

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 daughters 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 gaities 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.