

UNCLE MAX.

CHAPTER XXVI.—Continued.

"I am really and honestly glad that you and Giles work so well together. He will be a good friend to you, I know, for when he forms a favorable opinion of a person he is slow to change it, and Giles is one who will not change his mind through fire and water for his friends. I like to hear of him in this way, for you ways put him in the best light, and, though you may not believe it after all my speeches, I am sufficiently proud of my brother to wish him to be properly appreciated." And after this I mentioned him less reluctantly.

Max came back about ten days after Jill had left us. I found him waiting for me one evening when I got back to the cottage. As usual, he greeted me most affectionately, only he laughed when I made him turn to the light that I might see how he looked.

"Well, what is your opinion, Ursula, my dear? I hope you have noticed the gray hairs in my beard. I saw them there this morning."

"You are rather tanned by the cold winds. I suppose Torquay has done you good; but your eyes have not lost their tired look, Max; you are not a bit rested."

"I believe I want more work; too much rest would kill me with ennui," stretching out his arms with a sort of weary gesture. "I walk in the air all day; but it did not seem to do what I wanted: I was terribly bored. Tudor is glad to get me back. The fellow actually seems dull. Have you any idea what has gone wrong with him, Ursula?" But I prudently turned a deaf ear to this question, and he did not follow it up; and a moment afterwards he mentioned that he had been at Gladwyn, and that Miss Darrell had given him a good account of Miss Hamilton.

"I had no idea that she was away until this afternoon. Her departure was rather sudden, wasn't it?"

"I think he was glad when I gave him Gladys's message; but he looked rather grave when I told him how much she was enjoying her freedom."

"She seems a different creature; those Maberleys are so good to her; they pet her, and yet leave her uncontrolled to follow her own wishes. I am more at rest about her there."

"A girl ought to be happy in her own home," he returned, somewhat moodily. "I think Miss Hamilton has indulged her sadness long enough. Perhaps there are other reasons for her being better. I suppose she has not heard—?" And here he stopped rather awkwardly.

"Do you mean whether she has heard anything of Eric? Oh, no, Max."

"No, I was not meaning that," looking at me rather astonished. "Of course we know the poor boy is dead. I was only wondering if she had had an Indian letter lately. Well, it is none of my affair, and I cannot wait to hear more now. Good-night, little sea-bear; I am off." And he actually was off, in spite of my calling him quite loudly in the porch, for I wanted him to tell me what he meant. Had Gladys any special correspondent in India? I wondered if I might venture to question Lady Betty.

"As it very often happens, she played quite innocently into my hands, for the very next day she came to tell me that she had had a letter from Giles."

"It was a very short one," she grumbled. "Only she had an Indian letter to answer, and that took up her time, so that was a pretty good excuse for missing India."

"Has Gladys any special friend in India?" "Only Claude! I mean our cousin, Claude Hamilton. How strange! Why, he used to stay with us for months at a time, and he and Gladys were great friends; they correspond. He is Captain Hamilton now; his regiment was ordered to India just at the time poor dear Eric disappeared; he was awfully shocked about that, I remember. Etta wrote and told him all about it; he was a great favorite of hers. We none of us thought him handsome except Etta; he was a nice-looking fellow, but nothing else."

"And you and Gladys are fond of him?" "Oh, yes." But here Lady Betty looked a little queer.

"Gladys writes to him most; she has always been his correspondent. Now and then I get a letter written to me. You see, he has no one else belonging to him, nor his mother is dead. Aunt Agnes died about two years ago, and he never had brothers or sisters, so he adopted us."

"Claude Max knew him, of course?" "To be sure. Mr. Cunliffe knew all our people. Gladys was a favorite of his, too. I think every one liked him; he was so straightforward, and never did anything mean. I think he will make a splendid officer; he has had favor lately, and we rather expect he is coming home on sick-leave. Etta hopes so."

"Gladys has never spoken of her cousin to me."

"That is because you two are always talking about other things,—poor Eric, for example. Gladys likes to talk about Claude, of course; he is her own cousin." And Lady Betty's manner was just a little defiant, as though I had accused Gladys of some indiscretion. I heard her mutter, "They find plenty of fault with her about that," but I took no notice. I had satisfied my curiosity, and I knew now why Max fancied an Indian letter would raise Gladys's spirits; but all the same he might have spoken out. Max had no business to be so mysterious with me.

"I heard Captain Hamilton's name again shortly afterwards. I was calling on Gladwyn one afternoon. I was looking to do Gladys's absence, but I dared not discontinue my visits entirely for fear of Miss Darrell's remarks. To my surprise, I found her *de-licieuse* with Uncle Max. She welcomed me with a great show of cordiality; but before I had been five minutes in the room I found out that my visit was inopportune, though Max seemed unfeignedly pleased to see me, and she had repeated his words in almost parrot-like fashion. "Oh, yes, I am so glad to see you, Miss Garston; it is so good of you to call when dear Gladys is away. Of course I know she is the attraction; we all know that, do we not?" smiling sweetly upon me. "She has been away more than five weeks now,—dear, dear! how time flies!—really five weeks, and this is your first call."

"You know how Miss Locke's illness has engrossed me," I re monstrated. "I never pretend to mere conventional calls."

"No, indeed. You have a code of your own, have you not? Your niece is fortunate, Mr. Cunliffe. She makes her own laws, while we poor inferior mortals are obliged to conform to the world's dictates. I wish I were strong-minded like you. It must be such a pleasure to be free and despise the conveniences. People are so artificial, are they not?"

"Ursula is not artificial, at any rate," returned Max, with a benevolent glance. It had struck me as I entered the room that he looked rather bored and ill at ease, but Miss Darrell was in high spirits, and looked almost handsome. I never saw her better dressed.

"No, indeed. Miss Garston is almost too frank; not that that is a fault. Oh, yes, Miss Locke's illness has been a tedious affair; even Giles got weary of it, and used to grumble at having to go every day. Of course,

seeing Giles once or twice a day, you heard all our news, so we did not expect you to toil up here; that would have been unnecessary trouble after your hard work."

Miss Darrell spoke quite civilly, and I do not know why her speech rankled and made me reply, rather quickly.

"Nurses do not gossip with the doctor, Miss Darrell. Mr. Hamilton has told me no news, I assure you. Gladys's letters tell me far more."

"I was angry with myself when I said this, for why need I have answered her at all or taken notice of her remark? and, above all, why need I have mentioned Gladys's name? Miss Darrell's color rose in a moment."

"Dear me! I am glad to hear dear Gladys writes to you. She does not honor us. Lady Betty gets a note sometimes, but Giles and I are never favored with a word. Giles feels terribly hurt about it sometimes, but I tell him it is only Gladys's way. Girls are careless sometimes. Of course she does not mean to slight him."

"Of course not," rather gravely from Max. "All the same it is very neglectful of Gladys's part. If you are a real friend, Miss Garston, you will tell her what a mistake it is,—really a fatal mistake, though I do not dare to tell her so. I see Giles's look of dislike when the post brings him news, a pointment when the post brings him news, so thing but dry business letters. He is so anxious about her health." He let her go so willingly, and yet not one word of recognition for her own, I may say her only, brother."

"Max was looking so exceedingly grave by this time that I longed to change the subject. I would say a word in defence of Gladys when we were alone, he said. It would be worse than useless to speak before Miss Darrell. She would twist my words before my face. I never said a word in Gladys's behalf that she did not make me repeat it."

"The next moment, however, she had started on a different tack.

"Oh, do you know, Mr. Cunliffe," she said, carelessly, as she crossed the hearth-rug to ring the bell, "we have heard again from Captain Hamilton?"

Max raised his head quickly. "Indeed! I hope he is quite well. By the bye, I remember you told me he had a touch of fever; but I trust he has got the better of that."

"We hope so," in a very impressive tone; "but it was a sharp attack, and no doubt home-sickness and worry of mind accelerated the mischief. Poor Claude! I fear he has suffered much; not that he says so himself, but he is far too proud to complain. But he is likely to come home on sick-leave; next mail will settle the question, but I believe we may expect him about the end of July."

"Indeed! That is good news for all of us," but the poker that Max had taken up fell with a little crash among the fire-irons. Miss Darrell gave a faint scream, and then laughed at her foolish nervousness.

"It was very clumsy on my part," stammered Max. Could it be my fancy, or had he turned suddenly pale, as though something had startled him too?

"Oh, no, it was only my poor nerves," replied Miss Darrell, with her brightest smile. "What was I saying? Oh, yes, I remember now,—about Claude: he wrote to Gladys to ask if he might come, and she said 'yes.' Ah, here comes tea, and I believe I hear Giles's ring at the bell."

I cannot tell which of the two revealed it to me,—whether it was the sudden pallor on Max's face, or the curious watchful look that I detected in Miss Darrell's eyes: it was only there for a moment, but it reminded me of the look with which the cat eyes the mouse she has just drawn within her claws. I saw it all then within a quick flash of intuition. I had partly guessed it before, but now I was sure of it.

"My poor Max, so brave and cheery and patient! But she should not torment him any longer in my presence. If he had to suffer,—and the cause of that suffering was still a mystery to me,—she should not spy out his weakness. He had turned his face aside with a quick look of pain as she spoke, and the next moment I had mounted the breach and was begging Miss Darrell to assist me in the case of a poor family,—old hospital acquaintances of mine, who were emigrating to New Zealand."

My impertunity seemed to surprise her. My sudden loquacity was an interruption; but I would not be repressed or silenced. I took the chair beside her, and made her look at me. I fixed her wandering attention and pressed her until she grew irritable with impatience. I saw Max was recovering himself; by and by he gave a forced laugh.

"You will have to give in, Miss Darrell. Ursula always gets her own way. How much do you want, child? You must be merciful to a poor vicar. Will that satisfy you?" offering me a sovereign, and Miss Darrell, after a moment's hesitation, produced the same sum from her purse.

I took her money coolly, but I would not resign the reins of the conversation any more into her hands. When Mr. Hamilton entered the room, he stepped and looked at me with a violent astonishment; he had never heard of so faint before; but somehow my eloquence died a natural death after his entrance. I was still a little shy with Mr. Hamilton.

His manner was unusually genial this afternoon. I was sure he was delighted to see us both there again. He spoke to Max in a jesting tone, and then looked benignly at his cousin, who was superintending the tea-table. She certainly looked uncommonly well that day; her dress of dark maroon cashmere and velvet fitted her figure exquisitely; her white, well-shaped hands were, as usual, loaded with brilliant rings. She was a woman who needed ornaments; they would have looked lavish on any one else, they suited her admirably. Once I caught her looking with marked disfavour on my black serge dress; the pearl hoop that had been my mother's keeper was my sole ornament. I dare say she thought me extremely dowdy. I once heard her say, in a pointed manner, that "her cousin Giles liked to see his women-folk well dressed; he was very fastidious on that point, and exceedingly hard to please."

Mr. Hamilton seemed in the best of humors. I do not think that he remarked how very quiet Max was all tea-time. He pressed us to remain to dinner, and wanted to send off a message to the vicarage; but we were neither of us to be persuaded, though Miss Darrell joined her entreaties to her cousin's."

I was anxious to leave the house as quickly as possible, and I knew by instinct what Max's feelings must be. I could not enjoy Mr. Hamilton's conversation, amusing as it was. I wanted to be alone with Max; I felt I could keep silence with him no longer. But we could not get rid of Mr. Hamilton; as we rose to take our departure he coolly announced his intention of walking with us.

"The Tylcootes have sent for me again," he said, casually. "I may as well walk down with you now." He looked at me as he spoke, but I am afraid my manner disappointed him. For once Mr. Hamilton was decidedly *détropé*. I am sure he must have noticed my hesitation, but it made no difference to his purpose. I had found out by this time that when Mr. Hamilton had made up his mind to do a certain thing, other people's moods did not influence him in the least. He half smiled as he went out to put on his great coat, and, as though he intended to punish me for my want of courtesy, he talked to

Max the whole time; not that I minded it in the least, only it was just his lordly way.

"To my great relief, however, he left us as soon as we reached the vicarage, so I wished him good-night quite amiably, and of course Max walked on with me to the cottage."

"I was actually leaving me at the gate without a word except "Good-night, Ursula," but I laid my hand on his arm."

"You must come in, Max. I want to speak to you."

"Not to-night, my dear," he returned, hurriedly. "I have business letters to write before dinner."

"They must wait, then," I replied, decidedly. "For I certainly do not intend to let you leave me just yet. Don't be stubborn, Max, for you know I always get my own way. Come in. I want to tell you why Gladys never writes to her brother." And he followed me into the house without a word.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MAX OPENS HIS HEART.

But I did not at once join Max in the parlour, though he was evidently expecting me to do so. Instead of that, I ran up-stairs to take off my walking-things. It would be better to leave him alone for a few minutes. When I returned he was leaning back in the easy-chair, with his hands clasped behind his head, evidently absorbed in thought. I was struck by his expression: it was that of a man who was nervous himself to bear some trouble; there was a quiet, hopeless look on his face that touched me exceedingly. I took the chair opposite him, and waited for him to speak. He did not change his attitude when he saw me, but he looked at me gravely, and said, "Well, Ursula?" but there was no interest in his tone."

Of course I knew what he meant, but I let that pass, and something seemed to choke my voice as I tried to answer him.

"Never mind that now: we will come to that presently. I want to tell you that I know it now, Max. I've guessed a little of it before, but now I am sure of it."

I had rushed into his fact as he sat up and looked at me. He did not ask me what I meant: we understood each other in a moment. He only sighed heavily, and said, "I have never told you anything, Ursula, have I? but his manner testified no displeasure. He would never have spoken a word to me of his own accord, and yet my sympathy would be a relief to him. I knew Max's nature so well: he was a shy, reticent man; he could not speak easily of his own feelings unless the ice were broken for him."

"Max," I pleaded, and the tears came into my eyes, "if my dear mother were living you would have told her all without reserve."

"I should not have needed to tell her: she would have guessed it, Ursula. Poor Emmie! I never could keep anything from her. I have often told you you are like her: you remind me of her this afternoon."

"Then you must make me your *confidante* in her stead. Do not refuse me again, Max: I have asked this before. In spite of our strange relationship, we are still like brother and sister. You know how quickly I guessed Charlie's secret: surely you can speak to me, who am her friend, of your affection for Gladys."

I saw him shrink a little at that, and his honest brooding eyes were full of pain.

"My affection for Gladys," he repeated, in a low voice. "You are very frank, Ursula; but somehow I do not seem to mind it. I never care for Miss Darrell to speak to me on the subject, although she has been so kind; in fact, no one could have been kinder. We can only set up to our own nature: it is certainly not her fault, but only my misfortune, that her sympathy gave me so much pain."

"Surely you have not chosen Miss Darrell for your *confidante*, Max?"

"I have chosen no one," he returned, with gentle rebuke at my vehemence. "Circumstances made Miss Darrell acquainted with my unlucky attachment. She did all she could to help me, and out of common gratitude I could not refuse to listen to her well-meant efforts to comfort me."

I remained silent from sheer dismay. Things were far worse than I had imagined. I began to lose hope from the moment I heard Miss Darrell had been mixed up in the affair; the thought sickened me. I could hardly bear to hear Max speak; and yet how was I to help him unless he made me acquainted with the real state of the case?

"If I suppose I had better tell you all from the beginning," he said, rather dejectedly; "that is, as far as I know myself, for I can hardly tell you when I began to love Gladys. I call her Gladys to myself," with a faint smile, "and it comes naturally to me. I ought to have said Miss Hamilton."

"But not to me, Max," I returned, eagerly.

"What does it matter what I call her? She will never take the only name I want to give her!" was the melancholy reply to this.

"I only know one thing, Ursula, that for three years—ay, and longer than that—she has been the one woman in the world to me, and that as long as she and I live no other woman shall ever cross the threshold of the vicarage as its mistress."

"Has it gone so deep as that, my poor Max?"

"Yes," he returned, briefly. "But we need not enter into that part of the subject; a man had best keep his own counsel in such matters. I want to tell you bare facts, Ursula; we may as well leave feelings alone. If you can help me to understand one or two points that are still misty to my comprehension, you will do me good service."

"I will try my very best for you both."

"Thank you, but we cannot both be helped in the same way; our paths do not lie together. Miss Hamilton has refused to become my wife."

"Oh, Max! not refused, surely." This was another blow,—that he should have tried and failed,—that Gladys with her own lips should have refused him; but perhaps he had written to her, and there was some misunderstanding; but when I hinted this to Max he shook his head.

"We cannot misunderstand a person's words. Oh, yes, I spoke to her, and she answered me; but I must not tell you things in this desolatory fashion, or you will never understand. I have told you that I do not know when my attachment to Miss Hamilton commenced. It was gradual and imperceptible at first,—very real, no doubt, but it had not mastered my reason. I always admired her; how could I help it?" with some emotion.

"Even you, who are not her lover, have owned to me that she is a beautiful creature. I suppose her beauty attracted me first, until I saw the sweetness and unselfishness of her nature, and from that moment I lost my heart."

"The full consciousness came to me at the time of their trouble about Eric. I had been fond of the poor fellow, for his own sake as well as hers, but I never disguised his faults from her. I often told her that I feared for Eric's future; he had no ballast, it wanted a moral earthquake to steady him, and it was no wonder that his caprices and extravagant moods offended his lover. She used to be half angered with me for my plain speaking, but she was too gentle to resent it, and she would beg me to use my influence with Hamilton to entreat him not to be so hard on Eric."

"When the blow came, I was always up

at Gladwyn once, sometimes twice, a day. They all wanted me; it was my duty to be their consolider. I am glad to remember now that I was some comfort to her."

"Wait a moment, Max; I must ask you something. Do you believe that Eric was guilty?"

"I am almost sorry that you have put that question," he returned, reluctantly. "I never would tell her what I thought. It was all a mystery. Eric might have been tempted; it was not for me to say. She could see I was doubtful. I told her that, whether he were sinned against or sinner, our only thought should be to bring him back and reconcile him to his brother. God will prove his innocence if he be blighted falsely," I said to her; and, strange to say, she forgave me my doubts."

"Oh, Max, I see what you think."

"How can I doubt it?" he replied. "Knowing Eric's character so well? he was so weak an unstable, so easily led astray, and then he was under bad influences. You will have heard Edgar Brown's name. He was a wild, dissipated fellow, and Hamilton had a right to forbid the acquaintance; both he and I knew that Edgar had low propensities, and was always lounging about public-houses with a set of loafers like himself. He has got worse since then, and has nearly broken his mother's heart. Do you think any man with a sense of responsibility would permit a youth of Eric's age to have such a friend? Yet this was a standing grievance with Eric, and I am sorry to say his sister took Edgar's part. Of course she knew no better: innocence is credulous, and Edgar was a sprightly, good-looking fellow, the sort that women never fall to pet."

"Yes, I see. Eric was certainly to blame in this."

"He was faulty on many more points. I am afraid, Ursula, you have been somewhat biased by Miss Hamilton. You must remember that she idolized Eric,—that she was blind to many of his faults; she made excuses for him whenever it was possible to do so, but with all her weak partiality she could not deny that he was trifling, idle, and extravagant, that he defied his brother's authority, that he even forgot himself so far as to use bad language in his presence. I believe, once, he even struck him; only Hamilton declared he had been drinking, so he merely turned him out of the room."

"I looked at Max sadly. "This may be all true; but I cannot believe that he took that check."

"The circumstantial evidence against him is very strong," he replied, quietly. "You do not know what power a sudden temptation has over these weak natures: he was hard pressed, remember that; he had gambling debts, thanks to Edgar. Fancy gambling debts at twenty! I have tried to take Miss Hamilton's view of the case, but I cannot bring myself to believe in his innocence. Most likely he repented the moment he had done it, poor boy. Eric was no hardened sinner. I sometimes fear—at least, the terrible thought crossed my mind, and I know Hamilton has had it too,—that in his despair he might have made away with himself."

"Oh, Max, this is too horrible!" And I shuddered as I thought of the beautiful young face so like Gladys's, with its bright frank look that seem to appeal to one's heart.

"Well, well, we need not speak of it; but it is a sad time for us all; and yet in some ways it was a happy time to me. It was such a comfort to feel that I was necessary to them all; that they looked for me daily; that they could not do without me. I used to walk with Hamilton every evening; and when Gladys was very ill they sent for me, because they said no one knew how to soothe her so well."

"Do you wonder, Ursula, that seeing her in her weakness and sorrow, she grew daily into my life, that my one thought was how I could help and comfort her?"

"She was very gentle and submissive, and followed my advice in everything. When I told her that only work could cure her sorrow, she did not contradict me, in a little while I had to check her herself with duties. She had overwhelmed herself with duties; she managed our mother's meetings with Miss Darrell's help, taught in our schools, and helped train the choir. I had allotted her a district, and she worked it admirably. She was my right hand in everything; all the poor people worshipped her."

"Yes, Max," for he paused, as though overwhelmed with some bitter-sweet recollection.

"I loved her more each day, but I respected her sorrow, and tried to bide my feelings from her. It was more than a year after Eric's disappearance before I ventured to speak, and then it was by Hamilton's advice that I did so. He had set his heart on the match. He told me more than once that he would rather have me as a brother-in-law than any other man."

"I thought I had prepared her sufficiently, but it seems that she was very much startled by my proposal. Her trouble had so engrossed her that she had been perfectly blind to my meaning. It was all in vain, Ursula, for she did not love me,—at least not in the right way. She told me, with tears, accusing herself of unkindness. She liked, most certainly she liked me, but perhaps she knew me too well."

"She was so unhappy at the thought of giving me pain, so sweet and gentle in her efforts to console me and heal the wound she had inflicted, that I could not lose hope. She told me that, though she had never thought entirely as her friend, she had never thought of her. This thought gave me courage, and I begged that I might be allowed to speak to her again at some future time."

"She wanted to refuse, and said hurriedly that she never intended to marry. But I took these words as meaning nothing. A girl will tell you this and believe it as she says it. I suppose I pressed her hard to leave me this margin of hope, for after reflecting a few minutes she looked at me gravely and said it should be as I wished. In a year's time I might speak to her again, and she would know her own mind."

"I pleaded for a shorter ordeal, though secretly I was overjoyed at this oration of consolation vouchsafed to me. But she was inexorable, though perfectly gentle in her manner."

"I wish you had set your heart on some one else, Mr. Cunliffe," she said, with a melancholy smile, "for I can give you so little satisfaction. I feel so confused and weary, as though life afforded me no pleasure. But, indeed, I do all you tell me, and I mean to go on with my work."

"I was glad to hear her say this, for at least I should have the happiness of seeing her every day."

"In a year's time," she went on, "my heart may feel a little less heavy, and I shall have had an opportunity to reflect over your words. I cannot tell you what my answer may be, but if you are wise you will not hope, if you do not come to me then. I shall know that you have changed, and shall not blame you for the least. You are free to choose any one else. I have so little encouragement to give you that I shall not expect you to submit to this ordeal." But I think her firmness was a little shaken, and she looked at me rather timidly when I thanked her very quietly and said that at the time appointed I would speak

to her again. I supposed she had not realized the strength of my feelings.

"Ursula, I was by no means hopeless! And as the months passed on my hopes grew."

"I saw her daily, and after the first awkwardness had passed we were good friends. But her manner changed insensibly. She was less frank with me; at times she was almost shy. I saw her change color when I looked at her. She was quiet in my presence, and yet my coming pleased her. I thought it would be well with me when the time came for renewing my suit; but it seems that I was a blind fool."

"I had put down the exact date, May 7. It was last year, Ursula. I meant to adhere to the very day and hour; but before February closed my hopes had suffered eclipse."

"All at once Miss Hamilton's manner became cold and constricted, as you see it now. Her soft brightness, that had been so favorable a sign, disappeared entirely. She avoided me on every occasion. She seemed to fear to be alone with me a moment. Her nervousness was so visible and so distressing that I often left her in anger. A barrier—vague, and yet substantial—seemed built up between us."

"She began to neglect her work, and then to make excuses. She was overdone, and suffered from headache. The school-work tired her. You have heard it all, Ursula: I need not repeat it."

"One by one she dropped her duties. The parish knew her no more. She certainly looked ill. Her melancholy increased. Something was evidently preying on her mind."

"One day Miss Darrell spoke to me. She had been very kind, and had fed my hopes all this time. But now she was the bearer of bad news."

"She came to me in the study, while I was waiting for Hamilton. She looked very pale and discomposed, and asked if she might speak to me. She was very unhappy about me, but she did not think it right to let it go on. Gladys wanted me to know. And then all came out."

"It could never be as I wished. Miss Hamilton had been trying all this time to like me, and once or twice she thought she had succeeded, but the feeling had never lasted for many days. I was not the right person. This was the substance of Miss Darrell's explanation."

"You know Gladys," she went on, "how sensitive and affectionate her nature is; how she hates to inflict pain. She is working herself up into a fever at the thought that you will speak to her again."

"It was too terrible last time, Etta," she said to me, bursting into tears. "I cannot endure it again. How am I to tell him about Claude?"

"About Claude!" I almost shouted. Miss Darrell looked frightened at my violence. She shrunk back, and turned still paler. I noticed her hands trembled.

"Oh, have you not noticed?" she returned, feebly. "Oh, what a cruel task this is: and you are so good,—so good."

"Tell me what you mean!" I replied, angrily, for I felt so savage at that moment that a word of sympathy was more than I could bear. You would not have known me at that moment, Ursula. I am not easily roused, as you know, but the blow was too sudden. I must have forgotten myself to have spoken to Miss Darrell in that tone. When I looked at her, her mouth was quivering like a frightened child's, and there were tears in her eyes."

"I scarcely know that it is you," she faltered. "Are men all like that when their wills are crossed? It is not my fault that you are hurt in this way. And it is not Gladys's either. She has tried—I am sure she has tried her hardest—to bring herself to accede to your wishes. But a woman cannot always regulate her own heart."

"You have mentioned Captain Hamilton's name," I returned, coldly, for her words seemed only to aggravate and widen the sore. "Perhaps you will kindly explain what he has to do with the matter?"

"She hesitated, and looked at me in a pleading manner. I saw that she did not wish to speak; but for once I was inexorable."

"I must rely upon your honor, then, not to repeat my words either to Giles or Gladys. Your doing so would bring Gladys into trouble; and, after all, there is nothing definitely settled. I begged assent to this, and she went on rather reluctantly:

"Claude was always fond of Gladys, but we never knew how much he admired her until he went away. They are all half-cousins. Gladys's father was step-brother to Claude's. Giles has always been averse to Claude's marrying, but we thought this would make a difference."

"They are engaged, then?" I asked, in a loud voice, that seemed to startle Miss Darrell.

"Oh, no, no, she returned, eagerly; "there is no engagement at all. Claude writes to her, and she answers him, and I think he is in a bad way with her, and she has owned as much to me. Gladys is not one to talk of her feelings, especially on this subject; but it is easy to see how absorbed she is in those Indian letters; she is always brighter and more like herself when she has heard from Claude."

"I am to deduce