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unexpectedly running along the path from the house, and threw herself in her mother's arms.

"What is it—what is it, dear? Why have you come back without notice?" "I believe I was homesick. I wanted to see you, darling. Why, mother, you don't look a bit like yourself. What has happened, dearest?"

"Nothing—nothing, Virgy. Perhaps I have been bored; but you, child—you, too, look different!" "Well, I am grown up," said Virgy, laughing. "I was not grown up when I went away."

"Oh, that is it?" And the mother laughed too, but somewhat constrainedly.

In her present mood it was scarcely a pleasure to be reminded that she had a grown-up daughter.

"I hope you enjoyed yourself," dear child," she said. "Who was there? You never told me anything in your letters."

"Oh, well, there were a lot of people—cousins, you know, and we danced and had picnics and—"

"Go on, dear—and—"

"We were all in the wood one day, when a gentleman arrived I had not seen before. He was not young—that is, not a boy like the others—but I don't think he is old—"

Lady Mauleverer could not help laughing.

"What did he say and do?" she asked.

"At first I thought he was very rude, for he stared at me till I felt quite red and uncomfortable; then he looked about for Auntie, but she was not there just at that moment; then he went up to Cousin Mira, and said something to her; finally, he walked straight up to me. 'Your name is Virgy,' he said. It was a funny self-introduction—but he looked so nice and kind that I could not be angry, so I answered him quite prettily. 'Yes, I am called Virgy.' I suppose I ought to have drawn myself up with a dignified air and said, 'I am Miss Mauleverer,' but I didn't. And it was all right, for he said, 'I love the name of Virgy.' I made him a little curtsy and laughed. And do you know, mother, I thought I saw the tears come into his eyes, and he murmured, 'So like, so like. I could almost believe time had stood still.' But, mother, how white you look—why should my little story affect you so much?"

"Not the story, Virgy—the day is hot and you have come upon me so suddenly."

"Poor dear mother, it was too bad of me to forget that you have been leading so quiet a life of late that a surprise might startle you."

"But go on, dear, tell me who was this?"

"Though he had asked me my name, I did not like to ask his, but as soon as he had done talking to me, or rather staring at me, for he stared more than he talked, I went to cousin Mira and asked her who he was, and she told me he was General Barlington, and that he had won the V.C. in India, and was altogether a great man. I could not believe her, because he does not look like a General—he is too young, for when he came and talked to me again later on, he told me to call him 'Dick,' but I couldn't, you know. It seemed so funny and informal. Was it not odd that he should wish me to call him Dick, when I had never seen nor heard of him before?"

"General Barlington is an old friend. Before he went to India—"

"Yes, he said you knew him, mother. Why did he not tell me so at first? It was stupid of him."

"Perhaps he thought you were aware of it."

"Exactly. Why have you never spoken of him, mother?"

"Why should I? There are many people I have known in the past that you have never heard of, Virgy. But run away, dear, and hurry up Tomkins with the tea. I daresay you would like some, and I have a bad headache today."

"Yes, you look horrid. I wish I had never left you, if I am to come back and find you like this."

So saying, Virgy started off to the

house, and only just in time, for Lady Mauleverer felt that she could not endure much more of her daughter's gay prattle, and go on keeping the secret that had been so carefully guarded for years.

For a long while she sat quite still; she did not feel as if she had the power to move; but thought did not rest tranquilly because the body had no power of movement. The self-communing was scarcely peaceful.

"What did it all mean? To what would this meeting with Virgy tend? At last she roused herself and tried to chase away doubt and perplexity. "Of course, Virgy was her child—naturally he would be attracted to her. . . . It would be all right. She herself would see him soon, and then—"

Even as an echo Virgy's voice came clear and joyous from the open drawing-room. "Mother, tea is ready, and I forgot to tell you that General Barlington is coming to call tomorrow."

"Tomorrow. Thank God! she had till tomorrow to recover."

She would laugh and talk with Virgy, try and catch the infection of joy and gaiety and lightness from their exuberance in her child's youth and spirits—then perhaps he would not see so plainly how years had fled. But it was very difficult even to make the effort to be gay, for Lady Mauleverer felt heavily weighted by a depression which she could not throw off, yet the real reason of which it would have been difficult to give.

"Tomorrow—how was General Barlington coming there tomorrow?" she asked Virgy, with as much indifference as she could command. "Where was he staying?"

"At the hotel at Snaresbrook" (which was their nearest town) was the answer.

"Why did you not ask him to come and stay here?"

"Mother, how could I?"

And at her child's surprised exclamation Lady Mauleverer colored up, for she felt that she had been justly chidden.

"No, I forgot," she said, hesitatingly; "of course, you did not know how old a friend of my people Dick Barlington is."

Then she set the subject of this man on one side and strove to talk interestedly to Virgy of other matters, but the girl who had not the same reason as her mother for avoiding the discussion of General Barlington, was perpetually reverting to him. It almost seemed to Lady Mauleverer as if he had fascinated Virgy, been the first to awaken the embryo love that had hitherto been sleeping so peacefully in her maiden heart. If this were so, how terrible the mother's position would be. All her long life she had been dreaming of and pining for the absent Dick, and if it should be that her child was beginning to love him, God help them both!

All night she lay awake, too excited, too troubled to sleep, and when in the morning she went down to breakfast, and Virgy came bounding up to her from the garden, it was with a cry that the girl stopped short before she threw her arms round her mother's neck in the usual fond embrace.

"What is it—what is it, darling? How ill you look."

"Nothing, dear; only one of my headaches."

"A headache to-day, when General Barlington is coming, and you ought to look your best; oh, mother!"

"He will not come till the afternoon; I shall be better by then."

But if Lady Mauleverer thought the visit would be delayed till late in the day, she was very much mistaken. About eleven o'clock there was a ring at the front door bell, and before the two ladies had quite realized that a visitor had arrived, General Barlington was shown into the morning-room.

Lady Mauleverer went forward to receive him with no little *empressement*, but she was trembling from head to foot. She did not look well, as Virgy had said; still, traces of the old girl's beauty had not been wholly obliterated. Perhaps if she had dared