

He held her small hand for a long moment. There were tears in her eyes and in her voice. He pretended not to see them.

'May I come again before I go? I am not returning for another few days. Thank you, Justina, dear. You are very kind to let me be so privileged. Good-bye for to-day then. Don't work so hard if you can help it. Your little hand must be quite tired out. Good-bye, dear.' Sir Basil dropped her hand and was turning away when he looked back. 'You have my address. Send for me, Justina,' he said, abruptly, 'if you should find yourself in need of a friend.'

The words were almost strange, but they came from him involuntarily, urged by a sudden presentiment that there was a moment close at hand when she would need his friendship and his protection.

Perhaps the same feeling had made its way into Justina's heart. Anyway she showed no surprise at his words, and instead she had a touch of comfort in remembering them when he was gone. She little imagined, however, as she drew a chair up to the fire and sat staring wearily and with a sick heart into the glowing coals how speedily she would make tangible and definite test of this promised friendship.

CHAPTER V.

Basil Fothergill extended his stay in town another week, thereby causing much surprise and a little alarm to his sister, who awaited his return in his large, comfortable country house. He saw Justina three times during that week, and each visit he paid to the girl, left alone in her humble lodging home, caused him more anxious thought about her, more regret for the unhappy fate that had come to the beloved child of his old tutor and valued friend.

No mention whatever was made by either of them of Rupert Seaton during these interviews. They talked of all sorts and kinds of things, of Jus-

tina's work, of her ambitions, of her successes achieved in one sense so quickly; but the conversation, however started, generally terminated in remembrances and discussions of those old days when first they had become acquainted, and learned so soon to know and trust in one another.

Sir Basil's big, honest, manly heart was ablaze with anger and indignation against the creature who had won the girl for his wife and showed so little appreciation of the treasure that was his, so little evidence of a man's nature or spirit in his selfish neglect and worse than contemptible conduct.

What used to make the girl's shad-owed young life still more miserable, he could find no good or encouraging word to say of Rupert Seaton; therefore it was best to leave the matter untouched. He had no need of words to tell him Justina possessed a spirit of pride stronger than iron itself. The pain and hurt caused by her husband's neglect and unworthiness were written clearly in her sweet eyes and about her sad, young lips.

Basil Fothergill felt that for himself Justina had the deepest, the sincerest friendship, and that perhaps it would be to him she would turn most naturally and easily, did the occasion arise, when she had need of another's aid and support. Each time they met they seemed, paradoxically, to progress further as they went back ward. The nearer they grew to the past—to that old 'camaraderie' (which had lived in the man's memory with such vivid touches of pleasure and prettiness through the long ten years of separation that had stretched between those old days and the present), the more surely he felt that their friendship was true and well founded, that the girl found a solace and pleasure and a sense of hope in his existence.

Still, though the bond of their old affection had been revived clearly and surely, there was a great difference in its possibilities and certainties now. They were children no longer, and the world lay around and about them a hard, bitter, cynical, disappointing

world, as far removed from the peace and charm of that old rectory garden as the earth was removed from the stars.

But though he said nothing of Rupert, Basil Fothergill could not prevent himself from passing a very harsh criticism on Justina's other relations, on her uncle Paul North and his wife, on Margaret Lady Sartoris—her mother's eldest sister—and on the other members of that mother's family. Justina defended them all from his sweeping attack.

'You must remember I have no one to blame but myself,' she said, with the faintest of faint smiles lighting up her magnificent blue eyes. 'I behaved like a foolish, naughty child, and I must accept the consequences of my disobedience.'

'That may be very well as far as Dr. North is concerned, though I don't see that he is exonerated in the least from failing shamefully to do his duty,' Sir Basil said, gruffly, as he stood in his favourite position in front of the fire and stared down on the girl's serious, delicate loveliness, 'but it makes no excuse whatever for your aunt, Lady Sartoris—I only hope I shall run across her one of these days. I shall most unhesitatingly give her the benefit of my opinion of her.'

'Please don't,' Basil. Justina broke in very hurriedly. 'I want nothing from Aunt Margaret—absolutely nothing. We are, after all, little more than strangers to each other. My mother's people, as you know, never honoured us with much remembrance in the old days, and since I—'

She paused imperceptibly, and hurried her next words.

'And since I have taken to literature I fancy I have fallen a little lower in Aunt Margaret's estimation than formerly. She does not approve of women being independent or attempting to earn their daily bread. She had heard that I have to scamp about in all sorts of dingy dens and editorial offices, and she is frightfully shocked in consequence. I shall never forget,' Justina finished, laughing a little,

though the laugh was not merry. 'I shall never forget Aunt Margaret's horror one afternoon when her carriage was stopped in a block in Piccadilly, and on the omnibus just in front of her sat myself, neither a smart nor agreeable sight for Lady Sartoris. I can assure you, although the world in which she lives and moves and has her being has no suspicion that she possesses any such discreditable relation as I am.'

Basil Fothergill frowned and coloured.

'Don't try to run yourself down, Justina,' he said, quite sharply.

She made some laughing answer, and there was silence between them for a moment or two. It was Justina who broke it.

'I have often wondered how on earth you came to be my companion on that omnibus that very wet night?'

Basil did not answer immediately.

'Upon my soul, do you know?' he said, when he did speak. 'I don't understand, either, how I came to be there. I had just turned out of Charing Cross Station, and had every intention of taking a cab, when your omnibus stopped in front of me, and something, I cannot explain what—a species of magnetic force, I suppose—induced me to climb up the staircase and share your solitude. I have never been so grateful to anything in my life, Justina, as I have been to that invisible magnetism that drove me into your life once again.'

Justina smiled and coloured a little.

'Dear Basil, you will make me so vain,' she said, lightly. 'You put too high a value on my poor little friendship, I am afraid.'

'Perhaps I do,' he answered her, and then he turned and stirred the fire.

'Molly is coming up to town,' he said abruptly, as this was done. 'She has taken it into her head there must be something the matter with me as I am staying so long in town, so she had determined to come "right away," as the Yankees say, and see what is keeping me. You will like Molly. I know,' he went on quickly before she



WAITING FOR PEARS.