

"Do you mean there's anything possible?" she asked.

"My dear, you're a very good friend."

"I'm not very happy. I don't know what in the world Cecily will do. And yet——" Mina struggled with her rival impulses of kindness and curiosity. "It's all awfully interesting," she concluded, breaking into a smile she could not resist.

"That's the only excuse for all of us, I suppose," sighed Lady Evenswood.

"Not that I like the boy particularly," added Southend.

"Is there anything?" asked Mina. The appeal was to the lady, not to Southend. But he answered chaffingly:

"Possibly—just possibly—the resources of the Constitution——"

The bell of the front door sounded audibly in the morning-room in which they were.

"I daresay that's Robert," remarked Lady Evenswood. "He said he might call."

"Oh, by Jove!" exclaimed Southend, with a laugh that sounded a trifle uneasy.

The door opened, and a man came in unannounced. He was of middle height, with large features, thick coarse hair, and a rather ragged beard; his arms were long and his hands large.

"How are you, Cousin Sylvia?" he said, crossing to Lady Evenswood, who gave him her hand without rising. "How are you, Southend?" He turned back to Lady Evenswood. "I thought you were alone."

He spoke in brusque tones, and he looked at Mina as if he did not know what she might be doing there. His appearance seemed vaguely familiar to her.

"We are holding a little conference, Robert. This young lady is very interested in Harry Tristram and his affair. Come now, you remember about it! Madame Zabriská, this is Mr. Disney."

"Mr. Disney!" The Imp gasped. "You mean——?"