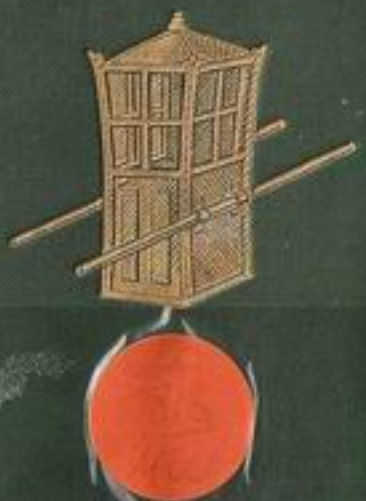
A Nest of Linnets

Frank Frankfort Moore



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"Dick—Dick," she gasped, "a dreadful thing has happened!" [*page* 350.
*Frontispiece*]

# A Nest of Linnets

By Frank Frankfort Moore
Author of "I Forbid the Banns," "The Jessamy Bride," "The Fatal Gift," "According to Plato," Etc., Etc. . . .

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# A NEST OF LINNETS

## CHAPTER I

"This will never do, Betsy," said Mr. Linley, shaking his head. "Sir Joshua calls you Saint Cecilia, but 'twere a misnomer if you do not sing the phrase better than you have just sung it. 'She drew an angel down': let that be in your mind, my dear. There is no celestial being that would move a pinion to help a maiden who implored its aid in so half-hearted a way. Let us try again. One, two, three——"

"'Angels, ever bright and fair,'"

sang Miss Linley.

Her father sprang from the harpsichord.

"Gracious powers, madam! the angels are not in the next room—they are not even in Pierrepont Street, take my word for it; they are in heaven, and heaven, let me tell you, is a very long way from Bath!" he cried. "Give forth the 'Angels' as if you meant to storm the ears of heaven with your cry. Think of it, girl—think that you are lost, eternally lost, unless you can obtain help that is not of earth. Stun their ears, madam, with the suddenness of your imploration, and let the voice come from your heart. Betsy, that smile is not in the music. If Maestro Handel had meant a smile to illuminate the part, take my word

for it he would have signified it by a bar of demi-semi-quavers, followed by semi-quavers and quavers. Good heavens, madam! do you hope to improve upon Handel?"

"Ah, father, do not ask too much of me to-night; I am tired—anxious. Why, only last week a highwayman——"

Miss Linley glanced, eagerly listening, toward the window, as if she fully expected to see the mask of a highwayman peering between the blinds.

"Betsy, I am ashamed of you!" said her father. "What stuff is this? Is there any highwayman fool enough to collect fiddles? Do you fancy that a boy with a fiddle tucked under his arm is in any peril of a bullet?"

"But they may affright the child."

"Child? Child? Who is the child? What! Do you think that because you have not seen your brother since he was fourteen, the four years that have passed can have made no impression on him?"

"I suppose he will have grown."

"You may be sure that he will be able to defend himself without drawing either his sword or his fiddle. To your singing, Betsy. Go back to the recitative."

"It would be a terrible thing to find that he had outgrown his affection for us. I have heard that in Italy——"

"Still harping on my daughter's brother! Come, Miss Linnet, you shall have your chance. You shall fancy that your prayer is uttered on behalf of your brother.

'Angels, ever bright and fair,
Take, oh, take *him* to your care.'

Now shall the angels hear for certain. Come, child; one, two——"

"'Angels——'"

sang Miss Linley.

"Brava!" cried her father *sotto voce*, as the sound thrilled



through the room and there was a suggestion of an answering vibration from the voice of the harpsichord.

"'Angels, ever bright and fair,
Take, oh, take me——'"

The harpsichord jingled alone. The girl's voice failed. She threw herself into a chair, and, covering her face with her hands, burst into a passion of sobbing.

"Oh, if he does not arrive after all—if some accident has happened—if—if——"

The apprehensions which she was too much overcome to name were emphasised in the glance that she cast at her father. Her eyes, the most marvellous wells of deep tenderness that ever woman possessed, at all times suggested a certain pathetic emotion of fear, causing every man who looked into their depths to seek to be her protector from the danger they seemed to foresee; but at this moment they appeared to look straight into the face of disaster.

"If I could translate that expression of your face into music, I should be the greatest musician alive," said her father.

In a second the girl was on her feet, uttering a little sound of contempt. She began pacing the floor excitedly, her long white muslin dress flowing from her high waist in waves.

"Ah, always this art—always this art!" she cried. "Always the imitation—always the pitiful attempt to arouse an artificial emotion in others, and never to have an hour of true emotion oneself, never an hour of real life, never an hour apart from the artifices of Art,—that is the life which you would have me to lead. I hate it! I hate it! Oh, better a day—an hour—a minute of true tenderness than a long lifetime spent in shamming emotion!"

"Shamming? Shamming? Oh, my Elizabeth!" said the musician in a voice full of reproach.

"Shamming! Shamming!" she cried. "I think that

there is no greater sham than music. The art of singing is the art of shamming. I try to awaken pity in the breast of my hearers by pretending that I am at the point of death and anxious for the angels to carry me off, yet all the time I care nothing for the angels, but a good deal for my brother Tom, who is coming home to-night. Oh, father, father, do not try to teach me any more of this tricking of people into tears by the sound of my voice. Dear father, let me have this one evening to myself—to live in my own world—my own world of true tears, of true feeling, of true joy. Let me live until to-morrow the real life of the people about us, who have not been cursed by Heaven with expressive voices and a knowledge of the trick of drawing tears by a combination of notes."

She had flung herself down at his knees and was pressing one of his hands to her face, kissing it.

"Betsy, you are not yourself this evening," he said in a voice that was faltering on the threshold of a sob.

"Nay, nay; 'tis just this evening that I am myself," she cried. "Let me continue to be myself just for one evening, dear father. Let me—— Ah!"

She had given a little start, then there was a breathless pause, then, with a little cry of delight, she sprang to her feet and rushed to the window.

Her father had rushed to the second window with just such another cry.

Hearing it she turned to him in amazement, with the edge of the blind that she was in the act of raising still in her hand. She gave a laugh, pointing a finger of her other hand at him, while she cried:

"Ah, you are a father after all!"

His head was within the blind, and he was shutting off with his hands the light of the candles of the room while he peered into the darkness, so that the reproach passed unheeded.



Before she had put her face to the pane her father had dropped the blind that he was holding back.

"Good lud! how the lad has grown!" he said in an astonished whisper.

"Tom! 'tis Tom himself!" cried Betsy, turning from the window and making for the door.

There was a sound of merry voices and many shouts of children's welcome downstairs—a stamping of feet on the stairs, a stream of questions in various tones of voice, a quiet answer or two, a children's quarrel in the passage as a boy tried to run in front of a girl. Betsy flung wide the door, crying:

"Tom, brother Tom!"

In another second he was in her arms, kissing her face and being kissed by her without the exchange of a word.

The other members of the family of Linley stood by, the father slightly nervous, fingering an invisible harpsichord, the brothers and sisters callous only when they were not nudging one another lest any detail of the pathetic scene of the meeting of the eldest brother and sister should pass unnoticed.

"Hasn't he grown!" remarked Mrs. Linley. Some of the flour of the pie which she had been making was on the front of her dress and one of the sleeves. She had transferred a speck or two to her son's travelling-cloak.

"He hasn't shaken hands with father yet," said Master Osiah with the frankness of observant childhood.

"He doesn't mind; he's too big for father to thwack!" whispered Master Willie.

"Oh, Tom!—but it was my fault—all my fault!" cried Betsy, releasing her brother, and passing him on to their father almost with the air of introducing the two.

For a moment the musician felt the aloofness of the artist.

"Father—*caro padre!*" said the boy, who had just returned from Italy.

"Son Tom," said the father, giving his cheek to be kissed, while he pressed the hand that the boy held out to him.

"What has he brought us, I wonder?" remarked little Oziah to Willie in a moderately low tone.

"Nothing that's useful, I hope," said Willie. "People have no business bringing home useful presents."

"I can't believe that these big girls are the little sisters I left at home when I set out on my travels," said Tom, when he had thrown off his travelling-cloak. "Polly? Oh, she is very pretty—yes, in her own way; and I daresay she is as pert as ever."

"And she needs all her pertness to keep her head above water in such a household!" said Polly.

"But Betsy—oh, what an English sound Betsy has—far sweeter than Bettina, I'll swear! Oh, *Bacco*, Betsy is our beauty," said Tom, looking critically at the blushing girl before him.

"Psha! everybody knows that," said Polly. "We don't stand in need of a traveller's opinion on so plain a matter."

"You, Tom, are as like Betsy now as two—two roses that have grown on the same stem," said Mr. Linley.

"Then I cannot without boasting say another word about her beauty," laughed Tom, making a very Italian bow to the sister whom he loved.

He undoubtedly bore a striking resemblance to her. His complexion was just as exquisitely transparent as hers, and his eyes had the same expression, the same timorous look, that suggested the eyes of a beautiful startled animal—the most wonderful eyes that had ever been painted by Gainsborough.

"And her voice—has it also improved?" asked Tom, turning to their father with the air of an impresario making an inquiry of a trusted critic.



"Look at her face, boy; look in her eyes, and then you will know what I mean when I say that her voice is no more than the expression of her face made audible," said Mr. Linley. "Look well at her this evening, my son; you will appreciate her beauty now that it is still fresh in your eyes; to-morrow you will have begun to get used to it. Brothers cease to be impressed with the beauty of their sisters almost as quickly as husbands do with the beauty of their wives."

"Tom is so like Betsy, there is no danger of his forgetting that she is beautiful," said Polly.

Tom gave a little frown, then a little laugh. His laugh was just as sweet as Betsy's: both suggested a campanile.

"You have made her a great singer, I hear, sir," he remarked, when he had kissed her again—this time on the hand.

"She was born a great singer: I have only made her a great artist," said the father. Then noticing her frown, he cried in quite another tone: "But how is't with you, my fine fellow? Have you proved yourself to be a genius or only an artist?"

"Ah, you remember how I replied to the bishop who had heard Betsy sing, and thought it only civil to inquire if I was musical also: 'Yes, sir, we are all geniuses'?"

"It has become the household jest," said Polly. "But my own belief is, that mother is the only genius among us; you shall taste one of her pies before you are an hour older. If you say that you tasted a better one in all Italy, you will prove yourself no judge of cookery."

"I should eat that pie even if it should contain not four-and-twenty blackbirds, but as many nightingales—or linnets. Ah, you remember, Betsy, how the name 'Miss Linnet' remained with you? Who was it that first called you Miss Linnet?"

"That were a question for the Society of Antiquaries,"

said Betsy, "and the bird we are all thinking of is a pie. Hurry to your room, Tom, or I vow there will not be left so much as a clove for you. You knew Polly's appetite; well, it has improved to the extent of an octave and a half since."

"*Corpo di Bacco!* I have no inclination to play second fiddle to an appetite of such compass!" cried Tom, hurrying from the room.

"I sing as Miss Cormorant in the bills when Betsy appears as Miss Linnet," cried Polly from the lobby.

And then they all talked of Tom—all except the mother, who had gone downstairs to the kitchen. How Tom had grown! How good it was of him to remember through all the stress of foreign travel and foreign study, the household characteristics of the Linleys, of 5, Pierrepont Street, Bath! It seemed so strange—just as strange as if a stranger had come into the house showing himself acquainted with the old family jests. And he had not even forgotten that Polly was pert! Polly held her head high at the thought that he had not forgotten her pertness. How noble it was of him! And yet he must have had a great many more important details to keep in his head.

Maria was thinking of the possibility of a brooch being among the luggage of her newly returned brother—a real Italian brooch, with perhaps a genuine yellow topaz in it, or perhaps a fascinating design done in mosaic, or a shell cameo of the head of Diana, or some other foreign goddess. Little Maria had been thinking of this brooch for some weeks. At times she could scarcely hope that so great a treasure should ever escape the notice of those lines of banditti, who, according to reports that had reached her, contested the passage of any article of value across the Italian frontier. But even admitting the possibility of its safe arrival in England, would not the news of its coming be passed round from highwayman to highwayman until the last chance of its reaching her had fled? Then there were



the perils of innkeepers, of inquisitive postboys, of dishonest porters. She had heard of them all, and thus was for weeks in a condition of nervousness quite unusual to her. And now the dreadful thought came to her: "*Perhaps he has brought the brooch to Polly, and only a book to me!*"

She looked with eager, searching eyes at Polly, and felt sure that she detected on her sister's face the expression of a girl who has secret intelligence that a brooch is about to be presented to her. She hoped that she would be strong enough to resist the temptation to pinch Polly. She had no confidence in Polly's self-control, however, should the book fall to Polly's lot.

And thus they all trooped downstairs to supper, and the moment they had seated themselves there arose one septet of joyful exclamations, for between the knife and fork of every one lay a neat parcel wrapped up in cotton-wool and silken paper.

And Maria's was a brooch—a beautiful mosaic design of the Pillar of Trajan.

And nobody had received anything that could possibly be called useful, so every one was happy.

And when Tom entered, after a dramatic interval, he was assailed on all sides by exclamations of gratitude. But he put his fingers in his ears for a few moments, and only removed them to be able more freely to repel the attacks made upon him by the girls. He could only receive one kiss at a time, though he did make a masterful attempt to take the two elders as a *concerto allegro* movement; the others he treated as a *scherzo*. He had the lordly air of the patron who flings his guineas about: the Italian jewellery had made a deep inroad upon a lira; but he was a generous man, and he loved his family. But his mother, being a thrifty soul—Mr. Foote thought her miserly—shook her head. She felt that he had been too lavish, not knowing anything about Italian jewellery.

## CHAPTER II

"'THE greatest singer in England.' Yes, that is what I heard," said Tom, patting Betsy's hand, which he held affectionately in his own. He had made quite an art of fondling hands, having been for four years in Italy. The family had returned to the drawing-room after supper, but as Mr. Linley and his son had begun to talk about music, the younger members had escaped to another apartment, the better to push on a nursery quarrel as to the respective value of their presents. The novelty of a newly returned elder brother was beginning to decline; he had eaten of the pie just as they had eaten of it, and now he was beginning to talk quite easily of music, when they had fully expected him to tell them some thrilling stories of Italian brigands full of bloodshed.

"She has sung better than any singer in England," said the father; "but that does not make her the greatest singer."

"Pacchierotti is the best critic in the world, and he told a company in my hearing three months ago that there is no singer in England who can compare with Miss Linley," said Tom. "Why, the great Agujari herself allowed that in oratorio she could never produce the same impression as our Miss Linnet."

"She spoke the truth, then, though she is an Italian," said Mr. Linley.





"Ah, let us talk about something else," cried Betsy. "Why should we talk of music within the first hour of Tom's return to us? Surely we might have one evening of pleasure."

Tom ceased fondling her hand and looked seriously into her face. And now the expression in their eyes was not the same. The soft, beseeching look that she cast at him was very different from the serious glance—it had something of reproach in it—with which he regarded her.

"We talk of music because there is nothing else worth talking about in the world," said he, and she saw with dismay the strange light that burned in the depths of his eyes, while his glance passed suddenly beyond her face—passed away from her face, from the room, from the world altogether. She knew what that light meant, and she shuddered. She had seen it in Mr. Garrick's face when he was playing in *Hamlet*; she had seen it in Mr. Gainsborough's face when he was painting the picture of her and her brother; she had seen it in the plain face of little Dr. Goldsmith when he had repeated in her hearing the opening lines of his sublime poem, "The Traveller"; she had seen it in the face of Mr. Burke when he was making a speech. She knew what it meant—she knew that that light was the light which men call genius, and she shuddered. She knew that to have genius is only to have a greater capacity for suffering than other men. What she did not know was that people saw the same light in her eyes when she was singing, "I know that my Redeemer liveth."

"What do you say?" cried the father, springing from his chair with a hand upraised. "What do you say, my son?"

"I say, sir, that we talk of music because there is nothing else in the world worth talking about," said Tom stoutly.

With a cry of delight the father threw himself into his son's arms.

"Thank God for that—thank God for that!" he murmured. "You have not worked in vain, my boy; I have not prayed in vain. The truth has been revealed to you. You are my son."

"Can any one doubt that this is the truth?" said the boy.

Betsy saw that he was careful to avoid looking in her direction. That was why she felt that he was addressing her personally.

"No, no!" she said, catching his hand again. "No, no, dear Tom; no one in this house will doubt that music is the only subject worth a word, a thought. It is our life. Is there any better life? How we can gladden the hearts of all who come near us! Even at Oxford—I have sung a great deal at Oxford, you know—I have seen the tears upon the faces of those men—the most learned men in the world. Just think of a poor ignorant girl like myself being able to move a learned man to tears! Oh, there is nothing worth a thought in the world save only music. Let me sing to you now, Tom; you will be able to say if I have improved."

Tom's face glowed.

"We have wasted an hour over supper," he said, and there was actually mournfulness in his voice. Happily his mother, the pie-maker, was not present; she had run from the room at the first mention of music. "I always think that eating is a huge waste of time. We might have been singing an hour ago. And what think you of this new instrument—the forte-piano—father? I have heard it affirmed that it will make even the harpsichord become obsolete. I laughed, having heard you play the harpsichord."

"Burney talks much about the forte-piano," said the father. "And Mr. Bach, who has been giving his



concerts in the Thatched House in St. James's Street, has surprised us all by his playing upon its keyboard; but, my son, 'tis less refined than my harpsichord."

"No one will ever be able to invent any instrument that will speak to one as does your violin, Tom," said Betsy. "You need have no fear that your occupation will soon be gone."

Tom smiled.

"The violin is the only instrument that has got a soul," said he. "Only God can create a soul. Doubtless God could make another instrument with a soul, to speak direct to the souls of men, but beyond doubt He has not done so yet."

"And now you shall awaken all the soul which is in yours, and make it reveal its celestial mysteries to us," said the father. "I am more than anxious to learn how you have progressed. I dare swear that you have not wasted your time in Italy?"

"Heaven only knows if I have done all that was in my power to do," said the boy, after a curious pause.

He was staring at the furthest corner of the ceiling while he spoke. Then he got upon his feet and walked across the room and back again without speaking; then he threw himself down upon a sofa with a sigh.

"Now and again—only now and again—father, I think that I succeed in reaching the soul of the thing," he said. "After long waiting and working and longing I sometimes hear its voice speaking to me, and then I feel that I am very near to God. Surely music is the voice of God speaking to the soul of man—speaking its message of infinite tenderness—gladness that is the gladness of heaven. . . . I think I have heard it, but not always—only at rare intervals. And I took up the violin when I was a child as if it were a simple thing—an ordinary instrument, and not a thing of mystery—a living thing!"

"You have learned the truth since those days!" cried the delighted father.

"The truth? Who is there alive that has learned the whole truth—the whole mystery of the violin?" said the boy. "I think that I have crept a little nearer to it during these years; that is all that I dare to say."

"You are a musician," said the father, and the tears of joy that were in his eyes were also in his voice. "The true musician is the one who fears to speak with assurance. He is never without his doubts, his fears, his hours of depression, as well as his moments of celestial joy. I thank heaven that I am the father of a musician."

"I thought that I was a musician until I heard Pugnani," said the son. "Hearing him showed me that I had not even crossed the threshold of the temple. Shall I ever forget that day? I was sent by my master with a message to his house on that hill where the olive-trees mingle with the oranges and the vines. I remember how the red beams of the sun at its setting swept across the Arno, and crept among the olives, and blazed upon the oranges till they seemed like so many lamps half hidden among the glossy foliage."

"Would that I had been with you!" said Betsy in a twilight voice.

"Ah, if you had but been with me, you would have learned more of music in half an hour than you could acquire elsewhere in a lifetime," said her brother.

"He played for you?" said the father.

"Yes, he played. The words are easily said. The villa is a lovely one, and when I reached the entrance, walking through the orange-grove, the sun had sunk, and from a solitary oleander a nightingale had begun to sing in the blue twilight. I stood listening to it, and feeling how truly Handel had interpreted the bird's song."

"Betsy shall sing you the *aria* 'Sweet Bird' when you have told us your story," said Mr. Linley.



"I entered during the first pause, for there was no bell to ring—my master had told me not to look for a bell or to call for a servant; the Maestro does not live as other men. The hall was empty; but I had received my instructions to wait there, and I waited until a man strolled in after me from the garden. He wore the common blouse of the Italian peasant, and carried a pruning-knife in one hand and a huge bunch of grapes in the other. I took him for a gardener, and the low bow which he made to me confirmed this impression. In replying to his courteous 'Buona sera, signore,' I told him that if he should chance to find Signore Pugnani in the villa, I would thank him greatly if he would let him know that I brought a message from Maestro Grassi. 'Signore Pugnani will be here presently,' said he. I thanked him, and, wishing to be civil, I said: 'His garden does you great credit—you are, I venture to think, his gardener?' 'Alas! sir,' said he, smiling, 'I am a much humbler person than his gardener. I have, it is true, dared to cut a bunch of grapes, but I am even now trembling at my boldness. I shall have to face the gardener before night, for he is sure to miss it. You are one of Maestro Glassi's pupils, sir?' he added; and when I assented, 'I, too, am learning to play the violin,' he said. 'It is very creditable to you to wish to master the instrument,' said I. 'You must have many opportunities in this household of hearing good music. Your master is, I believe, one of the greatest composers. I am overcome with admiration of his night piece—*La Voce della Notte*, he has called it.' 'I have heard him play it,' said he—'at least I think I recollect it. I fancy I should recall it fully if you were to play a few bars of the prelude.' He picked up a violin which, with its bow, was lying on a cushion on the settee of the hall, and began tuning it. When he had satisfied himself that the instrument was in tune, he handed it to me. 'Have you memory

sufficient to play a few bars of the *Andante*?' he inquired. 'Oh, I can play the thing throughout,' said I eagerly. I prided myself on having mastered the *Andante*, and I did not hesitate to play it. In the dimness of that twilight in the hall, through which the scents of the orange-trees floated—I can perceive the delicate perfume of that Italian evening still—I played the *Andante*."

The narrator paused, and then, lying back in his chair, he laughed heartily. His father smiled; his sister was grave.

"You played it creditably, I hope? You were in the presence of the composer, I begin to see," said Mr. Linley.

"Of course the stranger was Signore Pugnani, but I did not know it until he had taken the instrument from me," said the son. "He was courteous in his compliments upon my performance. 'I am but a pupil of that wonderful instrument,' said he, 'but I clearly perceive that you treat it with reverence. Would I tire you if I were to submit to your criticism my recollection of *La Voce della Notte*, sir?' I replied, of course, that he should find in me an indulgent critic, and I made up my mind to be indulgent. And then—then—he held the bow for a long time over the string—I scarce knew when he began to make it speak. I scarce knew whence the sound came. All the mystery of night was in that single note; it was an impassioned cry for rest—the rest brought by night. While it sounded I seemed to hear the far-off cry of the whole creation that travaileth, yearning for the rest that is the consummation of God's promises. Again he moved the bow, and that wailing note increased. . . . Ah, how can I express the magic of that playing? . . . I tell you that in a moment before my eyes the dim hall was crowded with figures. I sat in amazement watching them. They were laughing together in groups. Lovely girls in ravishing dishevelment flung roses up to the roof of the hall, and the blooms, breaking there, sent a shower of rosy perfumed petals



quivering and dancing like butterflies downward. Children ran to catch the frail falling flakes, and clapped their hands. Men old and young sang in varying harmonies, and at intervals of singing quaffed sparkling wine from cups of glass. Suddenly, while all were in the act of drinking, the goblets fell with a crash upon the pavement, and the red wine flowed like blood over the mosaics of the floor. When the crash of the glasses had rung through the hall there was a moment of deathly silence, and then, far away, I heard once more the wailing of a great multitude. It drew closer and closer until men, women, and children in the hall joined in that chorus of ineffable sadness—that cry of the world for the rest which has been promised. They lay on the pavement before my eyes, wailing—wailing. . . .

"Silence followed. The hall became dark in a moment; I could not have seen anything even if my eyes had been dry. They were not dry: that second wail had moved me as I had never before been moved. The darkness was stifling. I felt overwhelmed by it, but I could not stir. I remained bound to my seat by a spell that I could not not break. But just as I felt myself struggling for breath, a long ray of moonlight slipped aslant the pavement of the hall, and the atmosphere became less dense. In a few moments the hall was filled with moonlight, and I saw that, just where the light streamed, there was growing a tree—a tree of golden fruit that shone in the moon's rays. A little way off a fountain began to flash, and its sparkling drops fell musically into the basin beneath the fantastic jets. All at once a nightingale burst into rapturous song among the foliage. Ah, that song!—the soul of tranquillity, of a yearning satisfied! While I listened in delight I breathed the delicate dewy odours which seemed to come from the glossy leaves that hid the nightingale from sight.

"I do not know how long I listened—how long I tasted

of the delight of that sensation of repose. I only know that I was on my feet straining to catch the last exquisite notes that seemed to dwindle away and become a part of the moonlight, when I heard a voice say:

"'I find that my memory is trustworthy. I have played the whole of the *Voce*. I hope that I find in you a lenient critic, sir.'

"But I was on my knees at his feet, and unable to utter a word. Ah, it is the recollection of that playing which makes me feel that, even though I give up my life to the violin, I shall never pass beyond the threshold of the study."

"Sir," said the father, "you have told us of the effect produced upon your imagination by the playing of a great musician. But what you have proved to us is not that Signore Pugnani is a great musician, but that you are one. Give me your hand, my son; you are a great musician."

Betsy wiped her eyes and sighed.

## CHAPTER III

It was some time before Tom caught up his violin and began to tune it. His father had seated himself at the harpsichord, and Betsy had astonished her brother by her singing of Handel's "Sweet Bird." He affirmed that she was the greatest singer in the world. All that Pacchierotti and the Agujari had said about her singing failed to do full justice to it, he declared. He had heard singers in Italy who were accounted great, but the greatest of them might sit at her feet with profit.

"She will sing 'Angels, ever bright and fair' with true effect now, I promise you," said the father, with a shrewd smile.

"Ah, yes! now—now!" said the girl; and before her father had touched the keys of the harpsichord she had flashed into the recitative.

Her brother clasped his hands over his bosom, and, with his eyes fixed on her face, listened in amazement. She had become the embodiment of the music. She was the spirit of the song made visible. All the pure maidenly ecstasy, all the virginal rapture was made visible. Before she had ended the recitative, every one who ever heard that lovely singer was prepared to hear the rustling of the angels' wings. It was the greatest painter of the day who heard her sing the sublime melody, and painted his greatest picture—one of the greatest pictures ever painted in the world—from her.

"Saint Cecilia—Saint Cecilia, and none other," said Sir Joshua Reynolds. "She sings and draws the angels down when she calls upon them."

But the jingling harpsichord!

"It is unworthy of her," cried her father, taking his hands off the keys before playing the prelude to the air.

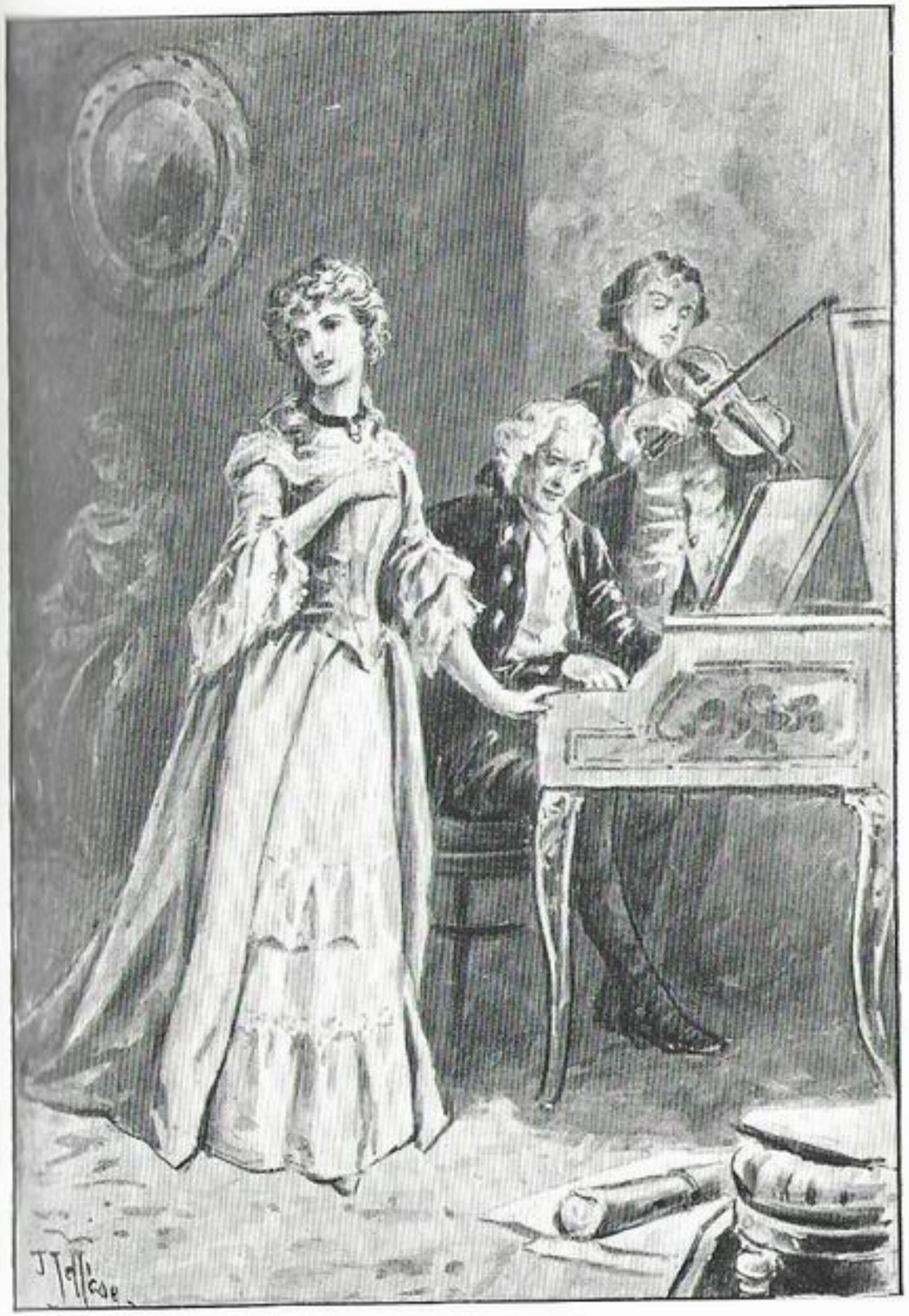
In an instant her brother had caught up his violin; he had been tuning it while they had been talking—and began to improvise an obbligato with the confidence of a master of the instrument. And then with the first sound of the harpsichord came that exquisite voice of passionate imploration:

> "'Angels, ever bright and fair,
> Take, oh, take me to your care.'"

She had never sung it so well before. She had never before known how beautiful it was. And now, while she sang, the violin obbligato helping her onward, she became aware of distant angel-voices answering her—soft and low they were at first, but gradually they drew nigh, increasing in volume and intensity, until at the end of the first part the air was thrilling with the sound of harps, and through all the joyous confidence of the last phrases came that glorious harp-music, now floating away into the distance, and anon flashing down with the sound of mysterious musical voices in response to her singing. At the last she could see the heavens opened above her, and a flood of melody floated down, and then dwindled away when her voice had become silent.

There was a silence in the room. Even the father, who thought he knew all the magic that could be accomplished on the fourth string, was dumb with amazement and delight.

"Ah, my sweet sister," said the violin-player, "your singing has led me to perceive something of the beauty of that *aria*. I think I caught a glimpse of the country



"ANGELS, EVER BRIGHT AND FAIR,
TAKE, OH, TAKE ME TO YOUR CARE!" [*page* 24.

"I think I can account for it," she cried. "Look out again, Tom, and try if you cannot see a Cerberus at the door."

"A Cerberus?" said he, peering out at the edge of the blind. "I' faith, I do perceive something that suggests one of the great hounds which I saw at the Hospice of St. Bernard—an enormous mass of vigilance, not over-steady on his legs."

"A three-decker sort of man, rolling at anchor?" suggested Polly, the pert one.

"An apt description," said Tom.

"I will not hear a word said against Dr. Johnson," cried Betsy. "He has kept his promise. When I told him that you were coming home to-day, he said: 'Madam, though your occupation as a singer entitles every jackanapes to see you for half a crown, still, in order to inculcate upon you the charm of a life of domesticity, I shall prevent your being pestered with busybodies for one night. I shall take care that no eye save that of Heaven sees you kiss your brother on his return.'"

"Dr. Johnson is not without a certain sense of what is delicate, though he may be in one's company a long time before one becomes aware of it," said Mr. Linley.

"Betsy did not tell you what he said when she thanked him," cried Polly. "But he rolled himself to one side, and pursed out his lips in a dreadful way. 'Tell the truth, Miss Linnet,' said he at last. 'Tell the truth: do you indeed welcome my offer, or do you not rather regret that the young rascals—ay, and the old rascals too—will be deprived of the opportunity of having their envy aroused by observing the favours you bestow on the cold lips of a brother?' Those were his very words."

"And his very manner, I vow," laughed her father; and indeed Miss Polly had given a very pretty imitation of the Johnsonian manner.



"Never mind," said Betsy. "If he only succeeds in keeping away Mrs. Thrale, he deserves all our gratitude."

And it was actually Mrs. Thrale whom Dr. Johnson was trying to convince that she had no right to enter the Linleys' house at that moment.

Hearing that Tom Linley was to return after an absence of four years in Italy, and knowing the spirit of impudent curiosity that pervaded the crowds of idlers in Bath, Dr. Johnson had posted himself at the door of 5, Pierrepont Street, when he learned that Tom had reached the house, and he had prevented even those persons who had legitimate business with Mr. Linley from intruding upon the family party.

He was having a difficult task with Mrs. Thrale, for the sprightly little lady had made up her mind to visit the Linleys and have at least one *bon mot* respecting Tom circulated among the early visitors to the Pump Room before any of her rival gossips had a chance of seeing the youth. But she found herself confronted by the mighty form of Johnson a few yards from the door of their house.

"Dear sir," she cried, "you are doing yeoman's service to the family of Linley. Oh, the idle curiosity of the people here! How melancholy is the position of a public character! Every fellow who has ever heard Miss Linley sing fancies he is privileged to enter her house upon the most sacred occasion; and as for your modish young woman, she looks on the Linley family as she does upon the Roman baths—to be freely visited as one of the sights of the place."

"Madam, you exaggerate," said Dr. Johnson. "The persons in Bath whose inquisitiveness makes them disregardful of the decencies of life do not number more than a dozen."

"Ah, sir," said the lady, "you are charitably disposed."

"Madam, to suggest that I am charitable were to suggest that I am incapable of taking a just view of a very simple

matter, and that, let me tell you, madam, is something which no considerations of charity will prevent my contesting."

"Dear sir," said Mrs. Thrale, "you will force me to appeal to your charity at this time on behalf of Mr. Boswell. If you do not permit him to enter the house and bring us a faithful report of young Mr. Linley, a whole day may pass before the Pump Room knows anything of him."

"Psha! madam, do you know the Pump Room so indifferently as to fancy that it will wait for any report of the young gentleman before forming its own conclusions on the subject of his return?"

"Ah, Dr. Johnson, but Mr. Boswell is invariably so accurate in his reports on everything," persisted the lady.

Little Mr. Boswell smirked between the cross-fires of the yellow lamplight and the lurid links; he smirked and bowed low beneath the force of the lady's compliment. He had not a nice ear either for compliment or detraction: he failed to appreciate the whisper of a zephyr of sarcasm.

But his huge patron was not Zephyrus, but Boreas.

"Madam," he cried, "I allow that Mr. Boswell is unimaginative enough to be accurate; but he is a busybody, and I will not allow him to cross this threshold. List to those sounds, Mrs. Thrale"—Polly in the room upstairs had just begun to sing, with her two sisters, a glee of Purcell—"list to those sounds. What! madam, would you have that nest of linnets disturbed?"

"Is Saul also among the prophets? Oh, 'tis sure edifying to find Dr. Johnson the patron of music," said the lady with double-edged sweetness.

"Madam, let me tell you that one cannot rightly be said to be a patron of music," said Dr. Johnson. "Music is an abstraction. One may be a patron of a musician or a painter—nay, I have even heard of a poet having a patron,



and dying of him too, because, like a gangrene that proves fatal, he was not cut away in time."

"And just now you are the patron of the musicians, sir?" said the lady.

"Just now, madam, I am hungry and thirsty. I have a longing to be the patron of your excellent cook, and the still more excellent custodian of your tea-cupboard. Come, Mrs. Thrale, sweet though the sounds of that hymn may be—if indeed it be a hymn and not a jig; but I hope it is a hymn—take my word for it, madam, a hungry man would like better to hear the rattle of crockery."

"Dear sir, I feel honoured," cried Mrs. Thrale. "But who will take charge of your nest of linnets in the meantime?"

"Our friend Dr. Goldsmith will be proud of that duty, dear madam," said Johnson.

"Madam," said Dr. Goldsmith, "I have my flute in my pocket; if any one tries to enter this house, I swear that I shall play it, and if every one does not fly then, a posse of police shall be sent for. You have heard me play the flute, doctor?"

"Sir," said Johnson, "when I said that music was of all noises the least disagreeable, I had not heard you play upon your flute."

"No, sir; for had you heard me, you would not have said 'least disagreeable'—no, sir; *least* would not have been the word," said Goldsmith.

"Pan-pipes would be an appropriate instrument to such a satyr," said a tall thin gentleman in an undertone to another, when Johnson and Mrs. Thrale had walked away, and Goldsmith had begun to listen in ecstasy to Tom Linley's playing of Pugnani's *nocturne*.

"Ah, friend Horry, you have never ceased to think ill of Dr. Goldsmith since the night you sat beside him at the Academy dinner," said the other gentleman.

"I think no ill of the man, George," said Horace Walpole. "Surely a man may call another a scarecrow without malice, if t' other be a scarecrow."

"'Tis marvellous how plain a fellow seems when he has got the better of one in an argument," laughed George Selwyn, for he knew that Walpole had not a good word to say for Goldsmith since the former had boasted, on the narrowest ground, of having detected the forgeries of Chatterton, thereby calling for a scathing word or two from Goldsmith, who had just come from the room where the unfortunate boy was lying dead.

The two wits walked on toward the house that Gilly Williams had taken for a month; but before they had gone a dozen yards they were bowing to the ground at the side of a gorgeous chair carried by men wearing the livery of the Duchess of Devonshire, and having two footmen on each side.

The beautiful lady whose head, blazing with jewels, appeared when the hood was raised, caused her folded fan to describe a graceful curve in the direction of Walpole, while she cried:

"You were not at the Assembly to-night, Mr. Walpole."

"Nay, your Grace, I have scarce left it: we are on the fringe of it still," replied Walpole.

"Under Miss Linley's window," said the duchess.

"Wherever Miss Linley sings and the Duchess of Devonshire listens is the Assembly," said George Selwyn.

"I have heard of one Orpheus who with his lute drew inanimate things to listen to him," said the duchess; "Miss Linley seems to have equal powers; for were it otherwise, I should not have seen my Lord Coventry in Pierrepont Street to-night."

"Your Grace doubted whether the people flocked to Miss Linley's concerts in the Assembly Rooms to hear her sing or to feast on her beauty," said Walpole.



"Well, now I confess that I am answered," said her Grace, "for the singer did not deign to appear even at a window. But I call it a case of gross improvidence for a young woman to be so beautiful of feature, and so divine of voice at the same time. Either of her attractions should be enough for one in a humble position in life. I call it a waste. Now tell me frankly, Mr. Selwyn, is Miss Linley as beautiful as your friend Lady Coventry was—the first of them, I mean."

"Madam, there have been but three beautiful women in the world; the first was Helen of Troy, the second was Maria Lady Coventry, and the third is——"

"Miss Elizabeth Linley?" cried the duchess when George Selwyn made a pause—a pause that invited a question—the pause of the professed *raconteur* who fully understands the punctuation of a sentence. "What? Miss Elizabeth Linley?"

"Madam, the third is her Grace the Duchess of Devonshire," said Selwyn with a bow.

"Oh, sir," cried the duchess, "you are unkind to offer me such a compliment when I am enclosed in my chair. I protest that you have no right to take me at such a disadvantage. Pray consider that I have sunk to the ground at your feet in acknowledgment of your politeness. But pray note the silence of Mr. Walpole."

"'Tis the silence of aquiescence, madam," said Selwyn.

"Pray let Mr. Walpole speak for himself, Selwyn," said the duchess. "As a rule he is able to speak not only for himself, but for every one else."

"'Twas but the verse of Mr. Dryden which came into my mind when George spoke of his three beauties, duchess," said Walpole:

> "'The force of Nature could no further go;
> To make a third she joined the other two.'"

"'Tis the compliment of a scholar as well as a wit," said her Grace—"a double-edged sword, keen as well as polished, which I vow there is no resisting. What return can I make for such favours—a sweet nosegay of favours in full bloom and tied with a riband of the finest brocade? The flowers of compliment are ever more welcome when tied with a riband of wit."

"O Queen, live for ever!" cried Selwyn.

"Nay, sir, that is not a reply to my question," said the duchess. "I asked you what return I can make for your compliments?"

"True, madam, and I reply, 'O Queen, live for ever!' in other words, give Mr. Gainsborough an order to paint your portrait," said Mr. Selwyn.

"Ah, now 'tis Mr. Gainsborough whom you are complimenting," said the duchess. "Alas! that we poor women must be dependent for immortality upon the pigments of a painter!"

"Your Grace is in the happy position of being independent of his pigments except on his canvas," said Walpole. "But let me join my entreaty to Mr. Selwyn's. Give to posterity a reflection of the privilege which is enjoyed by us."

"I vow that the king I feel like to is King Herod," cried the duchess.

"And with great reason, madam," said Walpole: "we are the innocents slain by your Grace's beauty."

"Nay, that was not the episode that was in my mind," laughed the lady. "Nay, 'twas t'other one: I offered you a favour, and you, like the daughter of Herodias, have demanded a human head—in pigment. But I have pledged myself, and I will e'en send a note to Mr. Gainsborough in the morning. What! the concert is over? Gentlemen, I trust that you are satisfied with your night's work?"

"Madam, should it be known that it was George and



myself who brought about this happy accident, we should rest secure in the thought that we too shall live among the immortals," cried Walpole.

"Future generations shall rise up and call us blessed," said Selwyn.

"And what will Mr. Gainsborough say?" asked the duchess.

"If he were a man like one of us, he would be in despair of ever being able to execute the task which your Grace imposes on him," said Walpole.

"True, if he were not supported from one day to the next by the thought of being for another hour in your Grace's presence," said Selwyn.

The beautiful lady held up both her hands in pretty protest, while she cried:

"If I tarry here much longer, I shall find myself promising to give sittings to Sir Joshua Reynolds and the full company of Academicians; so a good-night to you pair of flatterers. Heaven grant that I get safe home! Your *al fresco* concert-goers jostle one horribly."

The two gentlemen bowed while her Grace's chair was borne on through the sauntering crowd, for the house which had been the centre of the gathering had now become silent, and the candles in the drawing-room were extinguished. The clocks had chimed out the first quarter past eleven—an hour when most Londoners were in bed; but Bath during the eighteenth century was the latest town in England, and long after the duchess's chair had been borne away, long after Walpole and his friend had sauntered on to Gilly Williams's; long after Johnson had lectured the saturnine brewer, Mr. Thrale, on the evil of Mr. Thrale's practice of over-eating (Johnson himself was enough of an anchorite to limit himself when at Streatham to fifteen peaches before breakfast, and an equal number before dinner, and had never been known to swallow more than

twenty cups of tea at a sitting); long after Dr. Goldsmith had worried poor Mr. Boswell by pretending to be taking a note of Dr. Johnson's sayings for the day, having, as he affirmed, an eye to a future biography of the great man; long after Miss Linley had knelt down by her bedside to thank Providence for having restored her dear brother to his home, even though Providence had seen fit to supplant her in her brother's affection by an abstraction which he called his Art; long after the night had closed upon all these incidents in the beautiful city of Bath, some people were still sauntering through Pierrepont Street.

From the left there sauntered a young man of good figure and excellent carriage. He wore a cloak, and he had tilted his hat over his eyes, in imitation of the prowling young man on the stage. He kept on the dark side of the street and looked furtively round every now and again. He slipped into a deep doorway when almost opposite the house of the Linleys, and stood there with his eyes fixed on the highest windows.

"Sleep, beloved, sleep," he murmured, with a sentimental turn of his head. "Sleep, knowing naught of the passion that burns in the heart of thy faithful swain, who wakes to watch over thy slumbers."

He was so absorbed in his rhapsodising that he failed to notice the approach of another young man from the opposite direction to that from which he himself had come. The other was somewhat taller, and his carriage was better displayed by the circumstance of his being uncloaked, and of his walking frankly along the street until he too had reached the dim doorway. Then with a glance up to the windows of the Linleys' house, he too slipped into that doorway.

He started, finding that another person was there—a man who quickly turned away his head and let his chin fall deep into the collar of his cloak.



"What! Charles?" cried the newcomer. "Why, I left you at home going to your bedroom half an hour ago. What, man, have you turned footpad that you steal out in this fashion and wearing a cloak?"

"I trust, brother, that one may take a quiet walk without having to give an explanation of its purport," said the first sulkily.

"To be sure—to be sure," said the other. "I suppose that Joseph, even before he became a patriarch, took many a stroll in the cool of the night through the streets of Thebes—or was it Memphis?—without reproach."

"For that matter," cried the first, with some irritation in his voice, "what was your motive in coming hither, brother Dick? Did not you say that you were going to bed also?"

"I—oh, I only came out to search for you, Joseph—I mean Charles," said the second. "Yes, Jo—Charles, hearing you leave the house by the back, I thought it the duty of a younger brother to see that you did not get into any harm. Good heavens, brother! what would become of the Sheridan family if the elder son were to fall among thieves? Do you think that our patriarchal father would be satisfied if he were shown his Joseph's cloak saturated with red claret? Come home, Joseph, come home, I entreat of you. You can compose your sonnet to Betsy Linley much more fluently at your desk at home. Besides, father has a rhyming-dictionary—an indispensable work of reference to a lover, Charles."

"What do you mean, Dick?" said Charles in an aggrieved voice—the aggrieved voice afterwards assumed by the representative of the part of Joseph in *The School for Scandal*. "Brother, I really am surprised to find you making light of so estimable a family."

"As the Linleys or the Sheridans—which?" cried Dick. "Oh, man, come home; the girl is asleep hours ago and

dreaming of—of you, maybe, Charles. Think of that, man —think of that—dreaming of you! Oh, if you have any appreciation of a true lover's duty, you will hasten to your bed to return the compliment by dreaming of her."

Mr. Richard Brinsley Sheridan put his arm through his brother's, and Charles suffered himself to be led away to their house on the Terrace Walks, protesting all the time that the man who rushed hastily to conclusions was more to be execrated than the footpad, for the latter was content when he had stolen a man's purse, whereas the other . . .

"True—true—quite true, Joseph," said Dick. "We can make another score or two of those sentiments when we get home. Father has a copy of the 'Sentiments of all Nations' as well as a rhyming-dictionary."

## CHAPTER IV

Betsy Linley awoke in the morning with a feeling of having been disappointed about something, and she was disappointed with herself for being so weak as to be conscious of such an impression. In short, she was disappointed with herself for awaking in disappointment. She should have felt gladness, only gladness, to think that the brother, who had ever been so dear to her, had escaped all the perils of the years he had spent among the artistic barbarians of Italy, all the perils of the long journey through the land of brigands to land of highwaymen. No other consideration should have produced any impression on her.

The previous morning she had awakened with the one thought dancing before her, "He will be at home when I next wake in this house!" and it seemed to her then that this was all she required to make her happy. What more than this could she need? If he returned to her side safe and well, what could anything else matter? There was nothing else in the world of sufficient importance in comparison with such an occurrence to be worth a thought. The feeling that he was near her would absorb every thought of her heart, and nothing that might occur afterwards could diminish from the joy of that thought.

Well, he had come—she had felt his kisses on her cheek, and for an hour she had felt that he was her dear brother

as he had been in the old days. She felt sure that he would understand her, and, understanding her, sympathise with her. But from the moment that he had taken his violin out of its baize bag—he had nursed the instrument on his knees, as a mother carries her baby, during the entire journey from Italy—from the moment that she had seen that divine light in his eyes, when he drew his bow across the strings, she knew that there was a barrier between them. She felt as a sister feels when a well-beloved only brother returns to her with a wife by his side.

His art—that was what he had brought home with him, and she saw that it held possession of all his heart She felt that she occupied quite a secondary place in his affections compared with music—that he loved music with the passionate devotion of a lover, while to her he could only give the cold, calculable affection of a brother. She felt all the sting of jealousy which an affectionate sister feels when her brother, in her presence, looks into the eyes of the woman whom he loves and puts his arm about her. She felt all the bitterness of the step-daughter who sees her father smiling as he looks into the eyes of his new wife.

She had hoped that Tom's home-coming would make her father less exacting than he always had been in regard to her singing—that Tom would take her part when she protested against being forced to sing so constantly in public. Her nature was one of extraordinary sensitiveness, and it was this fact that caused her to be the most exquisite singer of her day. But then it was her possession of this very sensitiveness that caused her to shrink from an audience. It was with real terror that she faced the thousands of people whom her singing delighted. The reflection that her singing delighted every one who heard her gave her no pleasure, and the tumult of applause which greeted her gave her no exultation; it only added to the



terror she felt on appearing on a platform. She wept in her room, refusing anything to eat or drink for hours preceding an evening when she had to sing in public. More than once she had actually fainted on reaching the concert-room; and these were the occasions when she had thrilled every one present with the divine charm of her voice.

She was the most sensitive instrument that ever the spirit of music breathed through; but the cruelty of the matter was, that although without this sensitiveness she would never have been able to move the hearts of every man and woman who heard her sing, yet possessing it unfitted her for the *rôle* of a great singer.

This was the paradox of the life of this woman of genius. The most cruel jest ever perpetrated by Nature was giving this creature the divinest voice that ever made a mortal a little lower than the angels, and at the same time decreeing that it should be an agony for her to exercise her powers as infinitely less gifted women exercise their talents.

It is all to be seen in her face as we can see it on the canvases of Gainsborough and Reynolds—two of the greatest pictures ever painted by the hand of man. If the face of Miss Linley in Gainsborough's picture is divine, the face of Sir Joshua's "Saint Cecilia" is sublime. In both one may perceive the shrinking of a sensitive soul from anything less divine than itself.

And her father, an excellent man, who had made himself a musician in spite of many difficulties, insisted on her singing in public as frequently as he thought consistent with the preservation of her voice. He was incapable of understanding such a nature as hers, and she had this fact impressed upon her every day. He would tell her what Handel meant to accomplish in certain of his numbers, and she would listen as in a dream, and then sing the number in her own way, going to the very soul of its

mystery, and achieving an effect of which her father had never dreamed. She used to wonder how any one could be content, as her father was, to touch merely upon the surface of the matter and make no attempt to reach the soul underlying it.

Every day she startled him by her revelation of the depths of Handel's music—the blue profundity of his ocean, the immeasurable azure of his heaven ; and sometimes he could not avoid receiving the impression that this daughter, whom he had taught the rudiments of his art, knew a great deal more about it than he did ; and he only recovered his position as her master by pointing out her technical mistakes to her : she had dwelt too long on a certain note ; the crescendo in the treatment of a certain phrase had not been gradual enough ; her finish had been staccato. She must go over the air again.

So it was that he worried her. He was trying to teach a nightingale to sing by playing the flute to it. But the nightingale sang, in spite of his instruction ; the nightingale sang, sang, and longed all the time for the wings of a dove, so that she might fly away and be at rest.

She knew that her father was incapable of understanding her sensitiveness, and she had looked forward to the return of her brother, who might help her father to understand. Alas ! the instant she saw that strange light in his eyes she knew that she had nothing to hope for from him. And now she was putting on her clothes to begin another day which should be as all the weary days which had gone before—a day of toiling over exercises with her father at the harpsichord, so that her voice should not be wanting in flexibility when she would appear before an audience in the Assembly Rooms on the evening of the next day.

"Oh for the wings of a dove !" her heart was singing, when, pausing for a moment, with her beautiful hair falling over her shoulders, she heard the strains of her brother's



violin floating from the room below. He played the violin beautifully, but . . . "Oh for the wings of a dove to fly away and be at rest !"

* * * * *

Mr. Garrick called upon them before they had left the music-room. The children were delighted with Garrick, who could imitate, in such a funny way, their father giving a lesson, and Dr. Johnson assisting by the superiority of his lungs the excellence of his argument on some very delicate question—say, the necessity for building a hospital for spiders which had grown old and past work. This he made the subject of an animated discussion between Dr. Johnson and Sir Joshua Reynolds, keeping the whole family in fits of laughter at Dr. Johnson's polysyllabic references to the industry of the spider, and then bringing tears to their eyes at his picture of the heartlessness of allowing a grey-haired spider to be cast upon the world in its declining years. Of course the children appreciated the ludicrous mistakes made by Sir Joshua, whose infirmity of deafness caused him to assume that Johnson had said exactly the opposite to what he was saying. And then he pretended that he heard a knock at the door. He hastened to admit a gentleman with a very lugubrious face, and before he had opened his mouth there was a cry of "Mr. Cumberland ! Mr. Cumberland !" In the truest style of Richard Cumberland, he hastened to decry the whole spider family. Their spinning was grossly overrated, he declared ; for his part, he had known many spiders in his time, but he had never known one that was a spinster.

This sort of fooling was what Garrick enjoyed better than anything else, and he brought all his incomparable powers to bear upon it. He played this form of comedy with the same supreme perfection that he displayed in the tragedy of *Hamlet*. Even Tom Linley, who was inclined to be

coldly critical of such buffoonery, soon became aware of the difference between the fooling of a man of genius and that of an ordinary person. He laughed as heartily as his younger brothers and sisters during the five minutes that Garrick was in the room.

"By the way," cried the actor when he was taking his leave (Mr. Linley had just entered the room), "our friend Tom Sheridan goes to Ireland to-morrow. He has been released from his little difficulties which sent him to France. It seems that his chief creditor in Dublin actually petitioned the court to grant Tom exemption from any liability to pay what he owes. Is not that an ideal creditor for one to have? What persuasive letters Tom must have written to him! But for that matter, he could persuade the most obdurate man out of his most cherished belief."

"Could he persuade you that his Hamlet is superior to yours, Mr. Garrick?" said Linley with a twinkle.

"Well, sir, he might succeed in persuading me of that, but that would be of little value to him, for he could persuade no one else in the world of it. Just now he was trying to persuade me that his elder son, Charles, is a man of parts, and that his second son, Dick, is a nincompoop."

He gave a casual glance round the Linley circle; his eyes did not rest for a longer space of time upon Elizabeth than upon any of the others, but he did not fail to notice that a delicate pink had come to her cheeks, and that for the second that elapsed before her eyes fell there was an unusual sparkle in them. He did not need to look at the girl again. He had learned enough to make him certain that she was interested in at least one of the Sheridan family. But he was left wondering which of them it was that interested her. He had sufficient experience of the world, as well as of the Green Room, which he believed to be a world in itself, to be well aware of the fact that a beautiful girl may be as greatly interested in a nincompoop



as in his astuter brother; and this might mean that Miss Linley was interested in Charles Sheridan rather than in Dick.

"And did he succeed in persuading you?" asked Linley.

"Faith, sir, he had no trouble persuading me to believe that if it is a wise son who knows his own father, 'tis a wiser father than Tom Sheridan that knows his own sons," said Garrick, giving another glance round the circle. This time he saw Miss Linley's long lashes flash from her cheek; but her eyes were not dancing, they were full of mournfulness.

Garrick found that he would have to give time to the consideration of what this expression of mournfulness meant.

"Tom was, as usual, combining the arts of devotion and elocution in his household," continued the actor. "He holds that devotion is the handmaid to elocution. He has morning prayer in his house, not only because he is a good Churchman, but because he is an excellent teacher of elocution. He makes his children learn Christian principles and correct pronunciation at the same time."

"That is the system of the copybooks," said Linley. "By giving headlines of notable virtue, they inculcate good principles as well as good penmanship."

"I call it killing two birds with the one stone," said Polly.

"Mr. Sheridan is a copybook-heading sort of man in himself," cried Garrick. "He is an admirable sentiment engraved in copper-plate. He thinks that Heaven will pay more attention to a petition that is pronounced according to the rules of Sheridan's dictionary than to one which is founded on Johnson. This is how he says grace:—'For these and all Thy mercies——' 'Observe, children, I say "mercies," not "murcies." There is not nearly enough attention given in England to discriminating between the vowel sounds——Observe I say "vowel sounds," not "vowil

sounds." I have now and again heard Mr. Garrick say "vowil" instead of "vowel," which would almost lead me to believe that he has more Irish blood in his veins than his shocking parsimony would suggest. But for that matter, Mr. Garrick is constantly making errors in his elocution—— Pray note that I say "errors," not "errurs"—and the only wonder is that any educated audience can follow the fellow. You perceive that I say "follow the fellow," not "folly the feller,"—to be sure, it is folly to follow the fellow, but that is a matter of taste, not truth. You mark me, Richard?' 'Faith, sir,' says Richard, 'I am thinking more of swallowing than of following at the present moment; but if you begin upon the rashers, I promise you that I shall follow and say in the purest English, "For these and all Thy mercies, make us to be truly thankful."' Thereat brother Charles shakes his head, and says, 'You were remarking, sir, that the English are most careless over their quantities.' 'That is because they have not had the privilege of being born Irishmen,' says Dick; 'but we have, and for this and all Thy mercies, make us to be truly thankful. Let me help you to one of these excellent rashers, father.' Then the girls grin, looking down at their plates. Brother Charles shakes his head over Dick's levity, and the father puts on his best 'Cato' face, and remains dignified and, like the breakfast, cold. But by the Lord Harry, I am worse than Tom Sheridan; I am keeping you from your breakfast of sweet sounds. There is Master Tom tuning his violin in a suggestive way. Is it true what people say, Miss Polly, that the Linley family break their fast on buttered fugues, dine off a sirloin of sonatas, and sup off jugged symphonies, drinking mugs of oratorio, and every mug with a Handel? Farewell, dear friends—farewell! 'Oh, now for ever, farewell the tranquil mind, farewell content.'"

In a second he had become Othello, and the laughter was frozen on the face of every one in the circle. This



magician carried them at will from world to world. They were powerless before him. He left them gasping, looking at one another as if they had just awakened from a dream.

"A genius!" murmured Mr. Linley, when Garrick had gone, and a long silence followed in the room. "'Tis a doubtful privilege to be visited by a genius. It unfits one for one's daily work."

"Nay, sir," cried Tom, "I would fain believe that the visits of a genius are like those of an angel—that he brings us food, in the strength of which we can face the terrors of a wilderness as the prophet did—the wilderness of the commonplace."

"True—true," said his father. "Still, I think that 'tis just as well for us all that the visits of a genius have the qualities which have been ascribed to those of an angel. Now we shall begin our studies. After all, Mr. Garrick only delayed us for twenty minutes. It might have been much worse."

"Yes, it might have been Mr. Foote," said Polly.

"That would indeed have been much worse," said her father. "Mr. Foote makes us laugh, and leaves us laughing; Mr. Garrick makes us laugh, and leaves us thinking."

And then the lessons began.

Even the delight of hearing her brother play one of Bach's most ethereal compositions for the violin and harpsichord failed to make Betsy submissive to the ordeal from which she shrank. Her father seemed especially exacting on this morning, but he was not so in reality; it was only that Betsy felt more weary of the constant references to the technicalities which her fine feeling now and again discarded, greatly to the advantage of the composition which she was set to interpret, but which her father, with all the rigid scruple of the made musician, insisted on her observing.

And Tom, whom she had trusted to take her part, believing that he would understand her feelings by

considering his own—Tom stood by, coldly acquiescing in her father's judgment in all questions of *technique*; nay, he showed himself, by his criticism of her phrasing at one part of an air from *Orfeo*, more a slave to precision than was her father. She had had some hope of Tom when he had begun to improvise that mysterious accompaniment to her singing on the previous evening. Surely any one who could so give himself up to his imagination as he had done would understand how she should become impatient of the reins of *technique*! Surely he would understand that there are moments when one can afford to sing out of the fulness of one's heart rather than in strict accordance with the suggestions of the composer!

Alas! Tom had failed her in her hour of need. He seemed to think that the privilege of improvising should be enjoyed only by a player on the violin, and that it would be the grossest presumption on the part of a vocalist so to indulge her imagination. And thus, bringing weariness and disappointment to the girl, the day wore away.

When the family dinner was over, there were numerous callers at the house in Pierrepont Street. Among them there was an elderly gentleman named Long, who was treated with marked civility by Mr. Linley.

When he had left the house, and Tom and Betsy were alone, the former, after referring to some of the visitors, inquired:

"Who is that old gentleman whom you called Mr. Long?"

"He is nothing in particular; that is why I am going to marry him," said she.

## CHAPTER V

APPARENTLY Tom was not greatly startled by the declaration which his sister had made to him. He was screwing up a new string which he had just put on his violin, and he continued twanging it with his thumb as he raised it to the proper note in the scale. She watched him, with his head slightly turned to one side, and she heard the string creep up by quarter-tones until at last it satisfied his fastidious ear. Then he played pizzicato on all the strings for a while before he said:

"He is an old man, is he not?"

"He is the man whom I am going to marry," said she.

"He must be over fifty," said he.

"He is the man I am going to marry," said she.

"I saw by the papers that were sent to me from time to time that you had many suitors," said he. "I did not pay much attention to the papers, but now I recollect that some of them made sport of an elderly admirer. I suppose Mr. Long was he?"

"I daresay. Mr. Long cannot help his age. 'Tis not more absurd for him to be old than it is for me to be young. I suppose some newspapers would think it no shame to slight me for being young."

He gave a passable imitation of an Italian's shrug—he had learned something beyond the playing of the violin in Italy.

"*Che sara sarà*," said he, and there was a shrug in his voice. "After all, what does it matter whom one marries?"

"That's exactly what I say!" she cried, her quick ear catching his cynical tone. "What does it matter? I must marry some one, and is it not better for me to marry a man to whom I am indifferent than one whom I detest?"

He mused for a few moments, and then he said:

"I have not given much thought to the matter, but I think I should prefer marrying a woman who hated me rather than one who looked on me with indifference. Never mind. I suppose this Mr. Long is rich?"

"He is very rich. I may be able to save Maria from having to be a singer. I shall certainly save myself from continuing one."

His violin dropped upon his knees.

"What do you mean?" he cried. "It cannot be possible that it is your wish to cease from singing in public?"

"That is the only reason I have for agreeing to marry any one," she replied.

"*Dio mio!* You—you—you, who can become the greatest singer in the world; you, who have been given a voice such as might be envied by the very greatest of lyric artists; you with an intelligence that could not be surpassed, an imagination that actually stands in need of being restrained; you, who have it in your power to sway the souls of men and women as the tide of the sea sways the ships that are borne on its surface—you talk of ceasing to sing! Psha! 'tis not in your power to cease to sing. 'Tis laid upon you as a duty—a sacred duty."

"Ah, Tom—brother, cannot you understand something—a little—of what I feel?" she cried almost piteously. "I looked forward to your return with such happiness, and felt sure that you would understand how it is that I shrink from coming forward on a platform to sing for the



amusement—for the gratification of every one who can afford to pay half a crown to hear me—foolish men, and still more foolish women, caring nothing for music. You and I have always thought of music as something sacred, a gift of God, given to us as it is given to the angels—to be used in the service of God. Idle curiosity, fashion—foolish fashion, that is why they come to hear me sing. I know it. I know it. I have overheard them chattering about me. The Duchess of Devonshire, I overheard her say to Mrs. Crewe that she had come to see if I was as beautiful as she—as beautiful as Mrs. Crewe! And Mrs. Crewe said how lucky it was that they had an opportunity of judging upon this point for so small a sum as half a guinea. And there was I, compelled to stand up before them and sing, 'I know that my Redeemer liveth,' while they smiled, criticising me through their glasses, just as if I were a horse being put through its paces! Oh, my brother, I felt all the time that I was degrading my gift, that I was selling those precious words of comfort and joy and their wonderful interpretation into music that goes straight to the soul of men and women—selling them for money which I put into my own pocket! There they sat smiling before me, and Mrs. Crewe said she did not like the way my hair was dressed. I heard her whisper it just as I had sung the first phrase of 'For now is Christ risen from the dead,' just as the joy—the note of triumph that rings through the passage had begun to sound through my heart as it always does! Oh, what humiliation! I broke down; no one but myself knew it, for I sang the notes correctly to the end—the notes, but not the music. It is one thing to sing notes correctly and quite another to make music: the music is the spirit that goes to the soul of those who listen, producing its effect upon them either for good or bad. Alas! there was nothing spiritual in my singing that night. I was telling them that our

Redeemer had risen from the dead, and they replied that they did not like the way my hair was dressed! Oh, brother, can you wonder that I shrink with absolute terror from coming before an audience—that all my longing is for a cottage among trees, where I may sing as the birds sing, without caring whether or not any one hears me?"

She was weeping in his arms before she had finished speaking. He was deeply affected.

"My poor sister—my poor dear sister!" he said, caressing her hair; "I feel for you with all my heart. You are too highly strung—you are over-sensitive. What can I say to comfort you? How have you come to allow yourself to be carried away by the foolishness of some members of your audience? Good heavens! Think that if Handel had suffered from such sensitiveness the world would to-day be without some of its sublimest music!"

"How did he do it? I cannot understand how he could suffer his music to be played and sung, knowing the people as he did," she said. "It is all a mystery to me. It must have been an agony to him. But he was a genius; it may be different with a genius. A genius may be able so to absorb himself in his music that he becomes oblivious of the presence of every one. Alas! I am not a genius—I am only a girl. I cannot understand how Handel felt; I only know that I feel."

"And I feel for you," he said soothingly, as one addresses a frightened child.

"You do—I think that you do; and you will join your voice to mine in imploring our father to spare me the agony of appearing before an audience? Oh, surely there is something to live for besides singing to divert the people here! Surely Heaven has not given me a voice to make me wretched! Has Heaven given me a voice instead of happiness?"



"Do you indeed fancy that you could find any happiness apart from music?" said he. "If you do, you are not my sister. There is nothing in the world that is worth a thought save only music."

"What, have you never loved?" she cried.

"Love—love! Ah, yes; 'tis a sentiment, a beautiful sentiment. I do not say that it was created solely to give a musician a sentiment to illustrate—I do not talk so wildly; but I do say that it lends itself admirably to illustration at the hands of a competent musician; so that if Heaven had decreed that it should exist for this purpose, I would not hesitate to say that the object of its existence was a worthy one."

She put him away from her.

"I have talked to you to no purpose: you do not understand," she said. "It is left to me to work out my own freedom, and I mean to do it by marrying Mr. Long."

"I do not think that your feeling for Mr. Long would lend itself to interpretation through the medium of music," said he, smiling, as he picked up his violin.

She threw herself wearily into the chair that it vacated, and listlessly, hopelessly, watched him screwing up another of the strings.

"Listen to me, Betsy," said he, after a pause filled up by his twanging of the catgut: "I remember how good Bishop O'Beirne called you a link between an angel and a woman. Pray do not let the link be snapped, for in that case you would be all angel; let me talk to you as if there was still something of the woman in your nature. Handel was a genius. Mr. Garrick is a genius, too; each of them is the greatest in his own art that the world has ever known. And yet you do not hear that either of them thought as you do; you do not hear that Handel ever said that he was degrading himself because he overheard some fool saying that his suggestion of the hailstones in his treatment of the

Plagues was only worthy of the ingenuity of the carpenter of a theatre; we have never heard that Mr. Garrick resolved to retire from Drury Lane stage because some fools perferred Spranger Barry's Romeo to his."

"Ah, genius; but I am only a girl."

"Handel was a genius, and when he found that the public did not want his operas, he showed himself quite ready to give them what they did want. And yet there were as many fools and coxcombs in his day as there are in ours. My dear sister, it is for you and me to do what we can without minding what foolishness those who hear us may speak, being incapable of understanding us. When I was at Florence I was present one night at a great concert at which Maestro Pugnani was to play. Just before he began, one of the princes entered the theatre, and began to talk and jest in a loud tone with an officer who was in attendance. It was clear that he was not quite sober, and he continued to make himself offensive even after the Maestro had begun to play. We were all very indignant, and we felt certain that Pugnani would retire from the stage. He did not do so. When he had played his first movement, he looked up to the royal box, and then he smiled down at us. I saw the look that was upon his face, a look of determination—the look which is on the face of a master of fence when he is about to engage a tyro. In a second he had drawn his bow across the strings, and the jest that the prince was in the act of uttering remained frozen on his lips. We saw that—we saw the Maestro smile as he went on playing; he had the prince in his grasp as surely as if he had had his hand on the fellow's throat; he kept him enthralled for a quarter of an hour, and then, without a pause, he went on to the *Andante*. Before he had reached the second bar the prince was in tears. We saw that—yes, for a few bars, but after that we could see nothing,



for we also were in tears. At the conclusion of that incomparable performance the Maestro left the stage, smiling his smile of triumph. He had conquered that scoffer by the sheer power of his genius. When he appeared later on he was wearing on his breast the diamond order that the prince had worn. . . . Dear sister, let that be an example to you. When you find that you have scoffers among your hearers, you should feel yourself stimulated, rather than discouraged. You should remember that you are the greatest singer in the world, and that to be a great singer is to be able to sway at will the souls of men. You sent me a copy of Dr. Goldsmith's lovely poem. You remember that line in it, 'Those who went to scoff remained to pray'! That is how it should be when you are singing."

"How can you liken me to these men—all of them geniuses?" she cried with some measure of impatience. "Their life is their music; they live in a world of their own, and it is a world the air of which I have never breathed. It is the breath of their nostrils to face a great audience: I have been told that they feel miserable if they see a single vacant chair. But my life—— Ah, if I could but be allowed to live in a cottage!"

"What folly!" he cried. "And you intend to marry this old man in order to be released from the necessity to sing?"

"Is it an unworthy reason?" she asked. "I think 'tis not so. I shall be a good wife to Mr. Long."

"Oh, what folly! You—a good wife! Heavens! a girl with such a voice as you possess talking of becoming a good wife—a good wife—in a cottage, counting the eggs, milking the cows!" He was almost fierce in his scorn. "Is it possible that this is the sum of your ambition!"

"I ask for nothing better."

"As if there were any scarcity of good wives in the world!

Any girl may become a good wife, but only one in a generation can become a great singer, and I tell you that you may be the greatest singer that lives. 'Tis not I alone who have said it, though I have heard the best in Italy and I am capable of judging; no, 'tis your rivals who have said it—and Mr. Garrick. Would he have offered such sums to get you to sing at Drury Lane if he had not known that you were without an equal? And you talk about a cottage! I tell you, my sister, if you were to give up singing you would be guilty of a crime—the crime of spurning the greatest gift that Heaven can bestow upon a human being!"

"Ah, no!" she said. "If Heaven had designed that I should sing in the presence of all those frivolous people who pay their money to see me as well as to hear me, should I not have been endowed also with that talent which your maestro was able to exercise? Should I feel that shrinking from the platform which I now feel every time I have to sing? Should I not feel the pride which comes to every great musician on stirring an audience to its depths?"

"You tell me that you feel not that pride?—that you remain unmoved, no matter how greatly you have moved your hearers?"

"Weariness—only weariness, that is what I feel. My sole joy comes from the thought that it is all over. Indeed, I can honestly tell you, my brother, that when I get more applause than usual, I feel no pride, I only feel oppressed by the thought that I have pleased so well that the managers will be anxious to have me to sing soon again."

He looked at her with wonder in his eyes for a long time. Then he shook his head, saying:

"You were wrong to fancy that I would understand you. I confess that 'tis beyond my power to sympathise with you in your weakness. I could understand the nervousness of



a girl such as you on coming forward to sing an exacting part in an opera or an oratorio; but for one to be endowed with such a gift as yours, and yet to feel—as you say you do—— Oh, it is impossible for me to fathom such a mystery! 'Twere unjust to blame you, but—— Oh, well, a girl is a queer thing. My Maestro holds that every woman comes into the world not merely as a portion of that mystery—Woman, but as an individual mystery in herself. He might have founded his theory on you. But I will not say a word of blame to you—no, not a word, unless you marry Mr. Long and then give up singing."

"I will marry Mr. Long," she said after another pause.

She walked firmly to the door, and then upstairs to her room. Before she had got to the top of the stairs she heard him play the first bars of Bach's *Chaconne* which he was practising.

## CHAPTER VI

It was no new topic that found favour in the Pump Room on the morning following the concert in the Assembly Rooms. Yes, Miss Linley had never looked more beautiful and had never sung more beautifully. Most people took the view that had been expressed by the Duchess of Devonshire, and affirmed that it was quite improvident on the part of Nature to give so exquisite a voice to so exquisite a creature. It was quite a new departure, this combination of song and beauty. Nature had revealed her system in the case of the nightingale—a divine voice coming from a body that is no more attractive than that of a sparrow; and in the case of the peacock—a beautiful creature with the shriek of a demon.

But Mr. Walpole, who had a whole night to think over a reply to the suggestion made by her Grace, found himself quite equal to the task of facing such persons as were ready—as he expected they would be—to repeat the Duchess's phrase. People at Bath liked repeating the words of a Duchess, just as people like to sit on a chair in which a Prince has sat.

It seemed that her Grace had expressed her views regarding the prodigality of Nature in the case of Elizabeth Linley more than once before she had met Mr. Walpole, and more than once after that *rencontre*,





so that her phrases were vieing with the sparkle of the waters the next morning.

"Have you heard what the Duchess of Devonshire said about Miss Linley, Mr. Walpole?" cried Mrs. Thrale.

"Madam," said Mr. Walpole, "her Grace forgot that even Shakespeare is enhanced when bound in fine levant."

"To be sure, sir," said the lady; "but in the case of a singer——"

"Madam, you have in your mind the nightingale and Dr. Goldsmith," said Walpole. "But I do not mean to destroy the printing-press at Strawberry Hill because a clown can read the types in the *Advertiser* without a qualm."

And Dr. Johnson, too, had his views on the subject of Nature and Miss Linley.

"Sir," said Dr. Johnson, when his friend Beauclerk made an allusion to the topic which was being turned into verse in half the garrets in Grub Street, "sir, 'twere preposterous to assume that Nature works solely for the gratification of such people as have ears. I am more gratified to see Miss Linley sing than I should be to hear a less beautiful songstress."

"Nature created Miss Linley to set my mind at rest on a matter which has been puzzling me for years," said Dr. Goldsmith, when in the company of his dear friends, the beautiful Miss Horneck and her sister, Mrs. Bunbury.

"Then Miss Linley has not been created in vain," said Mr. Bunbury, who was busy with his sketch-book.

"Nay, let us hear what is your puzzle which has been solved," cried Mrs. Bunbury.

"I never could make out whether it was my beauty or my music that so charmed the people among whom I

travelled in Europe, but, listening to Miss Linley last evening, the truth was revealed to me."

And while the two beautiful ladies held up their hands and laughed merrily at the solemn face of their friend, Mr. Boswell, who had been hiding behind one of Dr Johnson's legs, went off with another story of Dr. Goldsmith's extraordinary vanity.

The next day it became known that the beautiful Miss Linley had actually promised to marry the elderly gentleman who had been so attentive to her for some months, thereby giving quite an impetus to the business of the lampooner. Mr. Walter Long was the gentleman's name, and he was known to have large estates in Wiltshire.

The news overwhelmed Bath.

"What, a third attraction accruing to Miss Linley!" cried the Duchess of Devonshire with uplifted hands.

"Poor Miss Linley!" said George Selwyn.

"Poor Mr. Long!" said Horace Walpole.

"'Pon my word," said Garrick, when the news of Miss Linley's engagement to Mr. Long was coupled with the information that she would not sing after her marriage, "Linley is thrown away as a musician. Such adroitness as he has shown in this matter should be sufficient to avert ruin from many a manager of a playhouse."

Indeed, the general opinion that prevailed among the cynical people, who knew what an excellent man of business was Linley, and how thoroughly he believed in the duty of his children to contribute to their support, was either that he wished to add to the elements of interest associated with his eldest daughter in order to make her more attractive to the public who paid to hear her sing, or that he had made an uncommonly good bargain with Mr. Long in respect of the compensation which he should receive for the loss of his daughter's services. The receipts of the next three concerts, people were

THE TWO BEAUTIFUL LADIES HELD UP THEIR HANDS AND LAUGHED MERRILY.
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ready to affirm, were to be regarded as the basis of the negotiations respecting the sum to be paid to him for the loss of his daughter.

But while the cynical ones were talking the brutal truth, there were blank looks on the faces of the many admirers of Miss Linley. She had had suitors by the score in Bath, and it was understood that when she sang for the first time at Oxford, she could have married the whole University. A wit with a capacity for mensuration had calculated that the amount of verses written to her upon this occasion would, if bound in volume form, and the volumes placed side by side, be sufficient to cover the quadrangle at Christ Church, and to leave as many over as would conceal the bareness of any lobby at Magdalen.

The consternation among the poets on hearing that Miss Linley had given her word to Mr. Long, was huge; and if all who threatened—through the medium of elegiacs—to fling themselves into some whirling stream (rhyming with their "vanish'd dream") had carried out this determination, there would not have been enough poets left to carry on the business of Bath.

The young bloods, who had been ready at any moment to throw themselves, or their rivals, at her feet—whichever would please her best—were full of rage at the thought of having been slighted by the lady, and swore fearful oaths, and made strange vows that she should never be united to Mr. Long. The elderly sparks, most of whom had been deterred by certain considerations of rheumatism and stays, and other infirmities, from kneeling to her, now looked very glum. They were full of self-reproach now that they had found how easily she had been won; and some of them were incautious enough to confide their feelings to their friends, and these friends had no hesitation in ridiculing them to other friends;

and as the consciousness of a lost opportunity usually makes a man rather touchy, there was a pretty fair share of recrimination in Bath circles during these days, and more than one duel was actually fought between friends of long standing; so that Miss Linley's triumph was complete.

"What more has the girl to wish for?" cried Mrs. Crewe, when some one had remarked that Elizabeth was looking a trifle unhappy. "She is beautiful, she has the voice of an angel, she is likely to be a rich widow before she is twenty, and she has made the best of friends ready to cut each other's throats! Pray, what more does she look for that she is still unhappy?"

"Is it not enough to make any young woman sad to think that she must relinquish a score of suitors, and only to obtain one husband in return?" said Mrs. Cholmondeley, who was of the party upon this occasion.

"It does truly seem a ridiculous sacrifice, with very little compensation," said another lady critic.

"The rejected suitors may find some consolation for their sufferings in the reflection that Miss Linley is said to be looking unhappy," said Mrs. Crewe.

"What! is't possible that she looks unhappy, although she is not yet married, but only promised? I, for one, cannot believe it!" cried another of the party.

"There goes a suitor who will need a great deal of consolation," said Mrs. Thrale, as a small man in military undress walked past the group with a scowl and a swagger. "Lud! Captain Mathews is so fond a lover I doubt if he would feel completely happy even if he had proof that the lady was crying her eyes out!"

"What! is't possible that the list of suitors included a person so obviously ineligible as that Captain Mathews?" cried Mrs. Cholmondeley.

"My dear, you should know better than to suggest



that the ineligibility of any man is obvious," said Mrs. Thrale. "Did not we all, up to this morning, regard Mr. Long as the most obviously ineligible of all the lady's admirers?"

"He is certainly old enough to be her father," said Mrs. Cholmondeley.

"And a man who is old enough to be a young woman's father is certainly old enough to be her husband; that is what we should have said, had we made a right use of our experience of life—and love," said Mrs. Crewe.

"And some of us have had a good deal of both," remarked Mrs. Thrale, looking vaguely into the distance, lest any one of her hearers might fancy that her comment was meant to be personal, and not general.

But of course there was no lady within hearing who did not accept the compliment as directed against herself. And whatever Mrs. Thrale's experiences of life and love may have been, she had sufficient knowledge of her own sex to be well aware that no vagueness of generalisation on her part would prevent any one of her friends from feeling assured that the lady had some one in her eye when she spoke. That was why they all smiled consciously, and glanced down with an excellent simulation of artlessness.

Before they had raised their eyes again, the sour-faced officer who had been referred to by Mrs. Thrale as Captain Mathews, had returned from his march across the gardens. He was about to pass the group when he seemed to change his mind. He turned on his heel and swaggered up to them.

"I dare swear, ladies, that you have been, like all the rest of our friends in this place, discussing the latest freak of the beautiful Miss Linley?" he said.

"On the contrary, sir, we have been discussing the engagement of Miss Linley to Mr. Long," said Mrs. Thrale.

He stared at the lady for some moments. He had not yet mastered Mrs. Thrale's conversational methods.

"What did I say?" he inquired after a pause. "Did not I suggest that you were discussing her latest freak? Lord! 'tis a fine freak! Her father has urged her to it. I shouldn't wonder if you have heard that I was depressed by the news! Now, tell the truth, Mrs. Cholmondeley, did not you hear it said that I was in despair?"

"Why, what on earth have you got to say to the matter, Captain Mathews?" cried Mrs. Cholmondeley, with a pretty affectation of amazement. She was a capital actress, though, of course, inferior to her sister, Mrs. Margaret Woffington.

Captain Mathews looked more than a trifle upset by the lady's suggestion. His laugh was hollow.

"Of course, nothing; 'tis nothing to me—nothing i' the world, I assure you," he said. "But you know how malicious are our good friends in Bath; you know how ready they are to attribute an indiscretion to—— Ah, you take me, Mrs. Crewe? You are a woman of the world."

"Oh, sir, you are a flatterer, I vow," said Mrs. Crewe. "Ah, yes, Captain Mathews, I am ready to admit that all our friends are malicious, but I give you my word that their malice never went the length of hinting anything so preposterous as that you could have expectations of finding favour in the eyes of Miss Linley."

"Preposterous? By the Lord, madam, were you a man who made use of such a word—— But of course—— Oh yes, 'twas a preposterous notion; and yet, madam, there are some in this town who do not think the notion of a man of family and property aspiring to the hand of a beggarly music mistress so preposterous."

Captain Mathews drew himself up, and swung his cane in long sweeps from side to side, assuming a self-satisfied



smile, as though he had made a crushing reply to the lady's rather broad satire.

"True, sir," said Mrs. Crewe; "Mr. Walter Long is a man of family and a man of property; that is possibly why no one has alluded to his engagement with Miss Linley as preposterous."

"What, madam, do you mean to suggest that that old curmudgeon—— Heavens! the fellow is sixty if he is a day—— But I vow 'tis nothing to me—nothing i' the world, I swear!" cried Mathews, with an extravagant swagger by which he meant to show his complete indifference.

"Of course 'tis nothing to you, sir," said Mrs. Cholmondeley. "No one ever fancied that it was anything to you."

"Seriously now, Mrs. Cholmondeley," said he, striking another attitude, "can you fancy that I ever thought of that sly patriarch as my rival?"

"Indeed, sir, I could never believe that you would be so ungenerous as to allude to a rival in such terms as you have applied to Mr. Long," said Mrs. Cholmondeley.

"A rival! my rival? Oh no, no!" he cried. "He is an old fool, but no rival to me."

"Certainly no rival to you, sir," said Mrs. Thrale.

"I knew that I could depend on you, Mrs. Thrale," said Mathews warmly; but noticing how the others in the group were smiling significantly, he began to feel that he had not been quite quick enough in the attention which he had given to the lady's words. It was being forced upon him that he was not quite certain of shining in conversation with these ladies who had a reputation for brilliancy to maintain.

He burst into a loud laugh, with one hand resting on his hip: his cane was in his other; he was pointing it roguishly at Mrs. Thrale.

The ladies instantly became grave; they could not possibly continue smiling while the man was laughing. But he soon became less exuberant in his forced merriment, and it did not seem at all unnatural for the wrinkles of his laughter to assume the design of a full-bodied scowl. He struck his cane violently upon the ground, saying:

"If any man in Bath dares to say that this fellow Long took her away from me he shall eat his words. And as for Mr. Long himself—well, let him look to himself—let him look to himself. He has not yet married Elizabeth Linley!"

He raised his cane as he spoke and struck it at an imaginary foe.

He did not see how it came that the ladies were in a paroxysm of laughter; but had he been thoughtful enough to glance round, he would have been enlightened on this point, for he would have seen just behind him a small man giving a representation of one who is paralysed by fear, his face haggard, his eyes dilated, and his knees trembling.

"I protest, Mr. Garrick, that you will be the death of us yet," said Mrs. Crewe, when Mathews had stalked off, and the little man was beginning to breathe again—heavily, and with an occasional sigh of relief, though he still kept his eyes fixed upon the disappeating figure.

Mrs. Cholmondeley fanned him daintily.

"Thank Heaven he is gone, and we are all safe!" gasped the actor.

"Had he turned round for a single moment he would have killed you, Mr. Garrick, and all England would be mourning," said Mrs. Crewe.

"Why, what is this, madam?" said Garrick. "A moment ago and you were accusing me of being the death of you, and now you go still further, and accuse me of running a chance of being killed myself!"



"Were both catastrophes to occur, they would be no more than a fitting overture to the tragedy on the threshold of which we stand at this moment," said Mrs. Thrale. "Why, the tragedy of Penelope and her suitors is like to be a trifle compared with that of Elizabeth Linley and her admirers."

"I feel that slaughter is in the air," said Garrick. "Has Captain Mathews a mind to be the Ulysses of the tragedy? In that case, I would not have the suitors to be quite despondent. But beyond doubt 'tis becoming a serious matter for Bath, this engagement of the sweetest of our nest of linnets. For Bath, did I say? Nay, I might e'en have said 'for England,' for of course you have heard that this is why Tom Sheridan has fled to Ireland?"

"What do you mean, Mr. Garrick—Tom Sheridan? Oh, lud! you cannot mean to suggest that he was among the suitors?" said Mrs. Cholmondeley.

"Why should he not occupy so honourable a position, madam?" said Garrick. "He is, I have good reason to know, some years younger than Mr. Long, and he is full of gratitude to Miss Linley for having made his entertainments a success by singing at them. I ask you, Mrs. Crewe, for I know that you are well acquainted with all these delicate matters—I ask you, can a man show his gratitude to a lady in any more satisfactory way than by begging her to marry him?"

"I should have to refer to my commonplace book to answer that question, sir," said Mrs. Crewe; "but I can assure you that it has long ago been decided that if a young woman be truly grateful to an elderly man for a past kindness, she will certainly refuse to marry him when he asks her. But you are not serious about Tom Sheridan?"

"Well, I admit that I have not yet been successful in getting any one to accept my theory on this matter," replied

Garrick. "But I know for sure that Tom Sheridan has gone to Ireland, and why should any man go to Ireland unless he has been refused by a lady in England? If the man have importunate creditors in Ireland, of course my argument is vastly strengthened."

"H'sh! here comes one of the sons," said Mrs. Thrale. "'Tis the younger—Dick his name is. I vow that I had an idea that 'twas he who was most favoured by the lovely Miss Linnet."

"Then take my word for it, madam, 'twas the father who was making love to her," said Garrick. "Surely, 'tis no more than natural that a right-thinking young woman should show some favour to the son of the man who hopes to marry her! But pray do not cite me as an authority on this point to Dick Sheridan. I own that I have strong hopes that Dick will one day become a great dramatist. Should his father marry Miss Linley, nothing could prevent Dick from becoming a great dramatist."

"Then let us hope that Miss Linley will marry Mr. Long, and so save Dick Sheridan from the terrible fate that you predict for him, Mr. Garrick," said Mrs. Thrale.

Before Garrick had thought out a fitting reply to the sprightly little lady, young Mr. Sheridan had sauntered up to the group. He was dressed with extreme care, and his carriage was so graceful—thanks to the early instruction which he had received from Monsieur Angelo, who had taught him to fence, as well as to dance—that he was a most attractive figure. Though his features were not handsome, his face had a winning expression, and he was entirely without self-consciousness. He had his hat in his hand when he approached the ladies, and his salutation of them was easy, but at the same time deferential.

"You have come at the right moment, Mr. Sheridan," said Mrs. Cholmondeley. "Mr. Garrick has just been saying shocking things about you."



"I am sorry that I came up, madam," said Sheridan. "Yes; for by doing so I know that I anticipated an abler defence of myself than I have at my command."

"Indeed, your reputation was quite safe in our keeping," said Mrs. Cholmondeley.

"True," said Garrick: "Mrs. Cholmondeley, Mrs. Crewe, and Mrs. Thrale are well known to constitute a medical board for an hospital for sickly reputations: one is as safe in their keeping as one would be in a ward at St. Thomas's."

"What! no safer than that?" cried Dick. "Oh, ladies! Mr. Garrick's compliments are certainly not overwhelming."

"Nay, Dick, I exhausted my art in referring to you before you came up; for I said that I had hopes that you would one day become a great dramatist," said Garrick.

"That was going to the extreme limit of the art of flattery indeed, sir," said Sheridan. "But one cannot become a great dramatist unless one has the subject for a great drama. Can any one of you ladies supply me with such a subject?"

"Pray try your hardest, Mrs. Crewe, if only to establish my reputation as a prophet," said Garrick.

"What! are the ladies to take Drury Lane reputations into their hospital?" cried Sheridan.

"Nay, sir, we are not the Board at an hospital for incurables," said Mrs. Crewe. "But you ask for a subject for a play, do you not?"

"I am ever on that quest, madam."

"If 'tis the subject for a comedy you seek, all you have to do is to look in the direction of the entrance to the gardens, and you will find it," said Mrs. Crewe: "a charming and sprightly young woman marrying an elderly gentleman."

Dick glanced toward the entrance to the gardens. Betsy Linley was walking by the side of Mr. Long.

There was a pause before Dick said: "True, madam,

there is a drama in the situation; and the beauty of it is, that it may be treated from the standpoint of tragedy, as well as comedy. Thank you, Mrs. Crewe; I shall e'en haste to write it."

He turned about and hurried away, with only the most general bow.

"Good lud!" whispered Mrs. Crewe, "the lad is in love with Betsy Linley, after all."

## CHAPTER VII

Having satisfied herself on one point, the astute lady ost no time making an attempt to satisfy herself on another point quite as interesting: being convinced that Dick Sheridan had hurried away because he was in love with Miss Linley, she was anxious to learn if Miss Linley was in love with any one. The fact that Miss Linley was walking by the side of the man whom it was announced she had promised to marry, was not accepted by Mrs. Crewe as any indication of the direction in which she should look for an answer to the question. Nay, so astute an observer of life was this lady, that she made up her mind in an instant not to assume at the outset of her investigation that, because Betsy Linley had promised to marry Mr. Long, she was therefore in love with some one else. She could remember instances of young women being actually devoted to the men whom they had promised to marry. She had an excellent memory.

She turned her eyes upon Betsy coming up the garden walk, but the result of her observation was inconclusive; Mr. Long was at that instant making some remark to the girl, and she had her head slightly bent toward him, while she listened attentively—smilingly. Clearly she had not noticed the abrupt departure of Dick Sheridan. There was nothing in the attentive smile with which she was encouraging the remark of Mr. Long.

## CHAPTER VIII

WHILE the coldly gay circle were endeavouring—as most people do who discuss the problems of life—to display their own cleverness in whirling round the topic of the moment, Mr. Long and Miss Linley were walking on through Sydney Gardens, neither of them so much as glancing behind them to observe what had become of Mathews.

The expression of apprehension which had made Betsy's face pale with the pink pallor of the blanch rose while Mr. Long was threatening Mathews, had not quite vanished. She seemed to feel that all cause for apprehension had not passed. Remembering the wild, savage way in which he had addressed her—his furious threats and his fierce passion, it seemed to her quite a miracle that he did not fly at Mr. Long's throat before the latter had completed the sentence that he uttered, while grasping his cane in that expressive way which had so appealed to the imagination of Garrick. She had ever sought to allay by considerate words the anger which Mathews had shown upon several occasions when she had apparently favoured other suitors; her whole aim was to prevent his quarrelling openly with any of her friends, forcing them to fight him; and she had been successful in her aims to quite a remarkable degree. She was thus amazed to find that, when Mr. Long assumed the aggressive





attitude, Mathews, so far from showing any disposition to fly at his throat, became absolutely passive.

It was too much for her to believe all at once, that Mathews had no intention of resenting the threats of Mr. Long; he might, she felt, be too greatly astonished at the adoption of such an attitude by an elderly man to be able to respond in his own way; but he would assuredly recover himself in a few moments, and then . . . . .

She glanced behind her and saw that the man was actually hurrying away in the direction of a distant exit from the gardens beyond the maze; and then the expression of terror which had been on her face gave way to one of astonishment. She looked at the man beside her; he was smiling quite benignly. She smiled too at his smiling.

"I cannot understand," she cried, after giving a sigh of relief—"I cannot understand how you succeeded with him. I felt sure when you had spoken that he would . . . Oh, he never spoke to me unless to utter a threat, and yet——"

"And yet he became amenable in a moment to the force of one insignificant threat on my part," said he, when she made a pause. "Ah, dear child, you have no need to be astonished at so simple a matter. The one argument which the habitual biter appreciates to the full is the bite, therefore one should make one's teeth meet upon his flesh, and all will be well. There is no need to be surprised at the sudden departure of this fellow; what should cause surprise is his appearance in your society. Pray, how did he ever contrive to gain such a degree of intimacy with you as enabled him to address you as he did?"

"What! is he not an officer and a gentleman of property?" cried Betsy.

"He is both. Was no further passport necessary to obtain his admission to your father's house?" asked Long.

She shook her head.

"He does not look a day over sixty," said Mrs. Thrale.

"Nor a day under it," responded Mrs. Cholmondeley.

Garrick was quoting Shakespeare:

> "Here comes the lady; O so light a foot
> Will ne'er wear out the everlasting flint!"

And then Mr. Long and Miss Linley reached the group, and Betsy was responding with exquisite blushes to the patronising smiles of the ladies, who greeted her with effusion and Mr. Long with great self-possession.

Mr. Long was, however, the most self-possessed of the group. There was gravity as well as dignity in his acceptance of the congratulations of the party.

"I am the most fortunate of men, indeed," he said, bowing low, and touching the grass of the border with the sweep of his hat.

"Nay, Mr. Long, do not depreciate your own worth by talking of fortune," said Mrs. Thrale.

"There is philosophy in your suggestion, madam," said he. "'Twas feeble of me to make the attempt to fall in with the general tone of the comments of my friends. Still, there is but one Miss Linley in the world."

"And you are ungenerous enough, sir, to seek to deprive the world of that one," cried Mrs. Thrale.

She had failed to perceive the tendency of his remark.

"What, Mrs. Thrale! is't possible that you are weak enough to look for generosity in a lover?" said Garrick. "Good lud, madam! the very soul of true love is the most ungenerous essence on earth."

"Ah, you see, madam, Mr. Garrick's love is of the earth earthy; but we were talking of quite another kind of love, were we not?" said Mr. Long readily, but not in a tone of badinage.

"We are very well content to be terrestrial," said Mrs. Crewe, lifting her chin an inch or so in the air.



"I am more ambitious; that is why I am by the side of Miss Linley," said Mr. Long.

"Very prettily spoke, sir," said Garrick. "Miss Linley I have always held to be celestial. Is not that so, Betsy?"

"Indeed, sir, you were good enough to offer me an engagement to sing at Drury Lane," replied Betsy, with a smile.

Every one laughed, and Garrick gave a wonderful representation of a man who is completely discomfited by an antagonist.

Mr. Long seemed to think that the moment was a favourable one for resuming his stroll with Betsy; he had just taken her hand and was in the act of bowing to the three beautiful ladies who were laughing archly at Garrick, when a loud laugh that had no merriment in it sounded at the further side of a line of shrubs, and Mathews reappeared.

Betsy, with a look of apprehension, started and took a step closer to Mr. Long. Mr. Long's face beamed with pride at that moment, for the girl's movement suggested her confidence in his power to protect her. The ladies saw the expression that was on her face, and the glance that he cast upon her, and there was not one of them who did not envy her, although Mr. Long was sixty years old.

"Ha, Miss Linley! are you never to be found except in the company of your grandfather?" cried Mathews, while still a few paces away from the group. Then, pretending to become aware of the identity of Long at the same moment, he roared with laughter.

"I swear to you, madam, I thought that you were in the company of your grandfather," he cried. "Sure, my error was a natural one! I ask you, Mrs. Thrale, if 'twas not natural that I should take this gentleman for Miss Linley's grandfather?"

"Mr. Mathews," said Mrs. Thrale, "I have no opinion

on such matters, though I have my own idea of what constitutes a piece of impudence on the part of a man."

"Ha, Grandfather Long, you hear that?" cried Mathews. "Mrs. Thrale says she knows what impudence is."

"Then where is the need for you to give her examples of it, sir?" said Long.

"Any fool could see that she had in her eye the case of an old man who makes love to a young woman," said Mathews brutally.

"Only a fool would take my words in such a sense, Mr. Mathews," said Mrs. Thrale.

"Nay, good madam, 'twas but my jest," said Mathews.

"Then let me tell you, sir, 'twas a very sorry jest," said Mrs. Thrale.

"I say 'twas a jest; at the same time, should any gentleman within earshot feel himself aggrieved by my humour, he will not find Captain Mathews slow to give him any satisfaction he may demand."

The fellow pursed out his lips, and struck the ground with his cane.

Mr. Long turned his back upon the man and entered smilingly into conversation with Mrs. Cholmondeley. For a moment he was separated from Betsy, and Mathews took advantage of that moment to get beside her.

"You are never going to be fool enough to marry a man old enough to be your grandfather?" said he in a low voice.

She made a movement as if to get beside Mr. Long; but he adroitly prevented her from carrying out her intention.

"You think I am the man to stand tamely by and see you marry him or any one else?" he said, putting his face close to hers, his eyes glaring into her own (he was imitating the attitude and the language of one of the actors whom he had recently seen at the Bristol theatre).

"Why should you be so chagrined, Captain Mathews?"

"YOU THINK I AM THE MAN TO STAND TAMELY BY AND SEE YOU MARRY HIM OR ANY ONE ELSE?" [*page* 72.

she said. "There are many girls far more worthy than I am who would feel flattered by your attentions. I am sure you do not wish to persecute me."

She was, woman-like, hoping by temporising with the man to prevent an open quarrel. He saw that he had succeeded in making her afraid of him.

"I set my heart on you, I set my soul on you, Betsy Linley, and you know that your father and mother favoured me; you, and you only, stood out against me." He had put his face closer to hers, causing her to shrink back an inch or two. "But you will have me yet—you must—by the Lord, you shall!" he resumed. "I swear to you that I have set my soul upon you. Murder—what is murder to such a man as I have become through you—all through the curse of your beauty! Do you think that I would hold back my knife for the space of a second from the throat of any man who was going to take you away from me? I swear to you that I would kill him—kill him without mercy—and you—you too! My love is of that sort. I would account killing you the next best thing to 'wedding you. I'll do either the one or the other—make up your mind to that—make up your mind to that! If you would save yourself—and him—and him, mind you—you will take me; 'tis your only chance."

She was terrified, for she saw that he had reached that point in the madness of his jealousy which was reached by Othello when he cried:

"Blood, Iago—blood, blood!"

She had seen Garrick in the part, and had been thrilled by his awful delivery of the words. Even now, in spite of her terror, she did not fail to be struck with the marvellous accuracy of Garrick's art. She was now face to face with the real thing—with the man in the clutch of an overwhelming passion; and yet she was not more terrified than

she had been when Garrick's voice had become hoarse while uttering those words of murder that had been put into the mouth of Othello by Shakespeare.

"What is this madness that has come to you?" she cried. "Oh, you must be quite mad! If you cared ever so little for me you would not overwhelm me with terror."

"I don't know which would be the sweeter—killing you or wedding you," he said. He kept his eyes fixed upon hers for some seconds, and then he added in a lower tone that chilled her: "By heavens! I do know now—now!"

She gave a little cry. She had done her best to restrain it, for the dread of a quarrel taking place between the men was upon her, and in an instant Mr. Long had turned to her. Another instant and he had thrust himself between her and Mathews and had taken her hand. He was not looking at her, but straight into the face of Mathews.

"We must not be late, Miss Linley," he said quietly, "and unless we hasten onward we shall not be in time to meet our friends at Bath-Easton. Stand aside, sir, if you please."

Mathews instinctively took a couple of steps back, while Long, still holding Betsy's hand, bent his head before the ladies and young Captain Horneck, of the Guards, who had just appeared by the side of his *fiancée*, Lord Albemarle's daughter.

There was a pause in the conversation passing round that little group—an electric pause, it seemed; every one appeared to be waiting for a thunderbolt to fall, for Mathews had a reputation for being an element of the lurid in the atmosphere of Bath. For a few moments after Long and Betsy had gone, he seemed uncertain what course to adopt; but suddenly he appeared to have light granted to him. He bent his malacca cane until he made both ends meet; then, with an oath, he hurried after Long and Betsy.



He overtook them before they had gone twenty yards, but while he was still some way behind them he called out:

"A word with you, Mr. Long, if you please."

Mr. Long turned round.

"I wish no words with you, sir," he said.

"But I wish some with you, sir," said Mathews, coming up to him, "I wish to give you a word of warning. I wish you to hear me swear that the day you wed Elizabeth Linley shall be your last on earth."

Long smiled in his face, and then in the terrified face of the girl by his side.

"What a compliment Mr. Mathews pays to you, Miss Linley!" said he. "My last day on earth—true; for thenceforth I shall be in heaven. Thank you, Mr. Mathews."

"In heaven? No, by the Lord, you will find yourself not in heaven, but——"

"You scoundrel! if you utter one more word I shall hand you over neck and crop to the hangman," said Long. "You think that your braggadocio airs have weight with me? I have but to raise my finger and the handcuffs are about your wrists. I know more about your past life than you seem to imagine, my good fellow. Now, get out of my way, or I shall subject you to the humiliation of a public caning."

He grasped his cane firmly, and there was upon his face a look of determination. Mathews took a step or two back. His jaw had fallen, and the ferocity of his expression had become tempered by the terror that appeared in his eyes. Mechanically he bowed, removing his hat while Long and Betsy walked on. Then he stood staring after them, failing to recover himself even though he could scarcely have avoided hearing the laugh that broke from one of the ladies in the group which he had just left. Some minutes had passed before he ceased gnawing the silver top of his

cane and stalked off in a direction opposite to that which Miss Linley and Mr. Long had taken.

"A duel! oh no; there will be no duel," cried Garrick in reply to a suggestion made by one of his group. "Oh no; I have studied men and their motives to small purpose these thirty years if I could bring myself to believe that Captain Mathews is the man to challenge Mr. Long to a duel in such circumstances."

"What! Did not you see the way Mr. Long grasped his cane?" cried Mrs. Cholmondeley.

"To be sure I did, my dear lady; that is why I am convinced that there will be no duel," replied Garrick. "We did not hear what Mr. Long said to the fellow, but we saw how he grasped his cane, and let me assure you, madam, that the language of cane-grasping is a good deal more intelligible than the English of our friend Dr. Johnson."

"If there be no duel I am sorry for Mr. Long," said Mrs. Thrale.

Her friends stared at her.

"I should rather be sorry for the elderly gentleman if he had to stand up before a man twenty-five years his junior, with pistol or small sword," said Mrs. Crewe.

"Ah, my dear, one must take a less superficial view of men and their motives—an excellent phrase, Mr. Garrick—if one desire to arrive at a complete understanding of both," said Mrs. Thrale. "I am sure that so excellent an observer as Mrs. Crewe will, upon reflection, perceive that the best chance an elderly gentleman has of captivating the heart of a young woman is by fighting for her. Mr. Long is clearly aware of this elementary truth. He is a brave man, and he is ready to risk his life in order that he may have a chance of winning his lady."

"But he has won her already," said Mrs. Crewe.

"Nay, she has only promised to marry him," said Mrs. Thrale, with the smile of the sapient one.



"It will be time enough for him to think of winning her after he has married her," remarked Mrs. Cholmondeley.

"I would not be so sure of that," said Mrs. Thrale. "Procrastination in a lover can be carried too far. Is not that your opinion, Mr. Garrick?"

"Madam, I feel like the negro who was choked when endeavouring to swallow a diamond: I am so overwhelmed by the jewels of wisdom which you have flung before me that I am incapable of expressing any opinion," said Garrick.

"You are far from being complimentary to Mrs. Thrale if you suggest that you have failed to assimilate her precious words, sir," said Mrs. Cholmondeley.

"Nay, 'twas not the negro and the diamond that was in Mr. Garrick's mind," said Mrs. Crewe. "'Twas Macbeth and his 'Amen.' We have seen Macbeth's 'Amen' stick in your throat more than once, Mr. Garrick, and I vow that when Mrs. Thrale asked you just now to say the word that would hall-mark her wisdom, as it were, the same expression was on your face."

"Madam, I would scorn to contradict a lady unless I differed from her," said Garrick; "but I repeat, there will be no duel."

"Why, who was talking about duels, sir?" inquired Mrs. Crewe. "Lud! Mr. Garrick, duels was the topic of five minutes ago, and time at Bath is precious."

"From duels to jewels is not a huge distance," said Mrs. Cholmondeley, whose pronunciation was not quite free from the Irish brogue which increased the fascination of her sister, Mrs. Woffington.

## CHAPTER VIII

WHILE the coldly gay circle were endeavouring—as most people do who discuss the problems of life—to display their own cleverness in whirling round the topic of the moment, Mr. Long and Miss Linley were walking on through Sydney Gardens, neither of them so much as glancing behind them to observe what had become of Mathews.

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"And yet he became amenable in a moment to the force of one insignificant threat on my part," said he, when she made a pause. "Ah, dear child, you have no need to be astonished at so simple a matter. The one argument which the habitual biter appreciates to the full is the bite, therefore one should make one's teeth meet upon his flesh, and all will be well. There is no need to be surprised at the sudden departure of this fellow; what should cause surprise is his appearance in your society. Pray, how did he ever contrive to gain such a degree of intimacy with you as enabled him to address you as he did?"

"What! is he not an officer and a gentleman of property?" cried Betsy.

"He is both. Was no further passport necessary to obtain his admission to your father's house?" asked Long.

She shook her head.

"I am afraid that my father has never been very particular in the matter of admitting people to our house," she replied. "Ah! that is one of the most distressing things about our life—the life of people who are dependent on the good-will of the public for their daily bread: we cannot afford to offend any one."

"You are thereby deprived of one of the greatest luxuries in life—the pleasure of offending the offensive," said he, smiling. "But quite apart from being cut off from this enjoyment, I really fail to see how your father's profession —and yours—gives the right to every adventurer to your society. It is one thing to be debarred the privilege of hurting the feelings of those who should be subjected to such treatment, and quite another to admit to your house every visitor who may come thither with no further credentials than his own impudence."

"That is what I have always felt," said she. "I have felt that that is one of the greatest hardships of our life. But all our life is made up of these things from which I shrink. Ah, I told you all this long ago."

"Yes, I shall not soon forget the hour when you opened your own sweet maiden heart to me," said he. "I had long been lost in admiration of your beauty and the unspeakable charm of your singing. I fancied more than once, however, that I noticed in your manner a certain shrinking from the favours which the public are ever ready to fling upon their favourites—yes, for a time, until a fresher favourite comes before them. I felt that that expression of timidity was the one thing by which your beauty was capable of being enhanced, but I never doubted for a moment that your shrinking from the gaze of the public was part of your nature."

"It is indeed an unhappy part of my nature; but I have not been deaf to the cruel comments which some people have made upon me in that respect," said she, and her face



became roseate at the recollection of how her timidity had been referred to as affectation.

"I have heard such comments too; they came from women who were overwhelmed by their jealousy of your beauty and your genius."

"Ah, no, not genius—I have no genius. My brother has genius. I know what it is to have genius. Tom tells me that he is in no way impressed by the presence of thousands listening to his playing on his violin. Mr. Garrick—he, too, has genius, and he has acted for Polly and myself quite as grandly as I have ever seen him act in his own play-house."

"Your definition of genius is founded on a somewhat arbitrary basis, my dear. Indifference to the public does not invariably indicate genius. I have heard it said by some who know, that David Garrick spends the first ten minutes of his appearance on the stage every night calculating the sum of money there is in the house. That is beside the question. If you are not in the possession of genius, you have at your command a possession even more subtle, more delicate, purer—you have the sweetest soul that ever lived in woman, and every time you sing you communicate some portion of it to your hearers."

She looked at him with some apprehension in her eyes.

"You promised me that I should never be forced to sing in public again," she said. "Oh, surely you are not now going to tell me that you take back your promise?"

"Nay, nay, let no such apprehension weigh upon you, dear child," said he. "Our conversation has drifted far from its starting-place. We were talking about that Mathews, and how easily he obtained admission to your father's house. I wonder should I be wrong if I were to suggest that he was the suitor who found most favour in the eyes of your father?"

"For a time, only for a time," she cried quickly, as if

anxious to exculpate her father. "When my father became aware of how distasteful Mr. Mathews was to me, he ceased urging me to accept his proposals. Oh, I can assure you that my father has never been anxious for me to marry any one."

"I can well believe that," said Long drily. Only a day had passed since he had been sitting at a desk opposite to Mr. Linley, while the latter explained to him, by the assistance of certain memoranda on a sheet of paper, the exact amount of loss per annum, worked out to shillings and pence, that the withdrawal of Betsy from the concert platform would mean to her father. Mr. Long had been greatly interested in the calculation, for it represented the sum which he had agreed to pay to the devoted father by way of compensation for the loss of his daughter's services. "And you—you have never been anxious to marry any one?" he added.

There was a little pause before she said:

"I have never been strongly tempted. I have never had a sleepless night thinking what answer I should give to the gentlemen who were good enough to ask me to marry them."

"I feel flattered, my dear one," said he.

"Oh no, you have no need to do so," she cried almost eagerly, and he perceived that she had a conscientious fear of his assuming that she had disregarded many eligible suitors in favour of himself. "Oh no, indeed! I do not believe that there was any offer made to me that caused me a great pang to decline. Of course I was sorry—yes, once or twice, when I really felt that they truly loved me; but—— Oh, why should I have accepted any of them when to do so would only mean adding to my fetters?"

"Ah, why indeed? A husband is sometimes a harder taskmaster than a father. Even with your small experience of life, you must have perceived this. Well, so much for the men who professed to love you; but you must know



that when we have talked about them we have dealt with one class only; we have not yet touched upon those whom you loved."

Her face had become roseate, and it wore a troubled expression. He laughed, and she saw that the expression on his face was that of a man who is amused. Her quick ear had told her that there was no note of jealousy in his laugh.

"Pray forgive me, my dear," he said. "Be assured that I have no intention of extorting any confession from you. Believe me, my child, I am glad of the evidence which you have given me—that sweet confusion—that sweeter blush—of your having the heart of a girl. 'Tis as natural for a girl to love as it is for her to laugh. If you had assured me that you had never loved, I feel that I should not love you as I do at this moment—as I have loved you from the first moment that I looked upon your dear face."

"Ah, sir, I pray to God that I may one day love you as you should be loved!" she cried, and he saw that tears were in her eyes.

"As I should be loved—I ask nothing more," he said. "That is what has always been in my mind with regard to you. Have you marvelled that I have not yet asked you to love me? I refrained, because I had told you that my sole hope in regard to yourself was to make you happy; and I knew that I should be making you unhappy if I were to impose upon you the duty of loving me. Such curious creatures we are, that when love exists only as a duty it ceases to be love. I pray to Heaven, Betsy, that you may never come to think that it is your duty to love any one—even a husband."

"Ah, you are too good to me—too considerate!" she cried. "Every time that you speak to me as you have just spoken, you overwhelm me with remorse."

"With remorse? Does that mean that you love some one else?"

"It means that I do not love you as I should—as you expect to be loved—as you have a right to expect that I should."

"Ah, dear girl, how do you know how I expect to be loved?"

"I know well how you should be loved, and I fear that I have deceived you."

"Nay, I never asked you if you loved me. If I had done so, and you had answered 'Yes,' you would have made at least an attempt to deceive me. I do not say, mind you, that I would have been deceived. I have been speaking just now of what is natural in a girl. Do you think that I fancy it is natural in a girl who is not yet twenty to fall in love with a man who is more than thrice her age?"

"Surely 'tis not impossible?"

"Ah, the little note of hope that I detect in your inquiry shows me how conscientious a young woman you are—how determined you are to give me every chance, so to speak. But I do not wish you to think of me in that way. I do not want you to try to love me."

"Not to try to love you—not to try?"

"Even so; because love to be love must come without your trying to love. Is that too hard a saying for you, Miss Betsy?"

"It is not too hard a saying; what is hard is the matter to which it refers—you would not have me do my best to love you?"

"Even so. Do you believe that you will find it so very hard to refrain from such an attempt?"

"I have promised to marry you."

"And, believe me, I would not have you keep your promise unless you are sure that you can love me without trying. You must try not to try."



She gave a laugh, but checked it abruptly before it had run its course. She became graver than ever as she walked along by his side. She was silent, and there was a dimness over her eyes which made their liquid depths seem more profound.

"Pray tell me what there is on your mind, my Betsy," he said. "Tell me, what is the thought which weighs upon you?"

"Alas!" she cried, "I did not know that you were so good a man."

"Nor am I," he said. "Believe me, I am not nearly so good as that; but even if I were, is that any reason why the reflection should weigh you down, or cause your eyes to become tremulous?"

She shook her head, but made no attempt to speak.

He did not urge her to speak. They had reached a green lane just outside the gardens—a graceful acknowledgment of the privileges of Nature on the outskirts of artificiality. There was a warm sigh of wild thyme in the air. A bee hovered drowsily upon the scent. Two yellow butterflies whirled in their dance above a bank of primroses.

He pointed them out to her.

"The butterflies have an aëry dance of their own, and so have the dragon-flies," he said. "I have watched them by my lake. Did I tell you that there is a tiny lake in my grounds? One can see its gleam from the windows of the house. It is pleasant to stand at the top of the terrace-steps and look across the greensward to the basin of my lake. Very early in the summer morning the deer come to drink there; I have seen the graceful creatures trooping through the dawn, and every now and again a hind would stop for a moment to scratch its neck with a delicate hind-foot, and then bound onward to join its brethren."

Still she did not speak. The butterflies fluttered past her face, but she did not follow them with her eyes.

"Sweet one, I grow alarmed," he said; "pray tell me all that is on your mind—in your heart. I think I can promise you that its weight will be lessened when you have told me of it."

"Alas!" she said, "nothing can lessen my fault—my shame."

"That is a word which I will not allow any one to speak in connection with you," he said. "You cannot frighten me, my dear; I have looked into your eyes."

"I have been guilty—I am ashamed. I gave you my promise, not because I loved you, or because I hoped to love you, but solely because singing in public had become so great a terror to me that I welcomed the earliest chance that came of freeing myself. Let me take back my promise. I am unworthy of so good a man."

"And that is your whole confession?"

"Ah! is it not enough? I tell you that I gave you my promise only because I was selfish. I was ready to sacrifice you so that I might gain my own ends."

"Ah, surely that were to pay too heavy a price for your freedom!" said he. "What! you were willing to submit to the rule of an elderly and arbitrary husband so that you might escape from the irksome flatteries of the crowds of discriminating people who have always delighted to do you honour? Do you wonder that I ask you if you do not think that you offered too high a price for what you hoped to gain?"

"Oh, if you could but know what I have felt, what I still feel about this life which I have been forced to lead, you would pity me and perhaps forgive me for the wrong which I offered to you! But no one seems to understand that it is just because I feel singing to be so great a gift, so divine a gift, that I shrink from exercising whatever of that gift



has been given to me by God, only for the amusement of people who are incapable of understanding anything of the beauty—of the real meaning of music. Oh, I tell you, Mr. Long, I have felt, every time I have sung for such people, as if I were guilty of a great profanation of something that is quite holy. Indeed, I tell you the truth, and, knowing it, I think that you will forgive me for promising to marry you in order to escape from a life that had become quite intolerable to me."

She had put out an appealing hand to him, speaking her last sentence, and he took it in both his own hands, looking tenderly into her face.

"My child," he said, "your confession reveals nothing to me. Can you fancy for a moment that I have lived in the world for sixty years and yet believe that I could be attractive to a young girl full of a young girl's dreams of the joy of life, which is the joy of love? Some men of my age undoubtedly are capable of cherishing such an illusion. People refer to them as 'old fools.' I think that within the past two days I have noticed on many faces the expression—a mingling of amusement and indignation—worn by the faces of people who have just exclaimed, or who are about to exclaim, 'Old fool!' Well, I may be an old fool for trying an experiment which involves the assumption that looking at happiness through another man's eyes is in itself the truest form of happiness; but however this may be, I was not so senile as to believe that when you honoured me by accepting my offer, you loved me with the natural love of a young girl for a young man. You confided in me upon one occasion when I pressed you to answer some questions which I ventured to put to you, that it was a torture to you to face the public, and that you were awaiting the return of your brother from Italy, in great hope that he would be able to persuade your father to permit your withdrawal from a career which, however brilliant it promised to be, was more

than distasteful to you. I confess to you, my dear, that I thought I saw my chance in this circumstance, and I too awaited the return of your brother with great interest. I knew that I had it in my power to save you from all that you dreaded, and also to save you from all that I dreaded—to save you from becoming the victim of some such unscrupulous fellow as that Mathews. Well, I have great hope that all I thought possible will be accomplished. So far, I can assure you, I am satisfied with the progress of events toward the end which I have always had in view—that end being to make you happy."

"But I want to make you happy; you are so good—so noble."

"I know you do, my child, and I have let you into the secret of the only way by which you can make me happy."

"Oh no, no! you have not said a word about your own happiness—you have talked about nothing but mine."

"Dear child, in talking about your happiness I have talked about my own. In endeavouring to compass your happiness I have been altogether selfish, for I have been seeking to realise my own. Now, my sweet one, we shall talk no more on this subject. I only ask you to remember that my aim is to see you happy. In what direction you may find that happiness is a question which I dare not try to answer for you; you will have to work out the answer for yourself."

He stooped over her hand and raised it to her lips. But hers lay limp in his own. She gave him the idea that she did not quite accept this closure of their conversation.

"You have not made me understand all that I think I should know," she said. "My mind is still vague; you have not even said that you forgive me for deceiving you, for agreeing to marry you when all that I hoped for was, not to make you happy, but to escape from the life which I was forced to lead."



"I positively refuse to say another word," he cried.

"But you forgive me—can you?"

"I could forgive you anything, my dear, except your persistency in the belief that you stand in need of my forgiveness. Now we must hasten on to our destination; and if you see any of the modish people nudge each other whispering, 'Old fool!' as we pass, you will only smile, knowing as you now do that they are the fools and that I am none."

She did not move from where she was standing, and a puzzled expression was on her face—an unsatisfied expression—not, however, quite a dissatisfied one. Once or twice her lips parted as if she were about to speak, but some minutes had passed before she found her voice; then she said:

"I do not understand more than one thing, and that is that you are the best and noblest man who lives in the world, and that I shall never deceive you."

"It is not in your nature to deceive any one," said he. "Some people—they are, however, few—are so gifted by nature."

## CHAPTER IX

When Richard Sheridan hastily left Sydney Gardens on the appearance of Long with Betsy Linley by his side, causing thereby all the faculties of subtle discrimination and of still more subtle deduction of at least one of the ladies of the fascinating group to be awakened, he sought neither the allurements of the gossip of the Pump Room nor the distractions of the scandal of the Assembly Rooms. He felt a longing for some place where he could hide himself from the eyes of all men—some sanctuary on an island where he might eat his heart out, far from the crowd who take a delight in making a mock of one who sits down to such a banquet.

He had left his father's house after breakfast, determined that no one whom he might meet should be able to perceive from his demeanour anything of what he felt on the subject of Betsy Linley's engagement to Mr. Long. He had heard the announcement of this engagement on the previous evening when leaving the Concert Rooms where Betsy had sung and her brother Tom had played, and it had come upon him with the force of a great blow—a blow from which no recovery was possible for him. That was why he had accepted the invitation of one of his friends to supper, with cards to follow. For several months he had resisted steadily the allurements of such forms of entertainment, for then the reward which he held before himself for





his abstinence was the winning of the girl whom he had loved since he and she had been children together. But now that his dream was broken he felt in that cynical mood with which the plunge is congenial. He welcomed the opportunity of plunging. When the waters had closed over his head, they would shut out from his sight the odious vision which had followed his pleasant dreams of past years.

He was the merriest, the wildest, the wittiest of the little party of gay youths that night. His was the most gracefully cynical of the banter which was directed against young Halhed—a youth who had acquired quite a reputation at Oxford as the avowed but hopeless lover of Miss Linley, and who was now rather overdoing the part of the rejected swain, going the length of quoting Horace and Juvenal on the subject of the lightness of woman's love, and being scarcely able to conceal his gratification at the distinction conferred upon him on being made the subject of the banter of his friends in general and of young Sheridan in particular. Before midnight had come and the first dozen of claret had gone, he was really not quite sure whether it conferred greater distinction on a man to be the accepted or the rejected lover of a young woman about whose beauty and accomplishments every one raved. The *rôle* of the Victim possessed several heroic elements. He was quite certain, however, that in introducing a mildly melancholy note regarding her heartlessness, he was conferring distinction upon the lady.

But when Dick Sheridan had crept upstairs to his room —somewhat unsteadily—after his bitterly merry night, he found that the bracing effects of the plunge are temporary. He found that though the plunge may alleviate, it is not curative—that the momentary alleviation which it secures has to be paid for.

He lay awake for hours, his remorse for having been so

weak as to lapse from the straight path which he had laid out for himself since he became conscious of his love for Betsy Linley, adding to the bitterness of the reflection that he had lost her for ever.

When he awoke after a few hours of intermittent sleep, he had a sense of his disaster; but with it came the resolution that he would let no one suspect how hard hit he was by the announcement of Betsy's engagement to marry Mr. Long—he would not even let the girl herself suspect it. He would smile and shrug when people referred to the matter in his presence. He would not be such a poor, weak creature as Halhed, who went about bleating his plaint in every stranger's ear. He would show himself to be more a man of the world than that.

He dressed with scrupulous care—he was not going to affect the loose garters of the woful lover—and sauntered out, swinging his cane with the ease and nonchalance of the man of fashion; and he flattered himself that the sharp and rapid repartee in which he indulged when he joined the group in the gardens, would be sufficient to convince even Garrick himself that he regarded the engagement of Miss Linley with complete indifference. The moment, however, that the girl appeared with Mr. Long at the entrance, he felt unable to sustain the *rôle* any longer: he felt that he must run away and hide himself in some secret corner where he could see no one and where no one could see him. He had not counted upon facing the girl so soon—he had not counted upon witnessing the chastened pride of her successful lover in the presence of the unsuccessful. He knew that he could not continue acting the part which he had assumed: he knew that he should break down and be shamed for evermore.

He hurried away without once glancing round, and his first impression was that he must weep. He only bore up against this appalling impulse until he reached his home.



He entered the house whistling, and shouted out a line or two of a merry song when on the stairs; but before the echo of his voice had died away, he was lying on his bed in tears.

He felt that his part in the world had come to an end—that for him no future but one of misery was possible. The hope which had sustained him in the face of his struggles to make a name for himself had turned to despair. She was not to be his. She was to go to another. She had elected to go to a man who, he believed, with all a true lover's suspicion of another's merits, was incapable of appreciating her beauty—her beautiful nature—her lovely soul.

He was overwhelmed by the thought of the bare possibility of a thing so monstrous being sanctioned by Providence. He despaired of the future of a world in which it was possible for so monstrous a thing to occur. It was no world for worthy lovers to live in—so much was perfectly clear to him. He felt himself to be a worthy lover, for had he not resisted temptations innumerable, during the years that he had loved Betsy, only for her sake?

He had felt upon every occasion of resisting a temptation that he was increasing his balance, so to speak, in his banking account with Fate—paying another instalment, as it were, toward acquiring Betsy Linley. He had worked for her as Jacob had worked for Rachel, but Fate had turned out to him as unjust as Laban had been—nay, more unjust, for he had not even a Leah given to him to console him; and, besides, his Rachel was bestowed upon another.

How could he be otherwise than hopeless of a world so ill-governed as to allow of such a gross injustice taking place?

The possible joys of the many temptations which he had resisted appealed to his imagination. So one thinks what one could have done with the sums with which one's banker

has absconded; and the result was to increase his bitterness. But perhaps what poor Dick felt most bitterly of all was his inability to sustain the dignified *rôle* of a cynical man of the world with which he had started the day. The reflection that he had completely broken down the moment that the girl appeared even in the distance, and that he had given way to his disappointment just as if he were nothing more than a schoolboy, was a miserable one. He wept at the thought of his own weeping, and beat his pillow wildly in vexation; and an hour had passed before he was able to control himself.

He sprang from the bed with a derisive cry of "What a fool I am!—a worse fool than Halhed! Good heavens! A girl!—she is nothing but a girl; and where's the girl who is worth such self-abasement? I am a man, and I'll show myself to be a man, even though she elect to marry every dolt in Bath!"

He felt that if she had appeared in the lobby outside his door at that moment, he would not break down. He would be able to smile upon her as Mr. Walpole was accustomed to smile when saying something very wicked and satirical. He knew that he was quite as witty and a good deal readier than Horace Walpole; but even if he lacked something of the polish which Walpole—sitting up all the night for the purpose—was able to give to a phrase, he believed that he could still say enough to let Betsy Linley learn what sort of a man he was. He would let her see that he was a man of the world looking on with a tolerant, half-amused smile and quite a disinterested manner at such incidents of life as marrying and giving in marriage. Oh, the cynical things that could be said about marriage! Some such things had, of course, already been said by the wits, but they had not nearly exhausted the subject. It would be left for him to show Miss Linley how supremely ridiculous was the notion of two people



believing—or rather pretending to believe—that they could find satisfaction only in each other's society!

Oh, the notion of marriage was utterly ridiculous! What was it like? Was it not the last refuge of the unimaginative? Or should he suggest that marriage was the pasteboard façade of a palace of fools?

Oh yes, he felt quite equal to the task of saying a number of witty things on the subject of marriage in general; but when he came to think of all that might be said on the subject of a young woman's agreeing to marry an old man, he felt actually embarrassed by the wealth of cynical phrases which lent themselves to a definition of such an incident.

He kept pacing his room, becoming more cynical every moment, until he had almost recovered his self-respect, and had forgotten that singular lapse of his from the course which he had marked out for himself in the morning—that lapse into the tears of true feeling from his elaborate scheme of simulated indifference—when the dinner-bell sounded.

He cursed the clanging of the thing. He was in no humour for joining the family circle: he knew that his sisters would delight in discussing the topic of the hour, and as for his brother . . .

Then it occurred to him that, seeing he would have to face his relations some time, he would excite their suspicion less were he to meet them at once. He now believed himself to be quite equal to sustaining the *rôle* of the indifferent man of fashion in the presence of his relations, though he had ignominiously failed to realise his ideal after a certain point earlier in the day.

He dipped his face in a basin of water to remove every trace of his weakness—the poor fellow actually believed that tears were an indication of weakness—and he was surprised to find how easily the marks were obliterated.

He was comforted by the reflection that his tears had been very superficial; they were not even skin deep,—so that he had not, after all, been so foolish as he fancied—he had been unjust to himself. He only needed a fresh ruffle to give a finishing touch to his freshness.

He descended to the dining-room lazily, and entered languidly. He found that the other members of the family had not been polite enough to wait for him for the two minutes he had taken to complete his toilet. They were deep in their leg of mutton, and the younger Miss Sheridan was calling for another dish of potatoes. The big wooden bowl which, Irish fashion, lay upon a silver ring, was still steaming, but it was empty.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed, entering the room, "I had no notion that I was late. Upon my life, I meant only to have a doze of ten minutes, but I must have slept for half an hour."

He yawned, and then stood before a mirror for a few moments, twitching his front into shape.

"You came in pretty late last night," said his elder sister, cutting another wedge from the already gaping wound in the leg of mutton before her.

"Nay, sweet sister, you are wrong," he said with a laugh. "Nay, 'twas not late last night, but early this morning I returned to my home. Prithee, sister, is't outside the bounds of possibility for you to provide us with a change of fare now and again? Mutton is doubtless wholesome, and occasionally it is even succulent, but after the fourth day of mutton, the most tolerant palate——"

"Have you heard that Betsy Linley is to marry old Mr. Long?" cried the girl with the air of one making an effective retort.

He was about to indicate to her his complete self-possession by inquiring what bearing Miss Linley and Mr. Long had upon the question of the advisability of



substituting veal for mutton now and again, but he was clever enough to perceive that his attitude would become convincing were he to appear less nonchalant; so after only an interval of a few seconds, he dropped his fork, crying:

"What! what do you say? Betsy Linley and Mr. Long? Oh, lud!"

Then he threw himself back in his chair and roared with laughter. He was amazed to find how easily he was able to laugh heartily—nay, how greatly he was eased by his outburst of hearty laughter. He felt that he was playing his part very well, and so indeed he was.

"Oh, lud! Oh, lud!" he managed to ejaculate between his paroxysms of mirth. "Oh, lud! 'Crabbed age and youth!' Has not Mr. Linley set the lyric to music? If not, he must lose no time in doing so, and Betsy will sing it at all the concerts. I foresee another triumph for her. He is sixty-five if he is a day—I'll swear it. But are you sure that there is truth in the rumour? How many names have not been associated with Miss Linley's during the last two years? Were not people rude enough to mention Mathews's name with hers six months ago?"

"'Tis more than mere rumour this time," said his sister. "I wonder that you did not hear all about the matter last night. Every one was talking of it in the Rooms."

"Ah, you see, I was hurried off to that supper, confound it! and, as you remarked, I did not get up in time for the Pump Room gossip," said he glibly. "Ah, I should have gone to the Pump Room, if only for the sake of studying the effect of this disastrous news upon the beaux! 'Twill be a blow to some of our friends—to some; but we need not travel beyond the limits of the Sheridan family to become acquainted with the effects of that blow." He pointed a finger toward his brother Charles, who indeed was looking very glum over his mutton. "Oh, my dear brother, you have my profound sympathy in your affliction.

But, prithee, be cheered, my Charles; do not let those doleful dumps get hold of you at this time.

'Shall I, wasting with despair,
Sigh because a woman's fair?'

Surely not, sir. This is not our way, in these days—these unromantic days.

'If she be not fair to me
What care I how fair she be?
With a hey, nonny, nonny!'"

"Do not tease him, Dick," said Alicia. "Poor Charlie!"

"Poor Charlie!" cried Dick. "Nay, I never meant to go so far as to call him 'Poor Charlie!' You have a strange notion of what constitutes sympathy, my dear, if you fancy that our brother's wound is softened by his being called 'Poor Charlie!' The cruel shepherdess did not send you any softening message, Strephon?"

"She sent me no message," said Charles.

"Then she was less unkind than she might have been," said Dick. "The woman who sends a kind message to the lover whom she has discarded is as cruel as the Red Indian would be were he to scalp his victim and then offer him as a solace a box of Canada Balsam for the healing of the wound. Oh no, dear Charles, Miss Linley is not all unkind."

"Do you know, Dick, that once or twice I received the impression that 'twas you yourself, and not Charles, that Betsy favoured?" said Elizabeth.

"What! I—I? Oh, my dear, you flatter me at the expense of my elder brother," laughed Dick. "Moreover, you cast an aspersion on the taste, the discrimination, and the prudence of the young lady. Dear sisters, take the advice of your brother, who knows this world and its weaknesses, and when it comes to your turn to choose



husbands, marry nice elderly gentlemen with large fortunes, as your friend Miss Linley is doing. Marriage should be regarded simply as an unavoidable preliminary to a brilliant widowhood. And let me assure you, Eliza, your widowhood will not be long averted if you provide your husband with mutton as tough as that which you set before your brothers four days out of the seven."

## CHAPTER X

DICK SHERIDAN felt it to be a great relief to him to turn a laugh against his brother in regard to the sudden step taken by Miss Linley, which seemed to have disconcerted not only Charles, but half the population of Bath as well. Dick could not bear to be suspected of entertaining hopes on his own account as to Elizabeth Linley; he possessed a certain amount of vanity—the vanity of a young man who is the son of an extremely vain old man, and who, though gifted—or cursed—with a certain wit in conversation, is still rather uncertain about his future. It was this vanity which had caused him to keep as a profound secret his attachment to Betsy: he could not have endured the humiliation of taking a place among the rejected suitors, and he had not so much vanity as made him unable to perceive that there was always a possibility of his loving in vain.

He felt that, as his secret had hitherto escaped suspicion —and he fancied that it had done so—he could best keep it concealed by laughing at the men who, like his friend Halhed and his brother Charles, had worn their heart upon their sleeve. The man who is ready to laugh is not the man who is ready to love, most people think; and, being aware of this, he made himself ready to laugh. Before the evening had come, he had so many opportunities of laughing that he felt sure, if he were to meet Betsy and her elderly lover, he would be able to laugh in their faces.





He could not understand how it was that he had been so overcome in the morning by an emotion which was certainly not one of laughter, when he had seen Betsy in the distance.

It was really extraordinary how many young men showed their desire to confide in him in the course of the afternoon. Some were even anxious to read to him the verses which they had composed in celebration of their rejection by Miss Linley; and this showed him how well he had kept his secret. His brother, who seemed, in spite of Dick's want of sympathy, to take a very lenient view of Dick's attitude toward him, was actually the first to approach him after dinner with the story of his sufferings, and with an attempt to enshrine the deepest of them in a pastoral poem which took the form of a dialogue between one Corydon and his friend Damon, on the subject of the ill-treatment of both of them by the shepherdess Phyllis, who, they both frankly admitted, was as charming a vocalist as she was a beautiful nymph, and who dwelt on the banks of a stream, to which all the country were in the habit of flocking on account of its healing properties.

Charles inquired if his brother did not think that the allusions to the vocalism of the young shepherdess and the incident of her living in the neighbourhood of a medicinal spring were rather apt; and Dick, taking the matter very seriously now, had no hesitation in expressing the opinion that no unprejudiced critic could fail to perceive from these data that the poet meant to refer to Miss Linley and to Bath. He was not sure, however, that Miss Linley would, on reading the verses, be stung to the quick. Dick did not think that as a rule young women were deeply affected by classical allusions, however apt they might be. But undoubtedly the verses were well intentioned, and quite equal in merit to many that appeared in the *Advertiser*.

Poor Charles was forced to be content with such commendation. To be sure, he took rather a higher view of

the poem himself, and he said that young Halhed had declared that some of the lines were quite equal to any that Pope had written, and that Mr. Greville had assured him that if he had not known that he, Charles, had composed the poem, he would unhesitatingly have accepted it as the work of Dryden. Still, he was much gratified by Dick's opinion that it was on an intellectual level with the material which appeared in the Poet's Corner of the *Advertiser*. He rather thought that he would go away for a while to the country. Did not Dick think that the situation of the moment necessitated his retirement from the frivolities of Bath for a month or two?

After due consideration Dick replied that perhaps on the whole a month or two in the country would do his brother some good; though, to be sure, if he were missed from Bath, some people might be found ready to say that he was overcome by the blow of his rejection by Miss Linley. Charles's eyes gleamed at the prospect of being thus singled out for distinction; and Dick knew why they were gleaming. He knew that his brother would certainly hurry away to the seclusion of the country before it would be too late—before people would cease talking of Miss Linley and the desolation that her cruelty had wrought. He knew that Charles would feel that, if people failed to associate the incident of his withdrawal from Bath with the announcement of the choice of Miss Linley, he might as well remain at his home.

"I shall go, Dick—I feel that I must go," murmured Charles. "Let people say what they will, I must go. I have no doubt that tongues will wag when it is known that I have gone. I would not make the attempt to conceal the fact that I have gone, and I hope that you will never stoop to pander with the truth in this matter, Richard."

"If you insist on my telling the truth, of course I shall do so; but I see no reason why I should depart from an



ordinary and reasonable course of prevarication," said Dick, with a shrug.

"Not for the world!" cried Charles anxiously. "No, brother; the truth must be told. I lay it upon you to tell the truth."

"'Twill be a strain at first," said Dick doubtfully—musingly, as if balancing a point of great nicety in his mind. "Still, one should be ready to make some sacrifice for one's brother: one should be ready at his bidding to make a departure even from a long-cherished habit. Yes, Charles, I love you so well that I'll e'en tell the truth at your bidding."

"God bless you, Dick—God bless you!" said Charles with real tears in his eyes and a tremolo note in his voice as he turned away. He never could understand his brother's humour.

"Hasten and pack your bag, and get off at once, or people will cease to be suspicious, and disbelieve me when I tell them the true story of your wrongs," said Dick. "It would be very discouraging to me to find that my deviation into the truth is not credited. You can send your poem to the *Advertiser* from the country; mind that you append to it the name of your place of concealment."

Charles lagged. He seemed a little taken aback.

"The verses would lose half their value unless they were dated from some place of concealment," Dick insisted.

"I perceive now that that is so," said Charles. "But, unhappily, it did not occur to me when I sent the verses to the editor an hour ago."

"What! you have sent them already?" cried Dick. "Oh, dear brother, you need no instruction from me as to the acting of the *rôle* of the complete lover. I will see that your grief receives the most respectful attention in your absence. Let that thought make you happy. It will be my study to see that you are referred to in the highest

circles as the unhappy swain. By the way, would you wish it to be understood that you are Damon, or do you prefer to be associated with the sentiments of Corydon?"

"I have not fully considered that question," said Charles seriously.

"What! Ah, well, perhaps it would be unreasonable to expect you to make up your mind in a hurry. But since both the shepherds express the sentiment of their grief with commendable unanimity, you cannot be prejudiced by being associated with either."

Charles went away very thoughtfully.

For the remainder of the afternoon Dick found himself advanced to the position of confidant in relation to several other young men, and at least two elderly gentlemen. He was amazed to find how closely the tale poured into his sympathetic ear by every one of the young men resembled that confided to him by his brother. And there was not one of them who had not made some attempt to embody his sentiment in a pastoral poem. All the poems were alike in their artificiality. He felt that he was hearing, not six different poems read once over, but one indifferent poem read six times over.

The elderly discarded swains who confided in him had also endeavoured to express their views of their treatment on paper. One had written a Pindaric ode on the subject, the other, who had a vivid recollection of the earliest essays in the *Rambler*, had written an imaginary epistle in the approved Johnsonian manner, beginning: "Sir, if no spectacle is more pleasing to a person of sensibility than an artless maiden dissembling her love by a blush of innocence, none is more offensive than that of the practised coquette making the attempt to lure into her toils an unsuspecting swain. Among the antient writers few passages are more memorable than the one in which, in sublime



language, Homer describes the effect of the song of the Sirens upon Ulysses. If the right exercise of the gift of song be deserving of approval, assuredly its employment as a lure to the adventurous is a fitting subject for reprobation."

The elderly gentleman, who was endeavouring to show to young Mr. Sheridan how closely Miss Linley resembled one of the Sirens, did not find a sympathetic listener.

"If Ulysses did not want to be made a fool of, why the deuce did he shape his course within earshot of the Sirens?" said Dick. "I don't suppose that they wanted him particularly, and the Mediterranean was broad enough for him to give them a wide birth."

"What, sir! Would you presume to teach Homer how to deal with his hero?" cried the interrupted author.

"I don't care a fig for Homer! You need not have paid your half-guinea, and then you would not have been made a fool of by Miss Linley's singing," said Dick.

"She has made no fool of me, sir," said the other tartly. "She did not presume so far, Mr. Sheridan."

"I suppose it would have been an act of presumption on her part to try to supplement Nature's handiwork," said Dick, with a smile so enigmatical that the gentleman was left wondering if he meant to pay him a compliment or the reverse.

Dick went away wondering also—wondering if he alone loved Betsy Linley in very truth. The artificiality of all the professed lovers was contemptible in his eyes. Was it possible, he asked himself, that not one of these men, young or old, loved her sufficiently to be able to conceal his affection within his own breast? There they were, writing their artificial verses and still more artificial essays—looking about for some one to make a confidant of in respect of the secret that each should have locked up in his own bosom! Truly a paltry set of lovers were these! Rhyme-hunters,

phrase-hunters, conceit-hunters, and nothing more. He, and he only, loved Betsy.

Had he carried his secrecy too far in that he had not confided, even in her? he wondered. But had he kept his love a secret from her? Alas! he felt that although he had never told her of his love, she was well aware of its existence.

And yet she had promised to marry Mr. Long.

He began to feel very bitterly about her—about Mr. Long—about womankind and mankind generally. He endeavoured as he entered the Assembly Rooms, to recall some of the bitter things which had occurred to him earlier in the day on the subject of the institution of marriage. He would show people that he could be quite as cynical as any of the Walpole set when it came to a definition of marriage.

But before he had drawn much consolation from such a reflection, he heard behind him the most musical laugh that ever suggested to an imaginative young man a moonlight effect upon a brook that rippled through a glen. It was a laugh that had rippled through England and made all the land joyous—it was the laugh of the beautiful Mrs. Abington: and for a century it has rippled forth from the canvases of Sir Joshua Reynolds, who painted her as Miss Prue and Roxalana.

Dick turned about and faced the charming creature, who, in the midst of a sunlit cloud of iridescent satin brocade, an embroidered mist of lace swirling about the bodice, stood there in the most graceful of attitudes, her head poised like the head of a coquettish bird that turns a single eye upon one, raising her closed fan in her right hand to the dimple on her chin, the first two fingers of her left supporting the other elbow.

"Heavens! what a ravishing picture! Is Mr. Gainsborough in the Rooms?" cried young Mr. Sheridan in an outburst of admiration. He forgot all the bitter things he



had on his mind. He forgot the grudge that he owed to the world: the world that included so joyous a creature as Mrs. Abington could not be in a wholly deplorable condition. This is what Mr. Sheridan thought at that particular moment, and that is what all England thought from time to time, when the same lady exercised her fascination over her audiences through the medium of a character in some new comedy. No heart could be heavy for long when Mrs. Abington was on the stage.

"Ah, sir," said she, "you are, I perceive, like the rest of your sex: you confound the effect of a new gown with that of an attractive face. You mix up a woman with her dress until you don't know which is which. Mr. Gainsborough knows the difference. Ask him to paint me. 'I will hang her brocade on a wig-stand and that will be enough for most critics,' he will answer. They say that the Duchess of Devonshire has induced him to paint her hat, and to eke out what little space remains on the canvas with her grace's brocade. Oh, Mr. Gainsborough is the only man who knows the woman from her dress!"

"Madam," said Dick, who had been whetting his wits all the time she had been speaking, "madam, when I look at Mrs. Abington it is revealed to me that a beautiful woman is a poem; her dress is merely the music to which the poem is set."

She did not sink in a courtesy at the compliment; most women would have done so, therefore Mrs. Abington refrained. She only gave an extra tilt of an inch or thereabouts to her stately head, and allowed her fan to droop forward until it was pointing with an expression of exquisite roguishness at the young man's face.

"'Tis a pretty conceit, i' faith, Dick," said she, "and its greatest charm lies in its adaptability to so many women. A song! quite true: we have both seen women who were the merest doggerel; and as for the music—oh, lud! I

have seen women dress so that it would need a whole orchestra to do them justice. For my own part, I aim no higher than the compass of a harpsichord; and I hold that one whose garments suggest a band is unfit for a private room. Music! I have seen women apparelled in a flourish of trumpets, and others diaphanously draped in the thin tones of a flute."

"'Twas a happy conceit that crossed my mind, since it has opened a vein of such wit," said Dick. "But pray, my dear madam, tell us how it is that Bath is blest."

"Bath blest! 'Tis the first I heard of it."

"Since Mrs. Abington has come hither. How is it possible that you have been able to forsake Mr. Colman and Covent Garden!"

"Mr. Colman is a curmudgeon, and Covent Garden is—not so far removed from Drury Lane."

"That means that you are not in any of the pieces this week?"

"Nan Cattley has it all her own way just now. All that she needs to make her truly happy and to make Mr. Colman a bankrupt is to get rid of Mrs. Bulkley."

"All Bath will rise up and thank her, since she has enabled Mrs. Abington to come hither. Bath knows when it is blest."

"Then Bath is blest indeed—more than all mankind. Was it not Pope who wrote, 'Man never is but always to be blest'?"

"I do believe that it was Pope who said it. Your voice sets a bald line to music."

"Lud! Mr. Sheridan, your thoughts are running on music to-day. Why is that, prithee? Is't possible that since Miss Linley has given up music and has taken to marriage—a state from which music is perpetually absent—you feel that 'tis laid on you as a duty to keep people informed of the fact that there is music still in the world,



even though Miss Linley no longer sings? But perhaps you believe exactly the opposite?"

"Just the opposite, madam?"

"Yes. Do you believe that there is no music in the world now that Miss Linley has promised to marry Mr. Long?"

He felt that his time had come; he would show her that he could be as cynical as the best of them—he meant the worst of them, only he did not know it.

"Ah! my dear lady, you and I know well that the young woman who gives up singing in favour of marriage exchanges melody for matrimony."

"Subtle," said the lady, with a critical closing of her eyes. "Too subtle for the general ear. 'Tis a kind of claret wit, this of yours; claret is not the beverage of the herd—they prefer rum. Melody on the one side and matrimony on t'other."

"Madam, I am not talking to the crowd; on the contrary, I am addressing Mrs. Abington," said young Mr. Sheridan, bowing with the true Angelo air. Mr. Angelo's pupils were everywhere known by the spirit of their bows.

The beautiful lady did not respond except by a smile; but then most people with ability enough to discriminate would have acknowledged that a smile from Mrs. Abington expressed much more than the lowest courtesy from the next most beautiful woman could ever express; and they would have been right. She smiled gently, looking at him with languorous eyes for a few moments, and then the expression on her face changed somewhat as she said slowly:

"What a pity 'tis that you still love her, Dick!"

## CHAPTER XI

The roseate hue that fled over the face of young Mr. Sheridan, when the lady had spoken, was scarcely that which would have tinted the features of the hardened man of the world which he had felt himself to be—for some hours. But all the same, it was vastly becoming to the face at which the lady was looking; and that is just what the lady herself thought. She would have given worlds to have been unworldly enough to be able to blush so innocently as Dick Sheridan. But she knew that the peculiarity of the blush of innocence is its innocence, whereas she was the favourite actress of the day.

She kept her eyes fixed upon him, and that boyish blush remained fixed upon his face. He was not self-possessed enough to look at her; but even if he had been so, he would not have been able to see the jealousy which her smile indifferently concealed.

"I protest, madam," he began. "I protest that I scarce understand the force of your remark—your suggestion——"

"Ah, my poor Dick, 'tis not alone a lady that doth protest too much," said the play-actress. "What force do you fancy any protest coming from you would have while the eloquent blood in your cheeks insists on telling the truth? The eloquence of the blush, unlike most forms of eloquence, is always truthful. Come along with me to one of the quiet corners,—I dare swear that you know them all,





you young rascal, in spite of that blush of yours; come along, and you shall get me a glass of ice."

She gave him her hand with a laugh, and he led her to a nook of shrubs and festooned roses at the farther end of the Long Room. The Rooms were beginning to receive the usual fashionable crowd, and the word had gone round that Mrs. Abington was present, so that she tripped along between bowing figures in velvet and lace and three-cocked hats brushing the floor. She saw that her companion was proud of his position by her side, and she knew that he had every reason to be so; she hoped that he would remain proud of her. The man who is proud of being by the side of one woman cannot continue thinking only of the other woman.

And all the time Dick Sheridan was hoping that the people who saw him conducting the beautiful lady to that pleasant place which, like all really pleasant places, held seats only for two, would say that he was a gay young dog, and look on him with envious eyes.

It was, however, of the lady that people talked.

But then, people were always talking of Mrs. Abington—especially the people who never talked *to* her.

She was wise enough to refrain from ignoring the topic which had caused him to blush.

"What a whim to take possession of such a young woman as Miss Linley!" she cried. "Have you tried to account for it, Dick? Of course I was in jest when I suggested that she had smitten you. 'Twas your elder brother who was her victim, was it not?"

He was strong enough, though he himself thought it a sign of weakness, to say at once:

"'Twas Charlie who fancied that he was in love with her; but 'twas I, alas! who loved her."

Mrs. Abington's lips parted under the influence of her surprise. She stared at him for some moments, and then she said:

"Dick Sheridan, you are a man; and a few minutes ago I thought that you were only a boy."

"I have known her since my father brought me from Harrow to Bath," said he mournfully. "She was only a child; but I know that I loved her then. I have loved her ever since, God help me!"

"My poor Dick! and you told her of your love?"

"Once; we were both children. Then we were separated, and when we met again everything was changed. I think it was her beauty that frightened me."

"I can believe that. A girl's beauty brings many men to her feet; but I am sure that those who are worthiest among men are too greatly overcome by it to do more than remain her worshipper from afar. Have you anything more to tell me?"

He shook his head. His eyes were fixed upon the floor.

"Ah, that is your history—a blank, my lord! a blank?" said she in the pathetic tone of Viola. "Ah, Dick, she cannot have guessed your secret, or she would have been content to wait until the time came for you to reveal it to her."

"Pray do not torture me by suggesting what might have come about!" he cried. "Psha! I have actually come to be one of her commonplace swains—her Damons and her Corydons—at whom I have been laughing all day."

"Laughing?"

"Well, yes, in a sort of way."

"Oh, I know that sort of laughter. 'Tis not pleasant to hear."

"Such a batch of commonplace lovers. They went about in search of a confidant. And I find that I am as commonplace as any of the crew."

"Nay, friend Dick; 'twas your confidante who went in search of you. I tell you, Dick, that when I heard two days ago that your Elizabeth Linley had made up her mind to



marry Mr. Long, I gave Mr. Colman notice that I would not play during the rest of the week, and I posted down here to do my best to comfort you, my poor boy! Oh, do not stare so at me, Dick! I am as great a fool as any woman can be, and that is saying much; and I would not have confessed this to you if you had not been manly enough to tell me that you love her still. I can only respond to your manliness, Dick, by my womanliness; but I have done it now, and yet you are only bewildered."

"I am bewildered indeed," said Dick, and he spoke the truth. "I do not quite understand what—that is, I do not quite understand you."

"Oh, do you fancy that I expected you to understand me when I do not understand myself?" she cried, opening and closing her fan nervously half a dozen times, and then giving the most scrupulous attention to the design painted on the satin between the ivory ribs. "Ah, what a fool a really wise woman—a woman of worldly wisdom—can be when her turns comes, Dick!" she said, after a rather lengthy pause.

Dick was more bewildered than ever. His knowledge of women was never very profound. He was slightly afraid of this enigma enwrapped—but not too laboriously—in brocade and misty lace.

"I think that you are a very kind woman, Mrs. Abington," said he at last. "'Twas very kind of you to come here solely because—because—well, solely out of the goodness of your own heart; and if you call this being a fool——"

He was startled by her outburst of laughter—really merry, spontaneous actress's laughter; it almost amounted to a paroxysm as she lay back on the pretty gilded sofa in the most charming attitude of self-abandonment. Joyous humour danced in her eyes—and tears as well; and once again she

had closed her fan and was pointing it at him quite roguishly. And the tears that had been in her eyes dropped down upon the roseate expanse of her bosom, and two others took the place in her eyes of those that had fallen, and her bosom was tremulous.

He looked at her, and was more bewildered than ever. What did this mingling of laughter and tears and mocking gestures and throbbing pulses mean? Was the woman in earnest? Was the actress acting?

He felt himself as bewildered as he could imagine a man being whose boat is suddenly capsized when sailing in what he fancies to be smooth water, but finds to be a whirlpool.

He somehow had lost confidence in his own power of judgment. He was forced to apply to her for an explanation of her attitude. But before he had opened his lips, that whirlpool of a woman was spinning him round on another course.

"My dear friend Dick," she said—her voice had acquired something of the uncertainty of her bosom: there was a throb in it—a throb that had something of the quality of a sob,—"oh, my dear Dick, I find that I must be very plain with you, and so I tell you plainly, Dick, that the sole reason I have in coming hither at this time is my regard for your future."

"For my future? I cannot see——"

"Ah, there are a great many things that you cannot see, Dick—thank God, thank God! Your future, dear sir, is what troubles me. Well, I frankly allow that my own ambition in this life does not extend beyond the playhouse. I am an actress, that is my life; I do not want to be accounted anything else by man or woman—only an actress. And I have in my mind something of a comedy which you are to write. Have you not confided to me your hopes of some day writing a comedy—not



that burletta stuff about Jupiter and the rest of them at which you have been working, but a true comedy? Mr. Garrick says he knows you have far more talent than Mr. Cumberland."

"Mr. Garrick is not extravagant in his eulogy," said Dick, becoming interested.

"No, he does not go too far. At any rate, I believe in your powers, Dick, if they are but allowed scope, and I have posted hither with the idea I have formed of the comedy which you are to write for me without delay. What say you to the notion of a young woman marrying an old man? Oh, no! you need not start and frown, Dick, for 'tis not your charmer and her elderly choice that I have in my mind, though I allow that 'twas the hearing of them put the thing into my head. No, a young woman, who has lived all her life in the country—she is very pretty (of course I am to play the part); marries an elderly gentleman (Shuter would play the husband), and forthwith launches out into all the extravagances of town life, to the terrible dismay of the old gentleman. 'Twill give you a fine opportunity of laughing at him for an old fool, who finds out that he is married to a young wife, but not sooner than she finds out that she is married to an old husband. Dick, Dick, you don't laugh. Is it possible that you fail to catch the idea of the comedy?"

"Oh, no! I catch the idea. I wonder what sort of a life they will have? Only Betsy will never want to come to town. All that she seeks is to be left in the solitude of the country."

"Who was talking of your Betsy?" cried the future Lady Teazle. "And who is there that can say with any measure of certainty what a young woman will be after she has married? Cannot you perceive that this must be the moral of the comedy? The young woman who appears

to her elderly beau to be quite content with the joys of country life, and to entertain no longing for any dissipation more extravagant than a game of Pope Joan with the curate, becomes, when once she has secured her husband, the leader of the wildest set about town, and perhaps eventually allows herself to be led away by a plausible scoundrel——" Dick sprang from his seat with clenched hands, and before a second had elapsed Mrs. Abington was by his side, and her fingers were grasping her fan so tightly that the ivory ribs crackled.

"You cannot get Betsy Linley out of your head, although she is no longer for you," she said in a low voice. "You are living in a fool's paradise, and are delighted to live there, although some woman may be at your hand who loves you better than you have ever hoped to be loved by Betsy Linley, and who would repay your love better than your dreams of Betsy Linley ever suggested to you. Take care, sir, that in the story of Miss Linley's future, the plausible scoundrel does not enter with more disastrous effect that ever I intended him to play in my little comedy! That is my warning to you, friend Dick. And now, tell me who is that pretty fellow that is staring at us yonder? I swear that I have rarely seen a prettier!"

Some moments had passed before Dick Sheridan had recovered himself sufficiently to answer her. He glanced in the direction indicated by her, and saw that Tom Linley was standing a little way off.

"'Tis Tom Linley," said Dick.

"One of the brothers?"

"The eldest. You have puzzled me, Mrs. Abington. I should like to know just what you meant when——"

"And I should like to know that young gentleman. If you do not beckon him hither and present him to me, I shall apply to Mr. Hale to perform that friendly office for me."

DICK SPRANG FROM HIS SEAT WITH CLENCHED HANDS.

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"I must know what you meant by introducing the idea of a comedy——"

"And I insist on your introducing young Mr. Linley. What, sir! are you fearful lest that pretty youth may become, under my tuition, a fitting subject for another serious comedy? No, no; no further word will you get from me. I have said far too much already. Go home, Dick, and try to recall something of all the nonsense that I talked in your hearing, and if you succeed, believe me, you will know more of woman and a woman's comedy than you have acquired during all your life."

"Am I to believe——"

"You are to believe nothing except the sincerity of my desire to see you the foremost dramatic writer of our time. To become a true writer of comedy needs discipline as well as a knowledge of the world, Dick, and discipline is sometimes galling, my friend. But I have hope of you, Dick Sheridan, and that is why I mean to leave you alone just now and seek out that young Mr. Linley, who is, I vow, a vastly pretty fellow and as like his beautiful sister as Apollo was like Psyche."

She kissed the tips of her closed fan and made a motion as if she were about to hasten to where Tom Linley was still standing; but Dick laid his hand on her arm.

"You have puzzled me thoroughly," said he. "But you shall have your new toy. He will be discipline enough for you, for Tom has long ago buried his heart in his violin."

## CHAPTER XII

Tom frowned when Dick suggested to him—in a delicate way, so that he should not be frightened—that the beautiful Mrs. Abington was greatly interested in him and had been gracious enough to give Dick permission to present him to her. Tom frowned. It was not that he placed a fictitious value upon himself; it was only that he could not be brought to take an interest in anything outside his art. Talking to a woman, however beautiful she might be, he regarded as a waste of time, unless she talked to him of his art, or, better still, listened to him while he talked of it.

"I came hither only to hear Mr. Bach's playing on the forte-piano," he said. "I think he is over sanguine of the effects that new instrument can produce, though I allow that he can do more with it than would be possible with the harpsichord. Its tones are certainly richer."

"Rich as they are, they are not to be compared to the tones of Mrs. Abington's voice," said Dick, taking him by the arm.

"Will she distract me, do you fancy? I do not like women who interfere with my enjoyment of the music," said the musician. "Most women are a great distraction."

"So it is rumoured," said Dick. "But Mrs. Abington —— Oh, you confounded coxcomb! there is not a man in the Rooms who would not feel himself transported to the





seventh heaven at the prospect of five minutes' conversation with this lady. Come along, sir, and do not shame me and your own family by behaving like an insensible bear who will only dance to music."

Tom suffered himself to be led to the lady.

She had watched with an amused smile the attitude of protest on the part of the good-looking young man. She was greatly amused; but in the course of her life she had had occasion to study the very young man, and she rather fancied that she had acquired some knowledge of him and his ways. He was an interesting study. She had found Dick Sheridan extremely interesting even during the previous half hour—though she had not begun her course of lessons with him. As a matter of fact, he had been in the nursery when she had begun to take her lessons.

She would have been greatly surprised if young Linley had acquiesced with any degree of eagerness in the suggestion made to him by Dick, and she did not feel in the least hurt to notice his frown and his general air of protest. She had once watched from the window of her cottage on the Edgeware Road the breaking-in of a spirited young colt. She had admired his protests; but before the day was done, the horse-breaker had put the bit in his mouth and was trotting him quietly round the field.

She had done something in the way of breaking in colts in her time, and they had all begun by protesting.

"I saw that you were a musician the instant you appeared, Mr. Linley," she said. "I know that you are devoted to your art. Ah, sir, yours is an art worthy of the devotion of a lifetime. Is there any art besides music, Mr. Linley? I sometimes feel that there is none."

The large eyes of the young man glowed.

"There is none, madam," he said definitely.

His air of finality amused her greatly.

"I feel pleased that you agree with me," she said. "I have no patience with such people as one meets at times —men who are ever ready to decry the art which they themselves practise. I have known painters complain bitterly that Heaven had not made them poets, and I have known poets cry out against the fate that had not created them wits. Here is our friend Mr. Sheridan, who is both a poet and a wit, and yet he is ready to complain that Heaven has not made him a successful lover as well."

Young Mr. Sheridan cast upon the lady a reproachful glance, and went off with a bow.

Mrs. Abington made room for Tom on her sofa. She sent him an invitation from her eyes. It was a small sofa; but he was entirely free from self-consciousness, and therefore he did not know what it was to be shy. He seated himself by her side. A fold of her brocade flowed over his feet. This did not embarrass him in the least.

He waited for her to talk. It did not occur to him that he should make the attempt to be agreeable to her.

"'Twas a pretty conceit that of Mr. Sheridan's," said she musingly. "But I am convinced that 'tis true. He said that you had buried your heart into your violin, Mr. Linley. Yes, I am sure that that is the truth; for were it otherwise how could the people who have heard you play declare, as some have done to me, that when you play 'tis as if you were drawing your bow across your heart-strings?"

"You have heard people say that?" he cried, leaning forward in eagerness; he had allowed the sofa to support his shoulders up to this point. "You have met some who heard me play? But I have only returned from Italy a few days. I have only played once in Bath."

"You can only be upheld when you play in public by the thought that in every audience there are some persons



—few though they may be, still they are there—who are capable of appreciating your playing—who are capable of receiving the impressions which you seek to transfer to them."

He looked at her with wide eyes, surprise, admiration, in his gaze.

"I never begin to play without such a thought," he cried. "That, as you say, is the thought that upholds me, that uplifts me, that supports me. I had it first from my dear Maestro. He used to urge us daily, 'Play your best at all times; even though you fancy you are alone in the room, be assured that the true musician can never be alone. Who can tell what an audience the spirit world gives to him? He must remember that his playing is not merely a distraction for the crowd in the concert-room, it is an act of devotion—an act of worship.' That is what the Maestro said, and every day I recall his words."

"They are words which no true artist should forget," said she. "The sentiment which they convey should be the foundation of every art. We cannot all build cathedrals to the glory of God, but it is in the power of every true artist to raise a shrine—perhaps it is only a humble one of lath and plaster, but it is still a sacred place if one puts one's heart into it. That reflection is a dear consolation to me, Mr. Linley, when I reflect sometimes that I am only an actress."

The boy was delighted. His face glowed. His heart burned.

"Dear madam," he cried, "do not depreciate your calling. Why, I have heard even great musicians say that the most one could do in a lifetime was to add a single note to the great symphony which Nature sings in adoration of the Creator."

"Then I was unduly ambitious when I talked of a shrine," said she. "And I am, I repeat, only an actress. Such as

I can only utter a feeble pipe—the trill of a robin. 'Tis you musicians whose works sound in the ears of all ages. Time calls aloud to time through you, until the world is girt about with a circle of glorious melody, and men live rejoicing within its clasp. Ah, sir, what am I, to talk of shrine-building? What am I in the presence of a great musician? Shrines? Oh, I can only think of Handel as a builder of cathedrals. Every oratorio that he composed seems to me comparable only to a great cathedral—glorious within and without, massive in its structure, and here and there a spire tapering up to the heaven itself, and yet with countless columns made beautiful with the finest carving. Ah, Mr. Linley, if the music of *Messiah* were to be frozen before our eyes, would it not stand before us in the form of St. Paul's?"

"I am overwhelmed by the grandeur of the thought," said he; and indeed he spoke the truth. His eyes had grown larger and more lustrous than ever while she had been speaking, and he could scarcely articulate for emotion. So highly strung was his temperament that the force of a striking poetic image affected him as it did few men. He had, as it were, reduced all the possibilities of life to a musical scale, and his thoughts swept over him as a bow sweeps over the strings of an instrument until all are set quivering.

"A cathedral!" he murmured—"a cathedral!"

She could see that those eyes of his were looking at such a fabric as she had suggested. He was gazing in admiration from pillar to dome, and from the dome to the blue heaven above all. She had never before come in contact with so emotional a nature—with so sensitive a soul. She knew that what Dick Sheridan said was true: Tom Linley had hidden his heart in his violin, and every breeze that touched the strings caused his heart to vibrate in unison with the music they made. She had only spoken to him on the



subject of music, and already his face was glowing—his heart was quivering.

Some minutes had gone by before he was able to ask her:

"When did you conceive that wonderful thought—the oratorio—the cathedral? Ah, Handel spent his life building cathedrals!"

"It was when I had heard your sister sing in the greatest of all the master's works," she replied. "Could any one hear Miss Linley sing 'I know that my Redeemer liveth,' and remain unmoved? Ah, what a gift is hers! I am certain that she is as sensible as you are of the precious heritage that is hers."

"Alas!" he cried, "she has flung it away from her. She has no thought of her responsibility. Nay, she is ready to sacrifice herself so that she may never be asked to sing again."

"Is't possible? Good heavens! you cannot mean that 'tis her intention to sing no more after she is married?"

"That is why she is marrying Mr. Long—to be saved from the necessity of singing in public; those were her words—'to be saved.' Just think of it! Oh, she can never have had any true love for music!"

"You think not? But perhaps she has given all her love to Mr. Long."

"She confessed to me—at least, she as good as confessed to me—that she intended marrying Mr. Long only because he had promised that she should not be asked to sing in public any more."

"She cannot care for this elderly lover of hers. Has she tried to make you believe that she does?"

"She professes to be grateful to him for releasing her from her bondage: those were her words also—'released from her bondage.' She has always thought of her singing in public as a cruel bondage."

"Heavens! But why—why?"

"I protest I cannot understand her. She is nervous—I think that she must be strangely nervous. She spends all the day in tears when she is to sing in the evening, and she is like to faint when she walks on the platform. And my sister Polly, who shares her room, told me that on returning from singing, Betsy has wept half the night under the influence of the thought that there were some people who remained untouched by her singing."

"Singular! Good heavens! where would we be if we all had the same share of sensibility? What, does she think that the plaudits of her audiences are not loud enough or long enough?"

"She is utterly indifferent to applause. Indeed, she acknowledged to me that she was better satisfied when she was coldly received than when she succeeded in arousing people to a frenzy of delight, because then 'twas her hope that the managers would not be so anxious to engage her again. Oh, Betsy is my despair."

"I can quite believe it. But you talked to her—reasoned with her?"

"Oh yes; I tried to make her feel as I do—that nothing in the world is worth a moment's thought save only music."

"But even that argument did not prevail with her? Did she not confide in you that she thought something else worth living for? Young girls have their fancies, as you may have heard—oh yes, their fancies and their loves. Has she been so foolish as to give her heart to any one, do you think?"

"She is going to marry Mr. Long."

"Oh yes, but I was not talking on the subject of marriage; on the contrary, I was speaking on the topic of love. She has had many suitors. Do you fancy that she may love one of them?"



He gave a shrug and smiled.

"She has had no lack of suitors, but I don't think that she set her heart on marrying any of them."

"Not even the poorest of them?"

He looked at her enquiringly.

"Do you know anything of her suitors?" he asked. "I have been in Italy for some years, and so came in contact with none of them."

"You did not put any question to her on the subject on your return?"

Once again he lapsed into the habit of shrugging, which he had acquired abroad.

"My dear madam," said he, "I was not sufficiently interested in the matter to put any question to her touching so indifferent a topic. But now that I come to think of it, I fancy she did say something to me about love being—being—being something that deserved—— Let me see, was it the word 'attention' that she employed? No, *consideration*; I believe that was the word. Yes, she said that she had considered the question of love."

"And with what result, sir? I protest that you interest me greatly," said Mrs. Abington. And indeed she had now become quite interested in this boy with the large eyes so full of varying expression.

"Alas! madam, this is the point at which my treacherous memory fails me," said he, after a little pause.

"Ah, is not that a pity, seeing that the point was one that promised to be of interest?" said Mrs. Abington.

"I am afraid that I was not interested, madam," said he. "If she had come to me with the result of her consideration of Mozart's additional instrumental parts to *Messiah* I feel sure that I would remember every word; but—— I wonder what view you take of the instrumental parts introduced by Mozart, Mrs. Abington? I should like to have your opinion on this subject."

"And I should like to have your opinion on the subject of love, Mr. Linley," said she in a slow voice, and letting her languorous eyes rest for a second or two on his—for a second or two—no longer. She recollected the horse-breaker; he did not force the bit into the mouth of his colt all at once. He allowed the little animal to put his nose down to the steel gradually. He did not frighten him by flashing it in his face.

"I told Betsy what I thought about love," said he. "I told her that, while I did not assert that the sentiment of love had been brought into existence solely to give a musician an opportunity for illustrating it, still it formed an excellent subject for a musician to illustrate."

"Indeed, you think well of love, Mr. Linley. Your views interest me amazingly. I should like to hear further of them. Love lends itself readily to the art of the musician? Yes, I should like to have this point further explained to me. I wonder if you chance to have by you any musical pieces by which you could demonstrate your theory."

"Oh, there is no lack of such works, I assure you."

"And I take it for granted that the only instrument that adequately interprets them is the violin. The violin is surely the lover's choice in an orchestra!"

"It is the only instrument that has a soul, madam. Other instruments may have a heart: only the violin has a soul."

"That is what I have felt—all my life—all my life; but until now my feeling was never put into words. Oh, it would be so good of you if you would play at your next concert some of the music that illustrates your theory. I wish to learn from you—indeed I do."

"I do not play in public for another week."

She gave an exclamation of impatience and then one of regret.



"'Tis too tiresome! I shall be back in London within the next day or two, and we may never meet again."

Her long lashes were resting on her cheeks as she looked down at the tip of one of her dainty shoes. He looked at her, and his artistic appreciation compelled him to acknowledge that he had never before seen such marvellously long lashes.

He followed the direction of her eyes, and his artistic feeling—he had begun to feel—assured him that he had never seen a daintier foot.

"Why should it be impossible for us ever to meet again?" he asked.

"Ah! why—why, indeed?" she cried. "It has just occurred to me that if you had half an hour to spare to-morrow, you might not grudge sharing it with an old woman whose interest you have aroused on a question of art. You shall bring your violin with you and demonstrate to me your theory that love is particularly susceptible of being illustrated through the medium of music. Oh, 'tis wholly a question of art—that is why I am so interested in its solution."

"Why, madam, nothing could give me greater pleasure!" he cried. "I shall go to you after dinner, and I promise you that I shall convince you."

"You may have a hard task, sir. I give you warning that on any question of art I am obstinate."

"Then my victory will be all the greater. Should I bring with me also a sonata illustrating the approach of autumn—'tis by a German composer of some distinction?"

"The approach of autumn?" said she. "Ah, I think we would do well to defer the consideration of the chills as long as possible. We will content ourselves with the approach of love, for the time being."

"Perhaps you are right," he said.

"The second house from the street in the Grand Parade is where I am lodging," said she. "You will not be later than four o'clock, unless you choose to come very much later and share my humble supper?" she added.

But the boy said he thought that it would be wiser for him to go while the daylight lasted.

And perhaps he was right.

## CHAPTER XIII

It was not within the bounds of possibility that the fascinating Mrs. Abington should remain for the rest of the evening seated by the side of young Mr. Linley in the Assembly Rooms. It was, as a matter of fact, thought very remarkable that she and he were permitted to have so long a conversation without interruption. This circumstance, however, did not prevent the young man's resenting deeply the intrusion of Mr. Walpole and his friend Gilly Williams upon the artistic and philosophical duologue in which he was taking, as he fancied, the prominent part. (He did not doubt that philosophy as well as art formed the subject of his discourse with the charming lady.)

He thought that he might tire out Mr. Walpole and his friend, who had the bad taste to push themselves forward—they did not even think it necessary to have philosophy and art as their excuse—to the destruction of that seclusion which he had no trouble in perceiving the lady loved dearly. He found, however, that Mr. Walpole and Mr. Williams represented merely a beginning of the obtrusive elements of the mixed society at Bath; for before they had got rid of more than a few brilliant phrases embodying some neatly turned but empty compliments—he was convinced that Mrs. Abington, the actress, was just the sort of woman to detest compliments—quite a number of men, well

known in the world of art as well as of fashion (to say nothing of philosophy), were bowing before her and delivering themselves of further compliments in the ears of the lady.

There was Mr. George Selwyn, for instance, who had some coffee-house jargon for her; its delivery necessitated his putting his face very close to her ear, and when she heard it, she gave a delightful simulation of a lady who is shocked—Tom actually believed that she was shocked. And then that awkward little Dr. Goldsmith, who, strange to say, was a great friend of Lord Clare and Bishop Percy and Captain Horneck of the Guards, and others of the most fastidious people in England—people who had it in their power to pick and choose their associates—came up with some witticism so delicately tinged with irony that no one laughed for several seconds. Dr. Goldsmith had to tell her that he had received a letter from Mr. Colman in which he had promised to put his new comedy in rehearsal immediately.

"That is good news for you, doctor," said the actress.

"For me? Nay, madam, 'tis not of myself I am thinking, but of you; for the comedy contains a part—Kate Hardcastle is the name of the heroine—which will make you famous. Oh yes, indeed, 'tis entirely on your account I am gratified."

"Sir, poor Goldsmith is vainer even than I believed him to be," Tom Linley heard the foolish little Scotchman, who followed Dr. Johnson about in Bath as well as London, say to the huge man of letters; and Tom thought that he was fully justified in making such a remark. He was, therefore, all the more surprised to hear Johnson say, after giving himself a roll or two:

"Sir, Dr. Goldsmith may at times have been deserving of reproof, not to say reprobation, but it would be impossible for him to go so far as to make your remark



justifiable. It is not for such as you to say 'poor Goldsmith!'"

Then quite a number of other notable people sauntered up, so that Mrs. Abington became the centre of the most distinguished group in the Long Room, and Tom, who did not see his way to protect her from these inconsiderate obtruders, felt that he would not be acting properly were he tacitly to countenance their attitude; so with a bow he stalked away. What dull-witted wits were these, who were too dense to perceive that the lady's most earnest desire was to be permitted to remain unobserved!

He hastened to his home and spent the remainder of the night practising over such musical selections as would tend, he hoped, to dissipate the philosophical doubts which Mrs. Abington appeared to have in regard to the relations existing between music and the sentiment of love.

Dick Sheridan did not leave the Assembly Rooms quite so soon. He had boldly entered the place in order to get over the meeting with Betsy Linley. He had felt sure that she would come to the Rooms this evening; for it appeared to him that Mr. Long was anxious to parade his prize—that was the phrase which was in Dick's mind—before the eyes of the many suitors whom she had discarded in his favour. Dick felt that he, for one, would not shrink from meeting her in a public place now; it was necessary for him to make up for his shortcoming in the morning.

But while she remained away, he was conscious of the fact that Mrs. Abington had given him something to think about. How was it possible that she knew that he loved Betsy Linley? he wondered; and what did she mean by suggesting that she had come down to Bath to say something that should console him for having lost Betsy? What sudden friendship was this which she professed for him? Why should she have assumed, unasked, the part of his sympathiser? He had been frequently in her company

during the previous year, both in Bath and London; for she had taken lessons in elocution from his father, and had naturally become intimate with the Sheridan family. Besides, she had more than once helped to drag his father from the brink of bankruptcy in Dublin, and lent the prestige of her presence in some of his seasons at that very fickle city; and for these favours Mr. Sheridan had been truly grateful, and had ordered his family to receive her at all times as their good angel.

Dick remembered how his father had dwelt upon the phrase, "our good angel," and he was thus led to wonder if it was her anxiety to act consistently with this *rôle* that had caused her to post to Bath without a moment's delay in order that she might offer him consolation in respect of Betsy.

He began to feel that he had not adequately expressed his gratitude to her for all the trouble which she had taken on his behalf—for the thoughtfulness which she had displayed in regard to him. He felt that she had not been merely acting a part in this matter. Whatever he may have suspected on this point at first, he could not doubt the sincerity of the note that sounded through that confession of hers—she had called it a confession, and she had called herself a fool. He did not know much about women, but he knew that when a woman calls herself a fool in earnest, she is very much in earnest.

But why should she have called herself a fool?

This was the question which had bewildered him before, and when it recurred to him now, it produced the same effect upon him.

The more he tried to recall her words the more satisfied he became that there was a good deal in the attitude of Mrs. Abington that he had not yet mastered.

He turned and looked up the room to where she was sitting. She was not looking in his direction. Her eyes



were fixed upon the face of Tom Linley, and she was listening with the most earnest attention to what Tom was saying. She really seemed to be completely absorbed in Tom.

For a few minutes Dick felt jealous of the other youth. Why should this lovely creature, who confessed that she had come from London solely to say a word of comfort in his (Dick's) ear, become in a moment so deeply absorbed in Tom Linley, who had no aspiration in the world except to improve himself as a performer on the violin?

In spite of that sudden twinge—it could scarcely be called a pang—of jealousy which he felt while watching Mrs. Abington giving all her attention to Tom Linley, his bewilderment did not disperse. But to do him justice, he had already ceased to think of her as a kind woman, and this was one step—though he did not know it—toward his discovery of the truth.

He did not get a chance to give further consideration to the question of the lady's motives at that time, for his friend Halhed waylaid him with a lugubrious face and a smile of infinite sickliness.

"You observe, Dick?" he said, nodding significantly.

"I observe much—a good deal more than I can understand," said Dick. "But what do you observe—that I am observing?"

"What? Oh, you must notice it—everybody must notice it. I dare swear that remarks are being made about it in every part of the Rooms," said Halhed.

Dick frowned.

"Do you mean Mrs. Abington?" he asked. "Why, man, 'tis only her fancy to give some slight attention to Tom Linley. She is an actress, and she may be about to act the part of a boy. They are all wild to do boys' parts. My father tells me that it was Mrs. Woffington who set the fashion more than twenty years ago."

"Mrs. Abington! Who cares the toss of a penny what freaks Mrs. Abington may indulge in?" sneered Mr. Halhed.

"No one, except fifty or sixty thousand playgoers in London," said Dick. "But pray, what is on your mind, Nat? Who is there present apart from her that calls for observation?"

"You are not so acute as I believed you to be, Dick, or you would know that 'tis not of any one present people are talking. You should have noticed that Miss Linley is absent, and that every one is saying that she is ashamed to face me. She has reason for it, Dick. Do you not allow that she treated me badly? Oh, you must allow so much; she treated me cruelly, for I give you my word, Dick, that I never offended her even by a look. I was not one of those presumptuous fools who made love to her. No word of love did I ever breathe in her hearing. Do you fancy that I am not speaking the truth, sir?"

"I do not doubt it, Nat—indeed I do not doubt it."

"Give me your hand, Dick; you are my friend. That is why I am perfectly frank with you now, as I have always been. I was ever silent in her presence, and I believed that she respected my silence; she must have known that I was ready to lay my heart at her feet, I was so silent. Ah, she is afraid to face me. She stays away."

"Nat, my friend, if you ask me for my opinion," said Dick, "I will tell you without hesitation that if you saw there was great reason to maintain silence in the presence of Miss Linley, the attitude is even more becoming in her absence. Come, sir, be a man. Think that there's as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it. Good heavens, man! am I doomed to listen to the plaint of every foolish swain who believes that he has been aggrieved by Miss Linley? I tell you plainly, Nat, you must find another confidant. What! Have you no self-respect? Do you think it is to your credit to go about, like a doctor at a funeral, advertising your own failures? Oh, I have no patience with fellows like you who have no backbone. And so good-evening to you, sir."



He turned about, leaving the young man overwhelmed with amazement, for Dick had always shown himself to be most sympathetic—a man to encourage confidences.

Strolling to another part of the Rooms, he felt himself tapped on the shoulder. Looking round, he saw that he was beside a certain Mr. Bousfield—a young gentleman of property who had been paying great attention to Miss Linley.

"You see, she is not here—she has not the courage to come face to face with me," said young Mr. Bousfield.

Dick looked at him from head to foot, and then with an exclamation ran for the nearest door, and made his way home without glancing to right or left, lest he should be confronted by some other men seeking to pour their grievances into his ear. He thought that he had exhausted the tale of the rejected lovers, but it seemed that when he had routed the main body, a company of the reserves had come up, and he did not know what strategy they might employ to force themselves upon him. He felt relieved when he found himself safe at home.

But to say the truth, he was greatly disappointed at not meeting Betsy face to face, when he felt sure of himself—when he felt sure that he would be able to offer her his congratulations without faltering. He had prepared himself for that meeting; and now he had begun to lose confidence in his self-possession, having had a proof of his weakness in the presence of Mrs. Abington. It was not satisfactory for him to reflect upon the ease with which that lady had extorted from him his confession that he was miserable because Betsy had promised to marry another man. Although he had begun talking to her in the same spirit

that he had meant to adopt in regard to Betsy, yet she had only to utter a single sentence, suggesting that she knew his secret, and forthwith he had broken down, and, by confiding in her, had put himself on a level with the full band of plaintive suitors who had gone about boring him with the story of their disaster.

To be sure, Mrs. Abington had professed to stand in need of no confession from him. She had—if she was to be believed—posted down to Bath the moment she had heard that Betsy had given her promise to Mr. Long, in order to tell Dick that she sympathised with him.

And if Mrs. Abington, living in London, was aware of his secret, might it not be possible that it was known to numbers of people living in Bath, who had far more frequent opportunities than could possibly be available to her to become aware of the truth?

This question caused him a sleepless hour after he had gone to bed. He could not endure the thought of being pointed at—of being whispered at by busybodies as one of the rejected suitors. His vanity recoiled from the thought of the bare possibility of his being relegated to so ignoble a position. He made up his mind to go to Mrs. Abington the next day and beg of her to keep his secret.

But, strangely enough, he became conscious of a curious reluctance—it seemed a curious instinct of reluctance—to go to Mrs. Abington. The truth was that what she had said to him when talking unreservedly and sincerely had somewhat frightened him. He had not quite understood what she meant when she had reproached herself for being a fool, and it was because he did not understand her that he was—in a measure—afraid of her. The young animal is invariably afraid of what it does not understand. To do so is an elementary impulse of instinct. That is why a dog is cowed when it sees a ghost; ghosts are unusual—very unusual; and that is why men who have not gone through



a course of astronomy are terrified at the appearance of a comet.

And the more that Dick Sheridan tried to arrive at an understanding of what the fascinating actress had said to him, the more frightened he became. She had spoken with convincing sincerity. That was just where the element of the unusual appeared, giving rise to his fears.

And then there was that little twinge—was it of jealousy? —which he had felt on looking up the Room and seeing her lavishing her attention upon Tom Linley.

He resolved that for the present, at any rate, he would not go near Mrs. Abington.

But when was he to meet Betsy face to face?

## CHAPTER XIV

It was not until he had dined the next day that the thought suddenly came to him:

"Why should not I solve in the simplest way the problem of meeting Betsy Linley, by seeking such a meeting myself? Why should not I go to her at her father's house on the chance of finding her there?"

He wondered how it was that it had not occurred to him long ago to take such a step. Surely, since his aim was to show her and the rest of the world how little he was touched by the news of her having promised to marry Mr. Long, no more effective step than this could be taken by him!

Of course her father would be in the room when he should meet her—certainly Mr. Long would be there; perhaps Tom would be scraping away at his violin, and Polly would be squalling—that was the word which was in his mind when he thought of the likelihood of Mary Linley's being engaged in practising some of her songs in the music-room—Polly would be squalling at the top of her voice. But any one, or all, of these incidents would only tend to make him more at home—more at ease when meeting Betsy for the first time under the changed conditions of her life. The Linleys' house in Pierrepont Street would not seem like the same place to him if Polly's voice were not ringing through it—if the children were not making a noise on the





stairs—if Mrs. Linley was not bustling about with a kitchen apron on, or, in the moments of her leisure, with her knitting-needles clicking over half a yard of worsted hose. Yes, he felt that he would be quite at his ease under the usual conditions of the Linleys' house; and that was why he took no pains to dress himself for the visit. With an instinct of what was dramatically appropriate—he never lost this instinct—he put on the old coat which he had been accustomed to wear when he had enjoyed what Mr. Linley called the "freedom of the Guild of Linley." That would show Betsy and the rest of them—though it didn't matter about the rest of them—that, whoever had changed, he was still the same.

He got his first surprise when the door was opened for him by Mrs. Linley. She had on her working-apron, and her hands were not free from a suspicion of flour. She beamed on Dick and wiped one of her hands on her apron to greet him.

"Come within, Dick," she cried. "Come within, man; though there's no one at home but Betsy and me. These are busy days with us, Dick, and this is the first quiet hour we have had since Tom returned from Italy. Of course you have heard the news—all Bath is talking of it, and I shouldn't wonder if it had gone as far as the Wells! 'Tis great news, to be sure; but it means a deal of extra house-work, and more pastry. The children are all gone to Monsieur Badier's assembly. The boys are taking part in the minuet, and Polly is to sing for the company between the dances. Mr. Linley and Mr. Long are at Lawyer Stott's. These settlements are always a trouble, though I will say that Mr. Long is more than liberal in his views. Poor Betsy! What will the house be without her, Dick? You will find her in the music-room. She sings every day now, but not real singing—only for her own pleasure. There she goes. Oh lud! why am I standing talking like this

when I should be turning my tartlets in the oven? Sniff, Dick, sniff! You have a fine nose. Do you smell the smell of burning paste, or is it only a bit over-crisp?"

Dick sniffed.

"I wouldn't be too sure of those tartlets, madam," said he. "But I don't believe there is more than a brown sniff coming from the oven."

"Oh lud! if you can sniff the brown, you may swear that the paste is black; you must make allowance for the distance the smell has to travel. Go upstairs; you'll be able to track her by the sound."

The good woman was already at the farther end of the passage to her kitchen before Dick had begun to mount the stairs.

The sound of Betsy's singing went through the house. The song was one of Dr. Arne's, which he had always loved. But had he ever loved the voice till now?

This was his thought while he stood outside the door of the music-room waiting for the song to come to an end.

It seemed to him that her singing of that song had the magical power of bringing before his eyes every day in the past that he had spent near her. The day when he first saw her she had sung that very song. It was at one of the entertainments given by his father in Bath, and he had just left Harrow. Every phrase of that song which now came from her lips renewed his boyish impressions of the girl, her beauty and the witchery of her voice. He could see himself standing before her, silent and shy, when she had come later in the day to have supper at his father's house. He had been silent and shy, but she had been quite self-possessed. It was upon that occasion that Mr. Burke referred to the Linley family as a Nest of Linnets.

Dick remembered how he had wondered why it was that he himself had not said that about the Linleys: why should



it be left to Mr. Burke to say it when it was exactly what was in his own mind?

He had loved her then. He recollected how he had struggled hard all the next day to write a poem about her—a song that her father might perhaps set to music to be sung by Betsy herself.

And then . . . and then . . . and then. . . .

The ghosts of the sweet past days flitted before him while the sound of that song enveloped him, and every spectral day shone white and bright in his memory. For a time he failed to realise that they were merely shadows flitting across his memory. They seemed to him full of life—a heart beating in every one of them. Alas! it was only his own heart that throbbed with those sweet recollections; for when the song faded away and closed in silence, he felt that he was alone. The beautiful creature of those old days had passed away from him and had left him lonely. He had awakened from a dream.

He felt such a sadness come over him that he could not open the door that separated them. He turned silently away, and was about to go down the stairs, when suddenly the door opened and the girl took a step into the lobby. She started, and gave an exclamation of surprise.

"What! is't you, Dick?" she cried. "Why, how was it that I failed to hear you come? How is it that you are going down the stairs?"

His self-possession had fled at the moment of her appearance. He faltered out something.

"You were singing, that was how you did not hear me come; and then—then—well, I thought that—that maybe I should disturb you by entering. Yes, you were singing."

"Oh, Dick!" she said, and there was a note of reproach in her voice.

She turned and walked back into the room. He followed her.

"I knew you would come, Dick," she cried, giving him both her hands. "Oh, I knew that you were not one who would stay away! I looked for you all yesterday, and I waited within the house all this morning. But you have come now, Dick, and I am glad—you know that I am glad to see you. Were we not always friends—the very best friends that could be, Dick?"

"Yes, I have come, dear Betsy," he said. "I have come to wish you—to wish you happiness; indeed, I wish you all happiness—with all my heart—with all my heart and soul, dear Betsy."

He saw her white figure before him through the mist of the tears that sprung to his eyes. And at that moment there was really no desire in his heart but that she should be entirely happy. Every selfish wish—every sense of disappointment—every sense of wounded vanity—every sense of self had dissolved in that mist of tears that came to his eyes, but did not fall.

She was looking into his face, but she did not see that there were tears in his eyes. Her own tears had sprung, and they did not remain in her eyes; they were running down her face.

She could not speak. She could only hold his hands, and all the time she was making a pitiful attempt to smile, only he could not see this.

They stood there silently for a long time. At last he felt her hold upon his hands slacken. Still, there was a suddenness in her act of letting them drop finally. With a sound like that of a little sob, she turned away from him and stood before one of the windows looking out upon the street.

He did not say a word. What word was there for him to say? He had no thought of the clever, cynical things he had meant to say to her on the subject of marriage. He did not at that moment even remember that it had been his intention to say such words to her, so that he did not



loathe himself until he had gone home and remembered what his intentions had been the previous day.

He stood silent in the middle of the room. Quite a long space of time had elapsed before she turned to him, and now he could see the smile that was upon her face.

"I knew you would come to see me, Dick," she said; "for I know that there is no one in the world who would be gladder to see me happy than you, Dick. And you—you will be happy too—you will give me a chance some day of seeing you happy, will you not? It would make me so happy, Dick."

He shook his head—that was his first impulse; but immediately afterwards he said:

"Oh yes; why should not I be happy—one day, Betsy? Oh, don't take any thought for me, dear; I dare say that I shall be able to—to—— What is it that makes people happy, Betsy? Is it love—is it loving—is it being loved?"

"Oh, Dick, there are surely plenty of things in the world besides love!" said she.

"There are, but none of them is worth working for," said he. "There is fame; you have that—you have enjoyed it for years——"

"Enjoyed it? Enjoyed——Ah, Dick, I have promised to marry Mr. Long in order to escape from it. Now you know why I have given him my promise. It is because I cannot live the life that is imposed on me—because I feel that if I were to continue leading this life I must one day throw myself into the Avon, seeking for rest. I hate the fame which has put my name into the mouth of every one. Oh, Dick, if you could know how all these years my heart has been singing that one anthem, 'Oh for the wings of a dove—the wings of a dove, to fly away and be at rest!' I have heard the boys in the Abbey sing it, but they did not know what the words meant. I know what they mean, and my heart has been singing them all these years. My soul has

been so filled with that longing that there has been no room in it for any other thought—any other aspiration. You can understand me, Dick—I know that you can understand me. My father cannot. He loses patience with me; and Tom, from whom I hoped so much, he is worse than my father. He has no thought in life apart from his violin, and he is happy only when people are applauding him."

"And Mr. Long—does he understand you?" asked Dick.

"Oh yes—yes; I feel that he does," said the girl. "Mr. Long is so good—so kind—so considerate."

"Oh yes; and you are still ready to do him the injustice of marrying him?" said Dick.

Her face flushed. She looked at him without speaking a word for some moments, then she turned away from him and faced the window, out of which she had been looking pensively.

He caught one of her hands from behind.

"Forgive me, dear Betsy, forgive me!" he cried passionately. "Oh, my Betsy, I did not come here to add to the burden which you have to bear; I did not mean to reproach you; only—you know—you know what is in my heart, dear—what has been in my heart all these years! I did not speak. What would have been the good of telling you? You knew it; you knew all that was in my heart!"

"I knew—I knew," she said, and every word sounded like a sob.

He was still holding her hand, but she had not turned to him. He was behind her.

"And I knew that you knew, and that gave me hope," he said. "I had hopes that one day—some day—— Oh, why did my father treat me as he did? Why did he take me from school and bring me here to spend my life in idleness? He would not consent to my learning anything that would be of use to me, that would have enabled me to earn bread for myself. Why could not he have given



me at least a chance of doing something—the chances that other boys are given?"

He had flung her hand away from him and had gone passionately to the farther end of the room, his hands clenched.

"What was the good of my hoping—dreaming—longing?" he continued, speaking across the room. "It seemed that every one was to have a chance except myself. But still, that did not prevent my loving you, Betsy—loving you as none of the more fortunate ones could love you. It was the one solace left to me, and you knew it; you knew that I loved you always; you knew——"

"Oh, Dick, Dick, do not be cruel!" she cried. "Let me implore of you. Oh, Dick, let us be to each other to-day as we used to be long ago when we were children together. You remember how frank we used to be to each other, telling each other everything? How could we be otherwise? We had not learned any language but that of frankness. Dear Dick, I know what was in your heart. You hoped, and I, too, hoped and hoped, until my life became unendurable. . . . Ah, can you blame me because when my chance of freedom came I accepted it? I promised to marry Mr. Long; but listen to me, Dick: I give you my word that if you tell me that I was wrong I will go to him and take back my promise."

He turned to her, and his hands instinctively clasped themselves.

"Oh, Betsy—my Betsy!" he cried; and then he was silent.

There was a long pause before she said, in a low but firm voice:

"Tell me what I am to do, Dick, and I will do it. I have given you my word."

"Oh, my beloved!" he said. His hands were clasped. He was gazing at her standing there before him in all the

pathos of her beauty. He knew that if he were to speak the word to her she would keep her promise to him, and the word was trembling on his lips. The temptation to speak it—to bring her back to him—almost overcame him. He looked at her—he faltered—then, with a cry, he put up his hands to his face, shutting her out from his sight, and flung himself into a chair with his head bent and his hands still upon his face.

"God help me! God help me!" he cried through his tears.

"And me too, Dick; God help me!" she said. "Oh, I knew that I could trust you, my Dick! I knew that you were noble—that you were equal to that act of self-sacrifice: a greater act of self-sacrifice than mine. You will not say the word; I knew that you would not say it."

She was kneeling beside his chair, and she had put an arm across his shoulders—it was almost round his neck.

Still he sat there with his face down upon his hands.

"Dear Dick, the noblest life is that which is made up of self-sacrifice," said she. "Yours is the strong and the noble life. But mine—— Oh, I feel that if I were strong I would be able to submit to my fate without murmuring. I would not seek to free myself from the life which I have led—the life which I abhor. But I am weak—I know it—I own it, and I feel that I cannot endure it any longer. The last time that I sang in public must be my last time to sing. I made up my mind that anything—death—would be preferable to such an ordeal. Oh, Dick, can you blame me greatly if, when Mr. Long came to me, I welcomed him as a slave welcomes the one who sets him free? I felt that he had come to stand between me and death."

He put up his hand and took the hand which was resting on his shoulder, her arm crossing his neck. He held it in all tenderness for some time, his eyes looking into hers.



Their faces were close together, but he did not kiss her face. Their breath came with the sound of a sigh.

"Dear child," he said at last, "dear child—dear Betsy, I was selfish even to say so much as I did to you—to say so much as even suggested a reproach. But, thank God, I am strong enough to resist the temptation which you put before me. I dare not ask you to change anything that has happened. It has been decreed by Heaven that we are to walk in different ways, and I hope with all my heart that you will have happiness. I asked you just now whence happiness sprang to any one. Dear Betsy, that question has been answered since I heard you speak. Happiness comes by self-sacrifice. Happiness comes to those who seek not their own good, but the good of others. That is why I can hope that you will be happy, my dear one."

"Indeed, that is what is in my heart, Dick," she said. "I feel that I can now do something for the ones I love—for my sisters—for my brothers. Mr. Long is kind and generous. He will, I am assured, help us all. Poor father is obliged to work so hard, and mother is a drudge. I think that little Maria has a nature like mine, and I shall be able to save her from all that I have gone through. And then, and then—well, there is something else to take into account. You can guess what it is, Dick?"

"Yes, I think I know what is on your mind, Betsy," he said. "You have been pestered by suitors, and now you hope that you will have at least a respite."

"A respite!" she cried. "Oh, Dick, I shall be safe for evermore. You do not know what I have suffered. It would seem as if every man who ever heard me sing considered that he had a right to send letters to me—letters full of compliments—and every compliment was an insult to me."

"Why did you not tell me?" he cried, starting up with clenched hands. "Why did you not give me a hint of this?

You know that I would have made every rascal among them answer to me with his life for every insult offered to you."

"I know that—that was why I kept everything a secret from you," she said. "The thought that you would be in danger on my account—— Ah, I know that blood has been shed already, and even now I do not feel safe. Captain Mathews—he was the most persistent of my persecutors, and even yet . . . he uttered the most terrible threats against me only yesterday. I do not feel secure."

"I will kill him—I swear to you that you have only to hold up your finger, and I will kill him."

"I know it, dear Dick—I know it. But do you think that I would consent to your running into danger for me? Oh, I would submit to anything sooner than that you should be put in jeopardy of your life. But I have told you all this that you may the more readily understand why I should be filled with longing to go away and hide myself in some place where there is calm and quiet—some place that has always been in my dreams. It must have come to me with the hearing of the anthem, 'The Lord is my Shepherd.' Oh, the vision of the green pastures beside the still waters! Now you know all that there is to be known, and you will not judge me too harshly, Dick?"

## CHAPTER XV

He saw the appealing look upon her face, and he knew that he had never seen so pitiful an expression before. Her fear was that he might judge her hastily and harshly. Ah, how could she have such an apprehension so far as he was concerned? He forgot while he looked into her face that there had ever been in his heart any thought of bitterness against her. It was impossible that he could even for a moment have entertained a thought except of sympathy in regard to her.

Did there exist in all the world a girl with so gentle—so sensitive—a nature as was hers? It would, he knew, have been impossible to make most people in the world in which they lived—the shallow, cynical, artificial world of fashion—understand how this girl should shrink from everything that young women in their world hoped to achieve. He knew that Elizabeth Linley was envied even by duchesses. There was no woman too exalted to be incapable of looking on her with envy. Dick Sheridan had heard from time to time the remarks which were made upon her by the *grandes dames* who frequented the Pump Room. The Duchess of Argyll, who twenty years before, had taken St. James's by storm, when she was only the younger of the two Miss Gunnings—she had now become Mistress of the Robes and had been made a Peeress in her own right—he heard this great lady say that Miss Linley was the most beautiful

young woman in England, and almost equal in this respect to what her own sister, the Countess of Coventry, had been at her age.

And the Duchess of Devonshire—he had heard her say that she was quite content to come to Bath to hear Miss Linley sing once only.

This was the verdict of the two greatest ladies in England, and he knew that what the duchesses thought one day all England thought the next. (The commendation which Miss Linley had received from the king himself when she had sung to his Majesty and the Queen at Buckingham House was not worth considering alongside that of the two great duchesses.)

Could any one believe that such a girl, envied as she was by all the rest of womankind, should shrink from the applause which greeted her every time that she sang—from the admiration which the most distinguished people in England offered to her? Could any one but himself understand the shrinking of that pure soul of hers from the fame that was hers—the adulation of the fastidious? Could any one believe that with all the world at her feet, her dearest wish—her most earnest longing—was for the seclusion of the green pastures, for the quiet that was to be found beside the still waters.

He looked at her, and felt a better man for looking at her. She was one of those rare women who carry with them the power of making their influence for good felt by all with whom they come in contact. No one could be in her presence and remain the same. She was a garden of roses. Dick Sheridan had come to her with his heart full of bitterness—he had been treasuring up hard words to say to her—treasuring up words of keen steel as though they were soft gold; and yet before he had even come into her presence—while he was still standing leaning up against the doorway, listening to her singing—every hard word,



every harsh thought had vanished. And now he was standing before her wondering how he could ever have had a thought of her except of tenderness and unselfish devotion. In her presence he had ceased to think of himself. Her happiness—that was what he thought of. He was quite content to take no account of himself in the world in which her happiness was centred. And yet she suggested that there was a possibility of his judging her harshly.

"What you have suffered!" he cried. "Is it the decree of Heaven that those who are more than half divine should have more than double the human capacity for suffering? That is the price which such as you have to pay for a nature such as yours. And you ask me not to judge you too harshly. Ah, my Betsy, you are judging me too harshly if you fancy it possible that I could have any thought about you that was not one of tenderness and affection. Tell me how I can serve you, tell me how I can stand between you and the world—the world that can never understand such a nature as yours. The world is human, and you are half divine."

"Ah, no!" she cried. "If mine were such a nature, I should be strong enough to endure the worst that could come to me. Alas! I am very human."

"Show me some one who is very human, and I will show you some one who is very nearly divine," said he. "What Bishop O'Beirne said about you long ago is the truth; you are more than half an angel. That is why people fail to understand you. I do not think that even I, who have known you so long, have quite understood all the sweet unselfishness of your nature until now. We are being divided now, dear Betsy. We are like ships that meet and then sail separate ways; but whatever may happen, I pray of you to think of me as one who understood you. I pray of you to call for me at any time that you may stand in need of some one to help you.

You know that I will come from the farthest ends of the earth to help you."

"I know it, Dick," she cried,—"I know it. A day may come when I shall have only that thought to sustain me."

There was a silence between them. It lasted for some time, each looking into the face of the other, and seeing there a very pale face—each holding the hand of the other, and finding it very cold.

Suddenly the silence was broken by the sound of voices downstairs—the voices and the laughter of children. Their feet sounded on the stairs.

In a quick impulse of the moment not to be resisted, the girl threw herself into his arms and kissed him on each cheek—rapidly—almost passionately. He held her close to him and kissed her on the lips. In another instant they had separated; the door of the room was flung wide, and the boys rushed in, followed scarcely less leisurely by Maria and Polly. They all talked together, giving some of the more striking details of the Dancing-Master's Assembly.

Polly, who was burning to make Dick acquainted with the opportunities of the newest minuet, was unceremoniously elbowed aside by one of the boys, who had a good deal to say on the subject of the refreshments. The buns might certainly have been fresher, he asserted; and Dick freely admitted his right to speak as one of the cognoscenti on the subject of the bun. But the critic was in turn pulled aside by little Maria, who had been presented with a cup of ice for the first time in her life, and was (paradoxically) burning to record her impressions on the subject of ice as a comestible. She admitted being startled at first, but she indignantly denied the impeachment of one of her frank brothers to the effect that she had been too frightened to swallow

THE DOOR OF THE ROOM WAS FLUNG WIDE, AND THE BOYS RUSHED IN.
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the first spoonful, but had, without a voice, borrowed a hasty handkerchief—— No, she had swallowed it, she declared, with a vehemence that carried suspicion to all hearers—she had swallowed it, and if she had not taken a second it was not because she was afraid, but because she was not greedy, like—she was in no doubt as to the identity of the greedy one of the party—the one who had eaten three slices of plum cake, and had not refused, as would have been polite, the fourth tumbler of lemonade. It was Master Oziah who accused himself by excusing himself in respect of this transaction.

Only three of the group were talking together, their voices becoming somewhat shrill, when Tom entered, and in a moment silence dropped on all. Tom had, since his return, given them to understand, upon many occasions, that he would not overlook any boisterousness on their part. He talked of nerves, and the young ones had stared at him. They had never heard the word before, and at once jumped to the conclusion that it was some foreign malady—perhaps Italian, and not unlikely to be a variant on the plague or the black death—terrors which had now and again been used by a nurse as a deterrent to their boisterousness.

Silence followed the entrance of Tom—silence and a nudge or two passed faithfully round the group from rib to rib. Tom, on entering the room, had suggestively left the door open—quite wide enough to allow of the exit of all the youngsters in couples without inconveniencing themselves.

He glanced significantly at the opening, and the hint was not lost upon the children.

Only Polly remained in the room. Tom could, no doubt, have dispensed with the society even of Polly; but that young lady had no intention of being in any sense

put out by her brother, though her father had hitherto taken his part in any domestic difference, on the plea that Tom was a genius.

She threw herself in a chair, displaying all her finery, and hoping Dick would notice at least some portion of it.

"Tom has been visiting Mrs. Abington these three hours," said she, with a nod to Dick.

"She took quite a fancy to Tom last night," said Dick. "But I had great trouble inducing Tom to let me present him to her. I think I showed some tact in excusing him by letting the lady know that he had buried his heart under the bridge of his fiddle."

"You did not tell me that she is devoted to music—to the fiddle," said Tom.

"'Tis the first I heard of it," said Dick. "I have heard of some of her devotions, but the fiddle was not among the number."

"You probably never took the trouble to find out, and she is not the sort of lady to obtrude her talents on an unwilling ear," said Tom.

"Oh!" remarked Dick.

"She is not such a lady," continued Tom. "But the truth is that she possesses a fine and elevated judgment on musical matters."

"That means that she praised your playing up to the skies," suggested Polly. "I have not lived in the house with musicians all these years to no purpose."

Betsy and Dick laughed; but Tom ignored their laughter as well as Polly's rudeness.

"I knew what a mind she had when she gave me her opinion on Handel last night," said he. "'Handel spent all his life building cathedrals,' were her words."

"And somebody else's words, I daresay, before they descended to her," remarked Polly. "But they are not true; at least, I never heard of Handel's building any



cathedral. Let us count all the cathedrals in England, and you'll very soon see——"

Tom gave a contemptuous laugh.

"Of course, every one must know that she was alluding to the oratorios of Handel," said he. "Has anything finer or more apt been said about the oratorios, Dick?"

"The phrase is very apt—indeed, it is striking," acquiesced Dick.

This degree of praise by no means satisfied Tom. He gave an exclamation that sounded almost derisive.

"Apt—striking—almost striking!" he cried. "*Cielo!* have you no appreciation of perfection? I tell you that nothing finer—nothing more beautiful was ever said in the world."

"Oh, she must have been impressed by your playing," said Polly.

"Don't be a goose, Polly," said Betsy. Then she turned to her brother. "Yes, dear Tom, any one who knows anything of Handel's methods will allow that to suggest a parallel between one of his great oratorios and a cathedral is—is—well, all that you say it is."

"Only one who is devoted to music and who understands its mysteries could have so sublime a thought," said Tom. "I felt it to be a great privilege to be permitted to play to such an audience this afternoon."

"For three mortal hours," whispered Polly.

"Three hours—immortal hours," said Tom. "But the time was all too short."

"I am afraid that I shall never be a musician," said Polly, with a stage sigh.

"What did you play for Mrs. Abington, Tom?" asked Betsy.

"I took some rolls of music with me," replied Tom; "but I found that there was no need to have gone to such trouble. She wished to have it explained to her how—

how — never mind, 'twas a theory of mine — we talked together about it — she and I — last night in the Long Room. Mr. Walpole came up—Mr. Selwyn—Mr. Williams —they had fresh-made epigrams—pleasantries taken from the French. They wearied her, but she was too polite to yawn in their faces."

"No; she would not yawn in their faces," said Dick. "And what was the subject of your theory, Tom? And how did it come that you had no need for the rolls of music you took with you to her lodgings?"

"'Love and its Interpretation by Music'—that was the point upon which she expressed the liveliest interest," said Tom.

"Oh, this is no place for me; I am too young," cried Polly demurely, as she rose from her chair and went to the door.

"Polly has become insufferable," said Tom in a tone of irritation. "Of course, any one who has studied music knows that it is a science."

"It is assuredly a science. Language is a science, I have often heard my father assert; and since music can interpret the language of love into phrases that can be easily understood, it must be granted a place among the sciences," said Dick. "But is't possible that Mrs. Abington would not listen to your demonstration of this science on your violin?"

"*Cielo!* Why do you suggest that she would not listen?" cried Tom.

"Why, man, have you not just said that you had no need of the rolls of music which you carried with you?" said Dick.

"Oh, I had no need for the printed music. I improvised for her," replied Tom.

"In the Italian fashion?" inquired Dick. "Well, I am certain that you had a most sympathetic listener to your



phrases of interpretation. She is, as you say, devoted to —to—science."

"She was more than sympathetic," cried Tom. "Oh, it is a better instruction for one to play to such a listener than to receive a lesson from a Maestro."

"Mrs. Abington is undoubtedly fully qualified to give lessons," said Dick. "I am sure you will learn much from her, Tom, if you give her your attention."

And then Mr. Linley entered the room.

## CHAPTER XVI

DICK stayed to supper with the Linley family; and in spite of the thought that this was probably the last of many delightful suppers at the house in Pierrepont Street—the reflection came to him often in the course of the evening after a burst of merriment from the children, in which Betsy and he joined, Tom being the only one to remain grave—he felt quite happy. To be sure his happiness was tinged with melancholy; but this fact did not cause it to be diminished—nay, his gentle melancholy seemed only to have the qualities of a tender summer mist at sunset, which makes the sun seem larger and gives it colour. The gentle sadness of his reflections only impressed him more deeply with a sense of his happiness—his happiness which arose from a sense of self-sacrifice. In the presence of Betsy he had lost sight of himself, as it were. He gave no thought to the certainty of his own lonely future. He could only think of the possibility of happiness which awaited his dear Betsy.

Mr. Long was not present at this supper: he had gone to his friends, the Lambtons, at the Circus, Mr. Linley explained; and Dick fancied that he saw a new light in Betsy's face when her father had presented Mr. Long's apologies. But he did not mistake the meaning of what he saw; he knew that whatever satisfaction she felt at that moment was due solely to her reflection that he, Dick,





would not now be subjected to the restraint which Mr. Long's presence could scarcely fail to put on him. He perceived that she was anxious that this farewell supper should include no element that would interfere with his happiness. And he gave her to understand that in this respect she need have no misgivings. The children, who had always made a great friend of him, had never before found him so merry—so full of stories: he had not really met an ogre since he had last seen them; but he was in correspondence with one, and hoped, upon the next occasion of his coming to Pierrepont Street, to be able to let them know what his views were on many topics of interest. And perhaps at the same time he might be able to tell them something of the professional career of a pirate whom he knew, and who was making quite a name for himself by his many acts of cold-blooded barbarity in the Channel. Meantime he gave them a circumstantial account of the night's work of a certain Irish fairy, who had attained some amount of popularity in the old days, when the only industrious section of the inhabitants were the fairies.

The children, consulting together in a corner of the room after supper, came to Dick and communicated to him the result of a plebiscite as to whether he or Mr. Garrick was the more entertaining; and they were happy to let him know that, while opinion was divided as to which of them could make the funniest faces when telling a story, there was perfect unanimity on the question of the quality of the stories, those told by Dick being far in advance of Mr. Garrick's, on account of their seriousness. Mr. Garrick's stories were, Maria asserted, as the mouthpiece of the group, far too ridiculous to be believed. But Dick's, it appeared, were well up to the level of the nursery, being perfectly plausible, especially those dealing with the Irish fairies.

Mrs. Linley was the only one of the party who was in

a mood to regret the absence of Mr. Long. She had taken special care that the pastry should be of that type which appeals to gentlemen who are as a general rule not partial to pastry. Mr. Long, she told Dick, had never avoided her pastry—no, not even when it came in such a questionable shape as an open tartlet, which Mr. Linley had often said might well make the boldest tremble.

The good woman questioned very much if Mr. Long would partake at the Lambtons' of any more wholesome fare than would have been at his service had he returned to Pierrepont Street; for though it was understood that the Lambtons had a French cook, who had once been in the employment of Lord Durham, yet for her part she did not believe that a Frenchman could cook a supper for an English palate,—palate was not the word she made use of, but in gastronomy politeness ignores precision.

After supper Betsy sang one song, her father smoked his pipe outside the music-room, and, refraining from criticism, suffered her to sing it after her own heart. He recognised the fact that she had now passed out of the sphere of serious criticism: she had become an amateur, and an amateur is one who sings for one's own satisfaction, regardless of the feelings of others. Tom was not in the room either: he had gone to his bedroom immediately after supper, and was playing on a muted violin; so that Betsy was permitted to sing without the restraint of any musical presence.

It was getting late when Dick took his leave of those members of the family who remained out of bed, and he found that only for himself and Betsy this leave-taking had any significance. They all begged him to come back again soon—all except Betsy. She took his hand and was silent. She did not even say "good-bye." He said "good-night" to every one but Betsy. To her he said "good-bye."

He found that although the street was in darkness, there



was a suggestion of moonlight on the rims of the hills toward the east. The moon was some days past the full and did not rise till within an hour of midnight. Pierrepont Street was lighted by only one lamp, and was quite silent. In the distance he could see the flaring links of a few belated chairs. From another direction there came to his ears the sounds of the singing of some revellers returning from supper and probably on their way to the lodgings of one of their number, where there would be a card-table.

Before these sounds had passed away into the distance he heard the music that was being played in one of the houses in the South Parade, where a dance was taking place. All the windows were lighted, and, looking up, he saw a shadow or two on the blinds—shadows moving to music—a graceful swaying with arched arms to and fro, and then the sudden sweep of the courtesy and the swing of the bow with the gold-laced hat skimming the the floor. All the grace, the allurement, of that lost poem of the eighteeenth century—the Minuet—came before his eyes with the motion of those shadows with the subdued blaze of a hundred candles behind them.

"Shadows," he said, "these things are all shadows: there is no substance in all this life; shadows fluttering for an hour in the light of the candles, and then passing away to the land of shadows whence they came."

He was in the true mood of the moralist. A gentle melancholy was upon him; and he was outside the room with the dancers. The moralist is the man who has not been asked to join in the dance. He walked on, and before he had quite gone out of hearing of the fiddles, the moon had risen above the edge of the hill and was moving among the fleecy clouds that covered the sky, making irises along their edges.

He had intended to go home, but the night was congenial

with his mood; the moonlight had a touch of his melancholy: it was not garish, but tenderly softened by the swimming clouds; so, feeling as if he had a sympathetic companion, he strolled on for a couple of miles on the Gloucester road, and then turned into a lane that led up the hill. Arriving at the highest point, he seated himself on a low bank, whence he could look down upon the lovely city bathed in that milk-white moonlight.

In the moonlight it seemed to his eyes like the city of a dream. All the enchantment of the first sweet sleep of night permeated it. It was surely like a silver city of a mirage—a wonder of the desert, with towers mingling with minarets and shadowy spires.

He did not feel unhappy. How could any one feel unhappy looking down upon such a scene? And there beneath his eyes the mystery and the magic of it all was added to, for the delicate veil of vapour which had been hanging over the windings of the river began to crawl up the banks, and, under the influence of the gentlest of breezes, to spread itself abroad over the city. Looking down upon it, it seemed to be a silent sea—the sea of a dream that comes without sound and floods the visionary landscape, and then swims into the dreamy moonlight. Tower and spire remained above the surface of the river mist—silver islands rising out of a silver sea.

What was this mystery of moonlight that was spread abroad before his eyes? he asked himself. What did it mean to him? Why had he been led forth on this night to be a witness of its wonders?

Was he to learn on this night of nights something of the mystery of life? Was he to learn that the destiny of man is worked out in many phases unfamiliar to man?

One mystery of life had already been revealed to him this night: the happiness of self-abnegation. She had taught him this—the one girl who came into his life, and



who would, he felt sure, ever remain a part of his life, though it might be that he and she would never meet again as they had been accustomed to meet during the previous two years—she had taught him this, at least, and he felt that his life was not the same since he had learned that lesson. He was conscious of the change. His life was better. It was purified; he was living it, not for the joy of life, not for the ambitions which he hitherto sought to realise, but for the spiritual gain; and he was content even though that gain could only be achieved at the sacrifice of all that he had once held most dear.

And all the time that he was reflecting upon the change that had come to him, the scene was changing under his eyes. The breeze that had lifted the mist from the river and spread it abroad through the by-ways of Bath, strengthened and swept those airy billows away into nothingness, and the still fleecy clouds that had been floating motionless about the moon began to feel the breath that came from the west, bringing up somewhat denser, but still fleecy, masses. The moon began to climb among the clouds, and now and again its disc was hidden as it laboured upward.

He rose from his seat on the green bank, and began to make his way down the lane to the London road. The night was very silent. The striking of the clocks of the city was less clear than that of a bell in the far distance. The barking of a dog came from one of the farms on the opposite slope of the river. The bleating of sheep came fitfully and faintly through the trees that concealed the meadow beyond the upward curve of the road.

He reached the road and made some haste homeward. Hitherto he had seen no wayfarer; but before he had gone more than a mile, he heard the rumble of a vehicle in the distance, and a few minutes after, one of the coaches came up and galloped past in a whirl of dust. Dick turned aside

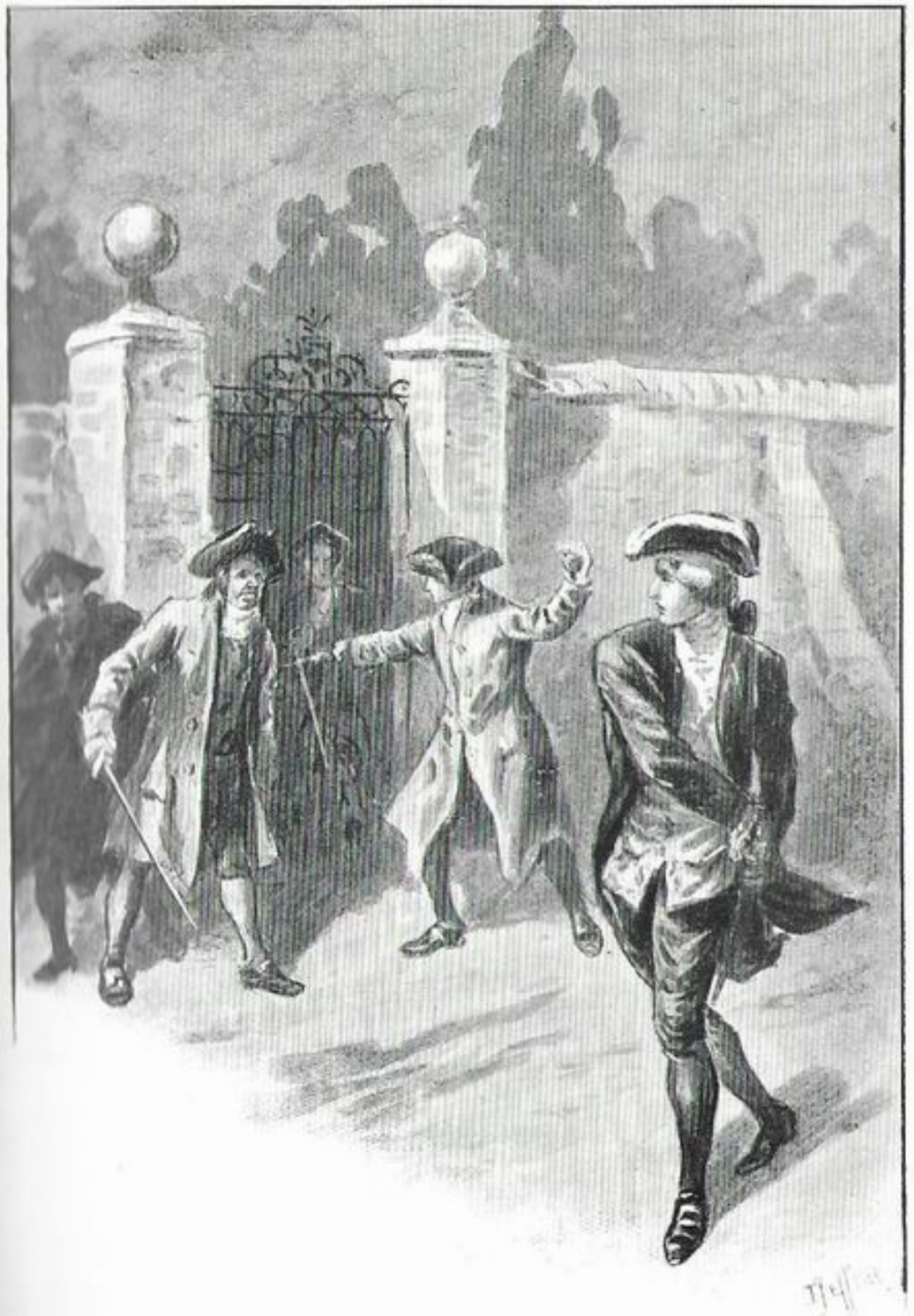
to avoid the dust, and stood for a few minutes in the cover of a small shrubbery. When he resumed his walk the coach was not only out of sight, it was out of hearing as well.

But before he had gone on more than a hundred yards he was startled by hearing another sound—the sound of a man's shout as if for help. It came from the distance of the road in front of him, and it was repeated more than once.

Dick stopped at the first cry, faint though it sounded, and listened closely. After all, he thought, the sound might only come from a shepherd driving his sheep from one pasturage to another; but the next time it came his doubt vanished. He was running at the top of his speed round where the road curved, and before he had gone far he saw three men furiously lunging—the moonlight flashed on their blades—at what seemed to him to be the iron gate between the carriage drive of a house and the road. When he got closer to them, however, he saw that there was a man behind the bars of the gate, and that while he was holding the latch fast with his left hand, with the sword which he held in his right he was cleverly parrying the thrusts of the others.

Without thinking of the likelihood of the men turning upon him if he interfered with them—his Irish blood, which was now pretty hot in his veins, prevented his entertaining the thought of danger to himself—he whisked out his sword, and, with a shout to encourage the man behind the gate, made for his antagonists. He never reached them. At the sound of his voice they contented themselves with a vicious thrust or two between the bars, and then turned and ran.

But Dick's blood was up, and he gave chase to them without pausing to see the condition of the man to whose relief he had come. The fugitives ran for some distance



He whisked out his sword, and, with a shout to encourage the man behind the gate, made for his antagonists. [*page* 164.

along the road, and then jumped the ditch where it was lowest and went headlong down the slope to the river. He followed hard upon them; but a small, though dark, cloud blotted out the moon for a couple of minutes, and he lost sight of them. When the moonlight came again he could only see two of the men; and they were still making for the river. Noting this, all his energies were strained in an effort to cut them off—he did not pause to consider the chance there was of the third man waiting in ambush to rush out on him when he should be passing.

He gained upon the fugitives when racing down the slope, and he was confident of getting within sword length of them when they should be stopped by the river. But the next dozen yards showed him that they would escape: a boat lay under the bank, and the fellows were making for it.

He gathered himself together at the brink of the river and made a rush at the hindmost man; but before Dick's sword reached him, the fellow sprang forward and went headlong into the water. At the same instant the other man threw himself into the boat, and the force of his leap broke loose the boat's mooring-line and sent the small craft half-way across the stream. Dick saw the man make a sudden grab over the side, and then a head appeared above the water, and an arm was stretched up to the gunwale. The boat drifted slowly across the stream, and Dick saw the two men get safely to the opposite bank, where they quietly seated themselves, the one who had been in the river squeezing the water from his hair.

"You rascals!" cried Dick, between his gasps for breath. "You rascals! I'll live to see you hanged for to-night's work."

"You'll do better if you save your breath to chase our employer," said one of the men, and Dick knew from his speech that he was a common man.

"Who is your employer?" he shouted.

The man laughed, saying:

"Find him. He can't be very far off."

Dick ceased parleying with the fellow, and made his way slowly up the sloping ground, looking carefully in every direction for the third man, but not going out of his way to search for him, the truth being that he began to feel that he had had his share in this adventure, the origin of which was as completely unknown to him as its meaning.

He reached the road without catching a glimpse of the third fugitive; and then he sheathed his sword and began to retrace his steps toward the iron gate where the encounter had taken place. Now that the affair had reached a certain point he had become sufficiently interested in it to have a desire to know what it had all been about.

Before he had reached the place, however, he came upon a man in a rather dishevelled condition, engaged in binding up his right hand with shreds of his handkerchief.

He saw that the man was Mr. Walter Long.

## CHAPTER XVII

"Heavens, Mr. Sheridan, it is to you I am indebted for my preservation from those rascals!" said Mr. Long.

Dick took off his hat in acknowledgment of the compliment.

"May I venture to hope that you have not received any severe injuries, sir? Your hand——"

Dick could see that there were some dark spots on the portions of the handkerchief that Mr. Long had managed to tie about his wrist and his knuckles.

"Only flesh wounds—scratches," said Mr. Long. "But you followed the fellows, Mr. Sheridan? That was brave of you. My mind was greatly relieved when I saw you returning. I am glad that you were not so foolish as to rush into what may have been a trap. I suppose that, like rats—other vermin—they escaped by the river?"

"Two of them escaped by the river—I followed them down to the very brink, sir, and saw one of them safely into the water," said Dick. "His companion went headlong into a boat and picked him up. The third I lost sight of shortly after they turned aside from the road."

"Let them go," said Mr. Long. "'Twas God's mercy, Mr. Sheridan, that you were within earshot when I called for help. They attacked me on the road without a moment's warning."

"Footpads!" said Dick.

"H'm—perhaps footpads," said Mr. Long doubtfully.

"I never heard that they infested this road, sir," said Dick. "They must be the lowest in practice at this work. The chance passengers so far out of the city are not frequent after dusk."

"I have my suspicions," said Mr. Long. "I must have been followed by those scoundrels—or they may have lain in wait for me. I was supping with Mr. Lambton at his house on the Circus, and did not leave until late. Then I ventured to take a walk of a mile, tempted by the curiously beautiful night. I assure you I was not dreaming of an attack; but it came. Luckily the fellows rushed out upon me from the shrubbery along the carriage drive to that house, leaving the gate ajar. I had barely time to parry the thrusts of the foremost of the band, and by a disconcerting movement to get within the gate and close it. I saw that my only chance lay in keeping the bars between us. I will do them the justice to say that they also perceived that this was the case. But they only lacerated my hand and wrist."

"You fought bravely and adroitly, sir," cried Dick.

"At the same time, Mr. Sheridan, I know that if you had not come up at that instant I should now be a dead man," said Mr. Long.

"Oh no, sir; you would most probably have run some of them through the body," said Dick. "Cowardly rascals they must be! They showed themselves ready enough to run; they did not give me a chance of a single thrust at any one of them."

"I sympathise with you, Mr. Sheridan," said Mr. Long. "But your sword will be the less soiled. Five minutes—perhaps two—would have done for me. A gate with bars is no effective barrier where the small sword is concerned; and then—— Well, I'm not so young a man as I once was, sir; I was heartily glad at your coming on the scene.



If you are walking back to the town I hope that I may claim your escort to my house."

"I shall feel proud to walk with you, sir," replied Dick, with alacrity. "But I venture to hope, sir, that you will see a surgeon before you retire."

"I assure you there is no need, Mr. Sheridan. I have an excellent servant; there is scarce a wound that he could not heal—he even professes to deal with those of the heart; but there, I think, he professes overmuch. I should like to put his skill to the test; so if you have a friend who is in an evil case in any matter pertaining to that organ, you have only to let me know. By the way, Mr. Sheridan, it may sound ungenerously inquisitive on my part to inquire to what happy accident I owe my life? Is it a usual custom with you to take a rural walk after midnight? Pray, sir, rebuke my impertinence as it deserves by refusing to answer me, if it so please you."

They had now begun to walk in the direction of Bath. The moon had risen high in the sky, and no cloud was visible. The night was so clear that Dick could not help feeling that the gentleman by his side saw his blushes that followed the inquiry. For the first time Dick perceived that he might have some little difficulty in explaining how it was that he came to be outside Bath on foot at that hour. When he had set out on his midnight stroll it had not occurred to him that he might be asked to give an explanation as to the impulse that had sent him forth. He hoped that Mr. Long did not notice his blush. It was only the suddenness of the question that had caused it.

"I took the walk because I had something to—to—think over," he said, without any particular readiness.

"Then you did well to walk at this hour and on such a night," said Mr. Long. "For myself, I can say that I have never yet faced any question that refused to be answered after a night's walk and a night's thoughts. And

now I will place myself on a confessional level with you, by telling you before you ask—you are not so impertinent as to ask—if it be habitual with me to take a midnight walk? I will answer 'No' to that question, sir, and tell you that my walk was due to a certain want of confidence on my part in respect of Mr. Lambton's excellent—too excellent French cook. I supped at Mr. Lambton's, as I believe I mentioned?"

"Mr. Linley said you were going to Mr. Lambton's house, sir," said Dick.

"Oh, then you supped at the Linleys'?" said Mr. Long; "or did you merely meet Mr. Linley in the course of the night after he left me?"

"I supped with the family, sir. Mrs. Linley has had the kindness to treat me as one of the family. She expressed her regrets that you did not come to eat her pastry. She also expressed her want of confidence in Mr. Lambton's cook."

Mr. Long laughed.

"Our fears were not wholly groundless," he said. "I think I made as frugal a supper as is possible in a house where a French cook possessing some determination and four new dishes reigns in the kitchen. And yet I own that an hour after supper, I—I—well, I felt that a brisk walk of a mile might at least prevent my forming an unjust judgment on the cook. On the whole, however, so far as I can gather, I am inclined to believe that Mr. Lambton's cook is merciful as he is powerful. Neither you nor I, Mr. Sheridan, can know into what temptations to tyranny a first-class cook is led. He cannot but be conscious of his own power; and yet Mr. Lambton's cook is, I understand, as approachable as if he were an ordinary person like one of ourselves. Nay, I have heard that some Cabinet Ministers are infinitely more frigid to their colleagues than he is to the other members of the Lambton



household. There's a man for you! And yet people say that the French nation—— But I have not asked you if Mrs. Linley's pastry was as crisp as usual."

"It could scarcely be surpassed, sir, even if it had been made under the superintendence of an university of cooks," replied Dick.

"Then it was not to get rid of the thoughts impelled by your supper that you set out on your walk?" said Mr. Long. "I have heard it said that no man can be a poet who has not been subjected to a course of bad cooking. 'Tis a plausible theory. You have read the poem of the great Italian, Dante, Mr. Sheridan? Well, sir, will any one have the temerity to assert that it was not penned under the influence of a series of terrible suppers? 'Twas but one step further, you will see, from the supper to the Inferno? And there was Milton—well, he follows the Biblical account of the curse falling upon humanity owing to the indiscreet breakfast indulged in by the lady of the garden. And John Bunyan—a great poet, sir, except when he tried his hand at verse-making—his description of the terrors of that Slough of Despond was most certainly written under the influence of a dinner in Bedford gaol. But perhaps you do not think of being a poet, Mr. Sheridan?"

"I have had my dreams in that direction, sir," said Dick, and once again he was led to hope that Mr. Long would not notice his blush. He could not understand how it was that Mr. Long succeeded in getting him to confess so much—more than he had ever confessed to another man.

"You have had your dreams, sir? I am glad to hear it. I would not give much for a lad who has not, before he is twenty, had dreams of becoming a poet. As a matter of fact, Mr. Sheridan, all men who do anything in the world are poets before they are twenty. The practical men are the men who have imagination; and to be a man

of imagination is to be a poet. Now you, Mr. Sheridan, will do something in the world, I fancy."

"Ah, sir, that was my hope—long ago—long ago."

"Long ago—long—— Heavens! you talk of long ago, when you cannot have more than reached the age of twenty-one! Why, I am sixty, sir, and do not venture to speak of long ago. Your life is all before you, Mr. Sheridan; and permit me to say that 'twill be your own fault if it be not a noble life—a notable life 'tis bound to be, considering your parentage. Your mother was one of the most remarkable women of this period of the century. Her novels possess extraordinary merit; I say that, and I was a friend of Mr. Richardson. Your father's genius is recognised. And think of the variety of his attainments. He is not only a great actor, he is a scholar as well; but if he were neither the one nor the other, he might still claim attention as a writer. His theories respecting the importance of elocution are valuable. One has only to hear you speak to become a convert to your father's theories. If you some day obtain recognition as an orator, you will have to thank your father for his admirable training of your voice. You intend, of course, to enter yourself as a student for the Bar?"

"That was also my hope, sir; but I cannot persuade my father to give me his permission to my studying for the Bar."

"What! does he wish you to enter the Church and become as distinguished as your grandfather—one of the few friends and the many victims of the Dean of St. Patrick's?"

"He does not seem to think it necessary for me to enter any profession, Mr. Long. He says I have not sufficient ability to do credit to him and the family—'tis in my brother Charles he has placed his hopes. He has been striving for some time to secure for Charles an appointment under the Government."



"I hope that he may be successful. And does he make no suggestion to you in regard to your future?"

"None whatever. 'Twas my dear mother who insisted on my being sent to Harrow, and I know that her intention was that I should in due time go to Oxford. Unhappily for us all, however, she died before her hopes were realised; and when my father returned from France with my sisters and brothers, I was taken from Harrow and brought here to waste my time. He seemed to think that I should be content to become a hanger-on of some fine gentleman. That is why he has always encouraged me to mingle only with people of title. Our bitterest quarrels—and we have had some, Mr. Long—have been about the Linleys. He has so exaggerated an opinion of the importance of our family, he thinks that it is not fitting that we should associate with the Linleys because they sing in public—because Mr. Linley is merely a teacher of music."

"You amaze me, Mr. Sheridan! Has your father never asked himself wherein lies the difference between a man who teaches singing and one who teaches elocution? I had no idea that he was so narrow in his views. Why, he is worse than Dr. Johnson. 'Twas Dr. Johnson who declared that if your father got a pension from the king, 'twas time that he gave up his. That was a very narrow-minded theory to pretend to have—I say 'pretend,' for when your father got his pension, the good Doctor showed no intention of relinquishing his. Still, that contemptible Mr. Boswell had no right repeating in every direction what Johnson may have said in his haste. You have heard Mr. Garrick drawing on the fool for the entertainment of a company? Every one knows that it was Dr. Goldsmith's humour to say to Johnson, 'Why do you call me "Goldy," sir—"Goldy," when you are well aware that I haven't even silver in my pocket?' And yet Garrick got Boswell to tell us the story t'other night as proof positive of Dr. Goldsmith's vanity.

But this is beside the point, the point being that you would not give up the Linleys, however narrow-minded your father was. Well, Mr. Sheridan, I do not say that you were in the wrong. You have known Miss Linley for some years, have you not?"

"Ever since we were children, sir."

"What! so long ago as that?" Mr. Long laughed, but quite pleasantly—not as some people would have laughed at that moment. "Then I hope, Mr. Sheridan, that you did not fail to offer the lady your congratulations on having accepted the offer of marriage made to her a few days ago? By the way, now that I come to think on it, the one to be congratulated in this case is not the lady, but the gentleman. Is not that your view of the matter?"

"I think, sir, that Miss Linley is the sweetest girl that lives in the world, and that any man whom she loves is fortunate above all his fellows."

"And I agree with you, with all my soul. The man whom Elizabeth Linley loves is fortunate above all the rest of the world. What I am wondering just at this moment, Mr. Sheridan, is whether that man be you or I. Here we are at Millsom Street. I lodge in the last house, where I hope you will be polite enough to call to-morrow to make inquiries after my health. Pray do not forget that I owe my life to you. The man who saves the life of another accepts a fearful responsibility. You will find that out before you have done with me."

He was holding Dick by the hand. But Dick heard nothing of his invitation delivered in so unconventional a formula. A previous phrase of Mr. Long's had taken complete possession of his mind.

"I should like to know, sir, what you meant by saying—by suggesting that—that——"

Dick's stammering was interrupted.

"Good heavens, Mr. Sheridan! you cannot be in earnest



in demanding an explanation of anything I say at this hour?" cried Mr. Long, with uplifted hands. "This, sir, is accepting your responsibility a little too seriously. You will be genteel enough to pay me a visit to-morrow—that is, to-day, for 'tis more than an hour past midnight. In the meantime, may I beg of you to—to . . . that is, not to . . . ah, on second thoughts, I will not beg anything of you. Good-night, good-night."

He took off his hat, and Dick mechanically raised his own. Mr. Long had turned down the street, but Dick still remained at the corner. Mr. Long had actually pulled the bell at the door of his house before Dick ran to his side.

"Mr. Long," he cried, "it has just occurred to me that—that it might be as well for you to say nothing to Miss Linley about the little affair that happened to-night. You know that she is nervous, and to hear that an attack was made upon you might prostrate her."

Mr. Long looked at him in a strangely penetrating way for some moments; then he said:

"You have given expression to the request which I was about to make to you just now. After a moment's consideration I withheld it: I remembered that you were an Irishman, and therefore that there was no need for me to ask you to remain silent in regard to an incident of which you were the hero. Mr. Sheridan, I will respect your wishes. Miss Linley shall not, unless I find reason to act differently, hear of your heroism through me."

"Oh, sir—heroism! that is too strong a word," said Dick.

"Perhaps it is, considering that it was only my life that you saved. Well, we shall say your good-fortune. Will you accept the compromise?"

"Gladly, sir: I shall always think of the incident as the most fortunate of my life."

"And I hope that neither of us, nor Miss Linley, will ever have occasion to think of it as otherwise; and so I wish you good-night again, my dear boy—my dear boy."

He gave Dick his hand once more, and Dick felt his fingers pressed with more warmth than he had ever received from his own father.

He rather wished that Mr. Long was his father.

## CHAPTER XVIII

Dick Sheridan was conscious of a curious impression of elation while lying awake recalling the somewhat exciting incident in which he had played an important part. And when he thought over the details of the occurrence, he felt glad that he was elated. He did himself the justice to refrain from attributing his elation solely to the fact of his having put some rascals to flight, and his having followed them with a naked sword, anxious to run them through. Of course, he did not deny that he found pleasure in the reflection that he had made the rascals fly, and he was quite ready to allow that this pleasure was tinged with regret that he had not been able to get the point of his weapon in between some of their ribs. At the same time, however, he knew that he was sincerely glad that he had been able to save the life of the man who was taking Betsy Linley out of his life.

She had told him, when her hand was in his, that the joy of life was not in living for oneself, but in bringing happiness to others; and he had gone forth from her presence feeling that she had spoken the truth. It was a truth that he had often heard before from the lips of teachers of the elements of Christianity; but its enunciation had produced no greater impression on him than the words of such teachers usually do upon their hearers. All his thoughts had been for himself: seeking his own pleasure—seeking

to cut a good figure before the eyes of the people who were around him. He had even gone to pay his visit to her in the same spirit. He was anxious to cut the figure of a cynical man of the world in her presence, and to show her that he was in no way touched by the announcement that she had given her promise to marry Mr. Long.

But in her presence he felt all the sweet influence of her nature; it surrounded him as the scent of a rose-garden surrounds one who comes among the flowers in June; he breathed it as one breathes the scent of the roses. The fragrance of her presence permeated his life. Her spirit became part of his spirit, and, sitting on the hill-slope, with the mystery of the moonlight about him, he felt himself to be a new man The reality of the change that had come to him was soon put to the test. The chance had been given to him of saving the life of the man who was taking Betsy from him, and he had welcomed that chance. To be sure, when he had run upon the men with his naked sword, he had not known who it was that he was rescuing from his assailants; but he knew now, and he felt that the reflection that he had saved his life for Betsy was the greatest happiness he had ever known.

What would have happened if he had held back his hand at that time?

That question he asked of himself, and he had no difficulty in answering it. He knew that, unless some miracle had happened, nothing could have saved Mr. Long from being murdered. And in that case Betsy would be freed from the obligation which she had accepted.

He knew all this, and he thanked Heaven in all sincerity that he had been able to save the life of the man who stood between him and Betsy Linley. He shuddered at the thought of the bare possibility of his having failed to hear Mr. Long's cries for help; and he felt rejoiced at the thought that he had done an unusual thing in wearing his



sword when going to pay his visit to Betsy. It was not customary to wear swords in the afternoon at Bath, though, of course, they were carried at night. But, when setting out to pay his call, Dick had fastened on his sword, the fact being—though he tried not to include it in the sequence of his thoughts while lying awake that night—that he had meant to accept an invitation to supper and cards at which one of his fashionable friends had hinted the previous evening. After offering Betsy his congratulations, and making a few worldly-wise remarks on the absurdity of marriage, it had been his intention to go to one of the Assembly Rooms, and thence to the supper-party; and, as an early return home was not among his calculations, he felt that it would be prudent to wear his sword.

What a lucky chance it was that he had been so prudent! (He had so successfully avoided thinking of his unworthy project that he had come to attribute his carrying of the sword to his own prudence and forethought.) Without a weapon, he himself, as well as Mr. Long, could hardly have escaped from the footpads, who were undoubtedly most desperate ruffians. And then, having settled the matter of his caution and forethought—two attributes which he had certainly not inherited, and which he could scarcely regard as inevitable to his nationality as an Irishman, from whatever source his intentions regarding the supper-party may have sprung—he went on to think of Mr. Long.

He had never exchanged more than half a dozen words with Mr. Long during the six months that the latter had been in Bath, and he had looked on him as quite an old fogey, possessing none of the brilliant gifts of a man of fashion. None of the *bons mots* of the dialogues of scandal which circulated in the Pump-Room in the morning and in the Assembly Rooms in the evening, having blown about the town during the day, were attributed to him. None of the dainty plums of malice—preserved in vinegar, not

in sugar—which the ladies with the rouge and patches passed round in their *bonbonnières* at the card-tables, came from him; and therefore Dick had never thought of him except as a good-natured elderly gentleman. To have a reputation for good-nature was of itself quite sufficient to exclude any one from the most fashionable set in Bath.

It was really only when it was announced that he was the successful suitor for the hand of Miss Linley, that people began to notice Mr. Long, and then the form that their attention took consisted in their alluding to him as an old fogey, if not an old fool.

Dick noticed that it was mostly the rejected suitors who so alluded to him, and he thought that it showed an amazing amount of weakness on their part: they were simply advertising their own failure—he had said so to his friend Halhed the previous evening in the Long Room, and he made up his mind that, whatever might happen and whatever he might think, he would never betray his own chagrin by calling Mr. Long an old fool.

Of course he could not but feel that it was an act of folly for a man turned sixty to make up his mind to marry a beautiful girl not yet twenty; he thought that he was equal to taking a dispassionate view of the matter. But he would never be heard alluding to Mr. Long as an old fool. He himself was not such a young fool as to give himself credit for any generosity in maintaining an attitude of reticence on this question; he was only determined not to show the same weakness as his friends, who acknowledged Mr. Long to be their successful rival.

But now, after recalling the attitude of Mr. Long when recovering from the effects of the attack made upon him by the three footpads—after recalling the easy tone of his conversation, and the adroitness with which he had obtained from Dick a good deal of information about himself and his prospects, and more particularly his lack of prospects,



Dick came to the conclusion that for the first time in his life he had been speaking to one who was indeed a man of the world—a man who understood his fellow men and who could be humorously tolerant of their weaknesses and their prejudices. He could not but feel, however, that among the attributes of a man of the world which he possessed, there was in parts of his conversation a certain element of the enigmatical. For instance, when almost at the point of parting he had said—— What were his exact words?

"*The man whom Elizabeth Linley loves is fortunate. . . . I am wondering whether that man be you or I.*"

Those were his very words, and they had puzzled Dick the moment they were uttered. They puzzled him much more now that he recalled them. They were certainly very strange words for such a man as Mr. Long to say at such a time as he had said them. Did they mean that he questioned whether Betsy loved him or Dick; or did he merely mean that he was uncertain whether he or Dick was the more fortunate in regard to some matter quite apart from the love of Elizabeth Linley—say, in the matter of age, or in respect of the adventure in which they had both been concerned? Did he mean that it was an open question whether the man who saves another man's life or the one whose life has been saved is the more fortunate?

To be sure, his remark about the good-fortune of a man was connected solely with the question of the love of Elizabeth Linley, so that his saying that he wondered whether the fortunate man was himself or Dick, seemed to be simply equivalent to saying that he wondered whether Elizabeth Linley loved himself, whom she had promised to marry, or Dick, who was no more to her than other men. Still, it might be susceptible of a different meaning; for instance . . . Great heavens! Could it be that Mr. Long was treating thus lightly the bare possibility that the girl

whom he hoped to marry had given all her love to another man?

He could not believe this of such a man as Mr. Long. No; Dick felt that his ear had been over-sensitive. He had allowed himself to be led into a tortuous course of thought, only because Mr. Long had made a pause of perhaps two seconds instead of four between his sentences. It would, he felt, be ridiculous for him to base a theory upon so shallow a foundation. It would be absurd for him to assume that Mr. Long meant to suggest anything more than a casual reflection on a topic worn threadbare in the pulpit—namely, the uncertainty of human happiness.

It was, however, one thing to assure himself that it would be unreasonable to suppose that Mr. Long meant to suggest anything but what was trite, but quite another to convince himself that his ear had played him false; and this was how it came about that he had the first sleepless night of his life, and that he startled his sisters by coming down in good time to breakfast. His appearance was, in fact, rather embarrassing to the housekeeper for the week: Alicia had heard him enter the house at so late an hour that she took it for granted he would not come down to breakfast before noon, and had given her instructions to the cook on this basis. Dick had to face an empty plate until his fish was made ready.

He inquired for his brother—was he the late one this morning?

"What! did not Charles tell you that he meant to go to the country?" asked Alicia.

"Not he," replied Dick. "The country? Why should he go to the country at this time?"

"Why, he said that you advised him to do so," cried Elizabeth. "You know what is the only reason he could have for flying from Bath just now. Poor Charlie! he feels that Betsy was not considerate toward him."



Dick laughed. He had quite forgotten that he had counselled his brother to go away for a time. He had really been more in jest than in earnest in the matter; but Charles had taken him very seriously, and had gone off without an hour's delay to a farmhouse eight miles out of Bath, on the Wells road. He was not slow to perceive what Dick had hinted at—that a gratifying degree of prominence might be given to his name if the fact became well known that he had been so greatly overcome by the news of Miss Linley's having promised to marry another man as to make it impossible for him to continue living in the same town with her.

"Poor Charlie!" said the elder Miss Sheridan in a tone that was meant as a reproof to Dick for his levity—"poor Charlie! But we can keep the matter a secret; we need not add to his humiliation, Dick, by talking of his having gone away on account of Betsy's treatment of him."

Dick laughed more heartily still.

"My dear girl," he cried, "your suggestion is well meant, but poor Charlie would not thank you if you were to act on it. Poor Charlie knows perfectly well that he has now got a chance of attaining such fame as may never come to him again so long as he lives. When the fickle Phyllis rejects Strephon's advances and accepts those of Damon, the Pastoral that commemorates the event confers immortality upon Strephon the rejected, just as surely as if he had been the fortunate lover. I can assure you that Bath, and Oxford too, I doubt not, are just now crowded with Strephons anxious to be handed down to posterity as the rejected swains. Take my word for it, poor Charlie would only be chagrined if he thought that no notice whatever would be taken of his forlorn condition as the rejected swain. Good heavens! wait until Friday comes, and you scan the Poet's Corner of the *Advertiser*; if you

do not find poor Charlie making a bid for the immortality of the doleful Strephon, I am greatly mistaken."

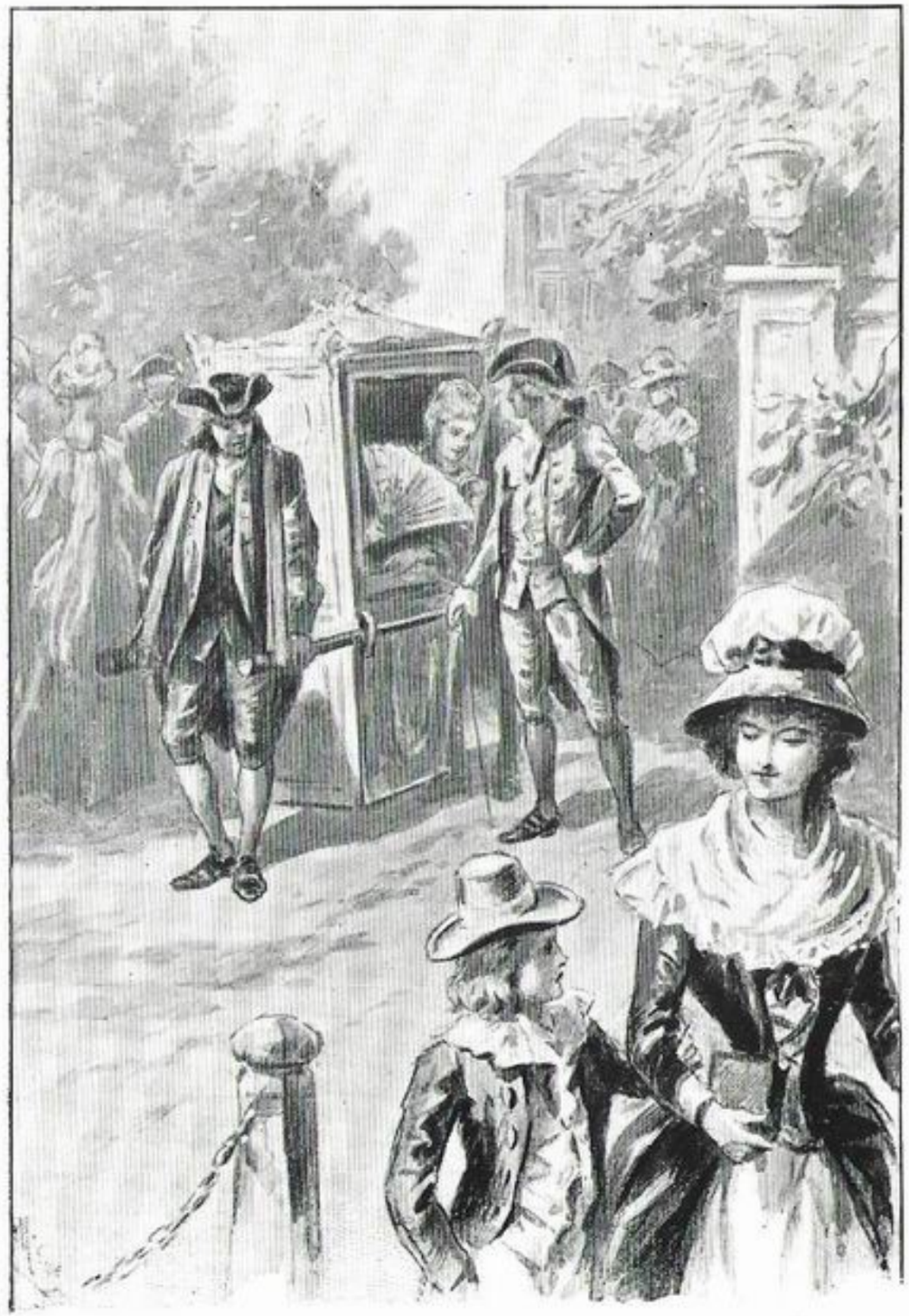
The girls stared at him.

"You are wrong—quite wrong, Dick," cried the elder. "Yes, you are. Charlie begged of us to keep his departure a secret. He said he would not have it known for the world."

Dick did not laugh again: on the contrary, he became solemn. He felt that it would be heartless on his part to make the attempt to undermine the simplicity of his sisters. But the fact that Charlie had taken such elaborate precautions to give publicity to the news of his departure caused Dick to have a higher opinion than he had up to that moment possessed of his brother's knowledge of human nature.

And then, finding that Dick was silent—penitentially silent—the two girls thought that the opportunity was a fitting one to give expression to their views regarding the heartlessness of Betsy and the devotion of Charlie. They had seen Mr. Long, and were ready to assert that poor Charlie was quite as good as he was, without being nearly so old; and Miss Sheridan went so far as to suggest that the family of Sheridan were fortunate in that they were not called on to welcome Betsy Linley as a stepmother.

Dick began to think, after this remark, that perhaps he had done his sisters an injustice in assuming their entire simplicity.



MRS. ABINGTON WAS IN HER CHAIR.

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## CHAPTER XIX

MRS. ABINGTON was in her chair. She had just been to see her friends at Bath-Easton, and was hoping that she would be in time for service at the Abbey. That was why she stopped Dick in the street. What did he think? would she be in time for the service? She would be quite content to accept Dick's opinion on the subject.

Dick looked at his watch.

"Madam," he said, after calculating a moment, "you will not be in time for the Confession, which seems rather a pity; but I promise you that you will be in good time for the Absolution, if you make haste, and that will be to your advantage."

"Sir, you are a rude boor!" cried the lady very prettily.

"If so, madam, I am rude at my own expense," said he. "My words implied a '*Nunc Dimittis*.'"

"Now that I come to think on't, that is so," said she. "But I am sure that you, being a man, must hold with me that the ideal Church is the one that grants absolution without insisting on confession."

"I am a sound Churchman, Mrs. Abington," said he; "I will not countenance the least suspicion of what is not orthodox."

"Psha! sir, that is equivalent to a confession that you like your salads without vinegar," said she—"your punch without lemon—your spice-cakes without spice—your charmer without a bit of Mother Eve."

"Madam," said he, "'tis now you who are orthodox—ay, up to the first chapter of Genesis; but for my part, I adore your sex, from Genesis until the Revelation comes."

"The Revelation? Do you mean until the revealing of the woman or the Revelation of the Divine?"

"Mrs. Abington, I am orthodox: I cannot admit that there is any difference between the two."

"You are a quibbler, I vow; but I would not hear your worst enemy accuse you of being orthodox."

"You can silence such an aspersion, madam, by letting it be known that you extended your friendship to me."

"More quibbling? I swear that 'tis a relief to have a simple chat with young Mr. Linley, after all this battledore and shuttlecock with you wits. Oh yes, Tom is a charming boy."

"I am told that he can illustrate the progress of a passion from Genesis to the Revelation."

"Ay, sir; but with the Apocryphal books left out."

"You can hear passages from them read out in the Abbey."

"He has made me wild to learn the violin. But, I fear, alas! that 'twill be too much for me."

"Faith, Mrs. Abington, 'twill not be for want of strings to your bow," cried Dick, dropping the tone of the man of fashion and assuming the good fellowship of the Irishman, even to his manner of raising his hat and bowing; he hoped that the hint would be taken by the Irish chairmen to lower the roof and resume their journey.

Mrs. Abington put up her hand to the roof.

"Tom is a charming boy," she cried, smiling the enigmatical smile of Miss Prue. "Oh yes; 'twas you who said that his heart was buried in his violin."

"I perceive that 'twas not a safe place of sepulture," said Dick.

"You said the truth when you told me that his heart was



there," said she. "Yes, I can hear the poor thing wail to be released every time he draws his bow across the strings. You will come to see me at my lodgings, will you not, Mr. Sheridan?"

"I will wait until your heart is buried beside Tom's within the frame of his fiddle; 'twere not safe else," cried Dick. "Hasten to your Abbey, or you will miss even the Blessing."

"Meantime, you will think out an epitaph to scratch into the varnish of the violin."

"A simple *Resurgam* will do, for, by the Lord Harry, your heart will not rest long in one place, you beautiful creature!" cried Dick, standing with his hat in his hand while the roof of the chair was lowered on its hinges, and the chairmen went off with their fair burden.

Dick made up his mind that he would be in no haste to visit her at her lodgings. She had made him somewhat afraid of her two nights before, when she had lapsed into sincerity in the Assembly Rooms, and he had not yet come to regard her as free from any element of danger to his peace of mind. He felt, however, that he had accused her wrongfully of the butterfly quality of fickleness: nearly forty-eight hours had passed since she had thought it worth while to captivate Tom Linley, and yet it seemed that she was still faithful to him.

But why should she think it worth her while to captivate Tom Linley?

Dick thought out this question while walking to Mr. Long's house, and before he pulled the bell he had come to the conclusion that Mrs. Abington was merely adapting to her own purposes the advice which Angelo, the fencing-master, was accustomed to give to his pupils. "Have a bout with the foils every day of your life, if only for ten minutes with your little brother in the nursery," was the advice which Angelo gave to pupils when urging on them

the need to keep in constant practice. Yes, Mrs. Abington must have heard him say that.

Tom Linley represented the young brother in the nursery. That was all very well, so long as the fencing was done with foils; but it would be an act of cruelty for an accomplished fencer to introduce rapiers into the nursery. He hoped that little brother Tom would come unscathed out of the encounter which represented to Mrs. Abington nothing more than a laudable desire to keep her hand in.

Dick found Mr. Long alone in his sitting-room. His left hand was rather more elaborately bandaged than it had been when Dick had seen it last. But Mr. Long assured him that the wounds were quite trifling—mere scratches, in fact, scarcely asking for the attention of a surgeon, although his valet had on his own responsibility called in an excellent young man, who could be trusted to do as little as possible to the wounds and so give them a chance of healing speedily, and who also could be trusted to hold his tongue in regard to the occurrence.

"I have been using the cudgel on my brains all the morning trying to invent some plausible excuse for carrying a bandaged hand for a day or two," said Mr. Long; "but up to the present I cannot boast of the result. My dull ass will not mend his pace by beating. Can you come to my help in this matter, as you did in the matter that placed me in need of such a story? Come, Mr. Sheridan, you are a man of imagination and resource."

"Alas, sir," said Dick, "all that I can offer to do is to bear testimony to the truth of any inaccuracy you may find needful."

"Whatever story we may invent, it will not be believed in Bath—so much is certain," said Mr. Long.

"I begin to think that, after all, we might as well tell the truth," said Dick.



"What! you think the case is so desperate as all that?" said Mr. Long.

"There is no better way of mystifying people than by telling the truth, especially when it sounds improbable," said Dick.

"I give you my word, Mr. Sheridan, you seem to speak with the authority of one who had tried what you suggest. Perhaps you may, under the stress of circumstances, have been led into the tortuous paths of the truth. Well, I think that, on the whole, we had better brazen the matter out, and give all Bath a chance of disbelieving us. But if we do so, we must also be prepared with a story to account for our being on the road at so late an hour. Ah, you will find, Mr. Sheridan, that telling the truth necessitates a great deal of tergiversation."

"I must confess, sir," said Dick, "I could scarcely hope to be believed if I were to make the attempt to account for my midnight walk on the simple ground of the fineness of the night."

"It would certainly be thought a very weak plea. Thank Heaven if I say that I supped at Mr. Lambton's and thought it prudent to have a stroll afterwards, I will be believed—at any rate, by such as know that Mr. Lambton has a French cook."

"Then I think it would be as well if we were to make an agreement not to mention my name in connection with the assault upon you; that will save the need for my thinking out a moderately plausible story to account for my presence on the scene."

"What! you would have me face all Bath with the story of having beaten off three footpads single-handed? Oh no, Mr. Sheridan! Anything in reason I am quite willing to state, but I have still some respect left for our acquaintance in Bath, and I decline to lay such a trust in their credulity. Why, sir, Falstaff's story of the knaves in Kendal Green

would seem rational compared with mine! The wits would dub me Sir John the first day I appeared abroad after telling such a tale. And the lampooners—that pitiful tribe who fancy that possessing Pope's scurrility is the same thing as possessing his genius—— Ah, I hear some of the doggerel —I could even make a quatrain or two myself on my own valour! Well, we shall not trouble ourselves further on this matter just now; we shall let our good friends take the first step. So soon as we hear what story they invent to account for my wounds, we shall know how much truth is needed; but we must economise our store. By the way, Mr. Sheridan, I wonder, if one of us had been killed last night, would Miss Linley be more distressed had it been you than if I had been the victim?"

The suddenness of Mr. Long's remark produced upon Dick the same effect as his remark of the previous night had done—that remark which Dick had pondered over during his sleepless hours.

He had no reply ready for such a question as Mr. Long had suggested to him—unless, indeed, Mr. Long would accept his unreadiness as a reply—his unreadiness and the confused, downcast look on his face, of which he himself was painfully conscious.

Some time had passed before Dick recovered himself sufficiently to be able to glance at Mr. Long, and then the expression which Mr. Long wore did not tend to make him feel more at ease. The smile which Dick saw on his face was a curious one—a disconcerting one.

"My poor boy," said Mr. Long, "I have no right to plague you with suggestions such as these. Still, I cannot help wondering if you are yet reconciled to the thought of Miss Linley's having promised to marry me?"

"I am reconciled, sir," said Dick in a low voice. "I was not so until I went to see her yesterday. I went, I may as well confess to you, Mr. Long, in a spirit of—of—no, not



mockery; I could not think of myself falling so low as to have a desire to mock her—no; I only meant to show her that I did not mind—that I did not mind."

"And all the time you were eating your heart out? My poor boy, I can appreciate what was in your mind, not merely because I am not without imagination, but because I have an excellent memory. But you saw her, and I do not think that you were quite the same man when you left her; I cannot understand any man remaining unchanged in the presence of that divine creature."

"She changed me. She made me to look on life differently from the way in which I had previously thought of it. She made me to perceive what 'tis to have a soul. She made me see that the real life which is worthy to be lived by a man is—is——"

"You can feel what it is, that is enough," said Mr. Long when Dick paused, lacking the words to express what was in his heart. "'Tis enough for a man to feel—only to the few is it given to put these feelings into words, and those few we call poets. The poet is the one who has the power to give expression to what the man feels. 'Tis doing an injustice to men to suggest, as some people do, that all the feeling is on the part of the poet. Have I interrupted your thoughts by anticipating you, Mr. Sheridan?"

"You have said what was on my mind and in my heart—to-day," cried Dick. "I was a fool to make the attempt to define what I felt. I am not a poet."

"I am not so sure of that. Our friend Mr. Linley will tell you that the pauses in music are quite as important as the combination of notes in interpreting the emotions; and you have made some eloquent and touching pauses, Mr. Sheridan. Believe me, my friend, those pauses did not speak in vain to me, and now . . . well, you took that long walk in the mystery of the moonlight. Did that represent the final struggle with yourself, my boy? When you found

out that it was I whom you had rescued from death, there was nothing in your heart but satisfaction? You were glad that you had saved me for her?"

"God knows it—God knows it!" said Dick, with bent head.

"I knew it too, my boy. I knew that you had taken the first step on that path to the new life which that sweet girl opened up before your eyes—a life in which self plays but the part of the minister to the happiness of others. And I . . . it may occur to you that I can make but an indifferent preacher on this subject, since it was I who asked Miss Linley to give me her promise. There are some people who say that marriage is the most pronounced form of selfishness in existence. I fear that in addition to being called by a considerable number of persons 'an old fool,' I am also called a 'selfish old fool.' Selfish; yes, they call me selfish because, appreciating the nature of that girl, and seeing how intolerable her position had become to her, mainly through the persecution of the very people who now call me selfish and ridiculous, I had the courage to ask her to give me the privilege of freeing her from surroundings that were stifling to her nature. Is the man who opens the door of its cage for the linnet impelled by selfish motives? I think that he is not. But in any case, the carping and criticism—the playful winks which I have seen exchanged between good people when I have passed with Miss Linley by my side—the suggestive nudges which I have noticed—I daresay you noticed them too——"

"I heard the remarks that were made when you appeared with her for the first time," said Dick.

"I did not hear them; but I saw the expression on the faces of the groups—that was enough for me. I had no difficulty in translating that expression into words. But you, who know,—you who have learned something of the nature of that girl——"



"Since yesterday—only since yesterday, sir."

"Even so—you, I say, knowing something of her nature, perceiving how her father had simply come to see in her the means of filling his purse—poor man! he was only acting according to his lights, and the nest of linnets takes much feeding—you, Mr. Sheridan, recognising the shrinking of that sweet creature from the public life which was being forced upon her, will, I think, not be hard upon me because I came forward to save her from all that was changing the beautiful spirit with which she was endowed by Heaven, into something commonplace—as commonplace as the musical education which her father was forcing upon her. She did not pay full attention to the dotted quavers, he told me one day in confidence, when I noticed the traces of tears upon her face. Dotted quavers! Good heavens! think of the position of the man who found fault with the song of the linnet on account of its inattention to the dotted quavers! . . . Her father understood as little of the spirituality of the linnet's song as did the fashionable folk who crowded to her concerts, not because they loved the linnet's song—not because it told them of the joy of the springtime come back to make the world a delight—no, but only because Fashion had decreed that it was fashionable to attend Miss Linley's concerts."

"Poor Betsy!"

"Poor Betsy! ay, and poor, poor Fashion! The child confided in me. So terrible an effect had that life to which she was condemned upon her that—you will scarce believe it—she was ready to become the prey of any adventurer who might promise to release her from it."

"And I failed to see this—I failed to see this," said Dick. His voice sounded like a moan of pain.

"You know the men who paid her attention—who were encouraged by her father; you know some of them," continued Mr. Long. "One of them, who was reported to be

the owner of a fortune, found great favour in the eyes of her father. He obtained easy access to the house, and he might actually have prevailed upon her to run away with him, for there was no lack of promises with him, if I had not come here. It was to save her from him that I asked her to give me her promise; for I knew that he had a wife already."

Dick started to his feet, his eyes blazing.

"The infamous hound!" he cried. "Who is he? What is his name? Only let me know what is his name, that I may kill him."

"There is no need for me to mention his name," said Mr. Long; "there is no immediate need for you to kill him or to give him a chance of killing you."

"Can you sit there before me, and tell me that 'tis not the duty of every man to do his best to rid the world of such a ruffian?" cried Dick passionately.

"I will not take it upon me to define what is the duty of a man in certain circumstances," said Mr. Long. "But I assure you that I should be sorry to go so far as to assert that the world would not be well rid of this particular ruffian; still, I know that the killing of him just now would be to overwhelm one who, we know, shrinks from even a publicity which is wholly honourable. There are doubtless many girls who retain so much of the feminine animal in their nature as causes them to delight to be made the subject of a fight between two men; that is—unhappily, it seems to me, but that may be because I do not understand all the principles of nature—an ordinary trait of the sex; but—you and I—ah, we know something of her, do we not?"

"But a fellow who set himself to bring about her ruin—— He is not still in Bath—you would not allow him to remain in Bath?"

"I have seen to that. I have reason to believe that he has fled. At any rate, he has not been seen in public since



I gave him a hint, the purport of which he could scarcely mistake. We will talk no more of him. I only referred to him as an instance of the dangers which, I perceived, surrounded Miss Linley, and which led me to make a move for her protection. I have been judged harshly. I was prepared for that. Sometimes in this matter I have felt disposed to judge myself much more harshly than any one else might feel. I wonder if you think that I was justified in asking Miss Linley to give me her promise when I saw that she was anxious to escape from a life which was killing her—when I saw that she was anxious to save her sisters from the necessity to appear in public and to sing for money—when I saw that she was set on this, and on helping all the other members of her family. Do you think that I was justified in asking her for her promise to marry me, seeing all that I tell you I saw, and knowing something of her pure and self-sacrificing nature?"

Dick was overcome by his own thoughts; but through all the discord in which they enveloped him there rang out clearly one note:

"You saved her," he said. "You saved her; that is all that I can think. Let me go away now."

He had spoken with his head bent, but his voice did not falter. And then he leapt up from his chair and turned to the door.