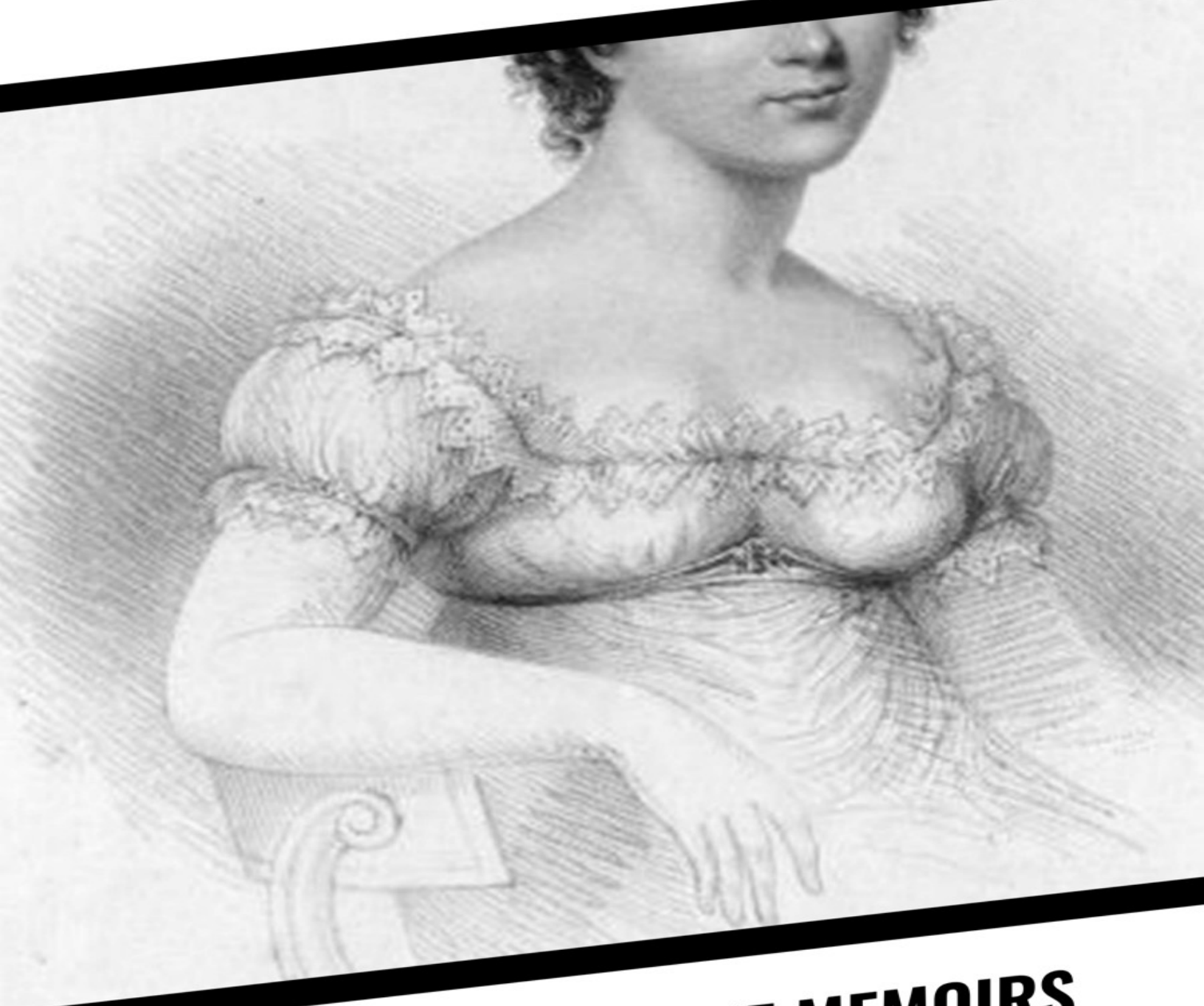




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HARRIETTE WILSON



**THE MEMOIRS
OF HARRIETTE WILSON**

Harriette Wilson

The Memoirs of Harriette Wilson

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VOLUME ONE

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CHAPTER I

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I shall not say why and how I became, at the age of fifteen, the mistress of the Earl of Craven. Whether it was love, or the severity of my father, the depravity of my own heart, or the winning arts of the noble lord, which induced me to leave my paternal roof and place myself under his protection, does not now much signify; or, if it does, I am not in the humour to gratify curiosity in this matter.

I resided on the Marine Parade at Brighton, and I remember that Lord Craven used to draw cocoa trees, and his fellows as he called them, on the best vellum paper for my amusement. "Here stood the enemy," he would say, "and here, my love, are my fellows. There the cocoa trees, &c." It was, in fact, a dead bore. All these cocoa trees and fellows, at past eleven o'clock at night, could have no peculiar interest for a child like myself, so lately in the habit of retiring early to rest. One night, I recollect, I fell asleep; and, as I often dream, I said yawning, and half awake, "O Lord! O Lord! Craven has got me into the West Indies again." In short I soon found that I had made but a bad speculation, by going from my father to Lord Craven. I was even more afraid of the latter than I had been of the former. Not that there was any particular harm in the man beyond his cocoa trees; but we never suited nor understood each other.

I was not depraved enough to determine immediately on a new choice, and yet I often thought about it. How indeed could I do otherwise, when the Honourable Frederick Lamb was my constant visitor, and talked to me of nothing else? However, in justice to myself, I must declare that the idea of the possibility of deceiving Lord Craven while I was under his roof, never once entered into my head. Frederick was then very handsome, and certainly tried with all his soul and with all his strength, to convince me that constancy to Lord Craven was the greatest nonsense in the world. I firmly believe that Frederick Lamb sincerely loved me, and deeply regretted that he had no fortune to invite me to share with him.

Lord Melbourne, his father, was a good man. Not one of your stiff-laced, moralising fathers, who preach chastity and forbearance to their children. Quite the contrary, he congratulated his son on the lucky circumstance of his friend Craven having such a fine girl with him.

"No such thing," answered Frederick Lamb, "I am unsuccessful there. Harriette will have nothing at all to do with me."

"Nonsense!" rejoined Melbourne, in great surprise, "I never heard anything half so ridiculous in all my life. The girl must be mad! She looks mad. I thought so the other day, when I met her galloping about, with her feathers blowing, and her thick dark hair about her ears.

"I'll speak to Harriette for you," added his lordship, after a long pause, and then continued repeating to himself, in an undertone, "not have my son indeed! Six feet high! A fine,

straight, handsome, noble young fellow! I wonder what she would have!"

In truth, I scarcely knew myself; but something I determined on: so miserably tired was I of Craven, and his cocoa trees, and his sailing-boats, and his ugly, cotton nightcap.

"Surely," I would say, "all men do not wear those shocking nightcaps; else all women's illusions had been destroyed on the first night of their marriage!" I wonder, thought I, what sort of a nightcap the Prince of Wales wears? Then I went on to wonder whether the Prince of Wales would think me as beautiful as Frederick Lamb did? Next I reflected that Frederick Lamb was younger than the Prince; but then again, a Prince of Wales!

I was undecided: my heart began to soften. I thought of my dear mother and I wished I had never left her. It was too late, however, now. My father would not suffer me to return, and, as to passing my life, or any more of it, with Craven, cotton night-cap and all, it was death! He never once made me laugh, nor said anything to please me.

Thus musing, I listlessly turned over my writing book, half in the humour to address the Prince of Wales! A sheet of paper, covered with Lord Craven's cocoa trees, decided me, and I wrote the following letter, which I addressed to the Prince.

"BRIGHTON

"I am told that I am very beautiful, so perhaps you would like to see me; and I wish that, since so many are disposed to love me, one, for in the humility of my heart I should be

quite satisfied with one, would be at the pains to make me love him. In the meantime, this is all very dull work, Sir, and worse even than being at home with my father: so, if you pity me, and believe you could make me in love with you, write to me, and direct to the post office here."

By return of post, I received an answer nearly to this effect: I believe from Colonel Thomas.

"Miss Wilson's letter has been received by the noble individual to whom it was addressed. If Miss Wilson will come to town, she may have an interview, by directing her letter as before."

I answered this note directly, addressing my letter to the Prince of Wales.

"SIR—To travel fifty-two miles this bad weather, merely to see a man, with only the given number of legs, arms, fingers, &c., would, you must admit, be madness in a girl like myself, surrounded by humble admirers who are ever ready to travel any distance for the honour of kissing the tip of her little finger; but, if you can prove to me that you are one bit better than any man who may be ready to attend my bidding, I'll e'en start for London directly. So, if you can do anything better in the way of pleasing a lady than ordinary men, write directly: if not, adieu, Monsieur le Prince."

It was necessary to put this letter into the post office myself, as Lord Craven's black footman would have been

somewhat surprised at its address. Crossing the Steyne I met Lord Melbourne, who joined me immediately.

"Where is Craven?" said his lordship, shaking hands with me.

"Attending to his military duties at Lewes, my lord."

"And where's my son Fred?" asked his lordship.

"I am not your son's keeper, my lord," said I.

"No! By the bye," inquired his lordship, "how is this? I wanted to call upon you about it. I never heard of such a thing in the whole course of my life! What the devil can you possibly have to say against my son Fred?"

"Good heavens! my lord, you frighten me! I never recollect to have said a single word against your son, as long as I have lived. Why should I?"

"Why, indeed!" said Lord Melbourne. "And, since there is nothing to be said against him, what excuse can you make for using him so ill?"

"I don't understand you one bit, my lord." The very idea of a father put me in a tremble.

"Why," said Lord Melbourne, "did you not turn the poor boy out of your house as soon as it was dark, although Craven was in town, and there was not the shadow of an excuse for such treatment?"

At this moment, and before I could recover from my surprise at the tenderness of some parents, Frederick Lamb, who was almost my shadow, joined us.

"Fred, my boy," said Lord Melbourne, "I'll leave you two together, and I fancy you'll find Miss Wilson more reasonable." He touched his hat to me, as he entered the

little gate of the Pavilion, where we had remained stationary from the moment his lordship had accosted me.

Frederick Lamb laughed long, loud, and heartily, at his father's interference. So did I, the moment he was safely out of sight, and then I told him of my answer to the Prince's letter, at which he laughed still more. He was charmed with me, for refusing His Royal Highness.

"Not," said Frederick, "that he is not as handsome and graceful a man as any in England; but I hate the weakness of a woman who knows not how to refuse a prince, merely because he is a prince."

"It is something, too, to be of royal blood," answered I frankly; "and something more to be accomplished: but this posting after a man! I wonder what he could mean by it!"

Frederick Lamb now began to plead his own cause.

"I must soon join my regiment in Yorkshire," said he: he was, at that time aide-de-camp to General Mackenzie: "God knows when we may meet again! I am sure you will not long continue with Lord Craven. I foresee what will happen, and yet, when it does, I think I shall go mad!"

For my part I felt flattered and obliged by the affection Frederick Lamb evinced towards me; but I was still not in love with him.

At length, the time arrived when poor Frederick Lamb could delay his departure from Brighton no longer. On the eve of it he begged to be allowed to introduce his brother William to me.

"What for?" said I.

"That he may let me know how you behave," answered Frederick Lamb.

"And if I fall in love with him?" I inquired.

"I am sure you won't," replied Fred. "Not because my brother William is not likeable; on the contrary, William is much handsomer than I am; but he will not love you as I have done and do still, and you are too good to forget me entirely."

Our parting scene was rather tender. For the last ten days, Lord Craven being absent, we had scarcely been separated an hour during the whole day. I had begun to feel the force of habit, and Frederick Lamb really respected me, for the perseverance with which I had resisted his urgent wishes, when he would have had me deceive Lord Craven. He had ceased to torment me with such wild fits of passion as had at first frightened me, and by these means he had obtained much more of my confidence.

Two days after his departure for Hull, in Yorkshire, Lord Craven returned to Brighton, where he was immediately informed by some spiteful enemy of mine, that I had been during the whole of his absence openly intriguing with Frederick Lamb. In consequence of this information, one evening, when I expected his return, his servant brought me the following letter, dated Lewes:

"A friend of mine has informed me of what has been going on at Brighton. This information, added to what I have seen with my own eyes, of your intimacy with Frederick Lamb, obliges me to declare that we must separate. Let me add, Harriette, that you might have done anything with me, with only a little mere conduct. As it is, allow me to wish you happy, and further, pray inform me, if in any way, *à la distance*, I can promote your welfare.

"CRAVEN."

This letter completed my dislike of Lord Craven. I answered it immediately, as follows:

"MY LORD—Had I ever wished to deceive you, I have the wit to have done it successfully; but you are old enough to be a better judge of human nature than to have suspected me of guile or deception. In the plenitude of your condescension, you are pleased to add that I 'might have done anything with you, with only a little mere conduct,' now I say, and from my heart, the Lord defend me from ever doing anything with you again! Adieu,

"HARRIETTE."

My present situation was rather melancholy and embarrassing, and yet I felt my heart the lighter for my release from the cocoa-trees, without its being my own act and deed. "It is my fate!" thought I; "for I never wronged this man. I hate his fine carriage, and his money, and everything belonging to or connected with him. I shall hate cocoa as long as I live; and I am sure I will never enter a boat again if I can help it. This is what one gets by acting with principle."

The next morning, while I was considering what was to become of me, I received a very affectionate letter from Frederick Lamb, dated Hull. He dared not, he said, be selfish enough to ask me to share his poverty, and yet he had a kind of presentiment that he should not lose me.

My case was desperate; for I had taken a vow not to remain another night under Lord Craven's roof. John,

therefore, the black whom Craven had, I suppose, imported with his cocoa-trees from the West Indies, was desired to secure me a place in the mail for Hull.

It is impossible to do justice to the joy and rapture which brightened Frederick's countenance, when he flew to receive me and conducted me to his house, where I was shortly visited by his worthy general, Mackenzie, who assured me of his earnest desire to make my stay in Hull as comfortable as possible.

We continued here for about three months, and then came to London. Fred Lamb's passion increased daily; but I discovered, on our arrival in London, that he was a voluptuary, somewhat worldly and selfish. My comforts were not considered. I lived in extreme poverty, while he contrived to enjoy all the luxuries of life, and suffered me to pass my dreary evenings alone, while he frequented balls, masquerades, &c. Secure of my constancy, he was satisfied—so was not I! I felt that I deserved better from him.

I asked Frederick one day, if the Marquis of Lorne was as handsome as he had been represented to me. "The finest fellow on earth," said Frederick Lamb, "all the women adore him;" and then he went on to relate various anecdotes of his lordship, which strongly excited my curiosity.

Soon after this he quitted town for a few weeks, and I was left alone in London, without money, or at any rate with very little, and Frederick Lamb, who had intruded himself on me at Brighton, and thus been the cause of my separation from Lord Craven, made himself happy; because he believed me faithful and cared not for my distresses.

This idea disgusted me; and in a fit of anger I wrote to the Marquis of Lorne, merely to say that, if he would walk up to Duke's Row, Somers-town, he would meet a most lovely girl.

This was his answer—

"If you are but half as lovely as you think yourself, you must be well worth knowing; but how is that to be managed? Not in the street! but come to No. 39 Portland-street and ask for me.

"L."

My reply was this—

"No! our first meeting must be on the high road, in order that I may have room to run away, in case I don't like you.

"HARRIETTE."

The marquis rejoined—

"Well then, fair lady, to-morrow at four, near the turnpike, look for me on horseback, and then you know I can gallop away.

"L."

We met. The duke—he has since succeeded to the title—did not gallop away; and for my part I had never seen a countenance I had thought half so beautifully expressive. I was afraid to look at it, lest a closer examination might destroy all the new and delightful sensations his first glance

had inspired in my breast. His manner was most gracefully soft and polished. We walked together for about two hours.

"I never saw such a sunny, happy countenance as yours in my whole life," said Argyle to me.

"Oh, but I am happier than usual to-day," answered I, very naturally.

Before we parted, the duke knew as much of me and my adventures as I knew myself. He was very anxious to be allowed to call on me.

"And how will your particular friend Frederick Lamb like that?" inquired I.

The duke laughed.

"Well then," said his grace, "do me the honour, some day, to come and dine or sup with me at Argyle House."

"I shall not be able to run away, if I go there," I answered, laughingly, in allusion to my last note.

"Shall you want to run away from me?" said Argyle; and there was something unusually beautiful and eloquent in his countenance, which brought a deep blush into my cheek.

"When we know each other better?" added Argyle, beseechingly. "*En attendant*, will you walk again with me to-morrow?" I assented, and we parted.

I returned to my home in unusual spirits: they were a little damped, however, by the reflection that I had been doing wrong. "I cannot," I reasoned with myself, "I cannot, I fear, become what the world calls a steady, prudent, virtuous woman. That time is past, even if I was ever fit for it. Still I must distinguish myself from those in the like unfortunate situations, by strict probity and love of truth. I will never become vile. I will always adhere to good faith, as

long as anything like kindness or honourable principle is shown towards me: and, when I am ill used, I will leave my lover rather than deceive him.

"Frederick Lamb relies, in perfect confidence, on my honour. True that confidence is the effect of vanity. He believes that a woman who could resist him, as I did at Brighton, is the safest woman on earth! He leaves me alone and without sufficient money for common necessities.

"No matter; I must tell him to-night, as soon as he arrives from the country, that I have written to and walked with Lorne. My dear mother would never forgive me if I became artful." So mused, and thus reasoned I, till I was interrupted by Frederick Lamb's loud knock at my door.

"He will be in a fine passion," said I to myself, in excessive trepidation; and I was in such a hurry to have it over that I related all immediately. To my equal joy and astonishment Frederick Lamb was not a bit angry. From his manner I could not help guessing that his friend Lorne had often been found a very powerful rival.

I could see through the delight he experienced at the idea of possessing a woman whom, his vanity persuaded him, Argyle would sigh for in vain: and, attacking me on my weak point, he kissed me, and said, "I have the most perfect esteem for my dearest little wife, whom, I can, I know, as safely trust with Argyle as Craven trusted her with me."

"Are you quite sure?" asked I, merely to ease my conscience. "Were it not wiser to advise me not to walk about with him?"

"No, no," said Frederick Lamb; "it is such good fun! bring him up every day to Somers-town and the Jew's Harp house,

there to swallow cider and sentiment. Make him walk up here as many times as you can, dear little Harry, for the honour of your sex, and to punish him for declaring, as he always does, that no woman who will not love him at once is worth his pursuit."

"I am sorry he is such a coxcomb," said I.

"What is that to you, you little fool?"

"True," I replied. And, at the moment, I made a sort of determination not to let the beautiful and voluptuous expression of Argyle's dark blue eyes take possession of my fancy.

"You are a neater figure than the Marquis of Lorne;" said I to Frederick, wishing to think so.

"Lorne is growing fat," answered Frederick Lamb; "but he is the most active creature possible, and appears lighter than any man of his weight I ever saw; and then he is, without any exception, the highest bred man in England."

"And you desire and permit me to walk about the country with him?"

"Yes; do trot him often up here. I want to have a laugh against Lorne."

"And you are not jealous?"

"Not at all," said Frederick Lamb, "for I am secure of your affections."

"I must not deceive this man," thought I, and the idea began to make me a little melancholy. "My only chance, or rather my only excuse, will be his leaving me without the means of existence." This appeared likely; for I was too shy, and too proud to ask for money: and Frederick Lamb encouraged me in this amiable forbearance!

The next morning, with my heart beating unusually high, I attended my appointment with Argyle. I hoped, nay almost expected, to find him there before me. I paraded near the turnpike five minutes, then grew angry; in five more, I became wretched; in five more, downright indignant; and, in five more, wretched again—and so I returned home.

"This," thought I, "shall be a lesson to me hereafter, never to meet a man: it is unnatural:" and yet I had felt it perfectly natural to return to the person whose society had made me so happy! "No matter," reasoned I, "we females must not suffer love or pleasure to glow in our eyes, until we are quite sure of a return. We must be dignified!"

Alas! I can only be and seem what I am. No doubt my sunny face of joy and happiness, which he talked to me about, was understood, and it has disgusted him. He thought me bold, and yet I am sure I never blushed so much in any man's society before.

I now began to consider myself with feelings of the most painful humility. Suddenly I flew to my writing-desk; "He shall not have the cut all on his side, neither," thought I, with the pride of a child, "I will soon convince him I am not accustomed to be slighted;" and then I wrote to his grace as follows:

"It was very wrong and very bold of me to have sought your acquaintance, in the way I did, my lord; and I entreat you to forgive and to forget my childish folly, as completely as I have forgotten the occasion of it."

"So far so good," thought I, pausing, "but then suppose he should, from this dry note, really believe me so cold and

stupid as not to have felt his pleasing qualities. Suppose now it were possible he liked me after all!" Then hastily, and half ashamed of myself, I added these few lines:

"I have not quite deserved this contempt from you, and, in that consolatory reflection, I take my leave; not in anger my lord, but only with the steady determination so to profit by the humiliating lesson you have given me as never to expose myself to the like contempt again.

"Your most obedient servant,
"HARRIETTE WILSON."

Having put my letter into the post, I passed a restless night: and the next morning, heard the knock of the twopenny postman in extreme agitation. He brought me, as I suspected, an answer from Argyle, which is subjoined.

"You are not half vain enough, dear Harriette. You ought to have been quite certain that any man who had once met you could not fail in a second appointment but from unavoidable accident—and, if you were only half as pleased with Thursday morning, as I was, you will meet me to-morrow in the same place at four. Pray, pray,55 come.

"LORNE."

I kissed the letter and put it into my bosom, grateful for the weight it had taken off my heart. Not that I was so far gone in love as my readers may imagine; but I had suffered from wounded pride, and, in fact, I was very much *tête monté*.

The sensations which Argyle had inspired me with were the warmest, nay, the first, of the same nature, I had ever experienced. Nevertheless, I could not forgive him quite so easily as this neither. I recollect what Frederick Lamb had said about his vanity. "No doubt," thought I, "he thinks it was nothing to have paraded me up and down that stupid turnpike road, in the vain hope of seeing him. It shall now be his turn: and I gloried in the idea of revenge."

The hour of Argyle's appointment drew nigh, arrived, and passed away, without my leaving my house. To Frederick Lamb I related everything, presented him with Argyle's letter, and acquainted him with my determination not to meet his grace.

"How good!" said Frederick Lamb, quite delighted. "We dine together to-day at Lady Holland's, and I mean to ask him, before everybody at table, what he thinks of the air about the turnpike in Somerstown."

The next day I was surprised by a letter, not, as I anticipated, from Argyle, but from the late Tom Sheridan, only son of Richard Brinsley Sheridan. I had, by mere accident, become acquainted with that very interesting young man when quite a child, from the circumstance of his having paid great attention to one of my elder sisters.

He requested me to allow him to speak a few words to me, wherever I pleased. Frederick Lamb having gone to Brockett Hall in Hertfordshire, I desired him to call on me.

"I am come from my friend Lorne," said Tom Sheridan. "I would not have intruded on you; but that, poor fellow, he is really annoyed, and he has commissioned me to acquaint you with the accident which obliged him to break his

appointment; because I can best vouch for the truth of it, having upon my honour, with my own ears, heard the Prince of Wales invite Lord Lorne to Carlton House at the very moment when he was about to meet you in Somerstown. Lorne," continued Tom Sheridan, "desires me to say, that he is not coxcomb enough to imagine you cared for him; but in justice, he wants to stand exactly where he did in your opinion, before he broke his appointment: he was so perfectly innocent on that subject. 'I would write to her,' said he, again and again, 'but that, in all probability, my letters would be shown to Frederick Lamb, and be laughed at by them both. I would call on her, in spite of the devil; but that I know not where she lives.'

"I asked Argyle," Tom Sheridan proceeded, "how he had addressed his last letters to you? 'To the post office in Somers-town,' was his answer, 'and thence they were forwarded to Harriette.'" (He had tried to bribe the old woman there, to obtain my address, but she abused him, and turned him out of her shop.) "'It is very hard,'" continued Tom, repeating the words of his noble friend, "'to lose the good-will of one of the nicest, cleverest girls I ever met with in my life, who was, I am certain, civilly if not kindly disposed towards me, by such a mere accident.' Therefore," continued Tom Sheridan, smiling, "you'll make it up with Lorne, won't you?"

"There is nothing to forgive," said I, "if no slight was meant. In short you are making too much of me, and spoiling me, by all this explanation; for, indeed, I had at first been less indignant, but that I fancied his grace neglected

me because——" and I hesitated, while I could feel myself blush deeply.

"Because what?" asked Tom Sheridan.

"Nothing;" I replied, looking at my shoes.

"What a pretty girl you are," observed Sheridan, "particularly when you blush."

"Fiddlestick!" said I, laughing, "you know you always preferred my sister Fanny."

"Well," replied Tom, "there I plead guilty. Fanny is the sweetest creature on earth; but you are all a race of finished coquettes, who delight in making fools of people."

"Now can anything come up to your vanity in writing to Lorne, that you are the most beautiful creature on earth?"

"Never mind," said I, "you set all that to rights. I was never vain in your society, in my life."

"I would give the world for a kiss, at this moment," said Tom; "because you look so humble, and so amiable; but"—recollecting himself—"this is not exactly the embassy I came upon. Have you a mind to give Lorne an agreeable surprise?"

"I don't know."

"Upon my honour I believe he is downright in love with you."

"Well?"

"Come into a hackney-coach with me, and we will drive down to the Tennis Court, in the Haymarket."

"Is the duke there?"

"Yes."

"But at all events, I will not trust myself in a hackney-coach with you."

"There was a time," said poor Tom Sheridan, with much drollery of expression, "there was a time—but now!" and he shook his handsome head with comic gravity, "but now! you may drive with me from here to St. Paul's in the most perfect safety. I will tell you a secret," added he, and he fixed his fine dark eye on my face while he spoke, in a tone, half merry, half desponding, "I am dying; but nobody knows it yet!"

I was very much affected by his manner of saying this.

"My dear Mr. Sheridan," said I, with earnest warmth, "you have accused me of being vain of the little beauty God has given me. Now I would give it all, or upon my word I think I would, to obtain the certainty, that you would from this hour refrain from such excesses as are destroying you."

"Did you see me play the methodist parson, in a tub, at Mrs. Beaumont's masquerade last Thursday?" said Tom, with affected levity.

"You may laugh as you please," said I, "at a little fool like me pretending to preach to you, yet I am sensible enough to admire you, and quite feeling enough to regret your time so misspent, your brilliant talents so misapplied."

"Bravo! Bravo!" Tom reiterated, "what a funny little girl you are! Pray Miss, how is your time spent?"

"Not in drinking brandy," I replied.

"And how might your talent be applied, Ma'am?"

"Have not I just given you a specimen, in the shape of a handsome quotation?"

"My good little girl, it is in the blood, and I can't help it—and, if I could, it is too late now. I'm dying, I tell you. I know not if my poor father's physician was as eloquent as you

are; but he did his best to turn him from drinking. Among other things, he declared to him one day, that the brandy, Arquebusade, and Eau de Cologne, he swallowed, would burn off the coat of his stomach. 'Then,' said my father, 'my stomach must digest in its waistcoat; for I cannot help it.'

"Indeed, I am very sorry for you," I replied: and I hope he believed me: for he pressed my hand hastily, and I think I saw a tear glisten in his bright, dark eye.

"Shall I tell Lorne," said poor Tom, with an effort to recover his usual gaiety, "that you will write to him, or will you come to the Tennis-court?"

"Neither," answered I, "but you may tell his lordship, that, of course, I am not angry, since I am led to believe he had no intention to humble nor make a fool of me."

"Nothing more?" inquired Tom.

"Nothing," I replied, "for his lordship."

"And what for me?" said Tom.

"You! what do you want?"

"A kiss!" he said.

"Not I, indeed!"

"Be it so then; and yet you and I may never meet again on this earth, and just now I thought you felt some interest about me"; and he was going away.

"So I do, dear Tom Sheridan!" said I, detaining him; for I saw death had fixed his stamp on poor Sheridan's handsome face. "You know I have a very warm and feeling heart, and taste enough to admire and like you; but why is this to be our last meeting?"

"I must go to the Mediterranean"; poor Sheridan continued, putting his hand to his chest, and coughing.

"To die!" thought I, as I looked on his sunk, but still very expressive, dark eyes.

"Then God bless you!" said I, first kissing his hand, and then, though somewhat timidly, leaning my face towards him. He parted my hair, and kissed my forehead, my eyes, and my lips.

"If I do come back," said he, forcing a languid smile, "mind let me find you married, and rich enough to lend me an occasional hundred pounds or two." He then kissed his hand gracefully, and was out of sight in an instant.

I never saw him again!

CHAPTER II

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The next morning my maid brought me a little note from Argyle to say that he had been waiting about my door an hour, having learned my address from poor Sheridan, and that, seeing the servant in the street, he could not help making an attempt to induce me to go out and walk with him. I looked out of window, saw Argyle, ran for my hat and cloak, and joined him in an instant.

"Am I forgiven?" said Argyle with gentle eagerness.

"Oh yes," returned I, "long ago, but that will do you no good, for I really am treating Frederick Lamb very ill, and therefore must not walk with you again."

"Why not?" Argyle inquired. "Apropos," he added, "you told Frederick that I walked about the turnpike looking for you, and that, no doubt, to make him laugh at me?"

"No, not for that; but I never could deceive any man. I have told him the whole story of our becoming acquainted, and he allows me to walk with you. It is I who think it wrong, not Frederick."

"That is to say, you think me a bore," said Argyle, reddening with pique and disappointment.

"And suppose I loved you?" I asked; "still I am engaged to Frederick Lamb, who trusts me, and——"

"If," interrupted Argyle, "it were possible you did love me, Frederick Lamb would be forgotten: but, though you did not love me, you must promise to try and do so some day or

other. You don't know how much I have fixed my heart on it."

These sentimental walks continued more than a month. One evening we walked rather later than usual. It grew dark. In a moment of ungovernable passion, Argyle's ardour frightened me. Not that I was insensible to it: so much the contrary, that I felt certain another meeting must decide my fate. Still I was offended at what I conceived showed such a want of respect. The duke became humble. There is a charm in the humility of a lover who has offended. The charm is so great that we like to prolong it. In spite of all he could say I left him in anger. The next morning I received the following note:

"If you see me waiting about your door to-morrow morning, do not fancy I am looking for you: but for your pretty housemaid."

I did see him from a sly corner of my window; but I resisted all my desires and remained concealed. "I dare not see him again," thought I, "for I cannot be so very profligate, knowing and feeling as I do, how impossible it will be to refuse him anything, if we meet again. I cannot treat Fred Lamb in this manner! besides I should be afraid to tell him of it, he would perhaps kill me!

"But then, poor, dear Lorne! to return his kisses, as I did last night, and afterwards be so very severe on him, for a passion which it seemed so out of his power to control!

"Nevertheless we must part now, or never; so I'll write and take my leave of him kindly." This was my letter:

"At the first I was afraid I should love you, and, but for Fred Lamb having requested me to get you up to Somers-

town after I had declined meeting you, I had been happy: now the idea makes me miserable. Still it must be so. I am naturally affectionate. Habit attaches me to Fred Lamb. I cannot deceive him or acquaint him with what will cause him to cut me, in anger and for ever. We may not then meet again Lorne, as hitherto: for now we could not be merely friends: lovers we must be hereafter, or nothing. I have never loved any man in my life before, and yet, dear Lorne, you see we must part. I venture to send you the enclosed thick lock of my hair; because you have been good enough to admire it. I do not care how I have disfigured my head since you are not to see it again.

"God bless you, Lorne. Do not quite forget last night, directly, and believe me, as in truth I am,

"Most devotedly yours,
"HARRIETTE."

This was his answer, written, I suppose, in some pique:

"True you have given me many sweet kisses, and a lock of your beautiful hair. All this does not convince me you are one bit in love with me. I am the last man on earth to desire you to do violence to your feelings by leaving a man as dear to you as Frederick Lamb is, so farewell Harriette. I shall not intrude to offend you again.

"LORNE."

"Poor Lorne is unhappy and, what is worse," thought I, "he will soon hate me!" The idea made me wretched. However, I will do myself the justice to say, that I have

seldom, in the whole course of my life, been tempted by my passions or my fancies to what my heart and conscience told me was wrong. I am afraid my conscience has been a very easy one; but certainly I have followed its dictates. There was a want of heart and delicacy, I always thought, in leaving any man, without full and very sufficient reasons for it. At the same time, my dear mother's marriage had proved to me so forcibly the miseries of two people of contrary opinions and character torturing each other to the end of their natural lives, that, before I was ten years old, I decided in my own mind to live free as air from any restraint but that of my conscience.

Frederick Lamb's love was now increasing, as all men's do, from gratified vanity. He sometimes passed an hour in reading to me. Till then, I had no idea of the gratification to be derived from books. In my convent in France I had read only sacred dramas; at home, my father's mathematical books, *Buchan's Medicine*, *Gil Blas*, and *The Vicar of Wakefield*, formed our whole library. The two latter I had long known by heart, and could repeat at this moment.

My sisters used to subscribe to little circulating libraries in the neighbourhood, for the common novels of the day; but I always hated these. Fred Lamb's choice was happy, Milton, Shakespeare, Byron, *The Rambler*, Virgil, &c. "I must know all about these Greeks and Romans," said I to myself. "Some day I will go into the country quite alone, and study like mad. I am too young now."

In the meantime, I was absolutely charmed with Shakespeare. Music I always had a natural talent for. I