

CHAPTER II.

THE ARRIVAL.

A great deal of hard work was done during the following week. The remodelling of the outfit was no light labor: but Pamela was steady to her trust, in her usual practical style. She trimmed, and fitted, and cut, until the always-roughened surface of her thin forefinger was rougher than ever. She kept Theo at work at the smaller tasks she chose to trust to her, and watched her sharply, with no shadow of the softened mood she had given the candle-lighted bedroom a glimpse of. She was as severe upon any dereliction from duty as ever, and the hardness of her general demeanor was not a whit relaxed. Indeed, sometimes Theo found herself glancing up furtively from her tasks, to look at the thin, sharp face, and wondering if she had not dreamed that her arms had clasped a throbbing, shaken form, when they faced together the ghost of long dead love.

But the preparations were completed at last, and the trunks packed; and Lady Throckmorton had written to say that her carriage would meet her young relative's arrival. So the time came when Theo, in giving her farewell kisses, clung a little closely about Pamela's neck, and when the cab-door had been shut, saw her dimly through the smoky glass, and

the mistiness in her eyes; saw her shabby dress, and faded face, and half-longed to go back; remembered sadly how many years had passed since she had left the dingy sea-port town to go to London, and meet her fate, and lose it, and grow old before her time in mourning it; saw her, last of all, and so was whirled up the street, and out of sight. And in like manner she was whirled through the thronged streets of London, when she reached that city at night, only that Lady Throckmorton's velvet-lined carriage was less disposed to rattle and jerk over the stones, and more disposed to an aristocratic, easily-swung roll than the musty vehicle of the Downport cabman.

There was a queer, excited thrill in her pulses as she leaned back, watching the gaslights gleaming through the fog, and the people passing to and fro beneath the gaslights. She was so near her journey's end that she began to feel nervous. What would Lady Throckmorton look like? How would she receive her? How would she be dressed? A hundred such simple, girlish wonders crowded into her mind. She would almost have been glad to go back--not quite, but almost. She had a lingering, inconsistent recollection of the contents of her trunks, and the sapphires, which was, nevertheless, quite natural to a girl so young, and so unused to even the most trivial luxuries. She had never possessed a rich or complete costume in her life; and there was a wondrous novelty in the anticipation of wearing dresses that were not remodelled from Pamela's or her mother's cast-off garments.

When the carriage drew up before the door of the solid stone house, in

the solid-looking, silent square, she required all her courage. There was a glare of gaslight around the iron grating, and a glare of gaslight from the opening door, and then, after a little confusion of entrance, she found herself passing up a stair-case, under the guidance of a servant, and so was ushered into a large, handsome room, and formally announced.

An elderly lady was sitting before the fire reading, and on hearing Theo's name, she rose, and came forward to meet her. Of course, it was Lady Throckmorton, and, having been a beauty in her long past day, even at sixty-five Lady Throckmorton was quite an imposing old person. Even in her momentary embarrassment, Theo could not help noticing her bright, almond-shaped brown eyes, and the soft, close little curls of fine snow-white hair, that clustered about her face under her rich, black-lace cap.

"Theodora North, is it?" she said, offering her a wrinkled yet strong white hand. "I am glad to see you, Theodora. I was afraid you would be too late for Sir Dugald's dinner, and here you are just in time. I hope you are well, and not tired."

Theo replied meekly. She was quite well, and not at all tired, which seemed to satisfy her ladyship, for she nodded her handsome old head approvingly.

"Very well, then, my dear," she said. "I will ring for Splaighon to

take you up-stairs, and attend to you. Of course, you will want to change your dress for dinner, and you have not much time. Sir Dugald never waits for anybody, and nothing annoys him more than to have dinner detained."

Accordingly, greatly in awe of Sir Dugald, whoever he might be, Theodora was pioneered out of the room again, and up another broad stair-case, into an apartment as spacious and luxurious as the one below. There her toilet was performed and there the gray satin was donned in some trepidation, as the most suitable dress for the occasion.

She stepped before the full-length mirror to look at herself before going down, and as she did so, she was conscious that her waiting-woman was looking at her too in sedate approval. The gray satin was very becoming. Its elaborate richness and length of train changed the undeveloped girl, to whom she had given a farewell glance in the small mirror at Downport, to the stateliest of tall young creatures. Her bare arms and neck were as soft and firm as a baby's; her riant, un-English face seemed all aglow of color and mellow eyes. But for the presence of the maid, she would have uttered a little cry of pleasure, she was so new to herself.

It was like a dream, the going down-stairs in the light and brightness, and listening to the soft sweep of the satin train; but it was singularly undream-like to be startled as she was by the rushing of a huge Spanish mastiff, which bounded down the steps behind her, and

bounding upon her dress, nearly knocked her down. The animal came like a rush of wind, and simultaneously a door opened and shut with a bang; and the man who came out to follow the dog, called to him in a voice so rough that it might have been a rush of wind also.

"Sabre!" he shouted. "Come back, you scoundrel!" and then his heavy feet sounded upon the carpet. "The deuce!" he said, in an odd, low mutter, which sounded as though he was speaking half to her, half to himself. "My lady's protege, is it? The other Pamela! Rather an improvement on Pamela, too. Not so thin."

Theo blushed brilliantly--a full-blown rose of a blush, and hesitated, uncertain what etiquette demanded of her under the circumstances. She did not know very much about etiquette, but she had an idea that this was Sir Dugald, whoever Sir Dugald might be. But Sir Dugald set her mind at rest on nearing her.

"Good-evening, Theodora," he said, unceremoniously. "Of course, it is Theodora."

Theo bowed, and blushed more brilliantly still.

"All the better," said this very singular individual. "Then I haven't made a mistake," and, reaching, as he spoke, the parlor door at the foot of the stairs, and finding that the mastiff was stretched upon the mat, he favored him with an unceremonious, but not unfriendly kick, and then

opened the door, the dog preceding them into the room with slow stateliness.

"You are a quick dresser, I am glad to see, Theodora," said Lady Throckmorton, who awaited them. "Of course, there is no need of introducing you two to each other. Sir Dugald does not usually wait for ceremonies."

Sir Dugald looked down at the lovely face at his side with a ponderous stare. He might have been admiring it, or he might not; at any rate, he was favoring it with a pretty close inspection.

"I believe Sir Dugald has not introduced himself to me," said Theo, in some confusion. "He knew that I was Theodora North; but I--"

"Oh!" interposed her ladyship, as collectedly as if she had scarcely expected anything else, "I see. Sir Dugald Throckmorton. Theodora--your uncle."

By way of returning Theo's modest little recognition of the presentation, Sir Dugald nodded slightly, and, after giving her another stare, turned to his mastiff, and laid a large muscular hand upon his head. He was not a very prepossessing individual, Sir Dugald Throckmorton.

Lady Throckmorton seemed almost entirely oblivious of her husband's

presence; she solaced herself by ignoring him.

When they rose from the table together, the authoritative old lady motioned Theo to a seat upon one of the gay foot-stools near her.

"Come and sit down by me," she said. "I want to talk to you, Theodora."

Theo obeyed with some slight trepidation. The rich-colored old brown eyes were so keen as they ran over her. But she seemed to be satisfied with her scrutiny.

"You are a very pretty girl, Theodora," she said. "How old are you?"

"I am sixteen," answered Theo.

"Only sixteen," commented my lady. "That means only a baby in Downport, I suppose. Pamela was twenty when she came to London, and I remember--Well, never mind. Suppose you tell me something about your life at home. What have you been doing all these sixteen years?"

"I had always plenty to do," Theo answered. "I helped Pamela with the housework and the clothes-mending. We did not keep any servant, so we were obliged to do everything for ourselves."

"You were?" said the old lady, with a side-glance at the girl's slight, dusky hands. "How did you amuse yourself when your work was done?"

"We had not much time for amusements," Theo replied, demurely, in spite of her discomfort under the catechism; "but sometimes, on idle days, I read or walked on the beach with the children, or did Berlin-wool work."

"What did you read?" proceeded the august catechist. She liked to hear the girl talk.

"Love stories," more demurely still, "and poetry, and sometimes history; but not often history--love stories and poetry oftenest."

The clever old face was studying her with a novel sort of interest. Upon the whole, my lady was not sorry she had sent for Theodora North.

"And, of course, being a Downport baby, you have never had a lover. Pamela never had a lover before she came to me."

A lover. How Theodora started and blushed now to be sure!

"No, madame," she answered, and, in a perfect wonder of confusion, dropped her eyes, and was silent.

But the very next instant she raised them again at the sound of the door opening. Somebody was coming in, and it was evidently somebody who felt himself at home, and at liberty to come in as he pleased, and when the fancy took him, for he came unannounced entirely.

Theo found herself guilty of the impropriety of gazing at him wonderingly as he came forward, but Lady Throckmorton did not seem at all surprised.

"I have been expecting you, Denis," she said. "Good-evening! Here is Theodora North. You know I told you about her."

Theo rose from her footstool at once, and stood up tall and straight--a young sultana, the youngest and most innocent-looking of sultanas, in unimperial gray satin. The gentleman was looking at her with a pair of the handsomest eyes she had ever seen in her life.

Then he made a low, ceremonious bow, which had yet a sort of indolence in its very ceremony, and then having done this much, he sat down, as if he was very much at home indeed.

"I thought I would run in on my way to Broome street," he said. "I am obliged to go to Miss Gower's, though I am tired out to-night."

"Obliged!" echoed her ladyship.

"Well--yes," the gentleman answered, with cool negligence. "Obliged in one sense. I have not seen Priscilla for a week."

The handsome, strongly-marked old eyebrows went up.

"For a week," remarked their owner, quite sharply. "A long time to be absent."

It was rather unpleasant, Theodora thought, that they should both seem so thoroughly at liberty to say what they pleased before her, as if she was a child. Their first words had sufficed to show her that "Miss Gower's"--wherever Miss Gower's might be, or whatever order of place it was--was a very objectionable place in Lady Throckmorton's eyes.

"Well--yes," he said again. "It is rather a long time, to tell the truth."

He seemed determined that the matter should rest here, for he changed the subject at once, having made this reply, thereby proving to Theo that he was used to having his own way, even with Lady Throckmorton. He was hard-worked, it seemed, from what he said, and had a great deal of writing to do. He was inclined to be satirical, too, in a careless fashion, and knew quite a number of literary people, and said a great many sharp things about them, as if he was used to them, and stood in no awe whatever of them and their leonine greatness. But he did not talk to her, though he looked at her now and then; and whenever he looked at her, his glance was a half-admiring one, even while it was evident that he was not thinking much about her. He did not remain with them very long, scarcely an hour, and yet she was almost sorry to see him go. It was so pleasant to sit silent and listen to these two worldly ones, as

they talked about their world. But he had promised Priscilla that he would bring her a Greek grammar she required; and a broken promise was a sin unpardonable in Priscilla's eyes.

When he was gone, and they had heard the hall-door close upon him, the stillness was broken in upon by my lady herself.

"Well, my dear," she said, to Theodora. "What is your opinion of Mr. Denis Oglethorpe?"

"He is very handsome," said Theo, in some slight embarrassment. "And I think I like him very much. Who is Priscilla, aunt?"

She knew that she had said something amusing by Lady Throckmorton's laughing quietly.

"You are very like Pamela, Theodora," she said. "It sounds very like Pamela--what Pamela used to be--to be interested in Priscilla."

"I hope it wasn't rude?" fluttered the poor little rose-colored sultana.

"Not at all," answered Lady Throckmorton. "Only innocent. But I can tell you all about Priscilla in a dozen words. Priscilla is a modern Sappho. Priscilla is an elderly young lady, who never was a girl--Priscilla is my poor Denis Oglethorpe's fiancée."

"Oh!" said Theodora.

Her august relative drew her rich silk skirts a little farther away from the heat of the fire, and frowned slightly; but not at Theodora--at Priscilla, in her character of fiancée.

"Yes," she went on. "And I think you would agree with me in saying poor Denis Oglethorpe, if you could see Priscilla."

"Is she ugly?" asked Theo, concisely.

"No," sharply. "I wish she was; but at twenty-two she is elderly, as I said just now--and she never was anything else. She was elderly when they were engaged, five years ago."

"But why--why didn't they get married five years ago, if they were engaged?"

"Because they were too poor," Lady Throckmorton explained; "because Denis was only a poor young journalist, scribbling night and day, and scarcely earning his bread and butter."

"Is he poor now?" ventured Theo again.

"No," was the answer. "I wish he was, if it would save him from the Gowers. As it is, I suppose, if nothing happens to prevent it, he will

marry Priscilla before the year is out. Not that it is any business of mine, but that I am rather fond of him--very fond of him, I might say, and I was once engaged to his father."

Theo barely restrained an ejaculation. Here was another romance--and she was so fond of romances. Pamela's love-story had been a great source of delight to her; but if Mr. Oglethorpe's father had been anything like that gentleman himself, what a delightful affair Lady Throckmorton's love-story must have been! The comfortable figure in the arm-chair at her side caught a glow of the faint halo that surrounded poor Pam; but in this case the glow had a more roseate tinge, and was altogether free from the funereal gray that in Pamela always gave Theo a sense of sympathizing discomfort.

The next day she wrote to Pamela:

"I have not had time yet to decide how I like Lady Throckmorton," she said. "She is very kind to me, and asks a good many questions. I think I am a little afraid of her; but perhaps that is because I do not know her very well. One thing I am sure of, she doesn't like either Sir Dugald or his dog very much. We had a caller last night--a gentleman. A Mr. Denis Oglethorpe, who is a very great favorite of Lady Throckmorton. He is very handsome, indeed. I never saw any one at all like him before--any one half so handsome and self-possessed. I liked him very much because he talked so well, and was so witty. I had on the gray satin when he came, and the

train hung beautifully. I am glad we made it with a train, Pamela. I think I shall wear the purple cloth to-night, as Lady Throckmorton said that perhaps he might drop in again, and he knows so many grand people, that I should like to look nice. There seems to be a queer sort of friendship between aunt and himself, though somehow I fancied he did not care much about what she said to him. He is engaged to be married to a very accomplished young lady, and has been for several years; but they were both too poor to be married until now. The young lady's name is Priscilla Gower; and Lady Throckmorton does not like her, which seems very strange to me. She is as poor as we are, I should imagine, for she gives French and Latin lessons, and lives in a shabby house. But I don't think that is the reason Lady Throckmorton does not like her. I believe it is because she thinks she is not suited to Mr. Oglethorpe. I hope she is mistaken, for Mr. Oglethorpe is very nice indeed, and very clever. He is a journalist, and has written a book of beautiful poetry. I found the volume this morning, and have been reading it all day. I think it is lovely; but Lady Throckmorton says he wrote it when he was very young, and makes fun of it now. I don't think he ought to, I am sure. I shall buy a copy before I return, and bring it home to show you. I will write to mamma in a day or so. With kisses and love, and a hundred thanks again for the dresses, I remain, my dearest Pamela, your loving and grateful,

"THEO."