

II.

My brother, the type of a modern Englishman, remarkable for dignified reticence, and placid demeanor, one day in a breathless, excited manner quite unusual to him, called me to the window, and bade me observe a house situated at the corner which had lacked a tenant for some considerable time.

I obeyed him and looked out.

The house betrayed an appearance of life, noise and bustle, a scaffolding had been raised in front of it, on which were workmen,—all busy painting, and decorating its exterior.

"I wonder who has taken 'Milford House'?" I asked Hector, after having completed my survey.

"Whoever has taken it," replied my brother, "intends to have it beautified."

"It is high time—considering what a tumble-down place it must be, quite a blot on our street," I answered.

"I wonder who the occupants will be?" he asked.

"I don't think this is our concern," I replied. "You are more curious than I ought to be, if I may assert the privilege of our sex—curiosity."

Had I only imagined then how the matter was destined hereafter to concern us, I should certainly not have rebuked Hector.

After a while, "Milford House," basking in its glory of fresh paint, showed unmistakable evidences of being occupied.

Gossip soon revealed its inmates to me and oddly enough, they consisted of father and daughter. One day I watched the latter leaving the house and I must say her appearance impressed me very favourably. I don't agree with those ill-natured cynics who assert that one woman seldom praises the beauty of another. At any rate, the received *dictum* of these perverse critics must receive a signal denial—as far as my experience could form an opinion of Miss Angela Vinesly.

I pronounced her then and I still think her to be one of the most attractive of her sex—I was always a poor hand at minute descriptions—and after all, how can mere words picture the charm of a bewitching face or an irresistible smile.

After his remarks, I was not surprised when Hector, who often threw off his *nonchalance* when in my company, addressed me in a somewhat unusual strain, on the subject of Miss Vinesly. "By Jove! Medora, have you noticed

our new neighbour. I think she is perfectly lovely."

I nodded a smiling assent to his remark.

"I wish we knew them, can't you manage to get an introduction or call or something?" continued my brother.

"I don't see how we can do so, as we don't know them," I answered, adding laughingly, "Why, Hector, I shall begin to think you are in love."

"What did you say their names are?" asked my father when I, later in the day, mooted the subject of calling on our new neighbours.

"Vinesly."

When I mentioned it my father grew as black as a thunder cloud.

"On no account call on them," he said, "I expressly forbid it."

"Is there any reason?"

"There is a reason—which I do not care to enter into. It is sufficient that I prohibit your calling—and I must exact obedience from you, Medora."

I forebore to argue the question and I merely replied, "Very well," and left him.

"I don't understand it at all," was Hector's remark to me, in the evening. "It is strange conduct, and borders on the despotic, Med. If it is only a whim, it is a most extraordinary one. What are we to do?"

"Humour the whim, if it is one, for the present, as there may be a cogent reason at the bottom of it."

Little did I think at the time that this conversation was a link in the chain of events that induced me to leave my home!

III.

Weeks sped on, and nothing happened to disturb the even tenor of our monotonous lives, until one day Hector burst upon me with these words:

"At last I have met her and spoken to her."

"How did you manage that?" I asked.

"By the merest possible chance," he replied. "She was crossing the street with her father, who, being infirm, leant upon her arm, when suddenly a hansom cab came dashing round the corner of the street, and a serious accident would have occurred had I not been in time to prevent it. I was thus lucky enough to be of material assistance to her when my aid was most necessary, and I escorted them to their own door. I must also tell you that her manner and conversation charmed me, and when I left them I promised to call on them with you."