

to her imperfect knowledge of the English tongue.

'That is a curious way of taking horse exercise, George,' observed he, drily; 'to go on foot, and lead your nag.'

'I had been out for a ride, sir, on the moor, and meeting Miss Hurt and Frankie in the wood, I joined them.'

'It was I who brought Miss Hurt to see the Wilderness,' said Frank, his delicate face flushing from chin to brow; 'I was showing her over the grounds.'

'Quite right, lad, quite right,' said Sir Robert, patting his head, but speaking absently. He had got something unpleasant to say, a circumstance which always weighed upon his mind till it was done with. 'By the bye, George, I have got something to say to you, which I fear will cause you disappointment. It is with regard to your friend Mayne—the fact is, I'—here he looked uneasily towards his brother-in-law.

'I am sure it will not be necessary Arden, to go into particulars with your nephew,' put in Mr. Walcot, smoothly. 'The fact is, Mr. Gresham, your uncle is far from well, and the presence of any visitor just now—being a stranger too—'

'No, no,' interrupted Sir Robert, petulantly, 'it is not *that*; I am well enough. But perhaps at some other time, if it's the same to Mr. Mayne; it isn't as if he knew about it, and we were putting him off, you see.'

'Well, unfortunately, sir, he *does* know about it,' answered Gresham, drily. 'Directly you were so good as to ask him—knowing what pleasure he would have in coming to Halcombe, and also that his movements are apt to be sudden—I telegraphed to him at Boulogne, from which place he has wired back to say he will be at Archerchester in two days.'

Mr. Walcot turned pale with passion.

'Quick as may be your friend, Mr. Mayne's, movements, I suppose a mes-

sage could still reach him by the wire to put off his coming?'

'Not unless the wire was attached to his yacht,' returned Gresham, coolly, 'as you may see for yourself.' And he drew from his pocket the return telegram, and placed it in Mr. Walcot's hands.

*'Was about to start for Folkestone, but am now off for Archerchester, which is the nearest port to Halcombe. A thousand thanks to your uncle. Shall be with you on Friday with great pleasure.'*

'You seem to be somewhat precipitate in your invitations,' said Mr. Walcot, biting his lip.

'Not at all; if I had been an hour later I should have missed my friend.'

'I did not mean that, sir—'

'Well, well, no matter,' broke in Sir Robert, 'there is no harm done, George. Your friend will be very welcome. Mr. Walcot, let us go on.' And he lifted his hat to the governess, and moved slowly away.

'It is horrible,' ejaculated Gresham, when the pair were out of earshot; 'my uncle is growing a dotard before his time, thanks to that sycophant and scoundrel. However, he has been done this time; the electric telegraph is certainly a great institution.'

Elise glanced at the boy, and then reprovingly at Gresham.

'Oh, Frankie knows what I think of Uncle Ferdinand,' he answered, lightly.

Here a sharp, authoritative cry of 'Frank, Frank,' was heard behind them. It was Mr. Walcot's voice.

The boy started off like a dog that hears its master's whistle.

When he overtook the two men, Walcot held out his hand, in a kindly manner, as it seemed; but when his fingers closed over the lad's, they gave a warning grip.

'Look here, Frankie; you said just now that it was you who asked Miss Hurt to take a walk in the wood: did anyone tell you to say that?'