

"I cannot be sure," Leslie answered, recovering her self-possession. "I had promised a friend of mine that I would spend Christmas with her; but Mrs. Stanley has made me consent to put off my visit until New Year's Day. I must see what Miss Capel says about it."

"Miss Capel, did you say?"—"Yes. Do you know her?"

"You don't mean the Miss Capel, the heiress, the beauty, who created such a sensation in the fashionable world last spring?"

"I suppose I do," said Leslie, laughing. "My Miss Capel is an heiress certainly, and some people call her beautiful."

"Don't you call her beautiful?"

"I know her face so well," returned Leslie, without a blush or a smile, "that I am scarcely a fair judge."

"You have known her long?"—"All my life."

"I have heard people say she is the luckiest girl in England—young, beautiful, accomplished, very rich, and entirely her own mistress."

"And yet," said Leslie, looking dreamily into the fire, "Miss Capel, with all her wealth, beauty and accomplishments, is not nearly so light-hearted as Beryl Danvers who earns her own living."

She raised her eyes to his face with a sunny smile. Capt. Lynn felt strangely thrilled, and Leslie saw his eyes flash with eager passionate longing, and she turned away blushing hotly.

Both were silent, and in that silence they heard voices in the hall.

"She has the sweetest, loveliest face I have ever seen!" declared Jack Stanley warmly.

Then Captain Stanley replied, in a cold and sneering tone—

"I think we have had enough of this doll-faced nursery-governess. Mrs. Stanley had better engage a fascinating housemaid; perhaps you might divide your affections between the two, and so be saved from the disgrace of marrying either of them."

Captain Lynn's cheeks burned with indignation. He glanced swiftly at Leslie to see if she had heard the insulting words, and then strode towards the door to take vengeance on the offender. Before he could reach it however, Leslie laid her hand upon his arm. He stopped at once and, looking down into her face, saw that she was smiling, though her color was somewhat heightened.

"Please do not do anything foolish, Captain Lynn," she said. "A man is at liberty to say what he likes about his mother's servants!"

She laughed; but he saw her lip curl contemptuously. He strode up and down the room furiously. Leslie's voice sounded cold and distant to him in his indignant wrath.

"I must ask you not to mention what we have just overheard, either to Captain Stanley or to any one else," she said. "It would do no good."

"Of course I will do nothing against your wishes," he answered, pausing beside her, as she stood, tall and calm, with an air of proud quiet dignity that became her well; "but I should like to make Stanley apologize to you on his knees!" He spoke in anger, but he really meant what he said.

"And if he did apologize, what would be gained?"

"Some slight satisfaction—I should have humiliated him to the dust!"

"And made an enemy of a friend, put me in a most awkward position, and almost forced me to leave the house; and after all you would not have made Captain Stanley change his opinion—and that opinion is nothing to you, and certainly nothing to me!"

"Nor to any one else except himself," added Captain Lynn.

Leslie almost forgot her dignity, and nearly laughed outright.

"You must promise me that your manner towards Captain Stanley will be exactly the same as before," she pleaded. "Let this make no difference."

"I cannot promise. He has insulted a lady, and so shown himself to be no gentlemen."

"He has done nothing of the kind. He has simply expressed his opinion that a governess is on a level with a housemaid. Well, if he thinks so, what does it matter? Anyway, he did not express that opinion to you; and, if he had done so, pardon me, you are not the proper person to avenge my wrongs."

"No, I am not," he replied bitterly; "thank you for reminding me of that fact."

Leslie turned to go; but, seeing that he looked hurt, and feeling that she had been very ungracious, she yielded a little, and said softly—

"Thank you all the same for your generous championship!"

Then, before he had time to answer she was gone.

"She is a little witch!" he said, smiling to himself. "She can turn and twist a fellow about by a single word. But what a miserable cad that fellow Stanley is!"

The Christmas holidays had begun, and Leslie became a guest in the house where she had hitherto been only a dependant. She was thrown daily, almost hourly, into the society of Captain Lynn and Claude and Jack Stanley. Jack was delighted. His brother stared at first; then his astonishment changed into disgust; but he speedily relapsed into indifference, and from indifference still more speedily into another state of mind altogether. He was cross and sulky when he heard Captain Lynn and Leslie practising in the small drawing-room, and wondered why he had ever invited "the confounded puppy" to spend his leave with him. He wished Miss Nelson would not always get an attack of neuralgia just at dinner-time, so that she remained up-stairs and his father took Miss Danvers into dinner.

Seeing and speaking to Leslie "on equal terms," as he expressed it, Jack Stanley fell over head and ears in love with her. Claude had ceased to sneer at the governess; and Graham Lynn always spoke of her with the greatest respect when he spoke of her at all—which was very seldom; for he preferred to think of her, not caring to analyse his feelings.

(To be Concluded.)

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