

the sweet voices of the choristers at five o'clock even-song; took passage at Westminster Bridge on a penny steamer for the tower; followed a crowd of sight-seers through that ancient prison and modern arsenal, and heard the old woman drone out her description of the Crown Jewels.

Hampton Court and Windsor were visited in turn. The palace-prison of Charles I., with the beautiful trees and river, or the stately Berkshire Castle, failed to excite more than a passing interest.

The picture-galleries of the one, and the State apartments of the other, were passed through as in a dream. My mind wandered back to the dark tunnel, the struggle with the madman, and the beautiful but unknown girl whom I had rescued, and whose face haunted but eluded me like a phantom.

Sometimes I fancied I saw her before me in the Park and hurried forward to find I was deceived; sometimes I thought I detected her figure in a distant room at the Academy, or her face in a private box at the opera, but was always mistaken.

A dozen times I travelled over the same route, at the same hour in the morning, thinking duty or pleasure might call her the same way. But no, search proved useless, and as the summer waned away I was beginning to forget her.

III.

The first week in November I was travelling through the valley of the Stroud, one of the loveliest parts of Gloucestershire. It was a dull day and travelling rather slow, as our train stopped at every station; but I found no little amusement in watching the porters at the different stations, and the different passengers who arrived or departed, and the degree of deference shown to each as he travelled first, second, or third class.

The portly rector, or the squire whose liveried footman was waiting

to take his valise, and whose carriage stood at the gate, the high-bred horses champing their bits, and impatient to be off, received the most flattering tokens of respect; while the poor curate was treated with only common civility, and the bluff farmer was not noticed.

I had almost dozed off to sleep amid the comfortable cushions of the carriage, when we stopped at a small way-station. A lady got out of a carriage behind mine, and as she passed into the station followed by a porter with her bag, I recognised my unknown *inamorata*.

The train was in motion again. No time was to be lost. I seized my valise and jumped upon the platform as the train swept on.

As I reached the station a carriage drove off from the outer door.

'Whose carriage is that?' I asked of the porter who took my valise.

'Major Chesley's, the Squire of Banton.'

'And how far is Banton?'

'Four miles.'

'Was that Miss Chesley?'

'Yes, sir, and a fine young lady she is. Everyone loves her in these parts.'

'Where can I get a fly?'

'At the Dragon, a few steps up the road.'

Following the directions of the obliging porter, I secured a fly at the inn, and was soon *en route* for Banton.

On the way I had time to think, and the more I thought the more ludicrous appeared my position.

What was I to do when I got to Banton? I might ask to see Miss Chesley, and make a formal call. I might put up at the village inn, under pretence of sketching or fishing in the neighbourhood, and trust to finding opportunities of meeting her.

But no, these modes of courtship did not suit me. I determined on a *coup d'état*.

'Drive to the Hall,' I called out to the flyman.

We passed through a high iron gate,