

shock of reality. Her father and mother! Like lovers together! Oh, ought she to undeceive him? But no, not now. It would be wrong to herself, it would be unkind to Percy, it would be cruel to her parents; for, whatever their differences, they had, at least, loyally tried, for their children's sake, to hide them from the world, and had appeared, as Percy said, to outward view like a pair of lovers. She turned the subject off with a nervous little laugh and a suppressed sigh. "After so many fears!" she murmured. "Why 'after so many years,' Percy? Surely love is for life, and life is all too short for love. I hope you and I will love one another equally—or more, if that were possible—after years of marriage."

"You and I—oh, yes, darling!—you and I—well, you and I are different. But it must give you great confidence to have lived all your life with a father and mother whose life is never clouded, while it makes me so diffident to feel that everyone may suspect me—I hate to say it, but—of being just like my father."

"No one could think you anything but just and sweet and good, Percy."

"Thank you, darling. How dear of you to say so! Well, I musn't go any further with you now. You will tell your people, won't you? Shall I see you this afternoon, as you said, at the Stanley's?"

"O, Percy, I'm so sorry, I didn't know you were going there! And mother accepted some tickets to-day for Signor Metelli's concert 'his afternoon. You know, Madame de Meza is singing there."

"That's all right, darling. Then I'll cut the Stanley's and go to the concert, and meet you casually afterwards."

"But you can't get tickets; everyone of them is sold. This is her first appearance since she came from Australia, and everybody says she won't sing much longer. She's growing old, you know, though her voice is lovely still; so all London is flocking to hear this concert."

"Never mind," Percy answered; where there's a will there's a way. I met the de Meza once, at my uncle Hubert's. I shall go to her boldly and ask her for a ticket."

"She'll have none; they're all gone."

"Then I'll ask for standing room."

"I do hope you'll get it!"

"If not, I shall loiter about the door outside, and wait till you come out. Then your people will see me, and ask me to walk back with them."

## III.

They said good bye near the clump of rhododendrons. Hilda went home, flushed and happy. But the moment of her arrival was, to say the least, an unfortunate one.

Three minutes before she arrived, Mrs. Lovell had ventured into her husband's study. She did not knock at the door. She entered hastily. Wilfred Lovell was engaged writing the last paragraphs of his chapter on the Primitive Relations of Etruscan Art to Assyria and Egypt.

"Thus we see," he said aloud, reading over his sentence in a balanced voice, to judge of its rhythm, "that the intelligent craftsmen of Cortona and Clusium did not merely accept these imported ideas in a passive manner, but added to them certain original modifications of their own, which entirely—Shut that door! Who comes in without knocking?"

"Wilfred, it's me. I've come to ask you—"

"Didn't I particularly say I wished to be left alone to myself this morning? Didn't I specially ask you to take care that the children shouldn't be allowed to disturb me? Yet only five minutes ago that boy Charlie spoilt the ring of a sentence by bursting in without warning, 'to look for his top,' he said; and now you spoil another by coming to bother me at the precise wrong moment about some domestic matter. Well, what is it this time? Cook given notice, eh? Maria broken something?—original modifications of their own, which entirely alter, and even destroy, the peculiar spirit of the Assyrian artists."

"No, Wilfred; it's not the cook. This is Christmas Eve, you know—"

"Christmas Eve! Oh, nonsense! Why, it's not one o'clock yet! How can it be eve before the day's half over? A transparent absurdity! Well, what do you want me for?"

"We're just going to boil the puddings, and before we tie them up—"

"Do I manage the pudding department?"

"No; but the children say everybody in the house must come and stir them."

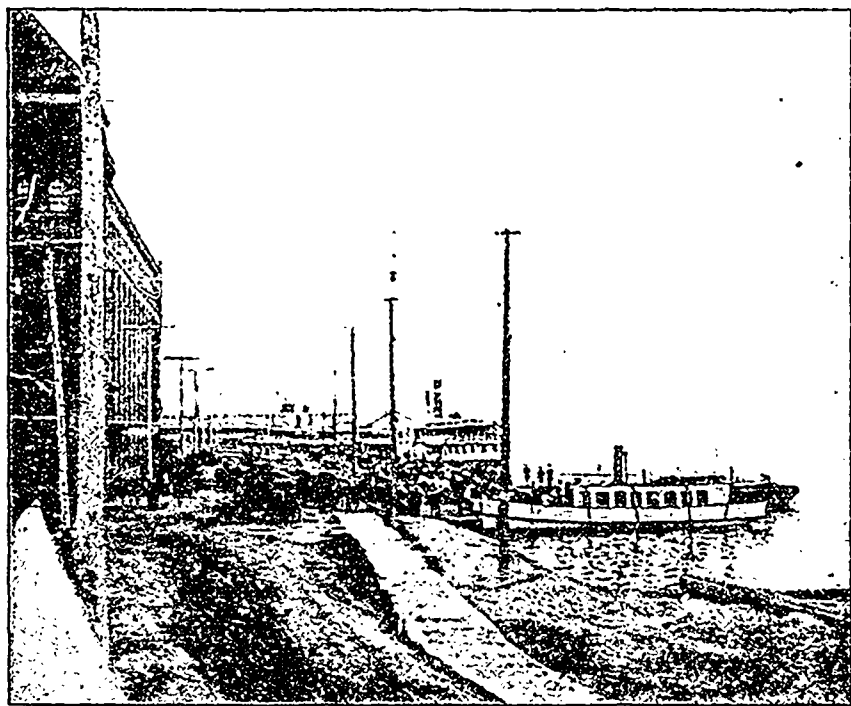
"Come and stir them! Louisa! What a ridiculous superstition!"

The children by this time were peeping timidly round the open door. Mrs. Lovell grew annoyed; they were both hot tempered. "It's not a superstition!" she answered, warmly. "It's just a good old custom. I wonder a man of letters and an antiquary like you doesn't see the picturesqueness and beauty of our quaint old customs!"

"Quaint old rubbish! It is a superstition, I tell you! Don't I know a vast deal more about these matters than you do? I've studied their origin. This stirring's un-Christian. It's a relic of the old cannibal sacrificial feast, where every member of the family had to bear his part in the slaying and eating of the human victim. Disgusting puerile trash! I won't countenance such nonsense, Louisa. You're old enough, I should think, to be ashamed of yourself!"

Mrs. Lovell made a deprecating face and dropped her voice low. "Before the children, Wilfred!"

Her husband turned to his writing. "Get out of this study!" he cried, petulantly. "I will not have you and your children intruding into my room at all hours of the day! This is intolerable—intolerable—that a man engaged upon a serious life-work should be badgered and bullied by a superstitious woman to stir her plum-puddings, in accordance with a ridiculous and degrading custom of our naked ancestors! Get out at once, I say



LEAVING BAY STREET DOCK, TORONTO, FOR THE LAKESIDE HOME, JUNE, 1898.