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him, as the sky had by this time cleared, and had left the room with the windows shut and the fire low, just as it was.

"Good gracious! we left that room in a pretty state," cried Emily, now. "We never dreamed of any one's coming to call in this country place. And Rosamund away too. It is the mother of those girls who came in at the Abbey yesterday, I suppose."

"And a precious lynx-eyed mother too," added Frederick. "So if you haven't done the right thing, you'll soon know it. I have a great mind not to go in. I don't see why I should. She will have to be civil now she finds I am booked here, and all's settled; but I know better than to believe she is really over-well pleased. If I had taken up with one of her daughters—"

"Surely Frederick, you will come in; you will not allow Em and me to go in all by ourselves," implored the much alarmed Etta. "We can't go in by ourselves, can we, Em? We have never seen her, and—"

"She won't eat you."

But he could not resist their entreaties, nor his own inclinations.

In his heart he was by no means ill-inclined to play the host on the occasion—he at home, and the Waterfields as guests in the King's Common great reception saloon.

He had never, he knew, advanced to anything like intimacy with the Waterfields; it had nettled him more than once in former days to find that they had been entertaining when he had received no invitation, and he and Rosamund had had their confidence on the subject—both of one mind—both triumphing that fate had spited all endeavours to separate them from each other.

"Well, well, I'll come with you," he now gave in with a good grace. "I'll come along and keep the good folks in order. I wonder how many of them there be? A whole bevy, I'll warrant 'em. Waterfields—unlimited order—eh, Em? eh, Etta?" and happy in his jest, he was reasonably disappointed at finding only the eldest daughter had accompanied her mother on the occasion.

If Rosamund had supposed that nothing could exceed the disadvantage at which her future sisters-in-law had been seen the day before, she was mistaken. True, they were not now arrayed in gaudy "bests," fresh from a suburban dressmaker nor were they over-heated and disordered by mid-day feasting; but they were louder, bolder, more aggressive, apologetic, and consequential than they had had any opportunity of being in Lady Julia's drawing-room.

Frederick had bidden them pluck up spirit, and be afraid of nobody; and, by way of further reassurance, he had entered the room first and flourished a welcome.

"How are you, Mrs. Waterfield? Glad to see you again. It is an age since we met. What a lot has happened since then, has it not? Where will you sit? Away from the fire? Bless me, what a shocking bad fire! The girls have nearly let it out. It's what they are always doing at home. Emily, this is Mrs. Waterfield. Mrs. Waterfield, Miss Gilbert. Henrietta, Mrs. Waterfield. I say, Etta, what a mess you have left this room in! Mrs. Waterfield will tell tales of you to Rosamund. You heard about poor Rosamund?" turning to her; "oh, yes, by the way, some of you were there at the time."

It was now "Poor Rosamund!" all at once, and from all three.

"I never thought to hear that poor child's name so taken in vain!" cried Mrs. Waterfield afterwards. "Really, I had hardly the patience to sit still and listen to 'Rosamund! Rosamund! Rosamund!' There was no stopping it, no turning it aside. And when I think of Lady Caroline, the proudest woman in the country—" and she broke off with almost a groan; she had not loved Lady Caroline, but she had never wished her anything so bad as this.

"I am going to ride over to the Abbey presently," quoth Gilbert, after a time. "I came here first, knowing the girls would have the latest news, if I did not find Rosamund herself returned; so when I found they had not set foot outside to-day I just stopped to take them out for a bit. It is dull for them," he added, kindly.

"It is a great pity," murmured Mrs. Waterfield, longing to add, "they had better go home."

"Yes it is, an awful pity," assented he; "spoils everything. My sisters had come on purpose to cheer her up, for I was sure she was out of sorts, and she had been uncommonly pleased with the idea; and I thought we should soon have seen her quite perked up. She was as bright as a humming-bird the night you arrived; wasn't she, girls?"

"Oh, dear, yes, in such spirits!" replied Emily; "but still we thought, Etta and I fancied, that she was perhaps, if anything, in too great spirits—you know what I mean, Frederick; she was up one moment and down the next. And yesterday morning, she hardly spoke a word. Lady Julia asked her if she were tired, directly we arrived there, and Rosamund owned she was; and—"

"I only know that I never saw her merrier than the evening before," said Gilbert, not above half satisfied with this; "but, of course, that bears out what I say" his brow clearing. "She has been overdone—the whole thing has been more than she can stand; she ought to get away

from this place. And I hope we shall manage that before very long," with a significant smile. "Under the circumstances, I think we need not stand too much on the proprieties, eh, Mrs. Waterfield?"

She bowed a cold assent.

"Meantime the point is, how long is this illness to last?" proceeded he. "Makin is a dull ass, to my mind, and is making by far too much of it. I shall see what Rosamund says of herself. The poor girl should surely have a voice in the matter; and she is not the one to—"

The door opened as he spoke, and, to the surprise of all, Lord Hartland walked quietly in—as though merely entering from another room.

"Ha! it's you!" cried Gilbert, starting up and intercepting his hand ere he could reach any one else. "Well, what news? How is she? Better? Here is Mrs. Waterfield come to inquire; and we were talking about her at this moment. Is she up? Will she see me if I go over by-and-by?"

This was what Hartland had been sent to prevent.

"Not to-day," he replied, as soon as he had made his greetings. "Lady Julia bade me say, in case I should find you here, that she feared no visitors could be admitted to-day. Rosamund was going to sleep, and was not to be disturbed."

"But I need not go yet; I can wait a bit."

"Medical orders, you know, Gilbert," said Hartland, who had learned his lesson. "Oh, medical orders be hanged!" rejoined Gilbert, evidently disconcerted. "I say—"

"I am so sorry," murmured Mrs. Waterfield, in her very soft voice seeming to rebuke his strident tones. "I am so grieved that such care should be needed."

Lord Hartland was silent.

"Is there anything we can do for her?" inquired the practical Miss Gilbert. "Does she want us to send her over anything?"

"Would she like books, or work?" chimed in Henrietta.

"I was not told to ask for anything—thanks," said the messenger gravely. "I believe Rosamund's maid brought over all necessities last night."

"Please give her our love, and say how very, very sorry we are," quoth Em.

"And tell her that Catherine is such a good hostess," added Etta.

"And that Mr. Liscard would have the Irish song again last night."

"And that the bullfinch took his sugar from my hand this morning."

There was no chance for Rosamund's old friends to get in a word or express a sentiment, all the interest and anxiety being thus already appropriated.

"I fear the messages will have to wait," responded Hartland, somewhat drily; "I shall not see the invalid."

"No, I thought not. So I shall not trouble you, Lord Hartland," and Mrs. Waterfield rose to depart. She felt as if she should defile herself by entering into the lists with such competitors; and as Gilbert had withdrawn from her side, and with his sisters was now bestowing his whole attention on the Abbey delegate, nothing remained for her, if she would support her own dignity, but to go, and to go forthwith.


"And a jolly good riddance," cried the major, on his return from seeing her to her carriage; "she was no sweeter than usual to-day, that worthy lady. Now Hartland, as I am not to go to the Abbey, you have got to stop on here. We can't leave Mr. Liscard again at the mercy of these girls as he was last night. You should hear what an account they have to give of him. By Jove! it will make you stare. They badgered the poor old fellow so, that he was obliged to be festive in self-defence. They would not let him alone. You and I must really be here to protect him to-night."

"I—well—oh yes, I can stop," said Hartland, after a moment's consideration. "I'll just walk back and let Lady Julia know—"


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 (TO BE CONTINUED.)

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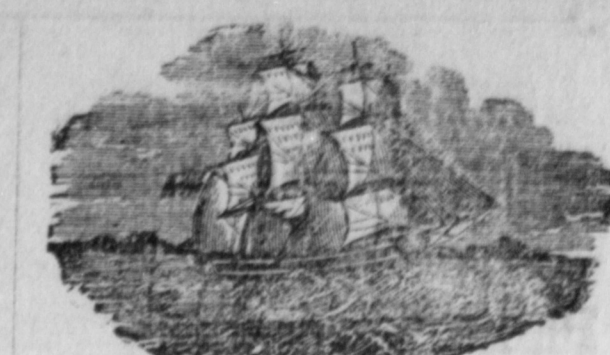
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