

He talked more than the others. They sat very silent, suffering for him if not with him. To-night there could be none of the little family jokes: the innocent, well-worn jests that age made dearer. The two maids knew that they must hurry through the meal to give him peace.

Mr Stone, clean-shaved, dark and pale, bolted his food in the manner of a melancholy dog who is not really hungry. His dark eyes drooped; his thin lips closed; his clear-cut intellectual face became as a mask—a mask of dumb sympathy. Nothing would make Mr Stone talk to-night.

Miss Effie—so bright and fresh and sweet, with white collar, black blouse, and soft brown hair drawn and looped and ribbon-tied in the transition stages of girl-simplicity—would only show her pretty eyes to the table cloth. Nothing could rouse her to-night. When Uncle Richard sought, with a languor that he could not quite conceal, to tease her about the new bicycle skirt, she exhibited no spirit, seemed powerless to defend herself.

"I'll wear it again to-morrow, if you like, Uncle Richard."

Then silence.

In Mrs Burgoyne's eyes there was affectionate solicitude, not hidden. No stranger perhaps would have said at once that Mrs Burgoyne was a pretty woman, yet people who knew her well sometimes thought that she was a very pretty woman. She was slim, but not slight in figure, dark-haired, broad of brow, with strong eyebrows over dark grey eyes and strong lips beneath a thin sensitive nose. Naturally a pale woman, but to-night anxious sympathy had brought two spots of colour to her cheeks. There was light and life in her face at all times, and to-night she looked as young almost as the girl of sixteen on the other side of the table. In her manner and her voice there was, most markedly, a something childlike that rarely survives childhood itself. She had dignity, but it was the dignity of a wise child, not the dignity of a mature woman. Perhaps on the emotional side of her nature, she was in truth no older than the girl.

This was all the little household.