

which the holly was to act as border, vanished up the stairs, though not before I had caught a distant view of a white pocket-handkerchief disappearing into her mouth—a slight incident that explained, to me at least, the real cause of her abrupt exit.

No sooner had she gone, than the awful ordeal I had been expecting appeared imminent. Mr. Westward began snipping off Aunt Noberry's leaves. Poor Aunt Noberry! I could not be sorry for my own sake when I saw the downfall of those wretched weapons of hers, which left her nothing but a bare, unsightly stick, but I was sorry on her account. However, it was no use regretting. The very scissors that had robbed my aunt of the only beauty she possessed, were poised ready to begin their work of destruction on me also. I gave up all hope then, and, for one brief moment of weakness, I longed to be back among my relatives in the garden. Then I perceived that I was the object of conversation.

"I declare," Mr. Westward was saying, "this sprig of holly is too pretty to pull to pieces, Miss Turner. It would look splendid in your hair." I cannot describe the intense relief with which I heard these words, or how proud I felt when Dolly's soft eyes were fixed on me, and me alone, evidently regarding me with admiring satisfaction.

"It is certainly too pretty to pull to pieces," she said, "and we shall want some sprigs just that size to adorn the brackets, so put it on one side, please. it will come in nicely for that."

"No, it won't. I want you to wear it in your hair to-night. Won't you, just to please me?" The last words were very tender.

"Nonsense!" was her laughing rejoinder, but the color mounted to her very brow.

"There, that is finished. What a long time Iva is; I'll go and see what she is about," and she rose hastily.

But he pushed her back again gently, firmly.

"Wait a bit," he said, "I want to tell you first what I think you must know already—that I love you better than all the world besides. Do not look so startled, Dolly—do not turn from me as if you thought me silly. We have known each other for a good time now, and I have loved you silently all the while, but I was determined to speak to you to-day. Dear, answer me!"

He was standing before her now, looking down at her with such a yearning of love and tenderness in his eyes that I felt sure she could not reject his suit.

She did not look up; she sat toying with

her thimble, and tapping her foot against the floor, as if chafing at the emotion that the quivering of her lips alone betrayed.

As for me, I was forgotten. He had dropped me in his eagerness and anxiety, so I lay helplessly at Dolly's feet, a solitary and unheeded sprig. Things remained in this state for a long minute. Then Mr. Westward spoke again.

"Miss Turner, don't be cruel, speak to me?"

"What am I to say?" came in a whisper from the parted lips.

"Why! don't you understand. I want you to tell me if you can return my love?"

There was another pause, broken again by the words—half pleading, half reproachful.

"Dolly, Dolly, don't be cruel."

Then she raised her head.

"I don't mean to be cruel, indeed, Mr. Westward; but you have taken me so by surprise I don't understand it quite yet. Be reasonable; give me time to think it over before I decide. It is such a momentous step to take that I—I feel almost frightened."

"Poor child! Yes, I will be reasonable; but you will put me out of my suspense to-night, will you not?"

"I will, indeed," she replied. Then her eyes rested on me. I think she regarded me as the innocent cause of this crisis in her life.

His glance followed hers, and, in a sudden impulse, he stooped to pick me up, and said:—

"If you wear this in your hair to-night, I shall know your heart is my own."

"Be it so," she answered, smiling, as she took me from his hand.

"Then it is a bargain! You will not trifle with me, I know. Good-bye till then: you understand why I can't stop any longer now;" and wringing both her hands, he seized his hat, and disappeared.

Iva returned almost immediately after.

"Mr. Westward gone," she exclaimed. "What have you been saying to him, Dolly?"

"What should I have been saying to him, silly child? It is nearly one o'clock, and I suppose he is as capable of hunger as other rational and irrational beings: and that reminds me that dinner won't be long now. I hear ominous sounds in the pantry, so we will leave the rest till this afternoon. Just take those sticks into the kitchen. Iva, will you?"

So saying, she went upstairs, holding me all the while, and on our way, I saw her sister, with a heap of stripped holly in her arms, traversing the passage below. Alas! my Aunt Noberry was one of those