

For though the mansion house and dirty acres have slipped through my fingers, thank heaven, our honour and the family pictures are as fresh as ever.' I'm to fight a duel with somebody—I forget who."

"You will discover to-morrow," says Durand. "Every one is satisfied with his or her role, I hope. I do not think we can do better."

But where were ever private theatricals in which the performers were satisfied with their parts? Mr. Dexter, still out of humour, grumbled audibly with the part assigned him. *Sir Anthony Absolute*, a blustering old heavy father, stamping ridiculously about the stage, and making an elderly ass of himself—a pretty part to assign him! He felt sure he would shine as *Faulkland*, in a suit of black velvet; but no—Durand in his beastly selfishness, must keep that to himself, for the sole purpose of making love to Marie.

Mrs. Beekwith would have preferred *Lydia Languish* to *Lucy*. Marie looks bored by the whole business. Miss Hariott, alone brisk and satisfied, announced her intention of returning instantly home, and bearing Reine with her, to begin their studies without a second's loss of time.

"What exceedingly versatile gentleman Monsieur Durand happens to be," she observes on the way. "He seems to know a little of everything under the sun. Was he ever an actor, Little Queen?"

"He is an opera singer," Reine says, in a very low voice.

"He sings charmingly, I allow, and although I do not overmuch like Monsieur Durand, it is impossible to really dislike any one with such a voice. What a good gift it is."

"You say you do not like him?" Reine repeats. "Why madame?"

"How can I tell? He is handsome, he is agreeable, he is polite, but still, 'I do not love you Doctor Fell.' It is that sort of unreasonable Doctor Fell feeling. I know some one else who does not like him either, Petite Reine."

"You mean Mr. Dexter?"

"No, my dear, I don't. I mean Mr. Longworth."

"And yet—poor Leonce—what has he done that any of you should dislike him?"

"Have you never disliked and distrusted any one, Petite, without why or wherefore? How long does he remain in Baymouth?"

"I do not know, Until the end of September, I believe."

"Reine," says Miss Hariott, abruptly, "when are you going to be married?"

"Married! Good heavens!" exclaims Reine, reddening and laughing nervously. "What a startling question!"

"Why startling? You are engaged, are you not? And marriage is the customary climax of engagement."

"Not always."

"Petite, what do you mean? I can see—I have seen for some time—that there is something between you and Laurence that is not as it should be. Dear, I was so glad when I heard he had chosen you, so glad my Little Queen was to be his wife."

"Yes," Reine says, smiling, but with a little quiver of the voice, "and not jealous at all?"

"I shall be sorry to lose my friend," replies Miss Hariott, steadily. "And a man is lost as a friend, who marries. But I knew he would marry some time and I was glad he chose you—glad, thankful, happy."

"Yes," Reine murmurs again softly, "It was best."

"You had vowed never to like him," goes on Miss Hariott, with a smile; "You tried hard to make yourself believe you did not like him. But, oh, child, I saw through it all, and I read your heart better than you read it yourself, and I know you care for him strongly, truly, deeply and well."

The dark face drops guiltily, deep red burning on either cheek; but she makes no answer to the accusation in words.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LAURA SHELTON'S REWARD.

MISS HARIOTT looks steadfastly at the blushing face, which tells its love story so sweetly, and lays her hand on Reine's shoulder, as she replies.

"And Laurence gave you his whole heart. Reine, do you know what a good gift the love of a true man is? I saw all from the first. I saw, too, that you both were proud and perverse, and misunderstood, and would not show what