

need not to be afraid that Lady Mary will offer any objection. When I consulted her about the arrangement, she actually shed tears of joy.'

'But what arrangement do you mean? I am very dense, but I do not feel able to understand.'

'I mean that, if she will only consent,' and here Lady Merriton took the girl's cold, clammy hand in hers, 'Craig should bring his wife here and make the Abbey their home. Will you come, Joan, and cheer two lonely old people, my love? We will do all in our power to make it a real home for you, and you shall be our own dear child. Only tell me you will come.' Then Joan raised her face and her eyes were full of tears.

'I will come if Craig wishes it,' she faltered, 'and if you really, really mean it.' Then she felt herself drawn into a motherly embrace.

'Thank you, my dear; then that is settled as far as you and I are concerned,' returned Lady Merriton in a tone of relief, as she rose from the couch. 'Now we have only to ascertain Craig's wishes'—and she rang the bell, rather to Joan's dismay. Surely she did not intend to question Craig in her presence? But Lady Merriton's next speech relieved her.

'Of course I am aware of his wishes, or I should not have mentioned my plan, but I am sure you would like a little talk with him.' And then, as the servant entered, she bade him ask Lord Josselyn to come to her, and as the man withdrew she followed him.

Joan was thankful to be left alone even for a minute; she left her corner and stood by the fire, and tried to calm her tumultuous thoughts. She did not move or turn her head when the door opened and Craig crossed the room. The next moment he had put his arms round her and was drawing her gently towards him.