

that is done out of doors a very inferior business, and, as it were, mere gathering of fuel for the fire inside. It was known in the neighbourhood that the ladies were preparing one; and moreover that they had a new kind of plum; in other words, that they intended to exhibit a prodigy of genius, who would flow upon the world from Brookfield. To announce her with the invitations, rejecting the idea of a surprise in the assembly, had been necessary, because there was no other way of securing Lady Gosstre, who led the society of the district. The great lady gave her promise to attend: "though," as she said to Arabella, "you must know I abominate musical parties, and think them the most absurd of entertainments possible; but if you have anything to show, that's another matter."

Two or three chosen friends were invited down beforehand to inspect the strange girl, and say what they thought of her; for the ladies themselves were perplexed. They had found her to be commonplace: a creature without ideas and with a decided appetite. So when Tracy Runningbrook, who had also been a plum in his day, and was still a poet, said that she was exquisitely comic, they were induced to take the humorous view of the inexplicable side in the character of Miss Belloni, and tried to laugh at her eccentricities. Seeing that Mr. Pericles approved of her voice as a singer, and Tracy Runningbrook let pass her behaviour as a girl, they conceived that on the whole they were safe in sounding a trumpet loudly. These gentlemen were connoisseurs, each in his walk.

Concerning her position and parentage, nothing was known. She had met Adela's delicately-searching touches in that direction with a marked reserve. It was impossible to ask her point-blank, after probing her with a dozen suggestions, for the ingenuousness of an indifferent inquiry could not then be assumed, so that Adela was constantly baffled and felt that she must some day be excessively 'fond with her,' which was annoying. The girl lit up at any sign of affection. A kind look gave Summer depths to her dark eyes. Otherwise she maintained a simple discretion and walked in her own path, content to look quietly pleased on everybody, as one who had plenty to think of and a voice in her ear.