

ed and sent her a copy of it, and, on the day after, she came up to our usual resting place where I was waiting, thanked me for it and complimented my skill. "And what did Mrs. Thomas think of it?" I asked. She shook her head. "Was it something very uncomplimentary?" I asked. "I was hoping she might have shown more forbearance to that than she does to the original."

"Why, I would not show it to aunt," she cried; "she would want to know where it was taken and all about it. You don't know what she would say if she knew I had been spending my time, her time, I ought to say, up here. Aunt expects me always to be at my post."

Instead of laughing, I suppose I looked as I felt, indignant at the idea of this tyranny.

"Oh, don't waste pity on me, Mr. Freeman," she said hastily. "Of course I am free to leave her for ever, but—well, I suppose it sounds very mercenary, but I can't afford to. Perhaps it's only natural for her to make sure I fairly earn her money before I get it." The color came to her face as she said this and saw the wonder I could not, for a moment, conceal, but she held up her head and looked at me, almost defiantly. I did not want her to go on, it was painful to her, but she continued in a determined sort of way. "When I came to live with my aunt first it was quite understood that if she liked me, if I suited her well enough for her to keep me till her death, she would leave me her money; and we need it, we need it at home, my mother and I, very much. At first to make myself stay I used to have to think about that a good deal—how badly we needed it, well, but lately—after enduring so much for it I seem to value it more. I could not give it up after all the—but there's aunt, too. She really wants me to stay with her; she says I don't neglect her so much as Julia did. Julia is the cousin she tried before me."

"And do you really think Mrs. Thomas would dismiss you if she knew of your occasionally sitting here?" I asked.

"It's quite likely; yes," she said, "most likely she would."

I stared at her sad face for a moment, and then surprised myself and her by starting to my feet. "Miss Thomas," I cried, "listen to me for a moment. No, don't go," I implored, for after a startled glance at my eager face she had risen hurriedly. But she shook off the hand which I had put out to stop her, and outside the door turned to say, rapidly, but positively, "I ought to have known better than to talk about that to a comparative stranger." Before I could say anything she was gone.

It was late in the afternoon of the same day, when I was returning from a solitary walk during which remembrances of Annie's words had haunted me, that I saw a buggy coming towards me. It contained Mrs. Thomas and a man from the hotel who was driving her. This was the first time I had ever seen her driving without her niece, and, to add to my surprise, she stopped and told me she had started to my brother's house. I asked her if she would not drive on there.

"No, thank you," she replied. "Jim," turning to the driver, "get out and walk on to the post-office for the mail. I shall wait here till you come back. I can speak to Mr. Freeman here."

"It is, Mr. Freeman," she continued, when the man had started off, "in relation to my niece."

I am sure I flushed crimson, but she had turned away and was searching the columns of a paper which she had drawn from the seat beside her.

"I want to ask you if you will exercise your photographic skill for me," she went on. "First of all, though, read this," and she handed me the paper, indicating a photograph with her black gloved finger. Greatly wandering, I took it, and read a piece headed, "Novel Adaptation of Photography." It was an account of the expedient by which a jealous photographer had proved the faithlessness of his lady-love. He had left a camera so arranged that during his absence it photographed her with someone else's arm around her waist. The tale could not be declared impossible, but the experiment required so opportune and unlikely a combination of circumstances to render it successful that the writer was quite warranted in conveying the impression that his artifice was so very and universally practicable.

I merely remarked to Mrs. Thomas that it was interesting, and quite a new idea to me.

"Well," she said, "I know you take photographs, so you are the only person here that I could ask to carry out a plan I have. I want you to leave your camera, it must be well out of sight, as the one described here was, and pointed on a certain place—I will tell you where. You must leave it open, you know, so that you will get the impression of whatever goes on in front of it."

"I am sorry," I said, "but it is impossible to—"

"Impossible! Isn't that the idea of this piece? It has been done. You can't tell me that I have misunderstood it. But perhaps it will give you some trouble: oh, yes; and that is why you hesitate."

"Indeed," I said, "I would be glad to photograph anything you want if it can be done in the usual way. Perhaps I can get the picture, whatever it is, by the ordinary process."

"I don't suppose," she replied, pettishly, "that you can do it by any process without a little trouble, but you can judge for yourself best if I tell you. What I am going to say is in strict confidence, Mr. Freeman. There is a little summer-house by the hotel, it is just this side, on a steep hill. Don't you know it? There are lots of briars about there that catch in one's dress."

I said I believed I knew where she meant.

"That," she said, "is where I want the picture taken. Miss Thomas, my niece, has been there several times lately, when I am taking my nap—of course you will not repeat this—to go off to that summer-house and sit there, not alone, but, quite shamelessly, with—with some man."

I was afraid of my confusion betraying me, but she plainly had no idea that that man was myself.

"Do you think—do you think it is any harm?" I said.

"Harm! Why—but I haven't told you the worst. Maria, Mrs. Vine's nurse, was my informant; she couldn't get near enough to identify the fellow, she said, but she declares she could see that he had his arm around her waist this morning when they were sitting there. You look shocked and indignant, Mr. Freeman; I don't wonder. Of course when she is there I am left quite alone, and uncared for." She

talked on, and I stood tightly clenching an iron rod at the side of her buggy, speechless.

"Here comes my driver," she exclaimed. "What can you do about getting a picture of them sitting there together? I want a proof of how she deserts me, and I want the man identified. Can I rely upon you to try it? Can you do it by what you said, the usual process?"

"No," I cried. "Let me think. No, I don't think I can." Here I moved back to make room for Jim who took his seat beside my tormentor.

"If you won't trouble to help me," she continued, in a tone of displeasure and disappointment, "I must give up my plan. To find out what I want to know I shall be driven to questioning Mrs. Vine's—you know who I mean," with a glance at the listening driver. "I wanted to avoid doing that; if I pay attention to her talk it will make her repeat it to everybody, I know. Well, good afternoon, Mr. Freeman: perhaps it was too much to expect from you. If you change your mind, though, let me know soon."

She drove off, and left me standing in the road, looking after her, half dazed. I had been taken so unawares, and had felt so confused that I had not declared the truth. Still, if I had been capable of telling her that I was the man who had been seen with Miss Thomas, ought I to have done so. Mrs. Thomas would never believe how innocently her niece had behaved. The nurse had said my arm was around her waist. Abominable liar! Then Mrs. Thomas, if she knew, would certainly prevent our next meeting, a meeting on which I had been building great hopes. Whatever course I should take later, I saw that now one thing was imperative and demanded my immediate action; Mrs. Thomas must be stopped from pursuing her enquiries. The only way in which I could do this was to tell her that I would try to help her in her detective plan; if I did not, she would be going to others and discovering the truth. I remembered her parting injunction, to let her know at once if I would undertake what she asked, and I hurried home and wrote her a note. I told her I had thought her plan over, and had changed my mind as to the possibility of getting the picture; I would try it; and asked her to let the matter rest till she found how I succeeded. In reply I received the following:

"You might experiment on the picture to-morrow morning, and let me know the result in the afternoon. I will leave the matter in your hands till then, but I cannot delay my enquiries in other quarters later than that."

After all, I had gained only one day's delay. On the afternoon of to-morrow I should have to tell her that the photographic plan had not been successful, and then would it not be useless to ask for more time to experiment?

"If only," I said to myself, "I could believe that Annie cared for me! Why, then I could send the aunt a picture of myself and her niece together and defy her. But in such a case all I was certain of was that Mrs. Thomas would pack the poor girl home to her poverty-stricken mother, and for that would she not regard me as her worst enemy? Could I depend upon being able to see Miss Annie alone to-morrow? It seemed improbable."

That night I was tossing, hot and sleepless, on my bed, wearied with anxious speculations, when an idea occurred to me which