

line of a linen collar at the neck. In short he was never in want of a colorable reason for appearing daily in the first floor drawing-room.

And every succeeding day Ellice greeted him with a look more candid, trustful, and glad. She laughed and chatted with him, appealed to his opinion, and communicated her own with the unaffected pleasure of girlish innocence—or the admirable adroitness of practised coquetry.

If Delcardie went downstairs toward evening more often than not he found the general there playing *besique* with the old lady. For the first time or two this privileged visitor continued the playful familiarities which habit seemed to have established between him and the young girl, such as pinching her ear, entangling his fingers in the soft rings of her hair, and kissing now her hands and now her brow. But one day Ellice disengaged herself from the arm he had put round her waist and crossed to the other side of the table.

"What!" exclaimed the general plaintively. "Are you going to cut off your poor old captive's rations?"

"I am not a little girl any longer, dear general," responded Ellice blushing.

Delgardie watching this episode, felt his heart give a delighted bound. Nearly every afternoon now found him drinking tea out of the eggshell service and abandoning himself to the growing delight of Ellice's society; studying his model he called it, but the pre-occupation peculiar to this sort of pleasure did not altogether blind him to the fact that Mrs. Mornington was a passionate *besique* player, and that she won a great many half-sovereigns of the general. Also more than once he surprised these old people exchanging looks of intelligence after aside glances at him and Ellice; and as a pendant to these meaning regards he one day overheard "the general" say: "That would be the easiest solution of your difficulty," and Mrs. Mornington, shaking her head doubtfully, responded: "An artist's passing whim!"

Delgardie would have attached more suspicion to these remarks, had any subsequent effort been made to attract him oftener, or keep him longer in Ellice's society, but the morning after they were made Mrs. Mornington was taken ill, and during the ten days she kept her bed Ellice did not once invite him to enter their apartments.

#### CHAPTER VII.

During this period of banishment the artist finished the portrait, and when Mrs. Mornington was well enough to return to the drawing-room and receive a visitor, he was enabled, with Ellice's connivance, to give her a little surprise. The new picture of her daughter was hanging in its place.

The old gentleman burst into tears before it, and when Delgardie, who witnessed the effect his work produced from a curtained window recess, showed himself before her, the old lady clasped his two hands in hers, exclaiming with tearful fervour:

"How can I show my gratitude! You have given me back my dead!" After an interval she repeated again, "How can I ever repay you for this great delight!"

Delgardie had drawn the photograph with the distinct hope and intention of arousing the emotion these sentences expressed; but when the opportunity he had worked for came, he hesitated to seize it. At heart he was too generous—too true a gentleman—to drive a bargain with two women in tears. He took refuge in procrastination. "Give me the pleasure of driving you and Miss Ellice to Stonitowe ruins to-morrow," he pleaded. "A few hours in this sweet, warm air will put new life into you after your illness; and when we are coming back I shall perhaps find the courage to ask a certain favor quite easy for you to grant."

Mrs. Mornington looked at her granddaughter, whose radiant face showed how intense a pleasure the proposed excursion would be to her.

"Why not!" ejaculated the old lady, as if she were questioning some unseen counsellor. Then addressing the painter, she said in her most gracious and courtly manner, "We accept your invitation, my dear Mr. Delgardie, on your own terms, and with many thanks."

The next morning brought with it ideal picnic weather, not a puff of wind in the still September air; not a cloudlet in the deep azure sky, and only peace, beauty and content in the golden harvest fields and the russet nut filled woods.

Never in Delgardie's eyes had Ellice looked so lovely as in that long drive, during which her delicate face was continually changing its expressions of interest and delight. Only a simple girl in a white *pique* dress and a straw sun hat trimmed with black ribbon; but what character in the sensitive, proud face! what meaning in the violet grey eyes! For three years Ellice's life had been so unvaried that her joy in this rare holiday was as real as it was naive; and little by little her gaiety communicated itself to her companions, who at the first start off were rather silent. Mrs. Mornington seemed nervous at finding herself in the open country, and Delgardie shy—though of what it would be hard to say—unless it were of feelings he was unable any longer wholly to conceal from himself.

However, by the time they reached the hill on whose summit the ruins of Stonitowe castle were situate, these symptoms of *malaria* had disappeared; the young man's face glowed with reflected happiness, and the grandmother wore a look of benign serenity. Delgardie had brought with him a hamper of provisions, the sorting and packing of which he had himself superintended; and he and Ellice laid the cloth together on a great circular stone which perhaps had been the dining table of the fierce baron's Saxon serfs.

There were no other excursionists to rob this romantic spot of its intrinsic charm and dispute with them inch by inch its most retired nooks. Who thinks of visiting Stonitowe ruins except the children who go bird-nesting there in the spring and blackberrying in the autumn.

(To be Continued.)

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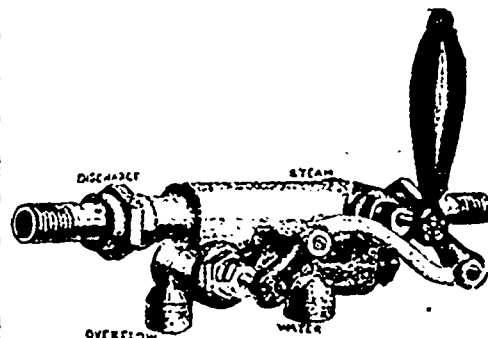
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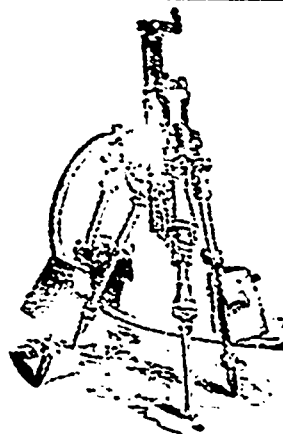
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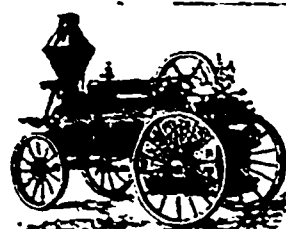
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