A TRUE FRIEND.

A NOVEL.

BY ADELINE SERGEANT

Author of "The Luck of the House," "A Life Sentence," etc., etc.

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JOHN LOVELL & SON,
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A TRUE FRIEND

CHAPTER I.

AN UNSUITABLE FRIENDSHIP.

Janetta was the music governess—a brown little thing of no particular importance, and Margaret Adair was a beauty and an heiress, and the only daughter of people who thought themselves very distinguished indeed; so that the two had not, you might think, very much in common, and were not likely to be attracted one to the other. Yet, in spite of differing circumstances, they were close friends and allies; and had been such ever since they were together at the same fashionable school where Miss Adair was the petted favorite of all, and Janetta Colwyn was the pupil-teacher in the shabbiest of frocks, who got all the snubbing and did most of the hard work. And great offence was given in several directions by Miss Adair's attachment to poor little Janetta.

"It is an unsuitable friendship," Miss Polehampton, the principal of the school, observed on more than one occasion, "and I am sure I do not know how Lady Caroline will like it."

Lady Caroline was, of course, Margaret Adair's mamma.

Miss Polehampton felt her responsibility so keenly in the matter that at last she resolved to speak "very seriously" to her dear Margaret. She always talked of "her dear Margaret," Janetta used to say, when she was going to make herself particularly disagreeable. For "her dear Margaret" was the pet pupil, the show pupil of the establishment: her air of perfect breeding gave distinction, Miss Polehampton thought, to the whole school; and her refinement, her exemplary behavior, her industry, and her talent formed the theme of many a lecture to less accomplished and less decorous pupils.

For, contrary to all conventional expectations, Margaret Adair was not stupid, although she was beautiful and well-behaved. She was an exceedingly intelligent girl; she had an aptitude for several arts and accomplishments, and she was remarkable for the delicacy of her taste and the exquisite discrimination of which she sometimes showed herself capable. At the same time she was not as clever—("not as glaringly clever," a friend of hers once expressed it)—as little Janetta Colwyn, whose nimble wits gathered knowledge as a bee collects honey under the most unfavorable circumstances. Janetta had to learn her lessons when the other girls had gone to bed, in a little room under the roof; a room which was like an ice-house in winter and an oven in summer; she was

never able to be in time for her classes, and she often missed them altogether; but, in spite of these disadvantages, she generally proved herself the most advanced pupil in her division, and if pupil-teachers had been allowed to take prizes, would have carried off every first prize in the school. This, to be sure, was not allowed. It would not have been "the thing" for the little governess-pupil to take away the prizes from the girls whose parents paid between two and three hundred a year for their tuition (the fees were

high, because Miss Polehampton's school was so exceedingly fashionable); therefore, Janetta's marks were not counted, and her exercises were put aside and did not come into competition with those of the other girls, and it was generally understood amongst the teachers that, if you wished to stand well with Miss Polehampton, it would be better not to praise Miss Colwyn, but rather to put forward the merits of some charming Lady Mary or Honorable Adeliza, and leave Janetta in the obscurity from which (according to Miss Polehampton) she was fated never to emerge.

Unfortunately for the purposes of the mistress of the school, Janetta was rather a favorite with the girls. She was not adored, like Margaret; she was not looked up to and respected, as was the Honorable Edith Gore; she was nobody's pet, as the little Ladies Blanche and Rose Amberley had been ever since they set foot in the school; but she was everybody's friend and comrade, the recipient of everybody's confidences, the

sharer in everybody's joys or woes. The fact was that Janetta had the inestimable gift of sympathy; she understood the difficulties of people around her better than many women of twice her age would have done; and she was so bright and sunny-tempered and quick-witted that her very presence in a room was enough to dispel gloom and ill-temper. She was, therefore, deservedly popular, and did more to keep up the character of Miss Polehampton's school for comfort and cheerfulness than Miss Polehampton herself was ever likely to be aware. And the girl most devoted to Janetta was Margaret Adair.

"Remain for a few moments, Margaret; I wish to speak to you," said Miss Polehampton, majestically, when one evening, directly after prayers, the show pupil advanced to bid her teachers good-night.

The girls all sat round the room on wooden chairs, and Miss Polehampton occupied a high-backed, cushioned seat at a centre table while she read the portion of Scripture with which the day's work concluded. Near her sat the governesses, English, French and German, with little Janetta bringing up the rear in the draughtiest place and the most uncomfortable chair. After prayers, Miss Polehampton and the teachers rose, and their pupils came to bid them good-night, offering hand and cheek to each in turn. There was always a great deal of kissing to be got through on these occasions. Miss Polehampton blandly insisted on kissing all her thirty pupils every evening; it made them feel more as if they were at home, she used to say; and her example was, of course, followed by the teachers and the girls.

Margaret Adair, as one of the oldest and tallest girls in the school, generally came
forward first for that evening salute. When Miss Polehampton made the observation
just recorded, she stepped back to a position beside her teacher's chair in the demure
attitude of a well-behaved schoolgirl—hands crossed over the wrists, feet in position,
head and shoulders carefully erect, and eyes gently lowered towards the carpet. Thus
standing, she was yet perfectly well aware that Janetta Colwyn gave her an odd, impish
little look of mingled fun and anxiety behind Miss Polehampton's back; for it was

"Oh, no, thank you; not at all," Margaret answered, blushing slightly as she took a seat
at Miss Polehampton's left hand. She was more intimidated by this unwonted kindness
of address than by any imaginable severity. The schoolmistress was tall and imposing
in appearance: her manner was usually a little pompous, and it did not seem quite natural
to Margaret that she should speak so gently.
"My dear," said Miss Polehampton, "when your dear mamma gave you into my charge,
I am sure she considered me responsible for the influences under which you were
brought, and the friendships that you made under my roof."
"Mamma knew that I could not be hurt by any friendship that I made here," said
Margaret, with the softest flattery. She was quite sincere: it was natural to her to say
"pretty things" to people.
"Quite so," the schoolmistress admitted. "Quite so, dear Margaret, if you keep within

your own grade in society. There is no pupil in this establishment, I am thankful to say,
who is not of suitable family and prospects to become your friend. You are young yet,
and do not understand the complications in which people sometimes involve themselves
by making friendships out of their own sphere. But I understand, and I wish to caution
you."
"I am not aware that I have made any unsuitable friendships," said Margaret, with a
rather proud look in her hazel eyes.
"Well—no, I hope not," said Miss Polehampton with a hesitating little cough. "You
understand, my dear, that in an establishment like mine, persons must be employed to
do certain work who are not quite equal in position to—to—ourselves. Persons of
inferior birth and station, I mean, to whom the care of the younger girls, and certain
menial duties, must be committed. These persons, my dear, with whom you must
necessarily be brought in contact, and whom I hope you will always treat with perfect
courtesy and consideration, need not, at the same time, be made your intimate friends."
"I have never made friends with any of the servants," said Margaret, quietly. Miss
Polehampton was somewhat irritated by this remark.
"I do not allude to the servants," she said with momentary sharpness. "I do not consider
Miss Colwyn a servant, or I should not, of course, allow her to sit at the same table with
you. But there is a sort of familiarity of which I do not altogether approve——"
She paused, and Margaret drew up her head and spoke with unusual decision.
"Miss Colwyn is my greatest friend."

"Yes, my dear, that is what I complain of. Could you not find a friend in your own rank
of life without making one of Miss Colwyn?"
"She is quite as good as I am," cried Margaret, indignantly.
"Quite as good, far more
so, and a great deal cleverer!"
"She has capabilities," said the schoolmistress, with the air of one making a concession;
"and I hope that they will be useful to her in her calling. She will probably become a
nursery governess, or companion to some lady of superior position. But I cannot
believe, my dear that dear Lady Caroline would approve of your singling her out as
your especial and particular friend."
"I am sure mamma always likes people who are good and clever," said Margaret. She
did not fly into a rage as some girls would have done, but her face flushed, and her
breath came more quickly than usual—signs of great excitement on her part, which
Miss Polehampton was not slow to observe.
"She likes them in their proper station, my dear. This friendship is not improving for
you, nor for Miss Colwyn. Your positions in life are so different that your notice of her
can but cause discontent and ill-feeling in her mind. It is exceedingly injudicious, and I
cannot think that your dear mamma would approve of it if she knew the circumstances."
"But Janetta's family is not at all badly connected," said Margaret, with some eagerness.
"There are cousins of hers living close to us—the next property belongs to them——"
"Do you know them, my dear?"
"I know about them," answered Margaret, suddenly coloring very deeply, and looking
uncomfortable, "but I don't think I have ever seen them, they are

so much away from
home——"
"I know about them, too," said Miss Polehampton, grimly; "and I do not think that you
will ever advance Miss Colwyn's interests by mentioning her connection with that
family. I have heard Lady Caroline speak of Mrs. Brand and her children. They are not
people, my dear Margaret, whom it is desirable for you to know."
"But Janetta's own people live quite near us," said Margaret, reduced to a very pleading
tone. "I know them at home; they live at Beaminster—not three miles off."
"And may I ask if Lady Caroline visits them, my dear?" asked Miss Polehampton, with
mild sarcasm, which brought the color again to Margaret's fair face. The girl could not
answer; she knew well enough that Janetta's stepmother was not at all the sort of person
whom Lady Caroline Adair would willingly speak to, and yet she did not like to say
that her acquaintance with Janetta had only been made at a Beaminster dancing class.
Probably Miss Polehampton divined the fact. "Under the circumstances," she said, "I
think I should be justified in writing to Lady Caroline and asking her to remonstrate a
little with you, my dear Margaret. Probably she would be better able to make you
understand the impropriety of your behavior than I can do."
The tears rose to Margaret's eyes. She was not used to being rebuked in this manner.
"But—I don't know, Miss Polehampton, what you want me to do," she said, more
nervously than usual. "I can't give up Janetta; I can't possibly avoid speaking to her, you
know, even if I wanted to——"

"I desire nothing of the sort, Margaret. Be kind and polite to her, as usual. But let me suggest that you do not make a companion of her in the garden so constantly—that you do not try to sit beside her in class or look over the same book. I will speak to Miss Colwyn herself about it. I think I can make her understand."

"Oh, please do not speak to Janetta! I quite understand already," said Margaret, growing pale with distress. "You do not know how kind and good she has always been to me—
—"

Sobs choked her utterance, rather to Miss Polehampton's alarm. She did not like to see her girls cry—least of all, Margaret Adair.

"My dear, you have no need to excite yourself. Janetta Colwyn has always been treated, I hope, with justice and kindness in this house. If you will endeavor only to make her position in life less instead of more difficult, you will be doing her the greatest favor in your power. I do not at all mean that I wish you to be unkind to her. A little more reserve, a little more caution, in your demeanor, and you will be all that I have ever wished you to be—a credit to your parents and to the school which has educated you!"

This sentiment was so effusive that it stopped Margaret's tears out of sheer amazement; and when she had said good-night and gone to bed, Miss Polehampton stood for a moment or two quite still, as if to recover from the unwonted exertion of expressing an affectionate emotion. It was perhaps a reaction against it that caused her almost immediately to ring the bell a trifle sharply, and to say—still sharply—to the maid who appeared in answer.

"Send Miss Colwyn to me."
Five minutes elapsed before Miss Colwyn came, however, and the schoolmistress had had time to grow impatient.
"Why did you not come at once when I sent for you?" she said, severely, as soon as Janetta presented herself.
"I was going to bed," said the girl, quickly; "and I had to dress myself again."
The short, decided accents grated on Miss Polehampton's ear. Miss Colwyn did not speak half so "nicely," she said to herself, as did dear Margaret Adair.
"I have been talking to Miss Adair about you," said the schoolmistress, coldly. "I have been telling her, as I now tell you, that the difference in your positions makes your present intimacy very undesirable. I wish you to understand, henceforward, that Miss Adair is not to walk with you in the garden, not to sit beside you in class, not to associate with you, as she has hitherto done, on equal terms."
"Why should we not associate on equal terms?" said Janetta. She was a black-browed girl, with a clear olive skin, and her eyes flashed and her cheeks glowed with indignation as she spoke.
"You are not equals," said Miss Polehampton, with icy displeasure in her tone—she had spoken very differently to Margaret. "You have to work for your bread: there is no disgrace in that, but it puts you on a different level from that of Miss Margaret Adair, an earl's grand-daughter, and the only child of one of the richest commoners in England.
I have never before reminded you of the difference in position between yourself and the young ladies with whom you have hitherto been allowed to

associate; and I really think
I shall have to adopt another method—unless you conduct yourself, Miss Colwyn, with
a little more modesty and propriety."
"May I ask what your other method would be?" asked Miss Colwyn, with perfect self-
possession.
Miss Polehampton looked at her for a moment in silence.
"To begin with," she said, "I could order the meals differently, and request you to take
yours with the younger children, and in other ways cut you off from the society of the
young ladies. And if this failed, I could signify to your father that our arrangement was
not satisfactory, and that it had better end at the close of this term."
Janetta's eyes fell and her color faded as she heard this threat. It meant a good deal to
her. She answered quickly, but with some nervousness of tone.
"Of course, that must be as you please, Miss Polehampton. If I do not satisfy you, I
must go."
"You satisfy me very well except in that one respect. However, I do not ask for any
promise from you now. I shall observe your conduct during the next few days, and be
guided by what I see. I have already spoken to Miss Adair."
Janetta bit her lips. After a pause, she said—
"Is that all? May I go now?"
"You may go," said Miss Polehampton, with majesty; and Janetta softly and slowly
retired.
But as soon as she was outside the door her demeanor changed. She burst into tears as
she sped swiftly up the broad staircase, and her eyes were so blinded that she did not
even see a white figure hovering on the landing until she found herself suddenly in

Margaret's arms. In defiance of all rules—disobedient for nearly the first time in her life—Margaret had waited and watched for Janetta's coming; and now, clasped as closely together as sisters, the two friends held a whispered colloquy on the stairs.

"Darling," said Margaret, "was she very unkind?"

"She was very horrid, but I suppose she couldn't help it," said Janetta, with a little laugh mixing itself with her sobs. "We mustn't be friends any more, Margaret."

"But we will be friends—always, Janetta."

"We must not sit together or walk together——"

"Janetta, I shall behave to you exactly as I have always done." The gentle Margaret was in revolt.

"She will write to your mother, Margaret, and to my father."

"I shall write to mine, too, and explain," said Margaret with dignity. And Janetta had not the heart to whisper to her friend that the tone in which Miss Polehampton would write to Lady Caroline would differ very widely from the one that she would adopt to Mr. Colwyn.

CHAPTER II.

LADY CAROLINE'S TACTICS.

Helmsley Court was generally considered one of the prettiest houses about Beaminster; a place which was rich in pretty houses, being a Cathedral town situated in one of the most beautiful southern counties of England. The village of Helmsley was a picturesque little group of black and white cottages, with gardens full of old-fashioned flowers before them and meadows and woods behind. Helmsley Court was on slightly higher ground than the village, and its windows commanded an

extensive view of lovely
country bounded in the distance by a long low range of blue hills, beyond which, in
clear days, it was said, keen eyes could catch a glimpse of the shining sea. The house
itself was a very fine old building, with a long terrace stretching before its lower
windows, and flower gardens which were the admiration of half the county. It had a
picture gallery and a magnificent hall with polished floor and stained windows, and all
the accessories of an antique and celebrated mansion; and it had also all the comfort
and luxury that modern civilization could procure.
It was this latter characteristic that made "the Court," as it was commonly called, so
popular. Picturesque old houses are sometimes draughty and inconvenient, but no such
defects were ever allowed to exist at the Court. Every thing went smoothly: the servants
were perfectly trained: the latest improvements possible were always introduced: the
house was ideally luxurious. There never seemed to be any jar or discord: no domestic
worry was ever allowed to reach the ears of the mistress of the household, no cares or
troubles seemed able to exist in that serene atmosphere. You could not even say of it
that it was dull. For the master of the Court was a hospitable man, with many tastes and
whims which he liked to indulge by having down from London the numerous friends
whose fancies matched his own, and his wife was a little bit of a fine lady who had
London friends too, as well as neighbors, whom she liked to entertain. The house was
seldom free from visitors; and it was partly for that very reason that Lady Caroline

Adair, being in her own way a wise woman, had arranged that two or three years of her daughter's life should be spent at Miss Polehampton's very select boarding-school at Brighton. It would be a great drawback to Margaret, she reflected, if her beauty were familiar to all the world before she came out; and really, when Mr. Adair would insist on inviting his friends constantly to the house, it was impossible to keep the girl so mewed up in the schoolroom that she would not be seen and talked of; and therefore it was better that she should go away for a time. Mr. Adair did not like the arrangement; he was very fond of Margaret, and objected to her leaving home; but Lady Caroline was gently inexorable and got her own way—as she generally did. She does not look much like the mother of the tall girl whom we saw at Brighton, as she sits at the head of her breakfast-table in the daintiest of morning gowns—a marvelous combination of silk, muslin and lace and pale pink ribbons—with a tiny white dog reposing in her lap. She is a much smaller woman than Margaret, and darker in complexion: it is from her, however, that Margaret inherits the large, appealing hazel eyes, which look at you with an infinite sweetness, while their owner is perhaps thinking of the menu or her milliner's bill. Lady Caroline's face is thin and pointed, but her complexion is still clear, and her soft brown hair is very prettily arranged. As she sits with her back to the light, with a rose-colored curtain behind her, just tinting her delicate cheek (for Lady Caroline is always careful of appearance), she looks quite a young woman still.

It is Mr. Adair whom Margaret most resembles. He is a tall and exceedingly handsome man, whose hair and moustache and pointed beard were as golden once as Margaret's soft tresses, but are now toned down by a little grey. He has the alert blue eyes that generally go with his fair complexion, and his long limbs are never still for many minutes together. His daughter's tranquillity seems to have come from her mother; certainly it cannot be inherited from the restless Reginald Adair.

The third person present at the breakfast-table—and, for the time being, the only visitor in the house—is a young man of seven or eight-and-twenty, tall, dark, and very spare, with a coal-black beard trimmed to a point, earnest dark eyes, and a remarkably pleasant and intelligent expression. He is not exactly handsome, but he has a face that attracts one; it is the face of a man who has quick perceptions, great kindliness of heart, and a refined and cultured mind. Nobody is more popular in that county than young Sir Philip Ashley, although his neighbors grumble sometimes at his absorption in scientific and philanthropic objects, and think that it would be more creditable to them if he went out with the hounds a little oftener or were a rather better shot. For, being shortsighted, he was never particularly fond either of sport or of games of skill, and his interest had always centred on intellectual pursuits to a degree that amazed the more countrified squires of the neighborhood.

The post-bag was brought in while breakfast was proceeding, and two or three letters were laid before Lady Caroline, who, with a careless word of apology, opened and read

them in turn. She smiled as she put them down and looked at her husband.
"This is a novel experience," she said. "For the first time in our lives, Reginald, here is
a formal complaint of our Margaret."
Sir Philip looked up somewhat eagerly, and Mr. Adair elevated his eyebrows, stirred
his coffee, and laughed aloud.
"Wonders will never cease," he said. "It is rather refreshing to hear that our immaculate
Margaret has done something naughty. What is it, Caroline? Is she habitually late for
breakfast? A touch of unpunctuality is the only fault I ever heard of, and that, I believe,
she inherits from me."
"I should be sorry to think that she was immaculate," said Lady Caroline, calmly, "it
has such an uncomfortable sound. But Margaret is generally, I must say, a very tractable
child."
"Do you mean that her schoolmistress does not find her tractable?" said Mr. Adair, with
amusement. "What has she been doing?"
"Nothing very bad. Making friends with a governess-pupil, or something of, that sort—
—"
"Just what a generous-hearted girl would be likely to do!" exclaimed Sir Philip, with a
sudden warm lighting of his dark eyes.
Lady Caroline smiled at him. "The schoolmistress thinks this girl an unsuitable friend
for Margaret, and wants me to interfere," she said.
"Pray do nothing of the sort," said Mr. Adair. "I would trust my Pearl's instinct
anywhere. She would never make an unsuitable friend!"
"Margaret has written to me herself," said Lady Caroline. "She seems unusually excited
about the matter. 'Dear mother,' she writes, 'pray interpose to

prevent Miss Polehampton
from doing an unjust and ungenerous thing. She disapproves of my friendship with dear
Janetta Colwyn, simply because Janetta is poor; and she threatens to punish Janetta—
not me—by sending her home in disgrace. Janetta is a governess-pupil here, and it
would be a great trouble to her if she were sent away. I hope that you would rather
take me away than let such an injustice be done.'"
"My Pearl hits the nail on the head exactly," said Mr. Adair, with complacency. He rose
as he spoke, and began to walk about the room. "She is quite old enough to come home,
Caroline. It is June now, and the term ends in July. Fetch her home, and invite the little
governess too, and you will soon see whether or no she is the right sort of friend for
Margaret." He laughed in his mellow, genial way, and leaned against the mantel-piece,
stroking his yellow moustache and glancing at his wife.
"I am not sure that that would be advisable," said Lady Caroline, with her pretty smile.
"Janetta Colwyn: Colwyn? Did not Margaret know her before she went to school? Are
there not some Colwyns at Beaminster? The doctor—yes, I remember him; don't you,
Reginald?"
Mr. Adair shook his head, but Sir Philip looked up hastily.
"I know him—a struggling man with a large family. His first wife was rather well-
connected, I believe: at any rate she was related to the Brands of Brand Hall. He married
a second time after her death."
"Do you call that being well-connected, Philip?" said Lady Caroline, with gentle
reproach; while Mr. Adair laughed and whistled, but caught himself up immediately

and apologized.
"I beg pardon—I forgot where I was: the less any of us have to do with the Brands of
Brand Hall the better, Phil."
"I know nothing of them," said Sir Philip, rather gravely.
"Nor anybody else"—hastily—"they never live at home, you know. So this girl is a
connection of theirs?"
"Perhaps not a very suitable friend: Miss Polehampton may be right," said Lady
Caroline. "I suppose I must go over to Brighton and see Margaret."
"Bring her back with you," said Mr. Adair, recklessly. "She has had quite enough of
school by this time: she is nearly eighteen, isn't she?"

But Lady Caroline smilingly refused to decide anything until she had herself
interviewed Miss Polehampton. She asked her husband to order the carriage for her at
once, and retired to summon her maid and array herself for the journey.
"You won't go to-day, will you, Philip?" said Mr. Adair, almost appealingly. "I shall be
all alone, and my wife will not perhaps return until to-morrow—there's no saying."
"Thank you, I shall be most pleased to stay," answered Sir Philip, cordially. After a
moment's pause, he added, with something very like a touch of shyness—"I have not
seen—your daughter since she was twelve years old."
"Haven't you?" said Mr. Adair, with ready interest. "You don't say so! Pretty little girl
she was then! Didn't you think so?"
"I thought her the loveliest child I had ever seen in all my life," said Sir Philip, with
curious devoutness of manner.

He saw Lady Caroline just as she was starting for the train, with man and maid in
attendance, and Mr. Adair handing her into the carriage and gallantly offering to
accompany her if she liked. "Not at all necessary," said Lady Caroline, with an
indulgent smile. "I shall be home to dinner. Take care of my husband, Philip, and don't
let him be dull."
"If they are making Margaret unhappy, be sure you bring her back with you," were Mr.
Adair's last words. Lady Caroline gave him a kind but inscrutable little smile and nod
as she was whirled away. Sir Philip thought to himself that she looked like a woman
who would take her own course in spite of advice or recommendation from her husband
or anybody else.
He smiled once or twice as the day passed on at her parting injunction to him not to let
her husband be dull. He had known the Adairs for many years, and had never known
Reginald Adair dull under any circumstances. He was too full of interests, of "fads,"
some people called them, ever to be dull. He took Sir Philip round the picture-gallery,
round the stables, to the kennels, to the flower-garden, to his own studio (where he
painted in oils when he had nothing else to do) with never-flagging energy and
animation. Sir Philip's interests lay in different grooves, but he was quite capable of
sympathizing with Mr. Adair's interests, too. The day passed pleasantly, and seemed
rather short for all that the two men wanted to pack into it; although from time to time
Mr. Adair would say, half-impatiently, "I wonder how Caroline is getting on!" or "I

hope she'll bring Margaret back with her! But I don't expect it, you know. Carry was always a great one for education and that sort of thing."

"Is Miss Adair intellectual—too?" asked Sir Philip, with respect.

Mr. Adair broke into a sudden laugh. "Intellectual? Our Daisy?—our Pearl?" he said.

"Wait until you see her, then ask the question if you like."

"I am afraid I don't quite understand."

"Of course you don't. It is the partiality of a fond father that speaks, my dear fellow. I only meant that these young, fresh, pretty girls put such questions out of one's head."

"She must be very pretty then," said Sir Philip, with a smile.

He had seen a great many beautiful women, and told himself that he did not care for beauty. Fashionable, talkative women were his abomination. He had no sisters, but he loved his mother very dearly; and upon her he had founded a very high ideal of womanhood. He had begun to think vaguely, of late, that he ought to marry: duty demanded it of him, and Sir Philip was always attentive, if not obedient, to the voice of duty. But he was not inclined to marry a girl out of the schoolroom, or a girl who was accustomed to the enervating luxury (as he considered it) of Helmsley Court: he wanted an energetic, sensible, large-hearted, and large-minded woman who would be his right hand, his first minister of state. Sir Philip was fairly wealthy, but by no means enormously so; and he had other uses for his wealth than the buying of pictures and keeping up stables and kennels at an alarming expense. If Miss Adair were so pretty, he mused, it was just as well that she was not at home, for, of course, it was possible that he might find a lovely face an attraction: and much as he liked

Lady Caroline, he did not want particularly to marry Lady Caroline's daughter. That she treated him with great consideration, and that he had once overheard her speak of him as "the most eligible parti of the neighborhood," had already put him a little on his guard. Lady Caroline was no vulgar, match-making mother, he knew that well enough; but she was in some respects a thoroughly worldly woman, and Philip Ashley was an essentially unworldly man.

As he went upstairs to dress for dinner that evening, he was struck by the fact that a door stood open that he had never seen opened before: a door into a pretty, well-lighted, pink and white room, the ideal apartment for a young girl. The evening was chilly, and rain had begun to fall, so a bright little fire was burning in the steel grate, and casting a cheerful glow over white sheepskin rugs and rose-colored curtains. A maid seemed to be busying herself with some white material—all gauze and lace it looked—and another servant was, as Sir Philip passed, entering with a great white vase filled with red roses.

"Do they expect visitors to-night?" thought the young man, who knew enough of the house to be aware that the room was not one in general use. "Adair said nothing about it, but perhaps some people are coming from town."

A budget of letters was brought to him at that moment, and in reading and answering them he did not note the sound of carriage-wheels on the drive, nor the bustle of an arrival in the house. Indeed, he left himself so little time that he had to dress in extraordinary haste, and went downstairs at last in the

conviction that he was unpardonably late.

But apparently he was wrong.

For the drawing-room was tenanted by one figure only—that of a young lady in evening dress. Neither Lady Caroline nor Mr. Adair had appeared upon the scene; but on the hearthrug, by the small crackling fire—which, in deference to the chilliness of an English June evening, had been lighted—stood a tall, fair, slender girl, with pale complexion, and soft, loosely-coiled masses of golden hair. She was dressed in pure white, a soft loose gown of Indian silk, trimmed with the most delicate lace: it was high to the milk-white throat, but showed the rounded curves of the finely-moulded arm to the elbow. She wore no ornaments, but a white rose was fastened into the lace frill of her dress at her neck. As she turned her face towards the new comer, Sir Philip suddenly felt himself abashed. It was not that she was so beautiful—in those first few moments he scarcely thought her beautiful at all—but that she produced on him an impression of serious, virginal grace and innocence which was almost disconcerting. Her pure complexion, her grave, serene eyes, her graceful way of moving as she advanced a little to receive him stirred him to more than admiration—to something not unlike awe. She looked young; but it was youth in perfection: there was some marvelous finish, delicacy, polish, which one does not usually associate with extreme youth.

"You are Sir Philip Ashley, I think?" she said, offering him her slim cool hand without embarrassment.

"You do not remember me, perhaps, but I remember you perfectly well, I am Margaret
Adair."

CHAPTER III.

AT HELMSLEY COURT.

"Lady Caroline has brought you back, then?" said Sir Philip, after his first pause of
astonishment.

"Yes," said Margaret, serenely. "I have been expelled."

"Expelled! You?"

"Yes, indeed, I have," said the girl, with a faintly amused little smile. "And so has my
great friend, Janetta Colwyn. Here she is: Janetta, I am telling Sir Philip Ashley that we
have been expelled, and he will not believe me."

Sir Philip turned in some curiosity to see the girl of whom he had heard for the first
time that morning. He had not noticed before that she was present. He saw a brown little
creature, with eyes that had been swollen with crying until they were well-nigh
invisible, small, unremarkable features, and a mouth that was inclined to quiver.

Margaret might afford to be serene, but to this girl expulsion from school had evidently
been a sad trouble. He threw all the more kindness and gentleness into his voice and
look as he spoke to her.

Janetta might have felt a little awkward if she had not been so entirely absorbed by her
own woes. She had never set foot before in half so grand a house as this of Helmsley
Court, nor had she ever dined late or spoken to a gentleman in an evening coat in all her
previous life. The size and the magnificence of the room would perhaps have oppressed
her if she had been fully aware of them. But she was for the

moment very much wrapped up in her own affairs, and scarcely stopped to think of the novel situation in which she found herself. The only thing that had startled her was the attention paid to her dress by Margaret and Margaret's maid. Janetta would have put on her afternoon black cashmere and little silver brooch, and would have felt herself perfectly well dressed; but Margaret, after a little consultation with the very grand young person who condescended to brush Miss Colwyn's hair, had herself brought to Janetta's room a dress of black lace over cherry-colored silk, and had begged her to put it on.

"You will feel so hot downstairs if you don't put on something cool," Margaret had said. "There is a fire in the drawing-room: papa likes the rooms warm. My dresses would not have fitted you, I am so much taller than you; but mamma is just your height, and although you are thinner perhaps——But I don't know: the dress fits you perfectly. Look in the glass, Janet; you are quite splendid."

Janetta looked and blushed a little—not because she thought herself at all splendid, but because the dress showed her neck and arms in a way no dress had ever done before.

"Ought it to be—open—like this?" she said, vaguely. "Do you wear your dresses like this when you are at home?"

"Mine are high," said Margaret. "I am not 'out,' you know. But you are older than I, and you used to teach——I think we may consider that you are 'out,'" she added, with a little laugh. "You look very nice, Janetta: you have such pretty arms! Now I must go and dress, and I will call for you when I am ready to go down."

Janetta felt decidedly doubtful as to whether she were not a

great deal too grand for the occasion; but she altered her mind when she saw Margaret's dainty silk and lace, and Lady Caroline's exquisite brocade; and she felt herself quite unworthy to take Mr. Adair's offered arm when dinner was announced and her host politely convoyed her to the dining-room. She wondered whether he knew that she was only a little governess-pupil, and whether he was not angry with her for being the cause of his daughter's abrupt departure from school. As a matter of fact, Mr. Adair knew her position exactly, and was very much amused by the whole affair; also, as it had procured him the pleasure of his daughter's return home, he had an illogical inclination to be pleased also with Janetta. "As Margaret is so fond of her, there must be something in her," he said to himself, with a critical glance at the girl's delicate features and big dark eyes. "I'll draw her out at dinner."

He tried his best, and made himself so agreeable and amusing that Janetta lost a good deal of her shyness, and forgot her troubles. She had a quick tongue of her own, as everybody at Miss Polehampton's was aware; and she soon found that she had not lost it. She was a good deal surprised to find that not a word was said at the dinner table about the cause of Margaret's return: in her own home it would have been the subject of the evening; it would have been discussed from every point of view, and she would probably have been reduced to tears before the first hour was over. But here it was evident that the matter was not considered of great importance. Margaret looked serene

as ever, and joined quietly in talk which was alarmingly unlike Miss Polehampton's
improving conversation: talk about county gaieties and county magnates: gossip about
neighbors—gossip of a harmless although frivolous type, for Lady Caroline never
allowed any talk at her table that was anything but harmless, about fashions, about old
china, about music and art. Mr. Adair was passionately fond of music, and when he
found that Miss Colwyn really knew something of it he was in his element. They
discoursed of fugues, sonatas, concertos, quartettes, and trios, until even Lady Caroline
raised her eyebrows a little at the very technical nature of the conversation; and Sir
Philip exchanged a congratulatory smile with Margaret over her friend's success. For
the delight of finding a congenial spirit had brought the crimson into Janetta's olive
cheeks and the brilliance to her dark eyes: she had looked insignificant when she went
in to dinner; she was splendidly handsome at dessert. Mr. Adair noticed her flashing,
transitory beauty, and said to himself that Margaret's taste was unimpeachable; it was
just like his own; he had complete confidence in Margaret.
When the ladies went back to the drawing-room, Sir Philip turned with a look of only
half-disguised curiosity to his host. "Lady Caroline brought her back then?" he said,
longing to ask questions, yet hardly knowing how to frame them aright.
Mr. Adair gave a great laugh. "It's been the oddest thing I ever heard of," he said, in a
tone of enjoyment. "Margaret takes a fancy to that little black-eyed girl—a nice little
thing, too, don't you think?—and nothing must serve but that

her favorite must walk
with her, sit by her, and so on—you know the romantic way girls have? The
schoolmistress interfered, said it was not proper, and so on; forbade it. Miss Colwyn
would have obeyed, it seems, but Margaret took the bit in a quiet way between her teeth.
Miss Colwyn was ordered to take her meals at a side table: Margaret insisted on taking
her meals there too. The school was thrown into confusion. At last Miss Polehampton
decided that the best way out of the difficulty was first to complain to us, and then to
send Miss Colwyn home, straight away. She would not send Margaret home, you
know!"
"That was very hard on Miss Colwyn," said Sir Philip, gravely.
"Yes, horribly hard. So Margaret, as you heard, appealed to her mother, and when Lady
Caroline arrived, she found that not only were Miss Colwyn's boxes packed, but
Margaret's as well; and that Margaret had declared that if her friend was sent away for
what was after all her fault, she would not stay an hour in the house. Miss Polehampton
was weeping: the girls were in revolt, the teachers in despair, so my wife thought the
best way out of the difficulty was to bring both girls away at once, and settle it with
Miss Colwyn's relations afterwards. The joke is that Margaret insists on it that she has
been 'expelled.'"
"So she told me."
"The schoolmistress said something of that kind, you know. Caroline says the woman
entirely lost her temper and made an exhibition of herself. Caroline was glad to get our
girl away. But, of course, it's all nonsense about being 'expelled'

as a punishment; she
was leaving of her own accord."
"One could hardly imagine punishment in connection with her," said Sir Philip, warmly.
"No, she's a nice-looking girl, isn't she? and her little friend is a good foil, poor little
thing."
"This affair may prove of some serious inconvenience to Miss Colwyn, I suppose?"
"Oh, you may depend upon it, she won't be the loser," said Mr. Adair, hastily. "We'll
see about that. Of course she will not suffer any injury through my daughter's friendship
for her."
Sir Philip was not so sure about it. In spite of his intense admiration for Margaret's
beauty, it occurred to him that the romantic partisanship of the girl with beauty, position,
and wealth for her less fortunate sister had not been attended with very brilliant results.
No doubt Miss Adair, reared in luxury and indulgence, did not in the least realize the
harm done to the poor governess-pupil's future by her summary dismissal from Miss
Polehampton's boarding-school. To Margaret, anything that the schoolmistress chose to
say or do mattered little; to Janetta Colwyn, it might some day mean prosperity or
adversity of a very serious kind. Sir Philip did not quite believe in the compensation so
easily promised by Mr. Adair. He made a mental note of Miss Colwyn's condition and
prospects, and said to himself that he would not forget her. And this meant a good deal
from a busy man like Sir Philip Ashley.
Meanwhile there had been another conversation going on in the drawing-room between
the three ladies. Margaret put her arm affectionately round

Janetta's waist as they stood
by the hearthrug, and looked at her mother with a smile. Lady Caroline sank into an
easy-chair on the other side of the fireplace, and contemplated the two girls.
"This is better than Claremont House, is it not, Janet?" said Margaret.
"Indeed it is," Janetta answered, gratefully.
"You found the way to papa's heart by your talk about music—did she not, mamma?
And does not this dress suit her beautifully?"
"It wants a little alteration in the sleeve," said Lady Caroline, with the placidity which
Janetta had always attributed to Margaret as a special virtue, but which she now found
was merely characteristic of the house and family in general, "but Markham can do that
to-morrow. There are some people coming in the evening, and the sleeve will look
better shortened."
The remark sounded a little inconsequent in Janetta's ear, but Margaret understood and
assented. It meant that Lady Caroline was on the whole pleased with Janetta, and did
not object to introducing her to her friends. Margaret gave her mother a little smile over
Janetta's head, while that young person was gathering up her courage in two hands, so
to speak, before addressing Lady Caroline.
"I am very much obliged to you," she said at last, with a thrill of gratitude in her sweet
voice which was very pleasant to the ear. "But—I was thinking—what time would be
the most convenient for me to go home to-morrow?"
"Home? To Beaminster?" said Margaret. "But you need not go, dear; you can write a
note and tell them that you are staying here."
"Yes, my dear; I am sure Margaret cannot part with you yet,"

said Lady Caroline,
amiably.
"Thank you; it is most kind of you," Janetta answered, her voice shaking. "But I must
ask my father whether I can stay—and hear what he says; Miss Polehampton will have
written to him, and——"
"And he will be very glad that we have rescued you from her clutches," said Margaret,
with a soft triumphant little laugh. "My poor Janetta! What we suffered at her hands!"
Lady Caroline lying back in her easy chair, with the candle light gleaming upon her
silvery grey and white brocade with its touches of soft pink, and the diamonds flashing