

have to get round step-mother first. She manages everything. Father doesn't trouble about anything in the world but his books and his walks."

"Phew!" whistled Jack disconsolately, adding, "you'll have to help me, Madge."

"I help you indeed. I should do fifty times more harm than good if I said a word about it."

"Well, but you can help keep the matter in a good humour."

"How?"

"Why make up to her a bit and we'll manage it."

"H'm! and so you think I can play the hypocrite among my various other accomplishments, do you?" and she turned away from him, a little haughtily.

"You needn't be a hypocrite for a little thing like that. Why, hang it all, one would get on badly in the world if he never made up to anyone a little."

"Then I'd rather get on badly," and Madge closed her lips with a determined air. "I hate flattery and hypocrisy, and I won't be double-faced for anybody. It seems to me more than half the people in the world are hypocrites. They just love each other, or pretend to, for what they can get, and express any feeling that happens to be in their own interest."

"Oh come, Madge, draw it mild. The world isn't half so bad as you would make out. There are lots of people who are very nice even if they don't always mean what they say."

"I shouldn't think them nice," she replied obstinately, "but of course the world naturally looks to you very different from what it does to me."

"Probably I know more about it."

"Why?"

"Because I've knocked about in it for at least seven years, and you've never left this little out-of-the-way village."

"Anyhow I've read a vast deal more than you have, and principally books by men who have spent their whole lives 'knocking about' as you call it. Besides, Jack, you never think seriously about anything. You just get through the day the pleasantest way you can and leave the worries to look after themselves."

"What a mean, selfish fellow you must think me, Madge," and Jack looked a little wistfully, into the serious young face beside him.

"Oh, indeed I don't!" she exclaimed. "I am certain you are no worse than other men; in fact, in my opinion you are a vast deal better. You are just the dearest old boy in the world," and she laid her hand caressingly on his arm. "I'll do anything in the world for you except be a hypocrite, and I couldn't do that, because I can't help saying what I think; it's my nature, you know. I suppose that's why I'm always getting into trouble."

"Never mind; it's a good fault, if it's a fault at all; only I'm sure you'd be happier, Madge, if you humoured the matter a little more. You know you are beginning to look much too old for your years. There is a change in you somehow that I don't quite like. You don't look happy."

"I'm not likely to," she replied

bitterly, turning her head away. "Another year you will find me more changed still. I expect I shall be unbearable."

"You'll never be that to me," he said quietly; "but what makes you think so?"

"Because every month I hate my step-mother, my surroundings, and lastly myself a little more," and her voice grew almost passionate in its earnestness.

"I know you have a wretchedly dull time of it," he said, "but you're very young, Madge, and it won't last much longer. Besides, you have a good home and excellent health, for which thousands of girls would envy you."

"Oh, yes, it's all very fine to talk. That's what step-mother says if I chance to make a single complaint in her hearing. She begins in a sanctimonious tone of voice to expatiate on my various blessings, and then preaches a sermon on the wickedness of ingratitude. She pities me for having such an evil disposition, and I—well, I just hate her, and grow a little harder than I was before," and there was a flash of defiance in her dark eyes, and a tremor in her voice, while she ruthlessly destroyed the flowers that were within her reach. And why should I have to live on here, killing time, while you go out into the world and enjoy your life?" she continued, speaking quickly. "It is unjust and unfair, I will never believe otherwise. You have a chance given you to work and do something which you care nothing for; while I, who would jump at the opportunity, am obliged to live a life of emptiness and ennui. Why shouldn't I have a real aim in life, as much as you?"

"You can't have the same that I have, because you are a woman, but you have a woman's aims."

"And what are they?" she asked in a tone of unutterable bitterness.

He was silent.

"Well, tell me, what are woman's aims?" she continued. "You don't know? Then I will tell you. She must make herself content to live the life of a dependent all her days, without a murmur. If she has a good home and good parents, she must consider she has all she needs. Whatever her nature, she must never desire anything further; if she does, she is wicked, ungrateful, base. When her brothers go out into the world to fight their way, encouraged by the delight of freedom and independence, she must stay at home and mend their socks and do as she is told, spending each day in the same weary round of little duties and little pleasures. Men tell her it is all holidays and she lives like a queen. She knows otherwise, but she soon learns not to say anything; she finds it is simplest to go with the crowd. It doesn't matter in the least, if the monotony and ennui crush her best points and develop instead, irritability, discontent and selfishness. It doesn't matter in the least, if, instead of becoming a gracious, high-minded woman, she becomes a fretful, dissatisfied, disappointed one! There is no sympathy, no escape for her. It is no one's fault. She happened to be born a

woman and she must abide by the consequences. If she feels she is capable of something nobler and better than the life assigned to her by custom and society, the sooner she crushes the feeling the better it will be; it is madness to cherish it; there is no place in the ranks for her. She is a woman, and woman's place is at home, be it never so uncongenial and disheartening. What more can she possibly want than household duties; and for pleasures, pretty clothes, tea-parties, and entertainments, with her chief aim to look nice and marry well? It is not an aim to treat lightly either, for if she fails to secure a husband there is nothing for her but the 'martyrdom of spinsterhood.' 'Martyrdom, not because she has no one to fight the battle with her, and gladden her life, but because, in the eyes of the world, she has failed in the great essential!'

She stopped short and breathed hard, while her eyes flashed out their scorn.

Jack expressed no surprise at her vehemence; he was used to his sister's flights of eloquence.

"It would be a pretty state of affairs at home, if all the women went out to work and left the house to look after itself," he said. "In fact there would soon be no homes at all, for men hate strong-minded women and would never marry them."

"I am not speaking of women who already have homes of their own to look after. I am speaking of unmarried women and girls, particularly those who see very little prospect of ever being married and have never had a chance to make themselves independent. Why shouldn't they have something to look forward to, better than waiting on their more fortunate sisters? But that's the argument everyone uses," she continued. "I wonder someone does not invent a new one; it could not be much poorer. If a woman has genuine, because useful, occupation in life, it does not follow that she loses her womanliness. She might lose a few traits such as spending several hours a day before her looking-glass and regarding every man as a possible husband. For the rest her mind would be enlarged and widened, and when the time came for her to have a home to look after, she would have had more time to make a wise choice and fulfil her mission better. If girls had something more satisfying in their lives, there would be none of that frantic haste to get married and have homes of their own. It isn't the girls reared in comfortable homes and shielded from every anxiety who make the best wives, Jack. It is those who know what it is to struggle and persevere. Those who have made their lives real instead of being content with mere butterfly existences. You talk disparagingly of strong-minded women, but the strong-minded woman you mean is a mere bubble of the age, who lost her womanliness, if she ever had any, before she went out into the world. You are no better than other men, Jack; you are all selfish, every one of you. You are afraid if you help us in our efforts to be freer, you will lose your