LUCY BETHIA WALFORD

LEONORE STUBBS

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Walford L.

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I.
"SHE HAS NO SETTLEMENT, DAMN IT."

"She can't come."

"But, father–"

"She shan't come, then—if you like that better."

"But, father–"

"Aye, of course, it's 'But father'—I might have known it would be that. However, you may 'But father' me to the end of my time, you don't move me. I tell you, Sukey, you're a fool. You know no more than an unhatched chicken—and if you think I'm going to give in to their imposition—for it's nothing else—you are mistaken."

"I was only going to say–"

"Say what you will, say what you will; my mind's made up; and the sooner you understand that, and Leonore understands that, the better. You can write and tell her so."

"What am I to tell her?"

"What I say. That she has made her own bed and must lie upon it."

"But you gave your consent to her marriage, and never till now–"

"I tell you, girl, you're a fool. Consent? Of course I gave my consent. I was cheated—swindled. I married my daughter to a rich man, and he dies and leaves her a pauper! Never knew such a trick in my life. And you to stand up for it!"

General Boldero and his eldest daughter were alone, as may have been gathered, and the latter held in her hand, a black-edged letter at which she glanced from time to time, it being obviously the apple of discord between them.

It had come by the afternoon post; and the general, having met the postman in the avenue, and himself relieved him of the old-fashioned leathern postbag with which he was hastening on, and having further, according to established precedent, unlocked the same and distributed the contents, there had been no chance of putting off the present evil hour.

Instead there had been an instant demand: "What says Leonore? What's the figure, eh? She must know by this time. Eh, what? A hundred and fifty? Two hundred? What? Two hundred thousand would be nothing out of the way in these days. Poor Goff wasn't a millionaire, but money sticks to money and he had no expensive tastes. He must have been quietly rolling up,—all the better for his widow, poor child. Little Leonore will scarcely know what to do with a princely income, and we must see to it that she doesn't get into the hands of sharpers and fortune-hunters–" and so on, and so on.

Then the bolt fell. The "princely income" vanished into the air. The problematic two hundred thousand was neither here nor there, nor anywhere. As for "Poor Goff," General Boldero was never heard to speak of his defunct son-in-law in those terms again.

In his rage and disappointment at finding himself, as he chose to consider it, outwitted by a man upon whom he had always secretly looked down, the true feelings wherewith he had regarded an alliance welcomed by his cupidity, but resented by his pride, escaped without let or hindrance.

"What did we want with a person called Stubbs? What the deuce could we want with him or any of his kind but their money?" demanded he, pacing the room, black with wrath. "I never should have let the fellow set foot within these doors if I had dreamed of this happening. I took him for an honest man. What? What d'ye say? Humph! Don't believe a word of it; he *must* have known; and

as for his expecting to pull things round, that's all very fine. It's a swindle, the whole thing." Then suddenly the speaker stopped short and his large lips shot out as he faced his daughter: "Does Leonore say she hasn't a penny?"

"She says she will have to give up everything to the creditors. I suppose," said Susan, hesitating, "everything may not mean—I thought marriage settlements could not be touched by creditors?"

"No more they can, that's the deuce of it."

"Then–?" She looked inquiringly, and strange to say, the fierce countenance before her coloured beneath the look.

If he could have evaded it, General Boldero would have let the question remain unanswered, although it was only Sue, Sue who knew her parent as no one else knew him—before whom he made no pretences, assumed no disguises—who had now to learn an ugly truth;—as it was, he shot it at her with as good an air as he could assume.

"She has no settlement, damn it."

"No settlement?" In her amazement the open letter fell from the listener's hands. She recollected, she could never forget, the glee with which her father had rubbed his hands over the "clinking settlement" he had anticipated from Leonore's wealthy suitor, nor the manner in which it had insinuated itself into every announcement of the match. No settlement? She simply stared in silence.

"If you will have it, it was my doing," owned General Boldero reluctantly; "and I could bite my tongue off now to think of it! But what with four of you on my hands, and the rents going down and everything else going up, I had nothing to settle—that is, I had nothing I could *conveniently* settle, and it might have been awkward, uncommonly awkward. I could hardly have got out of it if Godfrey had expected a *quid pro quo*. And he might—he very well might. A man of his class can't be expected to understand how a man of ours has to live decently and keep up appearances while yet he hasn't a brass farthing to spare. I'll say that for Godfrey Stubbs, he seemed sensible on the point when I tried to explain; and—and somehow I was taken in and thought: 'You may be a bounder, but you are a very worthy fellow'."

He paused, and continued. "Then he suggested—it was his own idea, I give you my word for it—that we should have no greedy lawyers lining their pockets out of either of our purses. What he said was—I've as clear a recollection of it as though it were yesterday—'Oh, bother the settlement, I'll make a will leaving everything I possess to Leonore,'—and I, like a numskull, jumped at the notion. It never occurred to me that the will of a business man may be so much waste paper. His creditors can snap their fingers at any will. That's what Leonore means. She's found it out, and flies post haste to her desk to write that she must come back here."

"So she must."

"So she must *not*. I won't have it. The whole neighbourhood would ring with it."

"By your own showing," said Sue quietly, "in order to free yourself from the necessity of making any provision on your part when the marriage took place, you precluded–" but she got no further.

"Provision on my part?" burst forth her father, who was now himself again, and ready to browbeat anybody; "what need had the girl of any provision on my part? She was marrying a fellow with tenfold my income. The little I could have contrived to spare would have been a mere drop in the bucket to him, and I should have been ashamed to mention it. I can tell you I felt monstrous uncomfortable having to approach the subject at all; and never was more thankful than when the young man, like the decent fellow I took him then to be, pitchforked the whole business overboard."

"All the same, it is quite plain," persevered she, "that it was with your consent and approbation that Leonore had no money settled on her, so that it could not be taken from her now;—and that being the case, you have no choice but to provide for her in the future."

"You mean to say that it's due to me your sister's left a pauper on our hands?"

"That's exactly what I do mean. And you must either give her enough to enable her to live properly elsewhere, or receive her back among us, as she herself suggests. Besides which, you must make her the same allowance you make the rest of us," and the speaker rose, closing the controversy.

Only she could have carried it on to such a close, indeed only General Boldero's eldest daughter —and only daughter by his first marriage—would have engaged in it at all. The younger girls, of whom there were still two unmarried and living at home, never, in common parlance, stood up to their father—though, if he had not been as blind as such an autocrat is wont to be, he would have easily detected that they had their own ways of rendering his tyrannical rule tolerable, and that while he fancied himself the sole dictator of his house, he had in fact neither part nor lot in its real existence.

What is more easily satisfied than the vanity of stupid importance always upon its perch? The general's habits and hours were known, also the few points upon which he was really adamant. He was proud, and he was mean. He liked to live pompously, and fare luxuriously,—he made it his business to cut off every expense that did not affect his own comfort, or dignity. But that done, other matters could go on as they chose for him.

So that while it was not to be thought of that Boldero Abbey should exist without a full staff of retainers without and within, it was all that his eldest daughter—the family manager—could do to get her own and her sisters' allowances paid with any regularity—and whereas the stables were well supplied with horses, and a new carriage was no uncommon purchase, it was as much as any one's place was worth to hire a fly from the station on an unexpectedly wet day.

When, exactly three years before the date on which our story opens, there had appeared on the scene a suitor for the hand of the youngest Miss Boldero, in the shape of a rich young Liverpool gentleman—General Boldero always talked of young Stubbs as "a Liverpool gentleman," and his hearers knew what he meant—he was accorded a free hand in reality, though demur was strewn on the surface like cream on a pudding.

"I have had to give in," quoth the general with a rueful countenance—but he spread the news right and left, and Leonore was kissed and bidden make the "Liverpool gentleman" a good wife.

Whereupon Leonore laughed and promised. Godfrey Stubbs was her very first admirer, and she thought him as nice as he could be. At first the Boldero girls had been somewhat surprised at the encouragement shown a stranger to come freely among them, but when it became clear that Mr. Godfrey Stubbs was a privileged person, they found it wonderfully pleasant to have a man about the place, where a pair of trousers was a rare sight—and the inevitable happened.

The engagement concluded, Leonore trod on air. She who had never been anywhere, who was never supposed to have a wish or thought of her own, was all at once a queen. Godfrey assented to everything, and of himself drew up the plan—oh, glorious! of a prolonged wedding tour. His little bride was to go wherever she chose, see the sights she selected, and—shop in Paris. She was actually to stay a whole fortnight in Paris to buy clothes.

"Very right, very proper;" nodded her father to this.

He was so smiling and genial over everything at this juncture that Leonore's tongue wagged freely in his presence, and on hearing the above she turned to him with a saucy air, which under the circumstances he found quite pretty and pleasant:—

"So you see, there will be no need to dive deep into *your* pocket, father, and my things will be ever so much smarter and more up-to-date besides."

"Ha, ha, ha!"—laughed the general.

It all came back to him now—all that rainbow period, which had just dissolved into the grim blackness of night. He could see the merry little chit—(as he called her then)—rustling in her new-found state like a puffed-out Jenny Wren; he could hear her calling to Godfrey over the stairs, and after him across the lawn; most distinctly of all, there rose before his mind's eye the wedding day, and the round baby face solemnised for the occasion, with its large eyes and pursed-up lips, whence emanated the bold "I will" which startled him by its loudness and clearness,—and yet again his own

sigh of satisfaction as the well-known march pealed out, and the pair walked down the aisle, and the thing was done.

The thing was done, and could not be undone—he was in spirits to play his part gloriously.

"Terrible business this, Lady St. Emeraud. Poor little girl, to have to be called 'Mrs. Stubbs,' eh, what? Oh, bless you, yes; it's her own doing, entirely her own doing—quite a love match,—but, well–" and there was a shrug of the shoulders, which, however, neither took in Lady St. Emeraud nor any one else.

"The horrid old wretch is simply gloating, and all the other girls may follow Leonore's example with his blessing;" was her ladyship's comment. "Stubbs—Tubbs—or Ubbs—if there is money enough, come one, come all to the Abbey." But the speaker turned with a more kindly air to the white-robed figure of the youthful bride, and wished her well with a kiss—and even that kiss added to the sting of General Boldero's present ruminations.

He had woven it into his remarks on many subsequent occasions. He called Leonore "Lady St. Emeraud's pet". And he would put himself in her ladyship's way when he had news of her "Pet," and tell the news with an air of its being of special interest. "Hang it all, her ladyship ought to have been the child's godmother, if we had had our wits about us;" he had exclaimed within the home circle.

What would Lady St. Emeraud say now? She was a woman of the world, and although she might choose to take up a girl after a fashion—(even he could not magnify the passing notice bestowed into more, since it never led to anything further)—she certainly would not care to—"I wish we could keep this fiasco from her knowledge," he muttered.

Had it been possible, he would have dropped the hapless young widow out of sight and ken, like a pebble in a pond. Her name should never have been mentioned by him or his,—and if by others, he would have replied curtly and conclusively that she had gone to live with her husband's people.

Confound it all, there must be *some* people to hang on to? It had of course been a great point at the beginning of the connection that young Stubbs stood alone in the world, and his not having a soul belonging to him had been emphasised as one of the assets of the match,—but with the new change of affairs, surely some vulgar old uncle or cousin could be unearthed to be made use of?

His auditor, however, had steadily shaken her head. She did not repudiate the suggestion on any ground other than that of its impossibility—but on this she took her stand with that accurate knowledge of her father which provided her influence over him.

He had just yielded the point, and she had mooted the idea of receiving her sister back to the home of her childhood, when we are admitted to hear the explosive "She *can't* come," with which our chapter opens.

We know how the battle went, and to what was due the victory, if such it could be called, on the part of Miss Boldero. She had discovered a secret—a shabby secret which the general had hitherto been careful to lock tight within his own breast—and armed with this she could do as she chose about Leonore—but her triumph cost her dear.

No one would have believed how dear. No one would have supposed that the person who of all others knew the ill-conditioned old soldier best, who knew him in and out and through and through, could retain for so poor a creature a spark of feeling other than that engendered by the tie of blood. To Maud and Sybil their father was simply "He,"—and to catch him out, or catch him tripping on any occasion, the best fun imaginable—but their half-sister suffered from every exposure, and when possible hid the offence out of that charity which is love.

She was not a clever woman, she was in some respects a fool. People would exclaim, "Oh, *that* Miss Boldero!" on finding which of the three it was who had been met and talked with. There was nothing worth hearing to be got out of poor old Sue. No gossip, no chatter—not even sly details of the general's "latest" wherewith her sisters were willing to regale their friends. Sue was dull as ditch-water and silent as the grave where family affairs were concerned.

She was not ill-looking, nay, she was handsome, as were all the Bolderos; and, curiously, she was better turned-out than the younger ones, for she had the knack of suiting herself in her clothes, which they had not,—but with it all, with her good appearance and respectable air, she belonged to the ranks of the uninteresting, and the weight she carried with her father was voted unaccountable.

No one, however, disputed it; and when the two withdrew together no one followed.

"Well, what does Leo say?" demanded Maud, who with Sybil had been lying in wait for their half-sister while the conversation above narrated was going on in the library. "What a time you have been! You might have known Syb and I were on thorns to hear what was in that great fat letter? Where is she going to live? Or is she going to travel? And is she going to invite one of us to go with her? If she does–"

"It ought to be me," struck in Sybil eagerly. "I am nearest her age, and Leo and I were always pals. I shouldn't at all mind going with her."

"Which of us would? It would be splendid. Can't you speak?" to Sue. "You are such a slow coach,—and surely you might have broken loose before, when you knew we were waiting."

"You have been nearly an hour;" Sybil glanced at the clock.

"We thought you might have called us in," added Maud.

"Anyhow, do for heaven's sake let us have it out now," continued Sybil impetuously. She had been giving little tweaks at the letter in her sister's hand, and a faint apprehension crept into her accents as she found it firmly withheld; "and don't look so owl-like. There is nothing to be owl-like about, I suppose?"

Hitherto neither had noted Sue's expression; now for the first time they simultaneously paused long enough to enable her to open her lips.

"I am afraid you will be disappointed," she said slowly. "I am so sorry to tell you, but—but things are not as you suppose. Poor Godfrey–" she paused.

"Poor Godfrey, well, poor Godfrey?"

Both exclaimed at once, and each alike made a movement of impatience.

"He had been very unfortunate of late. He had—speculated. He–"

"We don't care twopence about *him*, get on."

"He has been unable to leave Leonore–"

"Never mind what he has been *un*able to do—what has he been able?"

"He was ruined," said Sue at last, in a dull, matter-of-fact tone. "It appears he did not himself know it, for which Leonore is very thankful—but though he died in the belief that he was going to be richer than ever, when his affairs came to be looked into–"

"Oh, how long you are in telling it. You do love to harangue;" with a sudden petulance Sybil shook her sister's shoulder and seized the letter, whose perusal was the work of a minute.

"So that's how the cat jumps!" quoth she, suddenly as cool as she had been warm before. "Poor brat! Well, it will be nice to have her here."

"Here?" ejaculated Maud. "Is she coming here? To live?"

"Even so. Isn't she, Sue? Of course she is. She can't help it. Though, I say—no wonder you were ages in the library—how does *he* take it? Oh, you need not pretend, my dear, we can imagine the scene. Our revered parent is not given to mincing matters, and to have Godfrey Stubbs, his dear bloated son-in-law, collapse like a pricked balloon is rough on him. He was so pleased—that's to say he took poor Goff's death so very philosophically, that one knew perfectly how he felt. The money and not the man—it was an ideal consummation. He would have condoled with his poor little Leo, and petted and pampered her—and grinned whenever he was alone. She might have come to live with us *then*——"

"A nice jumble you are making of it." It was Maud who interposed, with a vexed face. "It is nothing but a huge joke to you—but upon my word, I don't see a pleasant time ahead for any of us. The bare sight of Leo will be a perpetual grievance, and we shall all reap the benefit."

By the evening's post, however, Leo was bidden to come.

CHAPTER II.
ON THE STATION PLATFORM

"Is that the widow?"

A couple of common-looking men with their hats and greatcoats on, were standing, notebooks in hand, in the centre of a handsomely appointed room, and the eye of experience would have seen at once what they were doing there. They were taking an inventory of the furniture.

Their task had been momentarily suspended by the opening of the door, and both heads had turned to behold a slight, black-robed figure step forward, then, at the sight of themselves, stop short, turn and vanish—whereupon the one put the above question and the other nodded for reply.

"Lor', she ain't but a girl!" muttered the speaker; then paused to rub his chin, and add sententiously: "that's the way with these rich young cock-a-doodles. They marries and lives in lugsury —gives their wives di'monds, and motor-cars, and nothin' ain't too good for them,—then pop! off they goes, and *we* comes in! Sich is life!"

"Godfrey Stubbs was a very decent feller;" protested the other, biting the top of his pencil with a meditative air. "He was misfort'nate, that's all."

"Humph? Misfort'nate? Yes, I've heard it called that before. Stubbs ain't the first by a long chalk whose sticks I've had to make a list of because of his dying—or living—misfort'nate. Who's the missus?"

"Can't say. There she goes!"—suddenly; and with one accord both stepped to the large French window which stood open, and stared across the lawn. "Just a mere slip of a thing," murmured Joe Mills, under his breath, "'bout my Milly's age, poor lass!"

"Lucky there's no kids," quoth his companion, bluntly; "and, 'Poor lass' or no, we've got our work to do. Where had we got to now? Look sharp, and let's clear out of this before she comes back,"—and spurred to activity by the suggestion, the interlude came to an end forthwith.

They need not have hurried; Leonore was not going to interrupt again. She had come to take a last look round, as she was not now dwelling there; but the sight just witnessed was enough to preclude any desire for further investigation, and she almost ran across the threshold which she was never more to enter.

It may be wondered at that none of her own people were with the hapless girl at such a moment —but a few words will explain this. A very few days before Godfrey Stubbs' sudden death, an outbreak of influenza, which was rife in the neighbourhood, had taken place at Boldero Abbey; and to the intense vexation of the general, he found himself laid by the heels, when it was above all things necessary and desirable that he should appear, clad in the full panoply of woe, at the funeral of his son-in-law.

He would go, he was sure he could go,—and he rose from his bed and tried, only to totter, trembling, back into it again.

Then he ordered up Sue, and sent messages to the younger ones. When it appeared that all were either sick or sickening, and that the doctor's orders were peremptory, he was made so much worse himself by wrathful impotence, that thereafter all was easy, and by the time the epidemic had abated, Leonore was no longer in her own house.

She was still, however, to her father's view a personage, and as such to be treated. Messages of affectionate condolence and sympathetic inquiry were despatched daily. Though he did not actually write with his own hand, he composed and dictated, and every epistle had to be submitted to him before it was sent—while each and all conveyed the emphatic declaration that, the very moment he was fit to travel, General Boldero would fly to his dear girl's side, to give her the benefit of his counsel and experience.

He had been for his first walk on the day Leonore's letter arrived which changed the face of everything.

Thereafter his influenza and all the other influenzas assumed astonishing proportions, and the trip to Liverpool which he had formerly assured Sue would do him all the good in the world, was not to be thought of. The weather was milder, but what of that? She had been against his going all along; and now when he had given in to her, she must needs wheel about face, and try to drive him to do what would send him back to bed again as sure as fate.

Sue had next suggested that she herself, or Maud should go. Sybil, the last to be attacked, was still in the doctor's hands.

The second proposition, however, met with no better fate than the first. It was madness to think of it; sheer madness to take a long, expensive—the speaker caught himself up and substituted "exhaustive"—journey, when there was no end to be attained thereby. Had he not said that Leo could come to them? Since she was coming, and since it appeared there was nothing to prevent her coming immediately, that settled the matter.

"You can put it civilly," conceded he; but on this occasion he sent no message, and did not ask to see the letter.

We perceive therefore how it chanced that the solitary, pitiful little figure came to be haunting the precincts of her former home as narrated above; she had been housed by friends who, struck by her desolation, were not wanting in pity and sympathy,—but confused, dazed, bewildered, she moved about as in a dream, her one conscious desire to be alone—and no one, she thought, would follow her on the present occasion.

No one did, but we know the sight that met her eyes on opening the drawing-room door, and she knew in a moment who and what the two men were, and what they were doing. And she fled down the garden path and passed from their view; but ere she reappears, we will present our readers with a brief glimpse of our heroine up to the present crisis in her life.

In appearance she was small, soft, and inclined to be round-about—while her face, what shall we say? It was a face transmitted through generations of easy, healthy, wealthy ancestors, who have occasionally married beauties,—and yet it had a note of its own. Her sisters were handsome, but it was reserved for her, the youngest, to strike out a new line in the family looks and one which did not ripen quickly. So that whereas the three elder Miss Bolderos had high noses and high foreheads, and long, pale, aristocratic faces, varying but little from each other—(for somehow Sue, by resembling her father, had no separate traits)—the funny little Leonore, with her rogue's eyes, and thick bunch of swinging curls, her chubby cheeks and dimpled chin, was for a time entirely overlooked. It was certain she would never be distinguished nor imposing—consequently would never contract the great alliance General Boldero steadily kept in view for Maud or Sybil. [*N.B.*—He never contemplated a husband for Sue—never had, though she was the handsomest of the three. Briefly, he could not do without her.]

But although he was presently obliged to confess to himself that the little snub-nosed schoolgirl was developing some sort of impudent looks of her own, he held them to be of such small account that it was as much a source of wonder as of congratulation when it fell out that they had fixed the affections of a suitor with ten thousand a year. It was luck—it was extraordinary luck—that Mr. Godfrey Stubbs could be content with Leo, when really if he had demanded the hand of any one of the three it would have been folly to hold back.

We need not, however, dwell on this period. Suffice it to say that on each recurring occasion when the general welcomed his married daughter beneath his roof, he was secretly surprised and even faintly annoyed to behold her prettier than before. She glowed with life and colour. She radiated vitality. She had a knack of throwing her sisters, with their far superior outlines, into the shade.

Even Sybil, who had something of Leo's vivacity, had none of Leo's charm. Even Maud, rated highest in the paternal valuation, had a heavy look. What if he had been over-hasty after all? What

if the little witch could have done better? Once or twice he had to reason with himself very seriously before equanimity was restored.

In mind Leonore was apt, with the intelligence, and it must be added with much of the ignorance, of a child. She was ready to learn when learning was easy—she would give it up when effort was needed.

As Godfrey was no reader, she only read such books as pleased her fancy or whiled away a dull hour.

Godfrey told her what was in the newspapers, she said. It did not occur to either that Godfrey's cursory perusal merely skimmed the surface of events.

Again, Leonore protested that she had no accomplishments, but that her husband could both sing and draw—and she would hasten to place his music on the piano, and exhibit his sketches. She thought his big bass tones the finest imaginable; she framed the sketches as presents for her father and sisters;—and so on, and so on.

In short the poor little tendril had wound itself round a sturdy pole, and with this support had waved and danced in the sunshine for three years,—and now, all in a moment, with cruel suddenness and finality, the pole had snapped, and the tender young creature must either make shift thenceforth to stand alone, or fall to the earth also. Which will Leonore do?

The present, in so far as she was concerned, was a grey, colourless vacuum.

She had of course to give audiences to her solicitor, an elderly, grizzled man, whose coat, she noted, was shockingly ill-made, and who had a heavy cold in the head, which brought his red bandana handkerchief much into play,—but though she dreaded his visits, and kept as far away from him as possible, with a fastidious dislike of his husky utterances, and heavy breathing, he relieved her of all responsibility, and in fact earned a gratitude he did not get.

His was a thankless task. Leonore only wondered miserably what it was all about? Of course she would do whatever was right; she would give up anything and everything—so what need of details?

Indeed she offered to surrender cherished possessions which Mr. Jonas assured her were not demanded and might lawfully be kept,—but this point clear, she had no interest in the rest, and his broad back turned, nothing else presented itself to fill up the dreary days which had to elapse before her presence could be spared and her departure arranged for.

"Your father will provide for you, I understand, Mrs. Stubbs?" ("And a good job too," mentally commented the lawyer, shutting his bag with a snap. "There's many a poor thing has no father, close-fisted or no, to fall back upon.")

"Yes—yes," said Leonore, hurriedly. She looked so young, and vague, and helpless, that as he held out his hand, and mumbled conventionally, his voice was a shade more husky than before.

"Oh, yes, thank you; thank you, yes."

"Now what is she thanking me for?"—queried Jonas of himself. For very pity he felt aggrieved and sardonic, and Leo perceiving the frown, and unable to divine its cause, was thankful anew that release was at hand. Every interview had been worse than the previous one. She had had to go in to the terrible old man all by herself, and be asked this and that, and begged to remember about things which had made no impression at the time, and been entirely wiped from memory thereafter.

Could she tell—oh, how she came to hate that ominous "Can you tell?" seeing that she never could, and that the confession invariably elicited the same dry little cough of dissatisfaction, followed by a pause.

What did it—what could it all mean? "Then I think I need not trouble you further, Mrs. Stubbs," said Mr. Jonas slowly,—and Mrs. Stubbs almost jumped from her seat.

Nothing could ever be as bad as this again. In her own old home no one would disparage poor Godfrey by inference and solemn silences as this grim old Jonas did. Every statement wrung out of her, even though the same simply amounted to a non-statement, a confession of utter ignorance and

trustfulness, had somehow damned her husband in the eyes of the man of business—but her own people would feel differently.

Godfrey had always been treated well, indeed made rather a fuss about at Boldero Abbey. Her father would run down the steps to meet the carriage which brought the young couple from the station on a visit. His hearty, "Well, here you are!" would accompany the opening of the door by his own hand. Then there would be an embrace for herself, and the further greeting of a pleased and affectionate host for her husband.

The pleasant bustle of welcome outside would be amply followed up within doors, where her sisters would cluster round, making as much of Godfrey as of herself—perhaps even a little more—remembering his tastes, his proclivities, his love of much sugar and plenty of cream in his tea, his partiality for warmth and the blaze of a roaring fire. "Ah, you Liverpool gentlemen, you know what comfort is!"—the general would jocularly exclaim, the while both hands pressed his son-in-law down into his own armchair. "I like to stand;" he would protest,—but Leonore had a suspicion that he did not like to stand for most people.

Godfrey was a favourite; for Godfrey there would be horses and dogcarts at command, keepers and beaters in the shooting season, (when such visits annually took place), and elaborate luncheons and dinners. "We don't do much in the way of entertaining, you know," the general would explain casually, having delivered himself on the subject to Sue, beforehand—("Hang it all, he can't expect *that*—but he shall have everything else, everything that we can do for him ourselves")—"We don't go in for that sort of thing, except now and again,—but after all, a family gathering is more agreeable to us all, I take it, eh, Godfrey? *That's* what you and Leo come for, not to be bothered by a parcel of strangers you know nothing about?"

But if strangers, *i.e.*, old neighbours whom Leo remembered from her youth up, and whom she would have liked very well to meet again, if these did accidentally cross the path of the Bolderos and their guests, nothing could be handsomer than the way in which Godfrey Stubbs was presented by his father-in-law. Godfrey would tell his wife about his meeting with Lord Merivale or Sir Thomas Butts with an air of elation. "Nice fellows; so chatty and affable." Once he let fall the latter word in public, and nobody winced openly,—so that Leo, who had often heard it in her married home, and never dreamed of thinking it odd, listened and smiled in all innocence.

It must be remembered that she had barely emerged from the schoolroom when Godfrey Stubbs carried her off as his bride, and that when the last blow fell, and there was a sudden demand on the forlorn little creature for qualities she either did not possess or was not conscious of possessing, she only felt with a kind of numb misery that it was all strange and terrible, and that if Godfrey had been there to help her—and a burst of tears would follow.

But at least she was going home; she had never yet got quite over the feeling that Boldero Abbey was "home," and always spoke of it as such, even in the days when her stay there was limited to visits. How much more then now—now, when she had no foothold anywhere else, and when the past three years took in the retrospect the shadowy outlines of a dream.

It was odd how distinctly behind the dream stood out the days of childhood. As the train bore her swiftly through the open country she knew so well, on the mellow, misty October afternoon, which came at last, Leonore's throbbing bosom was a jumble of emotions, partly, though of this she was unaware, pleasurable. Until now she had been dwelling in the past—the near past—the past which was all loss and sadness,—but as one familiar scene after another unfolded itself, involuntarily they awakened interest and a faint anticipation. Of a nature to be happy anywhere, and to cull blossoms off the most arid soil, the necessity for living in a villa among other villas on the outskirts of a great manufacturing town, had never called for lament and depreciation: no one had ever heard Boldero Abbey descanted upon,—indeed Leonore had sharply criticised the taste of a new arrival on the scene, a girl transplanted like herself by marriage, who was for ever telling her new associates what was done in B—shire.

All this young lady's endeavours could not win an adherent in Mrs. Stubbs, who simply put on a wooden face, and said, "Indeed?" when the other threw out: "It's all so different here from what I am accustomed to. I have never lived in any place like this before."

Leo moreover had her triumph which she kept for Godfrey's ear. "You know how that girl brags, and what an amount of side she puts on? Would you believe it, Godfrey, she's only a sort of stable-keeper's daughter! Well, I don't know what else you call it; her father is a trainer of race-horses, and that's how she knows about them; and the big people she quotes, of course they are all about such places—and—oh, I think it's sickening, even if it were no sham—that running down of nice James Bilson, who never sets up to be anything, and is a hundred thousand times too good for his wife."

"*You* don't buck, anyway," said he.

"I'd be ashamed," said Leonore proudly.

Her father and sisters thought the villa with its luxurious, well-kept surroundings, met her every aspiration; they liked it very well themselves as a *pied-à-terre*,—and though of course the grounds might have been more extensive, and the smoke of tall chimneys farther off, the general was remarkably sensible on the point. "Land is valuable hereabouts, and a man must live where he can keep an eye on his business."

"And our horses can go almost any distance;" Leonore was always anxious to impress this point. "We have lovely drives round by the Dee; you would almost think you were in the real country there."

"Quite so, my dear," her father would respond urbanely.

In his heart he spurned the idea. Country? Up went his chin, God bless his soul, the whole locality stank of docks and offices. The array of dogcarts daily drawn up outside the little station, in punctual awaiting of the five o'clock train, betrayed the business atmosphere. As Leonore did not see it, well, well. Nay, all the better–

"Don't, for Heaven's sake, any of you unsettle her," ordered he, aside. "She's in precious snug quarters, and has the wit to know it."

But now a strange and hitherto stifled sensation was stealing dimly into Leo's breast. How blue the mists were, how noble that range of forest in the distance—how broad and lonely and inviting that straight road with only a solitary cart upon it! There was the old red-roofed homestead she remembered so well at this point. There were the huge ricks and ample outbuildings. There were the smoking teams being unharnessed from the plough.

It seemed to her that she had seen them there often and often before, doing the same—and as the thought arose, another followed; of course they were; it was at this hour, by the self-same train, that she and Godfrey had always passed that way.

And she had always selected the same corner seat in the train, and gazed from the window—Godfrey being immersed in his paper, and indifferent to the view. At the thought of Godfrey she caught her breath and sighed,—but after a while the past drifted again into the present.

Who would come to meet her? She had half expected an escort all the way, and been relieved when none was proposed, for to talk would have been an effort,—but of course one or perhaps two sisters would be on the platform when she stepped out? Or perhaps her father—she shrank with a sudden qualm.

Not that she was precisely afraid of the general; he was too uniformly urbane and approving towards herself for that,—but was it possible that he was never quite natural? Had she not invariably the feeling of being treated by him as *company*? As some one towards whom he was bound to be agreeable and jocular? The quick, terse reply, and the occasional frowning undertone—the family undertone—were not for her, any more than for Godfrey; and whereas every one else in the house was liable to be snapped up and made to understand that an opinion was of no account, she, Leo, the youngest and presumably most insignificant of General Boldero's offspring, might say what she chose, unchecked.

It had all been pleasant enough, only—only now—now she would as soon not see a certain grey wide-awake upon the platform; she would hardly know what to say; and—and there it was!

There it was, but luckily not alone, indeed surrounded by quite a crowd of familiar faces, and the awkward moment—for the moment was awkward, far, far more so than Leonore suspected—was tided over by its publicity.

Every one had been told beforehand what took the general to the station on the occasion.

In the interval which had elapsed between the present moment and his reluctant tender of the shelter of his hearth towards his unfortunate daughter, he had had time to think. Since he must have her and there was no help for it, he would brave out the situation. His neighbours were not in the least likely to have heard anything of Godfrey Stubbs' affairs, which had never got into the papers and which he himself only knew of by personal communication. They could still be made to believe in the wealth of his late son-in-law; and by his continued deference towards Godfrey's memory and Godfrey's widow, he would still be envied and applauded for the match whose advantages he had so assiduously vaunted. It would be intolerable to have the truth known, wherefore the truth should not be known.

"She must understand to hold her tongue, and do you all of you hold yours," he ordered. "No whining, and whispering; no being wheedled out of confidences by impertinent people who make a show of sympathy, while in reality there isn't one among 'em who wouldn't lick his lips over our discomfiture if it were known. What? *That's* easy enough. She comes to live with us because she can't live alone; too young and—and helpless. It wouldn't be a bad tip—that's to say, if people choose to think that Leonore hasn't the head to manage her money-matters, and that big investments require a lot of looking after, let 'em. *We* needn't enlighten them. Let the poor child have any prestige she can get that way. After all, what she has or what she hasn't is nobody's business but her own—and ours; so mind you what I say, I'll have no talk set agoing, and if I find any of you–" and it was all about to begin again when Sue interposed:—

"Of course we shall say nothing to vex you, father".

"*You* won't, I daresay, but," and he threw a glance at the other two, "those feather-brained creatures–"

"Oh, we're all right." Sybil nodded gaily. "We don't want to give the show away any more than you do. And it will be rather fun to mystify the neighbourhood, and have the men coming fortune-hunting after a bit–"

"What?" thundered the general, aghast.

"They will, oh, yes, they will. Leo will look uncommonly pretty and pathetic as the rich young widow, and I don't suppose she will be inconsolable–"

"And you mean—God bless my soul!" But though General Boldero rolled his eyes, and kept up his high tone of indignant amazement, the speaker did not feel snubbed as she might have done.

"We shall have all the impecunious youths–"

"That we shan't." A relapse to fierceness.

Sybil laughed. "'Trying it on,' was all I was going to say, sir. Any one who knows *you* wouldn't back them for a brass farthing." There was a touch of bitterness in the last words which called forth a "Pshaw!" from the general's lips. He knew, as they all did, to what the sneer referred, and Sue, as usual, made haste to avert an explosion.

"I don't think we need fear that Leo will be in any hurry to marry again; she was very fond of poor Godfrey–"

"Then she must keep up appearances for his sake," struck in her father eagerly. "Tell her it's for *his* sake, mind; and see that she does it. As for that nonsense of Sybil's–" and he enlarged till he had worn out the subject.

When he left the room, the girls looked at each other. "He doesn't know Leo," said Maud at last. She was always the last to speak, it was the easiest way; Syb could rattle, and sometimes rattle

did well enough with a parent who as has been said could be managed when not openly contradicted, but she preferred silence and apparent submission. She could, however, emit a sentiment when alone with her sisters. "He won't find it as easy as he thinks to get Leo to pretend. She was always a truthful little thing."

"At the same time, it is her duty to obey our father's wishes," quoth Miss Boldero gently. "And one cannot wonder that he should dislike to have her unfortunate circumstances known."

"Meaning that she is as poor as a rat, Madam Grandiloquence. Ah, well, *I* don't mind. Didn't I say it would be fun to take in everybody?—and as *I* am not particularly truthful," laughed Sybil, "I'll play any part the old gentleman chooses, with all the pleasure in life. Maud, if I catch you tripping, I'll tread on your toes till you squeak. It is understood that our poor dear bereaved one—eh, Sue? that's the style, isn't it?—that she only comes to us because she needs the paternal advice for her oceans of money, and the paternal arm to prevent its being grabbed by needy adventurers. Again I say, what fun!"

But she had not grasped, nor had any of them, what was in General Boldero's mind.

He rather overdid his part presently on the station platform. He had elected to go alone, and have out the big carriage. He had given orders loudly for it and the luggage cart,—and so entirely was he engrossed in his own view of the subject, that the sight of a pale little face, with heavy eyes, and quivering lips, irritated him. "They'll see through her like a shot," he muttered to himself. "Why on earth need she—by George! I had forgotten though–" for he had actually forgotten that only a bare three weeks had elapsed since Godfrey's death.

Instantly his countenance changed. A mournful air was *de rigueur*, he must be tenderly and sympathetically sad, while yet respectful. He was aware of having been a little too talkative before, and of having given brisk and cheerful greetings to acquaintances whom he had informed of his errand. Hang it all, he wished he had thought of that sooner; and he now bent over the little black-gloved hand with his best air, hoping that he was watched. If he had been accused of any lack of feeling—he patted the hand, and tucked it within his arm.

And he noted with satisfaction the splendid furs, and handsome travelling bag, and all the paraphernalia which still clung to poor Leo and gave her the appearance of a princess.

Mr. Jonas had smiled grimly when asked about this,—but he had given such a decided opinion, and that in so kind a tone, for he was pleased and touched—that the little girl had thankfully received his word as law, and her personal possessions were intact.

In consequence, she had to apologise for the amount of her luggage.

"The more the better, my dear," said the general, graciously,—and everyone within hearing distance was edified by his directions freely delivered anent portmanteaux and dress-baskets. If there were too many for the cart, some of the smaller things could be put on the carriage box. William could walk. They could take a few light articles inside. Leo felt again the old feeling of being treated as *company*, but it took off the edge of a trying moment, and she was glad of anything that did that.

"Ahem, my dear!" The carriage door was shut, and the general opened his lips.

"Yes, father?"

"There were several kind friends looking on just now, whom I daresay you did not see. You did very well; there was no occasion for you to notice them. And in your place, I may add, I should not bother about seeing people—quite so, quite so—you were not thinking of such a thing, of course not,—you will just keep quiet, and let us say what has to be said. What I mean is," as he caught a bewildered look, "money matters are not in your line, and at such a time as this less than ever. Don't mention them. Don't know anything about them. *I* will tell people all they need to know–"

"But—but do they need to know at all?"

"Certainly not," said General Boldero, promptly. No answer could have pleased him better. "They see you return, very properly, to the home of your childhood, where in future I shall provide

for you," he gulped in his throat, and drew the rug further over his knees, but continued; "so that it is nobody's business how you are left by—by your husband."

"Godfrey never knew," murmured she.

"Ahem!" escaped the general.

"Mr. Jonas is afraid he had some anxiety," continued Leonore, bravely; "but he had told some one only the day before—before he died, that he hoped things were going to pull round all right."

"They all think that. But," proceeded her father, curbing the momentary snap, "we need not distress ourselves by entering into details about which I am as ignorant as you. I never thought a business man *could*—however, leave it. What we have to do is to bolster up his memory, to prevent nasty things being said of him—in short, to keep our neighbours in the dark as to the real state of affairs, for if they knew, they would certainly think it disgraceful."

The word was out and he felt the better for it.

Leonore started, and held her breath.

"Aye, disgraceful," resumed her father with increasing emphasis. "I fear I must say it, and there's not a person who if he knew all that I know, would not join me in saying it. But Godfrey Stubbs was your husband, and–"

"And they shan't dare to speak a word against him—oh, they shan't—they shall not,"—with a face of fire she turned towards him, "and, father, you can't and you mustn't, either; Godfrey–" but she could speak no more for sobbing.

"You shall protect his memory, Leonore."

And when the carriage drew up beneath the Abbey portico, General Boldero felt that he had accomplished the object for which he had met his daughter, and met her alone.

CHAPTER III.
SPECULATIONS

"I saw old Brown-boots Boldero at the station to-day," quoth Dr. Humphrey Craig, the doctor of the neighbourhood, as he shook himself out of his greatcoat and wiped the October mist from his beard, within the hall of his comfortable house. "Spick and span as usual, and boots as glossy as if there were no such things as muddy lanes in the world. To be sure he had his carriage to-day, though."

"His carriage?" The doctor's cheerful little wife was at once all interest; something in her husband's tone awakened interest.

"He was bringing home that poor girl of his."

"Leonore? Did you speak to them?"

"To him—not to her. We had to stand together on the platform, but I sheered off directly the train came in. He had told me what he was there for."

"But you saw Leonore arrive?"

"I saw her, yes,—poor black little thing. There seemed nothing of her at all beneath her widow's trappings. Handsome trappings they were too; the furs of a millionairess."

"Did she look–?"

"Rather miserable and frightened. Scared at seeing her father, I daresay. Bland and civil as the old ruffian is, every one knows how the girls quake before him. There he was, doing the polite, footman in attendance, big carriage outside—all to be taken note of as evidence that Mrs. Godfrey Stubbs was worth it."

"You are always down on that poor old man."

"Can't help it. I hate him."

"I do think you might give him credit for some fatherly feeling."

"I don't—not a ha'porth. Fatherly feeling? Bless my soul, I can never forget his face at the time of the marriage; it was simply bursting with greedy exultation, and at what? At getting rid of the poor child to such a high bidder. Stubbs wasn't a bad fellow, but it would have been all the same if he had been. Leonore was chucked at his head–"

"Hush—hush!"—Mrs. Craig, with a look of alarm, pointed to the green baize door which shut off the back regions. "You really should be more careful, dear; you can be heard in the kitchen, when you speak so loud."

"Don't care if I am. They know all about it;" but as the doctor had by this time divested himself of his outer garments, and extracted the contents of their various pockets, he suffered himself to be drawn into a side room, his own sanctum, still talking. "Marriages like that are the very deuce, and the law should forbid them."

"Plenty of girls do marry at eighteen," demurred she.

"Plenty of follies are committed,"—but the gruff voice got no further.

"Come, come, old bear, *I* am not the person to be growled at; *I* wasn't eighteen when I married you; that's to say, ha—ha—ha!—that's funny,—" and the brisk little woman, who had a sense of humour, laughed heartily. "You don't see? It sounded as if I were younger still,—well, never mind. You have had a horrid day, I know; comfort your poor soul,"—and with the words the wearied man was gently pushed down into his own armchair, that roomy bed of luxury into which he nightly sank when the labours of the day were over. When late like this, he had dined elsewhere, where and when he could.

And next the mistress of the house cast around her eagle eye. She was a born housewife, and particular about all her domain, but woe betide the servant who scamped her work in this room. Mary Craig had what might be called a convincing demeanour when she chose.

And she had not had a moment to run in and see that all was right on the present occasion; and the night was dark and chill, and her husband later than usual, having been far afield on his rounds,—it was just like Eliza to be careless—but Eliza had not been careless.

All was as it should be; a pleasant warmth was diffused throughout the whole snug apartment by a fire which had been lit in time, and was now a mass of glowing coals; the hearth glittered, the curtains were properly drawn, the lamp properly trimmed, and books and papers neatly piled upon the various tables. She had not even to fetch the favourite pipe of the moment, as it and a couple of matchboxes lay handy at the doctor's elbow.

"Eliza's conception of her part," nodded Eliza's mistress, pleasantly familiar with current quotations. "As she forgot a matchbox yesterday, she puts two to-day."

"And that with a fire big enough to roast an ox!" grunted the doctor, scornfully ignoring the extra contribution, and tearing off a strip from the envelope in his hand. "Wasteful hussy—like all the rest of you;" but when he had lit up, and thrown the burning end of paper into the fender, where it was suffered to expire without a motion on his wife's part, he leaned back and his hand stole along the arm of the chair till it found quite naturally another hand, and a round, warm cheek, a dear little cheek, lay presently upon both. For a few minutes neither spoke again.

Then Mary looked up. "Very tired to-night, Humpty?"

Oh, if the patients who thought such worlds of their grim, overbearing Scotch doctor, and the nurses who trembled before him at the county infirmary, could have heard him called "Humpty"!—but to do so they must also have beheld the softening brow, the relaxing of the stern lips, the gradual light which crept into the piercing eyes—and only one person was ever suffered to behold these. Her tender accents unveiled what was hidden from the world.

"Tired, darling?"

"Well, may-be." Humpty made an effort and roused himself. "Perhaps I am, a bit. Those idiots at the infirmary let me in for a lot more trouble than I need have had,—but I daresay it will work out all right. I'm worried about a new case, too,—however, no shop. Let's gossip.—What have you been about?"

To meet this invariable question was part of her daily business, and however trifling the happenings of morning and afternoon might be, they were taxed to yield something whereby Humpty might be beguiled from his own thoughts.

To-night, however, was an unlucky night, she had only such very small beer to chronicle that he soon fell back upon them, and they comprised the return of General Boldero's widowed daughter, and her probable future under his roof.

"She won't have a gay time of it—at least she would not, if she had come empty-handed,—perhaps as things are, it may be different."

"You forget, Humpty, that he always made a fuss about Leonore."

"I don't forget;" the doctor shook his head; "but I remember other things as well. It's all very well to try to whitewash that old sinner, but you don't know human nature as I do, my bairn. For that matter, I am not the only one to say nasty things of old Brown-boots. It is common talk that for all his posing as the genial squire and jolly paterfamilias, Brown-boots is as mean a skunk as breathes."

"I know he is rather a martinet at home, but–"

"But what?" He protruded his head eagerly, scenting something in her hesitation.

"The fault is not all on his side. Sue is straight: she is perfectly straight–"

"Oh, aye; we know old Sue, dull as ditch-water, but honest. Well?"

"The other two are just a little—sly."

"Sly? You don't say so? I hadn't thought of that. I daresay they are, I quite believe they are. Sly? And from *you*? Bless my life, they must be sly indeed for *you* to say so!" And he chuckled with keen enjoyment.

"What I mean is that they have no sense of duty. They simply pretend to give in to their father —and of course they are afraid of him—but behind his back it is a very different story. I don't like to say so, but it's true."

"Serves him right, the old tom-cat. I only wish they snapped their fingers in his face."

"No, no, Humpty–"

"But I do. However, I daresay they prefer a quiet life; and as for Leonore, I do wonder how Leonore will get on?"—and he puffed a long breath of smoke and looked down at his wife's upturned face. "If you should ever have a chance of doing Leonore Stubbs a good turn, do it. She'll need it," he prophesied.

The return of Leonore was the event of the neighbourhood. Others besides Dr. Craig had seen General Boldero's carriage, with its glittering harness and champing horses, in waiting at the station; and it was noticed that not merely its presence but that of the general himself on the occasion, was designed to give the young widow importance in the public eye. The Reverend Eustace Custance, the rector, and very much the rector, had both seen and understood.

Eustace was one of the excellent of the earth. His spare frame, long neck, and hanging head were to be seen year in year out entering familiarly every door in his parish,—entering with a friend's step, and departing with a note-book, well-worn and blessed by not a few, in his hand.

There were some among his richer parishioners who voted their clergyman a bore, but he was never so thought of by the poor. Their wants, their cares, their welfare was the burden of his thoughts —and we know that such a burden is not always a welcome guest in the seats of the mighty. General Boldero, for instance, would raise a curt hand to his hat, and mutter something about being in haste, if he chanced upon the rector on the road,—if possible, he would scuffle out of the way. "I never see that man but he has a subscription list in his hand," he would fretfully exclaim,—and though it did not suit his dignity to ignore the list, he would have disliked the person whose fingers thus found their way into his pocket, if it had been possible. Since it was not possible, he yielded a cold esteem, and secretly wondered why so worthy a recipient for promotion did not obtain it.

On the present occasion, however, Mr. Custance did not cross his neighbour's path; voluntarily he never did so, and he had, as it happened, no very pressing case demanding assistance on hand at the moment.

Wherefore, he only blinked his mild blue eyes as the handsome turn-out, designed to edify all beholders, thundered past him on the station road, and recalled what his sister had told him about the Bolderos that morning at breakfast. Emily was his purveyor of news, and his fondness for her made him often affect an interest in it which he did not feel. It might be an effort to say "Ah! Indeed?" and follow on with a proper question or comment when his thoughts were wandering; but he never failed to try, and from trying faithfully for many years, he had finally attained some measure of success.

Occasionally, also, Emily's chit-chat bore fruit; the good man had the scent of a sleuth-hound for any event which bore, however remotely, on his life's object; and though he might now have been secretly amused by his sister's excitement over what to him was a very ordinary circumstance, a single remark in connection with it arrested his coffee-cup on its way to his lips.

"To be sure I had forgotten that," he murmured.

"Forgotten that Leonore made a wealthy marriage, my dear Eustace? Why, it is only three years ago, and we were all full of it."

"Then I suppose she–" he paused and mused.

"You may be sure she brings back her money with her," nodded Emily cheerfully. "Poor dear child, it's all she has left. So sad to be widowed so young, is it not? I don't think you seem quite to take in how sad it is, Eustace," and she cast a gentle look of reproach.

The rector put down his cup and stirred its contents thoughtfully, debating the question within himself. He was so accustomed to sad cases that perhaps—well, perhaps it was as she said: certainly it had not occurred to him to bestow the same pity on a young girl, bereaved indeed, but with a good

home to come back to, as he did on Peggy, the ploughman's wife, for instance—that valiant Peggy who, with her ten children, was suddenly reduced from comparative affluence to naked poverty, by the death of the bread-winner of the family.

Peggy was getting on in years, and her strength was not what it had been. She had toiled and moiled, and brought up her boys and girls in a way that won her pastor's heart. His smile would be its kindest, his shake of the hand its heartiest when he entered the ploughman's hut; and there were others;—there was the case of Widow Barnaby whose only son had just returned upon her hands, maimed for life, after starting out into the world a fine, strapping youngster, the best lad in the village, only a year before! No, he had not classed the calamity which had befallen pretty little Leonore Boldero as on a plane with these.

But perhaps he was wrong, he was growing hard-hearted? Contact with the very poor, and with material misery, was apt to blunt sympathy with sorrows of another nature. "I daresay you are right, Emily," he said candidly; for once convicted, no one was swifter to acknowledge a fault. "I had not looked upon it in that light. Yes, it is certainly very sad about Leonore, poor thing."

"People say it is a blessing she does not come back poor and dependent;" thus encouraged, Emily proceeded with gusto, "for we all know the general."

"Aye, that we do. So Leonore is rich?" and he obviously pondered on the idea.

"My dear brother," Emily laughed, but the laugh was full of affection, "now what is to come first? The Christmas coals, or the Old Folks' Dinner, or–?"

"Peggy Farmiloe," said he, succinctly. "Her needs at the present time are paramount. The rest can wait."

"So you will call on Leonore?"

"I shall make a point of doing so—presently."

"You will have to get at her when she is alone, you know. It would be no good making it a topic of general conversation."

"I shall be as wise as the serpent, Emily," the good man permitted himself an appreciative sally. "Perhaps I shall not even introduce the subject at all on a first call, eh? It might not be in good taste—not that one should heed that. But if my clumsiness were to prejudice the cause—oh, I must certainly beware of clumsiness. Let me see, to-day is Thursday," and out came the note-book; and after due consideration Monday was fixed upon, whereupon Mr. Custance rose briskly.

"You may depend upon it, I shall go to the Abbey on Monday. And if this poor little widow's heart is in the right place–" a glance shot from his eye.

He foresaw sacks of coal and piles of blankets. He fed and he clothed. He distributed the older Farmiloe orphans hither and thither, and gathered the little ones together under his wing, which, weak before, would now be strong to shelter and support. The Barnaby lad should have better nursing and an easier couch. There was the old couple at the disused toll-gate too. It was a blissful dream; and it is sad to think—but we will not anticipate.

At Claymount Hall, the theme was treated from another point of view. Here dwelt a very fine old lady with a youthful grandson, of whom it may be briefly said that the neighbourhood thought Valentine Purcell a fool, and that Val himself was very much of its opinion.

"*She's* clever enough for two though, ain't she?" opined he,—and on this point it was the neighbourhood who endorsed his opinion.

The pair were an unfailing source of interest and amusement. Mrs. Purcell's latest word and Val's latest deed invariably went the round, and to their house as a centre every fresh topic made its way.

It was there, we may observe, that the doctor's wife had met the Boldero girls and heard about Leonore, and it might be added that it was there also the Reverend Eustace Custance gained the like intelligence. Let us hear how it was taken by the Purcells themselves.

Val, as usual, grinned from ear to ear, and had nothing to say—but his grandmother had plenty, and directly her guests had departed she summoned the young man to her side.

"What is this I hear about the Bolderos?"

This was Mrs. Purcell's little way of finding out what others had heard. It is true that she was slightly deaf as she was partially blind,—but she heard a great deal more and saw a vast deal further than most of her neighbours, and Val was never in the least taken in by a parade of infirmities. On the present occasion he simply waited for the speaker to proceed.

"Did those girls say their sister was coming back to live with them? I thought they did—but you know how badly I hear, especially if there is a hubbub going on. Were they expecting her to-day? And had their father gone to meet her, and was that why they had to hurry off, so as to be back at home before the carriage returned? I thought so, but those girls gabble like ducks. Eh? I was right then? And this is the end of poor little Leonore's great marriage? At twenty-one she is left a widow, with too much money to know what to do with—what? What did you say?"

"Didn't say anything, ma'am."

"But it *is* so, is it not? I am sure I heard Maud telling you–?" and Mrs. Purcell paused and peered sharply.

"*I* didn't, then. But I knew you would tell me afterwards if there was anything to tell."

"Humph!" The old lady paused again, and twisted her cap strings. Val was gazing stupidly out of the window, but whatever the expression of his face might be no one could deny that the face itself was worthy of notice. It was an almost perfect outline which was now cut sharp against the light, the unusually bright light of an autumn sun, setting in a cloudless sky.

Val was looking at the sun, and wondering if a slight haze surrounding it portended rain. He was learned in weather lore and most of his life was passed out of doors,—so that it was important to him to ascertain if he could, the forecast of each day. It meant whether he might expect a hunting, or a shooting, or a fishing day. This was infinitely more interesting than the conversation, though he was always ready for conversation if nothing better offered.

"Humph!" muttered his grandmother a second time, and stole a glance, a long, furtive, appraising glance—not at the sunset, but at the profile which it threw into such bold relief.

Apparently it satisfied her, for her own features relaxed, and her eyes sought the floor in meditation.

("She might be caught by his looks, why not? The other two are always glad to talk to Val, and Heaven knows it is not for anything he says. He contrives to make them laugh—he has a kind of oddity that goes down—but if he were an ugly fellow they would not trouble their heads about that. Now, if Leonore–she is but a child still, and as she could marry a man called Stubbs to begin with, she can't be particular. Anyhow it is worth trying for.")

"Val?"—suddenly the peremptory old voice rang out.

Val yawned and turned round.

"I am so sorry for dear little Leonore, I can't get her out of my head."

"Well, I'm sorry too." With an effort Val recalled what he had to be sorry for, but that done, he assumed a solemn air that did him credit—and indeed we are wrong in using the word "assumed," since directly he remembered or reflected upon the woes of others, Valentine Purcell's kind heart was touched.

"I'm awfully sorry," he reiterated now, shaking his head.

"It is so sad for her, is it not?"

"Awfully sad; I say, do you think she'd join the hunt?" Suddenly his eyes lit up, and he started to attention. "We do want some more subscribers jolly badly. If Leonore–"

"Not just at present, my dear,—but, yes, certainly, by-and-by, when she has settled down here, and left off her weeds."

"Her what?" he stared.

"Her widow's weeds, dear boy. The poor child must wear them, you know. White collars and cuffs, and that kind of thing. Happily she need not disfigure her sweet face by a frightful cap as *I* had to do."

"Oh, Lor! Do you mean Leo will have to turn out in a thing like that?"

"My dear, I just said she would *not*."

"But she might, he-he-he!" he chuckled, but the next moment was again preternaturally grave. "I had no idea. Poor Leo!"

This was better. The old lady sighed sympathetically. "Yes, indeed. Poor Leo! You always liked Leo, Val?"

"Rather. I can't imagine her in a beastly widow's cap, he-he-he! It's a beastly shame, but I can't help laughing."

"It does seem incongruous. I don't wonder that you can hardly picture that bright little sunbeam of a face with those golden curls hanging round it–"

"She's not as good-looking as Maud, you know."

"Indeed I think she is a great deal better looking," said Mrs. Purcell, shortly.

But she knew better than to argue the point, and resorted to one more likely to yield a favourable result.

"You were talking about Leonore's joining the hunt; and I fancy if you are content to wait a little and approach the matter delicately, she is quite likely to be persuaded. Every one knows that it is only stinginess on General Boldero's part which stands in the way of his daughters' hunting. *That* need not affect Leonore, who will now be quite independent, and can keep as many horses as she chooses."

"You don't say so? Yoicks! I'll be at her like a shot."

"And you can offer to pilot her, you know. She will be nervous at first."

"Oh, I'll pilot her. But she can ride all right, for we used to have great larks when they were out on their ponies, and Leo was always the best of the bunch. It will be fun if I can get her to follow hounds, and the hunt will be awfully obliged to me."

"Don't let any one else—it is your idea, and you ought to have the benefit of it."

"Trust me for that, ma'am," looking very wise. "I've never brought them a subscriber yet, and it would be jolly mean of any one to try to cut me out."

"If it is suggested, you must pooh-pooh the notion."

"How can I though, when I'm thinking of it all the time myself?"

"Leonore might be prevailed upon by *you*, by an old friend for whom she has a kindly feeling, and on whose judgment she could rely," replied Mrs. Purcell, softly; "while at the same time she would not think nor dream of such a thing if left to herself. And certainly she would resent being approached on the subject by strangers. Therefore it would be quite correct, absolutely correct, to say that no such approach would have a chance of success. You see that, my dear boy?"

He was further instructed that, in order to prepare the ground for his future mission, he was to take an early opportunity of calling at the Abbey, and of being especially respectful and sympathetic in his manner towards poor dear little Leo.

He was to show that as an old friend and playmate he felt for her; and he might, if he saw his way to it, intimate delicately that though he might grieve on her account at her return to dwell among them, he could not do so on his own.

"Well, I can say that, you know," Val brightened up. He did not much like being on the respectful and sympathetic lay, he told himself; he was pretty sure to make a mess of it there;—but if it came to saying he was glad–

"You can't *say* such a thing, my dear, you can only infer it. You can look it; look kind and—and tender."

"And jolly well show old Maud she needn't book me too sure as her man, eh?"

At last he seemed to have caught up what she was struggling against heavy odds to inculcate. It was up-hill work teaching Val anything, especially anything requiring *finesse*—but occasionally he would startle his mentor. He would emit a flash of intelligence when such was least expected, and there was now such a humorous light in his grey eyes that the old lady laughed in her heart. Dear, dear—how naughty he was! So he had the vanity to suppose that Maud Boldero reckoned him an admirer?

Whereat Val complacently knew she did.

By degrees he was led to reveal all his artless thoughts upon the subject, and somehow found it more engrossing than he had ever done before.

In truth, his grandmother had never encouraged mention of it before. She had ignored the Boldero girls when she could, and bracketed them together in faint, damning praise when to ignore was impossible. She knew exactly how to treat Val. An incipient flame could be warmed, cooled, or blown out by her breath—and as hitherto she had had no intention of receiving a daughter-in-law out of Boldero Abbey, she had simply never permitted a spark to be lit.

Here, in justice to the old lady, a solitary fact must be stated. Her grandson was not her heir, and the Claymount estate, of which she had a life rent, was strictly entailed; wherefore Val must be provided for otherwise.

A woman of another sort would have attained this end by saving out of her income, or by insuring her life—but Mrs. Purcell argued that she had so much to keep up, and Valentine's requirements were so manifold and costly that she could neither put by anything worth having, nor afford the heavy premiums an Insurance Office would demand at her age. She had not taken the matter into consideration till too late.

And the boy had been bred to no profession—indeed his grandmother secretly doubted his ability to pursue one—and she had been only too glad of the excuse to have him as her companion at Claymount. He had a pittance of his own, derived from his parents who were both dead,—but he had nothing further to look to, as his uncle, who in the course of time would succeed to the estate, openly flouted him for a "loafer," and made no secret of his opinion that the money spent on his hunters and keepers would have been better bestowed upon almost anything else.

What then was to become of Val—Val, who was the apple of her eye, whose very childishness and helplessness were dear to her, whose beauty of face and form—stop, she had it, she laughed as she told herself she had it. And how often she strained those dim old eyes of hers to see more clearly when her darling's step was heard, and how fondly they rested on the approaching figure and strove to appraise at its exact value the curiously beautiful face, no one but herself knew.

It was a face without a soul—and she was pathetically aware of this, but what then? Val would make a good husband—he would certainly make a good husband. Husbands were not required to be clever; and it was quite on the cards that even an intelligent girl might fall in love with a man who had only a kind heart and an amiable disposition to recommend him, provided his exterior were to her fancy.

But of course the girl must be rich; and now we come to the crux of the whole little scene above narrated—Leonore Stubbs, the wealthy young widow, with no ties, no drawbacks, and not too much discrimination (or she could not have married as she did in the first instance), was the very first person to solve the problem. In her own mind Mrs. Purcell decided that her grandson should call at Boldero Abbey the very first moment that decency permitted.

There is no need to multiply instances, it will now be perceived that in no quarter was the real secret of the unfortunate Leonore's return to the home of her childhood so much as suspected.

She was a pauper—but she was received as a princess. She had hardly a penny of her own—but she was marked down as a benefactress. She was bereft, denuded, bewildered, humiliated—but she was hailed with acclaim by the shrewdest woman in the neighbourhood on the look-out for an heiress.

CHAPTER IV.
A DULL BREAKFAST-TABLE

To her surprise, Leonore slept soon and soundly on her first night in the vast, gloomy bedchamber wherein it was her father's pleasure that she should be installed.

She had not expected to do so.

The room was known as the "Blue Room"; but years had faded the blue, which now only stood out with any clearness in creases of the curtains, or remote patches of carpet on which the light never fell. Otherwise a dull grey prevailed.

Nevertheless Leo had been fond of the "Blue Room" in early days; revelling in its mysterious depths, hiding in its capacious hiding-holes, and, finest fun of all, making hay in its huge four-poster with some little friend of her own age. It was an apartment so seldom used, and its furniture was so shabby and out-of-date, that Sue would readily accede to the little girls' petition to be despatched thither—only exacting a promise that there should be no climbing of window-sills, which promise had been broken, and confessed honourably—whereupon Sue, who was herself a woman of honour, never once mentioned window-sills again. The windows, deepset and high up in the wall, with broad sills inviting to perch upon, only existed as roofs for the cupboards beneath, once Leo had succumbed to temptation and gone unpunished. "No, dear, there is no need for any more punishment," Sue had said in her kindest accents,—and when Sue spoke like that, the little saucy upstart Leonore, whom usually nothing could repress, would be good for days.

Consequently the apartment had its associations; and under other circumstances its new occupant would have found it pleasant enough to look upon it as her own. But weary and dejected, with all the world in shadow around her, it is scarcely to be wondered at that she should shrink into herself, and look piteously up into Sue's face, as Sue turned the handle of the door.

"Am I—am I to be here, Sue?"

"Father says so, dear."

"But, Sue, couldn't I—some little room—?"

"Oh, I think you will be very comfortable here, Leo; you will have plenty of space for your belongings," she glanced at the array of trunks,—"and you can always remain in undisturbed possession," summed up Sue cheerfully. "The other spare rooms–"

"I never thought of *them*. My own little old room–" faltered Leo.

She had settled this with herself beforehand. Although it was on the top storey, and in a somewhat despised quarter, she had loved her small domain because it was hers and she might pull it about as she chose,—most girls feel the same, and Leo was a very girl, and youthful instincts were warm within her.

Sue, however, had received her orders on the point, and though they were distasteful, she recognised in them an element of reasonableness.

"I am sorry, dear, but that would never do. You know what father's wishes are. That you should be given a dignified position in the family; and—and I think he explained why. He had thought the matter carefully out before he fixed on this room for you. He does not like to be argued with, Leo."

Leo resigned herself. She knew the tone of old, it conveyed, "I am sorry, but I shall be firm"—it was the formal, precise, elder sister, the general's mouthpiece, not the good, old, motherly Sue, who spoke. Further resistance would be useless.

And now, alone, sitting on the great square sofa, with great square chairs and massive receptacles on every side, the forlorn little figure gazed about her with a heart that sank lower and lower. She was to occupy a "dignified position in the family"? Did that mean that she was still to be treated ceremoniously as in Godfrey's life-time? That she was still to have that uneasy sense of being

company which had then haunted her? Sue alone had led the way to her new abode—Maud and Sybil having vanished elsewhere—and this in itself forboded ill. She sat motionless, pondering.

In childhood the gap between herself and her elders had always been too wide to be bridged even at its nearest point, which was Sybil—but she had looked to her marriage hopefully. Then somehow, she could never quite tell how, but although she could manage to play the hostess to her sisters on apparently equal terms at Deeside, the old position remained intact at Boldero Abbey. For all her gay outward bearing, Leo was of a sensitive nature, and the girls—to herself she always called them "the girls"—had only to take a matter for granted, for her to follow their lead.

So that while it would have been joy untold to perceive the barriers withdrawn, and to have been allowed to run in and out of Maud's room and Sybil's room—she did not covet Sue's—in dressing-gown and slippers, to have brushed her hair of nights along with them and talked the talk that goes with that time-honoured procedure, Mrs. Godfrey Stubbs had no more been accorded this privilege, for which she had hungered ever since she could remember, than the little out-cast Leonore had been. Indeed, she was kept even more steadily at bay—and we will for a moment lift the veil for our readers and disclose why.

"It *isn't* unkind," quoth Maud, on one occasion. "I wouldn't be unkind for worlds, but it simply can't be done. Leo is no longer one of us; she belongs to the Stubby people among whom she lives, —and if we were to begin talking about them, we couldn't help letting out what we think—at least, perhaps I could, but you couldn't." It was to Syb she spoke, and Syb lifted her eyebrows.

"I daresay; I can't see any harm if I did. I should rather like to hear about the Stubby people and their queerities."

"Not from Leo's point of view. She would not see what you call their 'queerities'. She takes them all *au serieux*."

"Are you sure she does? She must see they are different from the people here, at all events; and–"

"How is she to see?" interrupted Maud quickly. "She never went anywhere before her marriage. She had only been to one ball, and a few cricket matches. Actually she had never once dined at a house in the neighbourhood."

"If she had, she might not have been so ready to take Godfrey. I couldn't have stood Godfrey as a husband myself, though I really don't mind him as a brother-in-law; and I think it a little hard that Leo should be tabooed."

"I tell you she isn't tabooed. It is for her own sake that it would be a pity her eyes should be opened. She has got to mix in inferior society, and why make her discontented with it?"

"All right, you needn't be excited. I am only rather sorry sometimes when the child looks disappointed.—I say, I do think father ought not to have been in such a hurry to marry her off," cried Sybil, with sudden energy. "I *do* think it. What good did it do? She's rich, and that's all—for I don't count Godfrey. I don't believe she cares for him more than she would for any other tolerably nice man who went for her as he did. I don't believe–"

"Bother what you believe!" Maud arrested the flow; "the thing is that we can't talk familiarly with Leo, as Leo now is. We can't let ourselves go. You must see this for yourself? Why, only to-night when she and Godfrey were so elated over the civility of their new 'Chairman,' and seemed to expect us all to be astonished and impressed, because he is such a bigwig and it was such a terrific condescension, I didn't dare to look at father. I knew the unutterable contempt that filled his soul. Condescension from an absolute nobody to one of us!"

"That's it. When you are at Deeside you are breathing a weird atmosphere, and Leo thrives in it. She knows all her neighbours, and expects you to know them. She took me once to an enormous reception at the opening of some building or other and it was beyond words—the most appalling women in the most appalling clothes—I told you about them—don't you remember the apple-green satin hat with six feathers? Well, I could hardly contain myself, but Leo saw nothing to laugh at. She

ran about all over the place, chattering to everybody, and could hardly be got away, she was enjoying herself so much."

"I don't blame her," said Maud indulgently. "I really don't blame her. How should she know any better, poor child?"

At the close of the discussion Leo's doom was sealed.

True, it was now reopened, and Maud conceded that by-and-by, perhaps, when by degrees the recalcitrant had been weaned from her ways, and taught to tread the paths of righteousness according to Boldero ideas, her case might be reconsidered,—but as, for decency's sake, the teaching could not be begun just yet, it was agreed that Leo should receive her lighted candle and good-night kiss in the hall, as before.

It was due to accident, however, not to design, that the sisters for whose fellowship our poor little heroine yearned, permitted her to be escorted by Sue only to take possession of her new domain. A milliner's box had arrived from London, and been brought up with Mrs. Stubbs' luggage. Leo could not compete with that box. It was all important that the new assortment of hats despatched by the Maison du Cram should be smarter and more becoming than the first batch which had been uncompromisingly rejected; and Maud, slipping out by one door, was quickly followed by Sybil through the other—whereupon Sue also rose, and said, "Come, Leo".

Here then was Leo, small, white-faced, black-robed, the most pitiable little object, almost a parody on the name of widow, dumped down in the "Blue Room" to rattle like a pea in a pod in its capacious depths.

She was indeed accustomed to a luxurious bedchamber, but then it was a different kind of bedchamber. At Deeside the morning sun poured in through large, single-paned windows, lightly curtained; and its rays were reflected by white woodwork clamped by shining brass, and wallpaper that glistened.

Into her new abode neither sun could enter, nor would have met with any response had it done so. She looked dolorously round and round, and tears stood in her eyes. Poor little girl, tears were never very far off in those days.

And she must have thus sat for some time, and perhaps dozed off for a minute or two, for a brisk tap at the door, and the bustling entrance of a housemaid, admitted also the sound of the dressing gong, and both seemed to follow close upon Sue's departing heels.

Dressing was an easy matter when there was no choice of attire and adornments, and Leo's curly hair only needed to be combed through to look as though it had been freshly arranged—so that though she had to open her trunks, and had a moment's flurry before she could be certain into which of these her solitary evening robe had been packed, she was ready and downstairs before any one else.

The evening was got through somehow, and then there was the return march through the long dim corridor to the antiquated apartment, and the conviction that she should never be able to sleep in it, and then—? No sooner had the weary little figure sunk down among the pillows and drawn up the coverlid, than the sound, sweet slumber of youth and innocence prevailed; and the mists were off the land and melting in the blue October sky, long before Leo unclosed her eyes. Eventually she was roused by the stable-clock striking eight beneath her window, and woke to find the night was gone.

Have we said that Leo had a happy disposition? She had not merely that, but a buoyant, recuperative, physical nature, which threw off every adverse circumstance as a foreign element.

Even an ailment could not make her ill, even misfortune could not make her miserable.

Experiencing either the one or the other she bent before it, but there was a fount of bubbling vitality within, which it was impossible wholly to repress.

So that when the little girl sat up in bed, and blinked her drowsy eyes—still drowsy for all the long hours of dreamless, healthy slumber—and when next she yawned and caught back a yawn in sudden recognition of a familiar object unobserved before—and when again she shook across her shoulders the thick plaits of hair on either side, and pulled out the crumpled lace upon her nightgown

cuffs, and finally jumped up and ran to look what the day was like, it was perhaps as well that nobody was there to spy upon the newly-made widow.

She actually laughed the next moment. Yes, she laughed as she sprang upon the erst forbidden window-sill, and out of pure daring sat there. Albeit a little creature, she was tall enough to have seen out without even rising on tip-toe,—it was the sheer pleasure of doing what no one could now stop her doing which prompted the action.

And then again she sighed. The immediate past rose before her, frowning, though the old past tittered. She hung her head, ashamed of her levity—and next her reflection in an opposite mirror kindled it afresh. How comical she looked perched aloft with bare feet hanging down, like a small white bird upon a rail! What a nice roost she had found—and it would be nicer still if she sat sideways, with her back to the shutters,—so, and her feet against the opposite shutters—so! The broad, smooth seat would be an ideal reading place for summer evenings, when the sun crept round to that side of the house, and began to descend, as she could remember it did, over the ridge of beech trees which belted the park below.

She could lock her door, of course. The room was her own, and even Sue could not expect to dominate over what went on within her own room. Besides—besides, she had almost forgotten that she was no longer under Sue's thrall, and that yesterday Sue had observed a gentle deference towards her.

That might pass—she hoped it would. If only she could be on the old terms,—and yet not on the old terms! If only she might be Leo, and yet not Leo! She tried to puzzle out the situation.

She knew indeed what she did not want, but could not define with any exactitude what she did. Three years of affluence and independence had to a certain extent left their mark, and she could not but own that it would be unpalateable to find herself again in leading-strings. At Deeside when a matter came under discussion, as often as not, Godfrey would say, "Please yourself, little wife,"—or, if not, the little wife was sure to be charmed with his decision. He was so much older and wiser, that whatever he decreed was safe to be satisfactory in the long run.

But her father and sisters would most certainly not make her pleasure their chief aim and object; consequently it was as well perhaps—a sigh of relief—that she could not be ordered about and have the law laid down to her as of yore.

And yet, even this would be better, infinitely better, than to be kept at arm's-length, and made to feel that she had neither part nor lot in the home life she had returned to share. For instance, if she were late for breakfast–What? What was that? The clock below was striking the half-hour, and precisely at nine the breakfast gong would sound—what had she been thinking of?

"I hope, Leonore, you will be more punctual in future," said General Boldero, as his youngest daughter took her seat at the table, and having thus delivered himself, he did not again address her throughout the remainder of the meal.

It might have been that he was taken up with his letters, of which he always made the most—handling the envelope even of an advertisement as though it were of importance—but Leo, sitting silent beside him, wished her place were a little farther off. She was conscious of a chill, and she had forgotten what a chill was like.

Her sisters talked among themselves, obviously indifferent to anything but their own concerns; and since it was apparent that the present social atmosphere was its normal one, she tried to think it had no reference to herself, and not to draw comparisons between it and that she had been of late accustomed to.

She and Godfrey had always enjoyed their breakfast-hour. It had often had to be hurried through, and the good things set before them unceremoniously bolted—but cheerfulness and good-humour made even that drawback endurable,—and after seeing her husband drive away from the door, Leo would return to fill her cup afresh, with a smile on her lips. She peeped round the table now, to see if there were a smile anywhere.

Sue looked worried and prim—the worst Sue. Miss Boldero never gave way to temper, indeed she had a creditably equable temper—but when things were not well with her she stiffened; she remained upon an altitude; she addressed her sisters by their full Christian names. Leo, who had been "Leo" on the previous evening, was now "Leonore".

"The girls" also had merely nodded as the small creature, looking almost irritatingly young and childish in her widow's garb, took her seat among them. Neither Maud nor Sybil looked young for their years, and perhaps unconsciously resented Leo's doing so, as accentuating a gap already wide enough.

Further, Leo looked her best in the clear morning light, while her sisters' complexions suffered. They would not have slept as profoundly as she, nor risen with such a spring of elasticity in their veins. They would not have the appetite for breakfast that made everything taste good. They were inclined to be "Chippy" with each other.

For Leo a new-born day was a day full of pleasant possibilities, and the less she knew about it the better. She rather preferred to have nothing arranged for; it left so much the more margin for something nice to happen. As for dullness, she did not know what the word meant.

For though our heroine's abilities were not of a high order, there were plenty of things she could do, and do well; and being by nature industrious and creative, she took much delight in small achievements. "Busy little woman!" Godfrey would exclaim, when one of these was submitted for his approval; and if his praise were at times lacking in discrimination, he was humble enough to satisfy any one's vanity when this was pointed out.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.