

and sister, and immediately afterwards Jack rose and said, "Excuse me a few minutes, old chap, I'm just going for a stroll with Madge, she always looks for it the first evening."

"Of course I will," was the ready answer, "and don't hurry back on my account. You said you were not going to make a visitor of me, you know."

"No fear," remarked Jack, lighting his pipe. "This is Liberty Hall, isn't it, mater? You can turn the whole house topsy-turvy if you like, no one will mind," and with a wicked twinkle in his eyes, he hurried away to join Madge.

He found her waiting for him at the hall door, and slipping her arm through his, she led him at once down the garden, to a little summer-house quite hidden from view.

Here they were no sooner seated than every spark of hauteur vanished from her face, and with a sudden rush of girlish enthusiasm she flung her arms round his neck and kissed him warmly.

A full moon had arisen since they went indoors, and in the silvery light Jack saw with a glow of pride the flushed cheeks, parted lips and shining eyes of his only sister, and a sudden deep tenderness mingled with sympathy for her loneliness, stole over him. He laid down his pipe, and turning half round, folded her in his strong young arms, with a look of genuine love and admiration, and kissed her lips with the warmth and earnestness of a lover.

"So you're glad to have your old Jack again, are you?" he asked playfully. "You haven't forgotten how to love him yet, at any rate."

"Oh, Jack," she murmured, with a deep-drawn breath of feeling, "if you only knew how I have wanted you, and what it is to have you. I sometimes feel quite frightened at my love for you, it is so deep. I don't seem to have anyone else in all the world belonging to me. If I could only be with you often."

He stroked her hair fondly.

"You will be soon," he said hopefully. "I'm going to speak to father about it before I go back. There's no reason why we shouldn't go away together some time this summer."

"Where to?" she asked eagerly.

"Oh! somewhere nice. I must talk it over with Guy."

"But you don't mean Mr. Fawcett to come with us?" she exclaimed in a voice of dismay.

"Yes, why not? He's a grand fellow. You'll like him awfully when you know him. If he didn't actually stay with us, he would be sure to stay in the same neighbourhood. We always go away together, you know."

"And I suppose my company would not make up for his, although you have him all the year round," she remarked bitterly.

"I don't know what you mean," he replied, with a shade of annoyance in his voice. "I wish you wouldn't be so silly, Madge. What's the matter with Guy, why don't you like him? You received him to-night as if he were a deadly enemy."

"I hate him," she answered quickly. "I've hated him for months, and I've no doubt he'll have the same feeling towards me in a day or two."

"What nonsense! How on earth can you hate a man you have only spoken half a dozen words to? And what don't you like about him?"

"It isn't the man himself. I don't care in the least what he is personally, but it's the hold he has on you. I hate him for being here now; for being always with you and for being such a 'grand fellow' as you call it, in your eyes."

She sat up erect and looked straight before her, while the hard look crept back into her eyes. "I hate the very sight of him and I am sick of his name," she continued half-fiercely. "Your letters are full of him; it is Guy here, Guy there, Guy everywhere. You have him always in London and yet you must bring him here, although you know perfectly well how I want you all to myself. It's too bad of you, you needn't have done it," and she bit her lips to still their quivering.

"My dear girl," exclaimed Jack in astonishment, quite taken aback by the sudden storm he had aroused. "You must be crazy to be jealous of Guy. I never heard of such a thing. What difference can his being here possibly make to you and me?"

"A world of difference to me," she answered bitterly. "Two's company, three's none. Besides, he is your guest, and of course you must entertain him; a lot of time you will have left over for me."

Her breast heaved with something like a sob, as she continued, "But you needn't mind, I'm not going to be in the way. I know I'm a wet blanket in any company, so I'll keep away from you. You needn't be uneasy about me, I'm getting used to these sorts of things, and I shall no doubt take it very stoically."

"My dear Madge, do you know you're talking like a child?" remonstrated Jack very seriously; "I shouldn't hear of your keeping away from us. You know perfectly well that when I come home I always want you all day long. You will completely spoil our visit if you keep up this absurd idea. Guy will be miserable, because he'll think it's all his fault. I can't think what's come to you."

A suspicious glint in her eyes caught his attention, and he softened instantly.

"Look here, Madge," he said gently, leaning towards her and putting his hand on hers, "you've been worrying about Guy coming till you've got quite silly about it. You must make a fresh start and try not to be prejudiced. You know I couldn't like him better than you, and if it comes to the point, of course I prefer your company to his. I brought him because I thought it would be a pleasant change for you. If you'll only try we shall be ever so jolly together, and Guy knows what you and I are to each other, so he'll take care not to be in the way."

She bent her head lower and clasped her white fingers through his.

"Promise me you'll try, Madge," he continued in a winning voice. "I know you wouldn't like to spoil my visit."

"Yes, yes, I'll try," she murmured hastily, with a catch in her voice. "You know I'd do anything for you. It's only because I love you so much I'm so silly. I will try really. You haven't the least idea how I love you, Jack. I seem to live for only three things; to read, to think, and to love you."

"You do far too much of the first two," he said gravely.

"I know I do, but I can't help it. I have been driven to it; there is nothing else. I must read for occupation, and thinking comes to me as naturally as eating, I simply can't help it. I am always thinking. I sometimes sit just reasoning and wondering till my head is throbbing so, I don't know how to bear it."

"Then why don't you give it up? Isn't there something else you can do? Suppose I send you a camera, how would you like that?"

"Not at all, I should soon weary of it. I want to *know*. I am always craving to find out about things, and I can't rest."

She clasped and unclasped her hands unconsciously as she gazed past him out into the night.

"Oh! you can't think what it is never to rest, and never to feel happy, but to be always, always craving. Those stars," and she raised her eyes to the skies, "they are just points of light to you. You don't care whether they are two or three miles away or billions; whether they are crowded with inhabitants, or just molten gas; you are far more interested in the result of a football match or horse-race. But to me, they are worlds and suns and solar systems, scattered in space at appalling distances. I know the names of all the largest ones we see, and most that is known about them, but what of that? I am wild to know more. See, that bright one opposite is Sirius. It is the brightest of them all and sheds forty-eight times as much light as the sun, and is probably twenty times as large. Then that other bright one is Jupiter; it will only be visible two more months and then disappear, but the astronomers know exactly where it has gone and when it will come back and the identical spot where it will be first seen. It is a fascinating study, but it is cruel."

She paused and a deep yearning look came over her face.

"I would like to have my heaven back," she said wistfully. "The children's heaven, which is only a few miles off, just behind the blue; and where myriads of shining angels with golden harps walked in streets of gold. It was better than knowing about the awful magnitude of space. It made you hopeful instead of crushing you down. The stars were only the angels' candles then. A beautiful delusion is often better than a cold and bare truth."

She clasped her white hands round her knees and leaned forward. "I would like to have my heaven back," she said again wearily.