

agreed, although I have never cared much for Aunt Sally, or derived any pleasure from her society. But I did not bargain for being made to drag on month after month in town in this sort of way. Had I been a free agent I should have gone home weeks ago. Any disagreeables that I might have been forced to face there would have seemed light in comparison with those endured here. Papa, I do not often speak so plainly, but you know that what I now say is the truth. No one can suffer beyond a certain point. I appeal to you to free me from my present misery."

Her eloquence was so great that it carried all before it. Sir Hector winced. He had never quite realised until this moment how extremely clear-sighted Dolly was, and now he perceived, to his no small confusion, that his plans had been patent to her from the first. Parents frequently make similar mistakes, and do not credit their sharp, young daughters and sons with sufficient perspicacity. Sir Hector, when left to himself, was a well-meaning, kind-hearted man. In his innermost consciousness he approved of every word that Dolly had uttered. Visibly affected, he got up and put his hand on her shoulder.

"Dolly, dear," he said, in an unsteady voice, "don't heap coals of fire on my head. I have been an old fool, and that's the whole truth of the matter, but, thank goodness, you've brought me to my senses. You were quite right to refuse that drunken young scoundrel. Let's say no more about it."

Her face grew suddenly bright, like a day in Spring after an April shower.

"Dear father," she said softly, "we will go away from here, for you have been no happier than I."

"That's true enough. But, Dolly——" and he stopped short.

"Yes, papa, what is it?"

"If I ask you something, will you give me an honest answer?"

A sudden blush suffused her face. She had a presentiment of what was coming.

"I will try my best. It is not always easy."

"What I want to know is this. Does our going home mean that you wish to renew your engagement with Captain Dornay? He has not behaved well, but I quite recognise that Mrs. Stapleton's death has made a considerable difference to the situation."