

"The children are out walking with their nurse, or you should see them. Perhaps you will, meantime, be interested in this handwriting." And she showed her the letter she was twirling between her fingers: a letter directed to herself, in the careful, delicate calligraphy chiefly practised by French ladies. "That is Blanche's writing. She tells me that the aunt with whom she stays during her brief sojourn in London is planning all sorts of gayeties for her. A bad preparation for our quiet life on this hill-top, I fear."

"O, I hope not," was Caroline's mechanical reply.

Her eyes were wandering wistfully towards that point in the landscape where at this moment a curling cloud of steam, and a rumbling sound, as of swift motion, betokened the course of the railway. Miss Kendal took her arm, and twined in within her own.

"You must come in-doors now, and see the wonders there. Furbish up your stock of admiration, my dear. I like my properties to be appreciated."

Thus she went on, and made no allusion to the flushed cheek and unquiet manner. And when, presently, Caroline restlessly talked of going back—"she must go back—it was getting late—she must go quickly"—Miss Kendal quietly put on her bonnet and shawl, and prepared to go with her. She probably saw, though she took not the slightest apparent notice of it, the momentary start and glance of troubled deprecation with which Caroline received her volunteered companionship on her homeward walk. But she made no remonstrance, no objection, and they walked on together—through the pine wood, down the hill, and along the broad path on the slope that led to Redwood.

Twilight was closing in as they reached the house. Caroline looked eagerly round, and for the first time suffered her lips to unclose on the subject whereof her heart and soul were full.

"Vaughan is to be here this evening. The train comes in before six, sometimes." She called to a servant who just appeared at the gate which led to the stables, and asked him, "Had the phaeton been sent to the station?"

"No, miss."

"How is that?" Caroline turned on the man, sharply. Look and gesture both expressed for the moment an almost fierce displeasure. Only for the moment; instantaneously she came to herself. "I desired it might be sent at half-past five o'clock, Robert."

"My master sent word it would not be wanted this evening, miss. He had a letter from Mr. Vaughan by the afternoon post, to say he was not coming to-day."

"O, very well."