WHICH?

From Hearth and Home.

CHAPTER III.

"No—not staying; we live there. Carmen is a farmer."

"Carmen?" repeated the stranger, involuntarily.

It seemed such an out-of-the-way name, especially in connection with the "farmer."

"Yes," said the young lady, laughingly. "Our mother was named Carmen—she was born at Cadiz Danvers is our name."

"And what is your Christian name?" said he, as one would speak to a child This chit of sixteen was no more to his grave years and experience.

"Mine is Netta," said she, with that touch of coquetry which men of over five and twenty find so amusing in school girls.

"A very pretty name. Here we are"

They had passed up the garden path, bordered by old-fashioned flowers, and paused under the wide, deep rose-covered porch. The house door stood open. The stranger placed his pretty burden on one of the seats of the porch, and looked for bell or knocker. There was neither.

"Netta called "Carmen! Carmen!" and instantly a door at the end of the passage opened, and a tall, slender young woman came quickly forward. She wore a blue serge gown and a large, bibbed holland apron. She was not a bit like Netta, but pale and dark, with large black eyes and dark chestnut hair, worn in short curls. One could hardly tell whether she was handsome or not, but she had a strangely vivid face, and her eyes were beyond doubt, beautiful She did not look more than four or five and twenty; she might have been older.

Netta began eagerly, the moment she caught sight of her sister:

"Carmen, I twisted my foot in Beechen Wood, and this gentleman brought me home."

"It was most kind of you," said Carmen, looking straight, with grateful eyes, into the man's face "Thank you a thousand times, but you don't mean to say you carried her?"

"Almost," he replied, smiling; "she is not very heavy, you know I don't think she is badly hurt, only a twist, I fancy; but I hope, Miss Danvers, you will let me call to morrow, to see how your sister is?"

"We shall be very pleased," replied the girl, simply, "if you are good enough to call. Will you let me offer you some tea now, it will be ready in a few minutes?"

"In accepting your kindness," he said, "let me relinquish my advantage. My name is Lockwood—Gerald Lockwood I am staying at Brenton's Farm."

Carmen and her sister knew the Brenton's. They had a large farmhouse, and in the summer let apartments, for which they asked an exorbitant rent.

"Will you come in here, Mr. Lockwood?" said Carmen, opening a door near. "You will excuse me for a few minutes while I see to Netta's hurt?"

"But won't you let me first help you into the house?"

"Indeed, I can manage that. You have done enough, I am sure."

"Don't say that Where is she to go?"

"Into this room, then, please," opening the door of a small sitting-room, opposite to that which she had indicated formerly.

Gerald Lockwood lifted Netta right up in his arms, carried her into the parlor and placed her on the sofa; then he retired in the opposite room.

Carmen Danvers a farmer, he thought. What an odd idea! She didn't look a bit like it. Her manner was wonderfully simple and self-possessed, but not in the least rustic. How on earth did these refined cultivated people get on with their rustic neighbors? Was Carmen a mere dilettante farmer? She did not look that sort of a woman, but her face was not a bit sunburned; her hands were smooth and delicate. In a little while she came into the room. Netta, she said, was not much hurt; it was only a slight twist. She would be able to walk again in two or three days.

"I have put the tea table in the porch," she added. "We generally have tea there in the summer."

And never had Gerald Lockwood enjoyed tea in a London drawing room as he enjoyed this tea under the porch of the Cedars Farm.

Netta reclined upon one of the seats, and there were cane chairs for her sister and the guest. The younger lady chattered much, and in her sixteen year old fashion coquetted with the guest. The elder said little, though that little was worth volumes of such talk as Netta's

Lockwood learned chiefly from the latter, that Mr. Danvers had been an officer in the army, with a turn at farming, at which he failed; that Carmen, inheriting his taste, learned the business thoroughly and when he died, some years ago, she took up the remainder of the lease and actually succeeded in doing well; not making a fortune, but paying her way and making a living

"All one can hope to do, in these days," Carmen said. "It is a small farm, and I have a splendid managing man, but I look after everything myself too. It is the only thing to do, if you mean to succeed."

"You are right, Miss Danvers. Who is your landlord, if I may ask?"

"Mr. Sheiton; he is a very good landlord, though a comparatively new man. His grandfather bought the property. It is a splendid estate, but he talks of selling it. He has no children, and the place doesn't agree with his wife, so it is really a burden on his hands. We are so afraid of nouveau riche getting the property."

"I heard it was for sale," Lockwood said

"You might buy it, you know," said Netta, a little saucily.

"Perhaps I might!" he replied, smiling into the rosy face; but whether he spoke altogether jestingly, or half in earnest, she could not make out.

The pleasant time came to an end at last, Gerald Lockwood rose to depart, and took leave, thanking his young hostesses, and repeating that he would call on the morrow, if he might, to which Netta replied, "Please do come," and Carmen smiled acquiescence.

[TO BE CONTINUED]