

softened; her knitting needles clashed in a somewhat less defiant and uncompromising manner. She considered within herself how best to give him the opportunity he sought. But while she considered, the silver voice from the fireside claimed his attention.

"Mr. Hesketh! do you know any petits contes. They want another, and I am tired."

Much flattered at her notice, Vaughan turned from his window, and advanced towards the little circle of eager faces, and its bewitching centre. Some awkward afterthought, though, made his approach less graceful than was usual with him. He even halted midway, to inquire, in a curious, constrained tone, "What he could have the pleasure of doing for Madame de Vigny." At which the young lady looked up, with a momentary, and probably unconscious, elevation of her pretty eyebrows, eloquently testifying to the singularity of the gentleman's deportment.

"For me? Ah! nothing. But you may amuse these children, if you will."

And, apparently taking a mischievous pleasure in his discomfiture, she moved from her seat, disentangled herself from the children, with a kiss to one, and a whispered promise to another, and came and leaned over Miss Kendal and her knitting.

"Do you know, I should like to learn that droll work of yours? One cannot for ever work at broderie. Cela m'ennuie."

"My dear, we shall cure you of that disease in good time," observed Miss Kendal, kindly, as, with her quaint, but irresistibly trust-compelling smile, she looked up into the charming, alluring face. "But I doubt if my droll work would exactly suit you. We shall see."

But here the children came crowding round. Mr. Vaughan Hesketh had apparently found himself unequal to the prescribed task of their amusement. He stood, uncomfortably enough, handling some books that were on the table, and every now and then giving furtive glances towards the two ladies. Madame de Vigny bestowed on him a half-imperious, half-reproachful, but wholly fascinating look, as the little troop came about her, with eager demands for "more stories!"

"Ah! I told you I was tired. I can think of no more to tell you just now. But if you like, we will go into the nursery, and play at that game—what do you call it, you petits sauvages?—bat-tel-dor and shut-tel-cock!" Pronouncing the inharmonious syllables very carefully, to the hilarious mirth of the children, Blanche moved, closely followed by them, to the door. There she turned, and with another pretty gesture of imperial *froideur*, she bent an adieu to the much-suffering Vaughan: "Good morning, Mr. Hesketh! We are all much obliged for your kind attention."