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aid Percy.

"I know what you mean," said he, "but I don't think it is characteristic of the Stoakleys—of which of them, for instance?"

"Of Blanche, certainly," said Mrs. Montgomery, "though she only does so mentally. She always is rather quicker than one expects. She is so pretty that one expects her to be stupid, which she is not."

"No, she certainly is not stupid."

Mrs. Montgomery paused. Perhaps Percy was not going to disappoint her after all. The professional beauty was posing of its own accord.

"I wish you liked her a little more," she said at length.

"Why?"

"Because you might marry her, perhaps."

Percy shut his book—it was not on the subject of Art—with a bang.

"Don't you think I like her enough for that?" he asked.

"Really, Percy, how you startle me. I hate the young generation. They are always chucking surprises about like schoolboys snowballing. How much you like her is a matter for yourself to decide."

"I decided long ago. It was a good thing I didn't tell you, as you so dislike surprises."

"Do you mean you are going to propose to her?"

Percy looked at her with most irritating deliberation.