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CHAPTER XIII.

THE SOTHERNE LETTER-BAG.

"ERNESTINE," said Mrs. Blair to that talented damsel, during the course of the same day that Colonel Fleming had so suddenly left Sotherne Court. "Ernestine, you are looking very pale."

"Thank you, madame, my health is quite good."

"That makes no difference," persisted her mistress. "You are looking very pale, and I am not at all easy about you."

Here Mademoiselle Ernestine's gifted nature asserted itself, and she perceived that it was her duty to be pale and ailing.

"Oui, madame, perhaps I am a little souffrante; I have had some aches in my head."

"Exactly so, Ernestine; and it is plain that you do not get enough fresh air; you want exercise, my good girl—a walk every day."

"Madame is very kind—but I have not much time for a promenade."

"Not during the day, perhaps; and that brings me to what I wish to say; I should like you to take a good brisk walk in the morning before you call me."

"Madame!" exclaimed poor Ernestine with rather a blank face at the prospect of an earlier rise from her much-loved bed.

"Don't interrupt me; it is dull I know for you to walk out so early without any companion or any object, but you might go along the high road; it is always dry that way; and then when you meet the postman you can come back, and if you like to take the bag from him, and bring it to me, to take my letters out, it will give you some little interest to go out for—and, Ernestine, you are a good girl, and I am very pleased with you. Look here! I have put out that black silk mantle of mine for you; it will make a nice jacket, and there is a bit of real lace on it, which I will give you too."

"How very amiable you are towards me, madame!" exclaimed the delighted maiden, as she took up the silk mantle.

"I am quite sure that an early walk will do you all the good in the world; there is nothing like the morning air."

"Thank you, madame; and shall I begin to-morrow?"

"Certainly, I should like to see some roses in your cheeks as soon as possible. Here, put some scent on this handkerchief, and give me my gold eyeglass—that is all I want just at present; you may go now."

* Entered according to Act of the Parliament of Canada, in the year 1876, by ADAM, STEVENSON & CO. in the office of the Minister of Agriculture.