

A Delicate Situation



Elizabeth Chater

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For Marilyn, Pat, Carol and Helen

Chapter 1

Miss Thalia Temple, unlike every other passenger in the Accommodation coach with her, was enjoying her journey. It was a habit with Tally to enjoy her life. Not that she had made a decision to do so in cold blood. No, indeed! It was her bright, outgoing, cheerful nature to enter upon every day and each new experience as though it were the most delightful adventure. Perhaps her thick, shining golden hair, soft brown eyes, and pretty smile set with two dimples won for her a pleasant acceptance in situations most persons would have found uncomfortable or even disastrous. For example, an experience such as the trip just completed from Bath to Exeter. As the passengers disgorged themselves from the coach in the early dawn, a more miserable lot it would have been difficult to discover. Tired, pallid, travel-queasy, they straggled into the Jolly Roger Inn seeking sustenance and comfort.

Tally, bright-eyed and fresher than would seem possible after the dreadful night, came up behind a drooping young mother who was striving to soothe her wailing infant.

"Do let me hold Susan, ma'am," she suggested. "Get yourself freshened up. I'll order a cup of coffee for us both, and warm milk for Baby. Yes, do go!" she urged firmly. "I'll meet you in the Common Room in a few minutes."

With a persuasive smile she nodded toward the inn. The weary mother gratefully transferred the child to Tally's arms and went into the spacious entry hall. Tally settled the baby

neatly in one arm and made her way purposefully toward the Common.

The infant, whether astonished by its new carrier or soothed by so much firmness and beauty, abruptly stopped its feeble wail and began to make sucking noises. Tally's delicious laugh gurgled softly, and her face was lit by a tender smile.

An inadvertent witness to this scene was a tall, handsome man in a modish coat, burnished top boots, skintight buckskins, and a truly dashing topper. He had been observing the grubby passengers disembarking from the coach with a clearly supercilious eye, but the little byplay had piqued his interest. As the beautiful young woman approached his vantage point, some willful impulse moved the gentleman to step in front of her, blocking her passage effectively. Thus Tally found herself confronting a natty waistcoat rather than the open doorway she had made her goal.

Large brown eyes raised a good fourteen inches to survey the face above this unexpected obstacle. Girl and man gave one another a careful survey. Tally saw a remarkably handsome face, strong, dark-browed, and capped with shining dark hair under the dashing angled topper. Keen gray eyes were making a slow, insolent scrutiny of her face and person. As the girl's color rose at this impertinence, a smile of mocking amusement tugged at the corners of a beautifully cut mouth.

"You are blocking the entrance, sir," Tally said crisply. Her voice was low and clear; her enunciation placed her in the class of educated and genteel persons.

The gentleman took a closer look. Observing her very appropriate and elegant traveling costume, he asked himself what such a charmer was doing in a public conveyance, and offering to hold the other girl's squalling infant to boot?

Tally had had enough of the young buck's insolence. "You will allow me to pass at once, sirrah, or I shall see you suffer for your impertinence."

In all of his privileged life, Lord Philip Sandron, the Baron Sandroval and Estes, had never been treated to quite such a look of icy condemnation. Beautiful ladies of his own class were wont to greet him with charming smiles and teasing allure, for his fortune was enormous and his title older and more respected than many a ducal name. So at this quelling setdown from an unknown chit of a female, Lord Philip raised an arrogant eyebrow.

"And who is to make me suffer?" he asked silkily. He made an elaborate scan of the immediate vicinity for possible defenders or knights errant, then returned his glance to the girl. "You?"

He had not thought that soft brown eyes could flash so fiercely, then narrow with such sharp intent. "You will not remove yourself?" came the quiet challenge.

Lord Philip thought quickly. This encounter was not shaping as he might have expected. Mentally he cursed himself for the willful impulse which had led him to obstruct the chit's passage. He could step aside and forget the whole incident. But a demon in his nature prodded him to uncharacteristic action. Or perhaps it was the lack of the

flattering response he had come to expect from this young woman.

"I am enjoying the view from here," he said with a taunting grin.

"Here, take the child," commanded the girl, thrusting the infant at him.

In a reflex action which was quite involuntary, Lord Philip caught the baby gingerly in both hands. Keeping one of her own hands a few inches below his, Tally knocked his hat off with the other. As he made a snatch, again involuntary, to save it, the girl neatly removed the baby *from* his loosened grasp and pushed past him into the inn.

An ostler who had observed the whole incident uttered a snort of laughter. Retrieving his hat from the muddy paving stones, Philip turned upon the wretched groom with a snarl. And then his expression changed. A wide grin replaced the snarl, and he threw back his head and joined in the laugh.

"Had ye there, didden' she Guv?" jibed the ostler.

"A most capable and determined female," agreed his lordship, the grin fading into a thoughtful expression. And I was an arrogant and insolent lout, he told himself. The girl handled me very neatly, with the minimum of violence. Should I seek her out and apologize? With a sense of shock it occurred to him that so far in his much-flattered social existence there had risen no situation in which he had felt it necessary to offer an apology. He was still surprised at his own uncharacteristic discourtesy in blocking the girl at the doorway. The incident was beginning to assume a strange

quality which startled and intrigued him. Casually brushing the mud from his hat, Lord Philip strolled into the Jolly Roger.

The girl was in the Ordinary, talking to the host's wife. The latter was cooing over the infant with that besotted look females get. Lord Philip changed his mind about approaching the girl under such public circumstances. He took a seat near the hall doorway. As was usual, a servant came almost immediately to him to request his pleasure.

"A glass of your best wine, if you please. I am waiting to have a fresh team set to, and shall not have time for a meal."

"Yes, sir, right away, sir!" The waiter ran off and returned quickly with the wine. Lord Philip tossed him a coin, his eyes returning immediately to the girl, who was now ensconced at a table near a window, feeding the baby with sips of milk from a small spoon. Within a few moments his lordship's groom was at his shoulder, announcing that the horses were put to. His lordship waved him away.

"Walk them till I come."

The groom, whose name was Ab bent, nodded and went back to the innyard, having first cast a knowing glance around the room to spot whatever charmer had engaged his lordship's fastidious attention. There was only one real Dasher, Ab bent estimated, but since she was busy feeding a nipper, it could hardly be her the master was stalking.

At this moment the child's mother came hesitantly into the Ordinary. She saw her child and the beautiful girl at once, and made her way among the long tables to come to them. With a few serious words and a dazzling smile, the Dasher arose and

transferred the baby to its mother. Then she made her way toward the door.

Lord Philip, in the grip of a strange compulsion, rose, and grimly set himself in her way.

Big brown eyes, twinkling with amusement, lifted to meet his hard gray glance.

"Not *again!*" she said softly, with both dimples showing.

"Wish to offer my apologies, Ma'am," said Lord Philip stiffly.

"Now that," said the chit, regarding him with mirthful eyes, "is handsomely done! I do hope your very modish chapeau is none the worse for its—tumble?"

A reluctant grin made human the stern expression on his lordship's face. He stood aside, making the elegant bow for which he was so admired at Almack's. Giving her a smile which brought roses to her cheeks, he said softly, "Better go while you still have the chance, Circe!—Or should I call you Parthenope—lest you, too, find yourself in deep water!"

If he had sought to disconcert the girl with his reference to the siren who drowned herself at the escape of the hero Odysseus, he was far out.

"But Odysseus didn't *escape me!*" flashed back the chit. "I knocked his hat off and let him go!"

Admiration lightened the man's expression as he bowed again. "A classicist, no less!" he murmured. "Well, little Miss Bluestocking, however you came to learn of the siren's myth, may I advise you that your teachers would not approve of your knocking a gentleman's hat off in public?"

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Slipping neatly to one side of him, the girl murmured, "*Gentleman?*" and then was gone from the inn.

Checkmate, admitted the nobleman, staring after the charming figure with a reluctant smile.

Chapter 2

The stagecoach from Bath pulled up before the George and Horse Inn at Crofton to discharge a single passenger. This was a young lady of really remarkable good looks, and her descent from the vehicle was marked by a chorus of farewells from the remaining passengers. Even the guard, a surly fellow whose bad humor was caused by the coachman's desire to break the record from Bath to London, with the resultant hideous jolting and careening of the coach upon the poor roads, gave a brief smile at the thanks this particular passenger was expressing for his help in unloading her luggage, and condescended to stretch down a hand to accept the vail she was holding up to him after he had remounted.

He nearly dropped the coin as the aspiring Jehu cracked the whip and set the stage in motion almost before his fellow worker had recovered his seat and his equilibrium.

Tally Temple chuckled at the shouts of outrage wafted back to her ears. Then, with a deep breath of anticipation, she turned toward the inn to look for her father. In a moment she had caught sight of a silver-haired head in one of the inn's small-paned bow windows, bent as usual over a book. Smiling maternally, Tally picked up her two heavy portmanteaus from the roadside where the guard had tossed them, and struggled with them toward the inn.

"May I leave these here until I meet my father?" she asked of a buxom dame who was watching her approach with some suspicion.

"Who is yer father?" countered the landlord's wife.

Tally cocked her golden curls toward the oblivious figure in the bow window. "He is Professor Temple, tutor for Squire Dade's sons," explained Tally.

The lady sniffed, but moved aside to permit the girl to deposit her luggage just inside the wide doorway.

"Mr. Temple," said the woman heavily, "is in the bar-parlor. *Reading.*"

"But, of course," agreed Tally with a chuckle. "I have seldom seen him doing anything else."

She ran lightly into the shadowy room and bent to bestow a kiss upon the top of her father's shining hair. He looked up, recognized her, and said with a sweet smile, "You must listen to this, my dear! The most amusing comment—!" He intoned a line in Latin.

"Papa! You are not going to welcome the daughter you have not seen for four years by reading to her from—from—" She leaned over and peered at the book her father held—"from *Ovid!* Papa! How very shocking of you!"

Jocelyn Temple was startled. "But it is his *Ars Amatoria*, Thalia. *The Art of Love*. So witty! Some rather rigid moralists find it distressing. It is my own opinion that Ovid was actually satirizing the loose amorality of the Roman nobility, rather than advising them how to be expert in seduction." His eyes returned to the book. "Some passages have a regrettable crudity, of course, but it is the rude familiarity of one's barber rather than that of an elegant gamesman." His voice trailed off, "No educated adult could find this a real menace to morality."

"Well, as an educated adult, I should prefer a fatherly embrace and some urgent demands to hear of my adventures since I saw you last," smiled his daughter, slipping the book carefully from his grasp and bending to kiss his cheek. "Now, dear Papa, let us proceed to whatever vehicle you have secured for our transport, and hie us to Dade House before starvation quite incapacitates us!"

Smiling his pleasure at her company, but looking a little bewildered by the situation, Mr. Temple said vaguely, "Vehicle? Let me see ... are we going somewhere, my dear?"

"Oh, Papa." The girl shook her head at him, but her own brown eyes were soft with affection. "You are to bring me to Squire Dade's home, where you have received permission for me to have a room and act as governess to his young daughters. You cannot have forgotten? Oh, Gemini! Do not tell me you have not arranged it?" She gave her absent-minded Papa a look of loving exasperation.

"A room? By Jove, Thalia, you are right!" The gentle, austere handsome visage lightened with a smile. "Squire Dade's good lady has graciously permitted me to invite you to live with the family!"

(Which, thought Tally sardonically, is not too bountiful a gesture, since she is getting a highly trained governess for her children without offering a single farthing of remuneration! Well, I shall have to see!)

Her father's gentle voice was continuing. "I have not seen your quarters, dear child, but my own are adequate, so I would assume that yours will be so." He gave her a gentle hug, whose tenderness brought tears to the girl's lovely eyes.

"You are so much like your beautiful Mama, my dear!" He sighed. "Now where can your luggage have got to? We really must be off! Mrs. Dade will think we are lost. She most graciously allowed me the use of a vehicle to fetch you."

Within a few moments father and daughter were seated within an unfashionable weatherbeaten gig, drawn by the most melancholy horse Tally had ever seen. The girl's portmanteaus made a fine resting place for her small feet. She smiled as she stared around her and breathed deeply of the fragrant country air.

"Now you must tell me how the Fates have dealt with you since last we met, Father," she said with a demurely provocative face. "Then, in turn, I shall open my budget to you, and before the cat can lick her ear—" she chuckled.

"Thalia, my dearest child!" protested her father as she had mischievously anticipated. He was wearing the closest thing to a boyish grin she had ever seen upon his scholarly face. "'Open the budget ... cat can lick her ear'! Is it for this cottage phraseology that I have kept you at Miss Enderby's very expensive seminary for goodness knows how long?"

"Ten years," Tally answered his remark succinctly. "And before that, two years at the Dame's School for the Children of Scholars."

"Has it indeed been as much?" queried Jocelyn Temple sadly. "I fear I have been a most inadequate parent, my dear Thalia, have I not? But when your mother died so young, there seemed to be no way I could care for you alone. I—I did write to you, did I not?"

Tally chuckled. "Several times a year—such scholarly screeds that I could use parts of them, in these later years, for the essays Miss Enderby required of senior students."

Jocelyn shook his silver head, but whether in censure of his daughter's behavior or of his own it was not clear.

"But you did make sure to visit me every Christmas, dearest." The girl soothed his evident condemnation of his lack of parental affection. To distract him, she began to tell him about some other escapades and exploits at Miss Enderby's Select Seminary for Young Gentlewoman. She spoke in so lively a manner that she soon had him laughing with her, and even recounting a lark or two of his own Oxford days. Thus, in pleasant converse, father and daughter came to Dade Hall.

It was not an impressive manor house, having been but recently built—within the last twenty years, in fact—by the nouveau riche parent of the present Squire Henry Dade. The founder of the family had not engaged a gifted architect to design him a Palladian mansion, nor indeed, anything which might be distinguished as Architecture; but had settled for a heavy brick house, foursquare and homely, set in the exact center of a small acreage. Tally sighed as the gig approached the huge box. She had had hopes of an interesting or possibly even an historic structure.

To her surprise, her father did not pull up in front of the heavy front portal, set without roof or shelter in the center of the front elevation, but drove around to the rear, where, at a sensible distance from the house, clustered a solid stable and barns. Dubiously the girl eyed her portmanteaus, her light

slippers, and the distance across a cobbled stable yard to the back door of the house.

"Are we to walk from here, Papa?" she asked. "My portmanteaus are really too heavy for either of us to carry so far."

"What have you brought in them, to make them so heavy?" teased her father, but with real interest. "Could it be—books?"

"Oh, my dear," gurgled Tally. "Surely you will have enough of them? Do you never think of anything else?"

Thus adjured, her father wrinkled his lofty brow beneath the shining hair. "Why, I must do, child." He came out finally. "I remembered to pick you up at the inn, did I not?"

"So you did, dearest," agreed the girl, controlling her amusement. "And as a reward, I have brought you—a few books!" Which had cost almost all the pocket money she had been allowed by Miss Enderby, whose substantial bills Tally knew took all her father's meager salary as tutor to the Dade youths, as well as some of his dwindling patrimony as a third son. Often Tally had yearned to buy such pretty clothes as adorned most of her classmates, but she had realized that, with her limited funds, she was wise to stick to simple dark woolens and, in the warmer weather, muslins and cottons in subdued colors or white. Her plain and limited wardrobe had never served to disguise her rare beauty, but it kept all but the most envious of her schoolmates from actively hating her for it. And when her French teacher, Madame Doriot, whose Gallic temperament was unable to endure the sight of so much loveliness so humbly adorned, offered to instruct her in

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the mysteries of dressmaking, Tally accepted with delight—and found a new talent which became increasingly useful.

By this time Mr. Temple had relinquished the reins to a stableboy, and, hefting one of Tally's portmanteaus, led the way to the house. It quite irked his daughter to see the distinguished scholar trudging in at the back door, but the obviously affectionate respect with which he was greeted by Cook and her two maids did much to restore the tone other mind. Professor Temple paused courteously to introduce the servants to his daughter, and made a gentle compliment upon the excellence of the cuisine which she would be privileged to sample in the ensuing months. This compliment brought an immediate offer of tea, which was gratefully accepted.

Tally began to revise her first rather unfavorable estimate of Dade Hall. When the stableboy, grinning, came into the kitchen with the second portmanteau, and offered to bustle them both up to Miss's room, she found herself in charity with the Dades, house and household. This cheerful attitude lasted until a little maid named Piety, accompanied by the stableboy, Alfred, escorted her to a poky room at the top of the house. Scarcely more than a large closet, this room was crowded by a truckle bed, a commode with wash basin, ewer and chamber pot, and a row of nails for the hanging of garments. Its one saving grace was the single window which looked out upon a pleasant vista of neat fields, a distant church spire rising above trees, and a great house set upon a remote hilltop.

The presence of Piety and Alfred beside her crowded the room uncomfortably. Tally had just opened her mouth to ask

if there could have been a mistake when she noted Piety's eyes upon the spread over the bed. It was a spot of warm color in the tiny room.

"Your Pa sent me here with that before he set out this mornin'. Seems he'd ordered it from Addie Jenks for your birthday, an' then forgot to send it." She grinned. "Addie was mad when she found out he hadn' sent it. She wanted all them fine young leddies to see 'er work."

All three dissolved into giggles. It warmed Tally's heart to see that her absent-minded parent had such tolerant admirers. She sent off the surprised and gratified Alfred with thanks and a couple of pence, and was about to do the same with Piety when the girl closed the door conspiratorially, bent her head in its mobcap close to Tally, and whispered, "You want to watch out for 'em, Miss. The whole family, I means. Missus is a tartar, an' Squire's as cold as ice for all he talks so hearty. But the worst is Master Rafe. Young Josh ain't so bad, just rumbustious, but Rafe is a mean one. 'E *pinches!*"

"Does he indeed?" asked Tally militantly. "And what happens when you pinch back?"

Piety drew a shocked breath. "We never would, Miss! "Twould be as much as our place was worth!"

"Master Rafe had better not try his nasty little tricks upon me!" promised Tally. "I'll box his bullying ears for him!"

The little maid gave a scandalized gasp. "'E's seventeen years old an' built like a bull!"

Tally's face sobered. "One of those," she said reflexively. Miss Enderby's Select Seminary had housed no male bullies, or in fact any males at all, but her pupils were far from stupid

and were, moreover, quite observant. They had seen blustering and brutal men during their escorted walks through Bath, and had even discussed ways to avoid or deal with such creatures if encountered. But what was possible for a genteel young lady protected by a wealthy or prestigious family would not be so simple for a young female in a subservient position in the creature's own home. Then an idea came to her.

"How does my father handle this nasty youth?"

Piety could not meet her eyes. "Master Rafe ain't ... that is, he don't bother wi' lessons much, Miss. 'E's off ridin' them great 'orses, or shootin' with 'is Pa, or hangin' about in the tavern. Mr. Temple don't seem to know Master Rafe ain't there. An' young Josh ain't in the schoolroom very much of late."

This information put a decidedly unpleasant complexion on her father's position in the Dade household, and, by extension, her own. "What does Squire Dade say when his sons play least-in-sight?" she asked the maid.

"He don't seem to care. Ever since your Pa told him the boys would never get into Oxford, Squire's been sayin' it's all bookish nonsense, anyway, an' he's glad the boys 'ave grown to be real men, not molly-mops."

"But then," said Tally with dismay, "if his pupils have grown beyond his instruction, what does my father do to earn his keep?"

Piety looked embarrassed. "Mr. Reeby—that's the butler—says Mr. Temple's to be let to stay on for no wages as long as you learn the girls—"

"Teach the girls," corrected Tally gently, but she was thinking hard. Her father would probably prefer not to have to wrestle with a pair of cloddish youths. In fact, he would most likely forget that that had been his reason for being in this household—as long as he had his books and was permitted to read them. If she, therefore, could make a success of teaching the girls, she could furnish her father with a quiet haven as long as her job lasted. And surely, for her salary, however meager, she could save enough to keep herself and her father until she secured another position? With a little lightening of spirit she smiled at her young intelligencer.

"That's all right, then! I'll just teach the girls and the Squire will pay me the salary. Perhaps not as much as he has had to give a scholar like my father, but—"

"Reeby says you ain't to get any salary," Piety informed her dolefully. "Jus' board an' room for yourself and your Pa. As long as you don't run afoul of Mistress or the boys."

This was sobering news indeed. The wretched little room seemed like a haven now, and her driving purpose must be to keep its low ceiling over her head until she could make some better arrangement. Putting her hand into her reticule, she drew out tuppence for Piety. The girl hesitated.

"Happen you'd best save what ye got, Miss," she advised. "If ye could learn me to write me name ... an' mayhap figger a little, so I c'd make change at the shops?"

"Of course I can, and will," promised Tally. "But you must take this now." She extended the coins. "It is very little, but it will help you to have it. There is nothing can make a woman feel more secure than her own money in her purse!"

Piety took the vail with a little bob of thanks and a dazzled smile. "Cook says yer to come down for a bite and a sup before you goes to see Mistress. Y'll need all yer strength for that, Cook says!"

A little daunted, Tally took off her bonnet and cloak, washed her face and hands, and returned the way she had come, to find the kitchen and its promised comforts. Twenty minutes later, she was facing her employer in the stuffy, pretentious drawing room.

Tally's new mistress was a bony, high-nosed woman whose features seemed set in a discontented sneer. She was overdressed for the time of day in purple satin, and around her person hung a musty odor. Her heavy eyebrows rose as she took in the elegance of the lovely girl standing before her, dressed modishly in garments which Mrs. Dade considered to be much too fine for a servant. The chit did not even wait to be spoken to, but introduced herself with what her employer felt to be encroaching pertness.

"I am Thalia Temple," offered the girl, in the same namby-pamby Oxford accent which was so irksome in the old fool of a father. Who did they think they were, this beggarly pair, with their airs and graces and not a groat between them to pay their shot? So her response, when she finally made it, was discouraging.

"Indeed? You are very late, Miss Temple. I suppose your father was woolgathering again? He is quite past doing his duties, for which my husband so generously pays him. It is as well you have come to help him."

This was a declaration of war, and at first flush Tally was more than ready to take up the cudgels. Then a saving prudence suggested that she hold her tongue until she knew exactly what she faced, so she contented herself with a mild, "I shall be most willing to instruct your daughters, Ma'am, if that is your wish."

"I would scarcely have engaged you to instruct my sons," snapped Mrs. Dade. "A word of warning, Miss Temple. You are to refrain from casting out lures or seeking to engage my sons' interest in any way. One sign of anything of that nature, and you and your precious father will be out-of-doors within the hour—without a reference."

Tally caught her breath and counted to ten. This had been the course recommended by her favorite teacher, who had realized that rare beauty, an even rarer temper, and no money at all would create many an inflammable situation for her brightest pupil. In the event, the device worked well enough so that Tally was able to assure her new employer in a tight little voice that she would be far too busy working with her daughters to have time for the opposite sex.

Mrs. Dade sniffed disbelievingly. "See that you remain of that mind," she warned. "They are normal young men, and will respond to a—a young female if she makes herself available."

Tally's lovely face flushed crimson. "I am not the sort of female who makes herself 'available,' Ma'am!" she snapped in her turn.

Mrs. Dade sniffed again.

There was a brief, unfriendly silence. Tally, who had not been invited to seat herself, resolutely refused to wiggle, and stood as stiff as a sergeant major on parade. At length she said in a controlled voice, "Would you care to outline my duties with the girls, and tell me what is to be my remuneration?"

"Let me make it clear to you at the outset, Miss Temple," said Mrs. Dade with obvious enjoyment, "that you will be receiving no remuneration. You will be provided with board and your room, and we shall continue to house your father, who is quite useless and is in fact becoming an embarrassment. And if that is not suitable, Miss," she concluded venomously, "you can get out and take the old fool with you."

Tally's face slowly became very pale, and her huge sherry-brown eyes took on such a luster that the complacent dame before her knew a moment of alarm. Then the fire died out of those clear eyes and the girl said, woodenly, "And my duties?"

"Your duty, Miss, is whatever I require you to do at the moment! You will run errands for me, write invitations and replies, assist Cook when we have dinner parties—Can you sew?" She interrupted her catalogue of duties to ask.

"Quite well," answered Tally, who had been making her own very modish garments for several years, thanks to the French mistress at Miss Enderby's.

"Then you will do mending and repairs, and make the girls' dresses."

"And teach them to read and write?" inquired Tally in a low voice.

"That, of course," said her employer. "But it is far from desirable that they should become bluestockings." She subjected the girl to a sneering scrutiny. "I would have them prepared to make a good marriage, to which, as we clearly see, an excess of erudition does *not* lead!" When the girl made no reply to this taunt at her unespoused state, Mrs. Dade went on querulously, "Are you able to teach pianoforte, sketching, refined behavior and the French language?"

Tally was tempted to reply that while she was qualified to teach all these subjects, she had little expectation that any daughter of Mrs. Dade was capable of learning. She took a tight grip on her anger. Until she could decide upon a course of action, she must keep even this unpleasant roof over Jocelyn's head and her own. So she merely nodded as she replied, "Yes, Ma'am, I can instruct the Misses Dade in French, pianoforte, sketching and watercolor, as well as sewing, mathematics, and household management—"

"Oh, that will be quite unnecessary," interrupted her employer. "My daughters will not need such cottage crafts!"

God help their unfortunate husbands! thought Tally, but she contented herself with a smile. "Where are your daughters now, Ma'am? Will you have someone take me to them?"

Mrs. Dade nodded majestically. "Ring the bell," she commanded, pointing toward a dingy cord hanging beside the mantelpiece.

It proved to be unnecessary to summon a servant. The door of the drawing room banged open and a short, heavysset youth barged in. He was dressed in a countrified parody of Town elegance, and his voice was a caricature of a Beau's foppish drawl.

"Alfred says the Temple filly is here at last—"he began, then perceived Tally standing by the mantel. A knowing leer tugged at his heavy features. "Oho, Mama! So this is the little governess! Lucky Lottie and Maude!" Disregarding his mother's frown, he strolled over to Tally, looking her up and down so boldly that bright color rose in her cheeks and she turned toward Mrs. Dade in protest. That besotted mother was now smiling at her offspring's massive shoulders as though his forward manner were the very acme of tonnish behavior.

"Where are Charlotte and Maude, Ralph? I wish to make Miss Temple acquainted with them at once, since they will be her particular charge."

Ignoring his mother's question, Ralph said with a smirk, "I think I shall go back into the schoolroom, now that you have secured such a pretty new teacher. Clever Mama!"

Mrs. Dade was neither amused nor flattered. Glaring at Tally, she said sharply, "My son is pleased to jest. I wish you to understand that you will have no time for dalliance with him or my younger son, Miss Temple!"

Suppressing the comment that if the younger son was anything like his brother, she would run to Land's End rather than engage in dalliance with either of them, Tally retorted, "I have assured you that I have no intention of promoting an

acquaintance with your family, Ma'am. My duties here are to instruct your daughters in genteel arts, to school them for successful entry into Polite Society. I neither hope nor wish for any closer connection."

The Dades, *mère et fils*, studied her temper-bright eyes and rosy cheeks. The mother was the first to speak. "Hoity-toity, Miss!" she snapped. "You shall not take that tone with me!"

Her son broke the charged silence which followed. "Mama, shall I show Miss Temple to her room?" Then, observing the stormcloud upon his mother's brow, he added hastily. "To the nursery to meet Charlotte and Maude, that is?"

"No, you may not!" She glared at the girl. "Pull the bell again, Miss Temple. I cannot think what the servants do with their time! They are never about when I need them!"

As if on cue, the door opened and Piety presented her solemn little face. "Did you wish to speak to me, Ma'am?"

"No, I wish you will take Miss Temple to the Nursery—at once! It is past time she began her duties. No, Ralph!" she addressed her son, who was attempting to sidle unobtrusively toward the door. "I desire you shall remain here. I have something to say to you! As for you, Miss Temple, you are expected to supervise my daughters at their luncheon and dinner, which they take in the sun room, before the rest of the family is served in the dining room. Do not let the girls dawdle! The servants resent delays or extra demands when they are serving us."

"Would it not be easier then," suggested Tally recklessly, "to have the children's meal served in their nursery, and thus avoid the bustle?"

"You think it would be easier for the servants to carry food up three flights of stairs?" sneered Mrs. Dade. "Then you must seek to persuade them! Now, must I ask you again to be about your duties?"

Tally was silent as she followed Piety up the three flights of stairs at the back of the house. She was appalled at the situation in which she had been placed. If the other son was anything like Ralph, she might find herself if not in actual danger, then at least subject to some very unpleasant advances. Could she fend off these bucolic Lotharios? The position of governess in the Dade household lacked even the few mitigating elements she had hoped for. At this moment, Tally would cheerfully have walked away from Dade Hall and searched for any decent, honest work which might be available, no matter how menial. But there was her father. Could she find employment which would bring enough money to take care of the two of them? She set her dainty jaw firmly. She would put up with the unpleasant conditions here just long enough to find some other work elsewhere, and then adieu, Dades!

The first order of business was to make sure she was not surprised by unwelcome visitors to her bedroom. "Is there some way I might sleep with Charlotte and Maude? A cot in their bedroom, perhaps?"

Piety stared at her intently, and then a bitter comprehension broke over her small countenance. "We could

set up yer truckle bed for ye there, Miss. 'Twould be uncomfortable, never to have a minute to yerself, but you'd be—safe." She bobbed her head. "Yes, I'll do it right away, whilst yer talkin' with the girls." She added, low-voiced, "The maids all sleeps in one room that opens into Cook's bedroom. Cook insisted after one o' her best helpers had to go 'way. In trouble, she was, but she wouldn't say if it was one o' the young men or Squire hisself."

Tally understood that Piety was doing her best to issue a warning, and was grateful for it, however daunting the facts which were implied. It strengthened her determination to spend no more time in this household than was absolutely necessary. Tally was neither stupid nor foolhardy. Even in the chaste confines of Miss Enderby's Select Seminary, there had circulated whispered tales and rumors of maidservants forced to leave their employment in disgrace because of certain unspecified activities they had shared with males. It had always irked Tally that the men involved in the forbidden behavior seemed to get off scot-free, while the wretched servant girl was dismissed without a character.

"I shall not permit anything like that to happen to me," she told herself stoutly, but the disturbing fear was present in the back of her mind. In a physical contest, she would be no match for the hulking lout she had just met in his mother's drawing room. She must put her mind to the acquiring of a weapon of defense—not lethal, of course, but a disabling deterrent. A canister of red pepper, perhaps?

A Delicate Situation
by Elizabeth Chater

Piety had halted outside a closed door. From within came sounds of verbal conflict, followed, as they listened, by a dull crash and a wail of rage.

Tally straightened her shoulders and walked in.

Chapter 3

In the nursery two small girls, facing each other with expressions of anger, turned their tear-stained faces toward the interruption. Tally said nothing, merely scrutinized her pupils carefully.

"Who ... are *you*?" demanded the larger of the two girls, belligerently.

"I am Miss Thalia Temple, your new governess. And who are you?" Tally responded quietly.

"We don't want you," began the larger girl.

She was interrupted by the other. "*I want her! She's ever so much prettier than any of the other nannies, and she looks as if she'd be more fun than old Temple—oh!*" The child stopped speaking, her face growing red with embarrassment as she realized she was speaking to the daughter of her brothers' tutor.

"Are you really to be our governess?" challenged the older girl. "You're much too pretty to be a servant—and you're not dressed like one. Mama will see that you dress more plainly, as—as befits your station." She brought out the phrase in mimicry of something she had heard her mother say.

"Well," said Tally reasonably. "She'll have to buy *me* some other clothing if she wishes me to dress differently, for every garment I have is as modish as this!" She laughed mischievously. "I make them myself."

"Mother will never buy you anything," snapped the older girl in a voice so like Mrs. Dade's that Tally was startled.

The younger girl had conquered her embarrassment and sidled past her sister toward Tally. Slowly she held out her grubby little hand. "I am Maude," she offered. "I'm glad you are to be my governess."

"Well, *I* am Charlotte," announced the larger girl, glaring in a most unfriendly manner. "And I am not going to have anyone like you telling me what to do!"

"I wouldn't dream of it," said Tally calmly. Then turning to the younger girl, she extended her hand and took the child's. "You welcomed me very prettily, Maude," she said in her pleasant voice. "I have high hopes that you will grow into a charming young woman, much admired for your social grace."

Maude's small face brightened at the unaccustomed praise. "Do you really think so?" she asked. "If you will teach me, I shall try very hard to learn."

Charlotte uttered a harsh, mirthless laugh. "What can a servant teach you? You are too stupid to learn anything anyway—Papa has often said so."

"Then Papa must be shown different—if indeed he ever made such a disparaging remark, which I cannot accept," said Tally, seeing Maude's hurt expression. "And I shall make you such a pretty dress to wear that it will be easy for you to show off your new graces," she promised, to the sparkling delight of the little girl.

"Can you make the new dress today?" she asked eagerly.

"We can pick out a style for you," agreed Tally. "I think it must be too close to luncheon to find materials and begin to cut and sew."

"Mama will never permit it," interrupted Charlotte enviously. "She is very reluctant to spend money upon us," she added, in a more vulnerable tone.

"Perhaps we might contrive the first dress for Maude without spending money," suggested Tally with a sparkling smile for the crestfallen Maude. "I shall see what I can discover. Possibly there are old garments in trunks in the storeroom—dresses your Mama has discarded because they are out of fashion or too well-worn in spots? We shall have to go upon a treasure hunt after our lessons are finished tomorrow morning," she promised the smaller girl.

"I want to have a new dress too!" demanded Charlotte.

"After lessons tomorrow morning," agreed Tally equably. "The lessons will show us how we are to proceed in making the dresses."

"How can that be?" challenged Charlotte suspiciously. "No lessons I have ever had have told me anything about making clothes. I think you are lying to us—or else you are not a real teacher?"

"I am a graduate of Miss Enderby's Select Seminary," replied Tally quietly. "I can teach French and Italian, pianoforte, sketching and painting, the polite dances, sewing and embroidery, as well as mathematics, history, and literature."

Charlotte shuddered elaborately. "Boring!" she cried. "I shall never pay any attention to *those* subjects!"

"If you wish to be considered an awkward ignoramus, then of course you must pay absolutely no attention to anything I am going to teach your little sister. She, I am quite sure, will

soon be on the way to becoming an accomplished young lady."

Maude heaved a deep sigh of satisfaction. "I shall try *very* hard," she promised, her adoring eyes on Tally's lovely face. "Shall I look as pretty as you, Miss Temple?"

Charlotte hooted with laughter. "*You?* You'll never be anything but a dough-face!" she said cruelly. "That's what Papa calls her," she explained loftily to Tally.

"He calls you Pug because you are forever snarling and fighting!" retaliated Maude, her small face red and ugly with anger. "And you broke the new slate!" she added. "I'm going to tell Mama!"

Tally thought it was time to intervene before the children worked themselves up to another shouting match.

"We shall not be using a slate just at present," she advised the combatants. "The sketches we are to make for your new dresses will be much better done on paper, with my nice dark drawing pencils. In fact, if you will wash your faces and hands now for luncheon, we will be able to make a start on our designs for your costumes before we are called to eat."

Maude agreed enthusiastically. She came closer to Tally. "Will you come to our bedroom while I wash my hands?" she asked shyly.

"I don't intend to wash," Charlotte stated in a strident voice.

Tally mimed delicate anguish.

"Why are you making that absurd face?" demanded Charlotte.

"Your voice is so rough and inelegant," said Tally in an exact copy of Miss Enderby's most quelling tone and diction. The rebuke had the same effect upon the recalcitrant Charlotte as it had had upon defiant pupils at the Seminary. Charlotte blushed for the first time, and her belligerence faltered.

Tally hardened her heart. Charlotte was made of stem stuff, and it would take a pretty sharp set down to pierce her shield of insensitivity to discover the child within. Still, if the position of governess was to be made bearable, the girl's intractability must be curbed or cured. Therefore she said, gently, "Show me the way to your bedroom, Maude. And perhaps you will be kind enough to permit me to wash my hands and face also? I should like to present an acceptable appearance for our meal."

"Please come this way," invited Maude, very much on her hostessly mettle. She opened a door at one side of the nursery and led the way into a roomy bedroom in which two small trundle beds occupied pride of place. There was a commode with a pitcher and basin, and in a small clay dish, a bar of very odd-smelling soap. A limp linen towel, not too clean, hung from a nail beside the commode. Tally inspected the arrangements dubiously.

Charlotte had followed them into the room and was now ready to thrust herself in front of her younger sister. "I'm the older. I shall wash first," she announced. Maude looked at Tally for support, and met such a mischievous smile that she immediately grinned in sympathy. Tally waited until Charlotte had finished her somewhat sketchy ablutions and was drying

herself on the towel. Then she said, low-voiced to Maude, "Will you show me where my room is? I am newly come to your home, and do not quite remember."

"Oh!" The child's face fell. "Are you leaving me so soon?"

"No," soothed Tally. "I am just going to fetch something which you will enjoy very much."

Eagerly Maude took her hand and led her out into and along the corridor back to the small room Tally had been shown earlier. Then, staring around the crowded space, she said, "It's *so poky!*"

"It will do," Tally answered. "I shall enjoy being close to you."

Since this was the first time in Maude's life that anyone had expressed pleasure in her company, she beamed at her new governess. But further surprises were in store. Piety and Albert appeared in the doorway.

"We've come to move yer bed, Miss," explained the little maid.

"I am hoping you will not object, Maude," Tally said soberly. "I have asked that my bed may be placed in your room for the time being."

A harsh little voice behind them piped up. "It's *my* room, too, and I object to having a servant share it with me."

Maude whirled on her sister. "It's mine as much as yours! She can stay on *my* side, an' we won't pay any attention to you, you horrid thing! So there!"

"I'm telling Mama on you both!" threatened Charlotte, but less belligerently, her eyes on Tally's gently smiling face.

"You must do as you think best," said Tally equably. "Do you often tattle upon your sister? It was not considered to be very good form at Miss Enderby's establishment. Of course, many of the pupils there were of noble birth, and their standards of behavior were very high." Tally came the snob ruthlessly over the unpleasant little girl. "Place my cot beside Miss Maude's if you please," she instructed the waiting servants. "I shall bring my portmanteaus and my drawing pencils."

This red herring was sufficient to divert Charlotte, who at this moment was almost pathetically anxious to find an escape from the unpopular position she had taken. "Are you really going to teach us to draw pictures of the dresses we would like you to make for us?" she demanded. Tally noted with relief that her harsh little voice had taken a milder tone.

"When we are washed and freshened up for our meal, I shall show you what I mean to do," answered Tally. "Now, Maude, we must bestir ourselves if we are to be ready in time for luncheon. At what time do we eat?"

"You are going to eat with us?" queried Charlotte. "Our other governesses never would. They were always looking for ways to get away from us."

"Why do you suppose they felt that way?" wondered Tally, solemnly.

This simple question was enough to disconcert both children. Tally left them to think about it as she directed the servants where to place her cot in the children's room. Thanking them, she dismissed them and lifted one other portmaneaus to her bed. She unpacked it and produced her

wash bag. From this she extracted a large cake of lavender soap. Tipping the water Charlotte had used out of the bowl into the slop pail, she poured in some fresh water and offered the delicately scented soap to Maude.

"This will make your face and hands smell very nice," she said, smiling into the eager little face. "Fashionable young ladies are anxious to present a fresh and fragrant appearance. I shall help you to achieve this, my dear."

Charlotte hung about near her own small bed, her mutinous and very envious glance slipping ever and anon to the animated pair on the other side of the room. But she said nothing until Tally, carefully drying the younger girl's face upon her own clean towel, brought out her ivory-backed brush and gently began to untangle the snarled mass of Maude's light brown hair.

"We hate having our hair brushed," Charlotte told Tally sharply.

"This lady doesn't pull like Nanna used to," said Maude, closing her eyes as Tally ran the soft bristles smoothly through the child's unruly mane.

"It will be even nicer after I've washed it for you," murmured Tally, still brushing rhythmically. "So shining ... so smooth..."

"Mama won't permit you to wash our hair," objected Charlotte. "She says it will cause a putrid sore throat."

"Have I a putrid sore throat?" asked Tally. "I washed my hair before I set out on the coach to be your governess, and I am going to wash it again today, to get the dust of the journey from it."

Both children fastened their gaze upon Tally's head. She had removed her saucy little chip hat, with its bewitching brown velvet bow tied beneath her chin. Her lustrous hair, guinea gold, framed her face with soft warm waves, and was caught in a neat, if girlish, snood she had made of the same velvet ribbons. Maude sighed ecstatically.

"When we wash my hair, will it look like yours?" she breathed.

"Of course not!" scoffed Charlotte, but Tally noticed that her expression was now more wistful than belligerent.

"It will take time and care," Tally said quietly. "All good things take time to mature: peaches on the trees and wheat ripening in the fields, little foals growing into great stallions—"

"Little onions growing into great scallions!" capped Charlotte with a triumphant shout.

"Very good, Charlotte!" applauded Tally with a delighted laugh. "That was quick! You have a witty command of language. I am impressed."

Charlotte's stare was arrested on Tally's face. Slowly the sneering belligerence faded from the child's expression, and she looked, for one fleeting instant, lost, confused. Tally's soft heart impelled her to include the child in the warm smile she gave Maude.

"Now, if you young ladies will guide me to the dining room?" she suggested, holding out a hand to each one.

Maude seized the offered hand eagerly and pulled Tally toward the door.

"We are not allowed to eat in the dining room," said Charlotte. Tally could swear there was an echo of the wistful

note in the harsh little voice. "We eat in the breakfast parlor—nobody ever uses it except us. Mama calls it the sun room."

A few minutes later, entering the grim little room, Tally couldn't understand why. If the kindly rays of the sun had ever thrust their way through those narrow, vine-choked windows, it must have been a long time ago. The walls had been painted a drab utilitarian shade of green, the floor was an ugly brownish tile. The table was high and massive, and the four chairs matched. Cutlery had been carelessly tossed upon a crumb-littered, stained cloth. Tally's lips tightened. Not even the servants' dining room at the Seminary, spartan as it had been, had shown such a brutal disregard for the sensibilities of those who had to eat there. As she stood staring at the unpleasant room, a challenging idea popped into her head. If successful, the plan would solve two urgent problems in one stroke. Before assigning places to her charges, she caught up the knives and forks and set them aside while she shook out the tablecloth and replaced it, clean side up, on the table. Then she reset the table correctly, explaining to a bemused pair of children why each fork and knife and spoon was placed as it was. Then she glanced around.

"Our napkins seem to have disappeared," she commented with a smile. "Perhaps they have gone to be washed."

"We often don't have any," vouchsafed Charlotte defensively. "Who needs them?"

"I, for one," replied Tally cheerfully. "One is never *quite* sure there will not be a slight accident with a brimming soup spoon or a too-heavily-laden fork. So embarrassing, don't you

agree?" Her twinkling smile and pretty dimples invited them to share her amusement over the suggested plight.

Maude grinned rueful agreement, but her elder sister tossed her head disdainfully and seated herself at the table. As Maude and Tally followed suit, a harassed-looking older woman peered in the doorway.

"Here a'ready, are you? Where's Mr. Temple?"

"Is my father to eat with us?" asked Tally.

"Mistress says we're to set it out here. Often he forgets to come." The woman laughed.

"Maude, will you show me where my father's room is?" Tally asked, keeping her dismay carefully hidden. After meeting Mrs. Dade and her son, she had not deluded herself that they would waste any courtesy on an elderly scholar, but to fob him *off* in this grubby room in the company of two graceless children—!

Then her common sense asserted itself. As she followed the willing Maude from the room, Tally told herself that her father would find it more pleasant to eat even in this wretched gloomy hole with Maude and Charlotte than to be forced to endure the crudities, patronage or insults of the Dades at every meal, or adapt to the noisy ignorance of the kitchen.

Her father's room, predictably, was another tiny attic cubby at the other end of the corridor from the nursery. Mr. Temple, greeting his visitors with absent-minded charm, was amused to be reminded that luncheon was being served, and pleased to accompany his daughter and her pupil back

downstairs. Seated between Maude and Tally, he beamed gently around the table.

"This is very pleasant," he smiled. "A capital arrangement! I shall be able to enjoy some civilized conversation with my food."

Devoutly hoping that the suspicious Charlotte would not understand the implications in that remark, Tally hurried into cordial speech, repeating Charlotte's play on the words *stallion* and *scallion*. Mr. Temple looked at the sullen little girl with real interest. While he had seen very little of the oafish lads he was supposed to instruct, he had seen almost nothing of their sisters.

"Have we here the brains of the family?" he teased gently.

"It was nothing," muttered the child, but her eyes, Tally noted, were fixed almost anxiously on the scholarly face.

"On the contrary," said Mr. Temple. "It showed a nice command of language and a good ear for assonance, that is, rhyming. Well done, Charlotte!"

The child ducked her head over her plate, and commenced to eat rather noisily. Tally glanced covertly at her father, fearful lest he be betrayed into making a disparaging comment on such graceless table manners, but his gaze held no censure, only a kindly pity. Maude was unaware of the undercurrents, and chattered away very cheerfully throughout the meal, appealing for attention in turn from Tally and her father. In spite of Charlotte's unusual silence, the meal progressed in a sprightly manner which won sympathetic grins from Piety, their waitress.

As the little maid was removing the dessert—a doughy pudding with a treacle sauce—she bent to murmur in Tally's ear, "You be 'avin' more gladsomeness than at Squire's table, Miss! The mistress has been jawin' on about this-an-that ever since they sat down. I'm glad I'm not Reeby."

"Who is Reeby?" inquired Tally, desirous of prolonging the conversation for reasons which had nothing to do with her employer's behavior at table.

"Calls hisself the butler, but Mrs. Dade says he don't know above half of what he's s'posed to. Only the master won't get rid of 'im, because Reeby does know about wines and likkers—an' I guess Mr. Dade thinks that's more important than knowin' about liveries an' the order o' pree-procee—"

"The order of precedence?" suggested Mr. Temple gently.

Piety nodded eagerly. "Yes, that's it! I 'eard 'em 'avin' a row about it after dinner las' night, while I was on my way up to bed with Cook. She says Reeby knows the Brother'ood—" The girl clapped her hand over her mouth. "I wasn't s'posed to mention *them*—!"

Tally raised an amused eyebrow at her father. The scholarly gentleman surprised her. "Local term referring to the gentry who provide good brandy and wines without the—er—formalities of Customs and Excise," he explained, straight-faced. Charlotte was staring at him, curiosity evident upon her plain little face. "Otherwise known as rumrunners, or smugglers."

"They are active in this neighborhood?" asked Tally.

"Not particularly. Oh, I imagine there's the occasional cargo run this way if the Riding Officers become too vigilant

along the regular trails." He rose and pulled back Tally's chair for her. "Well, my dear ladies, this was a most delightful treat." His smile encompassed both the children. "We must do it again soon."

Tally made her decision. The plan which had been tantalizing her imagination all through the meal suddenly seemed practical.

"We are going to do it three times every day, Father, and under such conditions that you will be quite unable to get your nose in a book and forget all about the time." Overriding his halfhearted repudiation, she co-opted Piety and instructed her to bring along Alfred, if possible, and meet with Tally and the girls in their room in five minutes.

Maude was happily agog at this unexpected departure from routine; even Charlotte forgot to look sullen and followed Tally up the back stairs without protest. When she had the whole group assembled outside the tiny bedroom she had originally been allotted, Tally explained her project.

"I am going to make this our private dining room," she announced. "It is convenient to your suite, girls—"

"You mean the nursery," interjected Charlotte loftily.

"But you are both getting beyond the age when you should be in a nursery, surely?" asked Tally. "Young ladies of consequence have bedrooms, or even a suite consisting of bedroom, sitting room and powder closet. And of course they never eat in the sun room," she explained smoothly. "Since your Mama wishes you to acquire the graces of well-bred young ladies, we must be sure you have the proper stage upon which to practice, must we not?"

Sweeping grandly along without waiting for their approval, Tally said to Piety and Alfred, "Surely there must be a small table somewhere which would never be missed if we moved it into my former bedroom?" She uttered this last phrase with a conscious twinkle which enlightened Piety as to her stratagem. All of them peered into the small room, at the moment looking even more desolate with the cot removed. "I plan to use this as the private dining room of the Misses Dade and their tutor-companions, Mr. Jocelyn Temple and Miss Thalia Temple. Now while you are bringing a table and four chairs—*not* from the sun room, I think!—Charlotte and Maude and I shall choose a pretty picture or two for the walls, some curtains and possibly even a carpet from the storeroom."

"I'd best bring up a bucket of water an' some soap, an' wash the floor first," announced Piety grimly. "It ain't bin done in donkey's years, from the look of it." She and Alfred hurried off, cheerful at the departure from dull, ordinary routine. Mr. Temple was staring at his managing daughter with surprise. "Do not tell me you have not arranged a task for me, also," he said with a smile.

Tally, pleased that she still had the scholar's full attention, grinned at him. "Yes, indeed, Papa," she said cordially. "I was hoping that you might be gracious enough to select a few of the *more suitable* books from that enormous clutter I observed in your room, and also one of the smaller bookcases I saw buried in the pile. Not Ovid, of course!" She caught a glimpse of a quite unscholarly smile on his face, and went on briskly, "I ask you to contribute several volumes to the

house-warming. You know you have always said there is nothing which civilizes a room like a few good books!"

"Is this what Miss Enderby's very expensive education has led to?" Jocelyn Temple laughed. "I see you have become *saucy* as well as *bossy*, as Miss Charlotte might well say!" He joined the delighted little girls in a laugh. Tally noted that Charlotte, preening herself a little, ranged herself at the old man's side.

"Well, girls, shall we choose our furnishings?"

"There's heaps of stuff in the storerooms, and they're not locked," Charlotte advised her. "I often used to poke about among the old stuff when there was nothing much to do."

This bleak picture put Tally so much in charity with the child that her smile was warmly encouraging. "Capital, Charlotte! Then you must be our guide. Come, Maude, we'll follow Charlotte's lead!"

Busily the older girl led the way down the corridor to a heavy door. Opened, it revealed a series of attics stretching away under the roof, filled with an astonishing assortment of old furniture, trunks, boxes, stacked pictures, even, to Mr. Temple's pleasure, piles of old books.

"No, Papa," chided Tally firmly. "First you must go and choose a dozen of your own books which would be of interest to young girls, and then you must select a small bookcase to put them in. As soon as Alfred returns with our table, I shall send him to your room to collect your donation to our project."

Thus neatly disposing of the elderly scholar upon a congenial task, Tally followed the now excited girls into the

lumber room. There she soon discovered more than they would ever be able to use of the items she had suggested. Maude unearthed a set of four charming small chairs whose seats were covered in faded needlepoint in flower patterns eminently suitable for an elegant dining room to be used by young ladies. Charlotte surprised Tally by bringing two dusty small pictures set in heavy imitation gold frames which quite overpowered their delicate beauty.

"Why, Charlotte! These are exquisite! When they are cleaned and reframed, they will be a delightful addition to your room." One was a little girl with a dog, the other pictured a girl with a kitten. In each case the small animal was staring at a large butterfly which had approached so close that the watching animal was almost crosseyed. Charlotte hugged the pictures to her.

"You wish to change the frames?" she objected. "They are *gold!*"

"But do they not take away from the delicacy of the pictures?" asked Tally. "One can scarcely see anything but the frames! The children and their pets are so much more interesting, do you not think?"

Charlotte held them away from her small, intently scowling face. "I like the frames," she said stubbornly.

"Then, of course we must keep them," Tally conceded, pleased to have as much cooperation as this from the difficult little girl. Charlotte glanced at her, suspicious of the sudden capitulation, then carried her prize to her bedroom to dust it off.

Meanwhile, Piety had got well into her task of scrubbing the floor of Tally's former bedroom. Alfred came puffing up the narrow back stairs balancing a small round table on his head. As he staggered along the corridor, Tally went to his aid. When they had placed the pretty table in the new dining room, Tally sent the boy along to help Mr. Temple with the books and the shelf which he had been charged to select for the new room. The corridor had suddenly become a scene of great industry: Maude dusting her pretty little chairs, Charlotte wiping her pictures, Alfred advancing with the bookcase, Tally washing the new dining table carefully, and sending Piety to bring beeswax and vinegar to polish it and the bookcase. They were all enjoying themselves hugely.

Into this domestic scene came the older Dade son. He paused at the head of the main staircase, here narrowed considerably from its lower reaches. His eyes went wide, startled by the bustle of activity.

"I say, what's going on here?" he burst out. Alfred brushed past him with the bookcase, breathing a muttered apology. Rafe frowned after him and confronted Tally. "Does Mama know about all this?" He grinned at Tally's involuntary glance of dismay, and then added in a sly tone, "I shan't tell her—if you make it worth my while."

In spite of her sheltered upbringing, Tally was nobody's fool. It was not in her nature to allow herself to be blackmailed, especially by the loutish heir of the Dades. So she smiled with all the conscious competence of a well-trained governess—(*thank you, Miss Enderby!*)—and spoke in a voice which immediately reduced Rafe Dade to nursery status.

"Your Mama has given me her instructions. She is desirous of having your sisters schooled in polite usage. I am setting the stage for the correct practice." Run and tattle about that if you wish! her complacent smile challenged him.

Unwilling to concede defeat, Rafe hung around the corridor, peering suspiciously into the rooms and getting in everyone's way. As the details of Tally's Grand Plan began to emerge, he cast her an incredulous look. Standing obstructively in the doorway of the bedroom she was turning into a dining room, he asked, "Why have you had your bed removed and these chairs and table set here? Where are you to sleep?"

"Oh, this is to be our own private dining room. I am to share your sisters' bedroom. There is plenty of space for my cot. We are going to use the former nursery as our schoolroom and parlor, and that little closet as our powder room. Your sisters' suite will be very much *à la mode*, I assure you, and the girls are as anxious as myself to see it all in train!"

Since even Charlotte was nodding purposefully, Rafe was compelled to accept the changes. He only said, with a taunting smile, "I shall join you for a meal—frequently."

Help came to Tally from an unexpected quarter.

"That you will not, Rafe Dade!" snapped Charlotte. "I haven't invited you—and one doesn't go out to dinner without an invitation! Mama has told me *that* much!"

"I don't need a special bid to a meal in my own house, you stupid ninny," sneered her brother.

Tally sprang to her charge's defense like a young tigress. The careless cruelty of his words and manner quite enraged her. "I am afraid that is exactly what you must have before you may join us," she interjected suavely. "This is Miss Dade's dining room, and her sister's. *No one* may sit at their table without their express permission."

The faces of the little girls showed incredulous pleasure.

"Is this really so, Miss Temple?" demanded Maude. "That no one may come unless we say so?"

"You or your sister Charlotte," confirmed Tally. "Although I am afraid you must suffer my presence—although I shall be your *dame de compagnie* rather than your guest."

"Dam duh comp—" faltered the child.

Tally smiled reassuringly. "The daughters of important houses often have a female companion of good family and impeccable training to act as a companion—*dame de compagnie*." She articulated the French phrase clearly. "It is the business of such a lady to help her charges to derive the greatest possible benefit and enjoyment from their daily experiences, and to provide an unexceptionable support and chaperonage in any circumstances which may present themselves. Your Mama has hired me to serve you in that capacity ... your *dame de compagnie*," she repeated the words carefully so even little Maude, lips moving silently, could get it correct.

Charlotte nodded once, firmly, and then turned her glance upon her older brother. "So, you see, Rafe, you must not come to eat with us until we bid you." Then, with a furtive glance at Tally, the child finished with unexpected panache,

"Maude and I shall be pleased to welcome you one evening ... a little later."

"Well done!" praised Tally. "The most experienced and gracious hostess could not have done it better!"

Ignoring the child's embarrassed pleasure at the praise, Rafe scowled at Tally. "Very nifty-naffy, Miss! I can see you'll turn the girls into simpering misses with your toplofty ideas. But you're only a servant here, don't forget! I'll find ways of teaching you your place." His coarse features were twisted into a crude leer. "Your most useful place in this household, I mean. Don't think hiding in my sisters' bedroom will work forever!"

Maude was frightened by his loud, hectoring manner, and even Charlotte drew closer to Tally's side, whether for her own protection or Tally's was not clear. Although the situation was awkward, Tally estimated it as useful since it seemed to bring her two small charges into an alliance with herself against a common enemy. She put an arm lightly around each child's shoulder and spoke as though the confrontation were a normal social occasion.

"Now, my dears," she instructed, "we bob a shallow curtsy to our visitor—just this depth is quite adequate." She demonstrated gracefully. "Then we smile—not too widely, Maude." This to the younger girl who was grinning her enjoyment of Rafe's set down, and again Tally demonstrated the exact width and warmth of the dismissing smile to six pairs of fascinated eyes. "Extending one hand, so." She held out her hand to Alfred, who was grinning delightedly at her. "We touch fingers lightly—*never* clutching!—and say

something like 'So good of you to call, Mrs. Hadley-Haddon! Do drop in again when you are in the neighborhood!'"

This byplay reduced both Piety and the girls to giggles, and drew a wide if sheepish grin from Alfred, in the role of Mrs. Hadley-Haddon. Tally swept on with the lesson.

"Now you, Maude, may bid Piety—I mean, the Curate, of course!—adieu *in form*, and Charlotte may take leave of Mr. Ralph Dade."

With a muttered curse, Rafe turned and strode from the room. Charlotte, hand already extended, froze; the small face shuttered. To everyone's surprise, Mr. Temple came into the room from the corridor.

"May I provide a substitute guest for the practice?" he asked with his gentle smile. He took the snubbed child's hand in his and bent over it in a courtly gesture. "Thank you for a delightful afternoon, Miss Dade," he said. "I trust I may call upon you soon again?"

To Tally's deep satisfaction, Charlotte rose bravely to the occasion. "So good of you to come, Professor Temple," she cooed, in a dazzling imitation of Tally's "social" tones. "*Do drop in again when you are in the neighborhood!*"

Then, pink-cheeked, she accepted the storm of applause and admiration from Tally, Maude, Alfred, Piety and Mr. Jocelyn Temple.

Chapter 4

Of course Tally did not get away scot-free with her innovations. Just before bedtime she had her small group seated in the newly furbished dining room. They stared around them with satisfaction. After an afternoon of hard work and hasty improvisation, they had created a little miracle. A pair of red velvet drapes, faded to a soft rose, were hanging from a rod over the window, their dust-grimed ends ruthlessly chopped off by Charlotte's shears. The round table was covered by an old linen sheet, clean but mended, which Tally had promised to cut and hem neatly for the next evening. A lamp with a quaint rose-painted shade on the table, another on the sideboard improvised from an old bureau, gave a pleasant glow to the small room. Piety and Alfred, already fanatically devoted to Miss Temple, had insisted upon bringing up the supper from the kitchen, and serving it in correct form. Their single stipulation was that Miss Tally should instruct them in the proper service of the meal.

"Me an' Alf 'as 'opes o' betterin' ourselves, if you'll learn us how the servants in great 'ouses go on," Piety announced. "Alfred wants to be a butler someday. I telled 'im you could learn him more in a minute than ol' Reeby ever knew," she confided. She had washed her face and hands, and made an effort to tidy her wispy hair, although nothing could be done to smarten up her deplorable garments.

Tally was deeply touched by the child's trust. "Of course I shall do my best to help you, Alfred and Piety. It is the least I can do to repay you for all the extra work I have put you to! And what *I* do not know, I am sure my Father can tell us. He is sure to have a book about it." Tally's dimpled smile invited the young people to join her in her joke. "But what do *you* wish to learn, Piety? In addition, of course, to the writing and reading I shall be teaching you?"

After a searching glance at the beautiful young lady, Piety whispered, "Would ye 'ave time to learn—to *teach* me 'ow to be a fine leddy's maid, ma'am? Then I could get good wages and mebbe 'ave a new dress ... an' a pretty bonnet?"

Tally's soft heart was completely won. "Of course I'll *teach* you all I can, Piety! How quickly you caught the correct term, my dear child! I can make you a new dress this very week—that is, as soon as I can obtain some material. You shall very soon be the smartest ladies' maid in Devonshire—in attendance upon the Misses Dade."

Piety's small, grubby face fell. "It's too much to 'ope for, Miss Temple," she said, extending her chapped, red little paws, cracked with rough work and harsh soap.

"I have a lotion which will help those to heal," promised Tally, heartsick at the evidence of the ruthless use of the small servant, and recklessly resolving to bring about a change in the child's circumstances.

How formidable a contest this would entail was rather rudely brought to her attention as Piety and Alfred were serving the sweet that evening—a return of the doughy treacle pudding they had had for lunch. While she was

instructing Alfred how to cut the thing into serving portions before offering it to the diners, the door was thrust open so savagely that it crashed against the wall and knocked off one of Charlotte's gilt-framed pictures.

"So this is how you intend to carry out my orders, Miss! Carousing in your bedroom with these—." The strident voice faded as Mrs. Dado's outraged vision began to comprehend just how far from her instructions the new governess had strayed.

Of course Jocelyn Temple had risen to his feet upon his employer's entrance. Tally forced herself to follow suit with what poise she could summon. She curtsied to the furious woman. "Miss Dade, Miss Maude, please stand when your mother enters the room," she advised, calmly. The children obeyed with flattering alacrity, but their Mama was not coaxed into complaisance by this show of courtesy.

"Where have you decided to sleep?" she demanded coarsely.

"With your daughters, Ma'am," answered Tally quietly. "I shall be handier then, if they should need attention during the night."

"You had your bed moved into their room without asking my permission?"

"I thought I was carrying out your orders, Mrs. Dade," Tally persisted quietly. "You wished them to be given complete training in elegant conduct. Every dormitory at Miss Enderby's was presided over by one of the younger teachers, who had her bed there, although she shared a common room

in which to spend the time not taken up by class instruction, meals, or other duties."

This quietly spoken explanation had some effect upon the affronted dame. She was still suspicious and angry, but she spared time to scrutinize the new dining room. "It seems you have set yourself and your father up very fine for servants," she sneered at length.

Tally held onto her temper with both hands. "It is well to instruct your pupils in the correct behavior required in a situation by setting up the actual conditions they will encounter. Good table manners can best be taught at table—or so Miss Enderby always stated," she said in a low voice.

"Miss Enderby! Am I to hear of nothing but that woman?"

"She is accounted to be of the highest ton," interjected Mr. Temple surprisingly. "When I enrolled my daughter there, Ma'am, the daughters of an Earl and a Marquis were in residence. Miss Enderby comes very highly recommended."

Tally did not know whether the unexpected intervention of her father had come as a greater shock to herself or to Mrs. Dade. That lady glared at the silver-haired scholar, but contented herself with a disparaging sniff. Tally felt sure, however, that her own status as governess had lost nothing by her father's reminder of the fashionable clientele at Tally's school. After a moment, Mrs. Dade requested to be shown the arrangements in her daughters' bedroom.

A little procession trudged down the corridor in Tally's wake, with Piety and Alfred carefully lighting the way with the two lamps. The bedroom did not look overcrowded by the addition of Tally's cot and a tiny bureau. Neither Tally, the

children, nor the servants made any mention of the plan to set up a powder room in the little closet, nor any of the other projects Miss Temple had so airily proposed.

When at length Mrs. Dade returned to the corridor, it was clear she was, if not delighted, at least reconciled to the new arrangement of the attic rooms. She did, however, cast one final jaundiced glance into the new dining room.

"It will take Alfred and Piety away from their other duties to come all this way upstairs to dance attendance upon you all," she said pettishly.

"It is part of their duties to wait upon your daughters," suggested Tally, greatly daring. She then hastened to add, "I shall help them, of course, as much as I can, by caring for the rooms. I wish only to establish the proper atmosphere for the Misses Dade's training," she concluded meekly, her sparkling eyes demurely masked by modestly lowered eyelids.

Mrs. Dade was still suspicious, and reluctant to permit the unauthorized behavior, but even to her prejudiced mind, the advantages of the training system were fairly obvious. Also she would be completely freed from the presence of her quarrelsome daughters, and the maddeningly absent-minded old scholar. She gave a reluctant nod.

"Well, I suppose I must permit you to try your schemes," she allowed ungraciously. "Since it does not require an expenditure of cash—"

"Oh, no, Ma'am," agreed Tally quickly. "We are finding everything we shall have need of in your excellent storerooms. So wise of you to have saved so many useful

items! If you will grant me permission to use what is necessary? To make the children comfortable, of course?"

With an even more reluctant nod—for in spite of other ill-will she could think of no reasonable excuse to do otherwise—Mrs. Dade gave permission. She gave the chastened group a final glare and departed.

Alfred and Piety had restored the lamps to the dining room, and the small party resumed the interrupted meal. Charlotte was the first to speak.

"It was Rafe got her up here!" she said, her small face sullen with anger. "I knew he would try to stop us. He is mean, and never wishes Maude and me to have any fun!"

If that were all his reason! thought Tally, but she did not try to argue with the child. Instead, she brought the conversation around to plans for the next day, and a discussion of the clothing to be made for the girls. "Our first task must be to discover just what treasures we have in these attics," she announced gaily. "And since we do not wish to waste our time over quite unnecessary objects, we must now make a list of what needs to be done to create a proper background for the Misses Dade!"

Maude began to glow again at the pleasant prospect, the servants entertained thoughts of sparkling new liveries, and even sullen Charlotte came out of her sulks to join the fun. As soon as the meal was finished, Tally set the girls to writing lists at the cleared table. Loath to dismiss Alfred and Piety from the cozy circle, Tally took their measure for, respectively a new dress and a new coat. Then she inquired as to the possibility of a contrivance like a basket which might be

lowered from the window of their dining room to the ground, in which-could be placed the various dishes containing their meal. Alfred was much struck by this idea, and said he had heard of just such an engine from one of the grooms who accompanied the family to London. But in that case, he added regretfully, the device was built into the house itself, and operated from the kitchen, below stairs, to the dining room on the ground floor directly above it. After a minute devoted to cogitation, he announced that Tally's idea would be workable; he knew of just such a basket, in which Cook sometimes conveyed supplies from the village. Ropes and a pulley he could find in the stable. Fired with enthusiasm, he hurried over to the window and made sure there was a stout beam above the window, to which a pulley could be attached. Even Jocelyn Temple was inspired by the eagerness of the party to relate a few interesting examples of the discovery of physical *apparati*, such as the wheel, the inclined plane and the pulley itself. Delighted, Tally sat back and thoroughly enjoyed the warm friendliness of the little group.

She made use of a lull in the educational dialogue to suggest to Piety that all meals for the top floor should be placed in the basket as soon as Alfred had constructed the device. Charlotte set them laughing by referring to it as their "basket waiter." Tally volunteered to be in charge of washing up their dishes and cutlery, which she proposed to keep in a cabinet in their new dining room.

"And now, goodnight, Piety, Alfred." She smiled around the circle of excited little faces. "We shall see you in the morning, shall we not? Rest well." When they had gone she turned to

the girls. "Now as to dishes. I saw some pretty ones in the storeroom, and if there is not a complete set, we shall eke out our resources with a few from the kitchen—with Cook's permission, of course!" She smiled at the children. "Cook must also be persuaded to give us our own cutlery and table linen, for I shall volunteer to keep them shining and fresh, and for that purpose I shall need to have a large bowl and some dish towels placed unobtrusively in our powder room." She smiled again. "Are we not going on famously, girls?"

Maude was dazed with enjoyment and weariness. She had never had such attention as she was now receiving. Charlotte, while vastly intrigued and pleased with the whole new situation, was less euphoric.

"This is all going to cause a great deal of work, Miss Temple, and I should like to know who is to do it?" she asked, as suspiciously as her mother had done.

Tally turned the question. "How thoughtful of you, Charlotte, to care about the added burden upon Piety and Alfred! You will make a successful mistress of your own home, one day, if you are so thoughtful of the welfare of your servants. Mr. Temple will be pleased to see this fresh evidence of your intelligent concern." She cast an appealing glance at her father.

Mr. Temple hastened to add all that was supportive, and mildly suggested that, after such Herculean labors as the party had performed that day, he believed they should seek their couches with no further delay. He took his leave with proper observance, and left the little girls and Tally staring at one another with tired satisfaction.

"To answer your earlier question more practically, Charlotte, I intend to do a great deal of the extra work our new estate has presented; Piety and Alfred will do what they would normally do, and by some pretty careful management, we can perhaps reduce the total load. For instance: at the moment. Piety spends much time bringing up fresh water for our ablutions—that means washing and bathing, Maude! Shall we ask Alfred—no mean inventor!—to run one of the downspouts into our powder room from the eaves? Could he install a cistern there, to catch the rain? Hair washed in rainwater becomes soft and shining."

Charlotte's mouth, which had been open to voice an objection, closed slowly. Then she frowned. "What would happen when the cistern overflowed? For I must tell you, Miss Temple, that the rains here often last for days."

Tally chuckled. "Charlotte, you continue to amaze me with your good sense! It would be a sad end to all our plans if we caused a flood to seep down upon the rooms below! We must find some way of turning off the flood when the cistern is full. We might ask Father. Or, better, can you, Charlotte think of a device we might use?"

Leaving the little girl importantly considering the matter, Tally slipped away to the darkened bedroom she was to share with the children. She checked the beds. They were not comfortable. Tally wondered if she should enlist Alfred's help in setting up something better from the storerooms, but decided to let that go for the nonce in case Mrs. Dade made another lightning foray onto the third floor. The sheets appeared clean if not ironed; the pillows were no lumpier than

she had occasionally known at Miss Enderby's. The small room between the schoolroom and the bedroom would make an excellent powder closet in which a bathing tub might be fitted as well as the children's commode and her own. As for the nursery-turned-schoolroom, it must have attention too, since it was even more drab and uncomfortable than the bedroom.

The girl sighed wearily, and alone for a few minutes, allowed her exhaustion and disappointment to bow her shoulders. She slumped against the wall near the head other bed, collecting energy to get the children ready for the night. A sound at the door made her look up quickly. Rafe Dade lounged in the open doorway, his face red and greasy with overindulgence. He was leering at her triumphantly.

Tally was suddenly infused with a cold fury. She took up the lamp she had brought. "You will get out of this room at once," she said coldly. "Or I shall fling this lamp at you and burn the house down!"

Correctly reading the message on that white face, Rafe turned and stumbled back along the corridor.

Chapter 5

*The next morning after breakfast, having sent the children into the storeroom to look for suitable dresses for refashioning, Tally made her way to the nursery which she was determined to change into a cheerful schoolroom that very day. She was in the act of pinning up some bright pictures of modish dresses from a copy of *The Lady's Magazine* which she had brought with her from Bath, when the door opened and a pleasant male voice inquired, "Am I speaking to Miss Thalia Temple?"*

Tally turned quickly, although the voice had not been that of Rafe Dade. She beheld a slender, well-dressed man with reddish hair and bright blue eyes in a pleasing countenance.

"I am James Kendale, Miss Temple," he introduced himself. "I have come to visit my sister, Mrs. Dade. She would like you to bring the children down for luncheon today, to entertain their uncle."

"Of course, Mr. Kendale," said Tally, smiling.

"I had just a glimpse of your dining room as I came along the corridor," Kendale went on, with an appealing smile upon his open face. "You have created a charming atmosphere there."

"Thank you, Mr. Kendale," replied Tally demurely, but her eyes and dimples were sparkling. How on earth had the belligerent Mrs. Dade ever got a brother of James Kendale's quality? He must have been, she thought with a naughtiness her father would have deplored, the best of the litter. Yet

there were, she could discern, some resemblances: hair that was carrotty-red in Mrs. Dade was a softer auburn in the brother; her beaky proboscis was a quite acceptable Roman nose on his larger face. The greatest difference was in manner, however. Where Mrs. Dade was domineering, rude and bad-tempered, Mr. James Kendale presented to the world a calm, friendly and courteous demeanor. Tally decided at once that she liked the young man. Conducting him to the refurbished dining room, she left him there with a smile while she went to tell the nursery party that their uncle had come to invite them to luncheon downstairs.

"And you, too. Miss Temple?" asked Maude, clinging a little nervously to Tally's hand.

"Yes, Maude, I am to accompany you. Your *dame de compagnie*, you remember? Shall we tidy ourselves for this social encounter?"

Charlotte had weightier matters on her mind. "We must ask him to dine upstairs with us, must we not Miss Temple?" she demanded. "I am sure I have heard Mama say often enough that all dinners must be paid for in kind."

While rather deprecating the businesslike terms of this dictum, Tally agreed quickly that it would be very pleasant to entertain their uncle at their own table, and deputed Charlotte to write him an invitation this very night before she went to bed.

"That will give him notice of the event, and give us time to alert Cook to prepare a specially nice repast for the chosen day," she advised. Charlotte agreed happily, and even

consented to having her long hair brushed neatly before she washed her hands and face.

Tally was pleased to note that the thorny, loud-voiced little child was slowly blossoming into an agreeable and intelligent girl who might, if she could be allowed to continue in this way, become a bright and interesting adult. But I really cannot see myself remaining in this nightmare family for enough years to guarantee it! thought Tally with an access of depression. If Rafe were to persist in his persecution, there would inevitably come a time when she would not be armed with a lighted lamp, or he be so fuddled with wine as to be easily outmaneuvered. Resolving to ask Cook for the canister of red pepper that very day, Tally helped her charges to wash and don their prettiest dresses. Then with a smiling reminder to be on their very best behavior, so that Uncle James would be eager to take a meal later in their own private dining room, she led her eager students to their uncle, who escorted the party down three flights of stairs to the main dining room.

The door was open and the family were just moving around the table to take their places as Tally and the children entered. At once all the adults turned to stare. Tally took the lead, making a simple curtsy toward Mrs. Dade. The girls followed suit quite creditably, their eyes anxious.

"Mrs. Dade, Miss Charlotte and Miss Maude are here as you requested."

Her employer, torn between surprise at Tally's modish dress and satisfaction at the excellent appearance and conduct of her daughters, merely gave a sniff. Squire Dade came forward to greet his children and their new governess.

He was a large, brutally coarse-looking man, his face red and swollen from the eight bottles of port he, in common with his fellow squires, consumed every night. His person, as he approached Tally, was redolent of liquor, sweat, and horse. The girl caught her breath as he took her hand.

"So you are the new governess, are you? Well, you're better looking than that old scarecrow, Temple. Perhaps you'll be able to teach the gels enough to get 'em husbands some day!"

Having thus demolished any pretensions she or her parent might have nourished as to their scholarly usefulness in his family. Squire Dade, glancing sideways at his wife, reluctantly released Tally's hand and stumped back to the head of his table. Rafe was looking sullen, and his younger brother, Josh, another hulking lout, was laughing boisterously and making hideous faces at his sisters. James Kendale came over to the rather forlorn "guests," and, taking Charlotte's arm, led her toward the table and seated himself beside her. Tally, after a glance at Mrs. Dade, led Maude to a place beside her father, and took the adjoining seat herself.

The meal was served. Tally was so proud of her charges that tears threatened to come into her eyes. They were a quiet, well-mannered pair, and ate with considerably greater delicacy than the older Dades. It was easy to see where Charlotte had learned her gobbling ways, for her father and both brothers ate as though they had been informed that the food would be removed within the next five minutes. The men meanwhile kept up a heavy-handed raillery of one another and of Mr. Kendale. This gentleman, Tally noted, was well

able to maintain his calm demeanor under the attack. He smiled at their wildest charges, replied seldom—and then in a pleasant, nonprovoking way—and addressed most of his remarks to his sister and the children. Tally herself was not spoken to, nor did she venture a remark. She noticed that the girls' eyes were on her frequently, alert to copy her quiet elegance of manner. She was just beginning to hope that the meal would go off without trouble when Mrs. Dade cleared her throat loudly in preparation for a speech.

"James," she demanded. "You are staying for at least a fortnight, are you not?"

Her brother smiled warmly. "If I do not put you out—?"

Both Squire Dade and his lady denounced the suggestion. James was obviously much admired. Even Tally, though she said nothing, agreed that the presence of this pleasant and good-humored gentleman could only enhance a family remarkably lacking in well-bred behavior and easy discourse.

Mrs. Dade was continuing. "I have a special interest in wishing you to remain, brother. Lady Frampton is holding a Ball to introduce her daughter to our local society, and when I mentioned your arrival, she was most pressing that you should attend."

"I shall be most happy to do so," agreed James warmly. "I think I have not met the young lady?"

"No, she's been off at some school for peers' daughters," said his sister. "Amelia Frampton is bursting with pride over the girl, and is vastly eager for all the local eligibles to catch a glimpse of her."

"Then I am scarcely to be included," bantered Mr. Kendale with a bland smile. "Being neither local nor especially eligible."

"The girl is," announced Squire Dade heavily. "Father's got bulging pockets and no sons. Hanging out for a son-in-law."

Tally, under cover of modestly lowered eyelids and a spurious interest in her plate, was following this exchange with interest. She was expecting to hear a good-humored set down from the young man across from her. Instead he waited a moment, and then said thoughtfully, "Is she pretty?"

Squire Dade guffawed. "I hear she's a strached-up piece, but not too bad to look at. Especially when you think of her father's moneybags. Better get your word in, Kendale!"

The young man made no reply, but Tally, raising her eyes to his face, noticed a quiet smile about his well-shaped lips. She was strangely relieved that he had not risen to the bait more obviously. Of course, she assured herself, any young man with his fortune to seek might be forgiven for considering the possibilities in an arranged marriage. Such alliances were made every day; no one thought any the less of the man or woman who agreed to an advantageous match. On the contrary! Unless the local heiress was a diamond of the first water, she might do very much worse for herself than to marry a charming, handsome, well-mannered man like James Kendale. At this thought, such a wave of envy struck Tally that, dismayed, she set her teeth against it as though it were a physical pain. Fortunately at this moment, and not at all to Tally's surprise, Mrs. Dade summarily dismissed her daughters and their governess. That the meal

was not quite over, with the dessert still to be served, did not seem to weigh with her. Rather sharply she told Tally to get the children outside for a long walk.

"Combined with a Nature lesson, if you are capable of it," she added waspishly. "You are keeping the girls too much of the time indoors making your quarters comfortable."

Tally, who would have welcomed a cup of tea at this moment, felt immediately put on her mettle to endorse the scheme of a walk when she saw how disappointed the children were at the abrupt termination of their treat. Somehow Tally got them out of the dining room without an explosion of ill humor which might well have prejudiced the image they had so far presented. As they went up to their quarters Maude was silent, and Charlotte muttered angrily beneath her breath.

While Tally was helping them into warm jackets and gloves, however, the child broke out angrily, "I do not think it very polite to bundle us off as though we were poor relations! We had behaved just as we ought, had we not, Miss Temple? The meal was not over—we had not been offered dessert ... and it was gooseberry tart, with cream!"

The sight of her small, angry face tugged at Tally's heart. It had been a thoughtless, unkind gesture to deny the children a treat they loved. Their behavior at table had indeed not warranted any such summary dismissal. Still, it would avail little to reinforce the girls' sense of injustice, to say nothing of her own disappointment in being denied the pleasure of tea and good company.

Good company? her common sense challenged her. The Dades? Tally was forced to accept the fact that what she was regretting was the opportunity to chat with the courteous and charming Mr. James Kendale.

He is here to try his luck with the heiress, she told herself scornfully, but was soon able to find considerable evidence to the contrary, to wit: Mr. Kendale had not known Miss Frampten was an heiress; he had not even known there was a Miss Frampten, or that he himself had been invited on purpose to meet an eligible young lady.

Noting the children's restlessness, Tally dragged herself out of such fruitless musings. Maude was voicing a plaintive cry that she was still hungry and really didn't wish to go for a walk in the cold wind. Unhappily conscious of her dwindling resources, Tally nevertheless proposed as a treat for her disappointed charges that they make the village sweet shop their goal, and see what goodies might be found therein. This suggestion finding immediate favor with the little girls, the party of three set out in better heart for the village of Crofton. There must indeed have been something restorative about brisk exercise, for Tally found herself recounting a marvelous tale of two little girls who were shipwrecked upon a tropic isle, forced to make do with exotic fruits and nuts until they eventually discovered a pirate's treasure and were providentially rescued by a naval cruiser the next day.

This excursion into fantasy had the children at first puzzled and then enthusiastic. They hardly noticed the chill wind after the first few minutes of the story. Charlotte, recognizing the sweet shop as they were almost past it (it was also the

bakery for the village, and sold pots, tea, coffee, sugar, treacle, and, in the back room, ladies' corsets), was moved to wonder that they had arrived so quickly, while little Maude could only plead with Tally to tell her "what happened next?"

Congratulating herself upon the success of her ploy, Tally led her charges into the tiny, crowded shop, which was presently full of deliciously tempting odors. Maude, suddenly shy, whispered to Tally to choose for her. Charlotte's eyes had been drawn to a display of marzipan rabbits, but at the moment of announcing her choice, she suddenly changed it to request one of the enormous barley sugar balls displayed in a bowl. Tally bought three, for she had not been given the opportunity to indulge herself often with sweets, which were frowned upon by Miss Enderby. She was aware, during the blissful if rather obstructed thanks of her charges, that Charlotte's eyes had strayed briefly once again to the plate of marzipan figures. Hastily reviewing her finances, she invited the girls to admire an elaborately knitted shawl which was displayed upon the far wall. With their attention thus distracted, she quietly purchased and secreted in her reticule three small bunnies with chocolate ears. Exchanging a conspiratorial smile with the proprietress, Tally led the children out into the street and back toward Dade Hall.

With their mouths comfortably full of barley candy, Charlotte and Maude and their governess were content to make the journey in silence. They were almost at the gateway to the property when Tally was alerted to the pounding of hooves upon the graveled drive. It was fortunate that she had even this much notice, for, at that instant, out through the

open iron gates galloped a rawboned gray stallion whipped on by Rafe Dade. It was clear that he was a bruising rider with more bottom than skill and no common sense at all. This was demonstrated rather alarmingly when the youth charged his mount straight at the schoolroom party. The gray, rolling a frantic, white-rimmed eye, tried to avoid the now-screaming girls. Tally snatched them to her and cast herself sideways out of the path of the stallion.

At the last moment Rafe sawed on the reins and dashed madly past, his raucous laughter ringing loudly above the wails of the children.

Tally picked them up and tried to brush the mud and gravel from their clothing. Most fortunately, neither of the children had been hurt, although Tally, who had cushioned their fall, felt numerous small discomforts and a suspicious moisture on her elbow where her sleeve was torn.

Charlotte was raging. She had lost the tasty nub of her barley sugar ball when she had opened her mouth to scream. Tally, more shaken than she cared to admit to the children, was anxious to get back to the safety of their room before any of them could become hysterical, and would not let Charlotte stop to search in the gravel for her sweet. It was a cold, shaken and unhappy trio who began to disrobe in the bedroom a few minutes later. Tally had led them in through the back door, being most anxious not to encounter any of the adults in the family. Cook expressing alarm at their white faces, had been easily persuaded to send Alfred and Piety up to the room with cans of hot water for a soothing soak.

When she had the girls safely in their room, Tally, still seething with suppressed anger at Rafe's callous disregard of his sisters' safety, said gravely, "We had a fright, did we not? I believe we should cosset ourselves a little, do not you? First I must make sure you were not hurt when I pulled you to the ground. Then we shall soak ourselves in a warm tub and put on fresh clothing for dinner in our lovely room. I must tell you now that I have a small surprise for you after dinner, since we did not get dessert at luncheon."

Maude's expressive little countenance immediately brightened, but Charlotte was not so easily diverted. She came close to Tally and said sternly, "You are hurt, Miss Temple. Your pretty jacket is torn and there is blood. I hate my brother! He is cruel and wicked. He tried to ride us down!"

Tally sought to make light of the matter. "My elbow is barely grazed. I shall wash it when the hot water comes. As for my jacket, if I cannot mend it, I shall just make another one. Have you decided what sort of dress you would wish me to make for you, Charlotte?"

This question served admirably to divert the child's attention. "Have we time before our supper to look in the storerooms, Miss Temple? There are trunks full of clothing, and you did say you could use them to make something modish for Maude and me," coaxed the child. She glared down at her dark brown fustian pinafore with contempt. "I loathe and detest these ugly, drab dresses!"

Delighted at her interest, Tally answered warmly, "Of course we have time! Before we wash and dress ourselves for

supper, we shall search for the softest, prettiest materials we can find to make some costumes for you both."

While heartily agreeing that the children's present garments were dull and unbecoming, Tally realized it would be absurd to deck them out in brocades and satins for schoolroom wear. Hoping very much that some acceptable materials might be discovered in the trunks, she led the way to the storeroom with forced enthusiasm.

"I must congratulate you. Charlotte, upon your excellent command of words. *Loathe and detest*," she quoted. "The first comes from Anglo-Saxon, *lathian*, meaning to be hateful. They had it from the Germans, who had it from someone else. Our English language is a wonderful storehouse of many different languages—very much as your family has collected interesting and useful objects from many different times and persons."

"And now they are there for us to use again," said Charlotte in pleased anticipation.

"To fit them to our own particular needs," agreed Tally, "even as we fit Latin words and Norman French words to our modern use. Take the other word you used, Charlotte: *detest*. It comes from the French, who had it from the Romans—*detestare*, to curse someone by calling on the gods to witness. Is it not interesting to consider how it came about that our splendid English tongue is so rich and varied?"

Charlotte, preening herself upon her command of so diversified an instrument, said with some satisfaction, "I loathe and detest Rafe, too. I call the gods to witness!"

Maude was shocked, but Tally had to laugh, and the three of them ended up in a fit of uncontrollable giggling. But Charlotte's mind was hungry for information. She demanded to be told more.

"Well," said Tally, "the English language is a most fabulous instrument, you know! When the Romans, Angles, Saxons, Normans came in turn across the sea to our little island, conquering Britons, a fierce Celtic people, with sword and flame, they found themselves, while for the time apparently subduing us, eventually themselves absorbed into the life of Britain. Rather than destroying us, they mixed with us, gave us depth and variety of character as well as knowledge, culture and new skills. In fact, we melded with our conquerors, until now we are all British—not Latins or French or German. This is shown most clearly in our beautiful English tongue, to which in turn Romans, Anglo-Saxons and Normans brought their gifts of ideas and words for them. This made our language, as you have demonstrated, Charlotte, a flexible tool capable of expressing everything from the poetry of Shakespeare to the crude forcefulness of an angry coachman!" She chuckled, remembering the masterly burst of invective which had accompanied the departure of the Bath coach.

Charlotte was staring at her intently. "Can you teach me about—about all that?" she asked.

"Of course, my dear! I am doing so. This is your first lesson. I must tell you that you have already a command of the language beyond what is customary for your years. You must have had a good teacher."

"Miss Graeme, a Scotswoman, was our governess for a while. She was the only one who seemed to care if we learned anything. The rest just wished to keep us quiet and out of Mama's way."

"Now that we are here," ventured Maude, a little bored by the scholarly discussion. "May we not find the materials for our new dresses?"

"Of course!" answered Tally. "We have more than an hour before our supper will be served."

The interval was spent eagerly turning over the contents of numerous trunks and boxes. Tally was heartened to find that not every mistress of Dade Hall had the same lack of taste as its current chatelaine. There was one gauze with silver threads which caught her immediate fancy, but she sternly repressed unworthy longings and concentrated upon materials suitable for children's clothing. There was a light blue woolen cape which contained enough material to make a pleasant daytime dress for each girl. Tally thought it might be collared with the fine lawn from a pair of lace-edged handkerchiefs. There was a rose silk peignoir, hardly worn at all, which would make charming party dresses for the children. There were several lace fichus which, washed and gently bleached, could be fashioned into dress-up blouses which any little girl would sigh for. Maude even came upon a cameo brooch still pinned to an old shawl, which Tally could immediately picture at the throat of one of the blouses.

Tally was ready to call a halt for the day when Charlotte, hanging precariously half in and half out of a huge box, discovered the tartan plaid and kilt. It had belonged to a man,

and its comfortable dimensions were great enough to provide a striking warm suit for each child. The girls hailed its glowing colors with delight, and felt the soft, thick material with eager claims that it would keep them cozy on even the coldest days. Their governess was happy to affirm their judgment, and was preparing to lead her laden charges back to their room with their booty when Charlotte said gruffly, "I think I have found something for you. Miss Temple."

Tally looked back. Charlotte was holding a crimson velvet costume which must, by its style, have belonged to the wife of the founder of the Dade fortune. The skirt was vast, having obviously been intended to be displayed over a hoop, and the color was a quiet radiance in the gloom of the storeroom. Although greatly moved by the look on the little girl's face, Tally still had the impulse to repudiate the gift and explain both her position in the household and her feeling that all material should be made over for her charges. Then she considered Charlotte's pleasure in having been able to offer such a gift, and the unaccustomed softness in the little face. She gave the child a wide, delighted smile. "My dear Charlotte, this is the finest present I have ever received! Thank you most sincerely!"

A single glance at the child's beaming face was enough to tell her she had made the correct decision.

Piety and Alfred had delivered the hot water. Tally got both girls into the capacious tub, presented them with some lavender soap and two washcloths, and told them to get to work. They did so, amid a spate of giggles. Then, clean, relaxed and in fresh clothing, they sat down to plan their next

action while they waited for supper. Before even half of the possibilities offered by the clothing had been discussed, Piety came tapping at the door to announce that supper was served.

It was eaten with much lighthearted conversation and laughter, even Piety reflecting the spirit of jollity on her shining-clean little face. Tally noticed that her hands were already showing some improvement from the use of the lotion she had supplied, and she inquired now, "Are your poor hands feeling easier now?"

"Oh, yes, Miss! Those cotton gloves you give me, I put them on over the lotion and they make me feel so—so comfortable! Cook says you will spoil me for sure."

Tally laughed. "I know she is teasing you, Piety, for a harder worker I have never encountered. Is this not so, Charlotte—Maude?"

Maude agreed eagerly, smiling at Piety, but Charlotte was unexpectedly quiet. After a rather embarrassing minute while the child scrutinized the servant, Charlotte said, frowning, "Could we perhaps make a better dress for Piety? She has worn that one as long as I can remember, Miss Temple. It must be very—"She faltered.

"Depressing?" suggested Tally softly.

"Yes, that's it. Very depressing to have only the one dress to wear."

Piety burst into tears.

When Tally had helped her to regain her composure, and had explained to the dismayed children that females sometimes cried for joy as well as for unhappiness, the rest of

the meal was spent in considering what garments were to be made first for all four persons present. This involved an explanation on Tally's part concerning patterns to be drawn, materials to be chosen for their suitability, and then to be cut according to the cloth available. Then there would be the actual sewing. Tally promised to give them all some instruction in this, but suggested that, for the first four dresses, she herself would sew them quickly.

"We shall begin our work in the morning, girls. I think new day dresses for you three is our first concern."

"What will we say if Mama discovers we are not having lessons?" faltered Maude.

"Oh, but we shall be!" Tally reassured her. "Drawing and a study of modish style are surely important skills for young ladies who wish to become *à la mode*, are they not? That is what your Mama has in mind for you."

Charlotte sighed. "It is like magic, Miss Temple! I cannot ever remember being this anxious to get to work in the schoolroom."

As they rose from the table, and Piety, grinning shyly, began to clear away, Tally lifted her reticule. "In all our excitement over the dresses, it is no wonder I had forgotten my promise to give you a small treat after supper." Both children froze with their eyes upon the reticule. Even Piety stopped working to watch, a sympathetic smile upon her countenance. Tally opened the bag and gave a tiny cry.

"What is this which has gotten into my handbag? Oh, children, you will not believe it!"

Eager voices demanded to know what Miss Temple had found.

Tally produced one small marzipan rabbit and set it upon the table. It looked so tiny and appealing that all three observers drew in a breath of pleasure. Charlotte's eyes rose to her new governess's face with such strength of feeling that Tally herself felt aware of tenderness. The disclosure of the second rabbit brought forth a chorus of delight. When Tally put her hand into her reticule a third time, Charlotte studied her rather than the candies upon the table. When the third rabbit emerged to take its place beside the other two, there was a silence. Then Maude turned her gaze reluctantly from the rabbits and said shyly, "Have you bought these for us, Miss Temple? Truly?"

"There are three," said Charlotte. Her eyes went from the rabbits to her sister, Tally—and then Piety. Her unspoken question was clear.

Tally asked softly, "Will you hand out the treats, Charlotte?"

Slowly the child approached the table. She lifted one little rabbit and gave it into Maude's eager hands. Then she picked up the second, and walking over to Piety, pressed it into her startled grasp. Then she walked back to the table. Smiling a little nervously at Tally, she said, "You and I must have rabbit stew for supper, Miss Temple! Can you cook it?" She handed the third rabbit to Tally.

"A Solomon!" breathed Tally. Then Miss Enderby's most brilliant pupil caught the little girl close to her, and hugged her hard.

Chapter 6

The fortnight before Lady Frampten's Ball was the most demanding two weeks Tally had ever lived through. Mrs. Dade, impressed in spite of herself by the smart and becoming costumes which the new governess had made up for the girls and Piety and Alfred using only the old rubbish in the attics, decided to have the girl smarten up her employer's wardrobe as well. With an ill grace, she consulted Tally as to what gown should be worn to the Ball.

"For you, Miss Temple, seem to have some kind of notion what is in vogue among the smarts. I suppose, among your classmates in that school you are always talking about, there were young ladies of consequence whose elegant costumes you were permitted to copy. Although I cannot like the idea that so much license was allowed you."

"License?" repeated Tally, bewildered at the direction of this thrust.

"To spend so much time making yourself costumes which were above your station," Mrs. Dade supplied, condescendingly.

"But are you not pleased, Ma'am, that I do so employ my time?" asked Tally, limpid-eyed. "For I can now turn out your daughters as handsomely as any girls in the neighborhood—and at no cost but that of my labor!"

Mrs. Dade decided not to resent this pert reply, lest it prejudice the success of her own new wardrobe, but she stored it in memory for a future reckoning. Although she

frequently deplored the possibility that Tally might get ideas above her station, the formidable matron was persuaded by her brother James to continue the practice of having the schoolroom party at the luncheon table. Charlotte and Maude reveled in this opportunity to demonstrate their newly honed good manners, and behaved so well that even the Squire was heard to remark that the brats weren't half as knaggy as the boys. He added, with a coarse laugh, that if they could continue to improve, he might be able to get them married off before they were ninety.

His audience received this jest with mixed emotions. Maude was quite overcome at the first complimentary notice her father had ever paid her. Charlotte, tight-lipped, kept her eyes on her plate, and a dull flush mantled her cheeks. Tally had all she could do to keep from telling the insensitive parent what she thought of him, more especially since he now compounded the offense by making the disastrous suggestion that they model themselves on their governess, who had a damned fine figure and a way of dressing which brought it to a man's notice.

Mrs. Dade's heavy red eyebrows drew down in a thunderous scowl at this comment. She had already opened her mouth to demolish the horrified governess, unwilling recipient though she had been of the heavy-handed compliment, when James Kendale said smoothly, "My dear Cornelia, should we not pay our duty call upon Lady Frampten this afternoon? Would it not be a pretty compliment to present me to her—and her daughter!—before the hustle-bustle of the Ball itself? I shall find myself quite beneath

notice—lost, in fact!—in such a squeeze as it is bound to be. And that would depress our family's pretensions too cruelly!”

This was said with such a look of mock alarm that the Squire and his sons guffawed, and even Mrs. Dade was forced to smile. The conversation, led skillfully by Kendale, moved into innocuous discussion of which carriage to employ upon the errand, and whether Squire Dade and the boys should accompany the party.

To Tally, who had been dismayed at the Squire's heavy-handed and most improper remark, Mr. Kendale's intervention held all the glamor of a knightly rescue. What a fine man he was! Tally had enough *nous* to recognize a masterly diversion when she beheld one. The girl felt keen admiration and gratitude for her unexpected champion. Even the little twinkle of laughter in the bright blue eyes which observed her departure from the table was a friendly and unobtrusive sign of his interest and kindness. Tally, commanded to remove herself and her charges from the dining room just before dessert, avoided the minatory glare of her employer as she busied herself thinking of ways to divert the girls from their inevitable distress at being ousted immediately before the sweet was served.

She could not suggest a walk to the sweet shop again, for her funds had dwindled sharply, and today's incident warned her that she would have to conserve the remainder in case of desperate need. Rafe had hardly taken his eyes off her during luncheon, and Tally knew his behavior would not long pass unremarked by his sharp-eyed Mama. Also, the Squire's crude compliment had alerted her to the possibility that she might

have an even more powerful aggressor than Rafe to fend off. Tally sighed and wished she might seek comfort from her father. This of course was impossible, for it would result in an open break with the Dades, inadvisable with her finances at such low ebb, and no other prospect of employment in sight. Setting her shoulders, she took the children for a walk through the garden, and upon sight of the solitary, irascible peacock which Mrs. Dade had, in a momentary aberration, imported to give the park *ton*, she told the little girls the Greek myth of Argus, the giant guardian whose hundred eyes were placed in the tail of a peacock after the giant had been killed by Hermes, the messenger of the gods. This rather gory legend went down very well with the girls, especially Charlotte, who was feeling bloody-minded at the loss of dessert. There was a happy ending, however, for upon receiving their supper from the kitchen, they found that Cook, an admirer of Tally, had provided them with a generous portion of *gâteau*, garnished with cream and cherries.

The atmosphere upon the following day was unusually harmonious. Tally had already learned from Piety that the visit to the Framptens had gone off in fine style. Mrs. Dade was in alt at the success her brother had made. She could not refrain from quoting at length what Lady Frampton had said to him, and Miss Mary had said, and how everyone had been much struck by Mr. Kendale's wit and charm. Tally was glad enough to hear this good report of her champion, and only a little wistful that she had not been present to witness his triumph for herself.

I am like the girls, she rallied herself, petulant at missing dessert!

She knew very well that there could be nothing between an impecunious governess and the brother other employer, but, oh, it was comforting to receive occasionally a warm smile and a pleasant word! To say nothing of James's efforts to defend her from his sister's wrath!

Tally was busily employed upon the creation of a ball gown for Mrs. Dade one afternoon toward the end of the week, and had reached a point where it was necessary for her to have a fitting before completing her task. Rather than summon the overworked Piety or Alfred up three flights to bear a message, Tally ran lightly down to the drawing room, from which issued a murmur of voices. Tapping lightly, she pushed open the door.

Gathered in a rather stiff group around a tea table sat three very elegant ladies and Mrs. Dade. Lounging against the mantel, Mr. Kendale greeted the new arrival with one humorously raised eyebrow and a pleasant smile. Mrs. Dade was not so forbearing.

"What is it now. Miss Temple? Are you having difficulties with the girls?"

As though I were forever interrupting and pushing myself forward, fumed Tally, but she managed to say lightly, "The children are well-occupied in the school room, Ma'am. There was just a detail about one of your new gowns. The modiste wanted your opinion on some *very crucial* matter—a drape over the bodice, I believe."

This provocative statement, delivered with a mischievous smile which invited the ladies present to share the joke, was received with a pricking up of interest from the bored-looking guests.

"Do you tell me you have a modiste bring your gowns from London, Mrs. Dade?" asked a middle-aged woman whose air of self-confident hauteur proclaimed her to be Lady Frampton.

Since Mrs. Dade, never too quick in repartee unless she was berating a servant, seemed unable or unwilling to answer the question, Tally, adopting an air of fawning subservience which brought the familiar twinkle to James's eyes, said primly, "Oh, no, Milady, just from Bath. Colette has such an excellent shop there!"

Since this was true, as Tally knew from her years at Miss Enderby's, and since it was also known to every lady in the district who had any pretensions to elegance, it could not but bring reluctant admiration and some envy from those present. Mrs. Dade closed her mouth and seemed a little dazed at the turn events had taken. Tally continued meekly, "I shall request the dressmaker to await your convenience, Ma'am."

She was turning back to the door when the youngest of the guests, a rather plain girl with a lively countenance and manner, called out, "*Tally!* It is you, is it not?"

Tally whirled at the remembered voice. "Cloris!" she said with genuine pleasure. "How good to see you again!"

"You *know* this girl, Cloris?" demanded Lady Frampton.

"Oh, yes, Godmama! She was Head Girl at Miss Enderby's, and won all the prizes, and on many occasions included me in the fun, besides helping me with my studies when I was quite

overcome by difficulties." It all came out in one ecstatic burst. "I was always a poor scholar," she confessed humbly.

"So you were at Miss Enderby's Seminary?" queried Lady Frampton, not appearing much pleased at the idea of her goddaughter having mingled with young women who later turned up as servants.

"My father is a scholar, and concerned to have the best possible education for his daughter; thus, Miss Enderby's. But he is also a younger son," admitted Tally with a wryly humorous quirk to her beautiful mouth. "Mrs. Dade has given me the post of governess to her charming daughters."

"Temple?" mused Lady Frampton. "Not the Derbyshire Temples, by any chance?"

"Nothing so racy." Tally was betrayed into a most unsuitable touch of banter. "No, my father's people have resided in London forever. My mother he met at Oxford." She was reluctant to tell them more, and indeed there seemed little real interest on the part of her inquisitor. With a final smile at Cloris, and a curtsy to the rest of the company, Tally took her leave, lest her employer come to believe she was trying to make a place for herself among the guests. As she closed the door behind her, she caught a flash of an encouraging smile from James.

It was not long after that that Annie, the upstairs maid, came to the schoolroom, where Tally was congratulating her pupils on the neat and careful work they had done, to inform Miss that Mrs. Dade wished to see her in her bedroom.

"Yer to bring the dress you was speakin' about, 'cause she's got time to try it on now."

Leaving the children to play a game of noughts and crosses, Tally caught up the new dress carefully, and, armed with scissors, needle and thread, ran lightly down to her mistress's bedroom.

Mrs. Dade seemed put out about something, and got herself into the new garment without comment. When she viewed herself in the mirror, however, her tight-lipped expression softened and she preened a little. "I must admit," she said harshly, "that you do know how to sew and contrive a garment, if nothing else! Why did you not tell me that you knew Cloris Blackstone?"

"It had not occurred to me that I should be meeting her here, Ma'am," replied Tally.

"Well, it has put me in a quandary," grumbled her employer, pursing her lips and drawing in her not inconsiderable stomach. "I shall have to wear my new corset with this! Well, it looks smart enough for the ball. And the color suits me."

Tally remained silent, realizing that Mrs. Dade had never appeared to better advantage, yet not thinking it politic to say so. After a few more minutes spent posturing in front of the mirror, Mrs. Dade returned to her quarrel. "Miss Blackstone has persuaded her ladyship to invite you to the ball Saturday evening," she said grudgingly.

"But that is quite impossible!" gasped the girl.

"Precisely what I told them, but her ladyship would have none of it. And James added his persuasions." This seemed to annoy Mrs. Dade more than anything else. "He told me—after the ladies had left, of course!—that your presence might

serve to distract Lord Philip Sandron's attention from Miss Frampten, and give my brother his chance to engage the girl's interest. I told James he was quite beside the bridge, for what peer would deign to notice a governess? Most unsuitable!" she fumed and muttered on, but Tally was paying her no heed. So *that* was what the encouraging smile had meant! That her champion intended to secure for her a little pleasure to lighten the grim drabness of her life. What a kind man he was! And how ingenious to fix upon such a reason for his partisanship: that Tally might lure away some elegant lordling from paying court to Miss Frampten. Tally almost forgot herself so far as to laugh aloud at such a ridiculous yet ingenious scheme. For surely Mrs. Dade must be forced to favor any stratagem which might give her charming young brother a better chance at the noble heiress! Not for one moment did it enter the girl's head that James might have serious thoughts in Miss Frampten's direction, that he might deliberately plan to use the beautiful governess to further his own designs. For one thing. Miss Mary was too much like her mother, very haughty and deplorably long in the face. Like a bad-tempered horse, thought Tally, and again was forced to stifle a laugh.

Her employer had removed the new garment.

"Well, I suppose you must come, since Lady Frampten has issued the invitation and James as good as accepted it for you. I imagine you have something to wear which will not disgrace us?"

Tally frowned. "I was not in the way of going out much socially while I was at Miss Enderby's," she began, and was

surprised to note a look of satisfaction on her employer's face. "I have a dress which I wore to the small soirees Miss Enderby arranged, to allow her pupils to learn how to go on in mixed company," she suggested doubtfully. "It is not as fine as this dress, Ma'am." She nodded toward Mrs. Dade's new gown, which she held over her arm.

"I am sure it will do very well," said Mrs. Dade with an access of graciousness. "Just be sure mine is finished in time, and do not neglect the children while daydreaming about the treat to come."

Tally closed her lips against the retort she would like to have made. Daydreaming! Her daylight hours were crowded with the innumerable tasks Mrs. Dade set her, in addition to those she had set for herself: teaching the girls, being a loving and enthusiastic companion to them, sewing, decorating their quarters, making sure her father ate and slept properly—! Even at night she was too tired to dream! But knowing it to be useless, she forbore to answer, merely took the new dress back to the schoolroom to be finished.

Of course she told the girls about the invitation, and they seemed at first very pleased for her. Then Charlotte said, "But Miss Temple, what shall you wear? Have you a pretty gown?"

"Would you like to look over my wardrobe?" Tally asked. From the delight upon the small faces, she knew they would like it very much. So she went over to the ancient armoire which Alfred and the youngest footman had dragged in from the attics, and which she had washed and polished and filled with her garments. When everything had been spread out upon the bed, Maude sighed blissfully.

Charlotte frowned. "There is nothing here which is as grand as Mama's toilettes," she said dubiously. "Yours are prettier, and of course you are not an old married lady, but still. Miss Temple—"

"Charlotte, you have good clothes sense as well as good eyes," Tally informed her. "These are good day dresses, but there is, as you say, nothing here which would do for a debut at a formal ball." She pursed her lips. "Now what are we to do?"

Maude immediately assumed an air of great concentration, but again Charlotte-came up with the only possible answer. "We must search in the storeroom again, Tally!"

It was the first time the child had offered to call her by any but her formal title. Tally knew it had slipped out in the stress of the situation, and she did not comment. Instead she returned the child's worried stare.

"What about the lovely red velvet you gave me? Do you think it might do?"

Charlotte frowned. "It *is* lovely, and I should love to see you wearing a dress made from it, but not—it seems better that you have something more ... more youthful?" The child ended on a note of query.

"Correct again, my dear," smiled Tally. "The velvet, while magnificent, would not be quite *comme il faut* for my first appearance in society. Something delicate, youthful, simple.... and her mind flashed upon the white dress with the silver webbing. "Do you think that I have the right to use your mother's—clothing?" she asked.

Charlotte swept this aside. "Of course you have! You must not embarrass the family in front of all the fine people. Besides, they aren't Mama's clothes. Most of them belonged to my grandparents—and probably *their* parents, for no one in the family seems ever to have thrown anything away! Mama was used to say they were outlandish and had them all bundled up here to get them out of the wardrobes. She told us so."

Into Tally's mind flashed again that memory of white gauze with silver threads through it. She had to remind herself firmly of her position in the household. But Charlotte, who was as bright as a new needle, had caught that errant expression, and said wisely, "You have remembered a particular dress in those trunks, haven't you. Miss Temple?"

"There was a white gauze," admitted Tally weakly with a delightful picture of herself floating around the ballroom in a swirl of silvered moonlight. In James Kendale's arms? Or perhaps in the arms of the rival, Lord Sandron?

"Show me!" Charlotte was demanding.

Tally did.

The children were excited at the possibilities of the lovely material. To be sure, it was creased by its long retirement, and a few streaks of dust and an unidentifiable stain marred the purity of its front panel, but as Tally immediately perceived, there was enough cloth in the flowing skirts to make a dress after the fashion of the daring new Empire style which the Swiss Heideloff, driven out of France by the Revolution, had just featured in his dazzling new book, *Gallery of Fashion*. He had published the book in England, and

of course a copy of it had appeared at Miss Enderby's, to be joyously circulated among the older pupils. The costume Tally had chosen was a deceptively simple one, almost *ingenuous* with its plain neckline, baby puffed sleeves, and straight, floor-length unadorned skirt. Tally could imagine the white and silver material made up in that style, the simple high bodice caught with a ribbon beneath her breasts. Such a garment, for all its elegant simplicity, was far from the modest schoolgirl's costume Mrs. Dade had obviously envisioned. Tally shook her head regretfully and put the dress back into the trunk. "It will be too fine, Charlotte. I am, after all is said and done, a servant."

"You are our *dame de compagnie*," the child said sternly. "It would not do for you to appear shabby."

Maude agreeing enthusiastically, Tally allowed herself to be persuaded into following a course of action which at once alarmed and attracted her. Common caution urged that she should not place herself in any form of competition with Mrs. Dade, or indeed, with anyone else. A governess permitted to sample the delights of the society of her superiors must never grasp or gobble; she must, ever mindful of her true position, be inconspicuous in action and speech, behave circumspectly and with due humility. But the image of the dress kept coming between Tally's inner vision and common sense. Sighing, she accepted the children's advice and took the white gown back to the bedroom.

When the dress was finished, the day before the ball, even Charlotte was struck speechless. By itself it was a glimmering

mist of pure and lovely line; draped upon Tally, it became the garment of Titania.

Maude said, on a sigh of pure pleasure, "You look like the Queen of the Fairies."

And Charlotte, nodding decisively, said, "I knew it would be perfect. Now all you've got to do is get to the ball without Mama seeing you in it."

This problem was resolved with a little hard thinking. When she came downstairs to join the group in the hallway the next evening, Tally wore her old tweed cape, a useful relic of the long, daily walks Miss Enderby insisted upon for all her pupils. Its chief virtue was that it completely covered its wearer and everything she had on underneath it. There was even a tweed hood, but Tally did not dare to attract Mrs. Dade's curiosity by totally concealing herself, so she let the hood hang down her back, and presented her golden hair in a neat, shining cap, its length carefully gathered into a demure snood of white and silver. Mrs. Dade eyed this with disapproval, but the battered old cape, clutched closely about Tally's slender figure, seemed to reassure her.

"Well, let us be on our way, if we have to," grumbled the Squire, who had been dragooned into attending his spouse to the festivities. James Kendale courteously assisted his sister into the coach. The Squire took the middle position, but when James endeavored to help Tally in beside him, the girl quickly took the facing seat, leaving James to sit beside his brother-in-law. From the sharp nod of Mrs. Dade's head, the girl knew she had made the correct move in choosing to ride backward, and removing herself from any contact with her employer's

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husband.

Chapter 7

Two hours later, Tally realized that accepting the invitation had been most ill-advised. The trouble began in the room Lady Frampten had set aside as a cloak-room for her female guests. Mrs. Dade, turning away from the mirror in which she had been viewing her new dress with complacency, was confronted by the spectacle of her daughters' governess emerging from the old tweed cape like a butterfly from a cocoon. The older woman's eyebrows went high and then lowered in a scowl.

"Where had you *that* gown?" she challenged.

"I sewed it up this week," explained Tally, trying to keep her composure.

"You did not lead me to suppose you had funds to purchase such material—" began the dame. Then, sharply, "Was it from my clothing that you took the cloth?"

Tally prevented herself from retorting that Mrs. Dade had never had such a garment in her wardrobe. "From one of the trunks in the attic," she admitted.

"And of course it did not occur to you to get my permission to take it?" snapped the irate woman.

"You had said I might use the old garments, Ma'am," faltered poor Tally, fearful of a public scene as the voices of some new guests could be heard at the door.

"For my children and myself—" hissed her employer.

"And for your servants," Tally reminded her, then made a warning gesture. "Shall we go down, Ma'am? I am sure Lady Frampton must be eager to greet you."

Since Mrs. Dade was not of a nature to listen to reason when she was in one of her rages, it was probably as well that the two newcomers were acknowledged enemies. Lady Black was the upstart wife of an impecunious baronet who had brought her husband not only a large dowry, of which he was in great need, but a pretty daughter and—triumph!—a fine son to inherit. The two middle-aged ladies were old antagonists. Even Mrs. Dade realized that the anger she felt against Tally at this moment must be kept under control lest it give Lady Black an advantage in their running battle.

Lady Black was quick in the field. "*Dear* Mrs. Dade, and who is this lovely child you have with you? Can it be Charlotte? Or the other daughter?"

Since Lady Black well knew that Charlotte was a carrot-haired ten-year-old, and that Rafe, the eldest Dade offspring, was only sixteen, this was a shrewd blow in more ways than one. Before the affronted Mrs. Dade could rattle back. Lady Black continued, "And *you* are looking unusually tannish tonight! Have you taken a trot to the Village?"

Seeing that her employer, never particularly bright, was all at sea over this modish cant, Tally ventured to enter the lists as a shield. "Mrs. Dade has no need to go all the way to London for her gowns, Ma'am," she said with a charming gurgle of laughter, as though the whole conversation were the greatest fun. "She has discovered her own particular modiste much closer to home than that!"

The antagonist treated this intervention with a coldly challenging glance, but there was no doubt that the situation of mystery, combined with the obvious elegance of Mrs. Dade's costume, was enough to give the militant lady pause.

"I do not believe you have been presented to me," she rebuked Tally. "Are you related to that very good-looking Mr. Kendale?"

"I am Thalia Temple, Ma'am," said Tally, as Mrs. Dade seemed to have lost her voice. "*Dame de compagnie* to Mrs. Dade's daughters."

"A governess!" breathed Lady Black, her protruding eyes assessing the white and silver gown in patent disbelief. Then, rallying, "Does dear Lady Frampten know that you are here?"

Mrs. Dade had had time to recover her wits. "Miss Temple," she announced with triumph, "was at school with Lady Frampten's goddaughter, Cloris Blackstone. At Miss Enderby's, in Bath," she concluded. Then, nodding in a condescending manner, she swept from the cloakroom, followed by Tally.

There was no time for more than a glance threatening future settling of accounts from Mrs. Dade, and a placating smile from Tally, before the two ladies had rejoined the waiting gentlemen and were confronting their hostess. Again their modish gowns were sharply scrutinized, but such was the press of guests waiting to be greeted that Lady Frampten could only direct a cold smile at Mr. and Mrs. Dade and an even colder one at Tally's pretty greeting. Lady Frampten made no bones about her displeasure at the sight of Tally in the white and silver Empire dress. She had, however, a warm

welcome for James Kendale, who brought up the rear of the party. She even detained the tall blond man for a moment, making a special point of saying, as she indicated the young woman standing next to her in the reception line, "You have already met my daughter, Mary, have you not? Such a pretty bouquet and trinket you sent her today! She will wish to thank you in person!"

"Then may I hope to have the pleasure of a dance—or two?—Miss Mary?" Tally heard James saying in a warm, teasing voice. How *nice* he is! she thought, and hoped very much that Mr. Kendale would wish to stand up with the governess for one dance, as well!

James Kendale did not disappoint her, although by the time he presented himself before her, Tally knew that she should never have come. Too many young men—and older ones!—had sought an introduction to the slender, golden-haired beauty in the attractive dress. Already Tally realized that her appearance was not such as to reassure anxious mamas or their hopeful daughters. A number of her guests were wondering why Amelia Frampten had been so dimwitted as to invite to her ball a dazzling Nobody who set herself up in competition with their own daughters. In vain, Lady Frampten mentioned Cloris Blackstone and Miss Enderby's. It was obvious to the mamas of the threatened debutantes that their hostess had miscalculated. The feeling was so universal, and so evident, that James, coming to claim a dance with Tally, offered a rueful smile with his hand.

In spite of a frowning glance from Mrs. Dade, Tally rose swiftly and accepted Mr. Kendale's offer. "This is terrible!" she breathed, as he took her into his arms.

"My sister has rather set the fox among the chickens," he admitted, with a twinkling glance. "Or should I say, the vixen? If your hostess does not slay you, one of the other Fond Mamas is certain to do so!"

"Mr. Kendale, I have done nothing out of the way—" began Tally, desperate for his comfort.

"Nothing but look prettier than any other lady in the room, and more spirited," he advised her. "No small crimes!"

"You think me wrong to have come," mourned Tally, her worst fears confirmed.

"On the contrary," James said, holding her just a little closer. His linen was so fresh and sweet-smelling that Tally unconsciously drew in a breath of pleasure and beamed up at him.

Kendale, observing her closely, smiled.

"You have done me a service," he continued softly.

"What can that be?" wondered Tally, looking up into his handsome countenance. She noticed that his eyes were focused upon something beyond her shoulder, and turned her head slightly, to catch an anxious look on the face of Miss Mary Frampten.

Flashing quickly back to James's face, Tally noted the look which he was giving the other girl—his warmly teasing look which had so delighted herself. Then James bent his head over her own face and said softly, "You are helping me to pique Miss Frampten's interest, you see." Before the

devastating implications of this remark had completely penetrated Tally's awareness, James said soberly, "We are two of a kind, my dear. With neither fortune nor prospects of our own, you and I must battle the world for our survival. My brother-in-law is convinced I might be successful in a bid for Miss Mary's hand, since I, while poor, am of an acceptable lineage."

"But you would not?" breathed Tally, dismayed.

"What else?" asked James, with such a bravely rueful smile that Tally's innocent heart bled for him. "I owe it to my family."

There was a pause in conversation as they moved in the dance. Then James said, with soft urgency, "You do not think the less of me, dearest little Tally? You understand that I must do my duty?"

For the first time in her intelligent, sensible life, Tally allowed herself to be carried away by what a more experienced woman would have recognized as a blatantly contrived bid for sympathy. That this young man should have to sacrifice his own inclinations in order to benefit his family seemed to her both noble and tragic. She gazed up at him with her inexperienced heart in her eyes. After a long, considering look, James Kendale's lips parted in his warm, seductive smile and he pressed her to him a little more closely. Then, to Tally's dismay, the music stopped, and he was leading her back to her seat beside his sister. It did not really surprise Tally to find Miss Frampton standing beside Mrs. Dade. With a bow and a smile of thanks in Tally's

direction, James led his hostess's daughter off to the supper room.

Mrs. Dade, ignoring Tally, turned to her husband. "Well, that seems to be going well enough, Henry," she said. "He was right, the young devil!" she added fondly. "It just took a show of interest in someone else to bring Mary over here posthaste to wait for him."

"He's sharp enough," grunted Squire Dade, grinning. "Now if you're satisfied with the results of your matchmaking, Mrs. Dade, I'll just retire to the cardroom for a drink and a hand or two of ombre."

"You might at least have the decency to escort me to the dining room before you desert me," snapped his lady. Her husband shrugged and offered his arm.

Turning to Tally, Mrs. Dade said coldly, "You have made enough of a show of yourself for one evening, Miss Temple. I advise you to go to the cloakroom until it is time for us to go home."

Now that my usefulness in securing Miss Frampton's interest is over! Tally fumed. She understood how Charlotte must have felt, being dismissed from the table before dessert. Yet there was more—a deeper hurt which she had no wish to examine. She hesitated after the Dades had moved away, watching the rush of guests crowding toward the hall en route to the dining room with its buffets and drink tables. It came to her that she had not one friend in the gathering. She could not catch sight of Cloris, although they had met briefly and talked earlier in the evening. Cloris had an affection for her, but was too much under the thumb of Lady Frampton to risk

that lady's ill-will by encouraging the Dade's governess. Sighing, Tally wended her way through the crowd toward the stairway, resigning herself to a lonely couple of hours in the cloakroom until the Dades should be ready to order their carriage.

She had nearly reached the foot of the stairs when a hot hand came down on her shoulder.

"Where are you off to, my pretty maid?" queried a slurred voice. Tally looked up into a youngish man's face, red with too-hearty indulgence in Lord Frampten's generously supplied liquors. She slipped from under the clutching grasp.

"I do not think I know you, sir." She began coolly.

The red-faced youth laughed loudly enough to turn several heads in their direction. "But I know you, Miss Whatever-your-name-is! You're the governess who wheedled her way into the company of her betters, or so Mama has it. Now what I want is to see if you are anything like my old governess for, by God, you don't look like her!"

Tally turned and ran, hoping to escape further embarrassment. Unfortunately, she caromed off a heavy body, and a muttered curse brought her the knowledge that she had bumped into her host, who was carrying two glasses of wine from the dining room. It hardly seemed surprising to Tally at this dreadful moment that one of the glasses, jostled by the encounter, should tip itself down the front of her gown. Upon this scene came Lady Frampten, Miss Mary, and James Kendale, who, like his host, was carrying filled wine glasses. Apparently the two couples were going to sit down together in some private nook to enjoy their dinner.

"Oh!" gasped Tally. "I am so sorry, Lord Frampton! Shall I bring another glass of wine to you?"

"Just go to the cloakroom," advised James coldly.

Tally fled.

No one except the butler had yet noticed a very elegant gentleman who had just entered the front door and was giving his evening cloak to the butler. This dashing gentleman, a very nonpareil in the butler's estimation, caught the little scene being enacted at the foot of the staircase, and was staring intently at the slender, beautiful girl whose exquisite gown was stained with wine. Muttering anathemas on heavy-handed country bumpkins who had neither the wit nor the skill to handle a glass of wine, Lord Philip Sandron stepped forward with an eagerness to involve himself in the painful little scene which would have surprised those who knew his dislike of faux pas and social incompetencies. To his surprise, the blundering old idiot who had spilled his wine on the girl's dress was now recognized as his host. To his greater surprise, the old fool did not stop to assist or apologize, but was leading his companions away, leaving the girl white-faced among a sniggering group. He took a closer look. By Jove, it was the girl from the inn! But what the devil was she doing here? He moved toward her.

Too late. She had turned at last and vanished up the stairs. Lord Philip knew a fierce hope that the chit was a fellow guest, and that he would have the weekend to lay siege to that lovely citadel. Subduing his eagerness—for she was obviously a guest if only for the evening, and he would meet her later, when she had repaired her costume—Lord

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Philip went to find his hostess and offer his excuses.

Chapter 8

The drive home was sheer misery for Tally. Seated on the rear-facing seat beside James, she was completely ignored by the rest of the party. Mrs. Dade had nothing but praise for James's conduct and skill in ingratiating himself with the Framptens and especially their daughter, and even the Squire made a couple of heavy jokes about his brother-in-law's skill with the females, and requested to be invited to the shooting when James was settled in at Frampton Court.

James made his usual discreet response, but Tally found herself less in charity with her former Beau Ideal. She had finally to accept that James was an opportunist, and for all his coaxing ways with herself, he had done nothing to support her during the black moment at the Framptens'. Tally could accept the idea that retreat was her only sensible course when, with the front of her delicate gown liberally splashed with wine, she faced the amused or disapproving stares of the clustering guests. But surely a man of Kendale's *nous* might have found something to do—to say—which would have lightened the burden of shame and guilt Tally felt? He had not even tried to help her. Setting her jaw against lost illusions, Tally grimly listened as James expressed his undisguised satisfaction at his success with the heiress.

So overwhelming had been Mrs. Dade's pleasure at her brother's triumph that she did no more than glare dismissively at Tally when at length they reached Dade Hall. "I shall be speaking to you tomorrow," she threatened, as the

girl hurried away toward the back stairs to mount to her bedroom.

She was thankful that her charges were fast asleep. With only the light of the night candle guttering in its holder, she undressed rapidly and thrust the stained garment into the waste basket. Never would she wish to wear the dishonored dress again, even if she were granted the opportunity. It was more than possible that she would be dismissed from her post the next day. Tally lay awake for long hours, confused and deeply unhappy, trying to decide what alternate courses lay open to a penniless governess who had also to find food and lodging for a most unworldly scholar.

She was not summoned to Mrs. Dade's presence during the morning, and had just begun to hope that James Kendale's success had sweetened her employer's normally nasty temper when Annie came to her where she was lunching with the girls and planning their walk for the afternoon.

"Mrs. Dade wants to see you in her bedroom," advised the maid. "Right away."

Tally had been giving a vivid, if sharply expurgated, description of the previous night's festivities to the enthralled little girls. She had wisely refrained from mentioning the cruelties of adult behavior, limiting herself to a description of dress and entertainment. So there was no apprehension in the little voices which urged her to come back quickly. Tally's own mood was apprehensive. It was foolish to hope that her employer would have been willing to overlook the governess's

success at the ball, since it had created resentment in so many of Mrs. Dade's neighbors.

Her fears were justified.

Her employer met her with a coldly angry countenance, more alarming than her usual petulance. Mrs. Dade launched at once into the attack. "Well, Miss," she challenged. "What is your excuse for your behavior last night? And don't tell me Miss Enderby taught you to make a public show of yourself, for I shan't believe it! In fact, I am beginning to doubt that you ever saw the inside of an exclusive academy, or if you did, it was as a pert maidservant, learning to imitate her betters!"

Already nervous and unsure of herself, Tally lost her hold on her temper. Still her voice remained quiet as she asked, "Which of your questions shall I answer first, Mrs. Dade? Or should I say, your accusations?"

Her employer gasped with outrage, but before she could deliver the thundering setdown she obviously had in mind, Tally went on. "To take your questions in turn: I had certainly no wish to be accosted by a drunken lout in Lady Frampten's hallway, nor do I accent that his boorish behavior is my fault. My jostling of Lord Frampten's arm was merest bad luck, brought about by my natural desire to escape the brutal grasp of one of his lordship's guests. My dress was ruined by the accident, but no one had even the courtesy to express regret!" The girl was carried away by her sense of injustice, aggravated by a sleepless night. "Instead, I was ordered to the cloakroom like a servant—"

But Mrs. Dade had got her breath back.

"Like the servant you are!" she snapped. "Did you think, just because some dimwitted girl recognized you from what I am quite convinced was a most casual acquaintanceship at your school, that you were free to enter the world of those who are far above your touch? I did not see your precious Cloris offering to help you last night. She was most likely embarrassed by your encroaching behavior as were the rest of us!" She smiled nastily. "Or so she gave me to understand, when I bid her good night."

Tally dismissed this without a second thought. Cloris was not the girl to defy her godmama, she knew, but Tally could not credit Cloris with the kind of ruthlessness which would deny an old friend.

Tally's lack of response to this taunt seemed to send Mrs. Dade quite beyond either justice or common civility. She took a furious step toward Tally and shouted, "I'll have no more of your insolence, do you hear me? I have decided you are not fit to instruct my girls in elegant behavior. If you wish to keep a roof over your head, and that of your doddering old fool of a father, you will report to Mrs. Murdoch at once and do as she tells you!"

"You mean," stammered Tally. "I am to work as a servant in your kitchen?"

"And anywhere else you are needed!" sneered her employer. "I'll have no more of your playing the fine lady in your own private dining room, Miss! You may relieve Annie of some of her duties—she is forever complaining of the work—making beds and cleaning the upper floor, and in the evenings you can sew a new set of uniforms for all the staff,

including yourself. I do not wish to see you again in any of those dresses in which you have been flaunting yourself around my house!"

When Tally, white-faced, had nothing to say to this, Mrs. Dade laughed harshly. "That's taken the wind out of your sails, has it? No more ladylike airs and references to Miss Enderby's? One thing more. You and your silly old father will eat in the kitchen with the rest of the servants."

"At least that will be a blessing," muttered Tally.

Her employer's ears were sharp. "Still saucy, are you?" She lifted her hand and caught Tally across the cheek. "Well see how quick you answer back after a few months of honest hard work!"

Dazed by the brutality of the blow—the first she had ever received—and by the totality of the disaster which had struck the Temple family, Tally turned to leave the room. Mrs. Dade had not yet finished with her.

"Tell Cook she is to have your belongings transferred to the bedroom I originally assigned to you."

Tally's blood ran cold. For, leaning against the wall outside his mother's room, obviously enjoying the conversation he had just listened to, lounged Rafe Dade. And there was a wicked promise in his leering smile.

Tally told a distressed Mrs. Murdock of the change in her status. When she came to the part about her bedroom, a look of real alarm crossed Cook's face, and she shook her head. "Better if you come with the other maids to my room, Miss," she said in a low voice. "It isn't safe—that is—"

"I am afraid of Rafe," Tally acknowledged quietly. "Is it possible we might defy Mrs. Dade and have my cot moved into your room?"

"Happen she'll never hear about it," encouraged the kindly woman, but her words convinced neither Tally nor herself. They both knew that Rafe would be quick to discover their failure to obey his mother's orders, and that he would report that failure immediately. They both knew also that Mrs. Murdock would then fall under Mrs. Dade's displeasure. They had no delusions about the speedy punishment which would be enforced. The unpleasant idea entered Tally's mind that Mrs. Dade might well be aware of her son's charming proclivities, and might even be willing that he should make Tally's life wretched with his harassment.

The girl's fine eyes began to blaze with anger. It was insupportable that she and her father should be under the control of such a harridan! They were neither slaves nor bond servants, forsooth! Setting her jaw firmly, she announced, "I am going to speak to my father. He must be made aware of the change in my circumstances. Then I shall come down and help you in whatever way I can in the kitchen, Mrs. Murdock. You must not be made to pay for my sins!" She concluded with a brave attempt at a smile.

The good woman's stout features were wrinkled with distress. "You'll come here, and welcome, Miss Temple, but I cannot have you ruining those pretty hands with kitchen work. I've seen what you did for Piety, with your lotion and your cotton gloves, and I'm as grateful to you as the child

herself is, but that sort of work is not for the likes of you. Miss, and so I tell you!"

Flashing a warm smile, Tally pelted up the back stairs to the attics. Sounds of thumping and bumping greeted her ears, coming from the new dining room, followed by a duet of wails by Charlotte and Maude.

"What are you doing, Rafe?" screamed the older girl. "This is *our* room—Maude's and mine—and you shall not remove our pretty chairs—!"

"All this trash goes back to the storerooms," came Rate's gloating voice. "Your fancy teacher is going to bed down here as she was supposed to. Get a move on, Josh! I haven't got all day!"

"I don't see why we have to shift furniture," complained his younger brother. "There are servants enough in this house, I should think!"

Beyond a harsh command to rattle his bones and get on with it, Rate's voice was not heard again.

Tally crept down the corridor to the far end, where her father now spent all his time except when attending at the girls' dining room. She tapped lightly upon his door and then opened it gently. The silver head lifted inquiringly from the heavy volume the scholar was reading, and a gentle smile of welcome brightened Jocelyn Temple's austere face.

"Thalia, my dear!" he said. "Have I missed the meal time again?"

Carefully the girl closed the door behind her. She looked for a key, but there was none. She went to stand beside her father, and, bending, took one of the fine, thin old hands into

her own two warm ones. "Dear Father," she said, softly but with a compelling urgency. "We must talk seriously, so please give me all of your attention. I have—I have need of your wisdom this day."

Alerted by her grave demeanor and by the painful entreaty in the lovely brown eyes, Jocelyn Temple rose to his feet, setting aside the heavy book and taking her hands in both of his.

"What has so frightened you, dear child? I am with you, and I shall protect you."

Sure now of his full attention, Tally quickly gave him the important details of their new status.

"But the woman cannot really intend you to work in her kitchen," he interrupted. "You are hired to instruct her children."

"She is punishing me for accepting the invitation Lady Frampten gave me, to her ball," explained Tally. "And for having a sort of success there with some of the younger men, although Lady Frampten was a most reluctant hostess to me, and Mrs. Dade a reluctant sponsor. But that is beside the point, Father. At this very moment, Rafe and Josh Dade are removing the furniture from our new little dining room, and replacing my bed there. And Father—" Her silken brows drew into a frown above the brown eyes. "I am afraid Rafe Dade intends to—to visit me there some night soon."

She met her father's astonished stare with as much poise as she could summon up.

"To visit you?" repeated Jocelyn Temple. "How is this?"

"Perhaps he has been reading Ovid." Tally tried for the light touch, and then her eyes filled with tears. "Oh, Father, you must know what a creature Rafe Dade is! He is only too sure that any female under the age of ninety would be happy to accept his rough gallantries—"

Her father interrupted her in a voice she had never before heard from him. "Are you telling me you are willing to accept—?" he began incredulously, and then interrupted himself. "Of course you are not! You despise the fellow, even as I do. And you are afraid. So he must be threatening to force himself upon you. I shall speak to his father."

Tally groaned. "Dearest, it would do no good! Indeed, I am almost as much afraid of the Father as I am of the son! This is a—a very—unscholarly family we have gotten ourselves involved with!" she said; trying to laugh.

Mr. Temple, still holding her hands, stared beyond her with an intent if unfocused glance. Oh, Father, prayed Tally, do not lose yourself in vague speculation at this moment! In her anxiety, she pressed his hands tightly. He brought his eyes back to meet hers, and his expression was suddenly very reassuring to the girl.

"I believe you informed me that the young man is 'at this very moment' superintending the removal of the furniture? Then perhaps I should offer to assist him."

And before she could grasp his arm or inquire as to his intentions, Jocelyn was out of his small room and striding along the corridor. Tally ran after him.

She caught up with him as he arrived at the door of the little dining room. At this minute, also, Rafe and Josh

appeared in the doorway, struggling under the weight of the sideboard. The elderly man tapped Rafe on the shoulder.

"May I help?" he asked politely.

"Get out of my way, you old fool!" snarled Rafe, who was finding furniture moving less amusing than his usual activities.

"I think not," replied Jocelyn Temple quietly. "I suppose I must warn you to defend yourself, since you are carrying a heavy object, but perhaps the disparity in our ages will even the contest. You are a despicable cur, sir, and I intend to knock you down."

"Oh, *Father!*" gasped Tally, torn between admiration and utter dismay.

Rafe, grunting under the load, had no such mixed emotions.

"Here, hold this bloody thing, Josh, till I smash the old fool! I'm really going to enjoy this!"

Alas for youthful optimism! Josh, not sure from inside the room exactly what was occurring, dropped his end of the sideboard. Rafe received the full weight of the heavy piece of furniture, instead of being relieved of it as he expected. High drama became farce. The sideboard fell against Rafe's knees and ended up on his boots, bringing a sharp yelp of pain from him. While he struggled furiously to get the unwieldy object off him, and wiggled himself out through the now-blocked doorway to confront his antagonist, Jocelyn Temple had assumed a belligerent pose which ill-suited his scholarly appearance. Had Tally not been so fearful of the outcome of the uneven contest, she might have laughed at the

mismatched adversaries. Rafe finally stumbled clear of the obstruction in the doorway, and flung himself at his former tutor. That worthy stepped smoothly to one side and tapped the raging youth on the nose with one white fist.

As an example of a wisty castor, it would never have received acclaim at Figg's Amphitheater. Yet it was enough, granted the impetus of Rafe's bullocking charge, to draw his claret and so blind him with fury that he ran directly into the far wall of the corridor and knocked himself breathless. Before the staring eyes of Charlotte, Maude, Josh, Tally, and at this point Piety and Alfred, who had been bustled upstairs by Cook to help Miss Tally, Jocelyn Temple dusted his hands fastidiously and turned to his daughter.

“How are the mighty-fallen!”

Alfred was grinning widely. Even Maude giggled.

Mr. Temple continued, “We shall pack our clothing and leave, Thalia. I really cannot endure this uncouth household another instant.”

“If yer reely gonna go,” piped up Alfred, “*and* I thinks it's a good idea, Perfesser, becos' Mr. Rafe will pound on you when 'e gets 'is wind back, I'll 'elp yer pack.”

“Do that, Alfred,” urged Tally. “Piety shall help me. Dear children.” She turned and took one of her little charges into each arm. “You must see that my father and I cannot stay here after what has just happened—”

“It's all Rafe's fault!” cried Charlotte. “He is forever spoiling everything, and making the maids cry, and ... oh, Tally, I'm glad you are going to get away before he makes you cry or hurts you. I hate him!”

Maude was already crying bitterly but quietly. Tally hurried them both to their shared bedroom, and, heaving her portmanteaus onto the bed, began to throw her clothing into them. Maude was too desolate at the thought of losing Tally to offer any assistance, but Charlotte, made of sterner stuff, set her small mouth grimly and packed the garments firmly as Tally thrust them into her bags.

"Will I ever see you again?" she asked, her voice gruff.

"Yes, my dear girl, you will," promised Tally recklessly. "Someday I shall be married to a fine gentleman and come to call upon Miss Charlotte and Miss Maude Dade, and—" But here her invention faltered, for the sheer unlikeliness of the proposed program daunted her.

"And take me away with you, dear Tally?" urged Charlotte, fitting a pair of shoes neatly into a corner as tears streamed down her little cheeks.

"Oh, Charlotte!" Tally broke down and hugged the child. "Please stay as good and sweet and bright as you are! I am truly wretched at the thought of abandoning you, but you must see that I have to go with my father to protect him—"

"Yes, I can see that." Charlotte's small face was intent and sorrowful. "He is really like another child, is he not? But you will be there to remind him to eat his dinner, and put on his raincoat. And he really did pop Rafe a leveler!" she added with satisfaction.

Tally was just closing her second portmanteau when Mrs. Dade erupted into the bedroom. "So, Miss, you and your nasty father have shown your true colors at last! I hope you do not expect me to keep you on after this—!" She halted,

taking in the packed suitcases and the fact that Tally was donning her old tweed cape. "You are running away! I might have expected it! Well, let me tell you. Miss, you'll not step foot out of this house until I have checked your bags thoroughly to see what you've hidden in them. And then I'll be sending for the constable to take your father into custody for his unwarranted attack upon my son. He's half killed the boy!"

Tally had suddenly had enough. "I hope you will call the constable," she said clearly. "I wish the whole neighborhood to know that a hulking seventeen-year-old was milled down by an elderly scholar one-quarter of his weight. And that my father whipped Rafe because your son was attempting to compromise the reputation of his sisters' governess! It will make pleasant hearing for the Framptens!"

With this shrewd if unsportsmanlike blow, Tally pulled on her cape and took up the heaviest portmanteau. "I intend leaving by the back door, as I entered," she said. "I shall bring my Father's things down after I have taken my own. You may search in my luggage if you wish, but I think you know very well I would have no use for anything from this house."

"You're not using my gig to start you on your travels," screeched her furious antagonist. "Get out of here before dinner—that's all I have to say to you!"

Thankful for this much mercy, Tally dragged her heavy portmanteau down the three flights of stairs and out to the stableyard. As she turned to go back for the other. Piety emerged from the kitchen bearing it, and Alfred came at her

shoulder with Mr. Temple's clothing neatly packed in a small sack. Noting the lost look in her father's eyes, Tally blurted out, "Your *books!*"

Jocelyn Temple smiled. "I've got my three best friends packed with my other suit and clean linen, and Alfred has promised to box up the rest until we can send for them." He smiled impishly. "He'll hide them in the stable loft where they'll be safe from interference."

Since Tally's fear had been that the vengeful Mrs. Dade might destroy Mr. Temple's books out of spite, she heaved a sigh of relief.

Cook came to the back door and made urgent gestures. Tally ran lightly over to thank her for her many kindnesses, and found a large parcel wrapped in clean cloth being thrust into her hands.

"A shivering-bite for the road, Miss Temple. God bless and keep you, child, and your Dad. They say the Lord looks out for—" She caught herself short, her face reddening.

Tally chuckled. "'Fools?' I hope it will be found to be so, for my father and I are starting a perilous journey, and we haven't even a gig to take us to the village!"

Mrs. Murdock was looking past Tally's shoulder. "Seems like the Lord is already looking out for you." She smiled.

Tally followed her glance and beheld James Kendale striding rapidly toward them from the front of the house. "I shall drive you to the next staging house in my curricule," he said firmly. "No, do not demur! Your father cannot walk so far, and neither can you deal with the luggage."

Within a few minutes the groom had harnessed a tolerable pair to the natty vehicle, and Mr. Temple and his daughter were squeezed in beside their benefactor. When the groom and Alfred had stowed the luggage, James tooled out of the stableyard and down the long driveway to the main road.

"I think *not* Crofton Village," decided James after ten silent minutes. "My family has enough to answer for hereabouts. So if you do not dislike it. Miss Temple, I shall set your father and yourself down at Minford. You can catch the London coach from there, and it will be a little less for the fare."

The fare! This essential element to departure had been quite out of Tally's reckoning. She set to considering, with a very anxious expression, how much two tickets to London would cost. After a swift, sidelong glance, James said quietly, "May I have the honor of lending you the money, Miss Temple? I know you will not wish to receive a gift, but if you would accept a loan—?"

"Quite unnecessary, my dear sir," said Jocelyn Temple cheerfully, startling both his daughter and their driver. "I found an old wallet behind my books as I was choosing some old favorites to bear me company. There is better than ten guineas in it. Enough perhaps to see us safely to the Metropolis."

Tally was so much heartened by this unexpected stroke of good luck that she was able to take her leave of James Kendale with equanimity in front of the George and Dragon Inn at Minford, and wave him off with a word of sincere thanks and a smile. As he drove smartly away, she smiled at her father.

"Such a good friend, after all," she said. "Do you not agree?"

And for the third time that day her father surprised her. "No," he said gently. "He is a completely selfish if charming young man, and would do nothing if it did not benefit himself. I believe he spoke simple fact when he said his family has enough to answer for hereabouts. The Dades are not popular, either above or below stairs. Even a breath of today's events would seriously jeopardize his hoped-for alliance with the Framptens."

Tally had little time to reevaluate her notions about men, her situation, and her father as he led the way into the inn to inquire as to the next stagecoach for London.

Chapter 9

Their amazing good luck did not hold for the next part of their journey. The rigors of a long drive in a coach crowded with seven other passengers inside, with more on the roof, was exhausting for the elderly scholar. Tally, noting the weary droop of his body, had just resolved to break their journey at the next posthouse when a young scapegrace seated on the roof bribed the coachman to let him tool the horses. Since the coach was at that time traversing a fairly deserted stretch of open heath, the driver handed over the reins, with the foreseeable result.

Those eight passengers who were riding outside on the roof seats suffered the worst damage, but barring an irate butcher who was flung quite off the vehicle, and who landed, bruised and bellowing, in a clump of gorse, no one appeared to be seriously injured. However, when the chastened coachman had his team in hand again, Tally observed that her father's face had assumed a frightening pallor. To the accompaniment of a great deal of conflicting advice from her fellow passengers, she held his drooping form in her arms to steady him against the jarring motion. When the coach at length pulled up in front of the Jolly Dog Hostelry, she discovered that Jocelyn Temple was unconscious.

There was, of course, no question of continuing the journey. When her father had been carried into the inn by the butcher and a farmer, Tally begged the guard to throw off their luggage before she hurried into the Jolly Dog to confer

with the host's wife. This harassed female, when she had accepted the fact that her unheralded guests were not Quality, as their appearance and manner of speech implied, became instantly suspicious and faintly hostile.

"I beg you, let me settle my father in a bed, and ask you to send for a doctor, ma'am! Then I shall satisfy your doubts as to our ability to pay," Tally urged.

Moved by something in the girl's lovely face, Mrs. Hedge trotted off to do her bidding. The two samaritans from the coach, awkward at Tally's sincere thanks, got themselves back to the vehicle whose coachman was shouting impatiently for them. Tally had just time to remove her father's neckcloth and boots and cover him with a blanket before a jolly-looking stout man in neat professional black presented himself at the bedroom to which Mr. Temple had been carried.

"I am Dr. Neville, ma'am. I have been told you have need of my assistance."

"Oh, yes, thank you, Dr. Neville!" said Tally devoutly. "My father, Jocelyn Temple, was badly battered when a young man tooled the coach we were riding in. Father has been unconscious for half an hour."

"Will you assist me while I examine Mr. Temple?" It was more of an order than a request, but Tally thankfully followed the doctor's instructions as he worked to determine the nature and extent of the damage. After a tense few minutes, he pulled closed the white shirt and stood staring down at his patient. "I shall have to take further observations. However, I am of the opinion that your father has suffered from a minor

malfunction of the heart. It is nothing too alarming—if he is kept very quiet physically and not allowed to fret or worry.”

“For how long?” breathed Tally, both relieved and dismayed.

“Several weeks.” The doctor looked searchingly into the strained beautiful face of the young woman, then considered her modish but quite, suitable apparel. “Is there a problem about money?”

Tally nodded, grateful for his understanding. Removing her gaze from its anxious contemplation of her father's face, she raised lustrous brown eyes to meet his. She said firmly. “We have a little over ten guineas. We were going to London, where I hope to get employment as a governess. I have no references except the fact that I was educated at Miss Enderby's Seminary in Bath.”

“No references, eh?” The doctor considered the flowerlike face. “Did your last employer's husband try to teach the governess a lesson or two?”

Tally was startled into a smile which revealed her enchanting dimples. “My employer's son, actually! Oh, Dr. Neville, the world is not what I was led to expect at Miss Enderby's! Or perhaps it is, for the majority of her pupils who have an established home and family. My father is a scholar who was formerly the tutor of the two boys in the family—”

“—until they chose to learn about you rather than Latin or Greek,” finished the doctor with brusque kindness. “You are well rid of them, in that case. Now your father must have rest and some care, and above all, freedom from anxiety. I think it would be best if you could find work in our village. Then

your father would not have to be moved. Have you relatives or friends in London?"

"No, sir. I shall try to find work here, if my father can be safely left alone?"

The doctor was frowning. It was, of course, none of his business. His practice extended over quite a wide area; he knew himself to be the best, though not the only, medical man in the county, and his usual class of patient was not an impecunious traveling scholar. Still, the fine old face resting on the pillow was a challenge to heart as well as skill, and the lovely little daughter, who was accepting this frightening situation so courageously, inspired him to a benevolent gesture.

"I'll speak to Mrs. Hedge—she is the wife of the landlord here—and request that she send her sister up to watch your father while you try to get a situation in Upton Downs. Offhand, I cannot think of a family with young girls needing a governess. Is there something else you could do?"

"I will be glad to do any honest work to support my father," Tally said quietly.

"Good girl!" The doctor smiled wryly. "We can only hope that opportunity will match willingness. Now I must be off, but I'll have Miss Boniface sent up to you. She is Mrs. Hedge's sister, and often does simple nursing for me in the county. I think you will like her," he added, as he left the bedroom.

Within a few minutes there was a tap at the door, and without waiting for permission, a gaunt woman dressed in neat gray with an old-fashioned white fichu around her shoulders came into the room. She had a pleasant face whose

best feature was a pair of small, twinkling dark eyes with long eyelashes. Her smile, while not effusive, comforted Tally. Quietly the woman came to stand by the bedside.

"This is your father, Miss Temple?" she asked in a low voice.

"Yes, Miss Boniface. He is Jocelyn Temple, and I am Thalia. I am so grateful that you are willing to care for my father while I look for employment in the village. What is it's name, by the way?"

"This is Upton Downs," said the good woman wryly. "Many a joke is made about that name in the surrounding villages, I can warrant you! Dr. Neville has told me what I must do, and I am prepared to begin at once."

"But your own home—" protested Tally, grateful but worried for the nurse.

"Oh, I live here with my sister and her husband," Miss Boniface reassured her. "I prefer nursing to helping about the inn," she explained with her wry smile. She drew a chair toward the bed, looked carefully at her patient, and then sat down where she could watch his face. "He seems to be resting easy," she said. "He has not recovered yet from his faint?"

As though their voices recalled him, Jocelyn's eyelids fluttered and then drew up over his mild blue eyes. Tally was at his side instantly.

"Dearest Father, what a surprise you gave us, dropping off to sleep in that wretched coach! I wish I had half your good sense."

As conversation it had not much sparkle, but the girl's voice was gentle and quiet, and the old man seemed to find it reassuring. "Where are we, Tally?" he asked.

"We are at the Jolly Dog Inn, Upton Downs, and I forbid you to laugh at the name, lest you offend the civic pride of Miss Boniface, who has graciously agreed to be your nurse." Miss Boniface took note of the loving warmth of the glance exchanged between her patient and his daughter.

Jocelyn smiled faintly. "This bed is more comfortable than that coachseat," he said drowsily.

The girl was quick to note his drooping eyelids. "You must take advantage of its comfort then," she advised her parent. "Nurse Boniface will keep an eye on you while I do some business below stairs. You are to let her know if you need anything. You must do exactly as she tells you, for she has only your good at heart."

"I see I have acquired two Nannies in my old age," teased Jocelyn. "Thank you, Miss Boniface." He closed his eye with a sigh.

Miss Boniface winked at the girl. "What a charming man," she said gently. "Rest assured, I shall take great care of your father."

Comforted, Tally made her way downstairs, clutching her reticule in which their total fortune made a not-too-large bulge. It was her intention to pay for several night's lodgings at once, so that her hostess would be reassured. Being totally unfamiliar with the topography of the inn, Tally peeped into one room after another and was pleased to find them neat and clean, if not grand. Led by a sound of many voices, she

finally found herself in the taproom, where an all-male audience fell silent as her presence was observed. Mrs. Hedge came forward.

"My sister is with Mr. Temple?" she asked.

Tally looked at the cross face with a sinking heart. "Miss Boniface is kind and competent. I am grateful we are to have her valuable assistance for my father." She ventured a glance around the interested spectators. "Could we settle our business in some—quieter place? If you please?"

Mrs. Hedge's formidable frown softened. "That would be better," she agreed. And when they had reached the main hallway, she continued. "You'd think those great gawks would have something better to do than to crowd into the tap on the chance of getting a glimpse of a pretty new face! Quite right you were to wish to remove to my husband's office for our business." She led the way into a stuffy little room largely occupied by a huge pigeonhole desk. It was clear from the fond, proprietary look Mrs. Hedge gave this massive piece of furniture that it was her pride. She did not sit down, or offer a chair to Tally, which suited the girl very well. Opening her reticule, she took out one of the guineas and offered it to the older woman.

"Will you tell me, please, when we have used this up, and I shall give you another one. There is also compensation for Miss Boniface to be taken into consideration."

Mrs. Hedge accepted the coin with a smile. "This will pay for a week's board and lodging for you and your father, and leave ample for Sara Boniface," she told the girl.

"I believe," challenged Tally with a rueful smile, "you are tempering the wind to the shorn lamb, Mrs. Hedges. Thank you." Then, squaring her shoulders. "Can you extend your kindness, and tell me if there is any lady in the neighborhood who would require a governess, a seamstress—or even a ladies' maid?"

Mrs. Hedge's face twisted in concentration. "Well, there's none as requires a governess. Only Sir Gerold's children are of that age, and he has Miss Plimpton. A very busy body," she added, with a hint of a grin. "As for dressmaking, if what you have on you made yourself, I should say you might be able to please any fine lady—but we haven't got any such in the district. Proper stay-at-homes, they are, and have had their dresses made by Mrs. Losee, in the village, for donkey's years. There ain't a Smart among. But you'll not pass on that remark, Miss?"

Tally shook her head. "Then I am to accept that my plan to be a ladies' maid or dresser would also fail of acceptance?"

Mrs. Hedge looked doubtful, obviously running the local households past her mind's eye. "Well, you could try, Miss Temple, but where there ain't no young men of impressionable age, as the saying goes, there's young ladies who might not be too happy to have a bonny face like your own introduced into the household. If you see what I mean?"

Unfortunately, after her recent experience, Tally did get her meaning. Her lovely countenance took on a deeply troubled expression. Mrs. Hedge racked her brains.

"You could help me here at the inn," she suggested.

Tally's lovely smile lightened her face. "Mrs. Hedge, that is altogether too much tempering of the wind! I am convinced you have matters well in hand here; your home is spotless and attractive. No, I shall put on my thinking cap. There must be *something* I can do which someone will require!"

Mrs. Hedges, doubtful but resolved to be comforting, said briskly, "While you're thinking, Miss Temple, why do you not come into the kitchen for a meal? I won't serve you in the Ordinary, for it's full of idle loungers panting for the sight of you. And that I know you do not wish." She ended with a decided bob of her head. Gratefully Tally followed her hostess into the spotless kitchen, at this hour fragrant with delectable aromas. After a delicious meal, served on one corner of the scrubbed wooden table, Tally felt a burst of new confidence that she could find work to support herself and her father. After all, she had a whole week to look! Perhaps there was a dame's school, where she could assist with the older children? Perhaps there were draperies or furniture covers to be made at some of the larger homes in the neighborhood? Even servants' liveries to be refurbished? The girl was determined, to accept any honest work to earn her father's keep.

By the beginning of the second week, however, the situation did not look hopeful. Tally had tried hard, turning up at the servant's entrance of every house Mrs. Hedges suggested, but to no avail. In addition, recurring "chance encounters" with the local beaux had begun to alarm her.

"Do these youths think of nothing else?" she demanded wrathfully of Mrs. Hedges, after one such confrontation which

had required the firm hand of the landlord's wife to discourage the would-be Casanova.

"Very little," vouchsafed the dame. "Hunting, in season; some sports; and of course drinking! You're a novelty to'em, Miss Temple. A sort of—of—"

"Challenge," supplied Tally gloomily. "Well, I had better begin to arrange for our departure, ma'am, for it's plain there's nothing for me here. As you warned me." She smiled at the worried woman.

"I can't bear to think of your Dad going off to London on that jolting stagecoach," fretted Mrs. Hedge. "Such a perfect gentleman as he is—but so frail with it! I do think he's been comfortable here."

"Supremely!" agreed Tally. "And since the Vicar has been visiting him, he's gotten brighter every day."

Both women shared a look of satisfaction at this. The elderly Reverend Tobbitt, after his first duty call had disclosed that both men had been up at Oxford, but in different years, had called frequently, the rare nature of the sick man's scholarship so delighting him that he practically haunted the Jolly Dog. The two old cronies spent happy hours in knowledgeable discussion of erudite matters which plainly interested both of them. In fact, Jocelyn was looking so much brighter and more satisfied than Tally had ever seen him, and spent the hours when his new friend was absent in contentedly perusing volumes that ecclesiastic had brought him. It wrenched Tally's heart to think of uprooting him from this most satisfactory refuge and thrusting him into the uncertainties of life in London. Yet something must be done,

and fairly quickly, for the major portion of their slender resources must be preserved to establish themselves in the great city. Her worried thoughts were interrupted by a soft exclamation from Mrs. Hedges.

"Miss Temple! I think I have it! Why can we not arrange for Mr. Temple to go to Vicar's house—it's a great rambling old place with plenty of rooms—and stay there until you are settled in town? You know the trip and the bustle to London would do him harm. And the Reverend Tobbitt's as merry as a grig when he's with your Dad. Acts like they was lifelong friends!"

Tally wondered if she dared let herself hope. It would be an ideal disposition of her father, really too frail to weather the harsh realities of struggle in the great city. But what of herself? While he was physically feeble, yet his very presence as her parent offered some protection. Could she survive without him? Tally set her jaw. She could. She *must!* But would the Vicar ...?

"If you really think he would be so kind—" She hesitated.

"I'm sure he'd love it," answered Mrs. Hedges. "Ask him today."

To Tally's surprise, the Vicar received her tentative suggestion with delight, and busied himself arranging his new friend's transfer to his home. It was obvious that he regarded an extended visit from this gentle, witty scholar as a prime treat. As for Jocelyn, he looked forward to a continuation of interesting discussion. Reassured, Tally superintended the changeover from inn to vicarage, and planned to depart from Upton Downs the next day. And since, after his illness,

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by Elizabeth Chater

Jocelyn was even less aware than ever of practical concerns, he was conveniently unworried about Tally's possible problems in the city.

Chapter 10

In the event, these were formidable. In fact, Tally was in trouble long before she arrived at the Metropolis. Leaving two guineas with the Vicar in trust for her father, Tally took the remaining eight to her host and changed them for smaller coins. The Hedges approved this caution, and gave the girl much good advice. Since they also made sure she had an inside seat in the stage coach, and presented her with a neatly packed lunch in an oiled-cloth lined basket when she left, her eyes were misty with tears of gratitude.

The first day's trip was not as arduous as Tally had expected. It might have been the result of the two weeks' rest and good food, or the consciousness that her father was in such suitable surroundings; whatever the reason, Tally found herself greatly heartened for the struggle she knew was to come. She had planned to go straight through to London, and did indeed remain in the coach through the first night, but by noon on the second day she had resolved to break the journey at whatever inn was reached before nightfall.

This resolve was strengthened by the presence in the coach on that second day of a raffish, down-at-heels man with a cocked hat, whose bold dark eyes fixed themselves in insolent appraisal on her person. It was a relief to get down from the coach in a crowded stable yard at dusk. After requesting that her portmanteaus be put off, she followed a porter into the well-lighted inn.

A substantial meal, followed by a refreshing wash in her tiny bedroom, of which, although it contained two small beds, she was at the moment the only occupant; put her in good spirits once more. She went early to bed, there being nothing else to do. It was not practical, as a lone female, to descend to the common room. She might—unpleasant thought!—meet the bold-eyed man, who would be certain to decide she had come looking for him.

After a refreshing sleep—for Tally was one who did not find the cheerful bustle of a coaching inn obnoxious—the girl rose, washed again, donned her clothing and did up her hair in the neat traveling snood which kept it tidy. Then, bearing one of her portmanteaus—she was getting pretty tired of dragging the heavy luggage with her wherever she went—she descended the stairway to the Ordinary. So very early in the morning, it was almost empty. With charitable pity for the sore heads last night's roisterers were doubtless suffering, she debated with the young servant what she would have for breakfast. While she was waiting for her choice to be produced, she became aware of a small head peering solemnly around the doorjamb in her direction. This object was soon joined by another, a foot higher up the jamb. Two small, dirty faces regarded Tally intently, and when her meal was set upon the table, the children advanced into the room toward her as though magnetized by the sight and smell of the food.

Tally greeted them with a smile. "Have you had your breakfast?" she asked.

Two heads shook as one.

Tally surveyed the amount of food on her plate and then turned her scrutiny upon the children. They were roughly dressed in dirty clothing. The boy was barefoot, and the little girl wore a pair of shoes which might once have belonged to her companion. Their hands were filthy and their faces not much better. But under the grime, Tally discerned handsome features and wide, rather beautiful blue eyes. Their hair, lank and dirty, had once been fair. Brother and sister, then. But how did such small waifs find themselves in a good hostelry? Then the message in the two pairs of eyes, now rigidly fixed upon Tally's plate, became too much for the girl to resist.

"Will you share my breakfast?" she asked. Still silent, the children scrambled onto chairs on either side of Tally and waited, eyes on her face, for the bounty.

Tally divided the food into three equal parts. "Come closer," she invited. "You may have the spoon." She handed it to the little girl. Then she looked from the solitary fork to the boy's dirty fingers. "You may have the fork." She decided. "I shall have to use my fingers, shall I not? We're told they were made before forks."

This seemed to amuse both children, and they watched her very fastidious manoeuvres before beginning to eat. Tally was pleased to note that they did not grab or gobble, although they were very obviously hungry. The plate was emptied in very short order, and two pairs of eyes raised gratefully to meet Tally's. "Thank you for the food," said the boy. "Food," echoed the little girl with a wide smile. Tally scanned the dirty little faces. "Where is your mama? Does she know you are here?" It occurred to her that the children's parents might

make a habit of sending them to the inn to scrounge a meal if the larder at home was empty. Indignation mingled with the pity the girl felt for the innocent offspring. At least the mother might have had the decency to wash her babies' face and hands! In a firmer voice she demanded, "Does Mama know where you are?"

"We have no mama," said the boy.

Tally's gasp of compassion was overridden by a cough that sounded like "Aaaa-hemm!" A man was standing near the table, looking at them. Tally regarded him with disapproval. The shifty eyes flashed across her face to the children, the empty plate, and back to Tally's stern countenance. He did not address her, but spoke to the little boy and girl. Tally was aware that the two small bodies had frozen into a watchful stillness.

"Did the kind lady give you some food, then?" The man spoke in a wheedling voice which somehow raised Tally's hackles, reminding her of the insolent yet furtive stare of the man in the cocked hat. This fellow had a very battered headpiece indeed, an old felt with a broken brim. The rest of his costume quite matched his headgear, being dirty and torn as well as old. Tally stifled a deep regret that such a rascal should be the father of these dear little innocents.

She forced herself to say calmly, "The little ones seemed hungry, so I shared my breakfast with them. Have you come to take them to their mother?" And not before time, her tone implied.

The scrubby fellow shrugged off the criticism. "Oh, their mum's long gone. Me an' me wife jus' keeps an eye on'em till

we can find someone 'oo's willin' to take over, as ye might say. Course we should 'ave to be sure said party could provide for—if ye get me mean-in'?"

A horrid thought had presented itself to Tally. "Do you tell me you are no relation to these babies? Is that why you don't bother to keep them clothed and fed properly?"

"Mrs. Baggs an' me ain't flush wi' the dibs like *some* people!" he retorted with a sullen flare of anger and a glance at Tally's modish costume. "Easy for you to cry us down, what never had to worry—" he turned on the boy and girl. "Get along out to the wagon!" he snarled.

Something in the little ones' frightened silence caught at Tally's heart. She rose and stood over the children, facing the man.

"Wait, Mr. Bagga, if that is your name," she began. "Where are you taking them?"

"On to the next coaching 'ouse." He shrugged. "Happen we'll be able to find their—*relations*— there." His grin showed rotten teeth.

At this moment a slatternly woman appeared in the doorway. "Wot's the matter, Baggs?" she whined. "Ain't ye found yet?" Then, seeing the tiny figures, she showed toothless gums. "'As the kind leddy staked ye little dears to an 'ot meal, then?" She smirked at Tally. "Bless ye fer a gen'rus soul, leddy."

"Stow it," said Baggs brusksly. "She ain't about to buy'em."

The woman's fawning smile changing at once into a cold glare. Limping forward, she stood over the boy. "Bring yer sister an' get a move on, or it'll be the worse for ye both!"

The youngsters scrambled down from their chairs in such haste that the little girl stumbled and fell. Too frightened to cry, she picked herself up and seized her brother's outstretched hand in a desperate grip. This was too much for Tally. She faced the brutal couple firmly.

"Am I to understand that you are offering to sell me these two children?" she said in a clear voice.

The brute's sudden frown and darted glance around the empty room revealed to Tally that she might have some advantage in the contest. "I'll give you two guineas, and that's the limit," she offered loudly. "Of course I shall have to have a—a Bill of Sale," she improvised, smiling at two ladies and a gentleman who were just entering the Ordinary. Thus emboldened, she went on, "You have no connection with these children, anyway. In fact, it is my opinion that you have stolen them from their rightful parents—whom I happen to know!" This outrageous lie was uttered in so ringing a tone as to catch the attention of the newcomers. As all eyes turned toward them, the Baggses slid out of the door like shadows.

Tally smiled at the bewildered children. "It seems we are to be a family," she said gently. "I am Tally. Will you be happy to come with me, my dears?"

"Yes, Tally," the boy said quickly. The girl nodded, and two large tears spilled over her lower lids and washed a path through the dirt on her cheeks. "Come up to my room now, little friends, and we shall get acquainted with one another," Tally said gently, and taking one small hand in each of hers, she led them up to her room.

There she was able to wash away the worst of the grime, and even managed, by eking out the water in the jug, to wash their hair. Combing it dry, she was pleased to discover that it was, in truth, the soft blond she had envisioned. Their clothing was a problem. It smelt moldy and sour, and no amount of brushing would dislodge the dirt and stains. Tally could not bear to put it back on the tender bodies of the little boy and girl. She stared at the trusting countenances raised to her own, and made up her mind. Surely somewhere in this small town there must be a shop where children's clothing could be purchased? She had no time to make garments for them herself. Nodding decisively, she smiled at her new charges, whose names, she had learned, were John and Mary.

"Your clothing is too dirty to be put back on you and your sister, John. I am going downstairs to talk to the innkeeper's wife to see if I can get some nicer clothes for you. Will you wait for me here?"

John's eyes searched the room warily. Then he gave her a tiny smile. "We'll wait for you, Tally."

"Shall I lock the door, so, no one can get in until I come back?"

"Yes." The small face was strained and solemn. "Have—have they gone?"

Of course he meant the wretches who had stolen him and his sister, the girl thought, answering cheerfully, "I expect those two are long gone! If you are very quiet, no one will bother you. Why do you not get into these comfortable beds and pretend that you are baby birds in your nests until I return?"

This suggestion found approval with John. Robing each of them in one of her own chemises, she tucked them into the beds. With a final reassuring word and smile, Tally went down to talk to the innkeeper's wife.

It appeared that contrary to her hopes, there were no shops in this village which sold clothing for small children. Tally was compelled to take the woman into her confidence, and to relate the story of the hapless children with considerable pathos. Mrs. Wiggins's ire was aroused at the tale of the stolen babies.

"Whatever is the world coming to?" she demanded. "Do you tell me *you* plan to look after them children, Miss? You're scarcely more than a child yourself, if I may make so bold."

"I am Thalia Temple, and my father is Jocelyn Temple, a scholar at present residing in the home of the Reverend Tobbitt in Upton Downs. My father would never forgive me if I permitted those wretches to carry out their scheme. I am sure it must be against the law to buy and sell human beings!"

Mrs. Wiggins was quite willing to agree to Tally's plan as long as it did not present any problems to herself. With the laudable intention of getting a possible source of trouble out of her establishment as soon as possible, she bustled about among her neighbors to such good effect that an adequate wardrobe was provided within a remarkably short time, chiefly by the wife of the local doctor, herself the mother of seven. Refusing payment, this good dame also commended Tally for her charity, while rather doubtful as to its final outcome.

"For you know, Mrs. Wiggins," she said as they watched Tally helping her charges into the stagecoach for London. "That girl's too young to be lumbered with those babies. Still, I expect her father and his friend will be able to place the children in a good home shortly."

It did not occur to either of the worthy ladies that Tally was, in fact, going away from her parent and his clerical host at that very moment, not joining them.

Chapter 11

John and Mary made good traveling companions. Whether it was that being well-fed and comfortably dressed contented them, or whether the novelty of traveling in a great stagecoach held them spellbound, she did not know, but they cuddled close to their new friend and seemed to be enjoying the ride. Tally had determined that she must break her journey every evening, since the small Mary, quiet though she had been taught to be in a hard school, was after all still little more than a baby. So when, just as dusk was falling, the coach pulled into an imposing innyard, Tally once more informed the guard that she and the children were staying the night, and desired him to set down her luggage.

She was able to secure a room, although the cost of it rather alarmed her, and as soon as she had the children washed and in bed, she went down to the kitchen to beg a simple supper on a tray. The cook was cross, being in the midst of the usual dinner rush, but was prevailed upon to instruct a kitchen maid to set up a meal.

The children's silent joy at the food was enough thanks for any effort, Tally felt, watching them lovingly. They were attractive little ones. Tally wondered, not for the first time, where the Baggises had gotten them. The boy did not know his surname, and did not seem to remember any other life, and the little girl was too young to understand what was happening to her. Tally, nibbling on an apple, began to concoct a story which might explain to her future employer

her possession of two tiny children. "I shall say I was asked to bring them to London to meet their parents, arriving from India ... no, for then I would have to disclose the family name and that of the ship!" She frowned. "Oh, dear! it is very true! We weave a tangled web, children, when we practice deceit! I charge you," she said, smiling at the two wondering faces upturned to hers, "never enter upon a course of action without thinking carefully about the results, and do not tell a lie!" She chuckled at their sober little countenances. "Always tell the truth, my dears!" They nodded gravely, and resumed eating. They were so dear, so appealing, that Tally was forced to admit she could not regret having them with her, even at the cost of a few falsehoods and more bother than she dared to contemplate.

When she had them safely tucked into bed, she rinsed out the boy's shirt and the little girl's dress. Then, stacking the empty plates from their supper upon the tray, she took it down to the kitchen before getting herself ready for the night. Her last thought was that she must proceed more cautiously with her dwindling store of money, since even her modest requirements were depleting it at an alarming rate.

It was necessary to stop again the following night, for to force the children to remain seated for twenty-four hours at a stretch was impossible. The passengers on today's coach had not welcomed the presence of small children, and had made their disapproval evident. One obese lady had cast a condemnatory look at Tally's ring-less hand, and had not been mollified by the story of the parents waiting in London. Tally perceived that she had got herself into what Miss

Enderby would have called a Delicate Situation. At this inn, it was not possible to persuade the cook to provide a meal on a tray, and Tally was forced to order some sandwiches and a jug of milk in the Ordinary, and take that up to her room. John and Mary's pleasure in the snack went a long way toward reconciling Tally to the cook's lack of cooperation, but it was apparent that the journey would present more problems than Tally had at first envisioned.

The most threatening of these appeared the following morning. When she led the children, washed and combed and neatly dressed in their newly acquired clothes, out to wait for the coach in the early morning, the first sight which met her eyes was a disreputable canvas-covered cart from the seat of which descended the man who had tried to sell John and Mary to her. Baggs threw the reins to his wife and advanced upon Tally with a mixture of fawning and belligerence which she remembered.

"So 'ere ye are, Miss," he said with false joviality. "Caught up wi' ye at last, 'ave I? There's the matter o' two guineas ye promised me. I'll 'ave now!"

Arms protectively around the shrinking children, Tally faced the rogue firmly. "We settled that matter when we discovered that you and your wife have no claim whatever to John and Mary," she said firmly. "I have no intention of allowing you to frighten them, or me, with your bluster, Mr. Baggs,"

"We'll see that," promised the rascal, coming close and bending to seize John's arm. "If they don't do as I tell'em, they know what to expect!"

Mary's small face was crumpling into woe. John's eyes sought Tally's for reassurance.

"Get your hands off that child this instant!" Tally cried.

"I should do as she tells you," drawled a deep masculine voice at Baggs's shoulder. Everyone turned to face this new participant in the scene. Tally's eyes widened with incredulity. Standing facing them, his masterful eyebrows lifted in arrogant amusement at their dumbfounded expressions, was the elegantly dressed man who had blocked Tally's way at the inn at Exeter. Involuntarily the girl's gaze went to his modish beaver, and her dimples framed a mischievous smile.

"I am glad to see there was no permanent damage," she murmured.

The handsome Buck grinned back at her, a flash of white teeth in a saturnine countenance. "Minx," he said doffing his hat, and then turned his steady regard on Baggs, who was hovering indecisively between further bluster and a quick retreat. "Is this lout bothering you, my dear?" he asked silkily.

"Oh, not now, I am sure," Tally informed him demurely.

Baggs took a searching look at the steely gray eyes and the firm, arrogant mouth. He bobbed his head in acknowledgement of defeat. Still he could not refrain from one final thrust.

"Takin' the bread outta a man's mouth, she is," he sneered. "No better than she should be, traipsin' aroun' the country with two brats, an' her with no ring on her finger."

Lord Philip made a step toward him. Baggs scuttled over to his cart, clambered up, seized the reins from his wife and

drove out of the yard, nearly colliding with an entering stagecoach as he went. His wife's wail of fright was a fitting coda.

Tally found the handsome stranger regarding her with laughter in his fine gray eyes.

"Do I dare ask what an unmarried lady is doing—er—traipsing around the country with two children? Are you their governess? I think you did not have them in tow when last we met."

"When last we met," Tally said smoothly, "you were much too busy being impudent to notice what I had in tow!"

Lord Philip had a very strong desire to seize the little witch in his arms and kiss the red lips so temptingly close. However, he had no wish to have his hat knocked off his head again, or to receive whatever other public embarrassment the lovely little filly might devise, so, bowing gracefully, he said "I am Philip Sandron, ma'am. Since you seem to be in need of some assistance, may I offer mine?"

Tally considered him thoughtfully. Amused at such a businesslike appraisal, he awaited her decision, considering whether to tell her he had seen her at Lord Frampton's, and rapidly deciding not to mention it until he had her in a position where such a disclosure might be useful. He was also much aware of the two little urchins she had in her care. He lifted a quizzical eyebrow.

"You seem to have an addiction for rescuing children," he said. "Last time, a baby. Now these two. Are you a member of one of those philanthropic societies which seek to rescue poor children from the streets, my dear?"

"And if I were?" demanded Tally, not at all liking his mockery. "Surely anything would be better than a life with those two creatures! Their name is Baggs, by the way, and they were trying to sell these darlings to me!"

"How enterprising of them," murmured Lord Philip. "But they did not know your mettle, my dear, did they?"

"I wish you will not be so presumptuous as to call me that," frowned Tally, but her reproof lacked force, for she had now decided to use this imperious gentleman. If she could trust him—? She searched his face with the big brown eyes he had not been able to banish from his memory.

"Can I trust you, sir?" she asked with a directness which brought him to full awareness that this was not, for her, mere casual dalliance. He considered the lovely face intently.

"I believe you may," he answered cautiously. Danger signals were ringing in his mind, but the chit was so deliciously lovely! "How did you wish me to assist you?"

"I need to get to London. There I must look for employment, and if possible find the parents of these two."

"You had them from—er—Baggs?" asked Lord Philip. "Did he say he found them in London? If so, their real home might more likely be Plymouth or Liverpool."

Tally nodded soberly. "You are right! It is not to be presumed that such a person would tell the truth if a lie would serve him better. Well, I shall just have to keep the children until I am established in employment, and then try to find a loving home for them. They are very appealing, are they not?" she asked, giving the children her lovely smile.

"Very," said Lord Philip, who had not taken his eyes off her.

"Are you, by any chance, upon the road for London?" asked Tally.

"I might be," admitted his lordship, a sparkle in his fine gray eyes.

"Then do you think you might possibly—that is—is it a very lengthy journey from here?" Tally's courage failed her at the thought of actually soliciting a ride for herself and the two children.

"May I have your name?" queried the gentleman, who was by now ardently upon the hunt. He added with some justification, "If I am to drive you to London, we must be at least upon terms of that much familiarity. I cannot forever be calling you 'You'—or 'my dear,'" he added with a teasing smile.

Tally nodded. "I am Thalia Temple, daughter of Jocelyn Temple, a scholar at present residing with Vicar Tobbitt of Upton Downs. And these are John and Mary."

The big man bent solemnly and took each small hand in turn. John managed a "how-do-you-do"; Mary beamed her guileless smile.

Lord Philip had no intention at this point in the game of revealing that he had carefully acquired from his hostess, Lady Frampton, all the details the latter knew or suspected about the Dade's governess, or that his idly considered intention of calling upon her at Dade Hall the following day had been rendered impossible by her abrupt leave-taking, also much publicized in spite of Kendale's best efforts. For

now, he was content to keep matters upon the casual basis which had been established by their two meetings. "My groom, Abbent, is rather a high stickler, and will no doubt be reassured to know your names. The trip to London should take about ten hours, and while you will have to sacrifice a degree of comfort, I assume that your primary need at the moment is speed?"

"Oh, yes! How *very* good you are!" breathed Tally, the fawning gratitude in her voice at variance with the mischievous dimples. Lord Philip's nostrils flared. Play with him, would she, the little minx? What a game this was going to be! Very good, was she? I hope you will still think so by the time I am finished with you, mused his lordship, putting on a pseudo-fatherly smile.

Abbent, who had of course overheard all the dialogue, as a good servant expected to do, and who knew his master, was echoing the thought. His reproachful glance left his lordship in no doubt that Abbent considered this little pullet to be game unworthy of his master's gun. He also sought to convey that he little relished the prospect of standing up on the platform at the rear of the curricule for ten hours straight.

His master's sardonic smile challenged Abbent's credulity. In the event, it was less than five hours before his lordship called a halt at a superior inn.

"It is time we had food," he announced, and gave the grateful Abbent the nod to dash in and prepare the host. "We shall let the children have a little run, and you may tend to their comfort." He firmly quashed Tally's incipient objections.

It was true, she had to admit, that Mary had become very restless, squirming the last half hour on Tally's lap. It would be a relief to get down even from this elegantly comfortable vehicle and stretch her own legs. The party therefore descended and walked into the hostelry, where a bowing landlord ushered them at once to a private parlor where, he assured them, a splendid meal would be presented to them within the twinkling of a bedpost.

Somewhat disturbed by the image thus conveyed, Tally blushed under Lord Philip's knowing smile. She took the children to a room where she might tidy them. The meal, when they sat down to it, was by far the finest Tally had ever tasted at an inn. She and the children, and indeed Lord Philip himself, did justice to it, and sat back replete.

"Thank you for the food," said John, who had been trained in a hard school.

"Food," chimed Mary, looking adorable with a tiny blob of cream on her upturned nose. Tally wiped it off tenderly.

"What good, clever children you are!" she said softly, and both infants gave her a beaming smile.

Lord Philip, feeling more moved—and in a different way—than was usual at this stage of a seduction, made his next gambit. "Should not they have a brief nap?" he questioned with a sober expression. "As I recall it, my own nanny insisted upon a rest after meals."

Tally frowned. "They are tired, yes. But we have not really time to spare, if we are to be in London before nightfall. I have still to secure accomodation for us, sir."

Lord Philip experienced a cold chill at the thought of Tally and her charges wandering through a night-time London searching for cheap lodgings. "I have had a better idea," he improvised hastily. "I think the children should not be subjected to the rigors of such a program. They will be very tired by the time we arrive. With them, and your two portmanteaus, you cannot be dragging about the streets! My sister has a house in London." (He neglected to tell Tally that it was his own house in which his sister lived, when she was in town, which currently she was not). "We shall go there for the night, and tomorrow you may begin your search for lodgings and employment."

Then, more to prevent her from objecting than because he really wished to know, Lord Philip continued, "What families do you have letters to, Miss Temple?"

Observing the surprise and alarm which now showed upon the girl's lovely face, his lordship found himself more disturbed than he liked. A horrid suspicion entered his mind. "You *do* have letters to families known to your father or the Vicar, do you not? Or recommendations from the Seminary where you trained?" Realizing the true cause of her dismay, he snapped, "You damned little idiot! Do you mean to tell me that you have set off for London, one of the wickedest cities in the world, and have cumbered yourself with two brats, a circumstance which is sure to be misunderstood by any prospective employer, without having the faintest idea where you will be employed—if at all?"

Under this thunderous attack, Tally protested gamely, "I am not quite an *idiot*, Milord! And you need not try to hide

your rank any longer, for I have heard Abtent milording you all day! I am not the fool you take me! I have almost seven pounds, and a good education, and I like children—”

“And your only sponsors,” finished Lord Philip grimly, “are the Baggses and a dissolute nobleman!”

“I should not, of course, consider calling upon the Baggses for a reference.” Tally's smile was twisted, her face white. “As for the nobleman—surely he is not as reprehensible as you are implying?”

“I assure you, you could have no worse sponsor,” said his lordship grimly. “To be known to be in my company would at once put you quite outside the possibility of decent employment.”

“But in your sister's house, surely—?” began Tally, and then caught the expression on his face. “I see,” she said slowly.

For the first time in his pampered, willful existence, Lord Philip Sandron knew deep embarrassment. This was the more odd because the lovely face of the girl held no censure, not even an appearance of shock. Philip felt a slight dew of perspiration spring out on his forehead, and realized that he would have been happier if Tally had looked censorious, or even verbally attacked him. Instead, she was still regarding him with that damnable little air of remoteness—a kind of detachment which he could hardly endure. “I see,” she said again, softly and still quite without condemnation. “Then I think I had better be securing a seat for myself and the children on the coach. We thank you for our delicious luncheon, Lord Sandron. Say goodbye to his lordship, John.”

"Goodbye, your lordship," said the little boy solemnly, and held out a small hand.

"You had better address his lordship as Lord Sandron, John," coached Tally gently. The boy repeated the words, and disengaged his hand from Lord Philip's big one. Without another look at the frowning man, Tally shepherded her charges to the waiting coach and instructed the guard as to which of the pile by the inn door were her portmanteaus. The guard was pleased to assist her into the coach, and hand up the children to her. Then he took up her luggage and stowed it in the boot.

Lord Philip turned abruptly and reentered the inn. The frown had faded, and his face was cold and set. Emotions he did not care to identify were causing him a surprising amount of discomfort considering his well-advertised heartlessness. What were a pair of velvet brown eyes to him? Even if they were set in a countenance as sweet as it was beautiful? He had had at least two young women in keeping who were lovelier, and who did not have her cool little air of reserve behind the darling, mischievous smile.

The Devil take her! thought Lord Philip angrily, and then wished he had not made the curse, even lightly. He decided that, if he were to have any peace, he must dismiss the little idiot from his mind. Completely. At once....

Chapter 12

Tally had been made rudely aware of the problems she was likely to encounter on her arrival in London. With less than seven pounds in her purse, she had an idea the better hotels and inns were not for her. However, it was important that she find immediate shelter for herself and the children. In the pressure of her situation, she thought of the one friend whose London address she knew, having spent a week there once during a vacation at Miss Enderby's. In spite of the rather unfavorable circumstances of their last meeting, Tally decided to see if Cloris Blackstone would shelter her and her charges for one night.

The Blackstone residence was in Eaton Square, and there Tally directed the Jehu who had picked up the weary threesome at the Saracen's Head Inn, where their coach finished its run. Within a time too short for Tally to formulate any but the most elementary plan, they were drawing up before the remembered edifice.

Pray Heaven Cloris is at home, thought Tally frantically, scrabbling in her purse for the required coins. The driver hoisted her luggage down and took it to the door, for which Tally rewarded him with another coin and a bright, if exhausted, smile. Before he had driven off, Tally was rapping with the knocker and encouraging the drooping children to be patient just a little longer and she would have them in a bed. I hope! she thought desperately, with all Lord Philip's bitter, abusive criticism in mind.

The imposing portal swung open, revealing the stout figure of the butler, and behind him, a well-lighted, beautifully furnished hall. Tally gathered her forces.

"You will scarcely remember me, Staton, but I am Miss Temple, Miss Cloris's friend—"

The stately servant executed a small bow. "Of course we remember you, Miss Thalia," he said calmly. "We did not, however, expect to see you tonight. The Family has just gone out to dinner."

Tally looked up at him, her heart in her desperate eyes. Staton considered her slight, gallant figure and the two little children at her side. "Come in, Miss Thalia," he said. "Martha will take you to your room. You can talk to Miss Cloris in the morning."

For it's plain to the meanest intelligence, thought the butler, who was considerably older than seven, that the girl's in a pickle and hasn't anywhere else to go. But what Madam is going to say to those little urchins! They can't be the girl's—she's too young and she's not that sort. Oh, well, it's only for one night!

He called the comfortable Martha to settle the unexpected guests in and give them some food. Thankfully, Tally followed the housekeeper up the stairs.

Tally awoke to smoky sunlight and a weight on her chest. Opening her eyes she found Mary's small body resting on her. John was looking at her, wide-eyed, from the other pillow. The house was still quiet, but certain muted sounds from below suggested that the staff were already about their daily business. Quickly the girl rose, hugged the children, and

praised them for their quiet behavior. She washed her face and hands and quickly donned the sober but tasteful gown she had remembered to shake out and hang up overnight. Then she washed and dressed the children and brushed out their pretty hair.

"Now, my dear John and Mary, you must wait here for me very quietly until I bring you your breakfast. Will you do that?"

"We'll wait," promised John, and took his sister's hand in his.

"Wait," agreed Mary, trustfully.

Tally's heart filled with the resolve to protect these little ones even if it meant finding her own small corner in London, for she had no illusions that Mrs. Blackstone would wish to house all three of them for any time at all. I'll leave right after breakfast, she told herself. I'll find a place and perhaps Mrs. Blackstone will give me a recommendation.

Thinking thus positively, Tally went downstairs to the breakfast room where she and Cloris had had most of their meals during her visit. The table was set for three, although none of the family, not even Cloris, had made a habit of getting up this early. As she stared around the room, Staton spoke from behind her.

"Bring the children down now, Miss Thalia. Best that you get some warm food inside you—"

With a vivid smile of thanks, Tally ran lightly back upstairs and brought John and Mary down. When she reentered the breakfast room, Martha was already setting bowls of porridge at the places, and pouring tall glasses of fresh milk. She had

a pleasant word for the children, and complimented Tally on their beauty.

"They were being offered for sale by a couple at an inn," explained Tally. "I did not think I could permit such a commerce in human souls."

Martha tutted sympathetically, but did not offer a comment. She realized better than Tally could ever do, the complications two tiny children would add to the girl's already difficult situation.

Tally began to wonder if her dismissal by Mrs. Dade had been a matter for discussion at the Blackstone dinner table, where of course Staton and the footmen would have heard about it. She did not care to ask. Instead she joined the children in a worshipful enjoyment of such food as they had never tasted before. Mary quite won all hearts, as, spooning up the last of her porridge and cream industriously, she beamed upon Martha and said, "*Good!*"

"How soon do you think I could speak to Mrs. Blackstone, Staton?" asked Tally. The butler had come into the room with plates heaped with eggs and ham, to which the children were now doing justice.

"She has left a call for her tea at nine o'clock, Miss Thalia. She will be going out early to the dressmaker's. There is an important Function which she is to attend in three days' time."

"May I leave the children in my—in the room until after I have spoken to her? They are very well-behaved, and will stay there until I return."

Martha looked at Staton. He nodded slowly, then suggested, "Martha could take them to the old nursery, Miss Thalia. They could play there very quietly until—until you needed them."

"Thank you, Staton, and you too, Martha. I am most grateful," said Tally warmly.

Hurrying up the stairs, she quickly tidied the room and packed the portmanteau she had opened the night before. Then, nervously, she washed her face again, and redid her hair into a neat, shining, plain roll at the back of her neck. Leaving her tweed cape with her luggage, she put on her neat chip hat, took her reticule and gloves, and went down one floor to Cloris's bedroom. Tapping lightly, she waited for Cloris's sleepy voice bidding her to enter.

Her friend was just sitting up when Tally came toward her bed. Cloris's mouth opened in a little squawk of surprise. "Tally! How did you get here? I thought you would ... that is, I didn't see you to say goodbye after the Frampton's dance. I heard—" She paused, then said, "Oh, Tally!" in a remorseful voice, and held out her arms to her friend.

Tally flew toward her and was received in a warm clasp. "I am truly sorry to have plumped myself upon you uninvited, but I was really desperate last night when the coach arrived in London so late, and I had nowhere to go," she confided, seating herself on the side of Cloris's bed.

"But of course you must stay here!" began Cloris with impulsive warmth, and then, less positively, "I am sure Mama will not hear of anything else."

"That is good of you, dear Cloris, but I must not do so. You see that, do you not? I have to find employment—"

"Oh, Tally, no!" interrupted Cloris, but Tally kept a serene smile of confidence upon her lips.

"Yes, Cloris. What I really hope for very much indeed is that your Mama will write me a little note mentioning that I attended Miss Enderby's Seminary and am qualified to teach the children of good families. Would that be possible?" The calm demeanor cracked just a little to reveal the desperation within.

"If she will not, *I will!*" vowed Cloris. "I do not believe any of the horrid things Lady Frampten said to Mama!"

Tally groaned. "What horrid things, Cloris?" As the other girl shook her head, Tally continued. "You've got to tell me, don't you see? I must know what I am to fight."

Cloris could not meet her eyes. "*You* know the sort of things, Tally! I shall not insult you by repeating them. I am sure I have never been in less charity with Godmama! For of course she does not herself believe such nasty tales, and to be passing them on is the outside of enough!"

"What is this, Cloris?" came a cool voice from the doorway. Mrs. Blackstone came into her daughter's room and stood beside the bed, looking from Cloris to Tally. "I did not know until just a minute ago that you had—honored us, Thalia," she said crisply.

"I came because I had nowhere else to go, Mrs. Blackstone," Tally said honestly. "My coach arrived in London at ten o'clock last night, and I—I was afraid. I am so grateful

for your—for the protection of your home. I intend to leave now that I have spoken to you ... thanked you."

This forthright speech seemed to mollify the lady somewhat. With a less acid tone, Mrs. Blackstone said, "I am pleased, of course, that you thought of Cloris and me when you were in such wretched straits, but you must know, Thalia, that there has been a good deal of unpleasant talk about you—"

"Mother!" gasped Cloris.

"Your mother is right Cloris. There has been talk, but I can only assure you that I have done nothing ... *nothing* of which any woman could be ashamed."

Mrs. Blackstone stared at her intently.

"I have never known you to lie, Thalia. But then, I do not really know you very well, do I? Miss Enderby spoke highly of you. What are your plans?"

"I am hoping to secure a position as a governess. Miss Enderby will give me a recommendation, I am sure, but if I could have one from some respected member of London Society—" The girl hesitated and then continued bravely, "addressed to some lady who needs the services of a governess..."

Mrs. Blackstone's eyes opened very wide. "You are saying that you wish *me* to write you a recommendation?"

"I was in hopes you might not believe whatever lies Mrs. Dade has been spreading about me. My father was compelled to—to punish her older son for his rude behavior toward me, his sisters' governess. I—"

Mrs. Blackstone shook her head. "I am sorry, but I cannot be writing a recommendation for you, Thalia. Lady Frampten is Cloris's godmother. The families have always been close. I cannot offend her by sponsoring a young person she has taken in such strong aversion. She believes you sought to come between her daughter and Mr. Kendale. I am sure you understand my position."

Tally, her heart in her shoes, nodded slowly. "Yes, I understand, Mrs. Blackstone. I have deep gratitude for the shelter your house has provided me and the children last night, and I shall leave—"

"The *children*?" squeaked Mrs. Blackstone. "What children?"

"Two darling waifs I met upon the road. A cruel brute was trying to sell them, so of course I took them away from him."

"How old are they?" demanded Mrs. Blackstone.

"John is about five or six years old, I should guess, and Mary cannot be more than three."

Her hostess breathed a sigh of relief. "At least Mrs. Dade cannot say they are yours!"

"I would not put it past her, if she hears about them," said Cloris grimly. "Mama, cannot we—?"

"No," said Mrs. Blackston with finality.

Tally's color rose. "I must take my leave, ma'am, of you and Cloris. You have been hospitable, and I thank you."

Cloris was looking so despondent that Mrs. Blackstone made haste to speed the parting guest before her impulsive daughter could make a scene which would embarrass everyone and achieve nothing. Keep that beautiful little

troublemaker in her house? Never! Quite aside from what Amelia Frampten would have to say, there was Cloris herself to consider. No beauty, she. The less competition she had to face, the more hope that she might make at least a respectable match. And then there were the two children! Mrs. Blackstone could almost hear Amelia Frampten on that subject!

"Have you enough money, Thalia?" she asked, leading her firmly from Cloris's room. "Staton shall call you a hackney. I am sure he will know of some hostel where you might be comfortably lodged at a reasonable cost."

At this moment there issued a wail of protest from her daughter's room, and Tally's reluctant hostess turned a harried glance on her uncomfortable guest.

Tally forced a smile.

"Don't worry, Mrs. Blackstone," she said softly. "I shall leave immediately. Cloris will be all right shortly. She quite frequently had these upsets at Miss Enderby's. She has a very tender heart."

Mrs. Blackstone, retiring to her boudoir, did not wait to see the last of these very awkward guests. Staton, however, spoke firmly to the driver of the hackney coach, paid him, and tipped him generously from the petty cash. After ordering him to take Miss and the children to a decent lodging house, he said sternly, "We shall be inquiring about Miss tomorrow. She had better be safe or you'll answer to us!"

Chapter 13

Tally was deeply grateful for Staton's kindness when she was deposited at Mrs. Timkin's lodging house on Mudge Street. She observed that the building was three stories tall and very narrow, set in a long row of similar structures, and while there was no such central, green square as graced Cloris's home, still the place seemed clean and respectable. Silently Tally and her charges followed the red-haired landlady up three flights to a small room off the top landing. It was tidy and barely adequate for her needs. Holding a silent child with each hand. Tally looked around the tiny cubicle.

There was a window, uncurtained. A narrow single bed took up one wall. One chair and a small chest of drawers, which would have to serve as wardrobe, table, and desk, were set against the other inner wall. On top of the chest was a basin and small jug for water.

"You'll need a trundle bed for your brother," announced Mrs. Timkin. She stared suspiciously at the children. "I 'opes as they ain't rambunctious! The jakes is in the yard at the back o' the 'ouse. Food in the kitchen at seven in the mornin' and six at night. Ye finds yer own lunch." She looked once more at the silent children, her gaze imperceptibly softening as she scanned the little girl. She frowned at Tally. This quiet girl, so pretty and soft-voiced, was quite outside Mrs. Timkin's usual experience. Her clothing looked like a swell's, but it was modest and far from gaudy. The landlady, eyeing it shrewdly,

estimated it was homemade, and wondered briefly if the girl was apprenticed to a dressmaker. Even her jaundiced eye perceived that the little ones were well-scrubbed, handsome, and well-behaved. The girl had appeared in a hackney with two large pieces of luggage. She had paid without haggling the five shillings Mrs. Timkin asked for room and board for the week. Still, there was the brats. Two little imps of Satan could stir up trouble if the girl wasn't around to keep them quiet.

"What work do you do?" asked Mrs. Timkin in her loud, grating voice.

"I am hoping to get work as a governess, for which I am trained," answered Tally cheerfully. "But I will do any honest work that is offered. Do you know of any such in the neighborhood, ma'am?"

Mrs. Timkin scowled. No job! She didn't like the sound of that. She began to have second thoughts about the desirability of the trio as lodgers.

At this crucial moment, Mary became Tally's *dea ex machina*. Beaming up at Mrs. Timkin, she pointed one tiny finger at the fiery mop of hair. "*Pretty!*" said Mary. "Pretty lady!" And she patted her own fair hair. Then she completed her conquest. "*Mama?*"

No person, not even the late unlamented Mr. Timkin, had ever used the word "pretty" in connection with Mag Timkin's carrotty thatch. As for the maternal reference, the landlady had two teenaged sons, big awkward fellows who took after their father, but no girl children. Mary was the embodiment of a dream Mrs. Timkin had never acknowledged. Disgusted by

her own soft-headedness, she heard herself instructing the young woman to bring the children down to the kitchen for a meal as soon as she had unpacked and settled in. After which unprecedented hospitality, Mrs. Timkin stamped angrily down the stairs, muttering against herself.

Tally gave her time to get back to her kitchen. Then, handing John the small toys Martha had given her for them, she told them to play very quietly while she brought up the luggage. Halfway down the stairs she encountered a large scowling youth laboring upward with her two portmanteaus. His surly expression changed to one of extreme interest as he took in the appearance of the girl above him.

"Oh!" cried Tally, quite completing his conquest. "You are bringing up my luggage! How kind you are! Which of Mrs. Timkin's sons are you?"

"Ah'm 'Orace." He grinned. "Me older brother 'Enry's eatin'."

Almost bashfully the red-haired youth followed the graceful figure of the girl back to the attic room. There he was disposed to linger, but Tally thanked him firmly and said she would no doubt be meeting him very shortly in his mother's kitchen. This got rid of him for the moment at least, and Tally hastened to complete the settling-in process. Just as she had the contents of the second portmanteau tucked into the dresser, a clattering upon the stairs announced the arrival of the promised trundle bed, manhandled by two youths of remarkably similar cast of countenance, both red-haired. One was her acquaintance, 'Orace, the other, surly, version she took to be 'Enry. Tally dismissed them as pleasantly as she

was able. 'Enry, lingering, seemed to find her courtesy more of an invitation than a request to vacate. Tally began to fear that she had exchanged Rafe and Josh for another oafish pair. She tidied John and Mary, and promising herself that she would make a curtain for the window that very day, she carried Mary down to the kitchen, closely followed by John. There they feasted in the company of Horace and Henry upon meaty bowls of beef soup and fresh bread and butter. The children's heads were beginning to nod over their crusts, and Tally took them back and put them to bed with the promise that she would take them for a walk after their nap. Locking the door, she hurried down to ask her hostess about possible jobs in the neighborhood. Rather grudgingly, Mrs. Timkin gave her three addresses.

Unfortunately, none of the prospective employers had need of Tally's services. The butcher's wife had already gotten her sister's daughter to help in the shop. Tally, seeing the bloody carcasses, could only be thankful the job was filled. The greengrocer's young wife mistrusted the look of the modishly dressed girl with the nobby accent, and rejected her out of hand. The tiny inn, three streets over, was little more than a tavern. While it was probably respectable, since Mrs. Timkin espoused it, still it was not a place in which Tally could see herself working happily.

In the back of her mind, there was always the pressure to make some sort of home for her father, but that would have to wait until she found work which would yield her a wage beyond the immediate needs of herself and the children. Tally got back to the Timkin's about four o'clock, and found John

and Mary cozily set up in the kitchen, helping Mrs. Timkin make a bread pudding. Thankfully, the girl accepted the offer of a cup of tea and the heavy scone which went with it. Then she took the children up to their room and settled them for the night, thankful that they had not remembered the promise to go for a walk. She expected to spend the evening worrying about her failure to get work, and planning farther efforts for the following day. Instead she rallied her spirits, got out a dress she had worn several years before, a dainty flowered muslin, and sewed up a pair of curtains before it grew too dark to see. Then she went to bed, and fell fast asleep.

She was wakened at daylight by Mary's little hand patting at her shoulder. She went down to get breakfast for the three of them, and Mrs. Timkin, to her surprise, helped her up with it.

"You didn' get any o' them jobs yesterday," she said harshly.

"There's always today." Tally's smile was firm.

Mrs. Timkin's eye was caught by the curtains. "Put them up yerself, did ye?"

"Horace gave me two nails, and I used the heel of my shoe," Tally explained. "I hope you do not object?"

Mrs. Timkin shrugged. "I don' 'old with dust catchers," she said repressively. "Where did ye buy the cloth?"

"I made them out of a dress that's too small for me," explained Tally further. "I'm going to make the rest of it into a pinafore for Mary. She loves the bright colors."

"The curtains is pretty," admitted the landlady. "And Mary'll look a treat in a pinny made o' that cloth." She stared hard at Tally. "Ye can sew, an' ye talks like a nob, an' you ain't bad to look at. Seems to me ye should be doin' better than Mudge street. Are ye some swell's daughter run off from yer folks? The kids ain't yourn, is they?"

Tally felt it was time to confide in her hostess. She told her about the Baggses first. Mrs. Timkin was suitably incensed, but was forced to admit that dozens of children were abandoned in the streets every week in the slums of London. "Their folks dies, or runs off because there's no money, or maybe the mother ain't married and can't keep them no longer. Mostly the brats goes to the workhouse. I'm glad you took." She stole a look at Mary, whose bright curls were bent over a bowl of bread and milk. She sighed and turned back to Tally.

"Now about yerself, Miss, wot do ye plan to do?"

Surrendering to the determined inquisition, Tally related the whole story of her adventures since leaving Miss Enderby's.

"That's as good as one o' them plays they put on in town, that is! Ye say yer Dad's stayin' with some old parson in the country? That's a weight off yer mind! Leave 'im there till we got ye a job. The devil's in it I can't think o' nothin' that would do, for yer Quality, that much is plain, an' yer Dad would never forgive us if we got ye into anythin' queer."

"Neither my father nor myself would be offended by honest work," protested Tally.

To which her mentor replied rather shortly, "Allow me to know, Miss! Barmaid 'e would never stand for, nor would I. Nor 'awkin' anything in the street. Set a bad example for Mary, that would. Yer too pretty to be a 'ousemaid, for that's a job as makes ye fair game for any randy buck in the 'ouse." She glanced at the curtains. "We might find ye a job sewin', but the pay's paltry and the work's rooinous on yer eyes. We can't get ye in as a governess without a letter from some great lady—"

"Wait!" cried Tally. "Miss Enderby would oblige me with a letter, I am sure of it! And Father's host might also speak for me! Mrs. Timkin, I'll write to them tonight, and ask for a recommendation. In the meantime, I'll keep looking in the neighborhood. And I'll help you all I can in the house, if you will just continue to keep an eye upon Mary and John while I am out looking for work?"

"There's one thing—" began Tally's landlady awkwardly. An unaccustomed color stained her cheeks. "If ye'd 'elp me boys to speak a little more perlite?"

"Do they wish to have instructions?" queried Tally, rather taken aback at the idea of Horace and Henry as scholars.

"'Tis me dearest wish they should learn enough to rise above their station in life," confessed their mother. Then, she said fiercely, "Coal 'eavers like their Pa was, I do not wish to be! 'Orace does odd jobs at a play'ouse, an' minds the 'orses of the men who comes to see the show. 'E don't make much, and it ain't steady. 'Enry's been workin' at the docks. 'E gets good money when there's a ship in, but 'e's 'ot-tempered, like

me, an' I'm worried 'e'll be killed by one o' them furrin' sailors."

"I'll be glad to do what I can, of course," agreed Tally quickly.

"If ye could learn to read, an' write, an' figger, maybe they could get jobs in a shop somewhere," urged Mrs. Timkin, her eyes glazed with the splendor of such a situation. "An' to pay for all yer trouble—for well I know it will be 'ard to drive anything into their thick 'eads!—I'll give ye an' John an' Mary yer room free."

Tally thought quickly. The offer would resolve her immediate difficulties, provide a safe haven for herself and the children, but it would not enable her to save money to bring her father to London. She considered the possibility of installing Jocelyn Temple in a room such as this. He would never notice the absence of amenities or even simple comforts as long as he had his precious books. Tally sighed. She hated to think of him in Mudge Street. If only he could remain with the Reverend Tobbitt! Perhaps she might offer to keep him there as a boarder? But at this instant, Mrs. Timkin was waiting for her answer.

"Yes, ma'am, I shall tutor your sons if they wish it. Writing, reading, mathematics—was that it?"

"An' figgerin'," added Mrs. Timkin. "That's the most needful to 'elp cut a dash."

Tally smiled reassurance. "Indeed it is," she agreed, "if they are to be clerks." She found it impossible to picture Henry and Horace Timkin in clean white stocks, wielding a pen at a desk. She hastened to explain one important

requirement. "We must set up a daily regimen, six days a week, at least two hours a day, if we are to show progress. I'll have to discover what they already know—and Mrs. Timkin," she added soberly, "your sons will have to agree to work. I cannot teach them against their will, you know."

Mrs. Timkin nodded. "'Orace, 'e wants to better his-self. You'll 'ave no trouble with 'im. Ye'll 'ave yer 'ands full with 'Enry. 'E thinks book-learnin' is for mollycoddles."

"I must warn you that if Henry doesn't want to learn, there is no way I know of to make him. He's a grown man."

Mrs. Timkin considered the problem, and reluctantly admitted the problem. "Stubborn, that's 'Enry. Well, just 'Orace, then, if 'Enry turns awkward." She peered hopefully at the girl. "I think 'e's got 'is eye on yer. Maybe that'll make 'im work?"

Horried at the thought of the loutish Henry with his eye on her, Tally hastened to disabuse his mama of the delusion that such a state might make for better scholarship. She was privately of the opinion that Henry would be more anxious to be the teacher than the pupil, and she had no desire to come to points with him. After further discussion, the ladies agreed upon a schedule which would leave Tally free to search for work outside the house to eke out her dwindling funds, while Mrs. Timkin kept an eye upon John and Mary.

As soon as her landlady departed, taking the children to the shops for an outing, Tally sat down and wrote her letter to Jocelyn. Then, lest he read it and promptly forget all that she proposed, she wrote a second letter to his clerical host. Lastly, she wrote a note to Miss Enderby, to request the

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needed recommendation. As she sealed the last envelope, she sighed with relief.

Chapter 14

While Tally was finding her first home in London, Lord Philip Sandron had just decided to give up the struggle to erase one cool, maddening, saucy, silly little female from his mind. The gods knew he had tried hard enough! The Beau Monde was abuzz with his latest series of extravagances. Matchmaking Mamas were beginning to think twice about placing their marriageable daughters in his way—it was such a capricious, wanton way!—and even his closest associates were asking themselves and each other what perverse devil had gotten into old Flip these days.

"Get yourself a new Inamorata," advised his best friend, Drogo Trevelyan, a big, catlike fellow with tawny hair and eyes. "Take her to Paris or Rome or somewhere and work off your bile."

"What a charming suggestion!" sneered Philip. "So elegantly phrased, too. I'm surprised you don't just prescribe a purgative, *Dr. Trevelyan*."

"Well, it's damned clear you need some sort of easement, Flip! You're as tight as a bowstring! What's to do?"

"I'm afraid I am in love," said Philip, unwisely.

He was compelled to endure his friend's laughter and persistent teasing for the next five minutes, and then, getting up from the table where they had been sharing dinner, he strode over to the window which looked out upon the elegant green of the central square. "I must request your promise

that you will not disclose what I have just said," he demanded.

Drogo hooted. "You know I won't give you away, old fellow." He grinned. "I am all Silence—like Lady Jersey."

Since this Patroness of Almack's was noted for her endless chatter, the comment did not reassure Lord Philip. "Until you meet the first of our friends," he added morosely.

Drogo stared speculatively at the tall, broad-shouldered back presented to his view. "You meant it, didn't you?" he said at length. "I ask forgiveness. It was such a shock—" He whistled.

Philip turned to face him, and the white, set look upon his friend's face quite wiped the amusement from Drogo's features.

"I have seen her three times." Philip began slowly. "She is beautiful, and sweet, and an innocent—and I permitted her to come to London with the two children—"

The alarm on Drogo's face arrested Lord Philip mid-sentence. He smiled a little grimly. "Oh, they aren't mine, nor are they hers. She—rescued them from a brute who was trying to sell them. She rather makes a habit of that form of benevolence."

"How old is this—er—philanthropist?" ventured Drogo. At the moment he was not entirely convinced of his friend's sanity. Flip's life to date had not given his intimates any reason to suspect a partiality for female saints or saviors.

Philip shrugged. "Eighteen, twenty ... certainly not more. Her name is Thalia Temple, and she's the daughter of a

scholar at present residing with a clerical type in a hamlet called Upton Downs—”

Drogo raised his eyes to the ceiling, his mouth widening in a grin. “Not—I beg of you—*not* Upson Downs!” he said in a voice strangled with laughter. “It is so—so *characteristic* of you! Sometimes ‘e’s up; sometimes ‘e’s down; sometimes ‘e just goes roun’ and roun’.”

“Any more such fustian out of you, and you’ll hear no more of this,” warned Philip, but the set look of his face had eased. “I had thought you might be willing to help me.”

“Every time.” Drogo assured him. “Open the budget, old fellow.”

After a suspicious glance at his friend’s carefully blank expression, Philip went on slowly, “I probably wouldn’t have mentioned the matter to you—irreverent dog that you are!—and it’s *Upton* Downs—had I not reached the end of my tether. I’ve been worrying about the silly little fool until I can’t get a decent night’s rest, and trying to put the idiot out of my mind by every means I can think of—”

“Don’t tell me!” begged Drogo. “Half of London is agog over your exploits! So they didn’t succeed in taking your thoughts off the silly idiotic fool—and *I quote you!*—” he protested, alarmed at the sudden look of anger on his friend’s face.

“It’s all right for *me* to say it. I know her,” Philip informed him loftily. “I begin to see there is nothing for it but to find her and take her in hand.”

His friend breathed a sigh of relief. “Excellent idea!” He agreed cordially. “I’ll help you.”

Philip looked up from a careful scrutiny of his fingernails. "How?"

"Well, first we'll go to Upton Downs." He suppressed a grin. "There we'll find out from her Papa where the charmer is presently residing, and then we'll both go and call upon her and urge her to accept your protection—"

"I'm damned if we will," said Philip between set teeth. "At least permit me to conduct my own campaign!"

Drogo was much relieved to note that the deep scowl had vanished from his friend's face, to be replaced, for the first time in days, by a look of pleased anticipation.

Chapter 15

Several days passed quickly as Tally established the new routine. 'Enry proved more than a bit awkward, justifying her own and his mother's fears. He seemed to regard the tutoring sessions as an invitation to prove his masculinity. Every meeting, sensibly scheduled by Tally to take place in Mrs. Timkin's parlor, became a test of strength, and since Henry was bigger, stronger, and had no scruples, his mother was forced to concede that for him, at least, the experiment had proved a failure. This was dramatically demonstrated when Mrs. Timkin, rushing into the parlor one evening at the urgent request of her younger son, discovered Tally locked in Henry's arms, struggling to avoid his kisses.

Henry released the girl at his mother's angry command, reinforced as it was with a frying pan, thankfully empty at the moment. He went to lounge against the door with an insolent grin.

"What's come over ye, 'Enry?" demanded his indignant parent. "Ye knows Miss Temple ain't no doxy! Besides, yer too young—"

"Am I, Ma?" Henry slouched over to stand beside his mother. "I'm off to the docks, Ma. There's a ship in, an' I got man's work to do, unloadin' 'er. No work, no pay! See ye tonight, pretty doxy!" He ruffled Tally's hair as he walked past her.

Mrs. Timkin apologized profusely, her hopes in ruins, and her fears for Tally rudely stimulated. The girl was able to

comfort her with the news that Horace, at least, was benefiting from instruction, and showed considerable aptitude. It was a relief not to have to face any more exhausting sessions with Henry.

Tally renewed her efforts to find genteel employment elsewhere. In this she had no luck. No recommendation had as yet arrived from Miss Enderby. As Tally had ruefully predicted, there was no message from Jocelyn Temple either, but a letter did come from the Reverend Tobbitt which disturbed the girl. It said in part:

Your dear father is the most comfortable of guests, since we are two old scholars together, and spend delightful evenings discussing the Classics or arguing theological quiddities. I would beg you to permit him to remain with me as long as he cares to, but I fear his health is not robust. He has developed a wracking cough and seems, in spite of all my good housekeeper can do, to be losing weight quite rapidly. Please be assured I shall do all in my power to assist and comfort this good man, but perhaps you might be able to visit him some Sunday or holiday, to see for yourself. Dr. Venable calls upon us both quite frequently; I can see that he regards us as a pair of old dodderers....

It seemed also that she had not solved the problem of Henry. That burly youth encountered her on the narrow staircase the following afternoon as Tally, having just put the children down for their nap, was hurrying to continue her search for work. Grinning widely, Henry blocked her way. At first she felt only vague impatience at his silly tricks.

"Do move over. Henry, and let me past!" Tally said crossly. "I must make use of this free time while the children rest."

"I can show ye a good way to make use of it," leered Henry.

Still Tally was not alarmed. She put her hand on Henry's shoulder and tugged at him. "*Move!*"

He took her in his arms. Since he was standing two steps below her, his face was on a level with hers. He had been eating onions, and his hot breath nauseated the girl. She pushed him from her in a frenzy of rejection which startled her as much as it did her attacker. So fierce was her thrust that Henry staggered and flung both arms wide, clutching at wall and stair rail to keep from falling. Tally slipped past him like an eel, and ran on downstairs, followed by a particularly ugly flow of invective from Henry.

Next time I shall slap his face, thought the girl, angrily.

She did not succeed in finding work that afternoon either, and her despondent thoughts about her father and their situation quite removed from her mind any memory of the unpleasant scene on the stairs. Henry said nothing further to her, but his glowering looks, had she noticed them, would have warned her that he had not forgotten her rejection of his amorous advances.

Young Horace, noting her depression, made a suggestion at the end of their lesson that evening. She had just congratulated him upon the improvement he was showing, and in a boyish spurt of enthusiasm, he told her he had been given tickets for a performance which was being given the following night at the theater where he worked. He invited

her to accompany him. Upon learning that the main play of the evening was to be Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Tally decided it could be classed as educational, and agreed to attend with him in place of their usual session with the books.

Mrs. Timkin was dubious, holding the notion that any performance upon a stage could hardly be called respectable, let alone educational.

"Actresses," she said darkly. "No better than they should be. All painted up and showin' their legs."

"This play is a classical tragedy, set in Rome before the time of Christ."

"Oh, an 'eathen play," interjected Mrs. Timkin, not at all mollified.

"It is accounted a great work of art, Mrs. Timkin," Tally said gently. "Horace will benefit from the beautiful use of the English language, I promise you, ma'am."

Scarcely reassured, Mrs. Timkin saw them off the following night with muttered forebodings, although she promised cheerfully enough to keep an ear out for the children, now safely tucked away in their beds on the top floor.

An hour later, Tally was devoutly wishing she had listened to Mrs. Timkin. The small theater, made over from a warehouse, was crowded with noisy patrons who seemed to prefer shouting insults at the actors to listening to the poetry of the Bard. The costumes, instead of imitating those of ancient Rome, were gaudy and tasteless examples of the worst extremes of contemporary styles. The actors and actresses forgot their lines, improvised in ways which would have driven Will Shakespeare to murder most justified,

especially since they pronounced the lovely words they *did* remember in accents more suited to the docks and the gutter than the senate chamber and villas of the Roman rulers. Horace did not seem to be disappointed, but Tally was forced to admit that there was nothing even vaguely educational in the performance as presented by Jonah Vandeleur's Company.

As the evening progressed. Tally's discomfort turned to active annoyance and finally to anger. What sort of barbarians were Mr. Vandeleur and his fellow actors to do this sacrilege to a work of such stature? The final insult was added to injury when an announcement was made that the last two acts of the play would be omitted to allow for the performance of a new farce. The audience were uproarious in their delight. Tally suggested to Horace that they leave at once. He looked so disappointed that she relented and agreed to remain for the rest of the program.

The farce, lacking even a nodding acquaintance with dramatic literature, seemed to please the audience greatly. They cheered every absurd bit of slapstick, the more vulgar the better. The farce was followed by a two-act play which surprised Tally with its witty lines and audaciously amusing plot. Even the actors appeared to enjoy this offering, and minced and ruffled across the stage with verve and enthusiasm. The audience became quieter, following the action closely. No more catcalls or insults, but hearty laughter as the humorous plot unfolded its fascinating twists and reversals.

"But this is good!" Tally murmured. Her only regret this time was over the staging: the costumes were not appropriate, and actors who were supposed to be members of the Haul Ton spoke in cockney accents more appropriate to Billingsgate than to the Beau Monde. The bad grammar and atrocious accents made several scenes disappointing. Slowly the audience began loudly mimicking the worst blunders. Others in the theater, less finicky, shouted for silence, adding considerably to the din. The play was brought to a rousing and rather rowdy finish, with the actors bellowing to be heard above the din. Tally was feeling very uncomfortable as they made their way out of the theater through the jostle of bodies, but Horace was ecstatic at his first experience with the drama.

"Miss Temple, wot's me chances of gettin' to be one o' them blokes up there?" Before Tally could answer, her escort stared calculatingly around him. "Must be upwards o' two 'undred paid to get in 'ere tonight. That's—well, that's a pretty penny comin' into their pockets every night!" Horace blushed under Tally's tutorial eye.

"Your skill at numbers needs to match your enthusiasm," Tally smiled. "That will be our first sum tomorrow evening. Given two hundred patrons at the theater, at two shillings the seat, with standing room at eight pence, how much does Mr. Vandeleur make?"

"I'd rather just ask 'im," admitted Horace. "An' if I was up there on the stage, 'e'd be payin' *me*!"

"I believe it is rather a chancy sort of life, Horace," said Tally soberly, as they walked back to Mudge Street. "Of

course, I do not know for sure. You could find out a great deal, working outside the theater most nights as you do. Do you think your Mama would approve of such a life for you? She seemed a little—unhappy about our going.”

“She'd be sure to like it better'n what 'Enry's doin'. She's always onto 'im about gettin' away from the docks. An' I can't keep 'oldin' 'orses forever!”

While Tally was strongly of the opinion that the life of an actor might be even less to Mrs. Timkin's taste than that of a stevedore, she kept her thoughts to herself.

To their surprise, all the lights were burning in the house as they arrived, and the front door was wide open. They had no more than entered the hall when they were confronted by a red-haired fury. Wild-eyed, Mrs. Timkin challenged them.

“Where is Mary?”

Tally's heart lurched. Not Baggs! Had he followed her here, stolen one of the children? “Is John safe?” she gasped.

Mrs. Timkin glared at her. “Sound in his bed. Did ye take Mary with ye to that den of iniquity?”

“You know we did not, Mrs. Timkin,” answered Tally gently, pushing past her to go up the stairs.

The frantic landlady caught at her arm. “Where do you think yer goin'?” she shrilled. “I've searched the 'ole 'ouse over and she ain't in it! If ye'd stayed here to look after 'er as ye ought, stead o' traipsin' out to play 'ouses, she'd still be 'ere! Yer not fit to 'ave the care o' the sweet little creature!” Her fury mounted as she confronted the white-faced girl. “Well, she's gone, an' ye can go after 'er! I want ye out o' here this minute, an' the boy with ye!”

Horace, shocked by his mother's sudden onslaught, was vainly trying to urge patience and calm when a slouching form entered the hall. Henry, grinning slyly, caught at his mother's shoulder.

"No, Ma, ye can't throw the little doxy out into the street tonight. The kid'll turn up tomorrow. Somebody's sure to find 'er an' bring 'er back."

"Stow yer mag," snarled his mother. "Mary's gone, an' this girl can go after 'er. I won't 'ave 'er in me 'ouse another minute!"

Tally was staring at Henry's face. On it a kind of sly triumph mingled with dissatisfaction with his mother's decision to oust the girl. Tally's jaw set. If he had done something with that child! "Where is Mary?" Tally demanded, glaring into Henry's face.

"'Spose you tell us. Miss Teacher," sneered the youth. "Yer the one knows everything around 'ere."

Tally turned upon a gaping Mrs. Timkin. "You've searched the house thoroughly? All the cupboards ... boxes?" Oh, Mary, are you hidden in a trunk? Can you breathe, Mary, where this beast has put you?

Into the dreadful little silence came a faint echo of a child's cry. Tally was not even sure she heard the sound, but Mrs. Timkin was into the kitchen and out the back door before anyone else could move. Tally ran after her into the small, cobbled yard behind the house. At the far corner loomed the structure which held the privy. The door was latched on the outside. From within came the tiny whimper of a child.

Mrs. Timkin had the door open and had snatched up the cowering Mary before Tally could act. The girl escorted the landlady back into the lighted kitchen, and then took Mary gently but firmly from Mrs. Timkin's reluctant grasp.

"I think it best that she come quietly to bed. She is cold and frightened," Tally said firmly.

Mrs. Timkin cast an agonized look at the tiny figure clinging to the girl's shoulder. "I'll bring up some 'ot milk," she muttered.

Tally left without another word or glance at the worried Horace. Henry had disappeared. The thought entered Tally's head that the brute might be lurking on the stairway in the shadows. If he dares to accost me, I shall push him down. And I hope he breaks his neck!

Washing Mary's tear-stained, weary little face, and gently wrapping her in the warm tweed cape before placing her in their bed, Tally realized that her situation had indeed changed for the worse. She was well aware that Mrs. Timkin had not meant the angry things she had said, and would in truth be desolate when Tally and the children left, but the girl knew it would be quite impossible for her to remain in a house which also held Henry Timkin. He was ignorant, malicious and brutal. The fact that he had used the tiny girl to hurt Tally proved that he had no scruples. This time the trick had ended without too much damage. His next little game might have a very different, even disastrous ending.

Tally was crooning a lullaby to the still-trembling child when Mrs. Timkin entered with a beaker of warm milk. "It will 'elp 'er to sleep," she offered humbly.

The girl accepted the peace offering. Pulling Mary up against her shoulder, she held the cup to the soft, pink lips. Mary drank a little, murmured, and then with a sigh, turned to rest against Tally's breast. Tally handed back the cup. "If you will just turn down the lamp very low, ma'am," she whispered. "I'll hold her till she goes to sleep."

With a final, longing glance at Mary, the landlady did as she was bid and slipped from the room. It was not long before Tally closed her eyes.

Next morning, when she led the children into the kitchen for breakfast, there was no sign of either of Mrs. Timkin's sons. The landlady seemed pathetically anxious to please, and had a bounteous meal on the table. Mary ate heartily, showing no ill-effects from her incarceration, and John was his usual quiet self. Tally, too, was quiet, thinking how best to phrase what she had to say.

Mrs. Timkin anticipated her.

"I knows as ye'll want to leave this 'ouse, after what 'Enry did las' night," she began miserably. "I can't say as I blame ye. Miss Temple, but 'ave ye reelly thought wot yer goin' to do?"

Tally met her glance pleasantly. "I have had an idea, Mrs. Timkin, but it will take a little time for me to make arrangements. Could I leave the children in your hands this morning while I go to see?"

Mrs. Timkin's tired face relaxed as she realized that Tally was going to trust her at least once more to guard the children.

"Thank ye, Miss Temple, I'll be glad to see to! Ye're determined to leave us, then? Me rotten temper 'as made ye sick an' tired of us. Ye know," she said, with a sidelong glance from under her puffy lids, "I didden' mean anything I said las' night. I was so feared for Mary..."

"Of course you were, Mrs. Timkin!" Tally soothed her. "I know how you love her, even as I do. Do not give it another thought! I have forgotten the whole incident—"

"But not 'Enry's dirty trick," said his mother grimly. "I could swear it'd never 'appen again, but I can see ye'd be 'appier somewhere's else." She straightened her back. "One thing I must ask ye to promise me, Miss Temple," she said formally. "If ye go, an' somethin' goes wrong, ye'll promise to come back 'ere till ye get it straight?"

"Thank you, Mrs. Timkin!" said Tally sincerely. "That is most reassuring, and kind." She smiled. "I'll leave Mary and John in your care while I make a call this morning."

Leaving the children happily amused by a grateful Mrs. Timkin, Tally readied herself for the gamble she had conceived during the night hours by donning her most elegant outfit, a deep blue woolen redingote with a tiny blue hat, from the brim of which her soft curls tumbled into a blue velvet snood. Taking gloves and reticule, she made her way back through the streets to the building Mr. Jonah Vandeleur had turned into a theater.

The playhouse looked less attractive by morning light, and Tally's courage was severely tested as she tried to find a way inside. The front doors were locked. Following a narrow, littered alley around the building to the rear, Tally discovered

an open back door which led into the stage area. Picking her way carefully through anonymous trash, past dressing rooms and stacks of painted canvas flats, she eventually came upon a half dozen people arguing loudly upon the stage. At her entrance, all eyes turned upon her, and the argument was temporarily suspended.

A haggard-looking middle-aged man came forward to address her. "I am Mr. Vandeleur," he made a consciously dramatic announcement. "How may I serve you, Madam?"

"I have come to help you," said Tally clearly. "You are really wasting your time, you know, and you seem quite talented."

"Oho, Mistress Hoity-toity!" sneered a dashing pretty brunette in a dress which showed a great deal too much of her person for that hour of the day. "Come to tell the vulgar players how to go on, have you? Who made you our critic?"

"I saw the performance last night." Tally kept her eyes on the manager. "The Shakespeare was badly read and incorrectly costumed for the period—" she began.

"Costumed!" hooted one of the older male actors. "Those togs were intended for a different play altogether. Our trouble was that the stupid merchants, and randy young Bloods who were only here to ogle the girl's bosoms, have neither ears to hear nor wits to comprehend the divine Will!"

"Your Antony was very good," acknowledged Tally, recognizing the rich, resonant voice and the oratorical approach. "I'm glad your 'Friends, Romans, Countrymen' speech wasn't cut. It was superb!" In fact, she could have

added, the only good thing about the whole presentation of the play, but caution held her tongue.

Last night's Antony swept her a deep bow. "'Out of the very mouths of babes,'" he grinned wolfishly. "I am Ponty Hamner, at your service."

"I am Thalia Temple, Mr. Hamner. Mr. Vandeleur, I would dearly like to be of service to your company."

The dark-haired woman came closer with what could only be characterized as a flounce. "And what d'you think you could do to serve us? Or is it just the men you've got your eye on?"

"Don't be coarse, Dorinda," mocked Vandeleur. He seemed to be enjoying the confrontation, and Tally noticed that when he laughed, his whole face lighted and became quite handsome.

"I took careful note of your performance," Tally continued. "When the audience laughed, and why; when they lost interest, but most especially when you held them."

The actors moved closer, even Dorinda's scowl fading as she pressed closer to hear an audience reaction to their performance.

"Do go on," invited the manager, and his knowing dark eyes fastened on the lovely face before him. "Tell us more! We are our favorite subject!"

"The witty play you finished with was by far the best thing I have ever seen upon a stage," she said honestly. She did not intend to tell them that, aside from a few amateur performances put on at Miss Enderby's, and a Christmas pantomime she and Cloris had been taken to by Mr.

Blackstone, she had never actually seen a play upon a stage. She had read every one of Shakespeare's plays, however, and listened closely enough to her father, and to her English mistress at school, to know what she was talking about ... she hoped!

"You should forget the Shakespeare, which as Mr. Hamner has just said, is above the comprehension of your regular audience, and concentrate upon such laugh-provoking and delightful plays as last night's success—"

"Not quite a success, my dear," said Mr. Vandeleur wryly. "You must have heard our—ah—detractors interrupting the latter half of the play? It's a fairly close plagiarism of one of Richard Sheridan's triumphs, by the way. Does that affront you?" His smile taunted her.

"Not at all." Tally surprised him. "Shakespeare quite blatantly plagiarized everything he could get his hands on, ancient or modern. Of course his reworking was so much nobler than the originals that *they* are forgotten, while his works live on."

"A bluestocking?" mused the manager, smiling into her eyes. "Surely not, with that enchanting face and figure!"

Dorinda moved in to break up the *tete-a-tete*. "Vandy's right. The Bucks, with their catcalls, and the stupid Cits, with their cries for quiet, nearly wrecked the second act between! Have you some way of preventing that?"

"I believe I may have," replied Tally earnestly. "If you will let me explain?"

"Say on. Fair Cicerone!" invited Vandeleur with a wicked twinkle.

Tally marshaled her ideas. "Your main problem is with the young men of fashion in your audience. They are offended by a way of speaking which is not like theirs. But you are *actors*," she hurried to add, as their faces darkened at this slur upon their accent. "You can play any role well—with proper coaching, can you not?" she challenged them.

"Who's to coach us—you?" sneered Dorinda.

"Yes," said Tally firmly. "Some of you—Mr. Vandeleur as the Rakehell, Miss Dorinda as the Heroine, and Mr. Hamner as the Squire, have already the upperclass accent required for the parts they play. The others could, with just a few rehearsals, acquire such an elegant mode of speech as would raise no comment from the highest stickler among the Beaus and Bucks." She paused, estimating the suddenly thoughtful expressions upon the faces of most of her audience. Hamner looked at Vandeleur.

"The girl may have hit upon the reason for our poor reception. Shall we try it?"

"*One* reason," interjected Tally.

"There is *more* wrong with our performance?" challenged Dorinda, but she was less belligerent since Tally had praised her own accent.

"Not with your performance, no. You were all charming, spirited, and amusing. But the play itself—the lines—contain many awkward grammatical constructions, which I am convinced," she said, dimpling at the manager, "did not come from the original—source. Naturally the young sprigs of nobility, from Oxford or Cambridge, will catch you up on it. It

gives them a chance to get their own back for the years their tutors scolded *them*."

"Girl's right," an older woman, handsome and stately enough to be a duchess, spoke up. "Let her help us, Vandy. We could use her kind of coaching."

Serious now, the manager stared thoughtfully at Tally's lovely, flowerlike face. "You listened pretty carefully, did you?"

"Yes. And I watched. The costumes do neither you nor the play justice—"

"Now she says we need new costumes," grumbled Dorinda. "Do you think we are made of money?"

"I can sew them up for you," offered Tally eagerly. "I make all my own clothes."

A dozen pairs of eyes scrutinized her modish and superbly fitting gown. The actresses drew closer, even Dorinda evidencing increased interest. They were like children at a treat.

Vandeleur, noting the change in attitude, smiled a little grimly. It appeared he had acquired, willy-nilly, a new coach, tutor, costumer—and, if he wasn't careful—a manager for his troupe of Thespians. Shrugging, he joined the eager group around Tally.

Chapter 16

Philip and Drogo had returned to London in high anticipation of a quick and successful conclusion to Philip's search. Jocelyn Temple, very frail indeed, but obviously happy with his clerical friend, had even dredged up the name of Cloris Blackstone from his somewhat unreliable memory. "I am sure that was where Tally intended to go," he announced brightly. "Something about a ball where she would meet her friend, Cloris. She spent several holidays there while she was attending Miss Enderby's Seminary. At least I think so." He concluded on a note of gentle doubt.

The vicar was rather more helpful. While he was at first suspicious of the bona fides of the two obvious Corinthians, he was persuaded by the wily Drogo, a shrewd campaigner, who took him aside while Philip was in conference with Temple, and confided that the girl had never turned up at the Blackstone's, and that all her friends were seriously concerned.

"You, sir, can understand, of course," added Drogo with the smile which had cozened a dozen keener brains than the Reverend Tobbitt's, "that we have no wish to alarm Professor Temple. As an old Mend of her family, Lord Philip wishes to assure himself of Miss Temple's safety and comfort."

Much moved by this evidence of Christian concern, the venerable cleric at once divulged the address of the boarding house from which Tally had written him. At the look upon Mr.

Trevelyan's face, he shuddered. "It is not—respectable?" he quavered.

"Let us say Mudge Street is not a part of London which Lord Philip, or Mr. Temple, would have chosen as a residence for Miss Thalia," Drogo said in grim accents. "I only hope—" He paused ominously.

The Reverend Tobbitt thrust the letter at him. "Do go at once, Mr. Trevelyan!" he urged. "And please be sure to let me know what you—that is, when you find Miss Temple. I shall protect Jocelyn's peace of mind in the meantime."

"Well done, sir," acknowledged Drogo, pleased with his success. If Philip actually discovered that Tally was not with her friend, Cloris, it would be time to share with him the letter Tally had sent.

In London again, they called upon Mrs. Blackstone. She was of two minds about receiving the notorious Lord Philip Sandron and Mr. Drogo Trevelyan, both acknowledged Rakes, into her chaste drawing room. Her daughter Cloris was there with her, unfortunately dressed in an unbecoming sacque. Still, she thought regretfully, even a Rake could have no interest in such an unsophisticated miss as her daughter. Curiosity got the better of maternal scruples.

"Show the gentlemen in, Staton," she decided.

A few minutes later, the haughty dame was completely won over by the properly expressed concern on the lips of Lord Philip, quite the handsomest man she had ever set eyes upon. Cloris was overwhelmed by Mr. Trevelyan, so Philip had a clear opportunity to tell the tale he had concocted—of being an old friend of the Temples, and of having just discovered, to

his alarm and considerable displeasure, that the unworldly Jocelyn had permitted his daughter to come alone to London after his recent illness.

"Alone?" queried Mrs. Blackstone, wondering if her dashing guest knew about the children.

"Except for the two children," Lord Philip said censoriously, having quickly taken the measure of the prudish dame before him. "It is typical of such an unworldly scholar," he went on, "that he would see nothing out of the way in his daughter encumbering herself with two waifs, and, of all things, bringing them to the City. It seems," he offered with a hooded glance at the lady's vivid expression, "that the philanthropic pair believed Miss Thalia might find the children's parents here."

Mrs. Blackstone tittered. "In London! What a fantasy!"

"Exactly what I told him," lied Lord Philip convincingly. "But you know these scholars! Heads in the clouds! No, for her dead mother's sake, I must find Miss Thalia and return her to—er—one better fitted to be her protector."

Mrs. Blackstone, thoroughly cozened, was nodding. "I told her that very thing myself, Lord Philip. But you know these silly girls!"

None better, thought Drogo, who had managed to listen to his friend's masterly performance while entertaining Miss Cloris.

"Indeed." The Roman-nosed dame was continuing. "She left us almost at once."

"What was her destination?" asked Lord Philip, casually.

Mrs. Blackstone colored unbecomingly. Under that bland scrutiny, she was forced to acknowledge that she had permitted her daughter's friend to depart to an unknown destination. "I—that is—Staton may know. He *assured* me he had found her a respectable lodging."

That's a lie, decided Philip, but since he had told so many himself that afternoon, he forgave the lady.

"You quite see that I must reassure Mr. Temple?" he asked. "Perhaps if I might speak to Staton? No, ma'am, you have been more than kind, and I have taken too much of your time already!" He bent over her hand with superb grace. "Thank you for seeing Mr. Trevelyan and myself. We would never have thrust ourselves upon your privacy had our concern for Mr. Temple been less urgent." He bowed slightly to Cloris. "I shall speak to Staton upon our way out, if I may?"

Receiving Mrs. Blackstone's permission, and her effusive farewells, the two gentlemen made their way into the hall. Staton, who knew more about Bucks and Bloods than Mrs. Blackstone would ever learn, proved unexpectedly difficult. He rejected the offered gratuity with unruffled countenance, and was uncooperative to a degree which quite cut up his lordship's poise. Dragged forcibly from the Blackstone residence by his friend, he turned on the latter almost before the door was shut.

"What the devil do you mean by—!"

"Take a damper, Flip," urged Drogo, grinning. "I have the chit's address." He pulled Tally's letter to the Reverend Tobbitt out of his pocket.

After scanning it quickly, Philip turned a thunderous scowl upon his soi-disant friend. "*You had this—all the time?* And you let me butter up that old harridan for half an hour? If we were not in plain sight of half London, I'd mill you down!"

"At least we know the girl's defenseless," urged Drogo. "No chance of old Hatchet-face putting up a row when you take the chit in keeping."

Suddenly arrested, Lord Philip stared at his friend, "No," he said slowly. "Young Thalia really hasn't anyone to defend her, has she?"

"Should be easy game," confirmed Drogo, not observing the glint in his lordship's eye. "I only hope you're first in the field. London's no place for fledglings—especially in the neighborhood of Mudge Street." Then, as Lord Philip mounted into the curricule and seized the reins from his tiger, the blond man was forced to leap for his place. "I say! What's got into you? Damme, I could have broken a leg!"

Lord Philip smiled sardonically.

"—much you'd have cared!" his ruffled friend added.

"You did rather ask for rough justice, withholding that letter," Philip advised him. "Be thankful your punishment was merely to jump into the curricule. Your cravat has come untied," he added kindly.

Muttering savagely, Mr. Trevelyan hastened to make repairs as the carriage bowled rapidly along. Lord Philip grinned and advised him to look sharp. "You will have to direct me to Mudge Street," he announced. "I'm sure you ascertained its exact location, while I was wasting my time

discovering the address of the hatchet-faced Mrs. Blackstone."

In the event, the two gentlemen were compelled to admit defeat at the hands of Mrs. Timkin. Like Staton, she had a shrewd idea of their intentions, and was too unhappy at her own part in Tally's continued wanderings to take a chance of adding to the girl's problems. At first she denied in a loud voice ever hearing of any such young woman. Then, on being shown Tally's letter, she said the girl had stayed just the one night and then left with an unidentified elderly couple. Then she slammed the door.

Standing on the narrow porch, Drogo looked at his friend with a rueful smile. "It's plain what that dragon thinks of us. Despoilers of innocence, no less! The girl seems to have made quite a strong impression upon the old virago."

"Where could she have gone? The little fool must know she's laying herself open to insult or worse, running about London without proper chaperonage!"

"Just so," agreed Drogo, too smoothly.

Philip sent him a fulminating glare. "I know what you're implying! My own plans for the chit are not precisely those of a *preux chevalier*—"

"I'm sure you'll do the girl very well," murmured his friend. "See that she has a fine wardrobe and a comfortable sum in hand when you finally give her her *congé*..."

"Shut up, damn you!" snarled Lord Philip.

Drogo concealed a smile, and turned to walk off the porch. He almost caromed into a husky young lad who was running up the steps. At once Lord Philip caught at his opportunity.

"You must be Mr. Timkin," he said genially.

"Well, I'm one of," agreed the boy with a grin.

"We're friends of Miss Temple's father, come to give Miss Temple a message from him," said his lordship solemnly. As the boy hesitated, he said with greater urgency, "It's really quite important."

"Well, I'm goin' back to the theater as soon as I've 'ad me grub. I could take 'er the message."

"No. Quite impossible. It's private and personal, you see. If you'll just tell us which theater—" Lord Philip left the sentence open.

Horace Timkin regarded the two swells with mounting suspicion. He'd seen their sort—every night at the Palace, usually three sheets in the wind and tetchy as a scalded cat! These two were coming away from his house. Maybe Ma had figgered not to tell them anything.

Confirming this last surmise, the front door banged open and an irate Mrs. Timkin yelled insults at Horace's interrogators. Defeated temporarily, the gentlemen mounted their curricule and drove down the street.

"—and I 'opes you didden' tell 'em nothing, 'Orace!" said his mother. "For to my mind, they're *up to no good!*"

Horace assured her that he had said nothing, conveniently forgetting his comment about the theater. For he 'adn't said which one, 'ad he?

Chapter 17

By eight o'clock four days later, the Palace Theater, Jonah Vandeleur, Manager, was alight and abustle for the evening's performance. The long queue in front of the ticket office attested to the lightning rapidity with which a bright new amusement is heralded about London. Horace Timkin, who had been promoted from horse boy to general factotum, proudly directed traffic as three younger boys took charge of the patron's horses and carriages and led them to a mews retained by Vandeleur for the purpose.

The facade of the Palace was as weatherworn and grimy as ever, but new lamps had been installed. Within the building, the floor was at least swept free of debris and the seats were dusted. More lamps here created a pleasant glow, and even the faded curtain took on a new luster.

On stage, the scenery and props already showed the mark of Tally's impeccable taste. The actors and actresses, shuffling about nervously before their first appearance of the evening, were almost unrecognizable in the svelte, fashionable costumes fitting them as though they had been made for them—which they had. Dorinda was looking particularly luscious in rose-red velvet, which temptingly concealed her richly curved beauty. At first the leading lady had objected to the comparative restraint of the costume, declaring that it would wipe her out like a candlesnuffer. A few honest words from Vandy, together with the installation of a full-length mirror in the dressing room, had changed her

opinion. She was now so reconciled to the presence of the lovely Miss Temple in the company that, as Vandy said, she sometimes even forgot to be nasty.

The juvenile lead, playing a character just down from Oxford, was mumbling over his lines in an effort to be sure of the correct, upper class pronunciation. Vandy was here, there, and everywhere, counting the full house with satisfaction, admiring the costumes, checking the props table, and running through his own lines at the same time.

A bell rang. The curtain rose. Vandeleur's Palace Players were on stage for their Revised, All-New-Sets-and-Costumes, Hit Show: *After You, Cherie!* (It ought, Tally had told them, to be called *After You, Sheridan*, for it was an obvious steal from *The School For Scandal*.)

The first act went very well; the second, better. Instead of the former catcalling and answering shouts for silence, there was laughter and applause. It seemed to Tally, hovering in the wings, that the actors were rising to meet the waves of approbation which came up to them from the audience. All the portrayals were good, some were excellent. Dorinda had already won all masculine hearts; the juvenile lead was bringing cries of pleasure from the ladies present. Vandy, coming off stage after one of his better scenes, stopped to savor the applause which had followed his departure. He beamed at Tally.

"It must be witchcraft! Surely a few refinements of speech would not cause so great a change?"

"They can hear you now, and understand what you are saying. They understand the witty lines when you recite them, and are able to appreciate every joke."

"To say nothing of the fair body of Dorinda in the new dress you constructed for her," smiled Vandy. The woman was now making a particularly arch speech on stage, her lovely body suggesting, under its artful concealment, a double entendre to play against her saucy speech. The audience loved it.

"A few weeks of this, and I can pay off the bills which have been dogging the life out of me, and give you a salary commensurate to your worth," Vandy was saying as the act ended.

"I am content at the moment to have the security of my rooms here in the building, and someone to look after the children while I am working down here," answered Tally. For that had been the arrangement: two small rooms in the loft above the stage, furnished adequately as a bedroom and sitting room from old theatrical props; food for herself and the children, and someone to watch and entertain them while Tally was making costumes and tutoring the actors. Surely a month or so of success such as this week was bringing would result in enough money for Tally to find a decent lodging and bring her father to London?

The third act was ready to begin, so Tally moved carefully out of the way of the actors waiting in the wings. As the play ran its course, the audience became more enthusiastic. Tally began to fear some kind of disturbance, but Vandy seemed to be perfectly pleased with the way the evening was

progressing. When the curtain came down for the last time, and the audience made its way out of the theater, Vandy caught the girl's arm.

"This has been the most successful week we've ever had," he told the girl. "Dorinda has suggested that we serve wine in the Green Room and invite some of the patrons who might give us some support in our new season. I think you should be with us. You have kept your nose to the grindstone too steadily of late, Miss Temple. Come now and celebrate the success which you have helped us earn!"

Tally could not refuse so charming an invitation or the wide smile which went with it. Excusing herself to check on John and Mary, and to wash her face and brush her hair, Tally made her way back down the steep stairs a few minutes later.

The so-called Green Room was simply a large room which had been furnished as a lounge for the company when they were offstage, or during the day to rehearse their lines. It was ablaze now with many lamps, and a small table had been covered with a cloth and set out with glasses and several bottles of wine. Clustered around this table were many of the company and a number of guests in brilliant costumes which rivaled those of the actors. All of these guests were male, Tally noted without much surprise. It was unlikely that any woman patrons of the theater would permit their husbands to escort them backstage to mingle with such rogues and demimondaines as actors were widely considered to be.

She was just considering slipping quietly away without the necessity of encountering any of the Bucks and Bloods around

the table, when a hand was laid upon her shoulder, and a deep familiar voice sounded in her ear.

"Miss Temple! What a pleasure to see you again! I am informed by Mr. Vandeleur that you are the Guardian Angel and presiding Genius of the Company!"

"Lord Sandron," acknowledged Tally with what she hoped was a composed smile. "I am afraid Mr. Vandeleur's kindness has quite overcome his veracity."

"Told you she'd got a mouthful of jawbreakers," chortled Vandy, who had obviously already been at the drinks table.

"I have just come from your father, Miss Temple," said Lord Philip without answering the manager. "May we go somewhere quiet so I may give you information about Mr. Temple?"

"Yes, of course," said Tally hurriedly, her eyes anxious. She led the way up to the room she used as a sitting room. "If you will keep your voice down," she asked softly. "John and Mary are asleep in the next room."

"I see," said his lordship, looking carefully around him. "You have created a little—home, here, Miss Temple. Are you sure it is the best thing for the children?"

"It is the best I can do at the moment," answered Tally soberly. "Please give me the message from my father."

"He is not as well as could be hoped," said Lord Philip. "Mr. Tobbitt says he is very weak, and does not eat, although he presents a cheerful front. It might be that he will need further medical help in the near future. Are you prepared for that responsibility?"

Tally clasped her hands together unconsciously as she stared up into the dark, handsome features above her. "I am to receive some money next week, and every week thereafter that the show prospers," she said. "How—how much do you think I shall need to send?"

"Nothing, this week," replied his lordship, correctly assessing the anxiety the girl was experiencing, and not wishing to frighten her back to her father. "How much is Vandeleur going to pay you?"

"I shall ask him tomorrow. It is no use trying to get sense out of any of them tonight."

"I should think not," agreed her visitor. "Do you have much to do with the Company—or Mr. Vandeleur?"

"I have been coaching them on pronunciation, and making their costumes," Tally advised him. "They give me help with John and Mary when I must be busy."

Lord Philip allowed his gaze to move around the shabby little room. "It seems rather a poor place to bring up small children, ma'am," he said critically. "Do you permit them to play out-of-doors?"

"I take them for walks when I have time," said poor Tally, feeling like a monster. "I cannot let them run loose on these streets!"

"Of course you cannot," his lordship said soothingly. "It is just that this seems an unpleasant place for little children to grow up in."

Tally hung her head. After a minute she said quietly, "I am doing my best, sir."

Lord Philip thought he had the girl about where he wanted her. He debated making the final turn of the screw, then decided it might be too soon. She had courage, and spirit. In the meantime—"May I see the children, Miss Temple? I should like to assure myself of their well-being."

This request did not seem strange to a girl of Tally's compassionate nature. She led the way into the bedroom, holding a shielded candle to light their way. Mary, a small cherub, was curled into a little ball at one side of the single bed. John lay on his small cot with arms and legs widespread. Both the children looked beautiful in the relaxation of sleep. Even more beautiful was the impossibility that anyone else shared this tiny cupboard with Tally. Still, keeping to his role as carefully as the actors downstairs, Lord Philip frowned and shook his head.

"What—oh, *what* is wrong?" pleaded Tally.

"The little girl—Mary, isn't it?—seems rather pale. It is unfortunate she cannot be in the country with your father."

"But there is no one there to care for her! I could not ask Reverend Tobbitt or my father to take on the management of a little girl, and she would be lost without John. He is the one stable thing in her small life!"

"Too bad!" Lord Philip shook his head soberly. "Well, it is to be hoped that she will not—that is, I hope she will continue to be well."

Being a very seasoned campaigner indeed, his lordship took his leave without further conversation, abandoning Tally to all kinds of fears—as he had intended.

Chapter 18

For the next few days, things went very well at the Palace Theater. An elated Vandy told the assembled company that he had invited the great Mr. Richard Sheridan himself to the opening night of the Revised Performance; that the noted playwright had accepted, come, and been amused.

"I made him an apology. He only laughed and said we'd given him an idea for a new play. 'I shall call it *The Critics*,' Mr. Sheridan told me," Vandy went on, hugely pleased by the awe on the ring of faces. "I've a few scores to settle with amateur critics and unworthy judges of the drama," he went on to tell me, 'but I intend to hit off the plagiarists as well! Let your writers be warned! I may immortalize 'em!'"

In high gig at this close brush with fame, the company tried even harder to do justice to their play. Crowds continued to flock nightly to enjoy the performance; money kept coming in with a satisfying jingle; the actors became more accustomed to, and therefore more skillful with their new accents.

Tally was not able to forget Lord Philip's cryptic comments. Although she kept a jealous watch, she could not see any sign of illness in either child. Still, there was no denying that Mary was pale. John, also. Tally agonized over the fact that the children really did not get enough play outdoors. But the streets around the Palace were even less attractive than Mudge Street; she could not turn her innocents loose in such a kennel.

Mr. Vandeleur went about his business with a wide smile. His eyes sparkled every time he looked at Tally. By week's end, the girl was sure there was something in the wind. The actors were treating her with a sort of deference which did not seem commensurate with the services she had been rendering. She often caught them looking at her, sometimes smiling and whispering. Even Dorinda had become almost friendly. It crossed Tally's mind that the company might be preparing some little treat as thanks for her work with them. At the Green Room party on Friday night Tally learned what had caused the change in behavior.

She had been reluctant to attend the wine party, feeling that she had nothing in common with either the company or their guests. In fact she found the fulsome attentions of the wealthy and titled idlers unpleasant to endure and impossible to escape. Still, Vandy had particularly requested that she look in for a few minutes at least. So, after checking the children as was her wont, she tidied herself and slipped down to the Green Room.

The first person she saw was Lord Philip Sandron. The subdued magnificence of his attire seemed to put the other men's gaudier garments to the blush, and his dark male beauty diminished every other male in the room ... with one exception. This was a tawny giant with a sleepy, catlike expression, who stood beside Lord Philip. The combination of the two big, fashionably dressed men, the one so dark, the other so fair, was a striking one, and every female member of the cast was present in the group around them. Being a good foot taller than the tallest of the women, Lord Philip

immediately perceived Tally as she entered the room. He smiled directly at her, and said something to his companion. The blond giant drew off the ladies skillfully, leaving Lord Philip free to approach Tally with a glass full of champagne.

Tally accepted it, trying but finding it impossible to avoid the steel-bright gray eyes staring down so intently into hers.

There was a shout from Vandy. "Glasses, everyone!" he called. "Time to drink a toast to the new owner!"

During the laughing scramble which followed, Tally's glance sought Lord Philip's. "New owner?"

His answer was a wide, white grin and a slight lifting of his glass. Tally looked at Vandy. He was standing in front of the table, his own glass raised, smiling toward them. "Boys and girls," he said facetiously. "I give you the new owner of the Palace Theater—Lord Philip Sandron!"

Amid laughter and cheers, the toast was honored. Tally sipped at her champagne, thoughts in a turmoil. Lord Philip had bought the building. What did that mean? Was he now her employer? Would he pay her a salary? The idea that this could be some benevolent scheme to assist her in supporting her father and the children had to be abandoned at once. Lord Philip was not a benevolent man; his attitude indicated as much. And even if he had suddenly decided to become a philanthropist, he would hardly have felt the necessity of buying a theater for the mere purpose of helping a girl and her family. No, there was probably no more to it than the whim of a wealthy, bored man looking for some new titillation of jaded interest. Or perhaps—for Tally had not been blind or deaf during the time she had worked with the company—he

considered that owning the building would give him rights with the pretty ladies who were the actresses.

Tally found this thought surprisingly distasteful.

Lord Philip was responding to the toast, his few sentences witty and gracious. He outlined briefly the changes he proposed: painting the building inside and out, installing chandeliers after the French fashion, and padded seats in the orchestra, and a carpet in the lobby. And, of course, he concluded, a raise in pay for all the cast.

This speech was cheered to the echo, and then there was a new assault on the drinks table. Tally looked about for a place to put down her glass, preparatory to slipping away. A firm hand on her arm stopped her.

"Where do you think you're going?" demanded Lord Philip.

"I'm very tired. I thought I'd retire to my room."

"I shall go with you."

"No!" The syllable was wrenched from Tally's lips.

Lord Philip frowned. "Are you going to be awkward?"

The girl looked up at the dark, handsome face, so attractive in its strong planes, the gray eyes like silver tonight under their strong black brows. Her eyes lingered on the man's mouth, and a little quiver ran through her body. What did he want of her? Surely she was not to be one of the women available with his purchase? Tally knew it was time to scotch any such idea.

"Yes." She changed her mind. "You had better come to my sitting room. There is something I must make clear to you."

Lord Philip frowned at her. This slender girl was far from a coquette. Her invitation held none of the erotic overtones

which would have been present had any other woman given him such an offer. His emotions were strangely stirred, as they seemed to be whenever he faced Tally. He followed her silently from the room; the eyes of more than one person observed their departure. Drogo Trevelyan grinned and waited with keen interest for the next development. It had occurred to him, with some amusement, that this latest little filly of Flip's might have a few surprises in store for his hitherto all-conquering friend.

Inside the fusty little room. Tally faced her new employer. She did not ask him to be seated. "I need to have it made very clear to me," she began, "just what my position is to be under the new management."

Damn the girl! She wasn't a child! Did she have to have it crudely spelled out? Lord Philip considered her warily. "Your position, as you call it, is whatever I happen to need of you at any particular time."

Tally gasped at the crudity of that. However, lest she be reading into his words something he did not intend, she pursued the subject. "What are you likely to need?" she persisted. "Tell me, if you please."

His lordship was disconcerted. The girl was not behaving according to his expectations. She was neither coy nor cowering. The huge eyes were steady on his, the pale face serious and intent. He shrugged. "I shan't need you to paint the building, or sew new costumes, if that's what you wish to know." I sound like a sullen boy! he thought.

"It isn't," said this most unnatural female.

Driven, his lordship found himself temporizing. "I may wish to consult you about the next play to be performed when this one has lost its popularity."

"Oh! *That* kind of work!" The girl's anxious look lightened. Her smile held the sweetness he had remembered, the beguiling, mischievous twinkle which had promised so much. Suddenly Lord Philip found himself angry. It seemed necessary to punish this maddening, obtuse, disappointing female.

"What have you done to yourself and John and Mary? You are the merest ghost of the lovely girl I met on the road to London! And the children are pale and drawn. Your position here in London is quite ineligible. You are selfish—foolish beyond permission—to have dragged John and Mary with you into this situation which exposes you to the attentions of any man who wishes to insult you! What would your father think if he knew what you are doing? Working with the scaff and raff of the stage—not even first-class actors!—in some wretched warehouse. I will not permit this situation to continue any longer!"

"What do you intend to do, Lord Philip?" Gone was the lovely smile. Big eyes stared up from a pallid face.

"I am sending a roach for you tomorrow at noon. I expect you to be packed and ready to leave London with the children."

"Where—where will we be going?"

It seemed to Tally at first that Lord Philip did not intend to answer her. His inexplicable, unjust attack had daunted her momentarily, but now there was a small flame of reciprocal

anger burning in her breast, and she began to have thoughts of defying this arrogant lordling.

"You will be taken to Sandron Place...."

"Where, I suppose, *your sister* will be waiting for us?" The rising anger in the girl forced out those provocative words like a challenge.

Lord Philip's face became white and set. "No, she will not! I shall be there, and I shall see that you and the children are properly fed and given exercise and fresh air to bring you all back to health. Then we shall see what work I have for you! No, do not seek to argue with me, Thalia. There is nothing more for you to do here. I have this instant removed you from the staff of the Palace Theater. You are to come with me to Sandron Place tomorrow. That is all you need to know at the moment."

He strode out of the room, closing the door behind him so sharply that Mary heard the slam and whimpered in her sleep. Between anger at this lack of consideration and fear for her future and that of the children, Tally spent a most uncomfortable night.

In the morning, while she was still washing and dressing John and Mary, someone called up to her that a gentleman was wishful to see Miss Tally Temple. It was still only eight o'clock, four hours before the deadline his lordship had set, and Tally's breast swelled with rage. She had been thinking of slipping away somewhere with the children, and this too-apt, early-morning arrival smacked of his lordship's arrogant surveillance. Tally ran down the stairs to the Green Room.

"You are very far out in your calculations—!" she began, and then halted in pleased surprise. "Mr. *Kendale!*" she breathed.

The puzzled look upon his face gave way to the familiar teasing smile. "Why, Tally, here's heat! What unfortunate fellow was about to receive the blast of your temper, I wonder? Aren't you glad to see me?"

"Of course I am!" laughed the girl. "You don't know *how* glad! You have come in the nick of time. How did you find me?"

He eyed her quizzically. "I arrived in London a few days ago on business, and last night decided to visit a play before I returned to Crofton. And what name should I see upon the playbill as assistant manager, but Miss Thalia Temple! I could not believe it could be so, but I returned this morning to make inquiries. Now you must tell me, what is the daughter of Jocelyn Temple doing in this dubious entourage?"

"It is such a long story, and not very interesting—quite boring, in fact. So tell me instead how everyone is at home. I am particularly interested in Charlotte and Maude! Are they well and happy? Have they a new governess? Do they like her?"

Laughing, Kendale held up one hand. "So many questions! I only hope I can remember them all."

"Just tell me about the girls. I am truly eager to hear of them. I was unhappy to leave them, you know."

Kendale nodded, his eyes fixed upon the girl's face. She was thinner than he remembered, pale, but this only seemed to make her beauty more vulnerable to him. Fair game?

Rapidly he estimated her situation. She had been making her way alone in London for weeks, for of course the old simpleton had been no help to her. The fact that she had found employment with a company of players was a guarantee that she had lost her virtue. Kendale didn't really regret that he had not been the man to take her virginity. He preferred experience and some knowledge in his sexual partners to the coyness and hesitation of ignorance. He moved closer and took her hand.

"Little Tally! *Pretty Tally!*" he said in a coaxing, intimate tone. He pulled her close to him and lifted her chin until her face was tipped up to his. Kissing her lightly, he went on, "I am supposed to leave London today, but I could easily be persuaded to linger until tomorrow if I might be sure of a long, cozy visit with you." He smiled, holding her gaze warmly. "Would your duties here allow you to spend the day with me at my hotel? And also, perhaps, the night?"

Kendale was correct in one detail. Tally had learned a great deal since he saw the Temples off from Minford village at the beginning of her journey to London. She had caught and reluctantly understood the lustful light in James Kendale's eyes, the purring seductiveness in his tone. Were men all alike? she wondered with a sense of despair. Surely her father had not had this devouring need to possess, to use any woman who attracted him? And little solemn John, would he grow up to be just such a lustful, selfish creature as James Kendale and—and others she had met? Tally shuddered. Then the anger which had filled her as she ran down the stairs to confront her visitor suddenly spread its warming energy

through her. Use her, would he? Take advantage of her desperate position? Well, Mr. James Kendale might have something to learn about *taking advantage*. Tally donned her brightest sweet smile, the one which had attracted and finally captivated Lord Philip.

"Oh, Mr. Kendale!" she breathed, through moistly parted lips. (Not for nothing had she observed Dorinda in action!) "Could we really spend some time together? But I must not keep you from your obligations in Crofton! Surely Miss Frampten awaits your return most eagerly?"

Kendale's eyes brightened and his nostrils flared with the excitement of the hunt. Delicious little creature, she was jealous of Mary Frampten! "Of course I have time for you, you absurd little woman! Can you come with me at once? It would be a shame to waste another minute of—uh—our opportunity."

The delicious creature was smiling enchantingly. "What I'd *really* like to do is have a drive—a *long* drive!—in the country with you. Can you wait until I get ready to go out? Just a very few moments, I promise you! There is ale on that table, and the latest popular scandals in the news-sheets over there to entertain you."

Mightily pleased with himself and his easy conquest, Kendale strolled over to the table, served himself ale in a rather smudged glass, and picked up one of the flimsy news-sheets which sought to titillate London's reading public.

Tally ran lightly up the stairs to collect John and Mary. Putting their few extra garments into the one open portmanteau, she closed and strapped it. "Now, my dears,"

she instructed the children. "There is a very kind gentleman below stairs who is going to give us all a ride in his carriage into the country. We shall not be coming back here. I wish you to be very good and quiet, and help Tally today. Will you do so?"

"I'll be good, Tally," said John soberly, and Mary chimed her little echo, "Good!"

So it was that the astounded Mr. Kendale beheld not one acquiescent young female but a party of three, complete with two large portmanteaus, approaching him a few moments later. He considered himself to be a man of the world, but this *tour de main* was so unexpected that he stared and hurried into speech.

"What is this? Are you planning to go somewhere? I am leaving the hotel today ... you did not intend to move in there, did you? And who the devil are these children?"

"Good," Mary assured him with her wide, guileless smile.

Tally was very much mistress of the situation. "I am so *happy* to accept your wonderful invitation, Mr. Kendale! It has come almost as the answer to prayer! You are returning to Crofton, while John and Mary and I were supposed to rejoin my father at Upton Downs—quite on your way! Riding in your carriage with you will be so much pleasanter than a public stagecoach! Are you using Mrs. Dade's carriage?"

Kendale had had time to make a recovery, but he was smarting at the disastrous reversal of the situation. Instead of a lovely armful to amuse him for the day and possibly all night, he had apparently been lumbered with the obligation of driving Tally to some absurdly named village with a brace of

brats riding bodkin between them. It was hardly to be endured! The devil was in it. He could think of no way to cry off without inviting the scorn of the lovely girl who was glowing so softly with pleasure beside him. Feeling that he had somehow been duped, he found himself carrying Tally's luggage out to the Dade carriage, directing Tom Coachman to stow it in the boot, and assisting the two little urchins into its gloomy interior.

He noticed that Tally had paused to speak to a hulking lout of a boy at the front of the theater.

"I am going back home, Horace," the girl said quietly. "Please give your mother my warmest thanks for her kindness, and tell her I shall keep her informed of Mary's progress."

"Yer goin' away, Miss?" blurted Horace. "Wot'll I tell Mr. Vandy?"

"He will understand, I think," said Tally. At least I left *him* better off than I found him, she thought. "Tell him I enjoyed working with the company, and wish them every success. And if a very toplofty nobleman by the name of Sandron calls to see me at noon today, you may tell him that I have taken the children into the country, as he suggested!"

With which announcement she ran lightly to the waiting carriage, and accepted the hand of the disgruntled-looking gentleman who waited to hand her in. The carriage jolted and lurched down the street. Horace watched it out of sight.

Chapter 19

Lord Philip Sandron arrived in front of the Palace Theater at twelve o'clock sharp in his best carriage. It was driven by Ballard, the most competent of his coachmen, and mounted on the box beside Ballard was Ab bent. The latter descended at once to assist with the luggage of the little doxy the master was picking up. Both Ab bent and Ballard had discussed this new start of their master's at length. Why should he wish to take some actress to his ancestral home? And two small children? Were they his lordship's? If so, how was it that not a single one of his lordship's servants had had any inkling of their existence? Both men were agog to behold the little light-skirt who had so besotted his lordship, till now a man who had a proper feeling for the correct place of women in a man's life.

Lord Philip was filled with a sense of urgency and excited anticipation which quite surprised him. He was deriving an unexpected amount of pleasure from the thought of the long, leisurely drive down into Devon, stopping for the nights at delightful small inns where he would arrange most deftly that Tally would share his bedroom. He did not even mind the presence of John and Mary. He knew they were quiet children, and would not cause him any trouble. They would also serve as hostages to guarantee Tally's docility! In fact, he told himself with a wicked grin, it would be like being the father of a family—without any of the cares or troubles normally involved in that position!

A heavy set youth ran to open the carriage door, and tried to speak to his lordship. Lord Philip brushed him aside, striding smartly through the opened front doors of the theater. The persistent youth followed him.

Two minutes later there was a roar of rage which even Ballard and Abbent could hear.

"You are telling me she has gone? And the children with her? *Who was the man?*"

Four eyebrows lifted as one, as the coachman and groom stared at one another with dismay. Run off on him, had she? There'd be the devil to pay—and they, being present, would receive the brunt of the master's wrath, sure as check!

When Lord Philip stormed out of the theater a few minutes later, however, he said nothing to them except to tell them to take the road to Exeter—*fast!* He did not even wait for the boy to slam the door, but pulled it closed himself with a fine, loud crack. Grinning reluctantly, Ballard whipped up the horses.

Within the luxuriously comfortable carriage, his lordship seethed with fury. Cheat him, would she! He'd see that! By God, he'd make her smart for this morning's work! The young lout had not had the name of Tally's cavalier, but he did say they'd left about nineish in a great lumbering old coach which looked more like a hearse. Philip consulted his watch. Three hours start, and his own carriage, though massive, was drawn by a team of four lively prads. He'd back his horses against any four in England—had done so successfully on more than one occasion, in fact—so it should be no problem to overtake a mediocre pair. But which way?

Knowing Tally as he was now coming to do, his lordship decided she was on her way to join her father, and spent a few minutes wondering what story she had spun the dupe in the hearse to get him to carry her home. I wonder if the silly gudgeon has any idea that Miss Temple is merely using him? His lordship thought with sardonic amusement. The thought comforted him more than the alternative, that Tally had conceived a *tendresse* for some slimy Cit or flourishing Macaroni, and was off to live a life of sin in the country. His eyelids narrowed to slits and a white line framed his lips at that picture. He forced himself to settle back against the comfortable squabs and endure the hours which must pass before he caught up with his recalcitrant little love. Once he had done so, it was out of the hearse and into his own carriage, stop at the nearest inn, fob off the children on Abbent, and then—and then, *Tally Temple, there would be a reckoning!*

Bemused at the fantasies his mind conjectured up at this point, Lord Philip drifted into a warmly satisfying daydream.

In the event, his lordship did not overtake his prey before his victim reached Upton Downs. For this unforgivable failure Ballard and Abbent were not to blame. A runaway phaeton in the temporary charge of an hysterical female came out of a side road and launched itself upon his lordship's carriage so unexpectedly that even Tommy Onslow, that peer among Whips, could not have escaped the collision. Ballard performed well, and the carriage ended up in a shallow ditch with no real injury or loss of life. Lord Philip was down into the road in a trice, and was pulling the shrieking female out of

her overturned phaeton. Since he slapped her face quite hard, she might have been excused for continuing to scream. Instead she gulped and said very calmly, "They ran away on me," before dissolving into floods of tears.

"Well of course they did, you silly widgeon," was his lordship's not very comforting reply. "Whose are they?"

"My brother's," acknowledged the girl. "He told me I couldn't begin to handle them—"

"So of course you immediately proved him correct," gritted Lord Philip, conscious of the danger in delaying his pursuit.

Before he could do the interfering female the injury she so richly deserved, there was a sharp tattoo of hooves upon the side road, and a smartish bay shot into sight, ridden by a slender youth. Pulling up beside the overturned phaeton, he leaped down and confronted the weeping girl. "I *told* you!" he raged. "By heaven, Lydia, if you've injured my horse—!"

"Your horse is in good hands now," said his lordship. In fact, Abbent was at its head, having unbuckled the harness and led the limping, quivering beast to the side of the road. "We shall have to right your phaeton and pull it over before I can proceed. My servants will help you."

Recalled to his duty, the young man said all that was proper and, giving his sister a glare which promised full retribution at a later time, he assisted Ballard and Abbent to remove the phaeton from the middle of the road. Next, his lordship's carriage had to be carefully inspected and brought back onto the highway. This took longer than expected, and even his lordship and the youth were forced to join in the exercise before his lordship's mettlesome team could be

soothed into a frame of mind which would allow of cooperation. During all this, the cause of the trouble sat on a grassy bank near the road, weeping silently but copiously.

"Does she always—?" probed the now fascinated Lord Philip.

"Invariably," agreed the youth gloomily.

"You have my sympathy, sir," said Lord Philip, bidding them both goodbye with obvious relief.

Because of this mischance, his lordship's carriage did not overtake the Dade coach before it reached the village of Upton Downs. Lord Philip was not too alarmed, since he was certain he knew his lady's destination, and, moreover, had no doubt whatever of his ability to get his own way with the girl when he found her. He had never felt such a surge of conscious power and pleasurable anticipation in his approach to any of the numerous females he had made his own. Somehow young Tally stimulated him in ways he found new and exciting. There was, in fact, a very militant sparkle in his fine gray eyes when his carriage drew up behind a paltry-looking coach in front of the Jolly Dog in Upton Downs.

There was no one within the vehicle, as a lightning glance revealed. Striding into the building, Lord Philip glared around with all the fire of a conquering hero. A cheerful-looking man approached and bowed low.

"I am Sandron," announced his lordship. "I am to meet Mr. Temple and his daughter here today. They are coming to be guests at Sandron Place. Please inform them I am here."

"Yes, Milord," said the host. "Miss Temple is in the parlor, having a bite to eat. Will your lordship join her?"

"By God, I will," said Lord Philip, carried away by hubris.

His entrance upon the scene in the parlor had, indeed, all the panache and power common to one moved by wanton arrogance and passion. The man seated beside Tally seemed to Lord Philip to be a mere smatterer, no challenge, unworthy of even an insult. He ignored the fellow and went directly to the girl. As the children stared, open-mouthed, Lord Philip advanced upon Tally, pulled her to her feet, and kissed her hard upon the mouth.

Since she had been eating raspberries, he found the kiss unexpectedly tasty. He reeled with the sharp jolt of pleasure he was experiencing. "We must try this often, perhaps with different fruits," murmured his lordship against the soft, sweet flavorful mouth.

After her first shock of surprise, Tally's next response to his lordship's audacious action had been delighted reciprocation. It took his impudent comment to bring her to her senses. Somehow forgetting to remove her person from his grasp, she yet said, with a coolness which Miss Enderby would have applauded, "You presume, Milord! We shall not be—be..." Unfortunately, she was not able to sustain her hauteur in the face of the glowing warmth and transcendent male virility of the man who was holding her so closely to him, staring down at her with ardent eyes. The wretch was very well aware of the effect he was having upon her, as his triumphant smile clearly demonstrated.

"'We shall not be—be ...' what, my dear girl?" he quoted her mockingly. "Trying other fruits? Because I can assure you

we shall be kissing one another with monotonous regularity for the next fifty years."

"But I can't—you don't—my father—" stammered Tally, hoping madly to be convinced of the truth of his splendid statement.

"You can, and I intend to, and your father will enjoy living at Sandron Place very much indeed. I have a library of forty thousand volumes."

"In that case, I have no choice but to accept your proposition," breathed Tally. "What was it, by the way?"

"What do you think it was, you little idiot?" snapped Philip lovingly. He was still riding the crest of his triumphant masculinity, and knew in that crystal moment that this adorable, exasperating little female would hold him all his life with her honesty, her fire, and her sweetness. "*You are going to make sure of me by marrying me, of course.* I could not guarantee to be faithful to you for fifty years under any lesser form of restraint."

"Then I had better marry you as soon as possible," agreed Tally blissfully. "If we hurry, there are still peaches, pears, and blackberries to be enjoyed this year."

"To say nothing of apples, my little Eve," grinned her besotted lover, and kissed her again, lingeringly, "Are you ready to come with me?"

"Oh!—We shall have to collect my father from the Vicarage," Tally gathered her wits enough to inform him.

"It is as good as done," answered Lord Philip largely.

"And I should like to be sure John and Mary had a good home—" her eyes lifted speculatively to meet his smiling gaze.

"I shall adopt them," said his lordship.

Tally peeped naughtily through her incredible eyelashes. "I would wish to invite Charlotte and Maude Dade to visit us at Sandron Place." She chuckled at his lifted eyebrows. "You see I must make my demands while I have yon in this most accommodating mood," she explained, dimpling at him.

"Wretch!" said his lordship in a maudlin voice. "What about jewels, furs, gowns?..."

"What about them?" murmured Tally, her eyes on his beautiful mouth.

"Don't you want *anything* for yourself?" cried her exasperated swain.

"Another kiss?" suggested Tally in a voice as maudlin as his.

With a groan of complete capitulation, that confirmed bachelor gave it to her. "I know this is starting a dangerous precedent," he managed to say at last, "but I find I cannot deny you anything, my dear, my very dear! Tally, you *are* my own true love!"

"Yes," said Tally Temple.

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