

"I consider that quite enough. I had already met more than one person, however, who seemed to think it very odd that I should have her to teach music in my family."

"Did they give any reason for thinking her unfit?"

"I did not choose to ask them. One was Miss Clarke—you know her. She smiled in her usual supercilious manner, but in her case I believe it was only because Miss Clare looks so dowdy. Nobody knows anything about her, though, except what I've just told you."

"And who told you that?"

"Mrs. Jeffreson."

"But you once told me she was a great gossip."

"Else she wouldn't have heard it. But that doesn't make it untrue. In fact, she convinced me of its truth, for she knows the place she lives in, and assured me it was at great risk of infection to the children that I allowed her to enter the house; and so, of course, I felt compelled to let her know that I didn't require her services any longer."

"There must be some mistake, surely!" I said.

"Oh! no—not the least—I am sorry to say."

"How did she take it?"

"Very sweetly indeed. She didn't even ask me why, which was just as well, seeing I should have found it awkward to tell her. But I suppose she knew too many grounds herself to dare the question."

I was dreadfully sorry, but I could not say much more then. I ventured only to express my conviction that there could not be any charge to bring against Miss Clare herself; for that one who looked and spoke as she did, could have nothing to be ashamed of. Judy however insisted that what she had heard was reason enough for at least ending the engagement; indeed, that no one was fit for such a situation of whom such things could be said, whether they were true or not.

When she left me, I gave baby to her nurse, and went straight to the study, peeping in to see if Percivale was alone.

He caught sight of me, and called to me to come down.

"It's only Roger," he said.

I was always pleased to see Roger. He was a strange creature—one of those gifted men who are capable of anything, if not of everything, and yet carry nothing within sight of proficiency. He whistled like a starling, and accompanied his whistling on the piano, but never played. He could also do a little on the violin, and during the first few months after my marriage, I often accompanied him. He could copy a drawing to a hair's-breadth, but never

drew. He could engrave well on wood, but although he had often been employed in that way, he had got tired of it after a few weeks. He was for ever wanting to do something other than what he was at; at the moment he got tired of a thing, he would work at it no longer; for he had never learned to *make* himself. He would come every day to the study for a week to paint in backgrounds, or make a duplicate; and then, perhaps, we wouldn't see him for a fortnight. At other times he would work, say for a month, modelling, or carving marble, for a sculptor friend, from whom he might have had constant employment if he had pleased. He had given lessons in various branches, for he was an excellent scholar, and had the finest ear for verse, as well as the keenest appreciation of the loveliness of poetry, that I have ever known. He had stuck to this longer than to anything else, strange to say; for one would have thought it the least attractive of employment to one of his volatile disposition. For some time indeed he had supported himself comfortably in this way; for through friends of his family he had had good introductions, and although he wasted a good deal of money in buying nick-nacks that promised to be useful and seldom were, had no objectionable habits except in ordinary smoking. But it happened that a pupil—a girl of imaginative disposition, I presume—fell so much in love with him that she betrayed her feelings to her countess mother, and the lessons were of course put an end to. I suspect he did not escape heart-whole himself, for he immediately dropped all his other lessons, and took to writing poetry for a new magazine, which proved of ephemeral constitution, and vanished after a few months of hectic existence.

It was remarkable that with such instability his moral nature should continue uncorrupted; but this I believe he owed chiefly to his love and admiration of his brother. For my part, I could not help liking him much. There was a half-plaintive playfulness about him, alternated with gloom, and occasionally with wild merriment, which made him interesting even when one felt most inclined to quarrel with him. The worst of him was that he considered himself a generally misunderstood, if not ill-used man, who could not only distinguish himself, but render valuable service to society, if only society would do him the justice to give him a chance. Were it only, however, for his love to my baby, I could not but be ready to take up his defence.

When I mentioned what I had just heard about Miss Clare, Percivale looked both astonished and troubled; but before he could speak, Roger, with

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