

Linhope was our curate for several years, and a better preacher I'd never wish to hear; but he met with a bad accident, as put an end to his preaching, and forced him to keep a school; but his family could scarcely make both ends meet. They were very poor, sir, very poor indeed, and poverty's a thing which never meets with no great notice; so for some years, nobody visited with the widdy and her two daughters. Mrs. Linhope had a rich brother in foreign parts, a man worth a most o' money, and he did something to help them; bought them a house and paid all their debts, and now they are reckoned genteelish by every body."

"Mr. Fleming's son was down here last summer, was he not?" said the old gentleman carelessly.

"To be sure he was, a very fine, handsome, young man, something about him quite remarkable. They do say that he had a mind to Miss Alice; but she had no fortune, and the old man would not give his consent to the match, and commanded his son to return home. A hard thing that, sir, but rich men are very hard hearted in love affairs. The young chap left B—— all in a hurry, and their maid servant told my wife that it was piteous to see the tears Miss Alice shed at the parting. Miss Alice, though she is poor, is a good young lady, and a clever young lady; there is not her like in all Suffolk, aye, or Norfolk either,—you should see how nicely she manages the children in the Sunday school. She has no unbecoming pride about her—not a bit."

"There are two young ladies—are there not?"

"Oh, yes. Miss Sophia is a proper beauty. The prettiest girl in the town, and has turned the heads of all the young men in the place; but she cares for none but the dashing Captain. She wishes to ride in a carriage, and be called my lady. The Captain is mortal fond of her; and his valet told me that he should not be a bit surprised if his master was to make a runaway match of it." Mr. Fleming rose and hastily paced the room. But observing the eyes of his companion were upon all his movements, he resumed his seat, and continued with an air of indifference.

"Is Mrs. Linhope acquainted with the intimacy between the Captain and her daughter?"

"He has been forbidden the house, sir, but the lovers meet every evening in the wood, quite unknown to the old lady, or Miss Alice. They would not countenance such goings on; for they well know that Captain Ogilvie would not marry a girl let her be ever so pretty, that could not bring him a large fortune. And all the world knows that the Captain is to have his rich cousin, the heiress."

Mr. Fleming bit his lip, with secret vexation; but anxious to extract all the information he could, from his loquacious host, he did not attempt to restrain his garrulity.

"Miss Alice is engaged to marry a missionary of the name of Norton, is she not?"

"Indeed, sir! well, this is the first I've ever heard of it," said Jacoby, eagerly grasping at such an important piece of news. "So, so, that's the way the land lies—well—well, that's the reason then, of Mr. Fleming going off in such a devil of a hurry. Its all very natural, sir. The young people were brought up together; its no wonder they should take a fancy to each other. He's a queer subject that Stephen Norton. He has spent a fine fortune in missionarying, and buying Bibles for heathen folk, who can't read them. He'd better stay at home, and help Miss Alice to teach his own people, instead of wasting his money on strangers! So he's to marry Miss Alice! is he?"

"I did not say that," returned Mr. Fleming, pettishly, "I only asked if the report were true."

"Oh yes, sir, your information is perfectly correct; I now remember hearing our baker's wife say something of the kind. In fact it is the common talk of the place."

"Pshaw," muttered his companion, impatiently committing his half burnt cigar to the flames, and rising to depart. "This is the way so many scandalous reports get circulated as true. I may have done the poor girls a serious injury, by listening to the idle prate of this gossiping fool."

What he had heard respecting Sophia had made a deep impression on Mr. Fleming's mind. He determined to watch the parties narrowly; and warn the deluded girl of her danger. With this intent he daily visited the spot where Sophia's meetings with her lover were said to have taken place; nor did he long direct his steps thither in vain. He constantly encountered his niece and the Captain, and had frequent opportunities of overhearing their conversation together, from the tenor of which, he discovered, with increasing uneasiness, that the infatuated girl trembled on the very brink of ruin. To save her from infamy was his first thought; and with this end in view, he haunted her path, and kept a watchful eye upon all her actions. The night Captain Ogilvie departed for London, to join his Regiment, he had appointed Sophia to meet him at the accustomed spot, and he felt confident that he possessed influence enough over her to induce her to elope with him to town; and with this design he had ordered a carriage and four to be in readiness at the corner of the wood. His cruel scheme, however, was frustrated; a chain of unforeseen events happened to detain Sophia an hour beyond the time appointed for their flight. The Captain was obliged to leave B—— a quarter before six. He lingered at the stile until the latest moment, listening in vain for the light step of his victim among the fallen leaves. She came not—and the heartless libertine was forced to abandon his enterprise. Had Sophia been true to her engagement,