

see plainly enough this step-cousin of yours will tax you pretty severely. Well, if 'twere done, 'twere best done quickly; so sit down, and write to your respected aunt that we will do our best for her art-stricken daughter."

Margaret Melford acted on her husband's suggestion, and in a few days received a letter announcing that Miss Alverton, *alias* Thornleigh would arrive on the following day. Accordingly at the proper time Margaret was at the station, watching for her cousin's train. She had not seen Maude since their childhood, as, during her later visits to Mrs. Alverton, Maude had been at school.

When the train stopped, a girl alighted from a first-class carriage, and looked about her somewhat helplessly. She being the only lady who left the train, Margaret went up to her and introduced herself. In a few minutes, bright active little Mrs. Melford had collected her cousin's various boxes, and consigned them to the care of a porter; then, turning to Maude, she said—

"Our house is quite close to the station, and the man will bring your luggage over safely—that is," she added, looking inquiringly at her companion, "if you are sure you won't mind the walk."

"No, thanks; the air is so delicious, pray let us walk."

They presented a striking contrast. Both were good-looking, well-bred women; but, while Mrs. Melford was a tiny brunette, all life, energy, and fun, whose trim dainty dress seemed the only possible garment for her pretty figure, Miss Alverton was a stately, dreamy blonde, her undeniably beautiful face sadly marred by its languid discontented expression, a woman to whom luxury seemed an actual necessity.

They passed along the lane that led to Hillside Cottage—the Melfords' home—in almost unbroken silence, Margaret wondering whether this was her cousin's usual manner, and, if it was, how she and Jack were ever going to stand it; but the exclamation of delight that broke from Maude when they reached the garden-gate reassured her somewhat.

The scene was certainly lovely. The cottage was built on the side of a hill—whence its name—sloping gently down to the little trout-stream that rushed along at the bottom of the valley, the hill on the opposite side rising steeply and thickly wooded; the view to the right was shut in by the hills, while to the left it embraced a fertile plain dotted with pretty farms to the blue

shimmering line of the sea on the distant horizon.

Jack met them as they entered, and was duly introduced. Even his bright courtesy was no match for Miss Alverton's languid coldness; and, after one or two attempts at conversation, he turned to his wife, saying—

"You had better show your cousin her room, Margaret. I told Jane to have tea ready for you in the drawing-room, thinking you would both be tired."

Margaret accordingly took Maude into the house, showed her her room, helped her with her wraps, and, welcoming her warmly to the Hillside, said how sincerely she hoped the visit would be a pleasant one.

"You are very kind," was all the answer she received, in Maude's cool unmoved tones; and, with a sense of being rebuffed, Mrs. Melford left her cousin, and went off to find her husband.

"She's a beauty," quoth Jack; "but what a cool hand!"

"She's very shy or very reserved—I cannot tell which. I only trust she will not continue such an icicle!"

"Well, little woman, if kindness can thaw her, you will manage it, I know;" and, so saying, Jack drew his wife into his studio to judge of his progress during the morning.

But Maude did not thaw either that day or the next, nor in fact for many days. Warm-hearted little Mrs. Melford was quite chilled by her coldness, reproaching herself bitterly for not being able to induce the girl to make herself more sociable or at home. Jack spent most of his time in his studio, and did not conceal his reasons from his wife, who blamed herself, on his account also, for bringing such a "wet blanket" into his house.

One day however, having left Maude to amuse herself as best she could in the garden, while she herself attended to some housewifely duty, on her return she saw her guest and husband talking earnestly together. Jack had thrown off his usual half-sarcastic manner, and was evidently trying to explain something, whilst Maude, all her composure gone, was listening intently, almost anxiously, now and then putting in a few words, which, even at that distance, Margaret fancied were pleading. At last Maude held out her hand to Jack, who pressed it warmly; then she turned and ran into the house without noticing her hostess.

Jack wandered on down the garden, smoking, and so deep in thought that he never noticed Margaret till she gently laid her hand upon his arm. It was promptly seized, and, drawing her to