

Beechfield Hall had come to an untimely end. Poor Sydney Vane was laid to rest in the little green churchyard behind the woodland slope which fronted the terrace and the lawn. His wife, prostrated by the shock of his death, had never left her room since the news of it was brought to her; his brother, the genial and warm-hearted General, looked for the first time like a feeble old man, and seemed almost beside himself. Even little Enid was pale and frightened, and had lost her inclination for mirth and laughter. The servants moved about in their sombre mourning garments with grave faces and hushed, awe-stricken ways. It seemed almost incredible that so great a misfortune should have fallen upon the house, that its brightness should be quenched so utterly.

As soon as the misfortune that had befallen the Vanes was made known, the General's maiden-sister descended from London upon the house, and took possession, but not in any imperious or domineering way. Miss Leonora Vane was far too shrewd and too kindly a woman to be aught but helpful and sympathetic at such a time. But it was in her nature to rule—she could not help making her influence felt wherever she went, and the reins of government fell naturally into her hands as soon as she appeared upon the scene. She was the General's junior by five years only, and had always looked on Sydney and his wife as poor, irresponsible, frivolous young creatures, quite incapable of managing their own affairs. A difference of opinion on this point had driven her to London, where she had a nice little house in Kensington, and was great on committees and boards of management. But real sorrow chased all considerations of her own dignity or comfort from her mind. She hurried down to Beechfield as soon as she knew of her brother's need; and during the weary days and weeks between Sydney's death and Westwood's trial, she had been invaluable at a friend, helper, and capable mistress of the disorganised household.

She sat one June morning at the head of the breakfast-table in the dining-room at Beechfield Hall, with an unaccustomed look of dissatisfaction and perplexity upon her handsome resolute face. Miss Vane was a woman of fifty, but her black hair showed scarcely a line of silver, and her brown eyes were as keen and bright as they had ever been. With her smooth, unwrinkled forehead, her colorless but