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## THE LION IN THE PATH

(From the Publisher's advanced sheets.)

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### CHAPTER XLVIII.—AN OBLIGING OFFICIAL.

The official ran to get some water, leaving the two visitors alone. The door had scarcely closed before Mistress Preston revived, and said—

"I was ill, but I seemed worse in order to get rid of him. The soldiers and many constables are now outside, waiting to capture or shoot you. The chief of the Secret Department is himself directing them. Happily, they none of them know you, and are waiting for me to give them the signal that you are the man they seek. But our coming here—this delay—even the sight of my face, will warn them of something wrong—that I am deceiving them; and the merest fancy of that kind will suffice. I am sure they wouldn't mind shooting me into the bargain, if they suspected me of betraying them when I have undertaken to betray you!"

"You have done that—you, my own sister—the daughter of a long line of nobles?"

"I have."  
"I cannot conceal from you, then, the fact that, even if you save my life now, we can never be as brother and sister."

"Oh, no; I understand! Quick! What will you do? Will you be so cruel—can you be capable of the torture—to let me see you die in effect by my own hands—before my own face?"

"I forgive you, at least—will help you, in any case—will give you chances of reformation, if you will take them. Will you take them?"

"Fly! fly! We can talk of this another day."

"No! You have given me a new reason for despising life. Swear to me you will change this life of yours, thoroughly, and then I will try to save this unhappy life of mine."

"I do swear!"

"Your card! Write down your address where I may find you. Ah! thank you!"

"No, no; you must not come there; I forgot."

"Be at the foot of London Bridge to-morrow night at eight—the City end."

"I will!"

"Now, kiss me for once as a sister, and remember that, if you seek a brother, you know the path. Time may do much. Let us go forth!"

"Are you prepared? What will you do or say?" said the alarmed girl.

"I scarcely know; but come! Delay and hesitation will be the most fatal manifestations. What was the signal you were to give them in coming forth, as a proof that you had found the right man?"

"I was to throw my veil back from my face over my head the instant I reached the centre of the quadrangle in your company, and then leave you—or, at all events, leave you the earliest possible moment after."

"Can we not go back into the building, and there separate unseen, and you come forth alone?"

"Oh, no! no! The chief himself was at the principal door watching before we came in, and the place will be almost empty by now."

The official here came running back, apologising for his having so far to go to fetch some water, and found the lady in part recovered.

"Could you favour me by sending one of your people for a chair?" asked Lord Langton—or, as we should rather call him, Daniel Sterne, for by that name had he introduced himself to the hospital managers.

The gentleman was very polite, went himself to see it done, and again there was a moment for secret talk.

"Get you into that chair alone," said Lord Langton. "If they speak to you, and you find they saw you go out with me, you can say what you please. I shall be gone."

She had no time to ask for explanations, for the gentleman returned to say the chair was ready.

We may note here a fact that Mr. Daniel Sterne had already marked—how much the official was impressed with the beauty of Mistress Maria—a "child of the hospital," as he had once called her in speaking to Mr. Sterne.

"I see you have a private gate yonder," said Mr. Sterne, pointing. "Would that save me much in point of distance in going towards the Edgware Road?"

"Oh, yes; but chairs cannot go that way."

"This lady and I separate now. Unfortunately, I have an appointment that cannot be postponed—"

"Would the lady accept my services so far as to see her to her lodgings?"

"I thank you most cordially in her name, and accept it for her. Would you first favour me with a pass through the gate?"

"Willingly."

The official led the way, but Mr. Sterne, before he got to the door, called to him, and said, with a smile—

"Would you favour me with your arm? I have had a most agitating interview this morning with this lady. I dare not fully accept her story, and therefore wish not to leave this place in her company till I have quite satisfied myself. You understand?"

"Oh, yes; and think you are quite right."

"Will you favour me with your arm? I have been ill of late, and am very feeble."

"Most gladly. Pray lean on me!"

And thus the two men went forth.

Daniel Sterne met more than one man whose eyes sought eagerly to look into the faces of himself and companion, but drew back seeing it was the respected manager of the hospital.

The gate was reached—opened—passed! And while poor Mistress Maria Clementina was a minute or two later facing in alarm the infuriated chief, who absolutely disbelieved her story that it was not Lord Langton, but a relative of that it was not Lord Langton, but a relative of her own she had strangely found, that personage himself was striding away towards his home on London Bridge, with the conviction that his hours were now measured—that he must instantly seek quite new shelter, and there determine, once for all, what to do as to the pursuance of his mission.

### CHAPTER XLIX.—SIR RICHARD'S UNNATURAL BEHAVIOUR.

The discovery of which Humphrey Arkdale had been the instrument, had an effect on more persons than those supposed alone to be concerned in it.

It may be remembered that the mercer, when he heard the particulars of the fate of the child that had been supposed dead, had evinced more than ordinary interest, though no one noticed the circumstance; and even if they had, they could by no possibility guess at the reason.

Christina was the first to perceive the effect on her father. That night, when she came to kiss him as usual, before going to bed, he did not jest with her, as he generally did, covering his affection in a show of play. No; he held her fondly a long time, stroked back her hair, gazed wistfully in her eyes, and then, to her astonishment, she saw tears in his.

At that sight, her own tears sprang instantly forth, and then, with a kind of laugh of sympathy, she sat herself on his knee, and said—

"Dear, dear papa, what is the matter? I won't go to bed till you have told me. You are not angry with me about my refusal to do what you wished as to Lord Langton?"

"Oh, no! God be thanked that you were so much wiser than I."

The thought she had aroused still further troubled him. He put her from him, got up, and walked about the room in undisguised emotion.

Christina followed, put one hand in his and the other round his neck, and whispered—

"Do—do tell me, or I shall think you won't trust me—that you don't think me capable of trust."

"Teena, is it a fact that you really love me?"

"Why, papa, are you going out of your senses? If you ask me that again, I shall really be obliged to get a mad doctor for you."

"Teena, darling, I am in no mood for this talk. Answer me—look in my face, look into your own soul, and think before you speak what such words mean—what they ought to mean, what sacrifices they may ask—those few simple words: Do you love me?"

"If I did not," cried Christina, with the tears again oozing forth, "I must surely be the most graceless, abandoned creature the world has ever seen! I own you have been so good to me, so indulgent, that I often in my prayers to God say to him I am sure I do not love papa enough; but God knows, for all that, that I do love you with all the little strength to love that he has given me! Dear, dear papa, you do not, cannot surely mean to give me such a dreadful idea as this—that you are beginning, after all these years, to doubt my love?"

"After all these years! Ah, there's the sting! God help me! After all these years! But come, Christina, forgive the old man's folly, and tell him—show him what you could do for him."

"I could die for you, I think, papa."

"Ah! but to live for me, and—and— Well, good night, Christina, good night! The blue devils have got full possession of me just for this once; don't let them get hold of you."

Before she could stop him, he kissed her, and left her abruptly.