

SERIAL STORY

THE LOVES of the LADY ARABELLA

By **MOLLY ELLIOT SEAWELL**

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SYNOPSIS.

At 14 years of age Admiral Sir Peter Hawkshaw's nephew fell deeply in love at first sight with Lady Arabella Sturmont, who spurned his attentions. The lady, an orphan, was given a berth as midshipman on the Ajax by his uncle, Giles Vernon, nephew of Sir Thomas Vernon, because the boy's father had attended a theater where Hawkshaw's nephew saw Lady Arabella.

CHAPTER II.—Continued.

No sooner had Giles said this than with the determination to be known as a man of spirit (I was, as I said, but 14), I concluded I would go to London, too. On the day that Giles Vernon got his 24 hours' leave, I also got the same. Mr. Buxton looked a little queer when I asked him for it, and said something about not allowing the midshipmen to leave Portsmouth; but I answered readily enough that I wished very much to go on a little expedition with Giles Vernon, which would last overnight. As the other midshipmen had been allowed similar liberty, I got my request; and next morning, as the Phoebe coach for London rolled out of the stables into the inner yard, I approached. Giles Vernon was also on hand. His surprise was great when he saw me.

"You take a risk, my lad," he said. "No more than you do," I replied, stoutly. "And I, too, love a roguish eye and a blushing cheek, and mean to go to the playhouse with you to see Mistress Trenchard." At which Giles roared out one of his rich laughs, and cried:

"Come along, then, my infant Don Juan."

We got inside the coach, because it was far from unlikely that we might meet some of our own officers on the road, or even Sir Peter Hawkshaw himself, who traveled much between Portsmouth and the admiralty. And had we been caught, there is little doubt that we should have been forced to right about face, in spite of the leave each one of us had in his pocket. So we made ourselves extremely small in a corner of the coach, and only ventured to peep out once, when we caught sight of Sir Peter Hawkshaw's traveling chaise going London-wards, and Sir Peter himself lying back in it, reading a newspaper. After that, you may be sure we were very circumspect.

I noticed, however, the same thing in the coach that I had observed the first hour I set eyes on Giles Vernon—that every woman he met was his friend. There were some tradesmen's wives, a French hairdresser, and the usual assortment of women to be found in a public coach; and in half an hour Giles Vernon had said a pleasant word to every one of them, and basked in their smiles.

The day was in April, and was bright throughout; and the relays of horses were so excellent that we reached London at four in the afternoon, having left Portsmouth at nine in the morning. We went straight to a chophouse, for we were ravenously hungry.

"And now, Dicky boy," said Giles to me, "keep a bright lookout for any of our men; and if you see one, cut your cable and run for it, and if we are separated meet me at the White Horse Cellar at 12 o'clock to-night to take the midnight coach."

By the time we had got our dinner, it was time to go to the play. We marched off, and made our way through the mob of footmen, and got seats for the pit; and when we went in, and I saw the playhouse lighted up and the boxes filled with beautiful creatures, I was near beside myself. Giles laughed at me, but that I did not mind.

I gaped about me until suddenly Giles gripped my arm, and whispered to me:

"Don't look to the left. There is a box with Peter Hawkshaw in it, and Polly, and two girls—one of them the greatest beauty I ever saw, though but a slip of a girl. If Peter or Polly sees us, Lord help us!"

I did not look around immediately, but the desire to have a glimpse of the adorable Lady Arabella made me steal a glance that way. She was very beautifully dressed, and though but little more than 16, such a vision of loveliness as fairly to rival reigning beauties of several seasons' standing. I own that I saw little Daphne sitting by Lady Arabella, but I noted her scarcely at all.

Nor could Giles keep his eyes off Lady Arabella; and I noticed that even when the divine Sylvia, as he called her, was on the stage, he was not strictly attentive to her, but rather sought that fateful box where so much beauty was enthroned.

The divine Sylvia was a delightful actress. I must admit, and in spite of being 40 if she was a day, and though ruffled with pain, she had something winning in her air and face, and I could understand her tremendous popularity with the town boys.

Neither Sir Peter nor Polly, as Giles called her, showed any signs whatever of having recognized us in the large crowd in the pit, and we began to congratulate ourselves heartily. There was a seat next to us held by a gentleman's servant, and presently he gave way to a remarkably handsome young man of six or seven and twenty.

A few words passed between master and man, and then we knew that the handsome gentleman was Capt. Philip Overton of the Second Life Guards. Giles exchanged significant looks with me.

Capt. Overton seated himself quietly, and after a careless glance at the house, seemed to retire into his own thoughts, quite unmindful of the stage and what was going on upon it. I wondered why a man who seemed so little in harmony with his surroundings should take the trouble to come to the play.

But if Capt. Overton was indifferent to all about him, one person, the young beauty in Lady Hawkshaw's box, was far from indifferent to him. Lady Arabella saw his entrance, and from that moment she was occupied in trying to obtain his attention. When at last he recognized her and bowed slightly, she flamed all over with color, and gave him as good an invitation as any man might want to come to her box. But Overton made no sign of any intention to go to her, and, when she finally seemed to realize this, she became as indifferent to all about her as he was. Other persons came to the box and went during the play, but they got little heed from Lady Arabella. Little Daphne, although but a child, not yet in her teens, showed a lively interest in all that passed and behaved in a most young-ladyish way, much to my diversion. (It was all of two years older than she.)

As the play progressed, I saw that Giles was becoming more and more infatuated with the fledgling beauty, and he even whispered to me a suggestion that we present ourselves boldly at the door of the box. This I received with horror, fearing both Sir Peter and Lady Hawkshaw. Indeed, I had not been able to shake off this fear of my great-uncle and aunt for a moment.

One's first night at the play is usually a magic dream, but mine was tempered with the dread of being caught on the spot, of being delayed in our



There Was Nothing for Me to Do But to Walk Along Beside Him.

return to Portsmouth, and the torment of seeing the adored of my heart quite absorbed in another man.

When the play was over, we sat still until the Hawkshaw party had passed out, and then, more for the sake of bravado, I think, than inclination, Giles ran pell-mell to the stage door, where he made one of a mob of gentlemen to see the divine Sylvia to her chair. And, to my alarm, as soon as the lady was within and the curtain drawn, he tipped the wink to one of the chairmen, who silently gave up his place, and Giles, taking up the pole, trudged off, assisting to carry his portly mistress. There was nothing for me to do but to walk along beside him amid the rattle and roar of coaches, and shouting of the hackney coachmen, the pushing and jostling of chairmen and linkboys, and all the confusion that attends the emptying of a London playhouse. Mrs. Trenchard's door was not far away, and when she was put down, and Giles sneaked off, I observed the handsome Capt. Overton standing at the turn of the street laughing at him. Giles, who was so timid in his love, was bold enough in his wrath, and stepping up to Overton said coolly:

"Sir, I perceive you are smiling. Who is the harlequin that amuses you, may I ask?"

"You, sir," promptly answered Overton.

"You are too good," responded Giles, "and I have before pinked my man in beauty's quarrel,"—and then he slapped Overton in the mouth. The next thing I knew their two swords were flashing in the moonlight. I stood paralyzed with fear. Not so a couple of burly watchmen, who, running forward, clutched the offenders and dragged them apart.

But the two late enemies, making common cause against the watchmen, fought them off; and when the watchmen desisted from the fight to spring their rattles for assistance, both Giles and the officer ran down a dark alley, followed by me as fast as my short legs would carry me, and soon all

three of us were huddled together in the porch of a church, some distance away from the scene of the fracas.

"Neatly done," remarked Overton with a smile, to Giles. "I should have been in that brawny fellow's clutches now, but for the clip over the head you gave him."

"You did your share, sir," politely responded Giles.

"But time presses and our affairs must be settled," said Overton; "here is my card. It is too dark to read it, but I am Capt. Philip Overton, of the Second Life Guards."

"And I," replied Giles, "am Midshipman Giles Vernon of the Ajax, ship of the line, now at Portsmouth."

By the dim light of a lantern in the church porch I saw the expression of astonishment upon Overton's face.

"Then," he stammered, "we are related."

"Yes," replied Giles, smiling, "and if you pierce me through with sword or pistol, it will be worth one of the finest estates in the kingdom to you, provided always that old villain, Sir Thomas Vernon, does not marry and have children in spite of us."

Overton reflected, half laughing and half frowning.

"If only you had not passed a blow! Anything else, though, would be an accommodation for, it was most unfortunate."

"Yes, as it turns out," responded Giles; "but the question is, now, when and where can we meet?"

Just then the great bell of St. Paul's tolled out the half before midnight, and I, who had been an almost unobserved listener, spoke out of the fullness of my heart.

"Giles," said I, "the coach leaves at 12. If we do not get to Portsmouth in time, we are deserters. Let Capt. Overton write to you and fight afterward."

"Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings comes wisdom," replied Overton, smiling; and so in two minutes it was settled, Overton agreeing to come to Portsmouth to fight, if Giles could not get leave to meet him half-way between Portsmouth and London. We then bade him good-by, and ran off as fast as our legs could carry us, and barely made the coach.

We traveled all night, Giles sleeping soundly and snoring very loud, in one corner. I felt great uneasiness about the coming meeting between him and Overton, although I believed there was no hostile feeling between them. But when two men face each other with arms in their hands, there is always the possibility of awful catastrophe.

The rosy morning broke when we were still some distance from Portsmouth. The sight of the blooming hedge-rows, the bird-songs, and all the fair beauty of the morning made me long to be outside, and at the last stage—my companion still sleeping—I got out, and with a shilling to the coachman, got the box seat. There were only two or three persons, besides the guard, on the coach.

Once up there, I could not rest satisfied without handling the ribbons. I had never even driven a donkey in my life, but, nevertheless, I aspired to drive four fresh roadsters. The coachman, a good-natured, foolish fellow, gave me the reins, down a perfectly smooth lane. I seized the whip, too, and brought it down across the wheelers' backs, and the next thing I knew, the coach was lying on its side on the road, and I was on the ground.

It was over in a wink, and it seemed scarcely longer before it had been righted; for the load was extremely light, and no one was hurt except Giles. He scrambled out of the coach window, his arm hanging down, not broken, but out of joint. I pointed to it.

"Your sword arm," I said.

There was nothing for it but to make for Portsmouth as fast as possible. Giles was in extreme pain; he said nothing, but great drops came out upon his forehead. When we reached the town, I at once put off in search of a surgeon, while Giles remained at the inn. I soon fetched the surgeon, who got the arm into place. When the man had finished, Giles asked when he could use his arm for pistol shooting.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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