

"I am surprised at that. I should have thought so talkative a girl as Fanny would have communicated so important a secret, which, after all, is no secret, though we do not make it a subject of common talk. It has been a long understanding, and is perfectly approved of on both sides. He is a most excellent young man, and it will be a great comfort to me to give my daughter to one I know so well and trust so completely."

"And are the young people much attached to each other?"

"Oh, I believe so. You know girls are generally reserved on such points, and Fanny does not say much; she seems shy when the subject is mentioned. It is very natural; it was so with myself, and will be with you some day," and she looked earnestly at me as she spoke.

"It is not likely that I shall ever marry," I said very quietly.

"Tut! so most girls say, but we find they change their minds. You are but a girl; you will change yours."

There was a pause before Mrs. Knollys resumed.

"Do you remember, Miss Norton, the day I first saw you, that you agreed with me that it was better to speak plainly, and be clearly understood, in order to avoid after mistakes and misunderstandings? Will you allow me so to speak now?"

"I had rather you did so at all times, Mrs. Knollys."

"You are no doubt aware, Miss Norton, that our branch of the family does not share equally with the elder one in its wealth. Sir Everard's fortune is very large, but that of the General has its limits, and we have four children, while Sir Everard has but one."

Not knowing exactly what answer was expected, I bowed.

It is for this reason that I am so glad that Fanny's prospects are settled, and so well. My nephew's fortune being already so ample he will need no dower with his wife; her portion may therefore pass to her sisters. And, also for the same reason," she added significantly, "it will be necessary that my son should marry well."

"I understand," I replied. So I did most fully.

"Now, Miss Norton, if I say anything that can at all be construed into unkindness, you must forgive me, and believe that it is very far from being intended as such. I have learned, partly from my own observation and partly from that of others, that my son has paid you particular attention since you have been one of our family."

The last expression I felt to be kindly meant. "And if so?" I asked.

"You must be sensible, Miss Norton, that such an attachment or engagement would, at my son's age and in his circumstances, be one that neither General Knollys nor myself could for one moment countenance. He is too young yet to think of marriage at all; and must, at any time,