

The kind lady did not say much, but her few beautiful words filled to overflowing the void left in Nora's heart by the sacrifice of the plant she had cherished. And then, when Mrs. Lanson finally rose to depart, leaving behind not only an abundance of fruit and other delicacies, but, of more value still, the lasting sunshine of her cheerful presence, she made a proposal so wonderful that the girl could scarcely credit her ears:

'I want you to come and live with me, Nora. I need a seamstress—some one whom I can like and trust, as I want her to be a companion also. I will pay you more than you can ever earn in this way' (pointing to the bundle of finished sewing that was lying on the table); 'and you will have a home as well,—a home in the suburbs, where I have decided to move, and where you may have all the flowers and fresh air you like—no, I won't listen to any thanks, my dear child! You will more than earn it, I am sure; and before long you will have regained the strength you have lost through this hard life. You know I am now the owner of your pretty lily; but I am sure it will not thrive without its usual mistress, so you must come to take care of it.'

And, without giving Nora a chance to reply, the good-hearted lady hurried off; while the girl she had thus befriended poured forth the most fervent prayers she had ever uttered in her life.—*Ave Maria.*

AN OPPORTUNE VISIT

'Insist that my dead sister's only child be received and treated with all kindness in my house.'

When Mr. Danvers spoke in that tone, his family knew that he meant to be obeyed. Even his proud, haughty wife knew better than to act in opposition to his wishes on those rare occasions when he thus asserted his authority.

He refolded the letter—the innocent cause of this storm in a teacup,—and arose from the breakfast table. He turned back at the door to say:

'Don't forget to send the carriage. And, Geof,' addressing his son, 'it would be a graceful act on your part to accompany the carriage. I shall try to get to the station myself.'

'What ever shall we do?' Isabel cried in dismay the moment the door closed upon her father.

'It is a calamity,' said Mrs. Danvers, in a vexed tone.

'She is sure to be utterly impossible,' Isabel went on, 'and papa will insist upon introducing her to every one of our guests! He has no sense of the fitness of things—'

'Or what is due a future countess,' laughed Geof, carelessly. 'But the pater is all right,' he added, in a different tone. 'I admire him for standing up for his sister's child; though he has not seen her since she was a toddling youngster.'

'You might be a little more sympathetic, Geof,' Isabel interrupted reproachfully. 'The Forsyths are so fastidious, and I know the Count will be shocked. He has always understood that—mamma's people are aristocratic, and—'

'And the inopportune arrival of this unknown little Texas cousin may undo the work of months,' supplemented Geof. 'It would be rather a pity, since you and the mater have taken so much trouble to land the Count; though I'm sure that—'

'Geof!'

'Oh, I'm not going to call him names! It's too late for that. But how any girl could throw over a man like Jack Tracy for—'

'Geoffrey!'

Mrs. Danvers' eyes flashed, and her lips were set in a straight line. A glance at Isabel's flushed, downcast face added fuel to the fire already kindled by her son's words. She was as nearly exasperated as so well-bred a person could allow herself to be.

Dorothy—whom her brother had teasingly nicknamed 'The Optimist' because of her sunny disposition, and happy penchant for finding the silver lining of every cloud,—looked up from the letter, which she had asked her father to let her read; remarking lightly, as though nothing unusual had occurred:

'She writes such a pretty letter. Her name is Patricia.'

'I shall ask your friend Jack Tracy to take her into dinner,' Mrs. Danvers said, turning to Geoffrey with a peculiar smile. 'They may be able to find something in common to talk about; for, with that name, I shouldn't be surprised to hear that she is a Catholic.'

Without glancing at Isabel's flushed face, Mrs. Danvers arose from the table and went to the telephone, when they heard her call up Dr. Tracy's office, and a few moments later say in her sweetest voice:

'Dr. Tracy? This is Mrs. Danvers. I want to ask a favor of you—ah? That is very kind, I'm sure. We are giving a small dinner party this evening. I know it is late for an invitation, but may I depend on you to take in Mr. Danvers' niece, who arrives unexpectedly to-day? Ah! That is kind of you! Ah—ah! Thank you! Then I shall expect you. Good-bye.'

A dead silence had fallen on the little group at the table. Isabel looked confused and half frightened. Geoffrey's brows were drawn together in a frown of annoyance. Dorothy was the only one of the three who retained her usual poise.

'I have a feeling that this little country cousin of ours is going to be vastly amusing,' she said, ignoring the storm signals in the two faces opposite. 'If mamma doesn't mind, I shall accompany you to the station, Geof.'

'It would be a graceful act on your part'—as well as on mine,' Geof said, smiling slightly.

Mr. Danvers was surprised and pleased to find Dorothy at the station with Geof. when he came bustling up at the last moment, all out of breath and a bit flustered. They were standing inside the gates, watching the steady stream of passengers filing in from the various roads.

'That is her train over there. She will be among that bunch,' Geof. said, indicating a rather larger crowd approaching from the right.

Mr. Danvers hastily adjusted his glasses, and Dorothy pressed a little closer to the great iron fence. She ran her eye quickly over the crowd, half unconsciously singling out the plainer and more dowdily dressed young woman; and she felt a distinct sense of relief when any of these young women were hailed by waiting friends. There were only half a dozen left,—three men, one old lady, and two girls.

One of the latter was small and dark, with a bright, piquant face, and wonderful dark eyes. She was quietly but neatly dressed in a close-fitting tailored suit, and looked so thoroughly a lady that Dorothy found herself turning reluctantly to the other girl, who must be Patricia Desmond. Mrs. Danvers' people were all fair. This girl was tall and fair and slightly florid.

The tall girl had barely stepped inside the gates when a little old lady pushed through the crowd and was gathered into the girl's arms! while a surprisingly gentle voice cried:

'Mother! I'm so glad to see you!'

'And this is your cousin, Dorothy. I'm sure you two will be great friends,' her father was saying, when she recovered from her astonishment.

'And you are Patricia Desmond! I'm so glad she cried impulsively, grasping the small gloved hand extended. 'You see, the Danvers are all fair,' she continued apologetically, 'and—'

'And you did not expect to see a gipsy,' said Patricia, with a smile that made her face beautiful. 'My grandmother Desmond was of French extraction, and I am said to resemble her,' she explained simply.

'You did not make the long journey alone?' Mr. Danvers asked, looking around for some one who might have accompanied her.

'Mrs. Lanning, with whom I am going abroad, stopped off at Washington to visit some friends. She wanted me to stay with her; but I felt an irresistible desire to take advantage of the opportunity thus offered of making the acquaintance of my mother's people. I came on alone from there.'

While Geof. was looking after the luggage, Mr. Danvers accompanied the girls to the carriage, where he stood chatting a moment before hurrying back to his office.

'I'm sorry we can't have you all to ourselves this first evening,' Dorothy said as they neared home. 'We have a rather formal dinner party on hand. In fact, the dinner is to be made the occasion of announcing my sister's engagement to Count Florenci de Lanfal.'

'Prepare yourself for about three hours of heavy boredom,' put in Geof. 'Afterward the atmosphere may lighten somewhat.'

'You mustn't mind Geof,' Dorothy laughed. 'He is so thoroughly American that he can scarcely do justice to a foreigner.'

Patricia smiled understandingly. She liked both these cousins. She found Isabel quite as likeable, though rather reserved and stately. But her aunt, for whose ungraciousness she had been somewhat prepared, awakened within her a feeling bordering on dislike.

Maurice Desmond was a struggling young artist who had not yet won either fame or fortune when Priscilla Danvers, against the wishes and advice of her relatives, married him. The first two years of married life were spent in fitting from place to place,—a Bohemian sort of existence that some natures find very pleasant. They then settled in a pretty little town in Southern Texas, where Patricia was born, and where, less than a year later, the young wife and mother died. It was through a sense of loyalty to her dead mother, whom she scarcely remembered, that Patricia decided to look up those unknown relatives.

'I am not proud,' she told her father when they were discussing her trip abroad. 'I shall write to my uncle, and give him the opportunity of refusing to meet me when I arrive in New York.'

Feeling that her visit was ill-timed, and that her presence just at this auspicious moment might be a source of inconvenience, if not of real annoyance, to her aunt, Patricia purposely delayed her descent to the drawing-room until just before dinner was announced. In the hall she met Dorothy, who had come in search of her.

'You are charming!' cried that young lady, impulsively.

Patricia thought she detected a slight note of relief in her cousin's tone. She smiled to herself, unconsciously lifting her head a trifle higher as she followed Dorothy into the drawing-room.

Mrs. Danvers, resplendent in lavender mousseline, her usually haughty countenance wreathed in gracious smiles, stood conversing with a young man whom she addressed as 'My dear Count.' He was tall and swarthy, and wore his evening clothes with a certain ease and dignity that