

SECOND THOUGHTS ARE BEST.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "MADGIE'S HERO."

CHAPTER II.

How Blanche Trent lived through the next two weeks was a puzzle even to herself. The more she reflected on her Uncle Derwent's words, the more convinced she was that all he said was just and right. The Dingle had never been her father's, therefore she could have no claim on it; but all the same, it was very hard to give up considering herself the mistress, and regard herself as the dependent, for that was what it amounted to. However, there was no alternative, and she had to endeavour to reconcile her mind to the new order of things. Perhaps her uncle's wife might not be very objectionable, and if she were neither very young nor very pretty, Blanche fancied that she might be able to hold her own in the house after all. So she dressed with unusual care, and took her seat with great dignity in the drawing-room the afternoon they were expected home, resolved at least to impress her new relative with a sense of her importance at the very outset.

It was dusk when the closed carriage containing Captain Haughton and his bride drove up to the door, and though Blanche was burning with curiosity, her pride would not allow her to go into the hall to welcome them. Seated with a book in her hand in the centre of the room, she awaited their entrance with great dignity, and just advanced a step as her uncle approached.

"This is your aunt, Blanche," he said, kindly; "it will be your own fault if you are not very happy with her."

Blanche bowed and held out her hand, then suddenly drew back with an exclamation of surprise—"Uncle Derwent, this is Miss Lyster!"

"This was Miss Lyster, dear!" then seeing Blanche look indignant, he turned to his wife. "I really thought Blanche knew, Helen: indeed, I fancied every one knew. Come, my dear, kiss your aunt, and bid her welcome home."

But Blanche was gone; she had rushed out of the drawing-room red hot, trembling with wrath and indignation, and locking herself into her room gave full vent to her feelings in the wildest manner, assuring herself tragically that she was outraged and insulted, and that she would never submit to her uncle's wife. The dressing bell rang, and the dinner bell, but she took no notice, and when a servant came to say that her uncle and aunt were waiting, she refused to go down, saying her head ached. That was true enough, and her heart ached too, for she felt very miserable and lonely, and when after dinner there came the sound of music from the drawing-room, she felt more wretched still, for they were happy enough without her. The worst part of it was, Blanche felt it was all her own fault and her own doing, but she was too proud to acknowledge it, and when later in the evening Mrs. Haughton came to her room with kind inquiries, and pressing entreaties that she would come downstairs, Blanche replied coldly and haughtily that she preferred remaining in her own room.

"We must only trust to time and kindness, Derwent," she said, when she rejoined her husband, "Blanche will be more reasonable by-and-by."

But days and weeks passed without bringing the desired improvement, and things were becoming extremely uncomfortable for everyone. Blanche kept to her own room persistently, and refused all advances from her uncle and aunt. One morning, however, she came downstairs after breakfast, with an open letter in her hand, which she gave her uncle to read. It was from a Mrs. Hunter, a stepsister of her father's, who lived in London.

"If you are so very unhappy, and your position is so intolerable in your Uncle Derwent's household, you may come to me," the letter ran, "but as I am not very rich and have many demands on my purse, I must beg of you to take charge of the younger children's lessons. Florrie and Eva are very good, and will be quite an amusement to you. My step-daughter, Katherine, assists with the elder girls, so come at once, dear Blanche, and I hope you will be very happy and comfortable with us."

"Well," Captain Haughton said, handing back the letter, "do you wish to go to Mrs. Hunter's, Blanche?"

"Yes, please."

"Do you understand that your aunt lives quite in London, and has a small house full of children; that you will miss many pleasures and enjoyments you have here?"

"Pleasures here, Uncle Derwent! I wonder what they are? I am sure I shall be much happier and more comfortable with my Aunt Hunter, and I should like to go at once."

Captain Haughton smiled, but consented, and three days



"AND THEN SHOOK HER COLDLY BY THE TIPS OF HER FINGERS."