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under the influence of the chilly family at the vicarage, and she felt that she was beginning to thaw the moment she sat down.

But in a few moments she began to have an idea that something had happened in her absence. She looked slowly round the room as if she expected to see a form in the shadowy corners made by the twilight.

At last her eyes reached the table, and there, by itself, lay a note with a sealed envelope beside it. This second envelope was big and clumsy, and evidently contained something bulky.

With a trembling hand Edna took up both envelopes; and tearing open the letter first, read:

"Lord Lockington has missed the bright presence of Miss Bellamy about the house to-day, and wishes her to know the pleasure he takes in her youth and girlish courtesy to an old man's whims. He has not yet received the present he is having prepared for Miss Bellamy, so in the meantime he begs her to accept the little gift which accompanies this note, and to wear it sometimes to give him pleasure."

Edna, with a strange sense, half of pleasure, half of pain, at her heart, broke the seal of the second envelope, and found inside a large, old-fashioned cameo ring, of marquise shape, bearing an exquisite figure of a young girl in flowing scarf and drapery.

It was a strange little present, and she was touched by it. She looked at it, indeed, with tears in her eyes, as the gracious gift of the sick man whom she had given pleasure to.

And she was still looking at the figure, kneeling on the hearthrug to admire it in the firelight, when the door opened and Mrs. Holland came in.

A frown of intense anxiety appeared on the housekeeper's face when she saw how the girl was engaged.

Edna wished that she had had notice of Mrs. Holland's approach, so that she might have put the ring away.

And the next moment she was ashamed of the wish, for, after all, there was nothing to conceal about the gift. It was not even the first present Lord Lockington had made her, and it was even possible that the housekeeper had been the person to bring it.

"Look, Mrs. Holland, Lord Lockington has sent me another present, a beautiful ring. Isn't he generous?"

Mrs. Holland came nearer and bent down, still with the same look of anxiety upon her face, at the jewel.

"Ah!" she said, "a cameo! His Lordship has a wonderful collection of those things. Yes, it's very beautiful, but it's not for wear, I suppose?"

Edna hesitated. "I think he wants me to wear it," she said, slowly; "indeed he has said so. In a little note he sent with it, he asks me to wear it sometimes."

The housekeeper looked at her with trouble in her eyes. "It's a pity!" said she.

"Why?"

"It makes people talk."

"Well, they can't talk if they know nothing about it. I needn't wear it except when I'm playing. Indeed, it's true, as you say, that it would be rather an awkward thing to wear. Look!"

She put it on her finger, and found, as she had expected, that, although made for a lady's small finger, the ring would not keep on.

"You see," Edna said, laughing, "there won't be much temptation to wear it, for it's a most difficult thing to keep in place. And it would be a pity, too, for it might get chipped. It looks very delicate."

The housekeeper, who had taken Edna's invitation, and seated herself in a chair by the fire while Edna placed herself on a footstool at her feet, sighed and let her gaze wander to the fire.

"I might have known how it would be!" she murmured.

The girl put her treasure in her lap, and looked searchingly into the housekeeper's face.

"What's the matter?" she asked, gravely.

Mrs. Holland sighed again. "Can't you guess? You're very young, but, after all, you're not quite a child."

Edna clasped her hands round her right knee, and looked at the fire in her turn.

"I suppose I know what you mean,"



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