

Haven House

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by Barbara Anne Olds

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Summary: Sylvania Kendrick, orphaned at the age of eleven, is sent along with her governess to
live at Haven House, home of a mysterious aunt that no one seems to like.

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To Briana, Dilyn, Ashley, and McKaylyn,
for inspiring me to write the kind of story
I loved when I was their age.

Historial Note

Once upon a time King George the Third ruled in England. Sadly he suffered from a disease that caused mental illness. Since he was unable to properly rule the country, the English Parliament named his eldest son Prince Regent. A Regent is someone who has all the authority of the king, but is not yet the king. George, Prince of Wales, ruled as Regent from 1811 until his father died in 1820. The Prince Regent then became King George the Fourth.

The years between 1811 and 1820 were a unique time in English history and are called “The Regency.” Life then was very different than it is now. There were strict rules to live by and women did not have the freedoms that they enjoy today. The English Regency period was short, but it encompassed many important events, and was peopled with some of the greatest writers, poets, artists, and military men who ever lived.

Chapter One

Sylvania Kendrick's parents died the day she turned eleven years old. She didn't mind terribly being made an orphan, especially since Philip and Sylvia Kendrick had never been more than beautiful, benevolent strangers who visited her world from time to time. In later years she found that what she most remembered about her eleventh birthday was the beautiful red velvet spencer she received as a gift. A gift she was never to enjoy wearing, because the entire family was immediately plunged into deepest mourning. For an entire year Sylvania's wardrobe consisted of nothing but black. When at last the time came to put off the blacks, her pretty red coat was found to be too small. It was terribly unfair.

No, she didn't mind too much being made an orphan. Being orphaned had very little impact on her daily life. She went on living in the grand terrace house in Grosvenor

Square, which was the only home she had ever known. She lived there with her nanny, Miss Popwell, who was known as Poppy. She was fond of Poppy, who called her Sally. Poppy read to her and encouraged her in watercolor, pianoforte, and needlework lessons, and every Saturday they would walk together to Hyde Park.

With her father's death, her guardianship passed to his cousin, the fourth Earl of Canfield. Being a confirmed bachelor, he was not really interested in his cousin's child, but he did take his responsibilities seriously, so he saw to it that the household lacked for nothing. The servants continued about their duties as if the master and mistress might come home at any moment.

Then, about eight months after the Tragedy, (for so it was called by Poppy), the unthinkable happened. The Earl fell in love, at the age of forty no less. Society was stunned, but Miss Thorne was the Toast of the Season, and was a perfectly suitable wife for a man of his position. He was besotted with her and could deny her nothing.

Unfortunately for Sally and Poppy, what the future Countess of Canfield wanted was the beautiful townhouse in fashionable Grosvenor Square. The Earl was living in bachelor quarters that would never do for his new bride, but Sally did not know this yet.

Miss Thorne, Sally decided, was not as beautiful on the inside as she appeared to be on the outside. She came to

this conclusion the day the Earl came to Grosvenor Square to conduct his bride-to-be on a tour of the house.

Sally and Poppy were supposed to have been out. It was Saturday and normally they would have been happily wandering through the park, but on that Saturday it rained. Poppy was suffering from a case of the sniffles so they could not risk her getting wet or chilled.

There was great commotion in the entry hall when the Earl and Miss Thorne arrived, accompanied by her mother and his sister. Sally left Poppy lying on the window seat in the nursery and crept out to the landing to peer through the railings down into the hall below.

Miss Thorne was exactly as she had been described in the papers—fair of hair, with a creamy complexion, cornflower blue eyes and pouting red lips. She was firmly attached to the Earl's arm as they stood looking about.

“My lord, “ she addressed him in a honey-sweet voice, “it is simply charming, and I will make it a showplace of which you can be proud. It's dreadfully dated, but it can be brought up to style in a trice.”

Sally was hurt. How dare this woman criticize her home! Her own mama had redecorated the entire house in the latest style not six months before her death. It was certainly not “dreadfully dated.”

The visitors moved out of the entry hall into the ground floor rooms and Sally returned to the nursery,

where Poppy was gently snoring. The poor woman really looked ill, Sally thought as she curled up on the settee with a book. A long time passed before her concentration was broken by footsteps and voices in the hall outside the nursery door. Suddenly it was opened and the entire party of visitors came right in.

Poppy woke with a startled snort and was horrified that she had been caught sleeping. Sally felt very sorry for her.

“My dear Miss Thorne,” the Earl said, “may I present Sylvania Kendrick, my ward.”

“What a lovely child,” Miss Thorne gushed, giving Sally an entirely uncalled-for hug. She was a private, self-contained child and had never cared for attention from strangers. She liked the Earl, so she smiled her best smile and curtsied for the ladies. She needn’t have bothered, for Miss Thorne had already forgotten her existence and was examining the nursery with a cold, calculating eye.

“It certainly is a good size,” she pronounced at last. Linking her arm through the Earl’s once again, she smiled up at him. “I can’t wait to do it over for our children.”

It was at that precise moment that Sally realized that her world was about to change—drastically, and not for the better, either.

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