

better get himself back to India as quickly as he could; for to stop by and see her married to another under his eyes was surely a pitch of self-torture and self-abnegation which could not possibly be required of him.

"Will you come out and take a turn in the garden with me, Juliet?" he asked of her as they rose from breakfast the next morning; "it is a nice bright day for a stroll, and I have something to say to you."

Juliet gladly consented, and went to fetch her hat.

They wandered out together towards the shrubberies, talking lightly first of one thing, then of another; Hugh, like a coward, delaying the evil moment as long as possible. Did he guess, perhaps, how rudely his hand was to tear away all her brightest dreams?

At last there was a sudden pause in their talk, and Hugh began hesitatingly:

"I said I had something to say to you."

"Yes?" she said enquiringly, breaking off a little branch of crimson-berried yew from the hedge along which they were walking.

"It is perhaps a difficult subject for me to broach to you, Juliet, and one which I can hardly dare hope you will listen to from me, but it has been forced upon my conviction of late that it is perhaps my duty to speak to you very plainly indeed upon this matter."

"Why should you not speak plainly to me?" she answered, looking down at the red berries in her hand and fingering them nervously.

"It is the matter of your marriage," he said gravely.

And then she answered, with, poor girl! heaven knows what a beating heart, and with all the hopes and fears of a glad love trembling in her low broken voice, "Speak to me as plainly as you will; speak to me from your heart, Colonel Fleming, not as guardian to a ward, but as man to woman; that is how I shall like you best to speak." In a moment it had flashed across her that because she was rich and he was poor, because he was her guardian and she his ward, therefore it was that he hesitated to speak what was in his heart towards her.

"Unfortunately, my dear Juliet," he answered after a moment's silence, during which every demon that understands the art of temptation had fought a pitched battle

within him and been defeated—"unfortunately, it is exactly as a guardian to a ward that I wish to speak to you. I think you have hardly given the subject of marriage with Cecil Travers as much attention and consideration as the idea demands from you."

The crimson berries dropped from her nerveless fingers upon the path and every vestage of colour faded from her face.

Colonel Fleming went on, speaking rather rapidly.

"I had no idea until lately how very much your poor father's heart was set upon it, and how completely the match was of his own planning and arranging for you."

No answer, only Juliet walked on rather faster by his side.

"Cecil Travers is certainly a most steady and deserving young fellow, and is, as I need not remind you, very much attached to you personally. He is, I am sure, quite above any sordid considerations, and will value you for yourself and not for your money, as so many of the men you will meet in the world might do. Don't you agree with me?"

Still no answer; Miss Blair walks rapidly on.

"From what Mr. Bruce tells me," continued Colonel Fleming, "and from what, indeed, I know myself of your affairs, it would be certainly a great advantage for the two properties to be united; it appears that the whole of those outlying farms in the Lynedale valley, which now form part of Mr. Travers's property, did in point of fact actually belong to your great grandfather, who sold them very much beneath their value to the Travers family in order to pay the debts of a younger son. Now, such a proceeding was of course an iniquity, and if you can in any way repair and make up for the sins of your ancestors by restoring the property to its original fair dimensions it is no doubt incumbent on you to do so. *Noblesse oblige*, my dear Juliet; in your position of responsibility you are not quite the free agent which young ladies are generally supposed to be in these matters, and you owe a certain distinct duty, not only to your predecessors, but also, if I may be allowed to say so, to those that are to come after you."

Then Colonel Fleming comes perforce to an end of his arguments, having in fact nothing more to urge.