for some arrangement. Presently a pert girl, Lady Betty Cochrane, out at sixteen, and bent on a husband before she was seventeen, marked Sophia's silence, nudged those about her, and took on herself to rally the girl.

"La, miss, you must have been at a Quakers' meeting!" she cried, simpering. "It is easy to see where your thoughts are."

"Where?" Sophia murmured, abashed by this public notice.

"I believe there is very good acting in-*Doblin!*" the provoking creature answered, with her head on one side, and a sentimental air; and the ladies tittered and the gentlemen smiled. "Have you ever been to-Doblin, miss?" she continued, with a look that winged the innuendo.

Sophia, her face on fire, did not answer.

"Oh, la, miss, you are not offended, I hope!" the tormentor cried politely. "Sure, I thought the gentleman had spoken, and all was arranged. To be sure-

"O'Rourke's noble fare
Will ne'er be forgot
By those who were there,
And those who were not!"

And those who were not!" she hummed again, with a wink that drove the ladies to hide their mirth in their handkerchiefs. "A fine man, O'Rourke, and I have heard that he was an actor in-Doblin!" the little tease continued.

Sophia, choking with rage, and no match for her town-bred antagonist, could find not a word to answer; and worse still, she knew not where to look. Another moment and she might even have burst into tears, a mishap which would have disgraced her for ever in that company. But at the critical instant a quiet voice at the stern was heard, quoting-

"Whom Simplicetta loves the town would know,
Mark well her knots, and name the happy beau!"

On which it was seen that it is one thing to tease and another to be teased. Lady Betty swung round in a rage, and without a word attacked Sir Hervey with her fan with a violence that came very near to upsetting the boat. "How dare you, you horrid man?" she cried, when she thought she had beaten him enough. "I wish there were no men in the world, I declare I do! It's a great story, you ugly thing! If Mr. Hesketh says I gave him a knot, he is just a-

A shout of laughter cut her short. Too late she saw that she had betrayed herself, and she stamped furiously on the bottom of the boat. "He cut it off!" she shrieked, raising her voice above the laughter. "He cut it off! He would cut it off! 'Tis a shame you will not believe me. I say-

A fresh peal of laughter drowned her voice, and brought the boat to the landing-place.

"All the same, Lady Betty," the nearest girl said as they prepared to step out, "you'd better not let your mother hear, or you'll go milk cows, my dear, in the country! Lord, you little fool, the boy's not worth a groat, and should be at school by rights!"

Miss Betty did not answer, but cocking her chin with disdain, which made her look prettier than ever, stepped out, sulking. Sophia followed, her cheeks a trifle cooler than they had been; and the party, once more united, proceeded on foot from the river to the much-praised groves of Pleasure; where ten thousand lamps twinkled and glanced among the trees, or outlined the narrowing avenue that led to the glittering pavilion. In the wide and open space before this Palace of Aladdin a hundred gay and lively groups were moving to and fro to the strains of the band, or were standing to gaze at the occupants of the boxes; who, sheltered from the elements, and divided from the humbler visitors by little gardens, supped *al fresco*, their ears charmed by music, and their eyes entertained by the ever-changing crowd that moved below them.

Two of the best boxes had been retained for Mrs. Northey's party, but before they proceeded to them her company chose to stroll up and down a time or two, diverting themselves with the humours of the place and the evening. More than once Sophia's heart stood still as they walked. She fancied that she saw Hawkesworth approaching, that she distinguished his form, his height, his face amid the crowd; and conscious of the observant eyes around her, as well as of her sister's displeasure, she

knew not where to look for embarrassment. On each occasion it turned out that she was mistaken, and to delicious tremors succeeded the chill of a disappointment almost worse to bear. After all, she reflected, if she must dismiss him, here were a hundred opportunities of doing so in greater freedom than she could command elsewhere. The turmoil of the press through which they moved, now in light and now in shadow, now on the skirts of the romantic, twilight grove, and now under the blaze of the pavilion lamps, favoured the stolen word, the kind glance, the quick-breathed sigh. But though he knew that she was to be there, though of late he had seldom failed her in such public resorts as this, he did not appear; and by-and-by her company left the parade, and, entering the boxes, fell to mincing chickens in china bowls, and cooking them with butter and water over a lamp, all with much romping and scolding, and some kissing and snatching of white fingers, and such a fire of jests and laughter as soon drew a crowd to the front of the box, and filled the little gardens on either side of them with staring groups.

Gayest, pertest, most reckless of all, Lady Betty was in her glory. Never was such a rattle as she showed herself. Her childish treble and shrill laugh, her pretty flushed face and tumbled hair were everywhere. Apparently bent on punishing Coke for his interference she never let him rest, with the result that Sophia, whose resentment still smouldered, was free to withdraw to the back of the box, and witness rather than share the sport that went forward. To this a new zest was given when Lord P-, who had been dining at a tavern on the river, arrived very drunk, and proceeded to harangue the crowd from the front of the box.

Sophia's seat at the back was beside the head of the half-dozen stairs that descended to the gardens. The door at her elbow was open. On a sudden, while the hubbub was at its height, and a good half of the party were on their feet before her-some encouraging his lordship to fresh vagaries, and others striving to soothe him-she heard a stealthy hist! hist! in the doorway beside her, as if some one sought to gain her attention. With Hawkesworth in her mind she peered that way in trembling apprehension; immediately a little white note dropped lightly at her feet, and she had a glimpse of a head and shoulders, withdrawn as soon as seen.

With a tumultuous feeling between shame and joy, Sophia, who, up to this moment, had had nothing clandestine on her conscience, slipped her foot over the note? and glanced round to see if any one had seen her. That moment an eager childish voice cried in her ear, "Give me that! Give it me!" And then, more urgently, "Do you hear? It is mine! Please give it me!"

The voice was Lady Betty's; and her flushed pleading face backed the appeal. At which, and all it meant, it is not to be denied that a little malice stirred in Sophia's breast. The chit had so tormented her an hour earlier, had so held her up to ridicule, so shamed her. It was no wonder she was inclined to punish her now. "Yours, child," she said, looking coldly at her. "Impossible."

"Yes, miss. Please-please give it me-at once, please, before it is too late."

"I do not know that I shall," Sophia answered virtuously, from the height of her eighteen years. "Children have no right to receive notes. I ought to give it to your mother." Then, with an unexpected movement, she stooped and possessed herself of the folded scrap of paper. "I am not sure that I shall not," she continued.

Lady Betty's face was piteous. "If you do, I-I shall be sent into the country," she panted. "I-I don't know what they'll do to me. Oh, please, please, will you give it me!"

Sophia had a kindly nature, and the girl's distress appealed to her. But it appealed in two ways.

"No, I shall not give it you," she answered firmly. "But I shall not tell your mother, either. I shall tear it up. You are too young, you little baby, to do this!" And suiting the action to the word, she tore the note into a dozen pieces and dropped them.

Lady Betty glared at her between relief and rage. At last "Cat! Cat!" she whispered with childish spite. "Thank you for nothing, ma'am. I'll pay you by-and-by, see if I don't!" And with a spring, she was back at the front of the box, her laugh the loudest, her voice the freshest, her wit the boldest and most impertinent of all. Sophia, who fancied that she had made an enemy, did not notice that more

than once this madcap looked her way; nor that in the midst of the wildest outbursts she had an eye for what happened in her direction.

Sophia, indeed, had food for thought more important than Lady Betty, for the girl had scarcely left her side when Mrs. Northey came to her, shook her roughly by the shoulder—they had direct ways in those days—and asked her in a fierce whisper if she were going to sulk there all the evening. Thus adjured, Sophia moved reluctantly to a front seat at the right-hand corner of the box. Lord P- had been suppressed, but broken knots of people still lingered before the garden of the box expecting a new escapade. To the right, in the open, fireworks were being let off, and the grounds in that direction were as light as in the day. Suddenly, Sophia's eyes, roving moodily hither and thither, became fixed. She rose to her feet with a cry of surprise, which must have been heard by her companions had they not been taken up at that moment with the arrest of a cutpurse by two thief-takers, a drama which was going forward on the left.

"There's-there's Tom!" she cried, her astonishment extreme, since Tom should have been at Cambridge. And raising her voice she shouted "Tom! Tom!"

Her brother did not hear. He was moving across the open lighted space, some fifteen paces from the box; a handsome boy, foppishly dressed, moving with the affected indifference of a very young dandy. Sophia glanced round in an agony of impatience, and found that no one was paying any attention to her; there was no one she could send to call him. She saw that in a twinkling he would be lost in the crowd, and, acting on the impulse of the moment, she darted to the stairs, which were only two paces from her, and flew down them to overtake him. Unfortunately, she tripped at the bottom and almost fell, lost a precious instant, and lost Tom. When she reached the spot where she had last seen him, and looked round, her brother was not to be seen.

Or yes, there he was, in the act of vanishing down one of the dim alleys that led into the grove. Half laughing, half crying, innocently anticipating his surprise when he should see her, Sophia sped after him. He turned a corner—the place was a maze and dimly lighted—she followed him; she thought he met some one, she hurried on, and the next moment was all but in the arms of Hawkesworth.

"Sophia!" the Irishman cried, pressing his hat to his heart as he bowed before her. "Oh, my angel, that I should be so blest! This is indeed a happy meeting."

But she was far at the moment from thinking of him. Her brother occupied her whole mind. "Where is he," she cried, looking every way. "Where is Tom? Mr. Hawkesworth, you must have seen him. He must have passed you."

"Seen whom, ma'am?" her admirer asked with eager devotion. He was tall, with a certain florid grace of carriage; and ready, for his hand was on his heart, and his eyes expressed the joy he felt, almost before she knew who stood before her. "If it is any one I know, make me happy by commanding me. If he be at the ends of the earth, I will bring him back."

"It is my brother!"

"Your brother?"

"Yes—but you would not know him," she cried, stamping her foot with impatience. "How annoying!"

"Not know him?" he answered gallantly. "Oh, ma'am, how little you know me!" And Hawkesworth extended his arm with a gesture half despairing, half reproachful. "How little you enter into my feelings if you think that I should not know *your* brother! My tongue I know is clumsy, and says little, but my eyes" — and certainly they dwelt boldly enough on her blushing face, "my eyes must inform you more correctly of my feelings."

"Please, please do not talk like that!" she cried in a low voice, and she wrung her hands in distress. "I saw my brother, and I came down to overtake him, and—and somehow I have missed him."

"But I thought that he was at Cambridge?" he said.

"He should be," she replied. "But it was he. It was he indeed. I ran to catch him, and I have missed him, and I must go back at once. If you please, I must go back at once."

"In one moment you shall!" he cried, barring the road, but with so eloquent a look and a tone so full of admiration that she could not resent the movement. "In one moment you shall. But, my angel, heaven has sent you to my side, heaven has taken pity on my passion, and given me this moment of delight-will you be more cruel and snatch it from me? Nay, but, sweet," he continued with ardour, making as if he would kneel, and take possession of her hand, "sweetest one, say that you, too, are glad! Say-"

"Mr. Hawkesworth, I am glad," she murmured, trembling; while her face burned with blushes. "For it gives me an opportunity I might otherwise have lacked of-of-oh, I don't know how I can say it!"

"Say what, madam?"

"How I can take-take leave of you," she murmured, turning away her head.

"Take leave of me?" he cried. "Take leave of me?"

"Yes, oh, yes! Believe me, Mr. Hawkesworth," Sophia continued, beginning to stammer in her confusion, "I am not ungrateful for your attentions, I am not, indeed, ungrateful, but we-we must part."

"Never!" he cried, rising and looking down at her. "Never! It is not your heart that speaks now, or it speaks but a lesson it has learned."

Sophia was silent.

"It is your friends who would part us," he continued, with stern and bitter emphasis. "It is your cold-blooded, politic brother-in-law; it is your proud sister-"

"Stay, sir," Sophia said unsteadily. "She *is* my sister."

"She is; but she would part us!" he retorted. "Do you think that I do not understand that? Do you think that I do not know why, too? They see in me only a poor gentleman. I cannot go to them, and tell them what I have told you! I cannot," he continued, with a gesture that in the daylight might have seemed a little theatrical, but in the dusk of the alley and to a girl's romantic perceptions commended itself gallantly enough, "put my life in their hands as I have put it in yours! I cannot tell them that the day will come when Plomer Hawkesworth will stand on the steps of a throne and enjoy all that a king's gratitude can confer. When he who now runs daily, nightly, hourly the risk of Layer's fate, whose head may any morning rot on Temple Bar and his limbs on York Gates-"

Sophia interrupted him; she could bear no more. "Oh, no, no!" she cried, shuddering and covering her eyes. "God forbid! God forbid, sir! Rather-"

"Rather what, sweet?" he cried, and he caught her hand in rapture.

"Rather give up this-this dangerous life," she sobbed, overcome by the horror of the things his words had conjured up. "Let others tread such dangerous ways and run such risks. Give up the Jacobite cause, Mr. Hawkesworth, if you love me as you say you do, and I-"

"Yes? Yes?" he cried; and across his handsome face, momentarily turned from her as if he would resist her pleading, there crept a look half of derision, half of triumph. "What of you, sweet?"

But her reply was never spoken, for as he uttered the word the fireworks died down with startling abruptness, plunging the alley in which they stood into gloom. The change recalled the girl to a full and sudden sense of her position; to its risks and to its consequences, should her absence, even for a moment, be discovered. Wringing her hands in distress, in place of the words that had been on her lips, "Oh, I must go!" she cried. "I must get back at once!" And she looked for help to her lover.

He did not answer her, and she turned from him, fearing he might try to detain her. But she had not taken three steps before she paused in agitation, uncertain in the darkness which way she had come. A giggling, squealing girl ran by her into the grove, followed by a man; at the same moment a distant fanfare of French horns, with the confused noise of a multitude of feet trampling the earth at once, announced that the entertainment was over, and that the assembly was beginning to leave the gardens.

Sophia's heart stood still. What if she were missed? Worse still, what if she were left behind? "Oh," she cried, turning again to him, her hands outstretched, "which is the way? Mr. Hawkesworth, please, please show me the way! Please take me to them!"

But the Irishman did not move.

CHAPTER III

THE CLOCK-MAKER

It even seemed to Sophia that his face, as he stood watching her, took on a smirk of satisfaction, faint, but odious; and in that moment, and for the moment, she came near to hating him. She knew that in the set in which she moved much might be overlooked, and daily and hourly was overlooked, in the right people. But to be lost at Vauxhall at midnight, in the company of an unauthorised lover—this had a horribly clandestine sound; this should be sufficient to blacken the fame of a poor maid—or her country education was at fault. And knowing this, and hearing the confused sounds of departure rise each moment louder and more importunate, the girl grew frantic with impatience.

"Which way? Which way?" she cried. "Do you hear me? Which way are the boxes, Mr. Hawkesworth? You know which way I came. Am I to think you a dolt, sir, or-or what?"

"Or what?" he repeated, grinning feebly. To be candid, the occasion had not been foreseen, and the Irishman, though of readiest wit, could not on the instant make up his mind how he would act.

"Or a villain?" she cried, with a furious glance. And in the effort to control herself, the ivory fan-sticks snapped in her small fingers as if they had been of glass. "Take me back this instant, sir," she continued, her head high, "or never presume to speak to me again!"

What he would have said to this is uncertain, for the good reason that before he answered, two men appeared at the end of the alley. Catching the sheen of Sophia's hoop skirt, where it glimmered light against the dark of the trees, they espied the pair, took them for a pair of lovers, and with a whoop of drunken laughter came towards them. One was Lord P-, no soberer than before; the other a brother buck flushed with wine to the same pitch of insolence, and ready for any folly or mischief. Crying "So ho! A petticoat! A petticoat!" the two Mohocks joined hands, and with a tipsy view-halloa! swept down the green walk, expecting to carry all before them.

But it was in such an emergency as this that the Irishman was at his best. Throwing himself between the shrinking, frightened girl and the onset of the drunken rakes, he raised his cane with an air so determined that the assailants thought better of their plan, and, pausing with a volley of drunken threats, parted hands and changed their scheme of attack. While one prepared to rush in and overturn the man, the other made a feint aside, and, thrusting himself through the shrubs, sprang on the girl. Sophia screamed, and tried to free herself; but scream and effort were alike premature. With a rapid twirl Hawkesworth avoided my lord's rush, caught him by the waist as he blundered by, and, swinging him off his legs, flung him crashing among the undergrowth. Then, whipping out his sword, he pricked the other who had seized Sophia, in the fleshy part of the shoulder, and forced him to release her; after which, plying his point before the bully's eyes, he drove him slowly back and back. Now the man shrieked and flinched as the glittering steel menaced his face; now he poured forth a volley of threats and curses, as it was for a moment withdrawn. But Hawkesworth was unmoved by either, and at length the fellow, seeing that he was not to be intimidated either by his lordship's name or his own menaces, thought better of it—as these gentlemen commonly did when they were resisted; and springing back with a parting oath, he took to his heels, and saved himself down a bypath.

The Irishman, a little breathed by his victory, wasted no time in vaunting it. The girl had witnessed it with worshipping eyes; he could trust her to make the most of it. "Quick," he cried, "or we shall be in trouble!" And sheathing his sword, he caught the trembling Sophia by the hand, and ran with her down the path. They turned a corner; a little way before her she saw lights, and the open space near the booths which she had seen her brother cross. But now Hawkesworth halted; his purpose was still fluid and uncertain. But the next moment a shrill childish voice cried "Here she is; I've found her!" and Lady Betty Cochrane flew towards them. A little behind her, approaching at a more leisurely pace, was Sir Hervey Coke.

Lady Betty stared at Hawkesworth with all her eyes, and giggled. "Oh, lord, a man!" she cried, and veiled her face, pretending to be overcome.

"I saw my brother," Sophia faltered, covered with confusion, "and ran down-ran down to-to meet him."

"Just so! But see here, *brother!*" Lady Betty answered with a wink. "Go's the word, now, if you are not a fool."

Hawkesworth hesitated an instant, looking from Sophia to Sir Hervey Coke; but he saw that nothing more could be done on the occasion, and muttering "Another time," he turned away, and in a moment was lost in the grove.

"She was with her brother," Lady Betty cried, turning, and breathlessly explaining the matter to Coke, who had seen all. "Think of that! She saw him, and followed him. That's all. Lord, I wonder," she continued, with a loud giggle, "if they would make such a fuss if I were missing. I declare to goodness I'll try." And, leaving Sophia to follow with Sir Hervey, she danced on in front until they met Mrs. Northey, who, with her husband and several of her party, was following in search of the culprit. Seeing she was found, the gentlemen winked at one another behind backs, while the ladies drew down the corners of their mouths. One of the latter laughed, maliciously expecting the scene that would follow.

But Lady Betty had the first word, and kept it. "Lord, ma'am, what ninnies we are!" she cried. "She was with her brother. That's all!"

"Hee, hee!" the lady tittered who had laughed before. "That's good! Her brother!"

"Yes, she was!" Betty cried, turning on her, a very spitfire. "I suppose seeing's believing, ma'am, though one is only fifteen, and not forty. She saw her brother going by the-the corner there, and ran after him while we were watching-watching the- But oh, I beg your pardon, ma'am, you were otherwise engaged, I think!" with a derisive curtsy.

Unfortunately the lady who had laughed had a weakness for one of the gentlemen in company; which was so notorious that on this even her friends sniggered. With Mrs. Northey, however, Lady Betty's advocacy was less effective. That pattern sister, from the moment she discovered Sophia's absence, and divined the cause of it, had been fit to burst with spleen. Fortunately, the coarse rating which she had prepared, and from which neither policy nor mercy could have persuaded her to refrain, died on her shrewish lips at the word "brother."

"Her brother?" she repeated mechanically, as she glowered at Lady Betty. "Her brother here? What do you mean?"

"To be sure, ma'am, what I say. She saw him."

"But how did she know-that he was in London?" Mrs. Northey stammered, forgetting herself for the moment.

"She didn't know! That's the strange part of it!" Lady Betty replied volubly. "She saw him, ma'am, and ran after him."

"Well, anyway, you have given us enough trouble!" Mrs. Northey retorted, addressing her sister; who stood before them trembling with excitement, and overcome by the varied emotions of the scene through which she had passed in the alley. "Thank you for nothing, and Master Tom, too! Perhaps if you have quite done you'll come home. Sir Hervey, I'll trust her to you, if you'll be troubled with her. Now, if your ladyship will lead the way? I declare it's wondrous dark of a sudden."

The party, taking the hint, turned, and quickly made its way along the deserted paths towards the entrance. As they trooped by twos and threes down the Avenue of Delight many of the lamps had flickered out, and others were guttering in the sockets, fit images of wit and merriment that had lost their sparkle, and fell dull on jaded ears. Coke walked in silence beside his companion until a little interval separated them from the others. Then, "Child," he said in a tone grave and almost severe, "are you fixed to take no warning? Are you determined to throw away your life?"

It was his misfortune-and hers-that he chose his seasons ill. At that moment her heart was filled to overflowing with her lover, and her danger; his prowess, and his brave defence of her. Her eyes were hot with joyful, happy tears hardly pent back. Her limbs trembled with a delicious agitation; all within her was a tumult of warm feelings, of throbbing sensibilities.

For Sir Hervey to oppose himself to her in that mood was to court defeat; it was to associate himself with the worldliness that to her in her rapture was the most hateful thing on earth; and he had his reward. "Throw away my life," she cried, curtly and contemptuously, "'tis just that, sir, I am determined not to do!"

"You are going the way to do it," he retorted.

"I should be going the way-were I to entertain the suit of a spy!" she cried, her voice trembling as she hurled the insult at him. "Were I to become the wife of a man who, even before he has a claim on me, dogs my footsteps, watches my actions, defames my friends! Believe me, sir, I thank you for nothing so much as for opening my eyes to your merits."

"Oh, Lord!" he exclaimed in despair almost comic.

"Thank you," she said. "I see your conduct is of a piece, sir. From the first you treated me as a child; a chattel to be conveyed to you by my friends, with the least trouble to yourself. You scarcely stooped to speak to me until you found another in the field, and then 'twas only to backbite a gentleman whom you dared not accuse to his face?"

As she grew hotter he grew cool. "Well, well," he said, tapping his snuff-box, "be easy; I sha'n't carry you off against your will."

"No, you will not!" she cried. "You will not! Don't think, if you please, that I am afraid of you. I am afraid of no one!"

And in the fervour of her love she felt that she spoke the truth. At that moment she was afraid of no one.

"'Tis a happy state; I hope it may continue," Coke answered placidly. "You never had cause to fear me. After this you shall have no cause to reproach me. I ask only one thing in return."

"You will have nothing," she said rudely.

"You will grant me this, whether you will or no!"

"Never!"

"Yes," he said, "for it is but this, and you cannot help yourself. When you have been married to that man a month think of this moment and of me, and remember that I warned you."

He spoke soberly, but he might have spoken to the winds for all the good he did. She was in air, picturing her lover's strength and prowess, his devotion, his gallantry. Once again she saw the drunken lord lifted and flung among the shrubs, and Hawkesworth's figure as he stood like Hector above his fallen foe. Again she saw the other bully flinching before his steel, cursing, reviling and hiccoughing by turns, and Hawkesworth silent, inexorable, pressing on him. She forgot the preceding moment of dismay when she had turned to her lover for help, and read something less than respect in his eyes; that short moment during which he had hung in the wind uncertain what course he would take with her. She forgot this, for she was only eighteen, and the scene in which he had championed her had cast its glamour over her, distorting all that had gone before. He had defended her; he was her hero, she was his chosen. What girl of sensibility could doubt it?

Coke, who left them at the door of the house in Arlington Street, finished the evening at White's, where, playing deep for him, he won three hundred at hazard without speaking three unnecessary words. Returning home with the milk in the morning, he rubbed his eyes, surprised to find himself following Hawkesworth along Piccadilly. The Irishman had a companion, a young lad who reeled and hiccoughed in the cool morning air; who sung snatches of tippy songs, and at the corner of Berkeley Street would have fought with a night chairman if the elder man had not dragged him on by force. The two turned up Dover Street and Sir Hervey, after following them with his eyes, lost sight of

them, and went on, wondering why a drunken boy's voice, heard at haphazard in the street, reminded him of Sophia.

He would have wondered less and known more had he followed them farther. At the bottom of Hay Hill the lad freed himself from his companion's arm, propped his shoulders against the wall of Berkeley Gardens, and with drunken solemnity proceeded to argue a point. "I don't understand," he said. "Why shouldn't I speak to S'phia, if I please. Eh? S'phia's devilish good girl, why do you go and drag her off? That's what I want to know."

"My dear lad," Hawkesworth answered with patience, "if she saw you she'd blow the whole thing."

"Not she!" the lad hiccupped obstinately. "She's a good little girl. She's my twin, I tell you."

"But the others were with her."

"What others?"

"Northey."

"I shall kick Northey, when I am married," the lad proclaimed with drunken solemnity. "That's all."

"Well, you'll be married to-morrow."

"Why not to-day? That's what I want to know. Eh? Why not to-day?"

"Because the fair Oriana is at Ipswich, and you are here," the Irishman answered with a trace of impatience in his tone. Then under his breath he added, "D-n the jade! This is one of her tricks. She's never where she is wanted."

In the meantime the lad had been set in motion again, and the two had reached the end of Davies Street at the north-west corner of the square. Here, perceiving the other mutter, Tom-for Sophia's brother, Tom, it was-stopped anew. "Eh? What's that?" he said. "What's that you are saying, old tulip?"

"I was saying you were a monstrous clever fellow to win her-to-day or to-morrow," Hawkesworth answered coolly. "And I am hanged if I know how you did it. I can tell you a hundred gay fellows in the town are dying to marry her. And no flinchers, either."

"Pon honour?"

"Ay, and a hundred more would give their ears for a kiss. But lord, out of all she must needs choose you! I vow, lad," Hawkesworth continued with enthusiasm, "it is the most extraordinary thing that ever was. The finest shape this side of Paris, eyes that would melt a stone, ankles like a gossamer, a toast wherever she goes, and the prettiest wit in the world; sink me, lad, she might have had the richest buck in town, and she chooses you."

"Might she really? Honest now, might she?"

"That she might!"

Tom was so moved by this picture of his mistress's devotion and his own bliss that he found it necessary to weep a little, supporting himself by the huge link-extinguisher at the corner of Davies Street. His wig awry, and his hat clapped on the back of it, he looked as abandoned a young rake as the five o'clock sun ever shone upon; and yet under his maudlin tears lay a real if passing passion. "She's an angel!" he sobbed presently. "I shall never forget it! Never! And to think that but for you, if your chaise had not broken down at my elbow, just when you had picked her up after the accident at Trumpington, I should never have known her! And-and I might have been smuggling at Cambridge now, instead of waiting to be made the happiest of men. Oriana," he continued, clinging to the railings in a tipsy rhapsody, "most beautiful of your sex, I vow-"

A couple of chairmen and a milk-girl were looking on grinning. "There, bed's the word now!" Hawkesworth cried, seizing him and dragging him on. "Bed's the word! I said we would make a night of it, and we have. What's more, my lad," he continued in a tone too low for Tom's ear, "if you're not so cut to-morrow, you're glad to keep the house-I'm a Dutchman!"

This time his efforts were successful. His lodging, taken a week before in the name of Plomer, was only a few doors distant. In two minutes he had got Tom thither; in three, the lad, divested of his coat, boots and neckcloth, was snoring heavily on the bed; while the Irishman, from an armchair on the hearth, kept dark watch over him. At length he too fell asleep, and slumbered as soundly as an innocent child, until a muffled hammering in the parlour roused him, and he stood up yawning and looked about him. The room, stiflingly close, lay in semi-darkness; on the bed sprawled the young runagate, dead asleep, his arms tossed wide. Hawkesworth stared awhile, still half asleep; at last, thirsting for small beer, he opened the door and went into the parlour. Here the windows were open: it was high noon. The noise the Irishman had heard was made by a man whose head and shoulders were plunged in a tall clock that stood in one corner. The man was kneeling at his task mending something in the works of the clock. The Irishman touched him roughly with his foot.

"Sink that coffin-making!" he cried coarsely. "Do you hear? Get up!"

The clock-maker withdrew his head, looked up meekly to see who disturbed him, and-and swore. Simultaneously Hawkesworth drew back with a cry, and the two glared at one another. Then the man on the floor—he wore a paper cap, and below it his fat elderly face shone with sweat-rose quickly to his feet. "You villain!" he cried, in a voice tremulous and scarcely articulate, so great was his passion. "I have found you at last, have I? Where's my daughter?" and he stretched out his open hands, crook-fingered, and shook them in the younger man's face. "Where is my daughter?"

"Lord, man, how do I know?" Hawkesworth answered. He tried to speak lightly, but with all his impudence he was taken aback, and showed it.

"How do you know?" the clock-maker retorted, again shaking his hands in his face. "If you don't know, who should? Who should? By heaven, if you don't tell me, and truly, I'll rouse the house on you. Do you hear! I'll make you known here, you scoundrel, for what you are. This is a respectable house, and they'll have none of you. I'll so cry you, you shall trick no man of his daughter again. No, for I'll set the crowd on you, and mark you."

"Hush, man, hush!" Hawkesworth answered, with an anxious glance at the door of the chamber he had left. "You do yourself no good by this."

"No; but by heaven I can do you harm!" the other replied, and nimbly stepping to the door that led to the stairs, he opened it, and held it ajar. "I can do you harm! A silver tankard and twenty-seven guineas she took with her, and I'll swear them to you. By God, I will!"

Hawkesworth's face turned a dull white. Unwelcome as the meeting and the recognition were, he had not realised his danger until now. The awkward circumstances connected with the tankard and the guineas had escaped his memory. Now it was clear he must temporise. "You need not threaten," he said doggedly. "I'll tell you all I know. She's—she's not with me; she is on the stage. She's not in London."

"She's not with you?"

"No."

"You're a liar!" the clock-maker cried, brutally.

"I swear it is true!" Hawkesworth protested.

"She is not living with you?"

"No."

"Did you marry her?"

"Ye-ye-No!" Hawkesworth answered, uncertain for a moment which reply would be the better taken. "No; I—she left me, I tell you," he continued hurriedly, "and went on the stage against my will."

The clock-maker laughed cunningly, and his face was not pleasant to see. "She's not with you," he said, "she's not married to you, and she's not in London? You deceived her, my fine fellow, and left her. That's the story, is it? That's the story I've waited two years to hear."

"She left me," Hawkesworth answered. "Against my will, I tell you."

"Anyway she's gone, and 'twill make no difference to her what happens to you. So I'll hang you, you devil," the old man continued, with a cold chuckling determination, that chilled Hawkesworth's blood. "No, you don't," he continued, withdrawing one half of his body through the doorway, as Hawkesworth took a step towards him. "You don't pinch me that way! Another step, and I give the alarm."

Hawkesworth recalled the opinion he had held of this grasping old curmudgeon, his former landlord-who had loved his gay, flirty daughter a little, and his paltry savings more; and his heart misgave him. The alarm once given, the neighbourhood roused, at the best, and if no worse thing befel him, he would be arrested. Arrest meant the ruin of his present schemes. "Oh, come, Mr. Grocott," he faltered. "You will not do it. You'll not be so foolish."

"Why not?" the other snarled, in cruel enjoyment of his fears. "Eh! Tell me that. Why not?"

But even as he spoke Hawkesworth saw the way out of his dilemma. "Because you'll not do a thing you will repent all your life," he said, his brazen assurance returning as quickly as it had departed. "Because you'll not ruin your daughter. Have done, hold your hand, man, and in two days I'll make her a grand lady."

"You'll marry her, I suppose," old Grocott answered with a savage sneer.

"Yes, to a man of title and property."

"You're a great liar."

Hawkesworth spread out his hands in remonstrance. "Judge for yourself," he said. "Have a little patience. Listen to me two minutes, my good fellow; and then say if you'll stand in your daughter's light."

"Hang the drab! She's no daughter of mine," the old man cried fiercely. Nevertheless he listened, and Hawkesworth, sinking his voice, proceeded to tell in tones, always earnest, and at times appealing, a story that little by little won the hearer's attention. First Grocott, albeit he listened with the same apparent incredulity, closed the door. Later, his interest growing, he advanced into the room. Then he began to breathe more quickly; at length, with an oath, he struck his hand on the table beside him.

"And you say the lad is here?" he cried.

"He is here."

"Where?"

"In that room."

"By gole, let me see him!"

"If he is asleep," Hawkesworth answered, assenting with reluctance. He crossed the room and cautiously opened the door of the chamber in which Tom lay snoring. Beckoning the old man to be wary, he allowed him to peer in. Grocott looked and listened, stole forward, and, like some pale-faced ghoul, leant over the flushed features of the unconscious lad. Then he stealthily returned to the parlour, and the door between the two rooms was shut.

"Well," the Irishman asked, "are you satisfied?"

"What do you say his name is?"

"Maitland-Sir Thomas Maitland of Cuckfield."

"She'll be Lady Maitland?"

"To be sure."

"And what do you call-her now?" the clock-maker asked. He seemed to find a difficulty in pronouncing the last words.

"Clark-Mistress Oriana Clark," Hawkesworth answered. "She's at Ipswich, or was, and should be here to-morrow."

Grocott's nose curled at the name. "And what are you going to get out of this?" he continued, eyeing the other with intense suspicion.

The Irishman hesitated, but in the end determined to tell the truth, and trust to the other's self-interest. "A wife, and a plum," he said jauntily. "There's a girl, his sister, I'm going to marry; she takes ten thousand out of his share if he marries without his guardians' consent. That's it."

"Lord, you're a rascal!" Grocott ejaculated, and stared in admiration of the other's roguery. "To take ten thousand of my son-in-law's money, and tell me of it to my face. By gole, you're a cool one!"

"You can choose between that and nothing," Hawkesworth answered, confident in his recovered mastery. "You can do nothing without me, you see. No more can Oriana."

The old man winced. Somehow the name-her name had been Sarah-hurt him. "What's the name of-of the other one?" he said. "His sister-that you're going to marry?"

"Sophia," the Irishman answered.

CHAPTER IV

A DISCOVERY

The scene in the gardens had moved Sophia's feelings so deeply that, notwithstanding the glamour Hawkesworth's exploit had cast over her, a word of kindness addressed to her on her arrival in Arlington Street might have had far-reaching results. Unfortunately her sister's temper and Mr. Northey's dulness gave sweet reasonableness small place. Scarcely had the chairmen been dismissed, the chairs carried out, and the door closed on them before Mr. Northey's indignation found vent. "Sophia, I am astonished!" he said in portentous tones; and, dull as he was, he *was* astonished. "I could not have believed you would behave in this way!"

"The more fool you!" Mrs. Northey snapped; while the girl, white and red by turns, too proud to fly, yet dreading what was to come, hung irresolute at the foot of the stairs, apparently fumbling with her hood, and really growing harder and harder with each reproach that was levelled at her.

"After all I said to you this morning!" Mr. Northey continued, glaring at her as if he found disobedience to orders such as his a thing beyond belief. "When I had prohibited in the most particular manner all communications with that person, to go and-and meet him in a place of all places the most scandalous in which to be alone with a man."

"La, Northey, it was that made her do it!" his wife rejoined sourly. "Go to bed, miss, and we will talk to you to-morrow. I suppose you thought we were taken in with your fine tale of your brother?"

"I never said it was my brother!" Sophia cried, hotly.

"Go to bed. Do you hear? I suppose you have sense enough to do that when you are told," her sister rejoined. "We will talk to you to-morrow."

Sophia choked, but thought better of it, and turning away, crept upstairs. After all, she whispered, as her hands squeezed convulsively the poor hood that had not offended her, it mattered little. If he were good to her what reeked it of others, their words, or their opinion? What had they ever done for her that she should be guided by them, or what, that she should resign the happiness of her life at their bidding? They had no real care for her. Here was no question of father or mother, or the respect due to their wishes; of kindness, love, or gratitude. Of her brother-in-law, who bullied her in his dull, frigid fashion, she knew little more than she knew of a man in the street; and her sister spared her at the best a cold selfish affection, the affection of the workman for the tools by which he hopes he may some day profit.

Naturally, her thoughts reverted to the lover who that evening had shown himself in his true colours, a hero worthy of any poor girl's affection. Sophia's eyes filled with tears, and her bosom rose and fell with soft emotion as she thought of him and pictured him; as she flushed anew beneath his ardent glances, as she recalled the past and painted a future in which she would lie safe in the haven of his love, secured from peril by the strength of his arm. What puny figures the beaux and bloods of town looked beside him! With what grace he moved among them, elbowing one and supplanting another. It was no wonder they gazed after him enviously, or behind his back vented their petty spite in sneers and innuendos, called him Teague, and muttered of Murphies and the bog of Arran. The time would come-and oh, how she prayed it might come quickly-when the world would discover the part he had played; when, in a Stuart England, he would stand forward the friend of Cecil, the agent of Ormonde, and the town would recognise in the obscurity in which he now draped himself and at which they scoffed, the cloak of the most daring and loyal conspirator that ever wrought for the rightful king!

For this was the secret he had whispered in Sophia's ear; this was the explanation he had given of the cold looks men cast on him in public. Nor was it too incredible for the belief of a romantic girl. In that year, 1742, the air in London was full of such rumours, and London, rumour said, was full of

such men. The close of Sir Robert Walpole's long and peaceful administration, and the imminence of war with France, had raised the hopes of the Jacobites to the highest pitch. Though the storm did not break in open war until three years later, it already darkened the sky, and filled the capital with its rumblings. Alike in the Cabinet, where changes were frequent and great men few, and in the country where people looked for something, they hardly knew what, unrest and uneasiness prevailed. Many a sturdy squire in Lancashire and Shropshire, many a member at Westminster, from Shippon and Sir Watkyn downwards, passed his glass over the water-jug as he drank the King; and if Sophia, as she drew her withered flower from its hiding-place, that it might lie beneath her pillow through the night, prayed for King James and his cause, she did only what many a pretty Jacobite, and some who passed for Whigs, were doing at the same hour.

In the meantime, and pending the triumph for which she longed so passionately, her dear hero's pretensions helped her not a whit; on the contrary, were they known, or suspected, they would sink him lower than ever in the estimation of her family. This thought it was that, as she lay revolving matters, raised in her mind an increasing barrier between her and her sister. The Northeys were firm Whigs, pledged not less by interest than by tradition to the White Horse of Hanover. They had deserted Sir Robert at his utmost need, but merely to serve their own turn; because his faction was drooping, and another, equally Whiggish, was in the ascendant, certainly with no view to a Stuart Restoration. Her Hawkesworth's success, therefore, meant their defeat and downfall; his triumph must cost them dear. To abide by them, and abide by him, were as inconsistent as to serve God and Mammon.

Sophia, drawn to her lover by the strength of maiden fancy, saw this; she felt the interval between her and her family increase the longer she dwelt on the course to which her mind was being slowly moved. The consciousness that no compromise was possible had its effect upon her. When she was summoned to the parlour next day, a change had come over her; she went not shyly and shamefacedly, open to cajolery and kindness, as she had gone the previous day, when her opinion of her lover's merit had fallen short of the wrapt assurance that this morning uplifted her. On the contrary, she went armed with determination as solemn in her own sight as it was provoking in the eyes of older and more sagacious persons.

Mrs. Northey discerned the change the moment Sophia entered the room; and she was proportionately exasperated. "Oh, miss, so you'll follow Miss Howe, will you?" she sneered, alluding to a tale of scandal that still furnished the text for many a sermon to the young and flighty. "You'll take no advice!"

"I hope I shall know how to conduct myself better, ma'am," Sophia said proudly.

Mr. Northey was less clear-sighted than his wife. He saw no change; he thought in all innocence that the matter was where he had left it. After clearing his throat, therefore, "Sophia," he said with much majesty, "I hope you have recovered your senses, and that conduct such as that of which you were guilty last night will not be repeated while you are in our charge. Understand me; it must not be repeated. You are country bred, and do not understand that what you did is a very serious matter, and quite enough to compromise a young girl."

Sophia, disdainful to answer, spent her gaze on the picture above his head. The withered flower was in her bosom; the heart that beat against it was full of wondering pity for her sister, who had been compelled to marry this man—this man, ugly, cold, stiff, with no romance in his life, no secret—this man, at the touch of whose hand she, Sophia, shuddered.

"I consider it so-so serious a transgression," Mr. Northey resumed pompously—little did he dream what she was thinking of him—"that the only condition on which I can consent to overlook it is that you at once, Sophia, do your duty by accepting the husband on whom we have fixed for you."

"No," Sophia said, in a low but determined tone, "I cannot do that!"

Mr. Northey fancied that he had not heard aright. "Eh," he said, "you—"

"I cannot do that, sir; my mind is quite made up," she repeated.

From her chair Mrs. Northey laughed scornfully at her husband's consternation. "Are you blind?" she said. "Cannot you see that the Irishman has turned the girl's head?"

"Impossible!" Mr. Northey said.

"Don't you hear her say that her mind is made up?" Mrs. Northey continued contemptuously. "You may talk till you are hoarse, Northey, you'll get nothing; I know that. She's a pig when she likes."

Mr. Northey glowered at the girl as if she had already broken all bounds. "But does she understand," he said, breathing hard, "that marriage with a person of-of that class, is impossible? And surely no modest girl would continue to encourage a person whom she cannot marry?"

Still Sophia remained silent, her eyes steadily fixed on the picture above his head.

"Speak, Sophia!" he cried imperatively. "This is impertinence."

"If I cannot marry him," she said in a low voice, "I shall marry no one!"

"If you cannot marry that-that Irish footman?" he gasped, bursting into rage. "A penniless adventurer, who has not even asked you."

"He has asked me," she retorted.

"Oh, by Gad, ma'am, I've done with you," Mr. Northey cried, striking his fist on the table; and he added an expletive or two. "I hand you over to madam, there. Perhaps she can bring you to your senses. I might have known it," he continued bitterly, addressing his wife. "Like and like, madam! It's bred in the bone, I see!"

"I don't know what you mean, Northey," his wife answered with a sneer of easy contempt. "If you had left the matter to me from the beginning, 'twould have been done by now. Listen to me, Miss Obstinate. Is that the last word you'll give us?"

"Yes," Sophia said, pluming herself a little on her victory.

"Then you'll go into the country to-morrow! That's all!" was Mrs. Northey's reply. "We'll see how you like that!"

The blow was unexpected. The girl's lips parted, and she looked wildly at her sister. "Into the country?" she stammered.

"Ay, sure."

"To-to Cuckfield?" she asked desperately. After all, were she sent to her old home all was not lost. He had heard her speak of it; he knew where it was; he could easily trace her thither.

"No, miss, not to Cuckfield," her sister replied, triumphing cruelly, for she read the girl's thoughts. "You'll go to Aunt Leah at Chalkhill, and I wish you joy of her tantrums and her scraping. You'll go early to-morrow; Mr. Northey will take you; and until you are away from here I'll answer there shall be no note-palming. When you are in a better mind, and your Teague's in Bridewell, you may come back. I fancy you'll be tamed by that time. It will need mighty little persuasion, I'm thinking, to bring you to marry Sir Hervey when you've been at Aunt Leah's for three months."

Sophia's lip began to tremble; her eyes roved piteously. Well might the prospect terrify her, for it meant not only exile from her lover, but an exile which she saw might be permanent. For how was he to find her? To Cuckfield, the family seat, he might trace her easily; but in the poor hamlet on the Sussex coast, where her aunt, who had tripped in her time and paid the penalty, dragged on a penurious existence as the widow of a hedge-parson, not so easily. There a poor girl might eat out her heart, even as her aunt had eaten out hers, and no redress and no chance of rescue. Even had she the opportunity of writing to her lover she did not-unhappy thought-know where he lived.

Mrs. Northey read her dismay, saw the colour fade in her cheek, and the tears gather in her eyes, and with remorseless determination, with cruel enjoyment, drove the nail home.

"There'll be no Vauxhall there," she sneered, "and mighty few drums or routs, my dear! It's likely your first masquerade will be your last; and for the wine-merchant actor that you were to see at Goodman's Fields tomorrow, you may whistle for him; and for your dear Amorevoli. It's to be hoped, Miss Lucy, you'll find your Thomas worth it," she continued, alluding to the farce that held the town, "when you get him." And then, changing her ground, with no little skill, "See here, child,"

she said, in the tone of one willing to argue, "are you going on with this silliness? Think, my dear, think, while it is time, for 'twill be too late at Chalkhill. You don't want to go and be buried in that hole till your brother comes of age?"

Sophia, resentful but terrified, subdued both by the prospect and by the appeal to her reasonableness, had hard work to refrain from tears as she uttered her negative. "No, I-I don't want to go," she stammered.

"I thought not; then you shall have one more chance," Mrs. Northey answered, with a fair show of good nature. "If you'll give me your word not to write to him, you shall have a week to think of it before you go. But you'll keep your room—on that I must insist; there you'll have time to think, and I hope by the end of the week you'll have come to your senses, my dear. If not, you'll go to Aunt Leah."

The mixture of severity and kindness was clever, and it had its effect upon poor Sophia, who stood weighing the alternatives with a rueful face. While she remained in town, if she might not see him, she was still near him, and he near her. She would not be lost to him nor he to her; and then, what might not happen in a week? "I will promise," she murmured, in a low uncertain tone.

"Good," Mrs. Northey answered; "then you may go to your room."

And to her room Sophia would have gone, in a mood fairly open to the influence of reason and solitude. But in an evil moment for himself Mr. Northey, smarting under a defeat which his wife's victory rendered the more humiliating, thought he espied an opportunity of restoring his dignity.

"Yes, you may go," he said sourly; "but take this with you. You will see there," he continued, fussily selecting a letter from a pile on the table, and handing it to her, "what are the terms in which a gentleman seeks an alliance with a lady. It is from Sir Hervey, and I shall be much surprised if it does not produce a very different impression on you from that which that person has made."

"I do not want it," Sophia answered; and held out the letter between her finger and thumb, as if it had an evil odour.

"But I insist on your taking it," Mr. Northey replied with temper; and in spite of the warnings which his wife's contemptuous shrugs should have conveyed to him, he repeated the command.

"Then I will read it now," the girl answered, standing very upright, "if you order me to do so."

"I do order you," he said; and still holding the folded sheet a little from her, she opened it, and with a curling lip and half averted eye, began to read the contents. Suddenly Mrs. Northey took fright; Mr. Northey even was surprised by the change. For the girl's face grew red and redder; she stared at the letter, her lips parting widely, as in astonishment. At last, "What? What is this?" she cried, "Tom? Then it was—it was Tom I saw last night."

"Tom!" Mr. Northey exclaimed.

"Yes, it was Tom!" Sophia cried; "and-oh, but this is dreadful! This must be—must be stopped at once!" she continued, looking from the paper to them and back again with distended eyes. "He is mad to think of such a thing at his age; he is only a boy; he does not know what he is doing." Her voice shook with agitation.

"What the deuce do you mean, miss?" her brother-in-law thundered, rising furious from his chair. "Have you taken leave of your senses? What do you mean by this—this nonsense."

"Mean?" his wife answered with bitter emphasis. "She means that, instead of giving her Coke's letter, you have given her the Cambridge letter; the letter from Tom's tutor. You have done it, like the fool you always are, Northey."

Mr. Northey swore violently. "Give it me!" he cried harshly. "Do you hear, girl? Give it me!" And he stretched out his hand to recover the letter.

But something in the excess of his chagrin, or in the words of the reproach Mrs. Northey had flung at him roused suspicion in the girl's mind. She recoiled, holding the paper from him. "It is five days old!" she gasped; "you have had it four days—three at least; and you have said nothing about it. You have not told me! And you have done nothing!" she continued, her mind jumping instinctively to the truth, at which Mr. Northey's guilty face hinted not obscurely. "He is on the brink of ruining

himself with this woman, and you stand by though you are told what she is, and were told three days ago. Why? Why?" Sophia cried, as Mr. Northey, with an oath, snatched the letter from her. "What does it mean?"

"Mean? Why, that one unruly child is enough to manage at a time!" Mrs. Northey answered, rising to the occasion. She spoke with venom, and no wonder; her hands tingled for her husband's ears. He had improved matters with a vengeance. "It's fine talking, you little toad," she continued, with a show of reason; "but if you don't listen to sense who are here, how are we to persuade him, and he not here? Tell me that, miss. A nice pattern of discretion and prudence you are to talk. Hang your impudence!"

"But you have done nothing," Sophia wailed, her affection for her brother keeping her to the point. "And I saw him last night; it was he whom I saw at Vauxhall. I could have spoken to him, and I am sure he would have listened to me."

"Listened to his grandmother!" Mrs. Northey retorted, with acrid contempt. "We have done what we think right, and that is enough for you, you baby. A nasty disobedient little toad, running into the very same folly yourself, and then prating of us, and what we should do! Hang your fine talking; I've no patience with you, and so I tell you, miss."

"But," Sophia said slowly, her voice grown timid, "I don't understand—"

"Who cares whether you understand!"

"Why-why you make so much of marrying me the way you wish, and yet let him go his way? If he does this, you'll get some of his money I know, but it cannot be that. It couldn't be that. And yet-and yet—" she cried, with a sudden flush of generous indignation, as conviction was borne in upon her by Mr. Northey's hang-dog face—"yes, it is that! Oh, for shame! for shame! Are you his sister, and will ruin him? Will ruin him for the sake of-of money!"

"Silence, you minx!" Mrs. Northey cried; and she rose, her face white with rage, and seizing her sister's arm, she shook her violently. "How dare you say such things? Do you hear? Be silent!"

But Sophia was beside herself with passion, she would not be silent. Neither the dead Northeys on the walls, nor the living sister should stifle the expression of her feelings.

"I take back my promise," she cried, panting with excitement; her words were scarcely coherent. "Do you hear? Do you understand? I promise nothing after this. You may beat me if you like; you may lock me up, it will be all the same. I'll go into the country to-morrow, but I'll make no promise. I shall see Hawkesworth if I can! I shall run away to him if I can! I'd rather do anything-anything in the world after this, than go on living with you."

"You'll not go on living with me!" Mrs. Northey answered through pinched lips, and her eyes glittered after an ugly fashion. "I'll see to that, you little scald-tongue! You'll go to Aunt Leah and feed pigs, and do plain-stitch; I hope it may agree with those dainty hands of yours. And you'll run away from there if you can. She'll see to that. I'll be bound she'll break some of that pretty spirit of yours, grand as you think yourself. So because your precious Tom chooses to take up with some drab or other, you put it on us, do you? Go, you little vixen," Mrs. Northey continued harshly, "go to your room before I do you a mischief! You'll not promise, but the key shall. Up, miss, up, we will have no more of your tantrums!"

Reduced to tears, and broken down by the violence of her emotions, Sophia asked nothing better than to escape, and be alone with her misery. She turned, and as quickly as she could she hurried from the room. Fast as she went, however, Mrs. Northey pushed after her, treading on her heels, and forcing her on. What passed between them Mr. Northey could not hear, but in no long time Mrs. Northey was down again, and flung a key on the table. "There," she cried, her nose twitching with the constraint she put upon her rage. "And what do you think of your management now, Mr. Imbecile?"

"I always said," he answered sullenly, "that we ought to tell her."

"You always said."

"Yes, I did."

"*You* always said!" his wife cried, her eyes flashing with the scorn she made no attempt to hide. "And was not that a very good reason for doing the other thing? Wasn't it, Mr. Northey? Wasn't it? Oh, Lord! why did God give me a fool for a husband?"

CHAPTER V

THE WORLD WELL LOST

Mrs. Northey was no novice. She knew something of intrigue, something of her sex. Her first step was to discharge Sophia's woman, a village maid, who had come with her young mistress from the country. The key of the offender's chamber was then intrusted to madam's own woman, Mrs. Martha, a sour spinster, matured not by years only, but by an unfortunate experience of the other sex, which secured her from the danger of erring on the side of leniency where they were concerned. Mr. Northey could not immediately leave London, therefore it was necessary that arrangements for the culprit's transport to the surer custody of Aunt Leah at Chalkhill should be postponed, but all that Mrs. Northey could do short of this she did. And these dispositions made, she prepared to await events with a mind tolerably at ease.

In every net, however, there are meshes, and small is the mesh through which a large fish cannot escape. It is probable that poor blubbing Dolly, the dismissed maid, innocent as she declared herself, was in somebody's pay, and knew where information could be sold. For before Sophia had been confined to her room for four hours, before the first passionate tears were dried on her cheeks, a clock-maker, who had come in to regulate the tall clock on the stairs, made the odd mistake of mounting, when no one was looking, to the second floor. A moment later a fingernail scraped Sophia's door, a note was thrust under it, and deftly as he had come, the workman, a pale, fat, elderly man, crept down again. He made little noise, for, to save his honour's drugget, he had left his boots in the hall.

Sophia, recovering from a momentary astonishment, pounced on the note, opened it and read it; and, alas for her discretion, her eyes sparkled through her tears as she did so. Thus it ran: -

"SWEETEST AND BEST BELOVED OF YOUR SEX, -

"The raptures of my heart when my eyes dwell on yours cannot be hidden, and must have convinced you that on you depends the life or death, happiness or misery, of your Hector. If you will, you can plunge me into an abyss of hopelessness, in which I must spend the rest of my existence; or if you will, you can make me in possessing you the happiest, as I am already in aspiring to you the boldest, of mankind. Oh, my Sophia, dare I call you that? Can such bliss be reserved for me? Can it be my lot to spend existence in the worship of those charms, for which the adoration of the longest life passed in thinking of you and serving you were an inadequate price! May I dream that I shall one day be the most enviable of men? If so, there is but one course to be taken. Fly, dearest, fly, your cruel relatives, who have already immured you, and will presently sacrifice you, innocent and spotless, on the vile altar of their ambition. Hold a white handkerchief against your window at six this evening, and the rest is easy. At dusk the day after to-morrow-so much time I need-I will find means to remove you. A few minutes later, Dr. Keith, of Mayfair Chapel, a reverend divine, who will be in waiting at my lodging, will unite you in indissoluble bonds to one whose every thought thenceforth not given to his King-will be consecrated to the happiness of his Sophia.

"Already my heart beats with rapture; I swoon at the thought. The pen falls from the hand of your humble, adoring lover,

"HECTOR (Count Plomer)."

Need we wonder that Sophia held the letter from her and held it to her, scanned it this way, and scanned it that way, kissed it, and kissed it again; finally, with a glance at the door, hid it jealously within her dress? She would have done these things had she been as much in the dark about Tom, and the machinations formed to rob him, as she had been when she rose that morning. But she would have halted there. She would have pardoned her lover his boldness, perhaps have liked him the better for it; but she would not have granted his prayer. Now, her one aspiration was for the moment when she might take the leap. Her one feeling was impatience for the hour when she might give the signal

of surrender. The pillars of her house were shaken; her faith in her sister, in her friends, in her home was gone. Only her lover remained, and if he were not to be trusted she had no one. She did not tell herself that girls had done this thing before, maiden modesty notwithstanding, and had found no cause to repent their confidence; for her determination needed no buttressing. Her cheek flamed, and she thrilled and trembled from head to foot as she pictured the life to which she was flying; but the cheek flamed as hotly when she painted the past and the intolerable craft and coldness of the world on which she turned her back.

The window of her room looked into Arlington Street. She stood at it gazing down on the stand of chairmen and sedans that stretched up to Portugal Street, a thoroughfare now part of Piccadilly. The end of the scaffolding outside Sir Robert Walpole's new house-the house next door-came within a few feet of the sill on which she leaned; the hoarse, beery voices of the workmen, and the clangour of the hammers, were destined to recall that day to her as long as she lived. Yet for the time she was scarcely conscious of the noise, so close was the attention with which she surveyed the street. Below, as on other days, beaux sauntered round the corner of Bennet Street on their way to White's, or stood to speak to a pretty woman in a chair. Country folk paused to look at Sir Bluestring's new house; a lad went up and down crying the *Evening Post*, and at the corner at the lower end of Arlington Street, then open at the south, a group of boys sat gambling for half-pence.

Sophia saw all this, but she saw no sign of him she sought, though St. James's clock tolled the three quarters after five. Eagerly she looked everywhere, her heart beating quickly. Surely Hawkesworth would be there to see the signal, and to learn his happiness with his own eyes? She leaned forward, then on a sudden she recoiled; Sir Hervey Coke, passing on the other side, had looked up; he knew, then, that she was a prisoner! Her woman's pride rebelled at the thought, and hot with anger she stood awhile in the middle of the room. Whereon St. James's clock struck six; it was the hour appointed. Without hesitation, without the loss of a moment, Sophia sprang to the window, and with a steady hand pressed her handkerchief to the pane. The die was cast.

She thought that on that something would happen; she felt sure that she would see him, would catch his eye, would receive some mark of his gratitude. But she was disappointed; and in a minute or two, after gazing with a bold bashfulness this way and that, she went back into the room, her spirits feeling the reaction. For eight and forty hours from this she had naught to do but wait; for all that time she was doomed to inaction. It seemed scarcely possible that she could wait so long; scarcely possible that she could possess herself in patience. The first hour indeed tried her so sharply that when Mrs. Martha brought her supper she was ready to be humble even to her, for the sake of five minutes' intercourse.

But Mrs. Martha's conversation was as meagre as the meal she brought, and the girl had to pass the night as best she could. Next morning, however, when the woman-after jealously unlocking the door and securing it behind her after a fashion that shook the girl with rage-set down her breakfast, the crabbed old maid was more communicative.

"Thank the Lord, it is a'most the last time I shall have to climb those stairs," she grumbled. "Aye, you may look, miss" – for Sophia was gazing at her resentfully enough-"and think yourself mighty clever! It's little you think of the trouble your fancies give such as me. There!" putting down the tray. "You may take your fill of that and not burst, either. Maybe 'tain't delicate enough for your stomach, but 'twas none of my putting."

Sophia was hungry and the meal was scanty, but pride made her avert her eyes. "Why is it almost the last time?" she asked sharply. "If they think they can break my spirit by starving me-"

"Hoity toity!" the woman said, with more than a smack of insolence. "I'd keep my breath to cool my porridge if I were you! Lord, I wouldn't have your hot temper, miss, for something. But 'twon't help you much with your Aunt Leah, from all I hear. They say she was just such a one as you once, and wilful is no word for her."

Sophia's heart began to beat. "Am I to go to her?" she asked.

"Aye, that you are, and the sooner the better for my legs, miss!"

"When?" Sophia's voice was low.

"To-morrow, no later. The chaise is ordered for six. His honour will take you himself, and I doubt you'll wish you'd brought your pigs to another market before you've been there many days. Leastways, from what I hear. 'Tis no place for a decent Christian, I'm told," the woman continued, spitefully enjoying the dismay which Sophia could not conceal. "Just thatch and hogs and mud to your knees, and never a wheeled thing, John says, in the place, nor a road, nor a mug of beer to be called beer. All poor as rats, and no one better than the other, as how should they be and six miles of a pack-road to the nearest highway? You'll whistle for your lover there, miss."

Sophia swallowed her rage. "Go down!" she said.

"Oh, la! I don't want to stay!" Mrs. Martha cried, tossing her head. "It's not for my own amusement I've stayed so long. And no thanks for my kindness, either! I've my own good dinner downstairs, and the longer I'm here the cooler it'll be. Which some people like their dinner hot and behave themselves accordingly. But I know my duty, and by your leave, miss, I shall do it."

She bounced out of the room with that and turned the key on the outside with a noisy care that hurt the ear if it did not wound the spirit. "Nasty proud-stomached thing!" she muttered as she descended the stairs. "I hope Madam Leah will teach her what's what! And for all she's monstrous high now, I warrant she'll come to eating breast of veal as well as another. And glad to get it. What Sir 'Ervey can see in her passes me, but men and fools are all one, and it takes mighty little to tickle them if it be red and white. For my part I'm glad to be rid of her. One's tantrums is as much as I can put up with, duty or no duty."

Mrs. Martha might have taken the matter more easily had she known what was passing in the locked room she had left. Sophia's indifference was gone; she paced the floor in a fever of uncertainty. How was she to communicate with her lover? How tell him that his plans were forestalled, and that on the morrow, hours before his arrangements were mature, she would be whisked away and buried in the depths of the country, in a spot the most remote from the world? True, at the foot of his letter was the address of his lodging-at Mr. Wollenhope's in Davies Street, near Berkeley Square. And Dolly-though Sophia had never yet stooped to use her-might this evening have got a letter to him. But Dolly was gone; Dolly and all her friends were far away, and Mrs. Martha was stone. Sophia wrung her hands as she walked feverishly from door to window.

She knew nothing of the hundred channels through which a man of the world could trace her. To her eyes the door of Chalkhill bore the legend Dante had made famous. To her mind, to go to Aunt Leah was to be lost to her lover, to be lost to the world. And yet what chance of escape remained? Vainly thinking, vainly groping, she hung at the window tearing a handkerchief to pieces, while her eyes raked the street below for the least sign of him she sought. There were the same beaux strutting round the same corner, hanging on the same arms, bowing to the same chairs, ogled from the shelter of the same fans. The same hackney-coachmen quarrelled, the same boys gambled at the corner. Even Sir Hervey paused at the same hour of the afternoon, looked up as he had looked up yesterday, seemed to hesitate, finally went on. But Hawkesworth-Hawkesworth was nowhere.

Her eyes aching with long watching, the choke of coming tears in her throat, Sophia drew back at last, and was in the act of casting herself on her bed in a paroxysm of despair, when a shrill voice speaking outside her door reached her ears. The next moment she heard her name.

She sprang to the door, the weight lifted from her heart. Any happening was better than none. "Here!" she cried. "Here!" And she struck the panels with her hands.

"Where? Oh, I see," the voice answered. Then "Thank you, my good woman," it went on, "I'll trouble you no farther. I can open for myself. I see the key is in the lock."

But on that Mrs. Martha's voice was raised, loudly remonstrant. "My lady," she cried, "you don't understand! I've the strictest orders-"

"To keep her in? Just so, you foolish thing. And so you shall. But not to keep me out. Still-just to be sure I'll take the key in with me!" On which Sophia heard the key turn sharply in the lock, the door flew open, and in bounced Lady Betty. To insert the key on the inside and secure the door behind her was the work of a moment. Then she dropped the astonished Sophia an exaggerated curtsey.

"La, miss, I crave your pardon, I'm sure," she said, "for calling your name so loud on the stairs, but that silly thing would do nothing but her orders. So as she would not show me the way, I ran up myself."

"You're very kind!" Sophia said. And she stood, trembling, and feeling sudden shame of her position.

Lady Betty seemed to see this. "La! is it true they won't let you out?" she said.

Sophia muttered that it was.

The visitor's eyes roved from the meagre remains of the midday meal to the torn shreds of handkerchief that strewed the floor. "Then it's a shame! It's a black monstrous shame!" she cried, stamping on the floor. "I know what I should do if they did it to me! I should break, I should burn, I should tear! I should tear that old fright's wig off to begin! But I suppose it's your sister?"

"Yes."

Lady Betty made a face. "Horrid thing!" she exclaimed. "I never did like her! Is it because you won't-is it because you have a lover, miss?"

Sophia hesitated. "La, don't mind me. I have five!" the child cried naïvely. "I'll tell you their names if you like. They are nothing to me, the foolish things, but I should die if I hadn't as many as other girls. To see them glare at one another is the finest sport in the world."

"But you love one of them?" Sophia said shyly.

"La, no, it's for them to love me!" Lady Betty cried, tossing her head. "I *should* be a fool if I loved them!"

"But the letter-that I tore up?" Sophia ventured.

The child blushed, and with a queer laugh flung herself on the other's neck and kissed her. "That was from a-a lover I ought not to have," she said. "If it had been found, I should have had my ears boxed, and been sent into the country. You saved me, you duck, and I'll never forget it!"

Sophia bent on the most serious imprudence could be wise for another. "From a lover whom you ought not to have?" she said gravely. "You'll not do it again, will you? You'll not receive a second?"

"La, no, I promise you," Lady Betty cried, volubly insistent. "He's-well, he's a nobody, but he writes such dear, darling, charming notes! There, now you know. Oh, yes, it was horrid of me. But I hate him. So that's enough."

"You promise?" Sophia said, almost severely.

"I vow I do," Lady Betty cried, hugging her. "The creature's a wretch. Now tell me, you poor thing, all about *him*. I've told you my affair."

Here was indeed a blind leader of the blind, but after a little hesitation Sophia told her story. She was too proud to plead the justification her sister's treatment of Tom supplied; nor was there need of this. Even in the bud, Lady Betty found the story beautiful; and when Sophia went on to her lover's letter, and blushing and faltering owned that he had pressed her to elope, the listener could contain herself no longer. "Elope!" she cried, springing up with sparkling eyes. "Oh, the dear bold man! Oh, how I envy you!"

"Envy me?"

"Yes! To be locked in your room and starved-I hope they starve you-and scolded and threatened and perhaps carried into the country. And all the time to be begged and prayed and entreated to elope, and the dear creature wailing and sighing and consuming below. Oh, you lucky, lucky, lucky, girl!" And Lady Betty flung herself on Sophia's neck and embraced her again and again. "You lucky thing! And then perhaps to be forced to escape down a ladder-"

"Escape?" Sophia said, shaking her head piteously. And she explained how far she was from escaping. "By this time to-morrow," she continued, choked by the bitter feelings the thought of to-morrow begot, "I shall be at Chalkhill!"

"No, you will not!" Lady Betty cried, her eyes sparkling. "You will not!" she repeated. "By good luck 'tis between lights. Put on your hoop and sacque. Take my hat and laced jacket. Bend your knees as you go down the stairs, you gawk, and no one will be a bit the wiser."

Sophia stared at her. "What do you mean?" she said.

"Northey's at the House, your sister's at Lady Paget's," the girl explained breathlessly. "There is only the old fright outside, and she's had a taste of my tongue and won't want another. You may walk straight out before they bring candles. I shall wait ten minutes until you are clear, and then, though they'll know it's a bite, they won't dare to stop my ladyship, and-oh, you darling, it will be the purest, purest fun. It will be all over the town to-morrow, and I shall be part of it!"

Sophia shuddered. "Fun?" she said. "Do you call it fun?"

"Why, of course it will be the purest, purest fun!" the other cried. "The prettiest trick that ever was played! You darling, we shall be the talk of the town!" And in the gaiety of her heart, Lady Betty lifted her sacque, and danced two or three steps of a minuet. "We shall-but how you look, miss! You are not going to disappoint me?"

Sophia stood silent. "I am afraid," she muttered.

"Afraid? Afraid of what?"

"I am afraid."

"But you were going to him to-morrow?"

Sophia blushed deeply. "He was coming for me," she murmured.

"Well, and what is the difference?"

The elder girl did not answer, but her cheeks grew hotter and hotter. "There is a difference," she said.

"Then you'll go to Chalkhill!" Lady Betty cried in derision, her voice betraying her chagrin. "La, miss, I vow I thought you'd more spirit! or I would not have troubled you!"

Sophia did not retort; indeed, she did not hear. In her heart was passing a struggle, the issue of which must decide her lot. And she knew this. She was young, but she knew that as her lover showed himself worthy or unworthy of her trust so must her fate be happy or most miserable, if she went to him. And she trembled under the knowledge. Chalkhill, even Chalkhill and Aunt Leah's stinging tongue and meagre commons seemed preferable to a risk so great. But then she thought of Tom, and of the home that had grown cold; of the compensations for home in which others seemed to find pleasure, the flippant existence of drums and routs, the card-table and the masquerade. And in dread, not of Chalkhill, but of a loveless life, in hope, not of her lover, but of love, she wrung her hands. "I don't know!" she cried, the burden of decision forcing the words from her as from one in pain. "I don't know!"

"What?"

"Whether I dare go!"

"Why," Lady Betty asked eagerly, "there is no risk."

"Child! child, you don't understand," poor Sophia wailed. "Oh, what, oh, what am I to do? If I go it is for life. Don't you understand?" she added feverishly. "Cannot you see that? It is for life!"

Lady Betty, startled by the other's passion, could only answer, "But you were going to-morrow, miss? If you were not afraid to go to-morrow-"

"Why to-day?" Sophia asked bitterly. "If I could trust him to-morrow, why not to-day? Because-because-oh, I cannot tell you!" And she covered her face with her hands.

The other saw that she was shaking from head to foot, and reluctantly accepted a situation she only partly understood. "Then you won't go?" she said.

The word "No" trembled on Sophia's lips. But then she saw as in a glass the life to which she condemned herself if she pronounced it; the coldness, the worldliness, the lovelessness, the solitude in a crowd, all depicted, not with the compensating lights and shadows which experience finds in them, but in crude lines such as they wear in a young girl's fancy. In the past was nothing to retain her; in the future her lover beckoned; only maiden modesty and dread of she knew not what withstood a natural impulse. She would and she would not. Painfully she twisted and untwisted her fingers, while Lady Betty waited and looked.

On a sudden in Arlington Street a small-coalman raised his shrill cry; she had heard it a score of times in the last two days; now she felt that she could not bear to hear it again. It was a small thing, but her gorge rose against it. "I will go!" she cried hoarsely. "Give me the clothes."

Lady Betty clapped her hands like a child at play. "You will? Oh, brave!" she cried. "Then there's not a minute to be lost, miss. Take my laced jacket and hat. But stay-you must put on your sacque and hoop. Where are they? Let me help you. And won't you want to take some-la, you'll have nothing but what you stand up in!"

Sophia winced, but pursued her preparations as if she had not heard. In feverish haste she dragged out what she wanted, and in five minutes stood in the middle of the room, arrayed in Lady Betty's jacket and hat, which, notwithstanding the difference in height, gave her such a passing resemblance to the younger girl as might deceive a person in a half light.

"You'll do!" Lady Betty cried; all to her was sport. "And you'll just take my chair: it's a hack, but they know me. Mutter 'home,' and stop 'em where you like-and take another! D'you see?"

The two girls-their united ages barely made up thirty-four-flung themselves into one another's arms. Held thus, the younger felt the wild beating of Sophia's heart, and put her from her and looked at her with a sudden qualm of doubt and fear and perception.

"Oh," she cried, "if he is not good to you! If he-don't! don't!" she continued, trembling herself in every limb. "Let me take off your things. Let me! Don't go!"

But Sophia's mind was now made up. "No," she said firmly; and then, looking into the other's eyes, "Only speak of me kindly, child, if-if they say things."

And before Lady Betty, left standing in the middle of the darkening room-where the reflection of the oil lamps in the street below was beginning to dance and flicker on the ceiling-had found words to answer, Sophia was half-way down the stairs. The staircase was darker than the room, and detection, as Lady Betty had foreseen, was almost impossible. Mrs. Martha, waiting spitefully outside her mistress's door on the first floor landing, saw as she thought, "that little baggage of a ladyship" go down; and she followed her muttering, but with no intention of intercepting her. John in the hall, too, saw her coming, and threw wide the door, then flew to open the waiting chair. "Home, my lady?" he asked obsequiously, and passed the word; finally, when the chair moved off, he looked up and down, and came in slowly, whistling. Another second, and the door of the house in Arlington Street slammed on Sophia.

"And a good riddance!" muttered Mrs. Martha, looking over the balusters. "I never could abear her!"

CHAPTER VI

A CHAIR AND A COACH

The glasses of the chair, which had been standing some time at the door, were dimmed by moisture, and in the dusk of the evening its trembling occupant had no cause to fear recognition. But as the men lifted and bore her from the door, every blurred light that peeped in on her, and in an instant was gone, every smoking shop-lamp that glimmered a moment through the mist, and betrayed the moving forms that walked the sideway, was, to Sophia, an eye noting and condemning her. As the chairmen swung into Portugal Street, and, turning eastwards, skirted the long stand of coaches and the group of link-men that waited before Burlington House, she felt that all eyes were upon her, and she shrank farther and farther into the recesses of the chair.

A bare-footed orange girl, who ran beside the window waving ballads or bills of the play, a coach rattling up behind and bespattering the glass as it passed, a link-boy peering in and whining to be hired, caused her a succession of panics. On top of these, the fluttering alarms of the moment, pressed the consciousness of a step taken that could never be retraced; nor was it until the chairmen, leaving Piccadilly behind them, had entered the comparative quiet of Air Street, and a real difficulty rose before her, that she rallied her faculties.

The men were making for Soho, and if left to take their course, would, in a quarter of an hour set her down at the door of Lady Betty's home in King's Square. That would not do. But to stay them, and to vary the order from "Home" to Mr. Wollenhope's house in Davies Street, where her lover lodged, did not now seem the simple and easy step it had appeared a few minutes earlier, when the immediate difficulty was to escape from the house. Lady Betty had said that the men knew her. In that case, as soon as Sophia spoke to them they would scent something wrong, and, apprised of the change of fares, might wish to know more. They might even decline to take her whither she bade them!

The difficulty was real, but for that very reason Sophia's courage rose to meet it. At present she knew where she was; a minute or two later she might not know. The sooner she took the route into her own hands, therefore, the better it would be; and as the men turned from the narrow street of Air into Brewer Street and swung to the right towards Soho, she tapped the glass. The chair moved on. With impatience, natural in the circumstances, Sophia tapped again and more sharply. This time the front bearer heard, and gave the word. The chair was set down, and the man, wiping his brow, raised the lid.

"What is it, my lady?" he said, with a rich Irish accent. "Shure, and isn't it right ye are? If we went by Windmill Street, which some would be for going, there's a sight of coaches that way."

"I don't want to go to King's Square," Sophia answered firmly.

"Eh, my lady, no? But you said 'Home.'"

"I want to go to the West End again," Sophia said.

"I've remembered something; I want to go to Davies Street."

"Faith, but it's a fine trate your ladyship's had," the Irishman cried good-humouredly, "and finely I should be scolded if his noble lordship your father knew 'twas with us you went; but it's home now you must go; you've played truant long enough, my lady! And-holy Mother!" – with a sudden exclamation-—"Tis not your ladyship! Oh, the saints, Micky, she's changed!"

The second chairman came round the chair, stared, and rubbed his head; and the two gazed in perplexity at poor Sophia, whose face alone appeared above the side of the conveyance. "Take me to Davies Street by Berkeley Square," she commanded, tapping the front impatiently. "To Mr. Wollenhope's house. What does it matter to you where I go?"

"To Davies Street?"

"Yes; cannot you hear?"

"Faith, and I hear," the Irishman answered, staring. "But then, the saints help us, 'tis not yourself. 'Twas her ladyship hired me to go to Arlington Street, and to take her home, and it's not leaving her I'll be!"

"But her ladyship lent me the chair!" Sophia cried desperately. "She'll take another. Cannot you understand? She knows all about it. Now take me to Davies Street."

Her voice trembled with anxiety, for at any moment she might be seen and recognised. A lamp in an oilman's window, one of the few lights that at long intervals broke the dull gloom of Brewer Street, shone on the group. Already a couple of chairs had swung by, the carriers casting, as they passed, a curious look at the stationary chair; and now a coach, approaching from the Soho direction, was near at hand. Every second she delayed there was a second on the rack. What would Sir Hervey or Lord Lincoln, what would any of the hundred acquaintances she had made since she came to town say of a girl found unprotected, after nightfall, astray in the public streets?

Alas, the men still hesitated, and while they stood staring the coach came up. Before Sophia could add reproaches to her commands, it was checked opposite the group. The coachman leant down, and in a tone of disappointment-as if it were only then he saw that the chair was occupied-"You've a fare, have you?" he said. "You can't take a lady to Crown Court, King Street?"

Before the Irishman could answer, "Here my man," a woman's voice cried from the coach, "I want to go to Crown Court, St. James's, and the coach can't enter. Double fare if you are quick! Here, let me out!"

"But, faith, ma'am, I've a fare," Mick cried.

"They've a fare," the coachman explained, leaning down anew.

"The fare can take my coach," the voice answered imperiously; and in a twinkling, a smartly dressed woman, wearing red and white and plenty of both, yet handsome after a fashion, had pushed, first her hoop and then herself out of the coach. "See here, ma'am," she cried, seeing Sophia's scared face, "the coach is paid, and will take you anywhere in reason. 'Twill make no difference to you and all to me, and a mite of good nature is never thrown away! I've to go where a coach cannot go. Up a court, you understand."

Sophia hesitated. Why did not the lady, whose bold eyes did not much commend her, pursue her way to Portugal Street, and descend there, where chairs might be had in plenty? Or why, again, was she in such a clamorous hurry and so importunate? On the other hand, if all were right, nothing could have fallen out more happily for herself; it was no wonder that, after a momentary hesitation, she gave a grudging assent. One of the chairmen, who seemed willing enough to make the change, opened the door; she stepped out and mechanically climbed into the coach. "To Davies Street, Mayfair," she said, sinking back. "To Mr. Wollenhope's, if you please."

Quickly as she took her part, the strange lady was quicker; in a second she was in the chair and the chair was gone. It seemed to vanish. A moment and the coach also started, and lumbered westwards along Brewer Street. Now at last Sophia was at liberty to consider-with no obstacle short of Mr. Wollenhope's door-how she should present herself to her lover, and how it behoved him to receive her.

She found it more easy to answer the second question than the first. Well indeed she knew how it became him to receive her. If in men survived any delicacy, any reverence, any gratitude, these were her due who came to him thus; these must appear in his greeting, or the worst guided, the most hapless of maids, was happy beside her. He must show himself lover, brother, parent, friend, in his one person; for he was her all. The tenderest homage, the most delicate respect, a tact that foreran offence, a punctilio that saw it everywhere, the devotion of a Craven, the gratitude of a Peterborough, were her right who came to him thus, a maiden trusting in his honour. She was clear on this; and not once or twice, but many times, many times as she pressed one hand on the other and swallowed the tell-tale lump that rose and rose in her throat, she swore that if she did not meet with these, if he did not greet her with them, plain in eye and lip-aye, and with a thousand dainty flowers of love, a

thousand tender thoughts and imaginings, not of her, but for her-she had better have been the mud through which the wheels of her coach rolled!

It was natural enough that, so near, so very near the crisis, she should feel misgiving. The halt in the dark street, the chill of the night air, had left her shivering; had left her with an overwhelming sense of loneliness and homelessness. The question was no longer how to escape from a prison, but how, having escaped, she would be received by him, who must be her all. The dice were on the table, the throw had been made, and made for life; it remained only to lift the box. For a little, a very little while, since a matter of minutes only divided her from Davies Street, she hung between the old life and the new, her heart panting vaguely for the sympathy that had been lacking in the old life, for the love that the new life had in store. Would she find them? Child as she was, she trembled now that she stood on the brink. A few minutes and she would know. A few minutes, and-

The coach stopped suddenly, with a jerk that flung her forward. She looked out, her heart beating. She was ready to descend. But surely this was not Davies Street? The road was very dark. On the left, the side on which the door opened, a dead wall, overhung by high trees, confronted her.

"Where am I?" she cried, her hand on the fastening of the door, her voice quivering with sudden fright. "We are not there?"

"You are as far as you'll go, mistress," a rough voice answered from the darkness. "Sorry to alter your plans. A fine long chase you've given us." And from the gloom at the horses' heads, two men advanced to the door of the coach.

She took them for footpads. The dead wall had much the appearance of the wall of Burlington Gardens, where it bounds Glasshouse Street; at that spot, she remembered, a coach had been robbed the week before. She prepared to give up her money, and was groping with a trembling hand for a little knitted purse, when the men, still grumbling, opened the door.

"I suppose you know what's what," the foremost said. "At suit of Margott's of Paul's Churchyard. You'll go to my house, I take it? You'll be more genteel there."

"I don't understand," Sophia muttered, her heart sinking.

"Oh, don't come the innocent over us!" the man answered coarsely. "Here's the *capias*. Forty-eight, seven, six, debt and costs. It's my house or the Marshalsea. One or the other, and be quick about it. If you've the cash you'd better come to me."

"There's some mistake," Sophia gasped, involuntarily retreating into the furthest corner of the coach. "You take me for some one else."

The bailiffs-for such they were-laughed at the joke. "I take you for Mrs. Clark, alias Grocott, alias anything else you please," the spokesman answered. "Come, no nonsense, mistress; it's not the first time you've been behind bars. I warrant with that face you'll soon find some one to open the door for you."

"But I'm not Mrs. Clark," Sophia protested. "I'm not indeed."

"Pooh, pooh!"

"I tell you I am not Mrs. Clark!" she cried. "Indeed, indeed, I am not! It has nothing to do with me," she continued desperately. "Please let me go on." And in great distress she tried to close the door on them.

The bailiff prevented her. "Come, no nonsense, mistress," he repeated. "These tricks won't serve you. We were waiting for you at the Ipswich stage; you got the start there, and very cleverly, I will allow. But my mate got the number of the coach, and if we had not overtaken you here we'd have nabbed you in Davies Street. You see we know all about you, and where you were bound. Now where's it to be?"

Sophia, at the mention of Davies Street, began to doubt her own identity; but still repeated, with the fierceness of despair, that she was not the person they sought. "I am not Mrs. Clark!" she cried. "I only took this coach in Brewer Street. You can ask the coachman."

"Ah, I might, but I shouldn't get the truth!"

"But it is the truth!" Sophia cried piteously; truly punishment had fallen on her quickly! "It is the truth! It is indeed!"

The bailiff seemed to be a little shaken by her earnestness. He exchanged a few words with his fellow. Then, "We'll take the risk," he said. "Will you come out, ma'am, or shall I come in?"

Sophia trembled. "Where are you going to take me?" she faltered.

"To my house, where it's ten shillings a day and as genteel company as you'd find in St. James's!" the fellow answered. "S'help me, you'll be at home in an hour! I've known many go in all of a shake, that with a glass of mulled wine and cheerful company were as jolly by nightfall as Miss at a fair!" And without waiting for more, the man climbed into the coach and plumped down beside her.

Sophia recoiled with a cry of alarm. "La!" he said, with clumsy good nature, "you need not be afraid. I'm a married man. You sit in your corner, ma'am, and I'll sit in mine. Bless you, I'm sworn to do my duty. Up you get, Trigg!"

The second bailiff mounted beside the coachman, the coach was turned, and in a trice Sophia was once more trundling eastwards through the streets. But in what a condition!

In the power of a vulgar catchpoll, on her way to a low sponging house, she saw herself borne helpless past the house that, until to-day, she had called her home! True, she had only to prove who she was in order to be released. She had only to bid them turn aside and stop at Mr. Northey's mansion, and a single question and answer would set her free. But at what a cost! Overwhelmed and terrified, at her wits' end how to bear herself, she yet shrank from such a return as that!

Gladly would she have covered her face with her hands and wept tears of bitter mortification. But the crisis was too sharp, the difficulty too urgent for tears. What was she to do? Allow herself to be carried to her destination, and there incarcerated with vile persons in a prison which her ignorance painted in the darkest colours? Or avow the truth, bid them take her to her brother-in-law's, and there drain the cup of ignominy to the dregs? In either case decision must be speedy. Already Arlington Street lay behind them; they were approaching St. James's Church. They were passing it. Another minute and they would reach the end of the Haymarket.

Suddenly she clapped her hands. "Stop!" she cried. "Tell them to stop! There's Lane's. They know me there. They'll tell you that I am not the person you think. Please stop!"

The bailiff nodded, put out his head, and gave the order. Then, as the coach drew up to the shop, he opened the door, "Now, no tricks! ma'am," he said. "If you go a yard from me I nab you. Smooth's my name when I'm well treated; but if Mr. Lane knows you I'll take his word, and ask your pardon. I'm not unreasonable."

Sophia did not pause to reply, but descended, and with hot cheeks hurried across the roadway into the well-known silk-mercier's. Fortunately, the shop, at certain times of the day the resort of Piccadilly bloods, was deserted at this late hour. All the lamps but one were extinguished, and by the light of this one, Mr. Lane and two apprentices were stowing goods under the counter. A third young man stood looking on and idly swinging a cane; but to Sophia's relief he retired through the open door at the back, which revealed the cosy lights of a comfortable parlour.

The tradesman advanced, bowing and rubbing his hands. "Dear me," he said, "you are rather late, ma'am, but anything we can do-William, relight the lamps."

"No," Sophia cried. "I do not want anything. I only-Mr. Lane," she continued, blushing deeply, "will you be good enough to tell this person who I am."

"Dear, dear, my lady," Mr. Lane exclaimed, becoming in a moment a very Hector, "you don't mean that-what is this, my man, what does it mean? Let me tell you I've several stout fellows on the premises, and-"

"No need," the bailiff answered gruffly. "I only want to know who the-who the lady is." He looked crestfallen already. He saw by the lamp-light that his prisoner was too young; a mere girl in her teens. And his heart misgave him.

"This is Miss Maitland, sister-in-law to the honourable Mr. Northey, of Arlington Street, and the House," the tradesman answered majestically. "Now, my man, what is it?"

"You are sure that she is not a-a Mrs. Oriana Clark?" the bailiff asked, consulting his writ for the name.

"No more than I am!" Mr. Lane retorted, sniffing contemptuously. "What do you mean by such nonsense?"

"Nothing now," the discomfited bailiff answered; and muttering "I am sure I beg her ladyship's pardon! Beg her pardon! No offence!" he bent his head with ready presence of mind and hurried out of the shop; his retreat facilitated by the fact that Sophia, overcome by her sudden release, was seized with a fit of giddiness, which compelled her to cling to the shop-board.

In a moment the good Lane was all solicitude. He placed a chair for her, called for volatile salts, and bade them close the door into the street. Sending the staring apprentices about their business, he hustled out to procure some water; but in this he was anticipated by the young man whom she had seen in the shop when she entered. Too faint at the moment to remark from what hand she took it, Sophia drank, and returned the glass. Then, a little revived by the draught, and sensible of the absurdity of the position, she tried to rise, with a smile at her weakness. But the young man who had brought the water, and who had something of the air of a gentleman, foppishly and effeminately dressed, implored her to sit awhile.

"Sure, ma'am, you can't be rested yet!" he cried, hanging over her with a solicitude that seemed a little excessive. "Such an outrage on divine beauty merits-stap me! the severest punishment. I shall not fail, ma'am, to seek out the low beast and chastise him as he deserves."

"There is no need," Sophia answered, looking at the spark with mild surprise: she was still too faint to resent his manner. "I am better now, I thank you, sir. I will be going."

"Stap me, not yet!" he cried effusively. "A little air, ma'am?" and he fell to fanning her with his hat, while his black eyes languished on hers. "'Twill bring back the colour, ma'am. Has your ladyship ever tried Florence water in these attacks? It is a monstrous fine specific, I am told."

"I am not subject to them," Sophia answered, forced to avert her eyes. This movement, as it happened, brought her gaze to the open door of the parlour; where, to her astonishment, she espied Mr. Lane, standing, as it were, in ambush, dwelling on the scene in the shop with a face of childish pleasure. Now he softly rubbed his hands; now he nodded his head in an ecstasy. A moment Sophia watched him, her own face in shadow; then she rose a little displeased, and more puzzled.

"I must go now," she said, bowing stiffly. "Be good enough to see if my coach is there."

The beau, taken aback by her manner, turned to the silk mercer, who came slowly forward. "Is her ladyship's coach there?" the young gentleman cried with great stateliness.

Mr. Lane hurried obsequiously to the door, looked out, and returned. "Dear, dear, ma'am," he said, "I fear those wretches took it. But I can send for a chair."

"Call one, call one!" the gentleman commanded. "I shall see the lady to her door."

"Oh, no, no!" Sophia answered quickly. "It is not necessary."

"It is very necessary at this hour," Mr. Lane interposed; and then apologised for his intervention by rubbing his hands. "I could not think of-of letting you go from here, ma'am, without an escort!" he continued, with another low bow. "And this gentleman, Mr. –"

"Fanshaw, man, Fanshaw," the young spark said, stroking his cravat and turning his head with an absurd air of importance. "Your humble servant to command, ma'am. Richard Fanshaw, Esquire, of Warwickshire. 'Tis certain I must attend you so far; and-and oh, hang this!" he continued, breaking off in a sudden fit of rage. For in the act of bowing to her, he had entangled his sword in a roll of Lyons that stood behind him. "Fellow, what the deuce do you mean by leaving rubbish in a gentleman's way?" and he struggled furiously with it.

Sophia could scarcely forbear a smile as Mr. Lane ran to the rescue. Yet with all his efforts before the little beau was freed. He cursed all tailors, and, to hide his confusion, hastened rather clumsily to hand her to the chair.

The bold knight was red
And the good stuff was shred

She was now in a new difficulty. Lane would give the order "Arlington Street"; Mr. Fanshaw, smirking and tip-tapping at the side, would insist on seeing her home. And she herself for an instant, as the cold night air met her on the threshold of the oil-lit street, and she shivered under its touch, hesitated. For an instant her fears pleaded with her, bade her take warning from the thing that had already befallen her, whispered "Home!" At that hour the future, mirrored on the gloomy surface of the night-street, on the brink of which she stood, seemed dark, forlorn, uncertain.

But her pride was not yet conquered; and without a vast sacrifice of pride she could not return. Her escapade would be remembered against her; she would be condemned for the attempt, and despised for its failure. Home, in her case, meant no loving mother longing to forgive, no fond tears, no kisses mingled with reproaches; but sneers and stinging words, disgrace and exile, a child's punishment. Little wonder that she grew hard again, since, on the other side, a girl's first fancy beckoned roseate; or that, when she announced with an easy air that she had to go to Davies Street, Mr. Lane detected nothing suspicious in her tone.

"Dear, dear, ma'am, it's rather late," he said. "And the streets not too secure. But Rich-Mr. Fanshaw will see you safe. Much honoured. Oh, much honoured, I am sure, ma'am. Delighted to be of service. My humble obedience to your sister and Mr. Northey."

A last backward glance as she was lifted and borne from the door showed her Mr. Lane standing in his shop-entrance. He was looking after her with the same face of foolish admiration which she had before surprised; and she wondered afresh what it meant. Soon, however, her thoughts passed from him to the over-dressed little fop who had added himself to her train, and whose absurd attempts to communicate with her as he strutted beside the glass, his sword under his arm and his laced hat cocked, were almost as amusing as the air of superb protection which he assumed when he caught her eye. Really, he was too ridiculous. Moreover, she did not want him. His presence was uncalled for now; and when she reached Davies Street, might involve her in new embarrassment. She would have dismissed him, but she doubted if he would go; and to open the glass and make the attempt might only incite him to greater freedoms. Sophia bit her lip to repress a smile; the little beau took the smile for encouragement, and kissed his hand through the glass.

CHAPTER VII IN DAVIES STREET

The chairmen pushed on briskly through Piccadilly and Portugal Street until they reached the turnpike on the skirts of the town. There, turning to the right by Berkeley Row, they reached Berkeley Square, at that time a wide, implanted space, surrounded on three sides by new mansions, and on the fourth by the dead wall of Berkeley House. For lack of lighting, or perhaps by reason of the convenience the building operations afforded, it was a favourite haunt of footpads. Sophia was a prey to anxieties that left no room in her mind for terrors of this class; and neither the dark lane, shadowed by the dead wall of Berkeley Gardens nor the gloomy waste of the square, held any tremors for her; but the chairmen hastened over this part of their journey, and for a time her attendant squire was so little in evidence that in the agitation into which the prospect of arrival at her lover's threw her, she forgot his presence. She strained her eyes through the darkness to distinguish the opening of Davies Street, and at once longed and feared to see it. When at last the chair halted, and, pressing her hand to her heart to still the tumult that almost stifled her, she prepared to descend, it was with a kind of shock that she discovered the little dandy mincing and bowing on the pavement, his hand extended to aid her in stepping from the chair.

The vexation she had suppressed before broke out at the sight. She bowed slightly, and avoided his hand. "I am obliged to you, sir," she said ungraciously; "I won't trouble you farther. Good night, sir."

"But-I shall see you back to Arlington Street, ma'am?" he lisped. "Surely at this hour an escort is more than ever necessary. I declare it is past eight, ma'am."

It was; but the fact put in words stung her like a whip. She winced under all that the lateness of the hour implied. It seemed intolerable that in a crisis in which her whole life lay in the balance, in which her being was on the rack until she found the reception that should right her, converting her boldness into constancy, her forwardness into courage-when she trembled on the verge of the moment in which her lover's eyes should tell her all-it was intolerable that she should be harassed by this prating dandy. "I shall find an escort here," she cried harshly. "I need you no longer, sir. Good night."

"Oh, but ma'am," he protested, bowing like a Chinese mandarin, "it is impossible I should leave you so. Surely, there is something I can do for your ladyship."

"You can pay the chairmen!" she cried contemptuously; and turning from him to the door before which the chair had halted, she found it half open. In the doorway a woman, her back to the light, stood blocking the passage. Doubtless, she had heard what had passed.

Sophia's temper died down on the instant. "Is this Mr. Wollenhope's?" she faltered.

"Yes, ma'am."

An hour before it had seemed simple to ask for her lover. Now the moment was come she could not do it. "May I come in?" she muttered, to gain time.

"You wish to see me?"

"Yes."

"Is the chair to wait, ma'am?"

Sophia trembled. It was a moment before she could find her voice. Then, "No," she answered faintly.

The woman looked hard at her, and having the light at her back, had the advantage. "Oh!" she said at last, addressing the men, "I think you had better wait a minute." And grudgingly making way for Sophia to enter, she closed the door. "Now, ma'am, what is it?" she said, standing four-square to the visitor. She was a stout, elderly woman, with a bluff but not unkindly face.

"Mr. Hawkesworth lodges here?"

"He does, ma'am."

"Is he at home?" Sophia faltered. Under this woman's gaze she felt a sudden overpowering shame. She was pale and red by turns. Her eyes dropped, her confusion was not to be overlooked.

"He is not at home," the woman said shortly. And her look, hostile before, grew harder.

Sophia caught her breath. She had not thought of this, and for a moment she was so overpowered by the intelligence, that she had to support herself against the wall. "When will he return, if you please?" she asked at length, her lip quivering.

"I'm sure I couldn't say. I couldn't say at all," Mrs. Wollenhope answered curtly. "All I know is he went out with the young gentleman at five, and as like as not he won't be home till morning."

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