

## For Jack Armour's

## Amusement.

IN TWO INSTALMENTS.

## CHAPTER I.

The sultry August sun is shining down fiercely upon yellow cornfields, straggling scarlet poppies, dusty white lanes, shadeless meadows.

Penelope Graham, looking cool and composed, in spite of the heat in a simple muslin dress and shady hat, has been strolling quietly through one of the same meadows, her thoughts as tranquil as her face.

But suddenly, with no apparent reason, she increases her pace to a rapid walk, and diverges from the straight path before her towards a little stile on the left.

In the distance has appeared a tall loose-jointed, rather ungainly-looking figure, attired in clerical garb, which Penelope knows only too well and by no means desires to meet.

Fate, however, is against her.

Before she can reach her goal, the Reverend Patrick Colquhoun's rapid strides have brought him up to her.

'How do you do, Miss Graham!

Penelope is disappointed, but politeness compels her to disguise the fact and smile sweetly.

Indeed, having a genuine liking for Mr. Colquhoun, she would not be averse to sparing him half-an-hour of her drowsy summer day did not her instinct tell her that danger lies ahead of them.

In his dark brown eyes—the only good feature of his plain face—there is a certain dog-like look of tenderness and fidelity, whenever he turns them upon Penelope, that has made her for a long time suspect that she is dearer to him than she fain would be.

She is not a coquette, Miss Graham, and even for the sake of being able to boast of an extra conquest, like so many of her friends, would not wish to give a moment's pain to any living creature.

Mr. Colquhoun, however, rushes upon his doom in spite of all her gentle, cold avoidance of him.

'Miss Penelope,' he says, after they have walked along and talked common-places for about ten minutes, 'I never seem to see you now. You have given up your class at the school, Mr. Merryweather tells me.'

'Yes,' says Penelope, quietly, but feeling secretly uneasy.

'The hot weather is trying, of course,' says Mr. Colquhoun, with kindly allowance, and he glances tenderly down at the slight pretty form at his side, 'but we miss you.'

Thank you. It is not exactly that I feel the heat, Penelope's honesty forces her to admit. 'Still, I did not feel that I wanted to keep on with the school just now; perhaps later—buriedly and vaguely—I may take it up again.'

Patrick Colquhoun hides the little twinge of pain it gives him to hear her speak like this, under his usual kind smile.

'But you are going to keep on with your private little class on Wednesday evenings, are you not?' he inquires.

'No, Mr. Colquhoun, I don't think that I can,' explains Penelope, glancing up with her sweet grey eyes. 'In fact, I am sure I can't. You see, I am going away.'

'Going away!' echoes Mr. Colquhoun.

'You mean for the usual summer holiday, of course?'

'No; I am going away for good.'

'Going away for good!' repeats her companion, in a stupefied voice. 'Then what did you mean a minute ago by saying you might—later—'

'Oh! next summer, if I come over, or at Christmas, or any time like that,' says Penelope.

A heart sick look has crept over the curate's face, and it is mingled great surprise.

'But, Miss Graham—forgive me, but you have always allowed me to consider myself your friend—I thought your home was with your aunt, Mrs. Armour, at the Court.'

'Yes, it is—it was, I mean—but another aunt has arisen on the scene, and Aunt Margaret at the Court thinks I ought to give some of my future to Aunt Maria, in Ireland, as I have given so much of my past to her. So I am leaving the Court. Aunt Maria is a sort of invalid. You're smiling a little—would tell me my duty lay with her.'

'Yes, yes, I should, of course—no doubt,' assents poor Patrick Colquhoun, with a pale face. 'But it seems very sudden—I had no idea—oh, Miss Penelope! he bursts out, his hopeless love unable to smother itself under the cruel blow that had just been dealt him, and forcing itself suddenly to the front, 'what can I say to you—what can I say to tell you what it will be to me if such a thing comes to pass—that you disappear utterly out of my life? I know it is madness—mad presumption—on my part to speak to you like this, but I love you, I love you so dearly, that I feel as if I can't face the thought—'

'Oh, Mr. Colquhoun, pray don't!' ejaculates Penelope, with distress in her voice and eyes.

'I have loved you so long,' says the poor fellow, unheeding for once her gentle interruption in his pain, 'ever since I first met you, Penelope. I have had no thought of anything but you.'

'Yes, yes, you have thought of your work; you are better than anyone who has ever been here,' breaks in Miss Graham again, anxious to stop his declara-

tion of passion for herself. 'You are the best man I have ever met, Mr. Colquhoun, and please—please don't be offended with me when I ask you to say no more. I esteem you, I respect you, I like you more than words can say—'

'But,' says Patrick, with a gulp and a clasping together of his big jointed fingers, 'you—you can't do more. I know it; I quite understand. Don't let me pain you, Penelope; I could bear anything but that. It has all been a mad dream on my part. I ought never to have spoken to you. It was presumption—'

'It was not presumption,' contradicts Miss Graham, indignantly, with tears in her eyes. 'It is the greatest honor I could have been offered, that a man like you should care for me, Mr. Colquhoun. It is simply a sort of perversity that makes me unable to say truthfully that I can love you in the same way as you have just told me you love me, not that you are unworthy. And I could not marry anyone unless I could give him my entire heart—deprecatingly.'

'No, no! I wouldn't wish you to,' cries the curate, firmly trying to crush down all evidence of his suffering. 'Forgive me and forget what I have been betrayed into saying, Penelope. You are so dear to me that the thought of parting with you for ever cut into me like a knife. I will try never to distress you in such a way again. You will let me say just this, that I shall never forget you.'

'And you will let me say that I shall always think it an honor to be your friend, won't you, Mr. Colquhoun?' says Penelope, earnestly and sadly, as she stretches out her small hand to his big one.

It is perfectly true, no mere attempt to soften her blow to him, that she sincerely, though her heart is not his regards him as the best man she knows.

When he has left her she sadly wends her way home to the Court, thinking of two blue, bold, laughing eyes, and wondering why they are so much dearer to her than Patrick Colquhoun's brown ones, for she instinctively knows that Jack Armour, her cousin, and Mr. Merryweather's curate ought hardly to be mentioned in the same breath though she has never heard of anything in the least degree to Jack's discredit and loves him as it is not likely poor Patrick will ever be loved, perhaps all the more passionately that the fact is secret and known to nobody but herself.

Penelope Graham is not one to wear her heart upon her sleeve and Jack has never asked her to marry him.

But still, it is the thought of him that has caused her to send Patrick away this afternoon with a 'Nay,' instead of the 'Yes' that would have made him blest above all his fellows.

## CHAPTER II.

'Down in a flowery vale' stands Stane Court, a not overpoweringly large abode, but reckoned one of the 'grand' places of the neighborhood.

The Armours are not rich—poor, rather—but their birth and standing are exceptional.

While Penelope Graham is sauntering through the meadows with her unwelcome suitor, her aunt, Mrs. Armour, is seated under a cedar on her lawn, and Jack, big and strikingly handsome, lies in the shade on the grass at her side.

They are talking, or rather, Mrs. Armour is, earnestly.

'I can't bear the thought of her going, Jack,' she is saying. 'I know it is her duty. I know her father's sister requires her more than I do, but Penelope away from me is a fact I can hardly face. Oh! my dear boy, what is to prevent you keeping her here?'

'I know what you mean, of course,' says Jack. 'But really, mother, to tell the truth, I don't want to marry Penelope the least bit in the world.'

'Oh, Jack!—in an accent of keen reproach—you must love her. Who could help it?'

'I have managed to help it,' says Jack, rather sulkily. 'I don't see any attraction in her at all mother. Of course I'm fond of her—I look upon her as a sort of sister, and of course, also, I shall miss her in a way; but I don't see any reason why I should sacrifice myself in the way you mean. She isn't the sort of girl I admire, or ever shall. I've let you understand so before.'

'But, Jack,' exclaims Mrs. Armour, weakly, 'I'm sure she is fond of you dear. I'm sure you have her whole heart.'

'Nonsense; nothing of the sort!' cries Jack, who, however, has no doubt of the fact, and closes his eyes for a moment, with the air of a coxcomb.

'Oh, yes you have! I know that is why she refused Charles Hunt; such a good offer for her, too; better than she will ever get again, poor child! No, Jack, she loves you, I have long known it, and I think you ought to make me happy by asking her. You know I love her as well as if she were my own daughter.'

'But, mother, I must marry money, if I marry at all; and you know Pen hasn't a penny.'

'Oh, Jack, dear! you could live as we do now. I should be so happy in my old age—Mrs. Armour cannot be more than fifty—and it would be luxury for her.'

'I shouldn't be happy in my youth, though,' remarks Jack, with a rather surly laugh, 'and I don't regard this sort of thing as luxury'—waving his hand to the quiet, grey house and shady garden.

'No. I'm afraid you have more extravagant ideas,' says his mother, with a sigh. 'Ah! Penelope isn't only pretty—but she's so good, Jack, that's why I want to see her your wife. Can't you, won't you, dear boy ask her?'

'No,' says Jack, restlessly. 'You want to make me miserable, mother. I don't care for her goodness. I shouldn't care for her for a wife. Don't bother me any longer, pray!'

With a deep sigh, Mrs. Armour lets the subject drop, but it is the one earnest desire of her heart, that Jack should marry Penelope Graham—the child of her dead sister—the girl who has lived with them so long, and, next to her son, is Mrs. Armour's idol.

It has seemed to her lately as if her life will become unutterably blank without Penelope, for Jack, in spite of her adoration for him, often shows her, by little selfishnesses and by lengthy absences from her, that she has made the usual parental mistake—indeed crime—of over indulging him in his childhood and boyhood.

He is very fond of her in a lazy way, but he does not, and would not, give up much for her; whereas Penelope is like some loving daughter, grateful for the home that has been bestowed upon her, and anxious to please her aunt by every possible means in her power.

It is no new idea of Mrs. Armour's that the two should marry.

She has always wished it, and now she yearns for it passionately.

It seems, however, as if it is not to be, so she has to stifle her desires, that she may not irritate Jack, to whom the idea seems so distasteful.

He, indeed, is now amusing himself in a way that, if she could but guess it, would soon show her the futility of her hopes.

In the evening, after dinner, Jack Armour, lighting a cigarette, strolls away in the calm August sunset, while Penelope's grey eyes and his mother's blue ones gaze after him admiringly.

He is, indeed, well worth looking at.

He disappears gradually from their sight and, when he is well beyond it, somewhat increases his pace.

His steps lead him to a sort of common, about a mile from the Court.

Here, long before he comes up to it, he perceives waiting for him the slight figure of a young girl.

Jack Armour has a refined taste, and Lizzie Talbot is not so much a rustic in appearance as her birth and up bringing might have made her.

Her face is very daintily colored—no apple red or daisy-maid bloom blushes upon her cheeks; her red lips are not the full and pouting ones of a village beauty but softly curved and beautiful.

Her tawny brown eyes are very innocent, and their lashes are long and curling, one shade only darker than the brown hair that ripples softly over her small head.

She may be seventeen or eighteen years of age, and is dressed in a shabby black shirt and a faded pink blouse, while a big hat is tipped over her face.

She is altogether very fair to look upon, as Mr. Jack Armour discovered almost before her eyes met his, on the common a few days ago, and they fell into natural talk, or what seemed natural to the girl.

She is ignorant of evil, of the world and its ways; and this, their first appointed meeting, does not seem to her a wrong or foolish thing, or one that both his people and her own rather stern mother would condemn.

She is already, or foolish child, believes she is, fathoms deep in love with the handsome young man, so greatly her superior although she knows nothing of him, still less that he is the owner of Stane Court.

She imagines he may be an artist, or an author staying down in the neighborhood for work or rest, for he has told her nothing, and she cares less.

'How good of you to come!' he says, tenderly, as he comes up to her, putting on an appearance of greater speed. 'I am sorry I'm so late Lizzie,' squeezing her hand in his. 'I hope you haven't been here long?'

'Not very long, sir—I mean—now very long,' she answers, too shy to use the name he has begged her to call him by—the safe name of 'Jack.' 'I didn't mind waiting at all,' she adds, hastily and obligingly.

'Ah, but I mind it for you,' replied Mr.

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Armour, who, nevertheless, has not hurried himself overmuch, and has done lengthy justice to his evening meal. 'It shan't occur again, Lizzie. Tell me did you have any difficulty about meeting me?'

'No; none. I think mother thought I was starting off for a walk as usual. You see, on these fine evenings she doesn't expect me to stay always. I work hard, she says, during the day, and she thinks I ought to have an hour or two in the evening to myself.'

'Just so,' says Jack complacently. 'Your mother seems a very nice woman, Lizzie; and what sense she has!'

'Yes,' assents, Lizzie, soberly.

She does not like to say she is afraid of Mrs. Talbot, but it is the case, and she would not mention her new friendship to her mother for the world.

She thinks it is a friendship, poor child—a pleasant friendship than she has ever known in all her life.

This gay young man with the bright blue eyes and gentle voice—he is like some fairy prince to her.

She could not up give the chance of coming out and seeing and speaking to him, she thinks, passionately, and her mother would be sure to make curious and dissatisfied inquiries about him which she could not answer.

She would not presume to question him for the world.

Mrs. Talbot would be sure to end in forbidding the companionship, and then life would seem too black and empty to be borne, so she has said nothing, and hopes that she may keep the secret to herself.

They stroll along side by side, over the soft turf, in the gathering twilight Jack well entertained in making himself agreeable to the pretty country girl, who evidently thoroughly believes in him, and Lizzie transcendently happy.

She has not the resolution to remove the arm he presently slips round her waist when they reach the cool, foxglove bordered lanes.

The passion of first love is claiming her for its easy prey, and she is foolish enough to believe that Jack's soft whispers mean that she must be something to him, incredible as it seems to her.

She only shyly shrinks a little away from his side, looking at him half wondering with her innocent eyes.

'How pretty you are, Lizzie!' he says.

'But why do you look at me like that?'

'I—don't know. Please don't,' she answers, trying to unclasp his strong, brown fingers with her own timorous ones.

'But it's so much nicer to walk like this. Don't you like it? You are not angry, are you?'

'No, oh, no, sir!' she falters uneasily, happy, nevertheless; 'but I—'

'Sir!' he echoes reproachfully. 'You promised to call me 'Jack,' Lizzie. I shall think you don't want me for a friend, if you behave like that.'

'Oh, sir,' she bursts out, 'it isn't that—you know it isn't that; only, I'm not a lady. I'm so far below you, it doesn't seem right to speak to you like that.'

He interrupted her by gently placing his hand over her lips.

He is not touched or made ashamed by her admitted inferiority, which might have appealed for her to a better man.

He never entertains any consideration but his own amusement.

'You're lady enough for me, Lizzie,' he replies. 'Come, doesn't it make this lovely evening pleasanter to spend it together? I believe you think there's something wrong in being happy.'

'No, I don't,' she answers, yielding to the spell his blue eyes and tender tone have cast over her, and leaving her slender little hand in his.

'You are happy, aren't you?' he exclaims asking a question, of which he knows the answer only too well.

He has to ask it more than once, however, before Lizzie's timid little 'Yes' comes in reply.

And then it is followed by a sigh.

'Why do you sigh?' he asks quickly.

He feels sincerely fond of this little country girl at the moment, and, during the last week, he has felt once or twice that he admires her more than he has ever admired anyone before, in spite of her circumstances.

He presses the slight form to him more closely as he looks down at her.

'I don't know,' she says, with a vague wistful mournfulness. 'It was because you are a gentleman, I think, and I'm so poor and low, and don't know anything.' J. F. &

'How do you know I'm a gentleman?' he exclaims, hoping she has not found out his identity, and almost inclined to wonder if she has been prying into affairs he would fain keep from her.

He little knows Lizzie, that he can think of her so.

'Oh, as if everybody couldn't tell that! she cries, with a little note of despair in her low but rather pretty voice.

'Well, if I am a gentleman, why should it make you sigh?' he asks rather relieved that she does not seem to have discovered the truth.

'I don't know. I know it is foolish, but it makes me wish I knew things,' she says, vaguely, uncertain how to express herself. 'There is such a difference between us. It is a condescension for you to speak to a girl like me—a poor, common working girl.'

'You may be poor, Lizzie, and you may have to work like many other people,' he says, 'but you could never be 'common.' You must not speak of yourself like that. You are a dear little girl, and I—I like walking with you and talking to you better than I do with the people you call ladies.'

Lizzie blushes with deep delight at this sweet flattery.

'Oh, do you?' she cries, trembling with pleasure.

'Much better. You know that, bending and kissing the soft cheek that none of her rustic admirers have yet dared to approach. She starts, and seems about to flee; but Jack clasps yet closer her girlish form.

'I never saw anyone as beautiful as you, Lizzie,' he says, for once speaking sincerely. 'I have thought about nothing else since I first saw you.'

Is it any wonder the simple child's very soul seems subjugated by such words from one who appears to her a prince among men, a being to be set up on high and idolised and adored in secret?

Her bliss is so great that she does not speak for a long time, and when she does it is to occur to the point that rangles even in her happiness.

'If I knew more—if I had read the things you have, and seen the things you've seen! she murmurs, wistfully.

'I doubt if I should like you as much if you had,' he answers, consolingly. 'But, if you want to make yourself wise, silly child, I suppose I must help you. I will bring you some books tomorrow night, and you shall try and find happiness in studying them.'

'Oh! he exclaims, 'how kind you are! Oh, how I will try to understand them! But when will you have the time? Remember, I shan't hear of your curtailing our time together.'

Such a thing had not occurred to Lizzie. 'Oh, no! I shall read them when I go to bed,' she says.

'But I won't have you spoiling your eyes and ruining your beauty over histories and grammars,' he protests, tenderly, and his care of her seems so sweet to poor Lizzie Talbot that she would follow him to the world's end to repay him.

They wander on and on in the sweet summer dusk, another Faust and Marguerite.

How often have such sad little dramas been played!

What heavenly nights these seem to Lizzie, and how Jack Armour excels himself in making her believe she is all the world to him!

Little do Mrs. Armour and Penelope Graham guess what takes him common-wards every evening; Lizzie and he share their secret between them.

## CHAPTER III.

Penelope Graham has made all her preparations for departure from the Court, when, one day, Jack approaches her, as she comes in from the garden, with a telegram in his hand.

'It has just come,' he explains. 'It must be from Aunt Maria!' she cries, tearing it open.

It is, truly enough.

It tells her that Mrs. Stapleton, her father's sister, thinks she had better put off her visit for a month or two, as she,

(CONTINUED ON FIFTEENTH PAGE.)

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