

"Yes, indeed I am. *What* do you think I ought to do?" Mrs. Saxelby crossed her hands, and raised her soft blue eyes imploringly.

Perhaps no more subtle flattery can be addressed to a man, than through an appeal made to his superior wisdom and experience, by a woman who asks his advice, and appears to lean helplessly and reliantly on his strength. When the appeal is made in the shape of a great confidence, which he supposes to be entrusted to himself alone, and when the appellant is a still graceful and pretty woman, the incense is so intoxicating, as to be well-nigh irresistible.

Clement—far from being a vain man—was not insensible to this flattery. And though Mrs. Saxelby had just confessed her utter inability to form a judgment for the guidance of her own conduct, he had a confused impression at that moment that she was a very sensible person, and that he had never hitherto done full justice to her discernment.

"Dear Mrs. Saxelby, I appreciate your confidence very highly indeed, and I feel diffident in offering advice on so delicate and important a matter. But, since you ask me, I will frankly tell you, that if Miss Earnshaw were my sister, or my—my cousin—I would not hesitate to put a decided veto upon her schem."

"I thought so," returned Mrs. Saxelby. "I fancied that would be your opinion. But what am I to do with her? You see what she writes. And after all you know, Mr. Charlewood, her chief anxiety is for me and Dooley."

"Miss Earnshaw is the most excellent young lady I know. Believe me, I have the highest admiration and—and—respect for her. But it is the duty of her true friends to shield her from the consequences of her own generosity and inexperience. Of course, as her mother, you feel that strongly."

"Mabel is not easily turned from what she thinks right, Mr. Charlewood."

"Undoubtedly. But if this course could be shown her to be not right?"

"Ah, how is one to do that? I may have my own convictions" (Mrs. Saxelby never did have her own convictions being always willing to cling to other people's); "but to persuade Mabel of their correctness—that is not so easy."

"She would not disobey your commands?"

"No. She would not do that. She has always been a loving and dutiful child. But how can I have the heart to condemn her to the hopeless drudgery she is now engaged in? You see she fears that her health may absolutely give way."

"But, Mrs. Saxelby, it does not follow that all her life need be sacrificed to this drudgery. Surely a better position might be found for her. And, besides: would you not like, Mrs. Saxelby, to see your daughter, and talk to her yourself?"

"Oh, so much! But that is out of the question until Easter. The Christmas holidays are just over."

"I mean, could you not run over to Eastfield for a day? I have long been intending to ask my friend Dooley to a bachelor dinner. If you would come too, Mrs. Saxelby, I should esteem it a great honour."

"To dinner?"

"Yes; at Eastfield. I have business that will oblige me to go there, at the end of the week. We could dine at the hotel, and I would convey you and Dooley home in the evening. You might thus have an opportunity at once of speaking to Miss Earnshaw, and conferring an obligation on me."

"You are very good; but—"

"Pray don't raise any difficulties, dear Mrs. Saxelby. If it were summer-time, I would bring a carriage and drive you over. But in this weather I fear I must ask you to come by the train. You will be warmer. And the journey will be so much shorter for Dooley at night."

Mrs. Saxelby hesitated only at the idea of going to Eastfield as Clement Charlewood's guest, for she had an uneasy sense that Mabel would disapprove of her doing so. However, Clement's strong purpose prevailed; as almost

any strong purpose, strongly urged, was sure to prevail with Mrs. Saxelby. She at last consented to accept the invitation; meanwhile, she would write to Mabel to prepare her for the visit, without returning any decisive answer to her letter.

"Of course you will hold my confidence sacred, and mention what I have said to no one," said Mrs. Saxelby, as Clement was about to take his leave.

"I shall certainly mention it to no one without your express permission. I did think at one time of asking one of my sisters to play hostess for us at our little dinner; but, under the circumstances of our visit to Eastfield, you will prefer that no other person should be asked?"

"Oh, please no. I don't want anybody to know a word. If Miss Fluke were to hear—"

"Miss Fluke!" exclaimed Clement, with a start. "The last person on this earth to be thought of! If she were to speak to your daughter on this subject—which she would not refrain from doing—would be certain to do if confided in—she would drive Miss Earnshaw to extremity, and offend her beyond forgiveness. Miss Fluke! In Heaven's name do not think of Miss Fluke!"

"Benjamin thought very highly of her," said Mrs. Saxelby, in a deprecating manner.

"Good-bye till Saturday, and no Miss Fluke! I will send a fly for you at twelve o'clock, if that will suit your convenience, and will meet you myself at the station in Hammerham."

"Good-bye; and thank you very, very much, dear Mr. Charlewood."

Dooley had been standing wistfully for some minutes by Clement's side, holding a letter in his hand, finding himself unnoticed, he had crept away to the window, where he climbed upon a chair, and knelt with his forehead against the glass.

"Good-bye, Dooley!" said Clement, coming behind him.

"Dood-bye," said the little fellow, in a low voice, but he neither moved nor looked round.

"Won't you shake hands?"

"No," returned Dooley, dryly.

"Dooley, I'm ashamed of you," cried his mother. "Not shake hands with Mr. Charlewood?"

"Dooley turned round slowly, and held out his tiny hand, then they saw that the child's eyes were full of tears.

"Why, Dooley, my boy, what's the matter?" asked Clement.

No reply.

"And there's your sister's letter, that you never showed me, after all. Mayn't I see it now?"

"No."

"No?"

"Oo don't want to tee it," said Dooley, checking a sob, and turning resolutely towards the window again, with the letter pressed against his breast.

"Ah!" said Mrs. Saxelby aside to Clement, "I see what it is. He is so sensitive about any slight to Tibby. Her letters are his great joy and pride, and he fancied you did not sufficiently appreciate the privilege of seeing one."

Clement took the child in his arms, and kissed his forehead with almost a woman's tenderness. "Dooley," said he, "I will be so grateful to you, if you will let me see Mabel's letter. I will indeed. I love her, Dooley," he whispered, pressing his cheek against the child's. Dooley looked at him with a solemn searching gaze, and then gave the letter into his hand without a word.

Clement read it and duly admired it, and was careful to remark that it was addressed to "Dooley Saxelby, Esq., Hazlehurst, near Hammerham," upon his reading which direction aloud, Dooley chuckled with irrepressible glee, and stuffed a corner of his pinafore, still wet with tears, into his mouth.

Clement walked to the village inn for his horse, mounted, and rode briskly toward Hammerham. His head was full of whirling thoughts, and the beat of his horse's hoofs seemed to be keeping time to the rhythmic repetition of a name.

What name?

MABEL, MABEL, MABEL, EARNSHAW.

#### CHAPTER IV. THE TRESCOTTS AT HOME.

"I'm blow'd if this ain't a rum game!" exclaimed Mr. Alfred Trescott to his father, enunciating the words with some difficulty, by reason of the cigar which he held between his teeth.

The Trescott family was assembled in Mrs. Hutchins's front kitchen on the Sunday evening on which Mrs. Saxelby had taken counsel of Clement Charlewood. The mistress of the house was from home, and the master had retired to the attic in which he slept. Mr. Hutchins, poor hard-working man, always went to rest at about seven o'clock on Sunday evenings, and usually enjoyed a long and uninterrupted slumber, to judge by the sonorous snores that made the lath and plaster of Number 23, New Bridge-street, tremble.

Mrs. Hutchins had become an ardent disciple of Miss Fluke, and was, at that moment, listening to the supererogatory sermon which Miss Fluke denominated "Sabbath evening lecture." Mrs. Hutchins found, to her pleased surprise, that she got nearly as much excitement out of Miss Fluke's spiritual exercises as from Rosalba herself; and she found, too, that whereas she must frankly own to seeking Rosalba for her own personal amusement and delectation, it was possible to lay claim to great merit and virtue on the score of her frequent attendance at the religious meetings held under the patronage of the Reverend Decimus Fluke and his family. In short, the profession and practice of the Flukian school of piety combined the usually incompatible advantages of eating one's cake and having it too. So Mrs. Hutchins was at present a model parishioner, and had—to use the jargon in vogue amongs the congregation of St. Philip-a-the-Fields—"got conversion."

Little Corda, still pale and delicate, but quite recovered from her accident, was sitting on a wooden stool before the hearth, with her head leaning against her father's knee, and her musing eyes fixed on the glowing caverns in the coal fire. Mr. Trescott was copying music at the deal table, which was strewn with loose sheets of manuscript orchestral parts, gritty with the sand that had been thrown upon the wet ink to dry it quickly, and save time. Alfred took his cheap cigar from between his teeth, and repeated with more emphasis and distinctness than before that he was blowed if this wasn't a rum game.

"Alf," said Corda, looking up very seriously, "I wish you wouldn't talk like that. I wish you wouldn't say blowed 'and rum.' They're quite vulgar words, and you ought not to use them. People might think it was because you didn't know any better. But you do know better, don't you?"

"Pussy-cat. I haven't time for your nonsense," was her brother's gracious reply; "I was talking to the governor."

"Well, well, well," said Mr. Trescott, irritably, "what is it? What do you want? One, two, three, four—tut! you've made me write a bar twice over."

"Don't be crusty, governor," returned his son, coolly. Alfred was of an irascible and violent temper himself, but his father's nervous irritability usually made him assume a stoically calm demeanour. He felt his own advantage in being cool, and besides he had an innate and cruel love of teasing, which was gratified by the spectacle of powerless anger. "You needn't flare up; it'll only make you bilious, and I shan't be frightened into speaking pretty. I was saying that the letter of Miss Earnshaw's is a rum game."

Mr. Trescott finished the page of manuscript on which he was engaged, sprinkled some pounce over it, plied the loose sheets one upon the other in a neat packet, and then, gently moving Corda's head from its resting-place, turned his chair round from the table, and stared at the fire with hands buried deep in his pockets, and a thoughtful frown on his face.

"It's very natural," he said, after a long silence, "that if Mrs. Walton is her aunt she should want to get her aunt's address. I was sure, from the first moment I saw that girl's ace, she was very like some one I know. And