

"If you really mean it—but, of course, you always mean what you say. Quick, Desdemona, dear; let us have pen and paper and begin our new monastery. Only," she hesitated for a moment, "people would say that it is quite too absurd."

"People say what they please," said Alan. "Wild words wander here and there. They say I am doing an absurd thing in working on my farm. That is gravely absurd. Suppose we do an absurd thing which shall have no gravity about it at all, but only be whimsical, and start our Abbey after the rules laid down by Father Rabelais."

"Yes, Alan, let us try it; we have been too grave lately."

"Then, on one condition, Miranda. It is that you become the Lady Abbess, and that Desdemona gives us her help in organising the thing."

"No—no," said Desdemona. "In your own house you must be Abbot, Prior, or whatever you call it."

But Alan was inflexible on this point. He promised to become an active-working brother, so long as it did not interfere with his work in the village; he would attend regularly, dine sometimes, take a leading part in the ceremonies, but Miranda must be the chief.

So it was settled.

"And for the ceremonies," said Miranda, "Desdemona must direct."

"I will do what I can," said Desdemona. "Of course you will have mediæval things revived. You ought to have games, riding at the ring, tournaments, mediæval singing and dancing, and mediæval dresses. All the brothers and sisters will be rich, I suppose."

"All but Tom Caledon," said Miranda; "and if we have Tom Caledon, we must have Nelly, and she is not rich at all. But that does not matter."

"Not at all," said Alan.

"Ah! You two," murmured Desdemona. "What a thing for two young people, not one, which always happens, and which is the reason why this world is so lopsided—What a thing, I say, that you can do what you like without thinking of money! If I could only persuade you to run a theatre on high principles, which would not pay."

"The Abbey first, dear Desdemona," said Miranda. "And when that is done

with, if ever it is, we will have our theatre, and you shall be the manager."

But Desdemona shook her head.

"Women ought not to be managers," she said. "They make bad administrators. There is only one man fit to be the dictator of a theatre. And that is—but I will tell you when we start the new house."

Then they all three went over to Weyland Court and examined its capabilities.

"What do you think?" asked Alan.

"The hall," said Desdemona, "will, of course, be the refectory, and the ball-room as well. Think of dining habitually in so splendid a hall. The lovely drawing-room, which is like that of Guy's Cliff, only longer and more beautiful, will do for our ordinary evenings; I see several rooms which will do for breakfast and morning rooms. There are stables ready for fifty horses: the kitchen is fit for a City company—"

"And rooms," Miranda interrupted, "for as many brothers and sisters as we can take in. Shall we have twenty-four, Desdemona? That seems a good round number to begin with."

But Desdemona thought twenty would be better, and they resolved on twenty.

"Every brother and sister to have two rooms," the girl went on, warming to her work, "and one room for his or her servant. That makes sixty rooms; and there are plenty to spare for guests, without counting the three haunted chambers."

"Oh!" said Alan, "you will have guests?"

"Of course," Desdemona replied. "What is the good of showing the world how to live if nobody comes to see you? You might just as well act to an empty house."

"And whom will you invite to join?" Alan asked.

Miranda threw herself into a chair, and took paper and pen.

"You, Alan, for one. What name will you take? But we will find you one. And you, Desdemona dear, under that name and no other. And I Miranda, because I shall not change my name. That makes three out of the twenty. Then we must ask Adela Fairfax, if only for her beautiful playing. And Edith Cambridge, because she is so beautiful and so clever. And perhaps Major Vanbrugh will join us. And then