

"Oh, but she's just lovely, Mrs. Drake," responded a young mother, holding her first-born in her arms. "Did you never see how she looked at my little Harry and smiled, as kind and pleasant as you please?"

"Ah, but you don't remember the first Mrs. Tremaine, Molly," answered the old woman; "it's six years since she died, poor dear! and you hadn't come to live here then. Ah! *she* was an angel, if you like!"

Meantime the carriage had passed swiftly down the village street, passed the porter's lodge, where the porter's wife, with a brood of shy, apple-faced little children, curtsied her smiling welcome, and up the winding drive that led to the entrance to the Towers, an ancient red-brick building, turretted and lichen-grown, with a noble façade that gave upon a broad sweep of velvet lawn, dotted over with magnificent timber.

In the entrance-hall was assembled a whole *posse* of servants, radiant in new liveries and white satin cap-ribbons, men and women, waiting, with pardonable curiosity, to greet their new mistress.

Mr. Tremaine sprang from the carriage almost before the footman could open the door, and then turned to hand out his wife.

"Welcome to the Towers, dearest!" he whispered, as she alighted with her hand on his arm; "and may it be a very happy home to you!"

He had a smile and a pleasant greeting for the servants as he passed through their midst, while the bride smiled in gracious condescension in return for their respectful greetings.

"Lead the way to the drawing-room, Martin," said Mr. Tremaine to the housekeeper, bustling and important. "Mrs. Tremaine will like to rest by the fire awhile and have a cup of tea."

So, with his bride on his arm, he passed down the hall, and led her up the shallow oaken staircase to the drawing-room, with its range of windows overlooking the lawn and the park. It was a stately room, draped in pale amber, with furniture of ebony and rich stores of rare and costly china. A cheerful fire, burning in the wide, old-fashioned grate, with its brass "dogs," lent a pleasant light and warmth to the apartment, and upon a low table drawn up in front was set out a dainty tea-service, with the silver kettle bubbling and hissing.

"You won't refuse a cup of tea after your journey, Evelyn!" said Mr. Tremaine, as he placed his wife in a luxurious easy-chair, and prepared himself to fill her cup and bring it to her with tender care. "I wonder where Sophy is? She would have come to meet us, I thought. I want to introduce you to your new daughter. Martin," turning to the housekeeper, who was standing by, smoothing her hands over her black silk gown, "where's Miss Sophy?"

"She's in the schoolroom, sir," answered the old lady, with perceptible hesitation. "May be she don't know you've arrived, sir."

A shade of annoyance crossed the master's face as he heard the reply.

"She *must* know we have arrived," he said, half to himself; "she is always the first to run out to welcome me." Then, in a louder tone, "I will go and bring her to you, Evelyn, if you will forgive my leaving you for a few moments. I dare say the poor child feels shy."

The schoolroom at the Towers was a long, low room, with mullioned windows, a broad, blue-tiled hearth; light oak furniture, upholstered in well-worn green morocco; a cottage piano, and rows of bookshelves plentifully supplied with volumes, mostly bound in faded calf.

By one of the windows, absently watching the little pink-edged clouds that were scudding across the darkening blue of the sky, stood a young girl—a girl of sixteen, who had scarcely yet grown out of childhood; with a

slim tall figure, a proudly-poised head crowned with a crop of short brown curls, that shone here and there with golden threads; small brown hands, and a sun-burnt face lighted by a pair of large-limpid blue eyes.

The blue eyes were brimful of unshed tears, though the head was thrown back proudly, and there was a look of angry defiance upon the childish mouth.

An elderly lady in widow's dress sat near, watching the girl with an expression of tender anxiety. Neither of them had spoken for some time, but at length the elder lady broke the silence—

"It is ten minutes since we heard the carriage drive up to the door," she said; "I think, Sophy, you ought to go and meet them."

The girl's only reply was to toss her curly head and avert her face still further from the speaker.

Then the elder lady rose from her seat, and approaching, laid one hand caressingly on the child's shoulder.

"I think you ought to, my dear," she said, gently. "Mr. Tremaine will miss you, and I am afraid he will feel hurt at your not going to meet him."

"Oh, no he won't," answered the girl, speaking sharply and quickly to hide a quiver in her voice. "He'll never miss me; he's got some one else he cares for far more than he cares for me now."

"I know you have got a kind and most affectionate father, my love," replied Mrs. Gray, in gentle reproof; "and I am afraid he will feel that you are unkind in not going to meet him and bid him welcome."

"And so I would," cried the girl, facing round suddenly, and speaking in a tone of suppressed passion—"so I would if he were alone; but he isn't; he's got some one else—some one who has come to take my own dear dead mother's place, and to make my life miserable; for I shall hate her always—I know I shall, for teaching papa to forget my own mother!"

"Hush, Sophy! hush, my child! You must not say such things; it is very, very wrong, and you will be sorry for it afterwards."

"I don't care!" cried the girl, rebelliously; "I was first to him until she came between us, and now I can never be the same to him again. I have lost my father, and he will never be the same father to me that he was. And you know it, too, Mrs. Gray, though you are like everyone else, and side against me. But I'll never, *never* call his wife mother; never, as long as I live!"

"My love, my love!" replied Mrs. Gray, in a tone of pained reproach, "how can you say such things? Do go and meet your father, my child. He will be grieved, I am sure, if you are not there to give him a welcome."

What reply Sophy might have made was cut short by the opening of the door, and the entrance of Mr. Tremaine himself. Sophy turned hastily, hesitated a moment, and then, springing forward, flung her arms round her father's neck, and, hiding her face on his shoulder, burst into a fit of passionate tears.

"Why, little one," he said gently, as he smoothed the brown curls, "were you never coming to give me a welcome? How was that?"

She made no reply, only clung the closer to him, with convulsive sobs.

"What, not a word of welcome?" he went on, a trifle reproachfully. "I shall begin to think you are not glad to see me home, Sophy. Is it so?"

"Oh, papa, I am so glad to have you back!" with a scarcely-perceptible emphasis on the "you."

"Then why did you never come to tell me so? Why do you leave me to seek you out? That is not like my own little Sophy."