

the difference to our future if we had declared our engagement six months ago, but the girl is engaged now to somebody else, and Raymond has gone down to his aunt this week to tell her that he will marry me. I would not give this explanation to many, but I do to you because I am sorry for you; you have been causelessly rude to me, however."

"Have I?" said David, humbly, "then I apologise. People in great bodily or mental pain don't always stay to consider their words, and I am giving up the hope of my life," and his voice was husky.

Deborah knew then that he had gone, for she heard the sound of his uneven footsteps across the grass. Monica was still there; her dress rustled softly against the paling, but after about five minutes Deborah heard her walk away in the direction of the house.

Then Deborah started to her feet. She would have given all she possessed to blot out the past half hour. She felt guilty and miserable, for she knew the conversation she had overheard had not been intended for her ears. Ought she to follow the two straight away and tell them she had been hidden there, or would that make them both more miserable and uncomfortable? She reproached herself bitterly for not having stuffed her fingers in her ears so as not to have heard what was going on, but in her excitement and distress the idea had not suggested itself to her. She bethought her of a story she had read in a paper of a woman who had been hidden behind a curtain during a freemason's meeting, and had been discovered, and was made to swear to keep secret all that she had heard on that eventful night. She did not know if the story were true or not, but it seemed to give her a clue as to the way she ought to act now. She had not intended to play the part of eavesdropper, and what she had heard should be kept absolutely secret all her life. She would tell nobody. It was a dreadful thing to have to keep a thing to yourself; it made her feel almost wicked, and yet she knew herself to be innocent of any intention to do wrong.

She walked back to the house with the volume of poetry tucked under her arm, very sad and sick at heart, for a trouble had befallen her that morning; her childish idol had fallen from its pedestal and could never be put up again. Miss Laing might be as beautiful as ever to look at, but she was not good or kind, and she had given Mr. Russell dreadful pain, and she did not seem to mind, and it was not right of her, Deborah decided, to have been engaged all that long time and not mention it, just because it had to do with money. She had not questioned Monica's conduct on any point before, but somehow the veil was rudely torn away, and she saw her as she really was, vain, cold, and selfish. The awakening was dreadfully painful, and tears were running down Deborah's face when she went up to her room to take off her hat. What woman is there who cannot remember a like shattering of

a childish idolatry? Until to-day Deborah had been in many ways unusually childish for her fourteen years, but between breakfast and luncheon she had taken, all unawares, a sudden leap onward. She had begun to form her own judgments of life and the actions of others.

She suffered an agony of apprehension during lunch lest any one should ask her where she had spent her morning, but the Professor only nodded at her good-naturedly as much as to say he understood why she had absented herself, and no one else seemed interested in her actions, except her mother who remarked that she looked tired and she trusted that she was not going to overwork herself during the holidays. Deborah shook her head quickly. When she dared to look about her she saw that David had seated himself at the end of the table near her grandfather, with whom he carried on incessant conversation about Indian affairs, and Monica was not present.

"Miss Laing is very poorly," old Mrs. Menzies announced presently. "I fancy the sun was too hot for her this morning. Is it not a pity, Mr. Norwood, that Mr. Russell must leave us to-day? But his leave is drawing to a close, he tells me, and of course his mother must grudge every hour he is away from her."

Mr. Norwood murmured his regret at David's untimely departure, and Deborah looked down at her plate. Would this secret of hers weigh for ever like a mill-stone about her neck, or would she sometimes be able to forget it? How thankful she was when the meal was ended and she could get away. She did not even feel as if she could go up to the nursery, for she could not settle to anything until she knew when Mr. Russell was going away. She was not left long in doubt, for the village fly hove in sight, and the worried housemaid struggled downstairs, carrying a portmanteau.

An irresistible impulse seized Deborah to run away from that good-bye. She was afraid of betraying herself; she was so intensely sorry for her friend, and almost before she knew what she was doing she was running with light steps, and her hair flying behind her in the wind, across the lawn to the old walled garden. She reached the door and was about to open it, when she felt a firm hand pulling it from the inside, and there stood before her Mr. Russell.

"Why, Deborah," he said, "you are flying as if the hounds were after you. I was taking a last look round the old place before I go away. I have grown fond of it somehow, and I don't suppose I shall ever see it again."

"Shan't you come here again then?"

"It is not likely. I'm going back to India, and it will be years, six or seven years at least, before I shall be home again, and who knows what may happen between now and then. Besides, you will be a grown-up young lady and will have forgotten me."

"No," said Deborah, simply, "I didn't forget before."

David gave rather a sad little smile; the girl's genuine friendship comforted him.

"True! you've been a very faithful friend, and I should like to keep your friendship always."

Then he paused and looked into the girl's true eyes. "There is a message I want you to deliver for me. Will you bid Miss Laing good-bye for me and say that I was a brute and apologise; just that and nothing more?"

Deborah turned white to the very lips. Had he guessed, she wondered! But David had only given her the message because he felt instinctively that he could trust the girl before him.

"Must I say it?" stammered Deborah.

"I should be grateful to you if you would, for no man likes to leave a house with the feeling that he has been rude to a lady in it."

"I will tell her then," promised Deborah.

"Thank you; I must be off, for I see the fly waiting at the door. Good-bye, kind, faithful, little friend."

He shook hands and was gone.

There was a funeral that afternoon, for Deborah, after she had watched the fly out of sight, went to her room and took out the doll David had given her years ago that always travelled about with her, but she had no further affection for it. Had she not called it Miss Laing in her rapture of devotion? But now it gave her no pleasure to think of her friend, nor did the doll with its face that had faded from pink to waxy yellow bring any pleasant memory to her mind. She folded it in paper and carried it hurriedly downstairs, snatching up a trowel from the corner of the hall where she knew her grandmother kept her gardening tools. Then she ran off to the dell.

"It is not a bit of good keeping you any longer; it only makes me sorry, and yet, you know, I could not give you away to anybody else, so there's nothing left but to bury you," she said, apologetically, as she scooped a big hole at the bottom of the dell not far from the graves of her fir-cones that she had buried years ago, but dolly lay, staring with hard black eyes at the sky overhead, and made no remonstrance.

Presently she was laid with gentle hands in her grave which was lined with moss, and the earth was heaped upon her, and then Deborah, in a very passion of sorrow, threw herself on her face and sobbed her heart out, but her grief was more for her shattered ideal than for the doll which had represented it; by which it will be seen that, notwithstanding her inches and her secret, she was not so very grown up after all.

That evening, with blushes and stammering, she delivered David's message to Monica.

"Did he say that?" said Monica, rousing herself into a sitting position on the sofa. "I'm glad of it, for he was very rude to me. He made me quite ill."

And Deborah, on her side, was glad that she had buried the doll. In her anger she could have stamped upon its grave.

(To be continued.)