

plans; for however dark her designs, the little old lady's ways could never be other than open as the day.

"The only pleasure, after all, in the entire frankness which my mother advocated so warmly," said the Professor, "would be in venting one's dislikes."

"Pray don't," exclaimed the widow. "I have tried it." She laughed as at an amusing recollection, though something bright shone in her eyes. "It was at school," she went on. "I conceived a mortal dislike for the girl sitting before me. It must have been a spiritual aversion, since it was inexplicable. I bore it in secret awhile, then, rebelling against the deceit, confessed the whole to its object." She paused. Madame Pfeiffe looked up from her knitting.

"Well?" said the Professor. His eyes twinkled behind his glasses.

Mrs. Benchley laughed, though the brightness in her eyes shone like tears now.

"What do you think she replied?" and the widow raised a flushed, warm face, guileless as a child's in its sudden show of feeling. "She said she had always thought me a proud, disagreeable creature, and she knew many others among the girls who agreed with her in this opinion. And upon that she proceeded to call over the names of so many whom I had believed to be my friends, that I ran from her in tears and cried for a week afterwards."

A murmur of indignant sympathy, with a low laugh from the Professor, followed this recital. There was a sparkle of drops and jewels as the widow passed her hand quickly over her eyes. "How silly!" she exclaimed, smiling and blushing, and half turning from her small but interested audience. "For a moment the bitterness and mortification of that hour came back to me."

"Not silly at all, my dear," Madame Pfeiffe hastened to say. She was more than ever charmed with the woman who inadvertently displayed so great sensibility, and who had told her little story in such a pretty dramatic way.

The Professor beamed upon her from his kindly eyes. Even the sheltering glasses could not quite hide their sudden softening. "In fact it was a failure," he said.

"It was indeed," Mrs. Benchley rejoined, "a painful lesson. I have confessed only admiration since then. My aversions I overcome or hide from sight."

"But even these, to be thoroughly honest, would involve so many fine distinctions," laughed the Professor. "My dear sir, you would be obliged to say to one, 'I like you tolerably.' Think of the torment in that adverb! How it would haunt the poor fellow. For myself—But here the conversation ended abruptly. There had been a noiseless step upon the stairs, and suddenly, without warning, a little, white-clad figure—girl or woman?—stood upon the lowest step, glancing timidly, half-deprecatingly from one to another, as though she would apologize for the intrusion, or must wait at least for recognition before advancing.

"Amy! my dear child." And Madame Pfeiffe rose so hastily that the work in her hands fell to the floor, and the bright blue ball of worsted rolled away under the piano. She drew the little shrinking figure from its perch. "This is a dear little friend, Amy Frere," she said, pulling the girl forward by one little dark, trembling hand. "She came while we were at dinner, quite unexpectedly, but is none the less welcome," she hastened to add, giving the little old hand in hers a reassuring pressure. "We did not look for her till next week."

Mrs. Benchley, half rising, made a rather stately salutation, after her first start of surprise. "Are there any more to come?" she thought, glancing involuntarily into the upper regions of darkness from which the little figure had glided in such mysterious silence.

"Mrs. Benchley is staying with us for a while. I am sure you will be friends," Madame Pfeiffe was saying. "And Flossy; we must not forget Flossy," as the little fluffy ball gathered itself up from the floor.

The girl half offered a hand, which was unobserved in the widow's deep courtesy, then gave a timid little shrinking bow, and without noticing the child at all, stood painfully confused, while Madame Pfeiffe drew her own chair forward.

"Good evening again," the Professor said, quietly, appearing from the shadow of the library door. He held out his hand to the new guest. She touched it without raising her eyes, and then sank almost from sight into the depths of the great arm-chair.

She was a very little thing. Hardly more than a child in size, with a dark, thin face, which in the strong light, as she stood for that one moment upon the stairs, had shown traces of care rather than years in the shadows under the great dark eyes and the tense lines about the small mouth. Her hands still trembled upon her lap, though she lay back quite still, as if glad to sink into this sudden oblivion. Her rest was only for a moment, however. John's solemn face appeared at the dining-room door. Madame Pfeiffe nodded to him. "Yes, John. Come, Amy, you must be faint with fasting. I thought you would prefer your tea quietly by yourself. She has had a long journey," she explained to Mrs. Benchley as the girl rose again.

"Ah!" the widow replied, her stateliness softening somewhat at the sight of the girl's worn face.

"Do spirits often drop from the skies here?" the widow asked the Professor, when his mother had led the new guest away. "And is their transit usually accomplished in two days?"

The Professor's eyes had followed the two figures disappearing through the open door. "I beg your pardon," added Mrs. Benchley, as his gaze returned to her; "but she appeared so suddenly in our midst, I looked up naturally to the sky-light." The words were spoken lightly, but there was a shade of annoyance in her tone. The girl was evidently a shy, nervous little thing, who would be only too thankful to be permitted to sink out of sight. She would ask for nothing and offer nothing in return; a nonentity, in fact. But the long pleasant evening was broken in upon. The drift was turned.

"Bolts nor bars avail against them," the Professor said, dreamily, emerging as from a reverie, and speaking from miles away. Then he roused himself. "However, this one arrived after most mortal fashion. I myself took her from the carriage at the door. I was called from the table, you know."

"I hate surprises," said Mrs. Benchley, with a petulance more than half real, and carrying her frankness to the verge of rudeness.

"Do you?" queried the Professor, absently. "While nothing is so surprising, so unexpected as—woman."

He had seated himself carelessly before the piano. He rose now, and began to pace back and forth slowly, his hands clasped behind his back.

"I do not understand. You assert rashly," began Mrs. Benchley.

But still he went on, his head bent so that his face was hidden by his shaggy hair, his eyes fixed upon the floor. The sound of John's stealthy step came out to them from the next room with the soft tinkle of glasses.

Then Madame Pfeiffe's voice, fustily persuasive, followed by another, softer, lower, and hesitating. The Professor turned his head to listen.

"I made a study of the subject once," he said, pausing before the widow. "Most men do, I imagine. It is a change from Greek and Hebrew verbs. Men take them up together. At least I did. The first was most absorbing, but soonest ended," and he went on again down into the shadows where the stairs turned. What was he saying? What did he mean? She had never heard that his life had held its romance.

"To illustrate," he continued, drawing near again, and unconsciously adopting the form of expression he was accustomed to use in the class: "I have known a woman, young, innocent, a child almost, who could be swayed by a breath; whose ways were clear to read as the stars are bright in heaven, to suddenly turn, without perceptible cause become at once reticent, cold—"

There was a slight stir in the dining-room; chairs rolling back, a mingling of voices; then Madame Pfeiffe and her charge appeared.

"My dear," Madame Pfeiffe was saying, "we must have these pale cheeks rosy. A raw egg before breakfast every morning is an excellent thing to build one up. What a fresh round face you had, to be sure, when you used to come to us ten years ago."

Ten years ago! Mrs. Benchley expressed her surprise. "That must have been in arms," she said, pleasantly. She was vexed with the girl for appearing so inopportunist, and yet one could not harbor resentment against the pale, frightened little creature, who sat upright in her chair now to reply, in a nervous, hurried way: "I am older than you think. I have been teaching for six years." Then, as if terrified by the sound of her own voice, she subsided quickly into silence and the friendly depths again. For the moment her cheeks had been as blooming as even good Madame Pfeiffe could have wished.

At the quick, impatient tone of her voice the Professor, who had walked away, turned his head and smiled as though at some odd recollection. His mother took up her words.

"Yes, and it is that which has worn her out," she said. "Poor Amy!" and there was a depth of compassion in her voice. "But we shall take care of her now that we have her again." She laid her plump, dimpled hand, shining with one old-fashioned ring, upon the arm of little Miss Frere's chair with these words, where it was quickly seized and furtively pressed in a little dark palm.

"We lost sight of her;"—Madame Pfeiffe went on, addressing the widow:—"for several years we knew nothing at all about her."

"Ah!" responded Mrs. Benchley, rather wearily. The girl was very nice and worthy and ill-used, no doubt; but her coming at this time was unfortunate, to say the least. A new element introduced into a well-assorted company can never be thoroughly welcome; and they had been so comfortable but an hour before! Mrs. Benchley turned with that one brief exclamation to the child who had fallen fast asleep at her feet. "I had quite forgotten," she said, making an ineffectual attempt to rise. "Will some one be kind enough to ring for Hattie?"

It was little Miss Frere who sprang up at this and pulled the bell-cord. Evidently she was accustomed to heed such requests. But the Professor raised the child tenderly from where she lay, a soft little heap upon her mother's gown. "Pray don't wake her," he said; and the Swedish nurse appeared just in time to see him bear her up the stairs, her long bright hair flowing over his arm.

Little Miss Frere started. The dark eyes opened wide in a kind of pained surprise as the widow gave the child into his arms, thanking him with a smile and a little conscious blush.

He returned presently to find Mrs. Benchley at the piano.

"Ah, do, my dear," Madame Pfeiffe had

pleaded, as she rose and strayed towards it. Her fingers wandered over the keys a moment as though searching for lost harmonies. Then she gathered them sweetly into one. Upon little Miss Frere, hidden in the great arm-chair, the sounds fell like a dream of music, like the echo of grand voices, like the noise of falling water far away. Her head drooped lower and lower; tears gathered in her eyes. Days of happiness long past trooped by, called up as from their graves—the days when she was younger and more fair and the future stretched out its arms to her, smiling and bright; when Robert's eyes beamed upon her, as she fancied they did now upon the beautiful woman over whom he leaned. Why had she come again only to disturb the peace which had fallen upon her with all these years? Ah, in those other days it was she whom he loved; and wrapt in her own thoughts, unconscious of all around her, with the music sounding faint and far away, she lived that time again. How full it was of hopes which she dreamed then could never fade; of joys which were to be eternal! Then came the change, like a jarring chord; the bitter words so soon repeated of, "I do not love you," she said to him hotly. How grave and set his face became at that. How real and near it all was to her now. She could almost feel again the summer sun upon the lawn; again the scarlet geraniums were all in blossom, and the whirr of the locusts sounded more distinctly in her ears than the song from across the room. "You will think better of it by and by," he said. "I never will," and even then, faint-hearted, and with the anger dying within her, she had turned away.

How he held her back; not in impatience at her wilfulness, only with a grave sadness in his face. "You will think better of it presently," he said. "Then you will tell me so. I will wait for that, dear." And still holding the hands that strove to pull themselves away, he kissed the forehead, hot and flushed, before he left her. How slowly the hours dragged by when the fierce heat of foolish anger was over. Then at night, when the sun went down upon her repentance, she wrote a little sorry note, which she shrank from putting into his hand, and so hid in the hollow of the larch-tree overhanging the wide porch at the side of the house, where, more than once, stealing out in the early morning, she had found tender missives to herself hidden under the fallen leaves. And then the waiting!—for nothing; for his cold grave manner did not change. And having spoken once, how could she speak again? The note was gone. He must have found it. She looked for it, crying; stealing out at dusk and stirring the green leaves which a passing wind had dropped into the cleft. Then he was called away—home to Germany, without warning, suddenly, that very day; or no, it was the next. She remembered now how he held her hand in parting from her. Ah! she thought with a quick gasp of pain, has he forgotten? The warm wet rain seemed to blow in again at the open door; again, just outside, the horses stamped impatiently. "You will be late," some one called. "Are you not coming?" And still he held her hand. Oh, why did he not speak? If she had raised her face! Perhaps at sight of the tears she tried to hide he would have relented.

Then the picture, with the gray mist hanging over the hills and the drops trickling down the window-pane, the thud of the horses' hoofs in her ears, all died away.

"Tender and true, adieu, adieu," sang Mrs. Benchley. The spell was broken. The singer rose from her place.

"Oh, thanks," murmured Madame Pfeiffe. "What a pretty song; but so sad."

The Professor was silent. But the singer, at sight of his bent head and the long slim fingers which seemed to trace a figure dreamily, felt that she had not sung in vain. It warmed her heart towards the girl sitting mute, but strangely moved, before her.

"And Miss Frere—does not Miss Frere sing?" she asked, turning to her with so cordial a smile that Amy looked up in surprise.

"To be sure," Madame Pfeiffe responded, before she had time to reply. "Amy, my dear?"

Poor Amy, sitting suddenly upright, dazzled and confused by the change from past to present, became reminded at once of the little girls whom she had left at the school only two days before, with their discordant hammering upon the old piano and their tiresome drone of "one—two—three" over their lessons—should she ever forget it?

"You still play, of course, Amy?" Madame Pfeiffe was saying.

"Oh yes." This she could do. This she did almost daily at the school. The teacher was accustomed to call upon Miss Frere to entertain visitors with music. To be thus summoned now was like falling back into one's own place after having been lifted to the clouds for a moment. She rose without any affectation of reluctance and went quietly to the piano. "What would you like? Shall it be something lively?" The words came without volition. It was thus she was accustomed to address the parents who visited the school; and the reply invariably was, "Oh yes, to be sure; something very lively." But with the question she raised so patient and weary a face that Madame Pfeiffe mentally resolved that it should be two fresh eggs before breakfast instead of one. There was a hasty reply of "Anything you choose." Mrs. Benchley tried not to smile at the forlorn little figure with its odd suggestion. But little Miss Frere saw nothing save the shadow of the man's face close beside her, and heard only one voice. "Sing," it seemed to say in her ear. "You sang once."

"But I have forgotten; I have no music," she began, confusedly. This was quite unlike her daily experience, and all her self-consciousness returned. There was a strange whirr in her ears. The pictures upon the wall danced before her eyes. "I sing only exercises with the children," she said.

But he went on relentlessly. "There is music here." And he dragged from its receptacle a loose collection of songs. He turned them over carelessly; then a sudden light came into his eyes as he selected one and placed it before her. She did not move. She sat outwardly calm, her hands crossed in her lap, her eyes lowered; only when his hand swept her cheek, as he arranged the music, she started, and the warm color flowed over her face. The leaves were yellow and crumpled and torn at the edges. Having placed them, he folded his arms, and, leaning back in the shadow of the half-closed door, waited.

There was a hush of expectation. The high clock, standing like a sentry in his box at the foot of the stairs, ticked on, measuring off the silence; outside, the wall of the wind was stilled; and through the open shutters behind the widow's chair the whitefaced moon looked in. The little dark hands struck a few uncertain chords. Then, with an odd, impatient movement, the girl rose. "I cannot," she said; "I have forgotten; and I am tired," she pleaded, standing before the Professor, her head drooping, her hands falling at her side. He gave a little contemptuous shrug of the shoulders. He pushed her aside almost roughly and took her place. There was no mist before his eyes. There was no trembling of his hands as they touched the keys, no quaver of the deep full voice, which seemed to hold tears, so expressive of more than the simple words of the song was it. Could one thus sing from a numb heart?

"Oh, wert thou in the cauld blast
On yonder lea, on yonder lea,
My plaidie to the angry air,
I'd shelter thee; I'd shelter thee;
Or did misfortune's bitter storms
Around thee blow, around thee blow,
Thy shield should be my bosom,
To share it a', to share it a'."

"Or were I in the wildest waste,
Sae bleak and bare, sae bleak and bare,
The desert were a paradise,
If thou wert there, if thou wert there;
Or were I monarch of the globe,
Wi' thee to reign, wi' thee to reign,
The brightest jewel in my crown
Wad be my queen, wad be my queen."

Mrs. Benchley leaned out from her chair. Her eyes were luminous, her cheeks wet. "Why have you never sung to us before?" she exclaimed. Surprise, admiration, and almost something more shone in her face.

"It is nothing," he replied, coldly. He tossed the yellow leaves of the old song from the rack. They fell to the floor with a soft rustle which no one heeded, for at that moment Madame Pfeiffe gave a sharp, startled cry which engaged everybody's attention.

A little white heap lay quite motionless in the great arm-chair.

There was a moment of confusion; then Madame Pfeiffe raised the girl in her motherly arms. "Dear child, it was the long journey," she said. "Here, John!" But the Professor put aside the little crowd of frightened servants who had gathered at his mother's voice, and, taking the girl from her arms, bore her up the stairs as he had borne the child an hour before. He would have done the same for any one, for the sake of common humanity. He would have felt the same tenderness and pity at any other time at the sight of suffering or weakness. There was no stronger emotion in his heart when he took the little form which lay like a dead weight in his arms. She had proved false, or she had not known her own heart once. It did not matter which. That thought did come to him as he laid her head upon his shoulder. The heavenly pity which the sight of weakness brings to us all had swept away the bitterness and anger which rankled in him a moment since. Shame kindled in its place that he could have felt resentment against anything so frail as this. That time of which he thought was far away in the past. It was like a dream of youth. He was not sure that he regretted the awakening, or that he would have had it otherwise if he could.

"Poor little girl!" he said, laying her down upon his mother's bed. He had not noticed until now how worn and thin was the face lying in sharp profile upon the pillow. Her life must have been hard indeed. How different it might have been! And yet the sigh was only for her. Poor child!

He left her with the women and came out into the hall. Some one emerged hastily from the adjoining room. It was Mrs. Benchley. She was very pale from fright and excitement, and a sharp suspicion which had pierced her as to the cause of Miss Frere's illness. Could it be possible that there had been any connection between the girl's visit so many years before and the confession of the Professor, the experience to which he had referred, and which she only half understood or believed at the time? The question in her mind gave her unconsciously an expression of anxiety which the Professor misinterpreted.

"Do not be alarmed," he said. "She is already recovering. You can do nothing; and I think we may both go down again." She was fingering the pretty, sparkling vinaigrette in her hand while he spoke; the color slowly returning to her face. She had hastened to bring it out in the first moment of night,