

Percival's heart may be hardened by self-will, but he cannot forever resist the continual unintermitting influence of such goodness as Miss Percival's. He is not naturally hard-hearted. His head is soft enough, if you can penetrate the crust of pride that overlays it.'

'Oh, mother, you mistake, it is all crust.'

'No, Mary, the human heart is mingled of many elements, and not, as young people think, formed of a single one, good or evil.'

The scene changes to Mr Percival's house. The clock is on the stroke of twelve. A lovely creature, not looking the victim of sentiment, but, with a clear, serene brow: her eye, not 'blue and sunken,' but full, bright and hazel: and lips and cheeks glowing like Hebe's—is busied with a single handmaid preparing New-Year's gifts for a bevy of children. Miss Percival's maid Madeline, a German girl, had persuaded her young mistress to arrange the gifts after the fashion of her father land, and accordingly a fine tree of respectable growth had been purchased in market; though when it entered the house it looked much like the theatrical representation of 'Birman woods coming to Dunsinane', the mistress and maid had contrived, with infinite ingenuity, to elude the eyes of the young Arguses, and to plant it in the library, which adjoined the drawing room, without its being seen by one of them.

Never did Christmas tree bear more multifarious fruit; for St Nicholas, that most benign of all the saints of the calendar, had, through the hands of many a ministering priest and priests, showered his gifts. The sturdiest branch drooped with its burden of books, chessmen, puzzles, &c. for Julius, a strapping of 13. Dolls, birds, beasts and boxes, were hung on the lesser limbs. A regiment of soldiers had alighted on one bough, and Noah's ark was anchored to another, and to all the slender branches were hung cherries, plumbs, strawberries and fine peaches, as tempting and at least as sweet as the fruits of paradise.

Nothing remained to be done, but to label each bough. Miss Percival was writing the names, and Madeline walking round and round the tree, her mind, as a smile on her lip and the tear in her eye indicated, divided between the present pleasure and the recollection of bygone festivals in the land of her home when both were startled by the ringing of the bell.

'It is very late,' said Miss Percival, with a look at Madeline which expressed, 'it is very odd that any one should ring at that hour. 'Close the blinds, Madeline,' she added, for the first time observing that they were open. The ring was repeated, and, as at first, very gently.

'Whoever it is, is afraid of being heard,' said Madeline, but bristling up with a coward show of courage, 'there is nothing to fear, Miss,' she added, 'and if you'll just come with me into the entry, I'll find out before I open the door who it is.'

'You hold the lamp, Madeline, and I will open the door,' replied Lizzy, who had a good deal more courage than her domestic.

'Oh no, that would shame me too much, dear Miss Lizzy.'

'But I am not afraid, Madeline;' so giving Madeline the lamp, she sprung forward, and with her hand on the bolt, asked, in a tone that might have converted an enemy into a friend, 'Who is there?' A voice low, anxious and trilling, answered, 'Lizzy.'

Now indeed, her cheek paled and her hand trembled, and Madeline, naturally inferring that these signals betokened fear, said, 'Shall I scream for your father?'

'Oh, no, no, not for the world; stand back, wait one moment,' and while she hesitated whether she might turn the bolt, an earnest, irresistible entreaty from without prevailed.

'For heaven's sake open the door, Lizzy—I will not even speak to you.' The bolt was turned, and Lizzy said, with the frankness that characterised her, 'If I might ask you in, you know I would, Harry.' Stuart seized her hand and slipped into it a note, and impressed with his lips the thanks that, true to the letter of his promise, he dared not speak, and then hastily retreated, and the door was immediately reclosed.

'It was Mr Stuart, Madeline.'

'Yes, Miss Lizzy, I saw it was, but I promise you I shall not tell'—

'No, do not, Madeline, for I shall tell papa, who is the only person who has any right to know.'

'You are quite different from other young ladies,' said Madeline, with an expression of honest wonder. But entirely different was Lizzy, for she forgot to finish the little that remained undone, and hastily dismissing Madeline, she hurried to her apartment, and opened