

**LOVELL'S  
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**LOUISA PARR**

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*DUMPS.*

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# DUMPS

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CHAPTER I.

THE declining rays of an afternoon sun come streaming in through the small stained windows of Sharrows Church, lighting up the winged stone figure who trumpets forth the valiant deeds of famed Sir Roger, playing in and out the doublet and frill of courtly Sir Hildebrand and his kneeling family, then touching or passing by the line of Dorotheas, Isobels, Griseldas—noble dames who have mated with the house of Deloraine—they stop to settle on, and flood with rosy light, my lady.

My lady sits in the large square family pew—its curtains all drawn back—with head so high, and mien so haughty, that who shall believe a day will come when her name too will be added to the list above, and eyes that now dwell wonderingly upon her greatness will then read, newly cut, *Hic jacet Theodora*.

“We all do fade as a leaf,” says the Rector, giving out the text of his sermon; and looking, as is his wont, fiercely round the church—seemingly to see if any there dare combat this assertion—he then in a mellifluous voice, with face to correspond,

repeats, as if for my lady's ear alone, "We all do fade as a leaf." And the congregation awed into attention, and my lady giving no dissentient sign, the Rev. Richard Bethune proceeds with his sermon.

For fully five minutes I strive to listen, and then something stronger than my will overcomes my good resolution, my thoughts stray from the preacher, my eyes follow, and both are fixed upon my lady. She is not the only occupant of the big pew. By her side sits her son—her only child—who although little more than my own age—a mere boy—is the present baronet, the owner of Sharrows Park and House, Sir Arthur Deloraine. But he has no interest for me. Compared with his mother he is a very everyday person, good-looking, but not different to others I have seen; while she—she has bright dark eyes, so piercing and yet so soft, a delicate skin, with cheeks of shell-like pink, and hair of silvery white, gathered high and rolled back from her face. As, entranced, I gaze upon her, I conjure up visions of the days of romance; when until noble deeds were done, and valiant acts performed, fair ladies would not listen, nor permit their hearts to melt.

It is not often I enjoy a sight of the object of all these fanciful dreams—the realization of many a heroine in my much-loved books;—for we live at Mallett, the town nearest to Sharrows, although some three miles off, and it is only when my father wants a longer walk than usual that he and I go to



Sharrows to church. Lately we have come rather often; for my father has some business in hand which obliges him to search through registers and books, and to have long conversations with Tuckett, Mr. Bethune's factotum and clerk, who seems to know the history and affairs of every one around. I wonder how my father finds patience to listen to the old gossip; and I fancy he feels it is not what—on Sundays—every one would do, for he waits until the congregation have moved on, and the churchyard is quite empty, before he commences to talk to the old man. If I should chance to be within hearing, papa says, "Our talk will only weary you. Wouldn't you like to wander outside better?" and taking the hint, I go into the little churchyard, and read and re-read all the wonderful epitaphs, texts, and verses a village population love to indulge in. This ended, and my father not yet come, I take my seat under an old elm-tree which overshadows a flat worn stone, and contemplate the half-obliterated inscription. The name is gone, but the date, left, is 1779, and the lines run,

"Should words be wanting to say what,  
Say 'what a wife should be,' and  
She was that."

"What should a wife be?" I ask myself, trying for occupation's sake to answer the question. And, beginning to create a standard of perfection, my thoughts, of need, wander back to my paragon, and

other interests are blotted out by the more absorbing one of my lady. I have had a very satisfying sight of her to-day. She does not leave her pew until every one else is out of church. Standing in knots about the porch, exchanging bits of local gossip, the congregation wait her coming, no one presuming to take his way home until the gentry have passed out. Very condescending is my lady to her son's tenantry; meting out the proper shades of recognition between the smock-frocked labourer who pulls the forelock, and the small farmers who raise their hats, gracious words and smiles are dispensed to them as she passes by. It is only when her eyes fall on us Mallett folk that she stiffens suddenly; and is it fancy makes me think, that she never looks so haughty as when she seems forced to recognize papa? Oh! it is such a little scornful movement of her head she gives him; while he—well, I wish he would not bow so low to her. Without having the smallest notion why, my face grows scarlet whenever they have an encounter. Nurse says it is because my father married into one of the county families; for my mother—who died a few years after I was born—was one of the Cuthberts of Turgis, and the Cuthberts and my lady are cousins. So my mother was a cousin to her also; but of that we never speak, because after her marriage her family and friends all gave her up. Nurse hints that it was a sorrow she never got over. "It carried her to her grave," she says, "poor dear!

though she never let it be guessed at by your father." I think, though, it must have been a sorrow to papa too, and it is that which has made him so bitter to everybody.

Papa began life as a clerk in Mr. Steele's office. He was not born in Mallett, nor even in the county; and because it was not known who he was, or whence he came, people were the more angry when he ran away with mamma. No one except old Mr. Steele stood his friend. Mr. Steele was the family lawyer. Nothing could induce him to abandon mamma. For her sake he gave papa his articles, and took him into partnership. But nothing would make her family forgive her, and when she died they took no notice, and never inquired, then nor since, about me. In spite of so much against him, papa has fulfilled Mr. Steele's prophecy. By his cleverness he has the best business in this part of the county. He is far better off than my uncle and cousins, whose estate had been involved for years; so that they were obliged at last to sell it, and to a client of papa's, a rich London tradesman, who is not very well received by his neighbours. Papa says the reason is that he made his money honestly, and could afford to pay fairly for the tumbledown property of a man who used his fine name and long pedigree to swindle everybody. Papa is terribly bitter against the Cuthberts, and nurse says that, but for him, Mr. Cuthbert would have got half as much money more for the Friary.