

and under the sway of her governess. But in a country place a girl cannot be buried and hidden away as she can be in a London house. She is surrounded by those who have seen her grow up, by people who have known her from a baby, who insist on taking her out with their own daughters and ask for her when they visit her elder sisters—her light cannot be hidden under a bushel nor her gifts kept secret from the world. So it must be confessed that Miss Dora had of late given her friends considerable anxiety.

I must say that it was not Dora's fault. A sweeter-natured girl I never knew. She was gentle, intelligent, refined, and spirited withal. She submitted without a murmur to Mary's restrictions, because she conscientiously believed in Mary's right to impose them; but she was not at all inclined to submit to the domination of everyone and everybody. Least of all was she inclined to submit to it from her father's younger sister, Miss Dorinda Elliott, after whom Dora had been called. And nobody could wonder at this fact, for Miss Dorinda was a person who inspired very little admiration, very little respect, and most certainly very little affection in the world.

Perhaps it was the contemplation of Miss Dorinda's life and character that made Dr. Elliott and his sensible daughter so careful on Dora's behalf. Miss Dorinda had been a beauty in her youth, and, even at the age of forty-five, possessed remains of good looks, which she prized more than they deserved. She had hair of a golden tint, and although its gloss was faded and the locks grown scanty, she valued it on that account. Her eyes were blue, but pale and sunken; her complexion was pale and unhealthy; her once graceful figure was meagre and angular. Worst of all, her lips had a fretful droop, and her forehead was scored with lines of ill-humour and disappointment. She had been expected to make a good marriage; she had lived for nothing else, and she had failed. The failure soured her, and she had passed the last few years in repining at her misfortunes and generally accusing Providence of treating her very harshly.

It was not a surprise to me, therefore, when Mary looked so alarmed one day after hearing that Dora was a beauty. "Oh, no, no, I hope not," she said anxiously. "Do you really think she is so very pretty, Mrs. Daintrey?"

"Of course I do," I answered, "and so must everyone who has eyes to see."

"I'm afraid I have *not* eyes, then. I do not see it at all. She is—yes, she is pretty, of course I know she is; but we are used to it—and really it is nothing out of the way—I prefer Alice's style or Gussie's."

"My dear Mary," I said, almost losing patience, "Alice and Gussie are nice, healthy-looking girls, but nobody would glance at them in a ball-room if Dora were near."

"Yes?" said Mary, doubtfully. "You think so Mrs. Daintrey? To me"—with a little hesitation—"she is just like Aunt Dorinda, and, you know, we have been so used to Aunt Dorinda all our lives that perhaps we don't appreciate her good points."

"Just like Aunt Dorinda!" That was the point of the whole thing. They were afraid Dora would be like Aunt Dorinda in silliness, in perversity, in love of admiration, because she was like her in hair and eyes. There never was a more ridiculous supposition. Dora had a strong head, a clear mind, a resolute will. She was full of "character," as people say, and Dorinda Elliott had about as much character as a feeble-minded hen. But it was to guard Dora from following in her aunt's footsteps that she was forced to lead such a secluded life. If she had not been allowed to do a little church work from time to time—teach in the Sunday school and arrange flowers for the church—I really do not know how Mr. Crisp would ever have found opportunities of speaking to her, although he afterwards acknowledged to me that he lost his heart to her on the day when he first looked down upon her sweet face in the Elliotts' pew at Underwood Church.

He did not take me into his confidence just then; but after that little talk with me about Lady Blethers and Mr. Jones, he went straight home to his lodgings and took refuge from his vexation in the thought of pretty Dora. And then, as he had nothing particular to do, he discovered that it was Wednesday afternoon (when Dora had a half-holiday), and that if he called at Dr. Elliott's he might be asked to play tennis with Jack Elliott, the son of the house, and Jack Elliott's sisters, "the girls." Jack was nineteen, not a very interesting young fellow, but good-natured, and Mr. Crisp cultivated his society assiduously. He was at home just then, "reading for" something or other, and Mr. Crisp was of great assistance to him. So, at least, Jack averred.

As Mr. Crisp entered the doctor's house—a pleasant, old-

fashioned building at one end of the village, with a garden and a paddock stretching away behind it—he became aware that a visitor who meant to stay a considerable time must have recently arrived. For the hall was crowded with boxes which had not yet been carried upstairs; and the hall table was loaded with shawls, wraps, parasols and handbags. Then the curate recollected, with sudden dismay, that he had been told that the doctor's sister was coming that very afternoon to stay with her nieces. Miss Elliott did not live at her brother's house; she never got on with her nieces quite as well as might be wished; and she found it more comfortable to occupy a flat in town or to go on long visits to her friends. In the summer months, however, or when any festivities were forward, she did not object to taking up her abode, for lengthened periods, at the doctor's house. But she had not visited Underwood since Mr. Crisp's arrival, and the curate had no very clear idea as to the type of woman that he was to meet.

"Dora's aunt!" That was how he phrased it to himself when he heard of Miss Elliott, little imagining how unpleasantly the words would have sounded in Miss Elliott's ear. Dora's aunt, indeed! As if she were not young enough and fair enough (in her own eyes, at any rate) to be thought of for her own sake, and without any reference to her nieces—impertinent chits! Miss Dorinda's golden hair would have stood on end at the idea!

The curate thought of her as "Dr. Elliott's sister," as well as "Dora's aunt." This was even more unfortunate. Dr. Elliott was between fifty and sixty; a spare, long-limbed, grey-haired, spectacled man; and if Edward Crisp had been interrogated, he would have said that he expected Miss Elliott to be long, lean, grey, and spectacled also. The real Dorinda was quite a shock to him.

The drawing room was on the sunny side of the house, and the blinds of the three long windows were, therefore, half pulled down. Mary was sitting at the tea-tray, as usual, and Alice was beside her. The younger members of the family were not there. But who was it that sat in Dora's seat, a stray sunbeam lighting up an aureole of golden hair? Was it Dora herself, with her hair cut short? That was the first idea that flashed across the curate's mind. He was slightly short-sighted, which must account for his mistake. For in another moment he was knowing and realizing confusedly that "Dora's aunt" was not at all what he expected her to be; that she was, in fact, ridiculously and unpleasantly like Dora herself. A likeness may sometimes be a very disconcerting thing, leading to a good deal of disillusion.

Miss Dorinda's crop was frizzled and curled until it stood out several inches from her head, and half concealed the wrinkles of her brow. In the subdued light, her complexion looked smooth and fair. Her eyes were brighter than usual, and her cheeks wore a roseate flush. Indeed, Miss Dorinda was looking remarkably well. She was dressed in a costume which would have suited Dora better than a woman of forty-five, but it was not altogether unbecoming. It was a combination of flowered cotton and soft silk of a pinkish shade, finished off with a lace hat adorned with flowers to match. It was a little elaborate for the country, but simple Mr. Crisp did not understand that, and only admired the general effect.

"Oh, yes, I have just come," Miss Dorinda was saying in somewhat plaintive tones; "and I am very glad to escape from the dust and heat of that dreadful London. I *adore* the country. I really wonder why *anybody* lives in town! I am sure you agree with me, don't you, Mr. Crisp?"

"I am very fond of the country," said Mr. Crisp.

"I knew you were. Everyone of any claim to refinement of mind must love it! I can't tell you what a pleasure it is to me to come here and see the green trees and flowers, and have the society of these darling girls. Ah, Mary, dear, you little know how often I think of you when I am in the hot, crowded streets of town."

"Why don't you live in the country then, Aunt Dorinda?" asked Alice, with what Mr. Crisp took to be a slight want of tact. "There is nothing to prevent it, you know."

Miss Elliott sighed and shook her head in a melancholy manner.

"You don't understand, dear Alice," she said sweetly—though there was a sub-acid flavour in the sweetness, "that to some people it is impossible to live without intellectual communion, without the intercourse of soul with soul. In the country one may find beauty; but beauty is not sufficient—we must also have truth."

Mr. Crisp thought this a beautiful sentiment.

"Shall we go out into the garden?" said Mary, interposing with a slight impatience which the curate discerned and

was puzzled by—for why should so sensible a person as Mary Elliott be impatient of her aunt's remarks?—"The girls and Jack are playing tennis; we can sit and look on while you have a game with them, if you would like, Mr. Crisp."

Before Mr. Crisp could express a pleased assent, Miss Dorinda spoke in a plaintive tone.

"How can anyone like to run about in the sun and get so hot and out of breath? I am sure Mr. Crisp would rather sit in the shade and have a little pleasant chat than play games with the children, Mary. Wouldn't you, Mr. Crisp?"

What could the poor curate do but stammer out his satisfaction at the prospect of half-an-hour's conversation with Miss Dorinda! And Mary did not try to help him out of his difficulty, although she knew well enough that he would greatly have preferred tennis to "sitting in the shade;" but she was aware, from long experience, that it was useless to interfere with her aunt's little plans.

Pretty Dora elevated her eyebrows and pouted disdainfully when she beheld Miss Elliott and the curate seating themselves on a garden-bench beneath a walnut tree, just where they could not see the tennis players. "Oh! Aunt Dorinda has got hold of him," she said, in a disappointed tone; "and I suppose he won't play at all, now."

"What a beastly shame!" said her brother Jack. "I'm sure Crisp's longing to come. Shall I go and ask him?"

"No, certainly not. He knows that he can come if he likes, and if he prefers Aunt Dorinda's society to ours, he had better keep to it." And with this unwonted spurt of temper, which came from a little pique, and a little wounded feeling, and from something which the girl had not yet learned how to define, Dora balanced her racquet in the air and tossed a ball or two over the net, as if she had no eyes for anything but tennis.

Poor Edward Crisp was not very happy, but he was by no means as miserable as Dora would have liked him to be. He was in some ways a simple-minded young man, and Miss Elliott's attention to his utterances flattered him a little. Besides, the deluded curate thought that to make himself agreeable to Dora's aunt would advance his cause with Dora. He dreamed of asking Miss Elliott to help him in his suit. She was so sweetly sympathetic that she would surely be kind to him in his love-lorn state! Perhaps, poor soul, she had had an unhappy love affair of her own when she was a girl; she must have been pretty in her day—oh, poor Miss Dorinda!—she was not altogether unlike Dora, although she did not possess Dora's beauty. And thus musing, he gazed into Miss Elliott's face with such earnestness—thinking all the while of Dora—that the lady blushed and dropped her eyes and wondered whether such a thing as love at first sight was ever known outside the pages of a novel. For evidently Mr. Crisp was struck with her; and she was struck with Mr. Crisp.

She was still more struck with him when she learned a few facts about his means and social position. She began to think it would be a delightful thing to be a clergyman's wife. She imagined herself living in a country rectory, visiting the country people—and, now and then, the poor. It was quite a charming ideal, and she cultivated Mr. Crisp's society with diligence.

Everybody else saw what was going on, but the curate did not. He put down Miss Dorinda's interest in him to her perception of his love for her niece, and he went on dreaming of Dora and talking to Dora's aunt until even his friends began to fancy that they had been deceived, and that he wished to make the doctor's elderly sister his bride.

What Dora suffered at this time I cannot undertake to describe. She never said a word about it; but those who knew her best saw with concern that she was growing thin and pale, and that her eyes looked dim and heavy sometimes as if she had cried all night. Her beauty became more pathetic in its character, but I did not think she lost it as some people said she did. I believe that Miss Dorinda absolutely triumphed in her niece's weakness. She went about commiserating Dora for her pallor and explaining to her acquaintances that the girl had *not* got anything on her mind—that she had only overstrained herself at tennis—and so on. Little Dora's friends were sometimes inclined to wish that they could strangle Miss Dorinda.

Meanwhile the Reverend Edward Crisp, quite believing in Dora's "strain," and very much concerned about it, made up his mind that he would not wait any longer, but would reveal his love and ask for her hand. So one fine day he put on his best coat, marched up to the Elliotts' house, and asked straightway for the doctor.

Of course, the doctor was out—he might have known that. And the young ladies were out—all except Miss Char-