

at all a grasping woman, and she would have been much better pleased if he had brought her a bouquet. But there it was! The Rector meant to be kind and not sentimental.

He thought that two people who had been married fifteen or sixteen years, should study each other's substantial comforts, and a fur lined cloak seemed to him the very thing his Elizabeth wanted, especially when, at this time of the year, it had the additional attraction of being cheap.

And then he had brought each of his children something useful, too. The girls some pretty spring gown pieces, and Roddie (who was his favourite, if such an evenly balanced mind allowed himself a favourite) various small gifts, all likely to forward his education. And I have almost forgotten to mention—and the Rector did forget to mention it until the very last of the other present: were bestowed—that Godfrey Harford had also sent Lady Elizabeth the new spring bonnet she had asked for.

This bonnet, it must be admitted, was a failure. However excellent Godfrey's taste might be in jewellery and pretty faces, it was certainly not in bonnets. It was of straw, and stiff. Now, one of Lady Elizabeth's great attractions was that she dressed to perfection. Whatever she put on seemed to suit her, because she took very good care to put on nothing that did not. Her style was graceful, perhaps rather gorgeous, for she loved to wear rich velvets and costly lace, which she could arrange round her fine form with rare becomingness.

"But this little, stiff, straw bonnet, how could Godfrey have bought such a thing?" many a time thought poor Lady Elizabeth, ruefully regarding her new possession. And she must wear it. The Squire was a man who noticed little things about dress, and Lady Elizabeth felt sure no would notice the absence of his gift the very first Sunday he was at home, if she did not appear in it.

But the spring had passed away before the bonnet was worn. Godfrey Harford lingered long abroad passing from city to city, and his relations at the Rectory only heard from him occasionally. It was the middle of May when he came back, and affairs progressed very quietly both at Kimal and at the Court during his absence.

Major Doyme had spent a week or two at home (having had a sharp encounter with his mother on his arrival there upon the subject of Sir Rupert Miles), and during this time he had seen a great deal of Alan Lester. The two men had fallen back into their old intimacy, and went fishing excursions and riding excursions almost daily together. This naturally threw Alan Lester with Lily, and sometimes she was painfully shy with him, and sometimes her old sweet trustful manner to him would return. Alan could not make her out. He asked Frank one day if he had offended Lily in any way, but the little Major answered with a smile that he was quite sure he had not.

"She is a shy little creature, and hates the idea of making advances to anyone."

"I think that could not apply to me," answered Alan also with a smile, "as I have known her since she was a child."

"She thinks herself a grown up young woman now though, and that makes all the difference."

Nevertheless Lily went out with her brother and Alan more than once to fish, though her part of the fishing consisted in merely unpacking the luncheon basket. Still she used to take the smart new fishing rod, which the Squire of Kimal had presented to her, and one day Alan took it up and admired it.

"Where did you get this swell article, Lily?" he asked.

Lily blushed deeply, as she answered.

"Mr. Harford gave it to me one day at the Rectory when he brought the children each a fishing rod to fish in the Rector's new pond."

"And did my friend Godfrey fish too?" smiled Alan, balancing the fishing rod.

"It was only play with us all, I think. I don't like to catch fish, you know."

"Yes, I know, I observe Miss Lily Doyme prefers to sit gracefully on the bank, watching the ripple of the water, I think, or the shadow of the trees. Well, never mind, Lily, we'll catch the fish for you, and you must eat them."

Lily laughed merrily, and threw off her brown straw hat, and strolled away a few steps from the fishermen to a little knoll beneath, where a stately oak's thick branches spread a deeper, darker shade.

It was a bright May day, warm and mild, and the young foliage of the great

tree beneath which she sat was in its fresh spring-time, and the girl kept looking up at the grand branches, throwing out their arms against the blue white-flecked sky.

How still it was! Only the ripple of the stream a little below, and the lumberous sound of bees, and the cooing of the pigeons from the wood beyond. Lily leaned back against the vast garbled trunk of the oak, idly watching through the branches the white clouds sailing before the light wind, and then, idly too, began weaving a garland of the small ground ivy which grew thickly around her.

As she did this she was herself "fair to see." She wore a white woollen gown with a little brown silk handkerchief knotted round her slender throat. And as she went on with her garland, Alan got tired of his fishing rod, for the sun was too bright on the water, and leaving his rod on the bank, he strolled towards where Lily was sitting beneath the shadow of the oak.

"May I enter, fair Druidess?" he asked smiling, "and—may I smoke?"

He seated himself by her side, and kept looking at her nimble little white finger twisting the ivy with a sort of languid interest, while over the girl's whole being stole such a sense of delicious joy that it was almost akin to pain.

"For whom is your garland, Lily?" presently asked Alan.

"I twist them round the flower-baskets at home, and they look pretty for days."

"Will you make me one to take home to my mother?"

"Yes, of course; you can have this one."

At this moment a shout of triumph was heard proceeding from the bank of the stream below, and Alan started to his feet.

"Frank has caught a fish, I declare!" he cried, and Frank presently appeared carrying his spoil in his creel with pride.

"I told you to have patience," he said. "By Jove you two look very comfortable here though—and I feel remarkably thirsty."

Upon this hint Alan whistled with his dog whistled twice and this was the signal for the luncheon basket to appear. They had driven over and put up at old Jee Davidson's, Alan having called for Frank and Lily Doyme at Kingsford on the way, and the servant was ordered to bring down lunch to the stream when Alan whistled.

In a few minutes they were all very busily engaged, though Lily was too happy to be hungry; she ran about helping her brother, whose appetite was remarkably good.

"I must say Miss Lil has chosen a very picturesque spot to lunch in," said the little Major, looking complacently up from his plate.

"And she adds to the picture," said Alan. "Frank isn't at all picturesque, is he, Sir Alan, devouring pigeon pie?"

"Oh, my dear, I'm too old and too worn to care for appearances—it's all very well for a pretty young woman! And she is rather a pretty young woman," he added, presently going up to where Lily was sitting, and lifting her ivy garland, and twisting it round her fair head. "There! I have crowned you—a little woodland queen!"

"I didn't know you were so poetical, Frank!" laughed Lily, with a happy blush, conscious, perhaps, that her garland was not unbecoming.

"You don't know what undeveloped attractions I may possess."

"Hold the luncheon basket quite steady for a few minutes will you, Frank," now said Lily, jumping up and turning the basket on one side. "I want to mount on it—there is a bit of foliage on that bough I must have."

She was as lithe and slender as a child. Frank obediently knelt down and held the basket, and Lily balanced herself with her pretty little feet on the wicker-work edge, and stretching up her arms, caught one of the stunted low hanging boughs, crowned with its beautiful pale, yellow-brown leaves.

"Isn't it lovely?" she said, plucking spray after spray and flinging them down, and then when she left her hold on the branch, the jerk it gave upwards upset her equilibrium. And she would certainly have fallen backward if Alan Lester had not caught her in his arms.

"Silly little girl," he said, "you might have hurt yourself."

"That's rather a come down to your pride, Miss Lil," remarked her brother, with a laugh.

"You shook the basket, Frank!" said Lily, releasing herself from Alan's arms, who was looking at her admiringly.

"Do you know what poor Jim used to call you, Lily?" he asked.

"No, poor boy!"

"A wood-nymph—his wood-nymph I believe—you look like a wood-nymph now."

"Then I must go back to an ordinary English girl—I will get my hat and take off my ivy crown."

"Wear it for a little while," said Alan still looking at her intently, and then after a moment or two he turned away with a restless sigh.

Something, as she spoke so brightly, as she looked up smiling so sweetly in his face, had recalled Annette to him, and the last spring-time that he had spent with her. He remembered just such a day as this—"One of those heavenly days that cannot die"—when he had stood with her too under the tender green of the opening leaves. He had tried not to think of her of late, and a conversation that he had with Frank Doyme after he returned to Kingsford, had helped him in this determination. Major Doyme had thought the matter over, and had spoken to Alan with apparent frankness, though with certain reservations which he thought prudent, regarding Annette's relations with her husband.

"I dined with Miles," said the little Major, "long his long tawny moustache as usual, 'I don't think he's such a bad sort of fellow. Mother had irritated him, you know, and he's confoundedly jealous, but as I told Annette if she is wise she will make the best of him, and I believe he is very fond of her.'"

"But does she seem happy?"

"Fairly happy, I think; and then you see, my dear fellow, if she chose to marry him for his money, and she has got his money, and I do not see how she could shirk her share of the bargain."

Major Doyme little thought as he repeated these words to Alan, the terrible effect which they had already created on the mind of the unhappy man of whom he spoke.

"And I wrote to her also," continued Doyme, "and pointed out to her that the past cannot be recalled, and that her best chance of happiness will now lie in learning to care for her husband. As I tell her, she could not part from him without grave scandal, and as far as I could learn he has certainly given her no reason to attempt such a thing."

Alan was silent. He bit his lips. The conversation was naturally intensely painful to him.

"All that she could say against him was that he is stupidly jealous, and that he won't let her go into society. Well, there it is!" (and the Major shrugged his shoulders). "Everyone to their taste, you know. I would find it supremely stupid to be constantly alone with one person, but Miles seems of an exactly opposite opinion. It's rather hard on a lovely coquettish girl like Annette to have got such a jealous husband, but I see no way to make any better of it, except for her to turn a very loving wife."

And Major Doyme laughed, feeling sure that in speaking thus he was speaking for the benefit of his friend.

And his word were not without effect on Alan's heart. He knew no better could be made of it, and that Doyme was speaking the truth when he said Annette had married Sir Rupert Miles "for his money, and had got his money." So he tried not to think of her; he went fishing with Lily and Frank, and he interested himself in the building of some new cottages for his workmen, and he did not forget also the unhappy girl Laura Davis, who lay in prison sorely ill.

But as yet nothing had come to light. The bloodguiltiness of James Lester's death remained a hidden mystery to Alan and the prisoner's mother, and no one else believed there was any mystery about it.

Such was the position of affairs on the bright May day when Lily stood under the great oak tree, crowned with ivy, and her smiles, her levelness, brought Annette so vividly back to Alan's mind.

He turned away, he grew silent, and the rest of the fishing excursion was not so lively as the beginning had been. But Lily had been happy, dangerously happy, and Frank Doyme also thought that things were progressing very satisfactorily. His leave was ended, and he was returning to duty the next day, but he hoped soon to hear that his friend Alan and his "little Lil" were going to be as happy as they deserved, and in the way that he was sure would make them so.

But after he left Kingsford, Lily did not see so much of Alan. She was too shy to go to the Court, and Alan disliked Mrs. Doyme so much that he never went to the Grange. A week and more passed away and he never saw her at all, and then one afternoon Mr. Harford, who had returned to Kimal two days before, arrived to call at Roden.

Alan was unaffectedly glad to see him. The Squire was a great favourite both of Lady Lester and her son; Lady Lester ever speaking of him, and also Lady Elizabeth, in the highest terms. They were old friends, her husband's friends, and had always been intimate at the Court. They pressed him, therefore, to stay and dine with them, and Godfrey Harford, with a word of apology for his dress to Lady Lester, gladly consented.

He was not looking well. Never a handsome man, his strong features looked harsher and more marked than of yore, and he was decidedly thinner. He joked about the French and Italian cookery not having suited him, and talked much as usual in his sprightly way, still Lady Lester's gentle, but acute gaze detected something was amiss.

Yet during dinner he made himself very agreeable, talking with shrewd observation and some humour of the incidents that had happened to him abroad. But when Lady Lester left them, Alan noticed that his manner and expression suddenly changed, and presently he asked Alan's leave to go out on the terrace in front to smoke their cigars.

It was a fine night, still and balmy, and the placid beauty of the Court lay sleeping in cold white moonlight, each tree, each leaf with borrowed silver ray.

They walked up and down at first almost in silence, something in the scene and hour, in the dewy freshness of "the silent air," filled each heart with a strange sadness and shadowy and indistinct memories from the past seemed to linger around them.

At last Godfrey Harford spoke, and there was a ring of great pain in his voice.

"We are old friends, Alan," he said, "and I came here to-day intending to tell you something."

"What is that, Harford?"

"I don't know whether I am justified in telling it, but I think I am. Some one's happiness, some one who is very dear to me is concerned in this story, and I know she would never forgive me if she knew that I told you, but I know what you are—a man so honourable that a woman's secret will always be safe with you, and I am therefore going to trust you."

"Of course, you can trust me."

"There is a little girl," said the Squire, in a strangely pathetic tone, as if spoken through unshed tears, "a little girl who seems to me the sweetest and purest child on earth, and whose love I was fool enough to hope to win. Can you guess, now? I asked Lily Doyme to marry me before I went away, and she refused me, and when I asked her if she could give me no hope she said she could give me none."

"I am truly sorry for this, Harford—most sorry."

"I had set my heart upon it, and it was a very bitter blow, but there it was! I am too old I know for her, but still I hoped to make this up. I would have tried hard to make her happy, but it was not to be—and Alan, when I urged her to tell me the reason, I wrung from her innocent lips that she had no love to give—that—that—"

"What?" asked Alan sharply, colouring, and looking round quickly in Mr. Harford's face.

"I wrung from her innocent lips," repeated the Squire, and his eyes grew dim, "that she had given her love to you, that when all the trouble came to you, when her sister left you, that her heart went to you. She faltered this out, saying there was nothing between you, that you cared nothing for her, but that she cared for you, though no one was ever to know this, and she only told me to spare me further pain."

Alan Lester was deeply moved.

"I never thought of such a thing," said: "I am completely astonished."

"I have seen her once since I and I fancied she did not look like this. This is what made me come."

"I can trust you, and you never to tell her that, I told you. This conversation, I had never been. I own heart. But mother; my dear—"

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