

WHICH?

From Hearth and Home.

CHAPTER IV.

She answered: "She does not know how. Please,"—for he had forgotten, it seemed, to release her hand—"I must go to my apples."

"May I come to the kitchen too?" "If you like. I should think you would prefer the woods."

"No, thanks; I am not going there. I want to speak to you."

About Netta! Carmen felt an odd tightening at her heart, but she led the way to the kitchen without a word.

Netta, leaning over the stairs, heard those last words of Lockwood's and smiled radiantly. She kept religiously away from the kitchen.

Carmen, standing by the table, proceeded to core her apples. Gerald Lockwood sat near, watching her, with many a covert glance at her face, which, had she seen them, would have startled her considerably.

He seemed content with silence for some little time, and when he spoke at last, it was in a soft almost subdued way, such as a man, has when his heart is full of a woman's face; and yet his first words were nothing about Netta.

"I want to know," he said, "what you would think of my buying the Woodlands?"

Carmen looked up surprised, half-amused, but this was only a feigning.

"What I should think of it?" she repeated. "Well, it is a splendid property."

"I know that—." He paused. "What does it matter what I think?" she said. "I should like you to be my landlord. That is all that I have any right to think about."

"You would like that?" he said, slowly.

"Indeed I should!"

"If he would only speak, she thought, and release her from this kind of tension! Was he half-ashamed of being in love [as he thought] with such a child as Netta? Otherwise, it seemed strange for a man near forty, a man of the world, to beat about the bush."

"Do you like Woodlands?" he added, after a minute.

Ne a with e que ish sh-ness "Oh, I am so glad!"

He looked at the girl, and drew a sudden, quick, silent breath. "Good heavens!"

He rose, and turned to Carmen "Shall you be busy this afternoon?" he said, with just a touch of impatience in his tone.

"Till five o'clock," she answered almost coldly. She was half angry with Netta for coming in when she did. The business would have been over but for her stupid impetuosity which itself showed her a child.

She "in love" with Gerald Lockwood! It was more than ridiculous, yet less so than his infatuation for her!

"After five you will be at home?" he said, not choosing to notice the coldness.

"Yes."

He did not say he would come. He shook hands with both sister and went away.

Netta pouted, her eyes filled. "Well," she said, at last pettishly, "didn't he say anything?"

"No, Netta—not about you?" "He—ne was going to!" with a half smile.

"I don't know, dear. If he meant to, you hardly gave him time."

Netta stalked to the window, and stood there, drumming on the panes.

"He should speak to me first," she said.

The words and manner would have been laughable, but that they were, in a way, so terrible. Lockwood was a try, a plaything, to this child; passion unknown, she could not touch the first note in the scale.

Carmen remained silent. She felt choking.

Lockwood did not come at five. After tea, Netta jubilated once more, with Carmen alone in the parlor. She would not intrude too early a second time; and from an upper window she by and by saw a man's tall figure turn in at the gate.

Carmen, sitting in the window seat, saw him too, and rising, restlessly moved away, and stood by the mantle-piece. The night was beginning to fade in the western sky, and there was less here than in the window.

Lockwood entered the room in his usual way, closing the door behind him. He crossed the room to Carmen's side, and took her hand in his. There was something in his manner and clasp—some electric change—that sent a vague thrill through her.

"I had to leave unfinished what I wanted to say this morning," he said, in the same soft way in which he had spoken before.

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