

The slightly irritated impatience with which Mrs. Mortimer had listened to the first words of this speech gave way to a shrewd amusement. "You mean that you've put Lydia up on such a high plane to begin with that whichever way she goes will be a step down," she asked.

"Yes, yes; that's just it," breathed her mother, unconscious of any irony in her daughter's accent. She fixed her eyes, which, in spite of her having long since passed the half-century mark, were still very clear and blue, anxiously upon Marietta's opaque dark ones. She felt not only a need to be reassured in general by anyone, but a reluctant faith in the younger woman's judgment.

Marietta released herself with a laugh that was like a light, mocking tap on her mother's shoulder. "Well, folks that haven't got real worries will certainly manufacture them! To worry about Lydia's future in Endbury! Aren't you afraid the sun won't rise some day? If ever there was any girl that had a smooth road in front of her —"

The door-bell rang. "They've come! They've come!" cried Mrs. Emery wildly.

"Lydia wouldn't ring the bell, and her train isn't due till ten," Mrs. Mortimer reminded her.

"Oh, yes. Well, then, it's the new sideboard. I am so —"

"It's a boy with a big pasteboard box," contradicted Mrs. Mortimer, looking down the hall to the open front door.

Seeing someone there to receive it, the boy set the box inside the screen door and started down the steps.

"Bring it here! Bring it here!" called Mrs. Mortimer, commandingly.

"It's for Lydia," said Mrs. Emery, looking at the address. She spoke with an accent of dramatic intensity, and a flush rose to her fair cheeks.

Her olive-skinned daughter looked at her and laughed. "What did you expect?"

"But he didn't care enough about her coming home to be