

"Uncle," said the weeping girl, "I cannot for a moment doubt Philip Ogilvie's sincerity. I know that he is devotedly attached to me; that on the death of the Baronet, he will make me his wife."

"You may have thirty years then, to wait for that event, Sophy. The Baronet is only fifty, and a heartier haler man for his years I never saw; but did the Captain ever ask you to marry him?"

"He promised me that, if I accompanied him to London, he would marry me privately."

"And you believed him! Silly girl! It was only a base subterfuge—a snare laid to betray you. Was it in order to make you his wife that he persuaded you to forget the duty you owed to God and your family? Was it in order to make you his wife that he taught you to despise the useless ceremony that superstition and bigotry had invented to enslave mankind? When he railed at the holy ordinance of marriage, and bade you trust to his love and honour, do you think that he was very anxious to lead you to the altar he scorned?"

Sophy was silent.

"When you listened with such eagerness to his demoralizing arguments, and leaned with such confidence on the bosom of the destroyer, did no feeling of remorse touch your heart? Had you no compassion on the mother who bore you—no pity for the sister, the companion of your youth? No respect for the memory of the excellent father, who had so tenderly placed before you the opposite paths of good and evil? No, Sophy; you thought not of their grief—of your own disgrace. You would have filled their hearts with unutterable anguish, and bowed them to the dust with shame. Alas! what happiness could you anticipate in their tears?"

Sophy shuddered, but she replied with firmness, unwilling to admit the possibility of having been deceived: "Philip Ogilvie will not forfeit his word; he will never cease to love me!"

Before Fleming could reply to her eager asseveration, the old gardener approached, wheeling a barrel of roots. He took off his hat to Mr. Fleming, and said, with a smile, "The bells ring blithely this morning, yer honour, and seem to chime to the tune of strong ale and good cheer. 'Tis a fine morning for the wedding—and you know, sir, the old proverb, 'Happy is the bride that the sun shines on.'"

"And who is married to-day, Robert?" asked Mr. Fleming.

"What, sir!" returned the loquacious old man, twitching his hat to the side of his head. "Have you not heard the news? I thought all the world knew it by this time. Miss Ogilvie, our rich heiress, is to be married to-day, up in Lunnun, by the Bishop—not in the church, like us poor folk, but in her father's own drawing-room, and a great lord to give her away. The news came down last night.

The old butler, Rollinson, ordered all the bells to be set a ringing this morning. There's to be three barrels of beer given away at the Hall tonight, for all the poor people in the parish, to drink the bride's health. There will be plenty to eat too, and lots of fun."

"And who is the bridegroom, Robert?" asked Sophy.

"Who, Miss Sophy! Why, who should it be but her gay cousin, the fine Captain, who used to be so often here in the summer—our parson's son, Philip Ogilvie."

Sophy uttered a murmur of ill-repressed anguish, and fell senseless into her uncle's arms. When recollection returned, she found herself in her own apartment, supported by Alice and her mother.

"He is married!" she exclaimed, with a ghastly laugh. "My Philip is married!"

"Who does she mean?" asked Mrs. Linhope of Alice.

"Captain Ogilvie is married!" again ejaculated Sophy, with the same wild tone and vacant stare.

"And why should his marriage, my dear child, affect you thus?" said her mother, tenderly wiping the moisture from her damp brow, and putting back with her other hand Sophy's beautiful, disarranged auburn tresses.

"Why should it affect me?" cried the unhappy girl, starting from her seat and clenching her hands vehemently together. "Why does it not drive me mad! I loved him—I trusted to his honour!—and I have been betrayed."

Mrs. Linhope and Alice exchanged glances of terror and alarm.

"No, mother, no!" exclaimed Sophy, in the same incoherent tone, "Do not look so pale; I am not fallen so low—not quite so low as that. No, no," she added, bursting into tears, "I am still innocent of that offence. God has preserved me, heartless wretch that I was, from a doom so infamous. My uncle knows all—will tell you all. Leave me, I beseech you—leave me to my own bitter reflections and self-upbraidings."

"She is right," said Mrs. Linhope, who began to comprehend something of the truth. "In her present state of mind she is best alone."

Alice thought otherwise. There was that in her sister's look and tone which greatly alarmed her, and, without consulting the unhappy girl, she silently succeeded in undressing and putting her to bed, and before night her mental sufferings were lost in acute bodily pain, and she was raving in a brain fever.

CHAPTER XXVIII  
CONCLUSION.

For three weeks, Sophy's life was despaired of by the physician in attendance. The poor sufferer