

It was a greater effort of self-denial to spare the third sponge cake.

Miss Marney's still-room maid made excellent sponge cakes, though they were shaped and sized rather to suit dolls than human beings with a taste for sweet things.

Spin it out as she would, the meal was over in the space of a quarter of an hour; and when the door opened presently, Jeanne thought the servants had come to clear away the tea-things. She did not turn her head from the window, still blurred with rain, to which she had returned, but stood there, looking out dismally at the rows of twinkling lights in perspective, reflected in the wet mud of the street until they were lost in grey mist and smoke.

The sound of a throat cleared—respectfully but unmistakably in readiness for speaking—made her start; and she beheld her aunt's maid standing at her elbow.

The old-fashioned waiting-woman—who was scarce ten years younger than her mistress, and had tended Miss Marney faithfully for upwards of half a century—addressed Jeanne kindly but stiffly, and somewhat as though she were speaking to a very little child.

“Your aunty is asking for you, Missy.”

“For me? At last! Will she really see me again? I will come at once,” said Jeanne, very joyfully.

The *ennui* vanished, and the dimples appeared.

“Then she must be better. Is she better, Mrs. Dunham, do you think?”

Dunham shook her head. Down her wrinkled face stole the slow tears of age, falling, unheeded, one after another on to her black silk bodice and violet silk apron.

A certain independence of character, joined to great industry and a respectful manner, had recommended Dunham to her mistress from their earliest acquaintance. They quarrelled just sufficiently often, and Dunham was just sufficiently outspoken to enliven their daily intercourse; but the maid was tactful as well as frank, and knew exactly how far she might go.