

always becomes strangely low and sweet. In fact, I am greatly deceived if he does not love you."

"No, no, papa, you mistake!" said Christina. And there was evidently now pain and distress in her voice and manner.

"Trust me, at least, Teena, with the use of my own eyes and ears. Now, mark. It is not because I think he loves you. And I must say, Mistress Teena, if you compel me to speak the truth, that I have seen you too look and listen as if you were not a little interested and charmed—eh?"

Again Teena coloured, but seemed angry with herself for doing so; and again she cried, almost with tears in her eyes—

"No—no, dear papa, you mistake—you do indeed—both what he feels and what I feel!"

"And what does he feel?" suddenly demanded the mercer.

Christina was too embarrassed to answer the question.

"Ah, you are nonplussed! Well, then, as to yourself—what do you feel?"

"As a friend—as a sister might; no more!"

"Friend! Sister! Humph! Ah, well! I have seen, in my lifetime, that love has a strange power for transforming very middling friends and sisters into exceedingly good wives. So let that pass.

"But now, Teena, for the pith of the matter. We are both of us, at all events, deeply interested in the fate of this gallant gentleman. Can we not save him, and give you a good husband at the same time?"

"Oh, papa! indeed you do distress me."

"Well, hear me out. This man will as certainly die on the scaffold as I shall certainly die in my bed—if I get out of the present mess—unless he can be persuaded to give up the whole infernal Jacobite scheme, and make his peace with the Government. From what I have seen, I feel sure that, if you were to marry him, and then let me go to Lady Hermia and tell her the whole story, I feel sure, I say, that she would for your sake—for my sake—and, I do believe, for the interesting rebel's own sake, go to her father, and worry him night and day till she had got him to obtain a pardon from the Government. There, now you know the scheme I've been hatching of late. You need not wonder at my audacity—I a mere citizen, he a nobleman—in planning such an alliance. But, remember, his rank and his estates are both, in a sense, in the clouds at present, while I have money, influence, and one of the most charming daughters in the world to eke out all other deficiencies."

Christina was silent at this. She did feel deeply interested in the fate of the young, heroic, noble spirit, so handsome, so unfortunate, and now in such danger.

What a blessing for the country, if she, by her own act, could arrest the incipient rebellion at its source, by taking away its moving spirit, and so preventing all the misery, bloodshed, and strife!

But, even were she open to consider such possibilities, was it likely that the earl would do what was expected from him? Clearly no.

Then the woman's modesty finished the last step of the reasoning, by assuring her the supposed lover was, after all, no lover, but only what she believed herself to be, a genial, sympathising friend.

But should she allow the thing to go on? That is, should she allow her father to understand that if he would do nothing painful to her, she would, on her part, oppose no obstacle?

While she hesitated over this thought, and passed in review before her the possible end—the marriage with so distinguished a man, the court life, the splendour, the coronet—there came before her the image of the unhappy departing Paul Arkdale, and in an instant every gleam of pleasure in the review died out, and she said to herself—

"No, no. He may never claim me, and I may refuse him if he should; but not in his present straits will I—"

There she stopped, and the mercer, who had been keenly watching her face, and all its changes of expression, said—

"Well, Teena, may I give him hope if he does say—"

Before she could answer, visitors were announced—Mr. Daniel Sterne and Humphrey Arkdale.

#### CHAPTER XLV. A DISCOVERY.

Sir Richard had scarcely got dinner over, when he was informed of the presence in the hall of two visitors—Daniel Sterne and Humphrey Arkdale.

The astonished knight seemed to feel that Humphrey had come just at that critical moment to punish him by demanding, in severe accents—

"What hast thou done with my brother?"

To his great relief, he soon found that this was an entire mistake, and that Humphrey Arkdale was much less concerned, to all appearance, about Paul than the unhappy mercer himself, whose heart now misgave him he had been harsh to the poor lad.

No, Paul's brother had come on quite other business, and business of startling importance to at least one person now present—Humphrey's companion, Mr. Daniel Sterne.

That gentleman himself introduced the subject when, after a little talk between Humphrey and Christina, there came a pause in the conversation.

Turning to Humphrey, he said aloud—

"Will you oblige me by repeating before my kind friends here the extraordinary story you have told me?"

Humphrey Arkdale hummed and hahed a little at this formal appeal, and his face slightly reddened, but he did not hesitate to answer the appeal made in these words—

"You see, sir," he said, addressing his former acquaintance, "when we met so strangely I could not recollect any of the circumstances attending your long residence at my poor father's, except the very pleasant one of our own boyish liking for each other.

"But when I got back to Bolton, and began to talk the matter over among my relatives, one of them told me that a very strange incident had occurred in his family about the very time the lady, your mother, and yourself accepted the poor shelter of my father's roof.

"I saw that he meant to intimate that there was more in the matter than he at first explained, and I tried to make him speak plainer, and then the whole came out.

"His own mother, it appeared, had been engaged by a strange lady to nurse her infant child, then only a few months old. The lady's conduct was strange—mysterious. She came only now and then, and always at night, and seemed buried in grief and anxiety. All at once she disappeared—just about the time of a great defeat of the rebels in that part of the country.

"The nurse was very poor, and very much alarmed when she found the ordinary time pass for the mother's call, lest the child was going to be left on her hands. When another week or more had passed, and still no news came—no letter, no message—she became convinced of the lady's death, and in a moment of alarm at the probable loss of a lover, who was annoyed at the incident, she sent the child off to the Foundling Hospital by a man and his wife who were going to London, and who undertook to place the babe in the hands of the managers of that new and very popular charity, secure that no questions would be asked.

"Well, Sir Richard, as I have already told Mr. Sterne, within a very few days after the babe had been thus disposed of, the mother came to fetch her child!

"Imagine the consternation of the nurse—her shame, distress, and fear.

"Unable to acknowledge what she had done, and obliged to give a sudden and decisive answer, she told the poor mother her child had died and been buried.

"At first, the wretched lady refused to believe; but when once the lie was told it was stuck to, and with so many alleged details to give it circumstantiality that the lady could not resist any longer, and being, so I judge,

unable to make any kind of public movement, went away, and thus the matter slept."

"And do you know if the child safely reached the foundling?" demanded the mercer, in a tone of extreme interest.

"Yes; the man and woman who took the child away were afterwards seen, and exhibited a receipt they had obtained, showing the safe delivery," replied Arkdale.

"Do you understand, Mistress Christina," asked the earl, looking with earnest eyes at the young lady—"do you understand that the child thus dealt with was my sister?"

"Merciful heavens!" responded Christina. "No, I did not indeed understand."

"Yes; it is my sister who has thus been dealt with!" added the earl, in a tone of profound indignation. "And now, how am I to find her? Why, she must be almost if not quite as old as yourself, sweet mistress. How am I to find her? All possible marks of identity have long since disappeared, I doubt not. And if she be found, what sort of person can I possibly hope or expect to see? Trained as a pauper—perhaps sent out already to service—possibly ignorant, vulgar, and utterly unfit for any other than her present mode of life! I see my friend and benefactor is hurt. He thinks it is because she is poor and humble in her condition, I speak with so much bitterness. I will give him proof he mistakes me. Let him now, therefore, learn from me, in this presence, that babe is—if she lives—is Countess in her own right, and who—

who I am—Stephen, Earl of Langton, by the grace of God, if not by the grace of King George; and whether plain Stephen Langton disinherited or Earl of Langton in full possession of his rights, proud to demand a continuance of the friendship of Humphrey Arkdale."

Christina seemed to feel now, once more, all her first instincts of liking for the earl revive, and she gazed with a kind of exalted, rapturous, seraph-like face on the earl's noble and animated countenance.

The mercer seemed strangely puzzled, gloomily silent.

But Humphrey's face was the most interesting study of all as he listened to these words. What he had discovered at Bolton had, of course, showed him that the mysterious Daniel Sterne's parents must have been mixed up with the insurrection of '45. But Daniel Sterne, when he first heard the story from Humphrey, had said nothing as to this point, but only asked him to go off to Blackheath and tell the story to their common acquaintance, Sir Richard.

Arkdale's worldliness had, of course, caused him many twinges of alarm about his own connection, however remote, with a rebel; but as he listened, all the man in him was roused into vivid life by the earl's generosity. He advanced warmly, yet with a certain profound respect, to take the outstretched hand, and said, as he did so—

"My dear Lord—"

"Hush! No lords here, if you please," said the mercer.

"My dear Mr. Sterne, then," said Arkdale, "I do indeed now understand what you must feel to know the condition of a sister born to such rank!"

"Ay, but, Arkdale, it is not the outward condition but the inward, that frightens me. However, what must be must. I shall instantly seek her."

As they were separating for the night—not to leave the house, for they were to sleep there—Sir Richard said aloud, in the presence of all—

"I again desire solemnly, in my daughter's presence, to disclaim any knowledge of, or sympathy with, the plans of this—this gentleman, calling himself the Earl of Langton!"

"And I too," cried Arkdale, glad to have so good an opportunity.

"And I must add," said the knight, "that it is in entire reliance on his honour, and on his solemn word that he is engaged exclusively on private matters, that I offer him my house and home."

"That's right, gentlemen!" said the earl, with a laugh. "Did I not know you both too well, I should suppose you were this very night wash-