

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Christina might have harboured similar thoughts to Moira and, being a would-be author, might have developed a scenario, analysed motives and identified suspects. She was, however, inclined to pass the affair off as a mistake although she could not resist the temptation of raising it with her mother.

“Felicity Lightfoot? A ballet dancer? It sounds a most appropriate name for someone of that profession! No, Darling - I have never heard of her, let alone agreed to assist her in the development of her career. Perhaps I should have heard of her?”

“It sounds a ridiculous name to me,” moaned Angela. “Can she not have the common sense and taste to change it?”

“Oh, I think not,” said Christina ignoring her sister. “I imagine it is just an innocent misunderstanding.”

“I expect that you are right. Now, then, tell, me how you fared with your secretary-elect.” Christina reported the details to her mother and sister, and the subject of the ballet dancer was dropped.

“Lightfoot, Ma'am?” Matthews was preparing the bed and arranging her mistress's clothes, whilst Helen sat before her dressing table and unravelled her hair. “There was a ballet dancer called Lightfoot. It must have been all of twenty years ago, only she did not dance under that name. She called herself Rosenska.”

“Rosenska? I vaguely recall her. Was there not some kind of scandal - some incident abroad?”

“If I remember correctly, Ma'am, she was on tour and she ran off with an German Count”

“A German Count?” mused Helen and paused her brushing for a moment. “I can recall some of it - it ended her career, and she simply dropped out of sight. Are you sure he was German? What was his name?”

“I don't rightly recall, Ma'am. I might have it in one of my scrap books. There were all manner of rumours going around at the time and it was said that he never married her in the end!”

“How awful! I wonder where she is now, and I wonder whether this Felicity Lightfoot is related. She must be a local girl for Miss Muir to know her.”

“I could ask Barnes to make a few local enquiries, Ma'am?”

“No, Matthews. I do not think that will be necessary,” said Helen sharply.

“Ma'am?” responded Matthews, trying to sound hurt by her mistress's tone.

“I think that Mr Bernstein may be the person to consult. He will arrange to find out all that is to be found out about this Miss Lightfoot, and he can advise me on whether I should become instrumental in supporting her career. Rosenska? It was said, was it not, that she might easily become one of the World's greatest dancers. How strange it would be if there is another Rosenska out there, waiting in the wings. I think we should find out.”

“Best to sleep on it, Ma'am. That's what my old mother used to say.”

“On this occasion I think that your old mother's homily is apt. I shall sleep on it.”

“I cannot understand it,” said Felicity. “Everyone is acting so strangely.”

“I am not,” said Michael, sitting beside her.

“All right. Everyone, except you.”

“How do you mean?”

“When I arrived home yesterday, Debbie was in a dreadful mood. I do not know what happened whilst I was out, but whatever it was, she refused to talk about it. I think she must have had a visitor because the door to the front room was unlocked and there was some torn-up paper in the grate.”

“You are very observant, I must say.”

Felicity smiled. “I expect it comes from reading too many detective novels. It used to

be a past-time of mine.”

“Have you any idea who it might have been?” asked Michael, who was not really interested.

“I wondered if it was Mr Muir about Kurt.”

“Why Kurt?”

“Well he was acting very defiantly last evening and he said that he would not be working for Mr Muir for much longer. I really do not know where he will go if he leaves. There's no work around here, nor anywhere else by all accounts. Then Moira was in a strange mood when I went around to see her.”

“You think the two could be connected?”

“It is all that I can think of. We have been friends for many years, but yesterday we quarrelled and she seemed most hostile, as if I was not to be trusted and she did not want to associate with me anymore.”

“How odd. It has nothing to do with her boy friend?”

“I think that it may have more to do with the fact that she has taken a part-time job working for Lady Christina.”

“Oh!” Michael could not disguise the surprise and disappointment in his voice. Felicity looked at him sharply. Was he going to start acting strangely now? “What is she going to do?” he asked weakly.

“As I understand it, Lady Christina is a writer and Moira is to be her secretary.”

“Secretary?”

“I think it sounds rather like a glorious typing job!”

“Did you tell her that?”

Felicity blushed and lowered her head. “Something like that, but only after I was sorely provoked. In all honesty, she started it. And I think that I was telling the truth because, by and large, that appears to be all that she will do.”

“When does she start?” asked Michael, anxiously.

“She has started.”

“Goodness! That was quick!” He caught her look of puzzled amazement and decided he would answer her question before she could ask it. “I have to confess that I knew of the proposal. I was invited up to the House for dinner a couple of nights ago to meet an Austrian engineer. If I re-collect matters correctly, the subject was raised there, although Miss Muir's name was not mentioned.”

“You have been up to the House for dinner? With Lady Newington?” she said with awe. “Is she as beautiful as everyone says?”

“Every bit as beautiful, even more so,” he said.

“Oh!”

She sounded disappointed, so Michael added, “but she is old enough to be my mother, and neither of her daughters take after her.”

“And the dinner? Was the food good? What did you talk about?”

“It was mostly politics - dreadfully boring. I couldn't join in as for the most part I hadn't the faintest idea what they were talking about. I just sat there dreading that Lady Newington would suddenly ask me what my views were, but she did not. I think she sensed that I was out of my depth and did not want to embarrass me. She is that kind of person.”

“But she was prepared to invite you in the knowledge that something of that kind could happen? That was not very considerate. I do not think I would be able to go to anything that fancy.”

“Yet you are prepared to dance in front of an audience!”

“That is different. There is a barrier between the audience and the stage. When you look out, they are there, but they are separate. They cannot ply you with difficult questions and try and make you look a fool.”

“I don't think I looked a fool,” Michael said, smiling.

“Oh, no. I wasn't trying to insinuate that. Did you have to dress?”

“I did not have to, but Lady Newington had thought of that and sent me one of her son's dinner jackets. Fortunately we appear to be about the same size. He is an artist, you

know.”

“I expect you looked very smart. I would have liked to see you.”

“It is a shame that you did not, or that I could not have taken you.” Michael felt uncomfortable at the last words he said. He had tried to remain true in what he said to Felicity. He might not have told her all the truth, but in what he said he had tried to be careful not to include things that were overtly misleading. Now he had stepped over the mark. There was no chance that she could have gone or that he could have taken her. It was a deception and he regretted it. “Not that there is any chance whatsoever of that happening,” he added, hoping that this would redress the balance.

“Oh, you never know,” she said gaily. “It could happen, and I think we would make a good couple.”

“Do you?” he said, meeting her gaze. “And when you have made your name and are a famous dancer with the World at your feet, will you still think so? Indeed, will you think of me?”

“I do not know,” she said seriously. “I have never thought about it.”

“Do you ever think of me?”

“What a question!” she exclaimed. “Of course I do!”

“And what do you think?”

“I think how much I like you,” she said lightly.

Michael felt comforted by her words but did not know whether to take her seriously. There was also danger here. It was a risky subject and there was no knowing where it might lead if it was pursued. “I like you, too,” he said, smiling. “I like being here with you.”

“When you should be working?” she teased.

“I cannot be working all the time. And I do work long into the evenings, sometimes. But, to return to the subject you first raised, what are you going to do about Miss Muir?”

“I don’t know. I suppose we will make it up. I have to admit that I do not feel in any hurry to do so. That is very un-Christian of me, isn’t it?”

“It sounds very reasonable to me,” he said. Michael might have felt pleased that Felicity’s association with Miss Muir was weakened but, on the other hand, if the two of them had fallen out, Miss Muir would feel less constrained not to say anything about her friend’s romance. “On the other hand, perhaps you should try and make it up. Friends are not easily come by. You never know when you might need them.”

“I suppose you are right, but she will have to make the first move, not I,” Felicity said adamantly. “She will have to come to me.”

Michael returned to the cottage under a cloud. It appeared that Felicity was not prepared to take the first step in reconciliation with her friend and, for him, for them, every minute that the matter was delayed put them at risk. He did not think he could rely upon Miss Muir taking the initiative, but could not reasonably go and see if he could precipitate action. “What is going on between your Miss Muir and her friend?” he asked his assistant.

“I don’t know. They had a dreadful row yesterday, calling each other all manner of names, but I don’t know what it was over. Moira didn’t say anything to me about it, but she was in a fearful humour. She did ask me where I heard the story about her friend being helped by Lady Newington - the one you told me. It seems it is not true. Who told you - Miss Lightfoot?”

“Who said that it is not true?” asked Michael anxiously.

“Moira did. She mentioned it to Lady Christina who said that she had never heard of it!”

“Perhaps her mother had not mentioned it to her? Or perhaps they want to do these things in a less than public way?”

“Perhaps. Moira came back with the impression that it was not true. Where did you hear it?”

“How do you feel about your young lady working for the Newington family? You do not think that it will give her ideas above her station?”

“What do you mean?” asked Arthur, anxiously. “Above her station? Moira?”

"I heard that Miss Christina was seeking a companion."

"Moira did not mention that."

"And what will happen when Lady Newington takes her daughters back to London?"

"How do you mean?"

Michael smiled knowingly. "In my experience, companions are usually expected to become members of the household and travel with them."

"You mean that Moira will be asked to go back with them to London? She did not say anything about that!"

"It may not come to that, but it could if Miss Muir becomes attached to Lady Christina. I wonder if that is the reason why she fell out with Miss Lightfoot."

"I don't know. Even if it was, there's not much I could do about it. Moira is a very determined girl. She won't listen to me."

"At least you could suggest that she should make it up with her friend. She may have need of her in time."

Arthur looked at the ground and pushed a stone with his foot. "I was beginning to hope that I might be seen as her friend in need," he said slowly. "And I think she has reasons why she has fallen out with Miss Lightfoot."

"Like what? Surely not to do with me?"

"I don't fully know, but there's something about her suddenly not going to Church anymore."

"Oh? Did they go together?"

"I don't know for certain. All I know is that your Miss Lightfoot was a regular churchgoer, and suddenly she stopped." Arthur could have said more as Moira had implied that Felicity must have a very strong reason for not being able to go to confession. She must have been very wicked, Moira thought, very wicked with someone, possibly Michael, for her, a devoted churchgoer, not to be able to confess. The mere fact that Moira found the thought of making a personal confession abhorrent was immaterial. Felicity had clearly stepped off the path of goodness into a life of sin, and Moira had no intention of accompanying her or morally supporting her there. She had told her so, to her face. She had asked her to tell her, if she was true, good and moral, what it was that prevented her from going to church. Felicity, white faced and shaken, had declined. The inference, Arthur thought, was that she and Michael had done far more than hold hands, though he was not prepared to tell Michael that. "Miss Lightfoot also said that she knew nothing about the sponsoring of her career," he added, bravely. "Where did you hear the story?"

"Oh, I am not sure," said Michael, thinking furiously. "I think it was someone I was talking to who works on the Estate. The question of Lady Newington's good works came up and Miss Lightfoot was mentioned." He was beginning to wonder if matters were now running his way. If Miss Muir had now talked to Felicity and she had denied that there was any sponsorship, and the two of them had fallen out over that, or something associated with that, there was surely less likelihood that Miss Muir would talk about her to Christina. His original stratagem was that they would remain friends and that her silence would depend upon their continuing friendship. If they were now, possibly, enemies, Miss Muir would not think it a suitable subject matter for conversation at the House. In a perverse way his strategy appeared to be working and it had an added bonus. If the friendship with Miss Muir was at an end, Felicity might turn all the more to him and he would not have to share her attentions with anyone else.

"They must have been mistaken, whoever they were," said Arthur.

"It sounds like it. And, on reflection, I will modify my advice. Although I have found no vices whatsoever in Miss Lightfoot, if they have as much distrust between them as you suggest, it might be unwise for you to suggest a reconciliation. If you did, Miss Muir might think of you as an appeaser, or even think that you were taking Miss Lightfoot's side. She might then turn on you. At the very least, your relationship might suffer. I think I would stay silent under the circumstances, and let things work out."

"I think you might be right," said Arthur. "I will not say anything."

He did mention the affair to his mother, describing what he knew of the quarrel and his conversations with Michael. "She must be a very flighty young lady," she said sternly. "She will come to a bad end. And he sounds like the kind of person you should not be working for."

"He seems all right to me. A little pompous at times and not at all knowledgeable. But he doesn't appear to be a dago-type."

"Yet you say that they meet each other regularly in the middle of the countryside? Not at this young lady's home in a proper and supervised manner? Something must be going on. She'll come to a bad end. I trust that you do not get up to anything you should not with your young lady."

"Of course not, Mum. I love Miss Muir. I would not dream of doing anything that might jeopardise our relationship. I hope to marry her."

"Your safest course is never then to meet her alone. In my experience, young people only behave properly and remain pure and intact if they are chaperoned at all times. Look at Romeo and Juliet! The nurse was supposed to chaperon them, and she did not! Look how they ended up!"

"Do you mean that we should never have any time together, alone?"

"Certainly not before the engagement and, if I had my way, not before marriage. After marriage you have the rest of your life to be together alone. Marriage should be entered into for all the right reasons and on a free and equal basis. It should not be because there is a child on the way."

These words struck a note of terror into Arthur's heart, not only for his relationship with Moira, but also for Michael and Miss Lightfoot. "You don't mean that you think Miss Lightfoot may be expecting a baby, and that is why she stopped going to Church?"

"Stranger things have happened," said Mrs Brown solemnly. "Leave young people alone, unsupervised, and there's always a risk that these things may happen. It takes only one moment of weakness, sometimes not even that. Some men have a way of taking what they want."

"I do not think Mr Bernstein would act like that," said Arthur, scandalised. "If I thought he was that kind of person I would not work for him. I doubt that Mr Hiller would employ him."

"Ha!" snorted his mother. "Little do you know. Your Mr Hiller is a strange one. I wouldn't trust him."

"Mr Hiller?"

"And you remember the Stevensons who used to live next door?"

"I remember Wendy Stevenson. She used to pull my hair."

"Her father used to come in here, when your dear father was away at the War, sit in that chair, undo his flies and expose himself! That's what he would do!" Arthur looked at the chair with horror, wondering whether he should ever sit in it again, but there was no knowing, of course, what use any of the chairs had been put to. "Of course," she continued, "I never said a word to his wife. It would have killed her. And that's a married man, for you!"

Arthur inevitably found himself thinking about his mother's words before he went to sleep that night. He could only think of one thing more dreadful than him making Moira pregnant before they were married. That was that someone else made her pregnant first.

"I understand that you and Moira have had a row." Felicity looked up from her meal. Debbie was standing at the range with her back to her and had tried to sound casual although her sister could detect a tremble in her voice.

"We have had an disagreement," said Felicity coolly.

"What was it about?" asked her sister in a slightly strained voice.

"I would rather not say," Felicity responded, laying down her cutlery. "Hasn't Mr Muir told you?"

"What do you mean?" asked Debbie sharply. "What are you insinuating?"

Felicity was taken aback by her sister's reaction, but on reflection the question might have been provocative. It was clear that either Angus Muir did not confide in her sister, or he

had, but her sister had chosen not to raise the matter of her meetings with Michael with her. For several weeks now she had been expecting a curt request for an explanation as to who this young man was, and as to what were his intentions, but none had come. She assumed that it was because although he knew, Angus had not seen fit to talk to Deborah about it. Perhaps he assumed that she knew all about it, anyway. If Debbie did not know, she did not want to tell her now, not in the context of Moira's unkind and censorious comments. "I am not insinuating anything," she said, trembling.

"Was it about me?" demanded her sister.

"You?" Felicity's heart leapt as she could not imagine what dark secret her sister might have that was dreadful enough for Moira and her to fall out over.

"Me!" said Debbie emphatically. "You heard me! Come on, I want to know!"

"Why should it be about you?"

"Me and Angus!"

"You and Angus? What do you mean, you and Angus?" Her sister wiped her hands and left the range, sitting opposite her, her arms folded on the top of the table. Felicity shook her head. "I do not understand," she said softly.

"He has asked me to marry him."

"He has what? Oh, I am sorry! Forgive me, I should be congratulating you! And what have you told him?"

"It is not that simple. He proposed to me before he told his daughter. I assumed that he now has, and that she objected, and that was what your quarrel was about."

"Angus has not told you what it was about, then?"

"I do not think he knows, but it concerns him, obviously."

"Goodness me," mused Felicity. "If you marry Mr Muir I will be Moira's step-aunt!"

"We would have liked the two of you to think of yourselves as step-sisters."

"She will have to apologise to me before I think of her as a step-sister."

"What was it about, then?"

"You haven't told me what you said in answer to the proposal!"

"What do you think about it?"

"I? I think it is a very sensible idea. What did you say?"

"I said I would think about it."

"Oh, Debbie!" said Felicity, crossly.

"I know what you are thinking, but I married in haste once before and I am determined not to rush into it again. Angus knows that and respects my views."

"But, still, you have known him for years. I cannot see what there could possibly be to think about."

"There's you for a start," said Deborah, picturing herself tearing up the cheque for five hundred pounds and throwing the pieces into the front room grate, where they still reposed. For a second she wondered if it could be stuck back together again.

"Me?" said Felicity opening her eyes wide. "Why me? What have I to do with it?"

"Your dancing - your career! I have that to think of."

"I cannot see that it would make any difference to my dancing. You will be citing Kurt as an impediment next!"

"He is leaving us," said Deborah, darkly. "He will be joining his father."

"Good gracious! I had no idea! All these things going on and I had no idea!"

"Yes. He will be going back to Austria with him when he returns. There was little I could do to stop him, especially seeing that he will soon be of age."

"I am sorry," said Felicity, not because she felt sorry but because she felt it was the appropriate thing to say. At least it would mean one less person around to molest her and Moira, and she would no longer have to bolt her bedroom door at night. "But what else is there?"

"There's the question of Moira, too. It had always been taken for granted that she would inherit the business and the property when Angus dies. His marrying again could complicate matters and he was not sure how Moira would react to it."

"Has he told her?"

"I assume so. I assumed that was what the quarrel was over."

"It was not."

Deborah smiled. "Will you tell your elder sister what it was about, then, Phoebe?"

"She said some very unkind and untrue things about me," said Felicity, bitterly. "They were not the kind of things that I wish to repeat, nor shall I forget them in a hurry."

"Are you in trouble?"

"What?"

"Come on Phoebe, you should tell me, your sister, what is going on. Why did you suddenly stop going to Church like that? Is it this young man that you have been seeing?"

Felicity's heart fell. "I didn't know that you knew about him," she said gloomily.

"Of course I know about him, or of him."

"Yet you said nothing."

"I was hoping that you would tell me. Sister to sister, you know."

"There really isn't anything to tell," said Felicity, shaking her head.

"Is it serious?"

"Serious? No, but I like him. He is pleasant to be with and to talk to. But I told him from the outset that my career came first and that I would never marry like - ."

"I know - like me! I am glad that the lesson has been learnt. And he is to be trusted - in all ways?"

"Oh, yes. He is a perfect gentleman. The most he has ever done was to take my hand. I trust him implicitly."

"Why don't you bring him home?"

"Here?"

"Yes. We could have tea in the parlour."

"It wouldn't be right or fair to him. It would run the danger of placing our relationship on a different footing. At present we always meet in the same neutral place. If I brought him home it might upset the balance and give him the wrong idea about my intentions."

"And what about his intentions?"

"I think he is like me. He is enjoying a purely platonic friendship."

"Be warned, Phoebe. Take your older sister's advice. There is no such thing as a platonic friendship between a young man and a young woman. Sooner or later his mind will turn to other things."

Felicity coloured slightly. "I do not think that Michael will," she said resolutely. "I feel perfectly safe with him."

"Just be careful," said her sister.

"And when are you going to say yes to Mr Muir? When did he propose? Was it romantic - did he go down on one knee?"

"There's Kurt," announced Deborah as she heard the sound of the front door clicking shut. She returned to the range, and Phoebe was left waiting in anticipation of hearing an account of how Mr Muir had asked her sister to make him the happiest man in the World.

"It is a letter from Michael's father," announced Helen.

"My father?" A sense of dread pervaded his thoughts on that bright summer afternoon as he sat opposite Christina checking, from time to time, that the ruins were still there, clinging to the horizon. Why would his father be writing to Lady Newington except that it was about him and the arrangement with Christina. "Your novel's not finished yet?" he asked Christina obliquely as Helen studied the single hand written sheet.

"It is progressing very well. I really have got into the swing of things and having a secretary is a great boon. I do not know how I managed before. I suppose the truth is that I did not!"

"She is proving useful, this Miss Muir?"

"Very. She is very quick and her work is accurate. I could not ask for more."

"I could," said Angela sullenly, but did not elaborate.

"What will happen we you go back to London?" asked Michael, his eyes still on Lady Newington.

“When we go back to London! I do not know. Oh, we have a loose arrangement under which I can send the manuscripts down to her, but I rather like the girl. She has a startling directness about her and she is a good organiser. I could use someone like that to organise my life.”

Michael could not imagine what there was in Christina's life that needed organising. Nor did he feel at all comfortable at the remotest prospect that suggested Christina might maintain a connection with Miss Muir. “Are you still thinking of her as a companion?”

“I do like her although I am not sure that she could be enticed away. She is devoted to her father and he appears to be dependent upon her.”

“Surely, once you are back in London you will have almost an unlimited source of potential secretaries or companions, if that is what you want? Wouldn't it be more sensible to wait until you are back in Town, and appoint someone then?”

“As I have said, I like the girl and she can do the job. And a bird in the hand - .”

“Better the devil you know,” said Angela smugly.

“Your father,” said Lady Helen, “has written about our Miss Lightfoot.”

Michael choked on his scone. For a moment the view went dark and the ruins disappeared completely. Terror seized him and he started to tremble as he caught sight of the juggernaut. His father knew. They all knew! They had all been there, sat calmly, drinking tea, eating scones with jam liberally covered in cream, and all the time they knew! And now he was going to be confronted with it. Hopelessly outnumbered, he was about to be sacrificed and torn apart by the Maenads.

“Of course,” continued Helen. “You have not heard about our Miss Lightfoot.”

“What?” he said, still trying to recover his breath.

“Miss Muir told me,” said Christina, “that there is a rumour that Mama is going to sponsor this young, supposedly talented, ballet dancer whose name is, appropriately we hope, Lightfoot. Of course, the rumour was untrue.”

“Indeed,” said Helen, “but I thought it would be prudent to seek your father's advice on whether I should consider whether to support this child. I know I do a great deal for the underprivileged, but I do little for the Arts. What do you think Michael? Should I seek out this Miss Lightfoot and see whether she deserves my help?”

He stood at the cross-roads. What if he should say “yes”? Helen would go to see Felicity and could not but be won over by her charm and grace. It was true that he could get to Felicity first and warn her not to mention their relationship. He could tell her that he had arranged this with Lady Helen because he knew that their relationship was doomed. Perhaps he would have to tell her everything, about Christina, about his father and his position? She would forgive him because he had made such a noble sacrifice. At least Felicity would have her chance. She would go to Paris, she would succeed and become famous. He would be able to follow her ascendance to stardom. Perhaps they would meet from time to time. Such meetings would be painful. What would be even more painful was the immediate loss of her.

On the other hand, if he said “no” he might still be able to keep meeting her throughout the Summer, and possibly into the Winter. Anything could happen. Once back in London, Christina might meet someone new and someone she preferred to him. Perhaps she would even, once again, take to liking Herr Cerny? And Felicity had mentioned that she and her sister were saving to send her to Paris, anyway. He would, himself, help them financially with that, if only he had the funds. The outcome would be the same, except they would be able to delay their parting.

It was a decision that might affect the rest of his life. It was a decision that he might regret for the rest of his life. “No,” he said calmly.

“How strange!” said Helen. “That is exactly what your father says. There is no return in ballet, he writes, and therefore he must advise against it.”

“Of course you do not have to take his advice,” said Christina perversely.

“That is true,” said Helen looking directly at Michael. “But Michael thinks that I should.”

“I do,” he said. They were determined to wring every last drop of blood from him.

“Have you not asked Mr Bernstein to find out who this Lightfoot person is?” asked

Angela, darkly.

“I do not think that is necessary under the circumstances.”

“I think we should be curious and discover why her name was linked to ours.”

“Pure speculation,” said Michael, boldly. “I expect that is what it was. Some of the Estate workers over a beer one evening. That sort of thing, you know.”

“I am sure that I do not,” said Angela.

The storm that blew up so quickly out of a clear blue sky, appeared to have passed. If lightning had struck, he had escaped its searing qualities and was emerging unscathed. Yet there was still a risk of it returning if Miss Muir went to work for Christina. Whilst she was sat at home, typing, she did not represent too great a threat, but if Christina prevailed, and Miss Muir went to work for her in London, an encounter with her would be unavoidable. How could he possibly escape meeting his future wife's secretary? Christina had said that there were local ties which might prevent Miss Muir from leaving Dover. Could he rely on these?

The storm which had passed did threaten to return a couple of days later when Felicity, trusting and innocent of the disservice he had done her over the matter of support from Lady Newington, told him of Mr Muir's proposal. He immediately grasped the significance. If Mr Muir married, he would no longer be so dependent upon his daughter. She would then feel free to work for and with Christina, and return with her to Town if she was asked. There appeared to be little doubt that unless something changed, Christina would ask her!

“What did she say?” he asked, trying to appear calm.

“She hasn't given an answer. There's the question of Moira to be resolved - her inheritance.”

“And how are things between you and Moira?”

“As bad as ever. I have not received an apology and I am not prepared to do anything until I do receive one!”

“Do you think that she will accept him?”

“Oh, yes! I am not sure that you could say that they love each other, but they are the best of friends and have been for a long time. At their age, who needs love if you have friendship and mutual understanding?”

“I am sure that I will still be in love when I am their age!”

“In love? With whom?” she asked lightly. “And you said 'still'! Who are you in love with now?”

He laughed. “You, of course!”

So a threat still remained. He could not rely on Mr Muir to act as a magnet and pin his daughter into staying locally. There was one other possibility - his assistant. If he worked on him, telling him what a wicked place London was, how he would lose her if she should go there, how it was down to him to woo her, win her, and her trust, and ensure that she did not accept an offer from Lady Christina should it be made, he still might avert disaster. The very fact that she was working for the Newington family laid her open to risk. He, Arthur Brown, would have to act if he really loved this girl and wanted to marry her. He would have to act now!

“When do you think they will get married?”

“I do not know. I think there is a little concern over the hostility between me and Moira?”

“What, this slanderous former friend of yours?”

“Is she spreading slander about me?”

“Arthur did say that there had been some innuendo.”

“The hussy! I would never have thought it of her!”

Later Michael wondered whether a marriage between Felicity's sister and her estranged friend's father would adversely affect the plans to send Felicity to Paris. He did feel guilty over his part in the decision over the sponsoring by Lady Newington. He would try and

make it up to her in time, but for the present it was Arthur Brown who had to do the making up, and he, Michael, was about to see that he did it.

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