

Blanche tossed her head, turned up her nose, and looked very scornful and rebellious. Obedience to her governess and attention to her lessons were the two things of all others she detested. She was in reality a very bright, clever girl, who could learn easily if she only chose to take ordinary trouble, but she had heard herself spoken of as bright, sharp, quick, clever till she began to consider herself quite a genius, and the routine and restraint of the schoolroom an insult. Her mother foolishly fostered and encouraged the idea of her having unusual abilities, and whenever visitors came to The Dingle, as their house was called, Blanche was sent for to play, or sing, or exhibit her drawings or paintings. She was very pretty, too, and inordinately vain of her appearance as well as of her accomplishments. In short, at fourteen, Blanche Trent was as spoiled, selfish, wilful, conceited and, despite her varied accomplishments, as ignorant a girl as one could easily meet. Governess after governess had left in despair or disgust, Mrs. Trent being always too weak to be just in her decisions, and the result was that Blanche always had her own way and thought she was going to have it for ever. Her father died when she was a baby, and her mother had never been able to manage her, being naturally a weak, loving, nervous woman, and rendered still more so by continual ill-health. Indeed, Blanche ruled the whole household till her Uncle Derwent returned from India. Captain Haughton was Mrs. Trent's brother, and The Dingle was his home. Mr. Trent had died young and poor, and his wife's income would scarcely have defrayed the expenses of their only child's education. However, Blanche knew nothing of that; she seemed to regard The Dingle as her own personal and absolute property. It had been her grandfather's, and was now her mother's; in the ordinary course of events it would be hers some day, and with that notion in her head, she treated her uncle very much as if he were an intruder.

Captain Haughton smiled good humouredly, and thought what a fortunate thing it was for his niece's future happiness that he had come home. The first thing to do, of course, was to find a suitable governess, and Helen Lyster seemed the very person suited for the task of reducing a refractory young lady to order. She was the daughter of an officer, highly cultivated and accomplished, but quiet and unobtrusive in her manner. She came very highly recommended, and Captain Haughton liked her appearance, and decided she at least should have a fair chance with Blanche, and that Mrs. Trent was not to interfere.

"Remember, Miss Lyster, all complaints, if there are any, are to be brought to me, and the very next day Blanche went with a budget—

"Uncle Derwent, I don't like Miss Lyster. I don't think she's a good governess," she cried, in her usual way, expecting her uncle to reply, "Then, my dear, we must try to secure a better."

But Captain Haughton only just raised his eyes from his writing for a moment with a look of grave surprise—

"I'm quite satisfied with Miss Lyster, Blanche. You are not capable of forming an opinion; go back to your lessons."

Blanche went, and the result was a weary morning for Miss Lyster. She was supremely patient, and bore all her pupil's waywardness and rudeness—for Blanche could be very rude when she liked—with calm dignity; still, it was a relief when the morning's work was over.

"I'm afraid I shall have a great deal of trouble," was her mental comment; "the girl has been completely spoiled; she has everything to learn, and much to unlearn, but she has great capacity, and I think a fairly good disposition at bottom. I must only try to reach

her heart; once that is accomplished, the rest will be easy."

But that was a very difficult task. Blanche was not naturally of a very affectionate disposition. She loved people and things by fits and starts in an uncertain sort of way, and just so long as she could patronize them. She was habitually more than constitutionally selfish, and she was vain. To win her affections it was necessary to praise her all the time, and that Miss Lyster could not conscientiously do. The result was she made very little progress with Blanche, and Blanche made still less with her, for she was determined not to learn, and one day she burst into the drawing-room, and declared that Miss Lyster didn't know how to pronounce German. While Mrs. Trent was feebly remonstrating, Uncle Derwent entered the room, and stumbled over the German grammar.

"You've dropped your book, Blanche," he said, quietly, pointing to it. "Pick it up, my dear."

Blanche obeyed, sulkily, and left the room, and then Mrs. Trent repeated what she had been saying.

Captain Haughton looked and felt really provoked. Ringing the bell, he sent for Blanche, who entered the room with a frown of defiance.

"What's this you've been saying about Miss Lyster, Blanche?" he said, gravely. "Your mother tells me you say your governess cannot pronounce German!"

"She can't, uncle; she makes the most ridiculous mistakes," Blanche cried, eagerly, glad of an opportunity of airing her grievances.

"My dear, it is you who are ridiculous. Miss Lyster speaks German perfectly; she has spent her entire youth in the country. Once for all, Blanche, let me have no more of this fault-finding, for you only display your own ignorance. I have perfect confidence in your governess's ability, and so has your mother."

Blanche tossed her head scornfully, but remained silent. She had much greater faith in her own capacity for judging.

"And I think it would be well," her uncle continued, gravely, "if you bestowed more time and attention on your studies. You cannot hope to have the advantage of such a teacher always, and you may some day have occasion to turn your talents to practical account."

"I'm quite as well able to teach as Miss Lyster," Blanche muttered, sulkily. "She never tells me anything I want to know," and anything Blanche Trent did not want to know that thing she would not learn. So two years passed away. Miss Lyster was patient, painstaking, careful; Blanche wilful, obstinate, often unruly, blindly rejecting opportunities that could never be recalled, wasting precious days and hours that could not be lived over again, however much she might desire it. She had learned much that she could not help with such a teacher, but not a tithe of what she might have acquired had she been so minded. She still considered herself a genius, quite capable of doing anything, which so often resolves itself into doing nothing, and was pleased to fancy herself totally unappreciated and misunderstood. Sometimes, in spite of herself—or, rather, quite unconsciously—she would unbend a little under Miss Lyster's genial, unvarying influence, and be amiable and almost industrious; but at the slightest symptom of reproof or correction, she flew back to her old defiant position of idleness, as far as her lessons were concerned, and studied rudeness in her demeanour. More than once her uncle endeavoured to point out to her how extremely wrong her conduct was, and how very unpleasant she made it for her governess, but Blanche only tossed her head in a way that seemed to say plainly she would make it unpleasant for her Uncle Derwent, too, if she dare.