

"I dare say, my dear," said Lady Jane, who was thinking of something else. But the words had hardly passed her lips before a sudden idea came into her head. Why not make use of this mistake? Was it not an especial dispensation of Providence? It was just possible that by a very little dexterity a meeting without prejudice might be managed between the two perverse cousins. She kept her presence of mind wonderfully.

"Are they dark or fair? I can't endure dark girls."

"I am very sorry to hear that," said she. "Ah, yes, of course, then Amelia is dark?—I was sure of that. I never heard you rave about any one fair yet."

"You are more perverse than anybody I ever met," said his aunt. "Well, my dear, on the eighteenth of next month you will meet each other here, and will be able to judge for yourselves. I hope to find you in a better frame of mind. You ought to be ashamed of yourself for even thinking of absolutely cheating this poor little girl out of the fortune your poor Uncle George most certainly meant for her."

"My conscience is clear," he said, laughing. "If she had been perfectly hideous, this Amelia Houghton, then indeed I might have felt bound, but as it is—"

"My dear, money is a very nice and comfortable thing, not at all to be despised."

"No, I quite agree with you, nobody has a keener appreciation of that than myself," said the young man with a laugh and a sigh. "I wish it came into one's pockets more easily."

"I did not tell you that little Mollie Houghton came to-day," said Lady Jane, rising and poking the fire. Charlie Houghton started violently.

"What! but you said the eighteenth. You do not mean to say that—"

"Mollie, Mollie," said his aunt a little impatiently. "Never mind the eighteenth. This is Mollie, the little fair one. You see, you have been away so long that you know nothing about your cousins—this is the youngest; she came out last season."

"Lawful name, Mary, I presume. Pretty!"

"Hum. But you must judge for yourself. She is a good little thing, and very clever and quick. Now remember, I must have no flirting; it would not be fair before the eighteenth."

"I ought to have told you, Aunt Jennie," said Captain Houghton, twisting his moustache, "that I am afraid my leave will be up by that time, and that I shall have to rejoin."

"Nonsense!" said Aunt Jennie as she left the room. Lady Jane went up stairs to bring Mollie down when the gong sounded. She put her arm round her waist, and said:

"My dear, I shall have a great deal to say to you, but we will put it off until nearer the eighteenth, and meanwhile you must make yourself as happy as you can. There is no one here but your cousin Charlie Houghton, whom you do not know—one of the Indian Houghtons you know—and grandmother."

Mollie's heart gave a great throb of delight. It was all right then, and the dreaded Captain Houghton was a Charlie, not a Stephen.

III.

It was all very well for Lady Jane to wear comfortable crimson plush in the delicious hour before dinner, when the severest etiquette relaxes, and the comfortable reigns supreme. The next morning all appeared in the rigorous mourning necessitated by the death of the old bachelor great-uncle who had made so extraordinary a will.

Mollie's little black gown fitted her like a riding habit, was short and business-like, her pretty white frills fastened by a pearl stud. "Nothing is worn in the country that is not tailor-made," Meta declared, and certainly the result was very pretty and natty. Mollie's hair was a mass of golden puffiness on the top of her well-shaped head, and a great golden knot behind; her skin was like cream and roses, her blue eyes danced with light and fun.

Tom Grey called her "stunning"; her brother Algy pronounced her "A 1"; and her more severe brother-in-law, Colonel Stewart, said that "she was very much like Aggie."

Breakfast was a very cosy meal at Holliwell. The papers and letters were always on a big built table in the window, and these were opened without ceremony during the process of eating. Moreover, the room was full of steaming machinery—a machine made coffee, a silver saucepan kept on boiling milk, the egg had a machine to themselves, another slowly turned hot toast before the fire. Aunt Jane had a passion for comfortable machinery.

Three letters and two packets were waiting for Mollie.

"My dear," said Lady Jane, holding up her hands, "if you are a good correspondent I wash my hands of you."

"Oh no, Auntie," answered Mollie. "If on this earth there is an occupation that is abhorrent to my very soul, it is letter-writing. These are from mamma, and Meta, and Aggie."

"All of whom you left yesterday."

"Yes, but they must have had an object in writing, they never write without, they hate it as much as I do. Yes! they had an object and a very jolly one," she exclaimed, glancing through her letters. "Meta has sent me a set of Danish silver ornaments, and Aggie an old silver belt. Oh, what ducks they are!"

"Open them quickly," said Aunt Jennie, who loved pretty things.

"Will you give me those packets, Charlie?" said Mollie.

Both Captain Houghton and Lady Jane gave a little jump. Mollie saw it, and grew crimson to the roots of her hair. "We are cousins," she said a little defiantly. "And I always call my cousins by their Christian names."

"Of course, of course," said Charlie hastily. "It is very nice of you, Mollie."

"Ah, but that is quite a different thing," said Mollie. "You are only a man, and I am a woman."

"I always call my cousins by their Christian names," said Charlie, cutting open the strings of Mollie's parcels.

"Hoist with your own petard!" said Lady Jane, laughing. "Quick, Mollie, let me see! It seems to me that Meta and Aggie are sisters worth having."

"We all think there is nobody like each other in the world," said Mollie.

"An excellent sentiment for home use," said Captain Houghton, laughing.

"How pretty they are! how charming!" said Mollie. "Oh, you dears, how I wish I could kiss you!" and she blew two kisses away from her finger-tips.

"Please don't put them on," said her cousin hastily.

"Why not? Of course I shall put them on."

"No, don't! you will only spoil the effect."

"What effect? Auntie, fasten them for me."

"Charlie is right, Mollie, they will look best in the evening; your gown is too severe for such trifling; those delicate little silver chains are out of character."

"Please keep them for the evening."

Mollie was very reluctant to obey, but was just about to yield, when she uttered a little cry of dismay.

"Oh Auntie, what is happening! Good gracious! what is it?"

Something awful was happening to the coffee machine; it was puffing excitedly, heaving itself up, while convulsive movements shook its frame.

"Heavens! Charlie, do something! What is the matter? Take off the lid. Something is fatally wrong."

But the lid was only a detail, and too late to give relief Captain Houghton rushed round to the other side.

"It burns so awfully," he said, shaking his fingers and dancing with pain.

"It is no moment for amateurs," cried Mollie.

"Immediate professional advice is absolutely essential," and she pulled the bell frantically.

"Why can't you do something, Charlie? Anything!" cried Lady Jane with a frenzied stamp.

The noises increased in violence every moment. In desperation Captain Houghton caught up a table napkin, threw it round the gasping machine, and carrying it out into the passage deposited it on the floor.

He had scarcely returned when a loud explosion took place outside, followed by an ominous rushing sound.

"It is all over," said in a funeral voice.

Mollie sat down and laughed till the tears rolled down her face.

"It is no laughing matter," cried Auntie Jennie. "I wonder what was wrong with the thing. What was it, Peter?" she asked of the butler when he had reached the scene of action.

She was of course informed that it was nothing but the accidental shutting of an all-important though minute safety-valve.

"I knew it could be nothing wrong with the thing itself, and you really might have known," looking wrathfully at Charlie, who was occupied looking pitifully at the burnt tips of his fingers.

"I am very sorry, Aunt Jennie," he began, but started nervously and stopped, for a strange bubbling began on the sideboard.

Lady Jane whisked the lid off the silver saucepan. "There is nothing like presence of mind," she said, complacently. "And now bring some fresh coffee and let us go on with our breakfasts."

Mollie had to stop laughing as best she might.

"It is a good thing Gwendoline did not come down to breakfast," said Lady Jane, presently.

"Has she a headache this morning?"

"Not much; you may go and have a chat on her bed if you like, Mollie, after breakfast. As for you, Charlie, you have got to earn your bread to-day, if you please."

"What am I to do? From breaking stones on the road upward, I am at your service."

"Shoot for the cook," said Lady Jane. "It is essential, especially as I am going to have a number of people here next week."

"What do you want?"

"Anything you can get, biped, feathered and quadruped; there are some very wild birds still to be had. Give your own orders. I told Peters you would want the keepers this morning."

"I hope you won't be out the very whole day," said Mollie.

"Nonsense, Mollie, I won't have him come home till it is too dark to see to shoot—the kitchen is desperately hard up."

"That is the reason we had that salmi," said Charlie. "I never tasted such ancient old bones in all my life."

"Ungrateful! Well, it rests with yourself whether you are well fed or not."

Mollie went up to Gwendoline's room and met with a warm welcome from her gentle cousin.

When it grew too dark to shoot, Charlie Houghton felt that he had done his duty like a man and came home.

Now the post went out at six o'clock at Holliwell—a very awkward time—and Lady Jane always put off her letters to the very last, so that five o'clock was not the uninterrupted hour that by all right it should be.

Lady Jane was writing hard at the far end of the room when Captain Houghton came, and Mollie was sitting on a low stool by her cousin's sofa learning to make Chinese knots on a piece of embroidery.

"We will have tea without waiting for mamma," said Gwendoline. "And you shall pour it out, Mollie."

"What luck have you had, Charlie?" asked Mollie.

"Half a brace," he answered.

"In common English, one. What was the one? animal? vegetable, mineral? how many legs? how many wings? only one head, it is self-evident."

"What do you say you have shot?" cried Lady Jane from her writing table.

"Four and a half brace, two hares and a cat, Aunt Jennie," answered Captain Houghton.

"Where did you kill the cat?" cried Mollie, indignantly.

"Care killed the cat," he answered quickly.

"Yes, but why did you shoot at it? I hate poor innocent cats being shot for nothing."

"Sorry I mentioned it," answered Charlie.

"It was not at all a nice puss, a regular vicious old tom—just the sort of grimalkin that a witch would have."

"Perhaps some poor old witch is now breaking in her heart for the want of it."

"It is bad enough that a young witch should be doing so," said Charlie.

"After that, Mollie, you may as well give me my tea," said Gwendoline.

"Any message to your mother, Mollie?" asked Lady Jane.

"Please say I have half written a long letter, auntie, and that I got here safely."

"Any comment on her letter, little woman?"

"No, auntie," answered Mollie, her cheeks becoming pink, "certainly no comment. Gwendoline, buttered toast, or cake, or bread-and-butter?"

"Bread-and-butter, please. No, not that bit, that bit underneath is the chosen of my heart."

"I was always brought up to take the first that came, and no choice," said Mollie demurely.

Aunt Jennie came toward the table, and hearing Mollie's last words, said with meaning:

"Your mother is a wise woman."

Gwendoline went up to her room after tea, whither Lady Jane followed her. There was always some anxiety in her heart about this one beloved daughter who was constantly suffering more or less, and yet was so brave, and good and cheerful, that her sofa was a very centre of comfort and content.

Mollie ensconced herself in a very low chair with a book. Charlie lazily lay back in another. It was very pleasant and warm, and the lamps were green shades which gave a delicious, subdued light.

"It is an odd thing," said Captain Houghton slowly, "how extraordinarily fast one becomes friends with one's cousins—in fact one gets to know them directly as if one had been intimate for years."

"I don't think I do," answered Mollie, her thoughts wandering to her own troubles. "To tell the honest truth, I have a rooted antipathy to my cousins just now."

"A what?" he exclaimed incredulously.

"A rooted antipathy."

"How very unkind!"

"Oh, I was not thinking of you at all, but of unknown cousins. I have lots."

"Most of them my nearest relations, I presume," he said, rather stiltily.

"I have not the least idea who your relations are," she answered. "Aunt Jennie is vague, she only described you as one of the Indian Houghtons."

"I thought you knew Stephen at all events."

"No, I don't; which is Stephen, asked Mollie, her face once more growing crimson.

"Stephen is an awful name."

"He is the dearest old fellow in the world," very indignantly. "There never was such an old brick."

"I feel a repugnance to his very name," she answered. "Who is he? your brother, your cousin, your what?"

"My uncle, of course, but he is only ten years older than I am, and he has been so much in England that I made sure that you knew him."

"I do not, and I do not wish to know him," said Mollie very distinctly. "I am quite certain that we should not get on, or understand each other in the very least."

"I don't think he would understand you, certainly," said Captain Houghton, humbly, "he is the most just, straightforward, best-tempered fellow out."

"It can't endure the very idea of him."

"At all events, you are not likely to have to put up with him, Miss Houghton, for he is not in England now."

"You are offended with me," said Mollie, suddenly aware of the enormity of her tirade.

"Not in the least, thank you," he answered coolly. "I am not Stephen."

"No, thank Heaven, you are not!"

"I never heard such prejudice in my life," said Charlie excitedly, rising to his feet. "Here is a fellow you never heard of or saw, one of the best going, the dearest old chap, and you sit there and abuse him like a pickpocket for nothing at all."

"I am accountable to no one for my likes and dislikes," said Mollie perversely.

"Then your horribly uncharitable."

"Charlie," and Mollie sat with her breath panting with indignation, "nobody ever said such a thing to me in my life."

"Oh, Mollie," he said suddenly, "you are angry; I wish I had not said it!"

"I should not mind if it were not true," she answered despondently, "and I won't say it any more."

"That's right, dear, and now we'll be comfortable again. Why, we have had a regular shindy."

"I am afraid I was cross," said Mollie penitently.

"Never mind," said Charlie superbly. "We will forget it, and you know he really is the best old fellow."

"He is not," cried Mollie, with a little stamp.

Captain Houghton threw himself into his chair, took up his newspaper, and buried himself in its contents. Mollie returned to her book, and silence reigned.

The dressing-bell rang. Mollie rose and lit a candle.

Just as she was leaving the room, Captain Houghton followed her hastily to the door, but whatever he was going to say was nipped in the bud, for an influx of servants poured in to arrange the rooms before dinner, and he was obliged to go up and dress.

(To be continued.)

VARIETIES.

THE head of the French Rothschilds does not seem to have the ready wit for which his father was distinguished. When his office was invaded the other day by fifty Polish Jews clamoring for money, he had to call the police to clear them out. The late Baron James Rothschilds was, during the revolution of 1848, confronted in his study by two brawny ruffians, who announced that they, as representatives of the "people," had come to claim and enforce an equal division of property. "Well," said the baron, "and at what figure do you put my fortune?" "A hundred millions." "Good; and what is the population of France? You don't know? Well, I will tell you. It is about thirty millions. Now, divide my hundred millions among thirty millions and you will find that each one's share will be a little more than three francs. Here, I will give you your full share at once," and he handed each one a five-franc piece, wished them good morning and bowed them out.

A. T. STEWART'S aversion to having his portrait taken is well known in New York; a correspondent in the *Missouri Republican* endeavors to throw some light on the subject and tells a story, to wit:—There is in Mrs. A. T. Stewart's gallery, hidden away amid drawers, Bonheurs, Knauses, Ludovics, Meissoniers and Churches, a dingy photograph. At a glance it is evident that it is a picture of Bismarck, stern enough to be the master of bloodhounds. It contains his name written in those long, straggling letters that need almost to be held at the horizontal level with the eye to read. It is a photograph that Bismarck sent to Mr. Stewart some years ago with the request for a similar gift from him in return. Mr. Stewart hesitated a long time about what to do, but he is said not to have been tempted to waver from his determination not to have his photograph taken, which was one of his firmest resolutions. He acknowledged Bismarck's gift in a polite note, stated his aversion to having his photograph taken, and enclosed a check for one thousand dollars to be given some charity. There is no reason given for Mr. Stewart's determination not to have his picture taken. Some conjecture that it was because of his wish to be able to appear suddenly at any point in his vast machinery of business without being recognized; others that he feared abduction; others that he wished to avoid identification for numerous reasons more easily thought of than expressed, and others that he wished to be thought of as being more imposing in appearance than he was. The only picture of him is a painting in Mrs. Stewart's room kept concealed by a curtain.

HOME ITEMS.

—All your own fault
If you remain sick when you can
Get hop bitters that never fail.

The weakest woman, smallest child, and sickest invalid can use hop bitters with safety and great good.

—Old men tottering around from Rheumatism, kidney trouble or any weakness will be almost new by using hop bitters.

—My wife and daughter were made healthy by the use of hop bitters and I recommend them to my people.—Methodist Clergyman.

Ask any good doctor if hop
Bitters are not the best family medicine
On earth.

—Malarial fever, Ague and Biliousness, will leave every neighborhood as soon as hop bitters arrive.

—My mother drove the paralysis and neuralgia all out of her system with hop bitters.—*Ed. Oswego Sun.*

—Keep the kidneys healthy with hop bitters and you need not fear sickness.

—Ice water is rendered harmless and more refreshing and reviving with hop bitters in each draught.

—The vigor of youth for the aged and infirm in hop bitters.