

her shyness, and found herself talking to Sir Valentino as she had not talked to anyone since the joyous, unfettered days at home.

They valse, and sat out a square dance, and then March, who had engaged himself for the next, and, indeed, for every other during the evening, was obliged to take her back to her seat among the dowagers. But her dainty, girlish grace had interested him. He thought it hard that she should be left alone and neglected, and he could not tell himself that Henrietta and Adelaide might have been more considerate for the little governess, and less self-absorbed.

He could not forget the small, wistful brown face; and when he could do so, he ventured to introduce two or three men whom he knew—officers stationed in the garrison town not far off. After that, Miss Lorrimer had the pleasure of several dances, but she went meekly down to supper in the wake of an elderly aunt and uncle of the family—an arrangement carelessly suggested by Mrs. Millard.

Close by were Henrietta, Sir Valentino March, and two or three others of the "liveliest set." Her late partner saw her, and smiled; and then, noticing that she was not likely to fare well, murmured a word or two to his companions, and secured for Violet a well-stocked plate and a cup of coffee, which would otherwise have found a more distant destination.

"You said you thought coffee much nicer than wine," he remarked, smiling.

And then, as he would have given her the cup, someone brushed against his elbow, and the hot brown liquid poured over Violet's white silk frock.

She half sprang up, with a little cry, but seeing his genuine distress, bravely tried to make the best of what was a dreadful catastrophe to her.

Together they essayed to wipe away the stains, which "would not out," and Sir Valentino murmured regrets and apologies, accusing himself of clumsiness and several sins prominent in the calendar. But, after all, what was to be done?

"Please don't mind," said the girl, smiling brightly, though her lips would tremble. "Really, it doesn't matter very much."

Of course, he had to go back to Henrietta and the others, cursing his own officiousness that he had come at all; and, of course, all thought of dancing during what remained of the evening was over for Violet Lorrimer.

She did not quite dare to betake herself upstairs with her misery, as she longed to do. Mrs. Millard had said she was to remain in the ball-room until the end, and might be angry if she ventured to

disobey. But, when she could leave the supper-table, with her elderly protectors, she went and hid herself and her spoiled dress in an obscure corner of the conservatory.

She looked down at the dress, so pretty and fresh but a few minutes ago. Now it was hopelessly ruined. She could never wear it again; and what quantities of things the five pounds would have bought! She might have sent half the money to her dear little mother; and the rest might have been put away for emergencies in the future.

As she thought of her mother, tears sprang to her eyes, and putting up her two childish little hands to her face, Violet began to cry softly.

For a few moments she forgot everything save her grief, until a slight, sudden noise caused her to look round fearfully.

Nobody was to be seen, but the branches of a rose-tree at the corner of the main passage which led from the conservatory were gently swaying as though they had been brushed against by someone passing.

Valentine March had happened, as he was dancing, to see a whisk of white draperies at the conservatory door, which told him in what direction the little governess had disappeared.

He was engaged for every dance, and therefore had no hope of being able to do so. He could not bear to think of the child sitting in the conservatory all alone. Presently, however, it appeared that one of his partners had been obliged to go home, on account of her chaperon's indisposition. No sooner had he heard the news than March was hastening to the conservatory.

He had no idea how seriously Miss Lorrimer regarded the accident to her dress. She had hidden herself, he supposed, because the beauty of the frock was gone, and she did not any longer wish to dance. This was bad enough, and the pleasure of the evening was gone because of what he termed his awkwardness. But when he turned the corner by the rose-tree, and saw the little bowed white figure on the secluded seat under the palm, a sudden realisation of the true state of the case dawned upon him, and he was stricken to the heart.

What could he do? His first and strongest impulse was to go to her, dry her tears, and console her in any way that might suggest itself. But he paused, the finger of Prudence holding him back.

"I never could keep my head when a woman cried," he said to himself. "If I go and speak to her now, I shall say or do something mad—that's certain. I shall only frighten her, and get myself into a scrape. I—I'll make up to her for