



NAXOS
AudioBooks

COMPLETE
CLASSICS
UNABRIDGED

Georgette Heyer

Sylvester

Read by **Nicholas Rowe**

CD 1

1	Sylvester	6:16
2	However stupid Sylvester might think her...	5:41
3	The Duchess's apartments comprised...	6:36
4	'Now, Sylvester –'	6:24
5	Chapter 2	5:29
6	'Sylvester, will you be silent?' begged the Duchess...	5:35
7	'Do you know what Harry said to me, Mama?'	6:00
8	She said: 'Sylvester, you have talked of five girls...'	6:01
9	Chapter 3	6:08
10	The Dowager Lady Ingham lived in Green Street...	7:15
11	Since Lady Ingham had made no attempt...	6:11

Total time on CD 1: 67:40

CD 2

1	Chapter 4	7:33
2	'You are surprised that I should mention...'	7:29
3	She reached the room just as Mary, a humble-minded girl...	7:45
4	She had written it after her London season.	7:08
5	Chapter 5	6:43
6	When Phoebe divulged to him...	7:59
7	Lady Marlow took her to Bath...	6:33
8	This unamiable resolve was strengthened...	7:35
9	His valet went out of the room.	6:58

Total time on CD 2: 65:47

CD 3

1	Chapter 6	5:36
2	But by the time he rose from the dinner-table...	6:19
3	This programme, which, a few hours earlier...	6:11
4	She began to coax him, representing to him...	5:31
5	Chapter 7	7:33
6	She was silenced at last by the entrance into the room of Miss Battery...	7:31
7	'If your grace should wish me to travel in the curricule...'	7:57
8	Chapter 8	6:23
9	'Tom, this – this is the Duke of Salford!' said Phoebe.	6:20
10	'I shan't do that, your grace.'	5:51
11	'You are not fifty years old, or more!'	6:21

Total time on CD 3: 71:37

CD 4

1	Chapter 9	7:26
2	Dismissed in this kind but firm manner...	7:34
3	'Good God! Heaven send...'	7:40
4	'Yes, Grandpapa!' said Phoebe incorrigibly.	6:48
5	Chapter 10	5:55
6	Sylvester dropped asleep on this vengeful thought...	5:47
7	She looked up, twinkling...	5:24
8	'Yes, just a stupid mistake!' he said reassuringly.	6:32
9	Chapter 11	7:07
10	A look of anxiety came into her face...	7:56
11	The easy confidence with which he uttered...	7:44

Total time on CD 4: 75:59

CD 5

1	Chapter 12	6:44
2	In this he erred...	6:12
3	'Well, I don't know yet...'	6:27
4	Here he was, tied still to a primitive inn...	6:48
5	Chapter 13	6:13
6	'When I see Marlow...'	6:06
7	She wondered that it should not have occurred to her...	6:17
8	Chapter 14	6:06
9	Miss Battery wrote affectionately but not helpfully.	5:33
10	In high good-humour was her ladyship...	5:57
11	Chapter 15	7:39
12	'Before you put yourself in a taking...'	7:16

Total time on CD 5: 77:23

CD 6

1	By the time Lord Elvaston's house in Albemarle Street was reached...	7:23
2	Sylvester, himself mounted on a neatish bay...	7:55
3	Chapter 16	5:57
4	He was just as charming when the projected expedition...	6:36
5	Phoebe, meanwhile, after enjoying an all too brief gallop...	6:37
6	He did not immediately reply...	5:58
7	Chapter 17	5:41
8	Knowing his Phoebe, Tom had come...	5:33
9	'Whoever it was who wrote the book,'...	6:22
10	Chapter 18	6:54
11	As she rose to her feet she looked fleetingly up at him...	7:02

Total time on CD 6: 72:02

CD 7

1	Chapter 19	6:53
2	There was a short silence.	6:40
3	'Wants you to take her home?' exclaimed the Dowager.	7:13
4	Chapter 20	7:15
5	'May I make so bold as to enquire, miss...'	6:30
6	He was struck by her earnest manner...	7:10
7	'Yes!' flashed Phoebe.	6:53
8	Chapter 21	6:05
9	Master Rayne, game to the last...	6:12
10	Removed to the smaller cabin, tucked up in its berth...	6:04
11	Chapter 22	6:37
12	'Then I am going with them,' said Phoebe.	6:01

Total time on CD 7: 79:37

CD 8

1	By the time Boulogne was reached...	7:43
2	Phoebe giggled, but said...	7:17
3	Chapter 23	6:33
4	As she listened to these incredible words...	6:10
5	Sylvester shrugged, and turned away...	6:13
6	'No, I may not,' returned Tom.	6:11
7	Chapter 24	7:21
8	At this point Thomas entered a caveat.	7:19
9	'I'm not angry,' Sylvester said...	7:20
10	Chapter 25	6:11
11	The dinner was good...	6:43

Total time on CD 8: 75:07

CD 9

1	Chapter 26	7:06
2	'My dear Thomas,' said Sylvester...	6:41
3	She looked at him for a moment...	7:03
4	Chapter 27	6:29
5	'Go in with Reeth, Thomas...'	6:26
6	'Have Miss Marlow's baggage carried into the house!'	6:45
7	Chapter 28	6:52
8	Phoebe heard her name announced...	6:18
9	'It – it seemed to me, ma'am...'	6:33
10	'Really, I am quite ashamed of him!' exclaimed the Duchess.	6:32
11	'What – what a pleasant room!' she achieved...	7:03

Total time on CD 9: 73:52
Total time on CDs 1–9: 10:59:04

Georgette Heyer
(1902–1974)

Sylvester

Sylvester – subtitled *The Wicked Uncle* – is in many ways vintage Georgette Heyer. Published in 1957, when she was at the height of her popularity, it features a flawed yet ultimately deserving hero; a naïve, strong-willed young heroine; meticulous historical accuracy; plenty of wit; and, of course, a happy ending. And as with all Heyer's novels, it is packed with fascinating insights into the Regency period – she was possessed of a vast knowledge of the era – and there are many references to real people and places.

For instance, one of her 'characters', Edward Hughes Ball Hughes (c. 1798–1863) – otherwise known as 'Golden Ball' – was an extremely wealthy dandy of the period, famed for his over-elaborate dress and prodigious spending habits. In Heyer's book, he is mentioned in passing by her hero Sylvester, the Duke of Salford, when he describes Sir Nugent Fotherby as being 'as rich as Golden Ball'. However,

the comparison goes deeper than that – Fotherby is portrayed as a gaudy figure of ridicule, an absurd, tasteless dandy who, like Golden Ball, squanders his money on clothes and cards. It is interesting to note that Heyer chooses a travelling coach as an example of Fotherby's conspicuous consumption – Ball Hughes was particularly renowned for his bespoke chocolate-coloured coach. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the abundance of fashionable young men among the wealthy Regency upper classes, the dandy is a frequently lampooned archetype in Heyer's work. Well-known figures such as Beau Brummel inspired a generation of young men to dress in the foppish way described so accurately by Heyer.

Lady Sefton and Lady Castelreagh, both of whom receive passing mentions in *Sylvester*, were real-life (and very eminent) members of the aristocracy. Crucially, they were both Patronesses of Almack's

Assembly Rooms, one of the most exclusive social venues of the period. The Patronesses were essentially the arbiters of acceptance into the *ton* (Regency high society), meeting every Monday to decide who should or should not be allowed entry into Almack's. Their approval was essential for anyone wishing to become a member of their exclusive circle – their disapproval meant social ostracism and disgrace.

Phoebe's trepidation at being cut by these fearsome women is not difficult to understand, particularly as, in 1816, less than two years before the events in the novel take place, a strikingly similar scandal occurred that both delighted and horrified 'society'. Taking her revenge against Lord Byron after their affair ended badly, Lady Caroline Lamb published *Glenarvon* – a Gothic novel featuring satirical depictions of well-known society figures and, in particular, a bitter, thinly disguised portrait of Byron himself. Although the novel was published anonymously (and became wildly popular), Lamb had her Almack's voucher rescinded and she was exiled from fashionable society. Phoebe would

have been aware of the furore – would probably even have read the book – and she would have known of Lady Caroline's fate.

Literature – in particular the romantic novel – is an important theme in *Sylvester*. Heyer even uses it to identify the year in which the novel is set. Discussing books with Tom, Sylvester mentions *The Knight of St John*, which he says 'came out last year'. This puts the action of the novel in 1818, as *The Knight of St John*, a romance by the popular contemporary author Anna Maria Porter, was published the year before. The Regency period was a time when Gothic and romantic novels such as Phoebe's *The Lost Heir* were extremely popular, and it is entirely possible that authors could find themselves catapulted into sudden notoriety. Phoebe herself makes reference to Byron's well-known comment about the enthusiastic response to his narrative poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*: 'I awoke one morning and found myself famous.'

There are some interesting parallels between Phoebe and her creator. Heyer started writing her first novel, *The Black*

Moth, at the age of 17, while Phoebe is 18 when she writes *The Lost Heir*. Both are Gothic adventure stories. Phoebe's love of books is encouraged by her governess, while Heyer's father, George Heyer, nurtured a love of literature in his daughter. As a child, Heyer would spend hours discussing books with her friends Carola Oman and Joanna Cannan, both of whom grew up to be authors.

The Black Moth was published, with George Heyer's help, in 1921. Unlike *The Lost Heir*, it did not make its author suddenly famous, but it did initiate a steady stream of novels and, in 1926, Heyer had her first major success with *These Old Shades*. By this time, she had been married for a year to a young mining engineer, Ronald Rougier, and had already published five books.

From 1932 until her death in 1974, Heyer produced novels at the extraordinary rate of almost one a year, spawning a new literary genre – the Regency romance. Yet despite her undeniable success, she was frequently troubled by plagiarism and financial problems. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, her company Heron

Enterprises was a source of contention between her and the tax authorities, and a large chunk of the profits from books written around this time went towards paying back money to the Treasury. Plagiarism also became a problem – from the 1950s onwards, several other writers traded on her popularity by writing novels using names, phrases and events from her books. She was even accused by some of her fans of publishing substandard work under a pseudonym. Although Heyer sought legal advice on several occasions, she never chose to sue.

Sylvester, published in 1957, is a product of these troubled years, and perhaps this goes some way to explaining the pseudo-autobiographical elements of the plot. Despite her immense popularity, Heyer was an intensely private person, answering the curiosity of inquisitive fans by saying 'you will find me in my work'. She never really seems to have been comfortable with her identity as an author of romantic novels, and she was unsentimental about her work, even referring to it as 'nonsense'. She did not preserve her manuscripts, and only kept a

few reviews. Just one fan letter remained in her keeping – from a Romanian political prisoner who wrote that she had spent twelve years in prison, telling and re-telling the plot of *Friday's Child* (1944) to her fellow inmates to keep themselves sane.

Heyer seems to have existed almost as two separate people: Georgette Heyer, the famous author, and Mrs Ronald Rougier – private, reclusive and enigmatic (so much so that her married name was first revealed in her obituary). Her work, with its unique juxtaposition of light-hearted romance and meticulous historical accuracy, echoes this uneasy dualism. Perhaps *Sylvester* – with its preoccupation with literature and authorship – was a way for her to come to terms with these personal issues and 'find herself in her work'.

Ultimately, of course, we can never know the 'real' Georgette Heyer, but perhaps this doesn't matter. Her novels sparkle with energy, intelligence and wit – and this is how she is known and remembered by her readers.

Notes by Caroline Waight



Nicholas Rowe's theatre credits include *The Madness of George III*, *Nation*, *Victory*, *Whipping It Up* and *See How They Run*. His television work includes *Da Vinci's Demons*, *Loving Miss Hatto*, *The Borgias*, *Beau Brummel* and *A Harlot's Progress*, and his films include *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* and *Young Sherlock Holmes*.

Credits

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