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the bay, the red cliffs jutting out to sea in the distance, and, on a further hill, silhouetted against the sky-line, an old tower or coastguard look-out.

A foot-path ran along the cliffs and over the downs, sometimes dipping down to the water's edge (where one might stand a moment for the water to ripple to one's very feet, or watch awhile the innumerable sea-gulls idly sitting on the incoming waves or swirling in a white flash to a further rock), then again mounting to a dizzy height over the cliffs, and worming its way along the coast-line for miles.

It was a perpetual delight to Miss Pragg when she wearied of London to bury herself in this solitary retreat, where she adopted country clothes and country hours—going to bed early, rising early, and dining in the middle of the day.

While the front of the house was devoted to the sea view, the real gardens and grounds lay at the back and sides, and were fairly extensive. There were old-fashioned flower-beds with box borders, quaint old trees of clipped yew, a carefully sheltered rose garden, sweeping lawns, and a fine shrubbery which separated the apple orchard and kitchen garden; beyond these, again, were two fields and extensive out-buildings. The stables had been recently utilized as a garage, for Miss Pragg always brought her car.

Old Mrs. Mellor, the housekeeper, had grown grey in the service of the Pragg family, and was in great contrast to Mrs. Law, of the White Maisonette. Her husband had performed the duties of butler for more years than he dared to remember, and two young country girls from the neighbouring village completed the household staff.

FORMERLY the house had been completely cut off from the outer world except for the tiny village with its half-dozen cob cottages, country inn and old vicarage; but of late years, to Miss Pragg's extreme disgust, several large new houses had sprung up about the old stone house, for other admirers of sea and country views had found out this beauty spot.

Manson spent his time in reviling the country, Miss Pragg, and all her works—behind her back, of course. She, on her part, never failed to snub him on all possible occasions, until John Grey wondered why the supercilious secretary stayed. When the reason was made plain to him, it occasioned him a great shock.

Life went on very quietly till the end of the summer, when Margaret Assitas made her appearance at Apple-tree House, looking in wonderful health and spirits after her yachting cruise. The atmosphere of the place became electrical at once, and alive with the vitality of her presence.

Seated on the balcony in a low, wicker chair on the evening of her arrival, the girl drew in a deep breath of satisfaction; the after-glow of the setting sun was still reflected in bars of red and purple across a darkening sky, while at the same time a pale moon shone high in the heavens, and the soft wash of a summer tide lapped lazily at the foot of the cliff.

Miss Pragg pretended to be reading a book, but was in reality studying the refined profile of her niece, which looked like a delicate ivory cameo in the soft light.

"I have not seen anything half so beautiful while I've been away, auntie," said the girl at last. "Grand scenery, perhaps, more austere and imposing, but not so tender, not so enchanting. It is good to be here again!"

"I always feel like that," returned Miss Pragg in a tone that was, for her, wonderfully subdued. "Thank goodness they can't build on the sea!" she added.

"Build on the sea?" queried Peggy, removing her eyes from the sky to look at her aunt.

"Well, I guess those jerry-builders would stick a row of villas before us if they could," retorted Miss Pragg vindictively. "Haven't you noticed the new houses at the back of us? There has actually been five built, in the last two years. Five, Peggy—Apple-tree House will be ruined—Henry will

be furious when he comes home, for the place will be built up at this rate."

"Five miles of sea-front lie between this and Falmouth," observed Peggy serenely. "After all, five houses won't really matter much; I thought they looked rather nice. Who lives in them, do you know?"

"Good gracious! I don't know," replied Miss Pragg with unnecessary emphasis.

"You have not called on any of the newcomers, then?" said Peggy, with assumed astonishment.

"I!—I! Call on a lot of upstarts?" cried Miss Pragg, the light of battle in her eyes.

"But how do you know they are upstarts, auntie? You just said you did not know who lived in them!"

"And I don't intend to know, either," retorted the elder lady firmly. "Retired shopkeepers, most probably, or mill people who want to forget their origin. They always get disgustingly rich—one can't know such people." She spoke stiffly.

"I simply adore shops, auntie," persisted Peggy wickedly, "and the poor people that keep them must retire some time; and you forget old Lord Wentwell got all his money from mills."

"Oh, that's different," said Miss Pragg obstinately.

"And didn't Sir William Blunt keep quite a small shop when he was a young man, and it kept getting bigger and bigger until he was made Mayor, and afterwards he got knighted because the King laid a foundation stone or something when he was in office—and you know very well, auntie, you simply adore Sir William!"

"Rubbish!" declared Miss Pragg, looking out to sea hastily. "Besides, Sir William is a very fine man," she added inconsequently.

"Auntie, you are the most Socialist Conservative—or Conservative Socialist—I ever met," laughed Peggy, "and to-morrow morning I intend to make a round of visits and leave my card on all the newcomers."

Miss Pragg looked at her niece in horrified and undisguised dismay.

"PEGGY, you must not do anything of the sort—it's—it's most imprudent," she remonstrated.

"Why imprudent, Aunt Pragg?" laughed the girl. "Have they got scarlet fever in the houses?"

"You know very well what I mean, Margaret. You know nothing about them. They might be anybody—retired burglars—or—or—" Miss Pragg was rendered inarticulate with alarm.

"How lovely," declared Peggy. "I never met any retired burglars; they must be interesting"—then, catching a look of genuine distress on Miss Pragg's face, she became suddenly contrite.

"Never mind, auntie dear; I promise you I will be most horribly proper and atrociously rude. If I meet any of these good people who live at our very gate I will stare stonily through them as if they in no way obstructed my view. I will ignore their smiles, and give them a chilly reception if they offer me any civility whatever—I—"

"Peggy, you are impossible," laughed Miss Pragg, looking decidedly relieved.

Peggy sighed aggressively. "To think that I shall never be able to speak to that perfectly adorable looking youth that I saw sucking the knob of his cane as I passed the green gate of the house on the left! I do wish people would wear labels round their necks giving an accurate description of themselves, their pedigree, their means of living, and past and present occupation. It would save an awful lot of bother, wouldn't it, auntie?" in tragic tones.

"What rubbish you do talk, child," remarked Miss Pragg severely. "You can't ignore class distinctions, especially in these days when there are so many 'vulgar rich.'"

"Idle rich," corrected Peggy, laughing. "Well, if I must not know any of the new people till some one vouches for their respectability, tell me how all the old ones are going on. The Vances, for instance. I must drive over to their place to-morrow."