

her mind, Edna thought.

The girl sighed. "When you've got to earn your own living," she said, "you can't have everything that you would choose. I should have gone as companion to a deaf old lady, to whom I should have to read aloud every day, if I hadn't come here. That would have been still worse, wouldn't it?"

Although she had herself spoken of the dullness of the life, the housekeeper appeared to resent the word "still" in the girl's speech.

"For the matter of that," she said, rather tartly, "his Lordship gave orders, particular orders, that you should be treated exactly like the ladies of his family, her Ladyship and his own sisters, when they come here. And, to the best of my belief, you have been so treated."

Edna perceived the mistake she had made in taking the housekeeper's apologetic attitude too literally.

"Indeed, indeed," she said humbly, "I'm very much too well treated. I've never had so much ceremony or so many beautiful things around me in all my life. But don't you see," she said, in a coaxing tone, putting her pretty, fair head on one side, and smiling with her pleading blue eyes into Mrs. Holland's face, "that this very ceremony is rather awful to me, since I am not used to it? I even think, though it seems disgracefully ungrateful to say so, that I should feel happier, or at least more at home, if I hadn't so many people to wait upon me, and if I were not treated like a princess instead of like the insignificant little person I am."

A smile of good humour appeared once more on the housekeeper's face. "Well, well," she said, "there's something in what you say, no doubt, my dear—I mean, ma'am. But as his Lordship has given his orders, all I can do is to see that they're obeyed. In the meantime I have to tell you something." She looked at the girl with a serious air, took note of her pretty hair, of her blue eyes, of her sweet little red-lipped mouth. "But mind, you're not to run away with notions, my dear, just because I'm obliged to tell you what his Lordship ordered me to say."

The girl sat up, wondering. Mrs. Holland coughed, and went on somewhat stiffly: "I don't know whether it's wise for you to know so soon, but, as I say, I have no choice but to tell you. His Lordship wished me to come and tell you that he is delighted with your playing, and to tell you that you have a soul for music. A soul," repeated Mrs. Holland, as if conscious that there was something profane about this use of the word, which she hoped might be forgiven her, as it was by his Lordship's orders. "That was the word he used, and which he wished me to repeat to you."

Troubled as she had been by fears that her playing and singing could not be good enough for the owner of this splendid mansion and these beautiful instruments, Edna leant back with a little sigh of intense relief. She shut her eyes, and, opening them suddenly, found the housekeeper's fixed upon her with rather a strange expression.

She looked anxious, Edna thought. Why? she wondered.

"It's very good of him to say such a thing," the girl said, with delight, which was tempered with humility, "and very good of you to bring me the message."

A sort of short laugh, which was scarcely more than a snort, was the housekeeper's first reply. She folded her hands, and then said:

"Well, there's no thanks due to me, for I shouldn't have brought that message. I must tell you, if I hadn't been forced to. I don't quite hold with telling people they're so satisfactory at the outset, for it might—I don't say it would in your case—but it might lead to their thinking there was no need to try to do so well, since people are so easily pleased."

A look of gentle reproach came into the girl's face. "I don't think you'd say that," she said, "if you knew how afraid I feel upon that very point. I knew," she went on, "that I was playing my best to-night, and I did hope that I should please Lord Lockington, if he happened to be listening. But I feel most terribly frightened lest I shouldn't always do as well—in fact, one can't always be the same," she added, plaintively, "and I assure you I'm more likely to do badly

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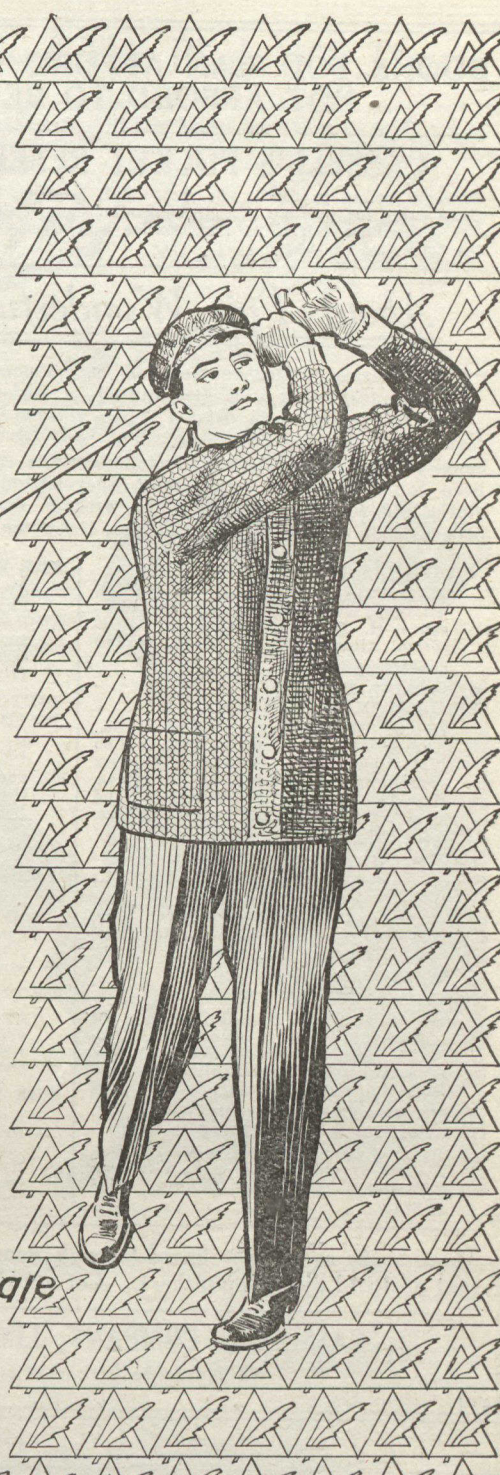
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