

we really know very little, though he was at Harrow with my brother."

So when Diana Vereker appeared in her fresh girlish prettiness to spend a month at Glenallen, Miss Thornton's hopes rose high.

Thornleigh and Glenallen were only a mile apart across the fields, and during the next ten days there were constant meetings between the two houses.

John Thornton's shyness began to evaporate before the sunshine of Diana's easy friendliness, and though his conversational powers never rose far above the expression of hopes connected with the hay, or the possibility of a good fruit season, it was evident that he began to like the girl's companionship. And Miss Thornton from her sofa or bath chair smiled and noted a good deal, and Miss Mortimer, endowed with her keener perceptions, noted more, and did not smile. For she saw, with that intuition only granted to some women, that while Diana was playing a game in innocent jest, to John Thornton it was deadly earnest.

Diana had been at Glenallen rather more than a fortnight when she received a letter from her mother rather more underlined and exclamatory than usual, which is saying a good deal for the iron. Mrs Vereker's style of penmanship.

After a dissertation on her feelings of loneliness in her daughter's absence—a loneliness which five dinner-parties, three "at homes," and a state concert had apparently failed to mitigate—Mrs Vereker went on:

"Such an extraordinary thing has happened! All London is talking of it. You know, of course, that Sir Eustace Legh, being old General Grant's godson, has been brought up to consider himself the old man's heir, and as the Legh property is so encumbered it was a mercy. Well, there has been a terrible scene! It seems that the General—he always was an old tartar—demanded that Sir Eustace should marry that deadly dull cousin of his, Janet Grant, merely because she is a cousin of the General's, and poor and so he thought he would kill two birds with one stone by marrying her to his heir. You know her, Di., red-haired, freckled, and deadly dull. Naturally, Sir Eustace, not being yet in his dotage as his grandfather seems to be, refused point blank. The result of which was that the General forbade him the house and you will hardly believe it

the next day made a will in favour of Janet Grant, leaving absolutely everything to her, and not a penny to poor Sir Eustace! Isn't it scandalous? I'm told he takes it splendidly, though I've not seen him. He is going to let Legh Court, I hear, as, of course, he will never be able to live there now, and is going to "do something"—what I can't imagine, as he has been an idle man all his life. I hear he has left town, and that odious old General is laid up with the gout, and Janet Grant is going about looking too pleased for words! I am so thankful, darling, that you never cared for poor Sir Eustace as he did for you, as, in spite of your remarks to me on the subject of interesting poverty, I doubt if it is as interesting in practice as in theory. I must tell you about the frocks at the X's. . . ." and the letter wandered off into the realm of chiffons, and presently dropped unheeded from the girl's hands.

It would have been hard for Diana to say why, or in what way, her mother's letter annoyed her, and yet it did. Sir Eustace Legh had never even more to her, in spite of his obvious wish to the contrary—than a pleasant friend, yet she was conscious now of her feelings being stirred in a stronger manner than the occasion seemed to warrant. She picked up her mother's monogrammed letter, and, placing it in her pocket, went downstairs to breakfast. A week ago Sir Eustace had been a prospectively rich man; now he was a comparatively poor one. Diana only wondered why she did not feel more sorry.

"I wonder if you would take this book over to Miss Thornton for me, Diana," said her cousin, a week later, looking up from an accumulation of correspondence. "I promised it her

to-day and I must get these letters done."

Diana jumped up with alacrity. She had been conscious for the last few days of a feeling of restlessness, unaccountable and undefinable. A walk was hailed with relief, and the buckled shoes again trod the grassy lane that led to Thornleigh.

She walked slowly. In the distance, as she approached the manor-house, she could see John Thornton standing under a large walnut tree on the lawn, gesticulating with his usual awkward movements to another and taller man by his side. Diana realised that this must be "my cousin, who is John's heir, and who is coming to us for a time to get an insight into farming, etc." Thus Miss Thornton on a previous evening.

patiently bent upon her. But the girl was feeling puzzled and a little chilled by Sir Eustace's abrupt manner, and John Thornton occupied no place in her thoughts.

"Is Miss Thornton in?" she asked with rather a tired note in her voice. "I have a book for her from Cousin Ursula," and John led her into the house with a shadow on his brow.

Miss Thornton was in one of her most garrulous moods, and when in such a mood no reins to her tongue. She discoursed— to a not unwilling listener—at great length on Eustace Legh's good looks, good qualities, and relationship to themselves as their cousin and John's heir.

"Of course," she remarked, with a little sigh, "if he had succeeded to General Grant's money this place

good soul, mounted on her Pegasus, yept "John's Perfections," sailed away into the realms of mixed truth and fancy. And Diana went back to Glenallen musing on many things.

There was a strange little cloud on Diana's horizon during the next week. She saw much of the Thorntons, little of Sir Eustace. He was always busy, feverishly busy, working assiduously at John Thornton's various duties connected with the Thornleigh estate. He avoided Diana, or appeared to the girl to do so, and she, remembering their friendship of the past two years, felt strangely hurt and puzzled, yet never had liked him better. His society manners, charming in themselves, yet more suited to the artificial atmosphere of a London drawing-room than the freer air of Thornleigh, had disappeared, and there was a new and sturdy independence in young Legh's face and manner that in no way detracted from his acknowledged charm.

Diana had written to her mother commenting briefly on the Legh episode, but not thinking it necessary to mention that the chief person concerned was at that moment within a mile of Glenallen. She had an idea that the news would not be particularly welcome—now.

And there was no talk of her returning to London or to the Verekers' place in Norfolk, though June had lengthened into July, and Mrs Vereker talked daily of "going home," and yet went not. And an impatient husband and a bored schoolroom daughter sighed in vain for the fresh air of the country, knowing that so long as a single dinner remained to be eaten, in good company he it understood, or a single "at home" to be crushed into, Mrs Vereker remained in Cadogan Square.

Miss Mortimer gazed one morning across the breakfast table at her little cousin with a somewhat perplexed air.

"I don't think you are looking particularly well as yet, for your change Diana," she remarked.

Diana's colour rose for one instant. "I am very fit, really, Cousin Ursula," she answered, "though I have a tiny headache this morning. I think I shall go out a little."

"My dear child!" Miss Mortimer rose and went to the window. "It has been pouring with rain all night, and yes, it is still raining a little. I thought you never went out in the wet, Diana?" with some amusement in her tone.

Again that hot colour in the girl's cheeks.

"No," she confessed, "I don't often. Cousin Ursula. But I feel so 'heady' and stupid this morning. I didn't sleep well last night."

Miss Mortimer made no further comment until her cousin presently reappeared in a neat grey coat and a jaunty little cap. "It has stopped now," she said.

Miss Ursula smiled. "Not the buckled shoes to-day, I hope, Di?" she queried.

Diana laughed, and pointed the toe of a neat brown boot. In a moment the garden door banged to, and Miss Mortimer was alone, the tender and yet humorous smile on her face deepening as she wrote on.

In an hour's time the sun was shining as brightly as if rain were an unknown quantity, and Miss Mortimer started to visit a sick woman a mile or so distant from Glenallen. A sudden turn in a quiet lane brought her within sight of a gate, on the top bar of which a man leaned his arms in an attitude that suggested extreme dejection. To her surprise Miss Mortimer saw that it was John Thornton, and that, with his head buried in his hands, he was quite unconscious of her approach.

She paused in perplexity, not liking to advance or retire. With a sudden



It was John Thornton.

Diana approached slowly, a bright spot of pink colour on a green landscape, with a framework of blue sky overhead. John Thornton's face lit up as he caught sight of her, and he raised his hat awkwardly as he came forward. The other man turned round quickly, displaying the boyish good looks of Sir Eustace Legh.

Diana caught her breath for one second, then greeted Thornton, and turned to his cousin with her old friendliness, cutting short John's stammering introductions.

"Sir Eustace and I are old friends," she said, brightly, "though I did not expect to meet him here.

Legh held her hand for one moment, and looked straight into her brown eyes.

"Nor I you, Miss Vereker," he replied, and turned to his cousin.

"John, I shall go and see after those men now," he said abruptly, and was gone.

A little silence fell between the two left facing each other. If Diana's eyes had not been unconsciously fixed on Eustace's retreating figure, she might have encountered the devotion in another pair of eyes so

would have been nothing to him with Legh Court to live at, but now, well, it makes a difference. It is so unlikely that John will ever marry that I feel Eustace or his children—John is only a few years his senior, you see—will live here one day. He is going to remain with us for the present, and learn something practical about the workings of an estate. Legh Court is to be let now there is no prospect of his being able to afford to live there. For a man who has done nothing all his life I must say he takes to work kindly. He and my brother are the best of friends, but then John is so good, and so different to most young men," and the

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