

daresay I shall fall on my legs somehow. If I cared about settling in a pokey town I could have one of the Miss Gwynne's in Conway any day, I know; but no, thank you, I'm not a marrying man,' and Harold looked at himself in his new black suit, and said to himself that he was too good-looking a fellow to be thrown away in a hurry. And after all, perhaps he would stay at the English shop, for business must be kept up whatever happened.

It just darted through his mind, how would things be if—if he married Hope,—but he said to himself that Hope wasn't quite his sort of girl. She was too old-fashioned and too religious. Yes, he said that to himself. He had kept it up while the poor old fellow lived, but he didn't think he could go on bothering with hymns every night, and such like.

No, when Harold did indulge in a day-dream concerning a possible Mrs. Westall, she had not Hope's dark eyes, colourless complexion, and commanding figure. She was curly-haired, fair and laughing, a sort of girl whose pink cheeks he would match with fluttering ribbons, and take on his arm to shows and 'outs,' enjoying the idea of being envied by other young men who had not arrived at such a pitch of married dignity. Hope wouldn't do for that sort of thing. She wasn't bad-looking at all; indeed Harold called to mind one Sunday evening when he had positively thought her pretty. She had gone up the hill a few steps, bareheaded, to breathe the air before returning to her father's sick room, and the wind had caught her dark hair and ruffled it slightly, making her look less prim and sedate than usual. Harold had admired her then, and begged her to take a walk with him, but she would not go, her face was pale and troubled, she could not leave Jonas.

If she had gone, Harold did not know but what he might have made—what he called—a fool of himself and said something to her. Well, perhaps it was best that she had refused his invitation and prevented him binding himself to anything. He was young yet to give up his liberty, he said.

But Harold thought differently on this point by-and-by.

A few days later he was a good deal roused by a thing he heard commonly spoken of in the village. The English shop did not belong equally to the two sisters, Faith and Hope, as he had imagined would be the case at old Halliwell's death. No, Faith had only a third of the concern. Hope it was who was the heiress.

'And she's not badly dowered either,' said one who knew. 'She was old Miriam Pryor's favourite niece.'

Harold meditated on this in silence. Faith came over with her children to spend a week with her sister as soon as she was able to travel. She had still the old discomfort lurking in her heart when she looked at Harold; but what mother's heart will not melt when her darlings nestle gladly in the arms held out to them. Harold was an honest child-lover, as we have said, and Faith's pretty little Olive soon refused to be debarred the shop where Harold was. She beat on the separating door with chubby fists, and distorted her little face into a thousand shapes, while she sobbed for 'Lalla,' as she called her devoted admirer. It was no use saying her nay, so she was accommodated with a nest on the counter while Harold served and weighed and counted. When he rode into Conway the fair-haired baby always sat before him on the saddle for the first half mile, Hope or Mari walking by the side of the pony to convey the little maid home. Olive always obeyed Hope's 'Come now, Livy,' at once; but to Harold's intense delight she invariably engaged in battle with Mari before allowing herself to be dismounted, the deaf old woman coming wounded out of the conflict once, and carrying a scratched face for some days.

Livy was put into the corner for that, and knew she deserved it.

It was still harder now for the prudent young matron to warn Hope against the youthful assistant, since her own little girl took the other side; but, much to her amazement, she tried to make Hope understand her feelings when Harold had ridden in to Conway one afternoon.