

The whimsical light faded from his blue eyes, and his lips straightened a little. "You are wiser than I am, my dear Isobel," he said. "You realize my position better than I do myself. It is evident that you have given some thought to the matter. The elder sons — the heirs to the tobacco-fields and slaves — are the fortunate fellows who retain the privilege of kissing their lady friends after arriving at the age of manhood. The poor, unfortunate devils who have their own way to make in the world must learn discretion all of a sudden. I'd not thought of that, but I see the good sense of it clear enough. I shall now kiss your hand, my dear, by way of greeting between old playmates after an absence of two months — and then I'll let the argument drop. May I venture?"

"No, you may not," she replied with spirit. "You have spoken very unkindly. Because I ask you to remember that we are no longer little children, you instantly speak as if — as if I do not care for you any more because — because you are not the heir to Admiral's Pride. I do not care for Admiral's Pride! You are — very unkind."

"I beg your pardon most humbly, Isobel," said Francis anxiously. "God knows I do not want to think that! We've been the best of friends ever since you came to Virginia, little girl; so why squabble just