

"What diplomatists we are!" said the Imp. "I didn't know we were so clever. But why do I take Janie to Mingham?"

"They'd say that Bob Broadley's no real danger, and if it *should* disgust Harry Tristram——"

"I am clever! Dear Miss Swinkerton, I never thought of anything half so good myself. I'll tell uncle about it directly."

Miss S. looked at her suspiciously. The innocence seemed very much overdone.

"I knew you'd laugh at it," she observed.

"I should do that even if it was true," said Mina, thoroughly enjoying herself.

Miss S. took her leave, quite undecided whether to announce on the best authority that the idea was true, or that it was quite unfounded. One thing only was certain: whatever she decided to say, she would say on the best authority. If it turned out incorrect in the end, Miss S. would take credit for an impenetrable discretion and an unswerving loyalty to the friends who had given her their confidence.

Mina was left very unquiet. Miss S. chimed in with the Major; the neighbourhood too seemed in the same tune. She could laugh at the ingenuities attributed to her, yet the notions which had given them birth found, as she perceived more and more clearly, a warrant in her feelings, if not in her conduct. Look at it how she would, she was wrapped up in Harry Tristram; she spent her days watching his fortunes, any wakeful hour of the night found her occupied in thinking of him. Was she a traitor to her friend Janie Iver? Was that treachery bringing her back, by a roundabout way, to a new alliance with her uncle? Did it involve treason to Harry himself? For certainly it was hard to go on helping him towards a marriage with Janie Iver.

"But I will all the same if he wants it," she exclaimed, as she paced about on the terrace, glancing now and then down at Blent. And again she stood aghast at the thorough-going devotion which such an attitude as that implied. "If only I could keep out of things!" she murmured. "But I never can."

Major Duplay drove up the hill in a Blentmouth station