

The logo features the word "NAXOS" in a bold, serif font, with "AudioBooks" in a smaller, sans-serif font below it. The text is centered within a red rectangular background.

NAXOS
AudioBooks

CLASSIC
FICTION

Georgette Heyer

The Grand Sophy

Read by **Clare Wille**



1	Chapter 1	6:36
2	'That's good,' said Sir Horace.	4:14
3	'I do not properly understand entails,' said his sister...	5:03
4	The Honourable Charles Rivenhall was twenty-six years old...	7:30
5	Chapter 2	5:57
6	Four of the family sat down at the huge table...	4:00
7	Chapter 3	6:44
8	She turned again towards her aunt...	6:27
9	Since Sophy was far too intelligent to suppose...	5:19
10	The Honourable Eugenia Wraxton was a slender young woman...	5:47
11	Chapter 4	4:26
12	Breakfast was served, at Ombersley House, in a parlour...	6:32
13	It was nearly half an hour later when the curricle again came...	5:39
14	Chapter 5	4:05
15	Mr Rivenhall, meanwhile, had gone off to visit his betrothed.	6:07
16	In this sedate way they rode side by side down the tan...	5:44
17	Chapter 6	6:09
18	'Do you know my cousin well, sir?' asked Sophy.	6:36
19	Upon her arrival in Berkeley Square...	4:04
20	'One of two things must happen. Either she will grow weary...'	4:13

21	Chapter 7	3:50
22	Miss Wraxton, treasuring up these hasty words...	5:32
23	Miss Wraxton, vouchsafing no answer, climbed down...	5:50
24	Chapter 8	7:07
25	Once beyond the narrow streets he let his horses lengthen...	5:06
26	At this moment Cecilia and Sir Vincent came round a corner...	5:40
27	Chapter 9	4:42
28	It was plain from the outset...	4:56
29	Sophy's eyes followed Cecilia and Mr Fawnhope...	5:58
30	Chapter 10	6:12
31	Sophy was met on her arrival in Berkeley Square...	5:28
32	It was at this inappropriate moment...	4:03
33	Chapter 11	6:46
34	Upon the following day, she sallied forth quite unaccompanied...	6:02
35	Chapter 12	5:35
36	As she spoke, the door opened behind her...	4:05
37	Not many minutes later, Sophy, reading in the Yellow Parlour...	4:16
38	Chapter 13	5:05
39	This reproof had the effect of making Mr Rivenhall recollect...	3:30
40	Chapter 14	5:28

41	Another regular caller was Mr Fawnhope...	4:59
42	Chapter 15	7:26
43	The immediate outcome of all this cogitation...	6:38
44	Chapter 16	7:24
45	Lacy Manor, which lay a little way off the turnpike road...	6:07
46	Chapter 17	4:44
47	Lord Bromford was ushered into the room.	5:36
48	Chapter 18	7:07
49	The door at the back of the hall opened to admit the Marquesa...	6:58
50	Within half an hour, Sophy, seated at the table in the hall...	5:19
51	Those best acquainted with Mr Rivenhall's powers of self-expression...	5:31

Total time: 4:44:41

Georgette Heyer

(1902–1974)

The Grand Sophy

The Napoleonic Wars cast a long shadow over the first two decades of the nineteenth century, and they feature heavily in many of Georgette Heyer's novels. The events of *The Grand Sophy* take place in 1816, a year after Napoleon's final campaign was brought to an end. It is made clear that Sophy herself, with her father Sir Horace, was at the centre of the action. Sir Horace states that they were 'in Brussels last year', Brussels being where the British army, under the command of the Duke of Wellington (1769–1852), was headquartered in 1815. Although it is not directly involved in the main narrative of the plot, this part of Sophy's colourful history is frequently alluded to in the novel, and it is crucial in establishing her character as capable and brave.

As is often the case with Georgette Heyer's work, references such as these are woven so deftly into the fabric of the book that they pass almost unnoticed; although her knowledge of the Regency period was

extensive, she wore her erudition lightly. In a throwaway comment, for example, Sir Horace reveals that Augustus Fawnhope – absent-minded suitor to Sophy's cousin Cecilia – was staying in Brussels 'with Stuart'; 'Stuart', in this context, probably refers to Charles Stuart, 1st Baron Stuart de Rothesay (1779–1845), a lifetime diplomat who in 1815 was the Ambassador to France, and who was also present in Brussels that year. Similarly, Sophy fleetingly mentions that she danced the quadrille with Fawnhope at the Duchess of Richmond's ball in Brussels. No more is said of this historic event, yet it has been described as 'the most famous ball in history'. It took place on 15 June 1815, the night before the critical Battle of Quatre Bras, and the guest list included such illustrious names as William II of Orange (1792–1849), Prince Frederick William, Duke of Brunswick (1771–1815), who was killed the next day, and the Duke of Wellington.

The Grand Sophy was published in 1950, when Heyer was at the height of her popularity. It bears all the hallmarks of her best romances; it is witty, charming and brimming with historical insight. It features a number of familiar comic characters, including the kind-hearted, ineffectual Lady Ombersley, the humourless bluestocking Eugenia, a host of incorrigible children and, of course, the stern, proud but ultimately good-natured hero, Charles. Sophy herself is one of Heyer's most memorable creations. Resourceful, kind and utterly indefatigable, she is a spirited, likeable heroine. From the outset, she both shocks and endears herself to her family, pushing the restrictive boundaries of Regency propriety to their limits. Sophy shoots and rides with supposedly unfeminine skill, and Lady Ombersley is amazed that she wishes to deal directly with Hoare's Bank. Here Heyer once again weaves fact and fiction: now C. Hoare & Co., Hoare's Bank is still extant; indeed, founded in 1672, it is the oldest privately owned bank in England. In an extraordinary sequence, Sophy visits a moneylender who has been blackmailing her cousin Hubert and threatens him with a gun, frightening him into giving

back the bond and the emerald ring with which he has been threatening her hapless relative. Her excellent aim, discussed earlier in the novel during a conversation with Charles, becomes crucial during the final denouement, where she finds it necessary to wound one of her friends in the arm lightly.

Dress is another important means of characterisation for Heyer. When we are first introduced to Charles it is made clear that though his clothes are well-made he is no dandy (a group for whom Heyer frequently expressed disdain in her novels). Similarly, our opinion of Charles's fiancée Eugenia is influenced before we have even met her. Cecilia reports that 'Eugenia never wears modish gowns. She says there are more important things to think of than one's dresses,' to which Sophy responds, 'What a stupid thing to say! Naturally there are, but not, I hold, when one is dressing for dinner.' The meaning is clear: Eugenia considers herself above such foolish considerations as dresses, but Sophy – wiser than her rival – knows that paying attention to her clothes does not make her frivolous.

Another source of humour in the novel

is the would-be poet Augustus Fawnhope. Easily distracted, making frequent recourse to quotation, and always dreaming of his next magnum opus, Augustus is obsessed with beauty, and views the world through a literary haze. Indeed, literature is often a prominent theme in Georgette Heyer's novels. She inherited a love of books from her father, George Heyer, and two of her closest childhood friends, Carola Oman and Joanna Cannan, with whom she spent many hours discussing literature, both grew up to be authors. Heyer showed promise from an early age, writing her first book, entitled *The Black Moth*, at the age of 17. It was published, with George Heyer's help, in 1921, initiating a steady stream of novels. 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 named 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 '50s

and '60s, 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.

The Grand Sophy, published in 1950, is a product of these troubled years, yet there is no trace of them in the novel, and it sparkles with all the vitality, humour and brilliance of her best work. Sophy is one of Heyer's most charming and adventurous protagonists, determinedly navigating her way through the social battlefield of Regency London with exuberance, enthusiasm and grace.

Notes by Caroline Waight



Clare Wille has been working as an actress and voiceover artist since graduating from RADA in 1997. Her theatre work includes *Seeing Without Light* at the Drum Theatre, Plymouth Theatre Royal, and *Look Back in Anger* with London Classic Theatre Company. Her TV credits include Five's sketch show *Swinging*, BBC 2's rolling news spoof *Broken News*, CITV's *Girls in Love* and appearances in *Vital Signs*, *Life Begins*, *All About Me*, *Where the Heart Is* and *Doctors*. She played Pru in Victoria Wood's *Housewife 49* and DS Rachel Dawson in *Heartbeat*. She has also read *Cranford* for Naxos AudioBooks.

Credits

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CLASSIC
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Georgette Heyer

The Grand Sophy

Read by **Clare Wille**

Resourceful, adventurous and utterly indefatigable, Sophy is hardly the mild-mannered girl that the Rivenhalls expect when they agree to take her in. Kind-hearted Aunt Lizzy is shocked; stern Cousin Charles and his humourless fiancée Eugenia are disapproving. With her inimitable mixture of exuberance and grace Sophy soon sets about endearing herself to her family, but finds herself increasingly drawn to her cousin. Can she really be falling in love with him, and he with her? And what of his betrothal to Eugenia?



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