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A Lover's GERALDINE: Romance.

Geraldine had taken a dislike to the man ever since the first moment when she had met his critical stare of approval in church; and she felt very much annoyed when the curate, after a few low words from his companion, said, in a hurried, nervous manner, peculiar to him when not gushing in the pulpit, vigorous denunciation was his forte:

"Miss Lindley, will you allow me to introduce to you my friend, Mr. Howard?"

She bowed rather coldly, and exchanged a few remarks with her new acquaintance in a hard, smileless, almost repellent manner which she could assume when not pleased. She thought Mr. Meadows had taken a liberty in forcing upon her this introduction to a man who, although his manner was that of a certain class of gentlemen, was, some instinct told her, an undesirable acquaintance. Mr. Howard was not of the type of men who are easily snubbed, and he took care not to let her pass on until, by an adroit remark, he had at last drawn out of her a smile from her. She then continued her walk, fulfilling her errand, paid two or three visits to cottages near and returned toward Copley. On the way back she gathered a basketful of primroses, and, as she walked into the churchyard, she sat down on one of the tombstones and began to put them together and arrange them into place. She had been one of the little girls who had been one of her scholars in the Sunday school, and who had been carried off by consumption just before the primroses began to blossom.

She was occupied with her new flowers when the voice of a man came to her in any work, however trifling. When the voice of the unknown Mr. Howard addressed her. He had approached from behind her, across the graves and the grass, so softly that she had not heard a sound until he spoke.

"Another errand of mercy or kindness, I can guess," said Mr. Meadows, with a smile and a pleasant manner which were difficult to resist; and Mr. Howard strode on, leaving the tombstone which separated him from her, and resting his hand upon the cross-beam of the grave which he had crossed, looked down upon her with a kindness which compelled her to look up. And then, as she looked up, against her will, to smile back again.

Mr. Howard was not a very young man. He was rather short, rather stout, and looked a year or two less than 40. In reality he was older; but he was so carefully dressed, so genial of manner, the gray hairs in his dark mustache and hair were so well dyed, that he carried his years very lightly.

Geraldine shook her head slowly and sorrowfully as she answered him: "No one can show either kindness or mercy to the dead. These flowers are to put on a grave."

"Then why do you do it? I have had impressed upon me, by the curate, that everyone I have met about here, that you are a young lady of transcendent learning and accomplishments, and all likely to do anything without a season, and a good one."

"That silly Mr. Meadows has been telling you that. He thinks me learned because I know where all his hackneyed quotations come from. But even if I were learned, I dare say I should have human weaknesses. I suppose putting flowers on a grave is silly, yet I should like to think there would be no one silly enough to put them on mine."

"Not silly at all. Don't let us talk about graves," said Mr. Howard, with uncomfortable hastiness. "Why choose the subject of death for conversation on such a lovely morning as this?"

"Oh, but I think there are many things sadder than death," said Geraldine, for whom, in the hour of her two-and-twenty years, the tomb had a fascination which a quarter of a century's nearer approach to had very much decreased in her companion.

"Separation—life-long separation from—people we care about, and whose lives suddenly quivered: 'no good friends a long way off in trouble and suffering, and not like to think of them—why, to die young seems easy compared with a lot of troubles I know! But then I believe that people who live very solitary lives seldom fear death," she added, in a moralizing tone that frequent solitude had caused her

to acquire when speaking on subjects about which she had thought much. "But surely you don't lead a solitary life, young as you are! You are not quite in the wilderness here, though I dare say the society of the neighborhood is not very enticing—there are so few young people of your own age in the families about."

Geraldine was rather surprised: everyone looked upon this gentleman as a stranger.

"I always find out something about the inhabitants of any place I may be in, as well as about the scenery," he added, in explanation, "and I make a point of seeing all the old houses and churches. Old buildings are eloquent to me."

"You are severe. But I don't confine myself to Copley. I go further afield, and visit Heckleton and Tolbeach and Waringham."

"The church at Tolbeach is pretty, but there is not much to see at Heckleton. And Waringham—why, Waringham is a long way off; it is not in Suffolk at all."

"No, it is just within the borders of Norfolk, I know," said the stranger, smiling. "But it is only seven miles off, nearer than Tolbeach."

"Only seven miles off? Indeed, I—I think you must be mistaken. I have lived here all my life, and I—oh, indeed, I am sure it is a great deal further than that."

"No, I assure you you have miscalculated the distance. You know where the road branches off just at the foot of the hill which goes up to Waringham Park gates?"

"I have never been to Waringham."

"I have never been to Waringham," he echoed, in a tone of surprise which it suddenly occurred to Geraldine to think was feigned. "Then that accounts for your thinking it so much further off than it is. You ought to know Sir Charles Otway and his two weird old sisters."

Geraldine started; but her companion did not seem to notice this. He continued:

"Sir Charles himself is a charming gentleman—he is an old friend of mine—indeed, a connection of my family; but his sisters are the very reverse of him in all things at least, the younger is, and the elder follows her sister's lead. But you really ought to know Sir Charles."

"I do know Sir Charles," answered the girl, quietly, but in a constrained voice. "He is my guardian."

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