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after dinner. Mr. Liscard had resumed his wonted habits, and, as before, pursued his own path; while the lawyer and the steward transacted between them such business as had formerly fallen to his wife's share. Miss Penrose had recommended lessons and rules; all—with one exception—had fallen back, more or less, into the old groove, with a diffidence of the new, natural under the circumstances,—all but Rosamund, and for her everything was changed.

She was now not only mistress of her father's household but prospective mistress of another, and had thus to take up two positions at once.

But although the future was surcharged with importance and variety, it seemed that, for the present, there was nothing wherewith to while away the tedious hours. As soon as all the blackedged epistles had been responded to, and the dressmakers and milliners had executed their final orders, nothing remained which could very well, according to her views, be put forward and turned into an occupation. By nature, as we know, she was neither intellectual, nor possessed with a turn for any of the fine arts; and although by no means deficient either in wit or sense, these hardly stood her in much stead at this pinch.

Society was out of the question; her old friends the Waterfields, who indeed might have been admitted to intercourse, were absent from home; Lady Julia was obliged to be careful of cold winds, and was, moreover, apt to look wistful and let fall inconvenient remarks; the Stonelys—she soon came to an end of the Stonelys—so that, all said and done, Major Gilbert himself was the only resource of his betrothed, and it is to be feared she did not find him a sufficient one.

He was very kind; he had invariably provided something wherewith to amuse and enliven her, when he came boldly tramping in at the door, ringing no bell, but admitting himself as a man who has a right to do so. As invariably he had brought with him a fresh color, and a fine appetite—the rewards of exercise and health. Usually he walked at this time, one of his horses being laid up; and knowing Rosamund to be also a walker, he did not like to find her sitting over the fire on a fine, breezy afternoon, in a room warmer than was wholesome, and with a book she laid aside but languidly on his entrance. He thought she did not go out enough, did not run about enough. He remembered her as running in and out of the garden door all day long.

The weather was not tempting perhaps, but there were days when a good run and a blow in the soft south winds would have done her all the good in the world—and it transpired that on these she had not set a foot outside! She had been afraid it was going to rain. Had he known Rosamund of old, he would have been still more surprised than he was. She who had snapped her fingers at waterspouts, to be daunted by the chance of a shower!

He saw enough as it was, however, to fancy she wanted a shaking up, and the happy idea forthwith presented itself of providing a treat for Emily and Henrietta, and at the same time giving his fair one something to do and to think about.

"What do you say to having the girls here?"

"The girls?"

"Em and Etta. I daresay they would come. They are longing to know you. And just now, when the house is quiet, and nothing going on, you would get to know each other a long way better than at another time. What do you think?"

"Oh, I think—yes, I think I should be very glad." It was not exactly hearty, but it was as much so as he had expected. Rosamund had not been hearty about anything of late. "If my father has no objection," proceeded she; "and of course they would understand that we can have no amusement for them."

"Of course. I should say they would prefer it. They are lively girls themselves, and need no entertaining. Oh, they would be happy enough."

"Then I will ask papa, and write at at once."

"Oh, no hurry, wait till we have had our chat," and he drew near affectionately, for he had just arrived.

"If I do not write now, I shall be too late for the post."

"I forgot. That alters the case. Well, if you are as keen as all that," and he strove to be pleased that it was so, and easily persuaded himself that it was merely a renewal of her girlish ardour, and no desire to escape from his embraces, which sent Rosamund so quickly out of the room. She was some time in coming back, but excused herself by producing the note already written, and inquiring, prettily, whether it were worded as he liked. Would it do?

Yes, it would do very well; yes—turning over the page again; very well, on the whole; it was, perhaps, just the least bit in the world formal; but after all—oh, it would do nicely, and it was very kind of her and her father, and the girls would be immensely pleased.

"How soon do you think they will come?" She was beginning to feel really a little pleased and curious herself, and was not sorry to have something—anything—to look forward to.

"What day did you ask them for? I forget. Did you name a day?"

"No. I said the first that was convenient. This is Tuesday. Perhaps about Friday?"

"I hardly think Friday," said Gilbert, who had his own reasons for saying so. "We'll call it Monday. I'll just scratch a line myself," and he sat down again at the now neglected davenport, and wrote a hasty despatch.

Which was just like him, all at home declared. For it was to the effect that "the girls" were to be sure to come, but they were equally sure not to come one day sooner than that for which they could be fully and suitably equipped at all points. If they wanted frocks and hats, and fallals, they were to get them straight-way, and he would see that the bill was paid; all he bargained for was that the young ladies, when they did appear, should do him credit. There were also several considerate suggestions, which the prompt and clear-headed brother had thought out in the interval between making the proposal, and Rosamund's return with it carried out; and finally, he promised to meet their train and go with them up to the house.

As he had foreseen and foreordained, a joyful acceptance was speedily received, and Monday was the appointed day. But unfortunately, when the Monday came, there came with it some military business which brooked of no delay, and which could only be transacted, as ill-luck would have it, during the very hour at which the sisters' train was due. He had no time to let them know; he did not know himself till after they must have started on their journey.

"Poor things! I am really sorry about it he considered. 'I know they will be in a blue funk. And it would have taken off the edge if I could have gone up with them. But it can't be helped. I shall get over to King's Common as soon as possible; and after all, they may thank their stars they have only to encounter Rosamund—not Rosamund's mother."

"Emily, he is not here." An anxious face looked up and down the station platform, when the long train from London pulled up that afternoon about four o'clock. "Frederick is not here," exclaimed Henrietta Gilbert, in accents almost tragic. "And he promised faithfully, and he knew how we should feel! I did think—"

"Sh," murmured Emily back. Her eye had caught sight of a tall footman lugubriously corded, and instinct told her whom it was this functionary sought. "I suppose Rosamund is outside," added she, "and has sent him in for us."

Half of the conjecture, and half only, proved correct. The footman was for them, but Miss Liscard was not outside. Miss Liscard would explain herself what had detained her. Then it became evident that the man was looking for a maid. He had taken the young ladies' bags and rugs; but it was not until Miss Gilbert herself volunteered to point out their luggage that he desisted from further quest.

"Did he think there were more of us?" inquired Henrietta, aside.

But she was nudged to silence, and neither spoke again till they were safe within the large roomy omnibus which was used for station work at King's Common.

"Well, here we are at last!" cried Etta then. "Here we are, and here we go! Really and truly we are now to make this grand visit we have talked so much about. If only Frederick had been with us now, I should feel perfectly happy. I can hardly yet believe it. I keep thinking all the while that something or other will be sure to turn up to stop us. Every morning lately I have expected a letter saying that some one else had died—"

"Do take care." "Oh, I shall take care, never fear. I shall be as quiet as a mouse as soon as ever we get there. Directly the smallest corner of the house comes into sight my heart will sink down into my boots, just as it did at the station. That footman gave me a turn, and—I wonder how far we have to drive."

"I am afraid not far."

"Why? How do you know?"

"I remember Frederick said about two miles."

"Only two miles! Oh dear, we shall take no time over two miles at this rate! I wish it had been ten."

"I am sure I don't," said Emily, who was more courageous. "I am tired with sitting still so long already; and now that there is no Lady Caroline, there is nothing really to mind."

"Oh, isn't there, though? If there had been a Lady Caroline, I do not believe I should ever have come."

"Perhaps we should never have been asked—except, of course, to the wedding." "I almost wish we had not been. We could have got on famously at the wedding. We should have been driven up, for one thing, together with a lot of others—not all by ourselves in state, like this. The carriage would not have been sent only for us, and that great footman would not have discovered we had no maid. Emily, why didn't we bring one of the housemaids?"

"We never did such a thing before," said Emily. "I never once thought of it. And I know plenty of girls don't," added she, "though I suppose some do. And after all, Etta," with a touch of sound sense, "what good would it have done, when the very first thing that would have come out among the servants would have been that he was not a real maid? We have never been fine people. Why should we begin to pretend?"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

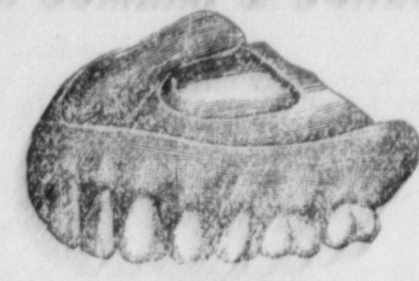
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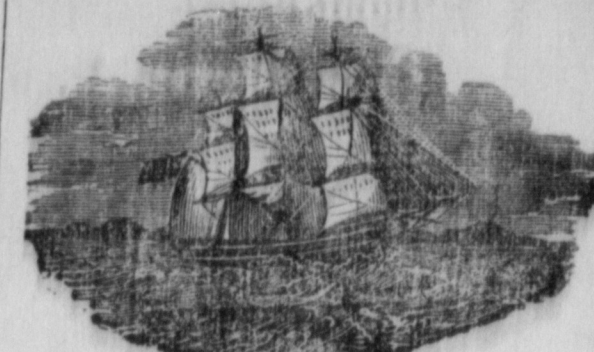
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