

Miss Jemima, all unconscious, though somewhat perplexed at the strangeness of things in general, stepped into her brougham and asked herself calmly what was the matter. Instinctively she raised the little mirror attached to the carriage, bent forward, and—saw!—

She never again spoke to that branch of the Dinmonts; and when some months later she died, George was not so much as mentioned in her will.

"But what's the odds," said young Dinmont, very philosophically, on the occasion, "as long as we're 'appy?"

Just now he does not look particularly happy as he walks through the grass beside Brandy Tremaine, but is evidently protesting anxiously against injustice done, whilst the latter is exploding with laughter.

"What's the joke, Brandy?" asks Jack Blunden, lazily raising himself on his elbow. "You will be ill if you conceal it much longer. Don't be selfish, dear boy: let us be partakers of your joy."

"It's only Dandy's last," says Brandy, still full of enjoyment (Mr. Dinmont is a "gallant plunger" and a Christian gentleman, but because his name happens to be Dinmont, and his garments irreproachable, it goes without telling that to all who know him his Christian appellation is simply "Dandy").

"It is only Dandy's last," says Brandy, whilst Dandy in the background glowers painfully. "He is so sentimental and so full of poetry!"

"I wouldn't make an ass of myself, if I were you," interposes Mr. Dinmont, wrathfully.

"I like that," says Brandy, with a fresh accession of mirth. "Just wait till I tell my tale. We were walking along by the sea-shore, when some curlew flew over our heads, and Dandy said—"

"Don't believe him, Miss Tremaine," interrupts Dandy, angrily.

"Dandy said, in his most poetic tone, 'The curlew tolls the knell of parting day.' Ha-ha," says Brandy, laying down his head in a passion of laughter upon the window-sill inside which Dugdale sits, also openly amused.

"Well, any one might make a mistake," says Gretchen, holding out a friendly hand to Dinmont, who grasps it thankfully, "and all the world knows the difference between 'curlew' and 'curfew.' What a goose you are, Brandy! Sometimes I think you would laugh at a straw."

But Gretchen's kind defence rather falls to the ground, as all around her are giving way to open merriment.

"Oh! shade of Thomas Gray!" says Blunden. "I'd give up spouting if I were you, Dany: it evidently doesn't agree with you. Try something else."

"Oh, I dare say," says Mr. Dinmont, justly incensed. "You're all very funny, of course, aren't you? No one doubts that; and any fellow, you know, can invent a story of another fellow, you know; that's simple; but I think I could invent a good story if I went about it all."

"Do go about it," says Scarlett, the most generous encouragement in his tone. "Do, there's a good fellow. If you engage to make it half as amusing as Brandy's, we'll come in a body to hear it. There's a noble offer!"

"Shall we go for a walk?" asks Kitty, rising suddenly, in answer to a glance from Gretchen. "It is only half-past four, and tea will not be in the library until five. If you all wish it, we shall just have time to take a peep at the gardens."

"Will you come?" says Scarlett, in an undertone, turning to Gretchen.

She shakes her pretty head, and then says, gently, "I think not. I am a little tired, and—I always read to Mr. Dugdale for a short time about this hour. Go with the rest, and come in with them when tea is ready."

"I almost begin to envy Dugdale," says the young man, discontentedly, yet with an assumption of playfulness. He has been so long her friend that now he finds it difficult to realize the fact that he is indeed her love. As for Gretchen, the idea has never once occurred to her. To tell her that "little Tom Scarlett"—with whom she has gone nutting scores of times when they were boy and girl together—is madly in love with her, would be to cause her the most intense amusement.

"If you were an invalid, unable to go about, I would read to you too," she says, sweetly. Whereupon the young man tells her she is "an angel,"—foolishly, perhaps, but with the deepest sincerity.

Gretchen laughs, taps him lightly on the arm with her fan, and warns him he must not flatter, after which she accompanies him on his way to the gardens with the others, until she reaches the hall-door, where—having committed Dandy and Flora and Brandy to his special care, with a view to preventing bloodshed—she parts from him and goes in-doors.

Dugdale, having seen her pass with Scarlett, and believing her gone for the walk proposed by Kitty, has turned, with an impatient sigh, upon his weary couch, and is preparing to count the minutes that must elapse before the arrival of the welcome tea summons them to the house again, when the library door opens, and Gretchen comes in.

"Shall I read to you for a little?" she says, brightly, drawing near to him. "The others have all gone for a walk, so I have nothing to do."

"Oh, thank you! How very good of you!" said Dugdale, flushing. "But you must not, indeed. See how lovely the evening is. You really must not make yourself a prisoner for my sake."

"I am glad to stay," replies she, simply, sinking into a little cosy wicker chair beside him. "The evening is just a degree too lovely for me. I can't bear much heat; and August is evidently trying to atone for the miserable summer we have had. Besides, my mind is now at rest. Brandy and Flora cannot come to much grief while Tom Scarlett is with them. I told him to walk between them."

"A wise precaution."

"What shall I read?" asks Gretchen, glancing idly at the well-filled shelves around her.

"May I ask you to talk to me a little instead?" says Dugdale, with hesitation. "I have a slight headache, and I like to hear your voice."

"Now, I told you not to sit in the sun, did I not?" says Gretchen, with concern. "I knew it would make you feel ill; and this room is always so warm. Shall I put some eau de Cologne on your forehead? It will refresh you, and give you a little cold, shivery feel."

"I should like it so much," says Dugdale, gratefully, who would have said just the same about assafoetida, had she proposed laying it on his forehead

with her own soft little hand. Opening a bottle that lies upon one of the tables, she applies the remedy carefully, barely touching him, so delicately her fingers move. Once they stray a little to brush back the hair that interferes with her gentle task, and the unwonted tenderness of the action, though slight, and born of the mere womanliness of her disposition, stirs his heart to its depths and creates in him a longing, to let her know how sweet she is in his sight,—a longing, however, which he restrains. Of what avail to speak? How can the admiration of such as he is (however honest)—the admiration of an inert and useless mass—please her? Nay, might it not rather raise a feeling of repugnance even in that gentle breast, a shrinking from one doomed to spend the short time allowed him upon earth in forced inaction?

"Now are you better?" asks Gretchen, presently, in so hopeful and so anxious a tone that any man would have protested by all his gods he was well, rather than chagrin or disappoint her. Dugdale, of course, declares on the spot that even the last faint lingering throb has disappeared, and that never was there so wonderful a cure as she has effected in five minutes. Whereupon Miss Tremaine sits down, the scent-bottle still in her hands, and commences conversation.

"You heard that ridiculous story of Brandy's," she says. "I think it was all too bad for poor Dandy. But he will quote poetry, however wrongly. Do you like him? Is he not a nice boy?"

"Charming. He is very much attached to you, is he not?"

Gretchen laughs.

"He could hardly exist unless he believed himself in love with some one," she says. "It is part of his life; and I am his *corps de r serve*. He only returns to his allegiance to me when he has no one else to love. He has known me so long that he is perforce fond of me. Don't you think mere association creates liking? I do."

"I dare say. Has Scarlett known you a long time?"

"Oh, yes. Ever so long—years and years. Tom and I are great friends."

"I should have thought him something nearer than a friend."

"Should you?" says Gretchen opening her eyes. "Oh, no. We have known him all our lives. I am sure he will always be 'little Tom Scarlett' to us, in spite of his six feet and the fact that he is five years older than Kitty. What a foolish thought to enter your head! He is rather handsome, is he not?"

"Very handsome. No one could dispute it; and a good fellow, too. I was rather intimate with him for some months after Maudie married his cousin, Major Scarlett, and before—before—"

"Yes, we all like him very much," says Gretchen, with nervous haste.

"What was he saying to you when you laughed and tapped his arm with your fan?"

"When?"

"A few minutes ago. Before you all went away from the window."

"Then? No doubt some wretched nonsense," says Gretchen, evasively.

"Tell me what it was."

"But it was silly."

"Never mind; tell me. I don't believe it was so silly as you say."

"Well, then, if only to prove your wrong, I will tell you. He said I was an angel," says Miss Gretchen, with a blush and a gay laugh. "Now confess yourself in fault."

"But Dugdale does not so confess himself. He is, on the contrary, silent, and gazes at her curiously for a moment or two. Gretchen's blush dies away, and, with a slight but evident effort, she says,—

"He came over to-day to ask us to go to a picnic with his people and some others next Thursday."

"How very rash of him! He must know those infallible Americans have predicted storms and all sorts of awful things for the beginning of September."

"Nevertheless we are bent on defying them. They must be wrong sometimes," says Gretchen. Then, after a little pause, she goes on: "My only regret about it is that I fear you will be very lonely all that day."

"I shall certainly miss you, if you mean that. But you must not worry about me. No doubt I shall pull through until you return. And, remember, one day without companionship is little for one who has been accustomed for months past to live entirely alone."

"Still I wish you could have some one to amuse you."

"I shall amuse myself looking forward to the evening, when I shall expect you all to tell me everything that happened and all that was said worth hearing."

"I don't think you will have much to hear, at that rate," says Gretchen, with a smile.

"Promise to tell me all Scarlett says to you, for instance," says Dugdale, jestingly, yet with his eyes intently fixed upon her face.

"Would you call that 'worth hearing'?"

"I should."

"Then—with an irrepressible laugh—"you have a higher opinion of Tom Scarlett's powers than I have. However, if it will interest you, you certainly shall hear all I can remember."

"That is a promise?"

"Of course a promise," replies she, some faint wonder in her tone. Then the tea is brought, and all the others come straggling in, still intent upon the coming picnic.

"I adore picnics," says Brandy, who is feeling satirical. "They are the only opportunities one gets of eating unlimited flies. There are few things so nice as flies."

"Well, that's the worst of picnics," says Mr. Scarlett, gloomily who is still consumed by jealousy. "They are so uncomfortable, and one never gets anything to eat."

"Oh, you forget," says Brandy. "Don't be ungrateful. How can one be hungry at a picnic? Why, if the worst comes to the worst one always has one's knees in one's mouth."

"Another of Brandy's clever remarks," says Miss Flora, with a sneer, turning up her small nose even higher than Nature, who has been liberal in that respect, ever intended. "But it didn't come off, did it? You should say, 'Here you all laugh;' or, 'This is the point;'—or something."