

and what new ones were in prospect, but there were certain little constructions of ribbon, lace, and muslin, which were wont to surprise one another. Their fingers were apt and quick at these small toilette appointments, and as there was a strong desire "not to be outdone" in these matters, the first glance at meeting at such times as these would be a rapid one, in some fear of receiving a check. This evening, however, a certain satisfaction on each face, after the usual inspection, told that each was comfortable in the assurance that her own share of muslin and ribbon was on all points equally satisfactory.

"The doctor is going to be late, and keep us waiting for our dinner," complained Mrs. Majendie, as the first stroke of six chimed, and the doors above the Swiss clock flew open, and a little mountaineer rushed out and struck up a vigorous tune on his bugle.

"Oh, I am not in the least alarmed on that account," answered Claude Egerton; and the clock ceased, the bugle ended, the mountaineer made a hasty retreat, slamming his wooden carved doors after him in a most rude manner. At the same instant the deawing-room door opened wide and softly, and "Dr. Majendie and Mr. Crawford" were announced.

The doctor's punctual appearance was the signal for the usual jokes on his extraordinary punctuality, and, with a general smile, each one tried to say something clever. The doctor, with rapid step, had soon greeted his friends, and nipping off all budding jokes, he said, in his vigorous voice, "I was very nearly putting you all to the test to-day by giving you a new subject to joke about—I was within a pip of being late for dinner."

"I was sure of it; I was sure of it!" said Mrs. Majendie.

"This young gentleman," he continued, pointing to Basil, "must needs have a difference of opinion with an unoffending person we met coming along—a perfect stranger to the place too. I cannot conceive who he is. Have any of you seen a certainly unpleasant-looking town-bred man about?"

"A sulky, ill-tempered, disagreeable lout," added Basil Crawford.

"Well, a 'self-contained' sort of fellow, at any rate," added the doctor.

"Oh, it must be that man!" cried Gwendoline, looking at Claude Egerton.

"That is what I call a lucid explanation," said her father.

"Oh, he must be Jem Sawyers; he is going to be the new under-gamekeeper," said Cyril.

"Well, well, nothing is decided yet," said his brother.

"If you will take my advice you will have nothing to do with him," said Basil Crawford. "The Doctor spoke to him three times before he would give any answer, and when I asked him what his name was he would not give any answer at all. Now I dislike a fellow who does not speak when he is spoken to."

"He is not so pleasant as he might be," said Claude; "but for the same reason he is more to be pitied than any one else."

"He is a man to give a wide berth to; he is up to no good," continued Basil.

"Nonsense!" said the doctor, laughing; "you townspeople are so suspicious. Why should he be up to no good?"

"Bad face, bad head, bad expression," was the answer.

"I wonder how he would photograph?" remarked Gwendoline.

"With the exception of Cyril, no one seems predisposed in his favour," said Claude Egerton, "but for this very reason I am beginning to take some interest in him; the man is evidently at odds with his fellows and with prosperity. If I do try him as under-keeper, I shall give his chief a strong hint about him; Merton is a very decent fellow, and will stand no nonsense, and will soon get him into shape. You see, if one does not give these sulky natures a chance, they never give themselves one, and if everybody throws them off, they must go to the bad." He still spoke in his light pleasant manner, and then the conversation turned, for dinner was announced.

Gwendoline sat next Basil Crawford at the table, strictly maintaining her dignified silence. She was quite stern over the haunch of mutton, and rather sarcastic when he asked her whether she would not have preferred boiled fowl.

He hastily changed the conversation, and made a remark about Bessie Vernon, to the effect that she was such a bright piquant girl, and one of the most amusing girls he had ever met.

"What connection can there be between boiled chicken and Bessie, that you speak of them in a breath?" said Gwendoline.

"I really cannot tell," he said, rather humbly, "unless—is there not some legend of a chicken's having a merrythought? and that made me think of the merry girl."

"You evidently want a support, to keep your thoughts from wandering—a rod of iron, like the thing the photographers use when they wish to make one look particularly idiotic." She had previously determined to make no mention of the photograph, but for all that she could not resist the temptation to hover round the subject, and thereby, perhaps, induce him to start it.

"There are far stronger things than rods of iron," he remarked.

"You mean your admiration of Bessie's bright piquancy."

"No; stronger even than that."

"I cannot guess riddles, I never could do so." she replied, "they are out of my line, so I give up your rod."

"And cease fishing for compliments?"

"When did I fish for compliments? I never yet found the necessity to do that. And I am perfectly certain that you never had any experience of me in that way, for I should never have been silly enough to fish in such shallow waters."

"How came you to be sure of shallowness?" he said; "I suppose in proof of the proverb, 'Set a thief to catch a thief?'"

It was not nice of him to speak generally in such a callous unfeeling tone, or to turn the joke against her; and having something of an ill-regulated mind, this young person immediately trampled on all her resolutions, and dashed into the subject of the photograph, by saying, "I was not certain until I saw your photograph, and they say that all one's traits, however unflattering, appear in one's photograph very distinctly."

"Oh, you are talking of photographs!" cried Bessie, from the other side of the table. "Did Gwendoline tell you how she disliked yours, Mr. Crawford? I thought it so good, but she said it was downright ugly—hideous!"

"Did she? Well, that is the reason I did not offer her one."

Gwendoline's temper was not improved. Everybody was disagreeable, the dinner was horrid, the day was a failure. She said, "My opinion of the photograph was never asked; if stray reports of what I said to myself reach your ears, it becomes simply a game of Russian scandal."

"Well, well," he answered, "there is a time for all things, so we will not talk scandal till after dinner."

Nor did things go better in the drawing-room, later on. Dr. Majendie was one of the last to leave the dining-room, and on entering the drawing-room he gave one quick comprehensive glance around. Mrs. Majendie, as usual, was the central figure and chief ornament of the room, and the circle round her was composed of nearly ever one in it. But there remained a few isolated members of the party, and of these his eye fell first on his own daughter, sitting studying the paper, and further on, at the open window, but with, her back to it, was Naomi Vernon. The Doctor was a great reader of character, and had a rapid way of understanding situations, and after the first glance he had taken he crossed the room toward that open window, but long before he reached it he was aware that she was watching one particular person in the group round his wife. There was a strange unsatisfied expression on her face, and she was so absorbed in her thoughts that she scarcely noticed his approach, and started when, standing at her elbow, he said, "Naomi!"

"Dr. Majendie!"

"Come and look at the moon."

"Moon!"

"Yes, moon; did you never hear of the moon before?" He walked towards the open windows which led to the gardens.

She followed him out of the window under the verandah. It was twilight, and the faint new moon gave but little light at present.

"Naomi, I wonder what you were worrying yourself about when I came up to you just now?" He

stood a few paces before her, and looking straight across the well-kept lawns and flower borders. There was no answer, so, without looking round, he continued—"I will tell you what I noticed: you were watching with an all-absorbed interest one particular person; there was trouble and sadness on your face. At all events, you do not deny what I say, as some girls would have done, but I know you too well, we are too old friends for you to try to deceive me. Once upon a time you used to say you told me all the secrets; will you tell me this one?"

"No!"

"Will you speak about it if I tell you that I know all about it? You know I have a diary in which I can discover all secrets, and I have not searched in it for this secret to-night for the first time; I learnt it long ago, and sometimes I have wondered if you would ever come to your old friend and talk about it. I do not know that I should ever have said anything to you about it had I not seen that expression on your face to-night."

"Oh, hush!"

"But, Naomi," he continued, unheeding her interruption, "take my advice: try to think of something else, try to occupy your time and mind; you are clever and able to do many things; interest yourself chiefly with some one occupation, work seriously at it."

"I cannot," she said, with sudden movement, and walking a few paces along the gravel walk before him; but he vigorous voice, "Cannot does not exist. Now, Naomi, you compose capitally, stick to that for a time; go home and think about a song—of course it will be a love-song, never mind that, it is what songs are meant to be—write it to-morrow, and let me hear it a week hence."

"How can one put out of one's head the things one cares most to think about and put uninteresting ones in their places?"

"By work!"

"And give up all the brightest things and take to an uninteresting life?"

"By following the footsteps of every one who has gone before you, how can you judge which is best for you? how can you even know which way may prove the brightest? How many times have we all had occasion to thank Providence that the desires we once had have not been fulfilled! We all desire blindly for things never attained; and the impossibility of anything ever satisfying us proves our immortality. Here we are only preparing for satisfaction."

"You are patient!"

"I have learned to become so."

"Dr. Majendie, why did you give me this advice to-night?" she inquired, coming to a sudden standstill in the path beside him, and looking earnestly at him.

"Because"—and he turned away and again looked across the grass and flowers—"because I feel sure that he is not for you nor you for him."

There was a short silence, and feeling sure that, whether she believed his words or not, they had given her pain, he continued, "And I feel sure you are deceiving yourself too. Few cares and some idleness have let you run away with the notion that you care more than you really do for a certain person. It is surprising how far wise people can carry the force of persuading themselves that they are in love when they are nothing of the kind. It would not astonish one in the case of some people, but it certainly does astonish one in the case of people capable of better things—yourself, for instance, Naomi."

"You always say I am capable of better things," she answered, in a low voice, and with an attempt at a smile, "but I am sure you have had no proof of it in any way; I have done nothing worth doing in all the years that I have lived in the world. I feel as if I had had no opportunity, and never should have a real opportunity of doing anything worth doing."

"That is precisely the state of mind people are so apt to get into; they say 'there is nothing that I can do,' and then they rest comfortably on their oars, ready at a moment's notice to bring up and air that sentence, and to bewail themselves such is really their case. Meanwhile, time is short, opportunities slip by, and powers dwindle. Naomi, do not let that be your case!"

(To be continued.)