

"You must bring Lady Tristram to see me," said Lady Everswood.

"Cecily? Oh—well, I'll try."

Lady Everswood smiled and Southend laughed outright. It was not quite the way in which Lady Everswood's invitations were generally received. But neither of them liked Mina less.

It was something to go back to the tiny house between the King's and Fulham Roads with the record of such adventures as these. Cecily was there, languid and weary; she had spent the whole day in that hammock in the strip of garden in which Sloyd had found her once. Despondency had succeeded to her excitement—this was all quite in the Tristram way—and she had expected no fruit from Mina's expedition. But Mina came home, not indeed with anything very definite, yet laden with a whole pack of possibilities. She put that point about the viscounty, which puzzled her, first of all. It alone was enough to fire Cecily to animation. Then she led up, through Lady Everswood, to Mr. Disney himself, confessing however that she took the encouragement which that great man had given on faith from those who knew him better than she did. Her own impression would have been that he meant to dismiss the whole thing as impossible nonsense.

"Still I can't help thinking we've done something," she ended in triumph.

"Mina, are you working for him or for me?"

This question faced Mina with a latent problem which she had hitherto avoided. And now she could not solve it. For some time back she had been familiarised with the fact that her life was dull when Harry Tristram passed out of it. The accepted explanation of that state of feeling was simple enough. But then it would involve Cecily in her turn passing out of view, or at least becoming entirely insignificant. And Mina was not prepared for that. She tried hard to read the answer, regarding Cecily earnestly the while.