

Le Diable

Miss Camilla Willyan

“I rede ye speak lowne, lest Kimmer should hear ye;
Come sain ye, come cross ye, an’ Gude be near ye!”

When my Cousin Tom came in one day, with two blue eyes in his head, I knew something had happened to him. Not that he kept an assortment of visual organs for different occasions; but the dear fellow’s eyes are like Nova-Scotia skies, their blue hidden, as a rule, and revealed as an exception. Pale films of thought, purple hazes of reverie or tenderness, Scotch mists of utter laziness—each had its turn. But on this occasion, as I have said, his eyes were blue. He shut the door, walked straight to the hearth-rug, put his hands behind him, turned his back to the fire, and faced me, all with military precision.

“Camilla,” he said, in a concise manner, “I have seen the devil!”

Naturally enough I asked what he was like.

“He is like a young woman twenty-two years of age,” said Tom. “He has a slight, limber form, he has an intellectual head, he has green-gray eyes that look like windows with the curtains down, he has a great deal of dull-brown hair that looks as though it grew in a hot place and were a little scorched, he has a long nose, a short upper lip, and a full under lip.”

“Most faces have chins.” I suggested, since he seemed to have got through.

“Chin? O, yes!—small and pointed—about as little of a chin as could well be tolerated. A chin, Camilla,” Tom said, taking his hands from behind his back, and placing the first two fingers on his right hand, in an argumentative way, in his left palm, “a chin means a good deal. A well-squared chin clinches the character, it denotes grip. A man with a well-squared chin may go down, but, in my opinion, he is meant to go up. A small chin is a loose rein; and *Facilis desecusus Averni*’—you know.”

“I know nothing of the kind,” I said, pettishly, not knowing a word of Latin. “If you have anything further to say, confine yourself to your mother-tongue.”

Tom looked at me in a contemplative way, and allowed the fizz to work off.

“I suppose you saw this thing sitting on a pinnacle,” I said, presently.

“Well, yes,” he replied. “It was on the top of Bald-head, in the midst of a group of young girls. They called it Lize Blackburn, and I was introduced to it.”

“Tom,” I said, “what do you mean by calling Mrs. John Blackburn’s niece from the city the devil? I have heard of her, and knew she was coming. She is called a most accomplished young lady. I am going to call on her this minute.”

“I suppose you don’t want any company?” remarked Tom, as I went toward the door.

“Of course, I do!” I said, “that is, if my company will put on a clean collar, and get a decent pair of gloves on his hands, and just curl up that near moustache a little.”

While I am dressing, I may as well give a word of explanation. Tom Stanhope and I were cousins, as I have hinted before; that is, when he was a baby, his mother, then a widow, married my mother’s brother. So we called each other cousins, and scarcely knew the difference, though there was no relationship at all, except by marriage. We grew up together, I being three years the younger, and within a few years were both made orphans. Grandmother Stanhope had died at my mother’s birth, bearing but two children, and those her husband never suffered to live away from him. Mother took her husband home, and Uncle James took his wife and wife’s baby home, and there they died, all but the baby. If they had lived longer, it is likely there might have been another establishment as the families increased; but in Grandfather Stanhope’s great house there was space and to spare for a score of people.

When poor Tom and I, aged respectively thirteen and ten, found ourselves orphans, our grandfather was still a young man in looks, being only fifty, and remarkably well-kept. At the time my story commences, thirteen years later, the mathematical reader will perceive his age to have been sixty-three, Tom’s twenty-six, and mine twenty-three. We lived in one of those delightful towns which are large enough for safety, wealth, and a city government, and at the same time not so large but you can know everybody’s business, and have everybody know yours. In one of those large cities, one feels so insignificant, quite like a needle in a stack of hay.

If my grandfather had remained a widower all these years, it was not the fault of his lady acquaintances. They had sympathized with him, shedding actual tears, they had pitied those poor, dear motherless children, and hugged and kissed poor Tom and I nearly to death. But Mr. Stanhope remained obdurately constant to his lost wife, whose pathetic, violet eyes looked down on him from the wall of his library where her sweet, pictured face seemed to hallow the air. A competent housekeeper was procured—one who could not be suspected of matrimonial designs on her master, a governess came in by the day, and after a while Tom was sent to college, and we got on in the most delightful manner without the help of a grandmother-in-law. We had everything that money could buy, within a pretty wide margin; we had the largest and finest house in town, with three carriages and four horses in the stable, with gardens and conservatory, and with a retinue of ten well-trained servants. Tom was a junior partner in a large mercantile house where our grandfather was chief owner, and I had a regular allowance of five hundred dollars a year for pocket money, and everything of any cost bought for me, besides an extra sum on my birthdays, and at Christmas and New Years. I never had to buy furs, or shawls, or jewelry, out of my own money, and my boot-and-shoe bill was sent in to grandfather, and Tom always gave me my gloves. So we managed to worry along without suffering.

I don't know that anything more is necessary to define our positions in its larger features, and, moreover, I am dressed for our walk and going down stairs. I put my head in at the parlor door, and beheld Tom so engrossed in studying his personal appearance in one of the large mirrors that he didn't hear me. I didn't like to catch him with that satisfied smile on his face, for I should have been awfully angry if he had ever caught me where I was looking at myself; so I drew back and rattled the latch, as we do for lovers, then went in and found those lovers, Narcissus and his reflection, standing back to back, a long way apart, and Tom with the most innocent expression of countenance. I didn't see the reflection's face, but I presume that had a very innocent expression, also.

"I hope you've prinked enough," was his salutation. "I've been waiting here half an hour."

I opened my mouth, and looked at him. I almost spoke. But I heroically swallowed the words; and to this day Tom does not know what an angel I am, and never will, unless he should happen on this story. My rule is, if you want to influence a man, no matter what you think of him, make him believe you think him immaculate. (Young ladies, put this down in your note-books.)

So, instead of saying, "O Tom! I opened the door a minute ago and saw you bowing and smiling at yourself, and practising all sorts of attitudes and expressions, like a monkey," I merely said, "Tom, excuse me, but hadn't we better go to the devil?" I didn't mean to swear, you perceive; that's what he had called her.

We went, walking about half a mile, to Mrs. John Blackburn's house. The family were old friends of ours, and I didn't care if it wasn't just ceremonious calling-time, being four o'clock in the afternoon. The family were just coming up from dinner when the servant opened the door for us, and immediately the Blackburn girls made a rush on us with loud welcomes. Nettie Blackburn was sweet on Tom, but he didn't care much about her. There were four of them, nice, hearty, gay, showy girls; and when they had cleared away their waterfalls and flounces a little, I saw a fifth young lady behind them, half obscured by Papa and Mama Blackburn, who were coming forward in a more ponderous manner. Of course, this was the person whom my cousin had so profanely described.

She answered the description perfectly as far as it went. Of course, Tom didn't know enough to say that she wore a light-blue, French cambric dress, with a scarf of black lace thrown over her shoulders, and a long vine of myrtle hanging off her hair, and swinging down her back. Do you know how cool and delicious those discordant colors look sometimes? Just go on some hot day in summer, and look at a rank, blue violet among its leaves, looking the picture of comfort, while the clover heads are like coals of fire; or look at Miss Lize Blackburn just as she stood there. She stood quiet and perfectly grave, but her eyebrows were raised ever so slightly, which gave her a critical and superior expression, for which I would gladly have shaken her out of the little exquisite slippers I saw she wore. Besides, her short upper lip was so very short, and had such a curl to it, that, whether she meant it or not, she had very much the air of sneering at us.

But when they managed to gush out an introduction, such a change as came! Such a honeyed smile, such a deeply-bent bow, such a soft clasp as she gave my hand! For an instant I thought I must have mistaken her first expression entirely; but I am no fool, and I soon perceived that she

could put on and off expressions, as she did her combs and collars. I should think a sweet expression kept in the mind for occasional wear would sweeten the mind a little; but that didn't happen to Lize Blackburn. You might as well try to warm your house with a picture of a fire. I don't believe the mercury in the thermometer would rise, though Guido painted the picture.

I was rather surprised, however, to perceive that she took no notice whatever of Tom. To be sure, I knew he didn't deserve any from her, but how should she know that? I don't suppose that he had been rude to her; on the contrary, it seemed likely that he had been very complimentary, even while mentally endowing her with horns and hoof, and surrounding her with a sulphurous atmosphere. When Tom doesn't like people he is awfully polite to them. But the young woman was polite enough to me, and really charmed me with her bitter-sweet manners. Such cutting little speeches as she could make, with the most innocent air in the world! Such tender little compliments as she paid me! She broke off in a defence of Griffith Gaunt to exclaim at my finger-nails, "Was there ever anything so lovely!" Taking just the tips of my fingers in her slight hand! "Rose-petals for pinkness, and so thin!"

I always liked a dainty caress, and hated a person whose affectionateness suggested pounds avoirdupois, or a use of the dumb-bells. Therefore, this girl's delicate touches were fascinating.

"You are a little flatterer," I said, just as people always do; but was delighted all the same.

Lize Blackburn and I sat apart getting acquainted, while Tom and the girls, and Mr. and Mrs. Blackburn were social at a distance from us. I always noticed in Lize that she liked to get apart with somebody, and never joined a circle except to coax [someone] out of it. She liked undivided attention. After awhile I saw Tom casting glances our way. I don't think he was quite indifferent to the distracting slipped foot with which the damsel was patting absently on the carpet while we chatted, perhaps he was wondering what we were talking about.

"If I had dreamed that Stonberg was so delightful a place," the girl said, "I would have come here long ago. My aunt and cousins have been teasing me for years. I have invitations enough from them in the course of the year to kindle my fire all winter. I am high up where the furnace doesn't reach, and have to have a coal fire. I'm awfully poor, you know? You didn't know it? How odd! Why, I don't own anything but the clothes I wear, and some books, and gincracks, and a real Parian bust of Dante. I board in a genteel house, but my room is under the roof, as I told you. However, when I am going up to it, I half shut my eyes, and fancy that I am climbing one of the Alps with my parasol for an alpenstock. Of course, when I get up there, and see a destestable room with cheap paper, a horrible second hand, tufted carpet with figures big enough for a meeting-house, and dingy, worsted curtains promoted [upstairs] when the library was new-furnished, then I feel disenchanted. But it is only to take a book from my shelves, or open my piano, and I am all right. But the contrast is rather grating sometimes. I have a taste for elegance, and when I am out of that chamber I have it. Are you horrified to know that I earn money? Now what an independent person you are! But it isn't with me as with everybody. When papa and mama died in Florence—papa was consul there—I was left quite alone, and somebody proposed my going to Countessa Niri's family to teach the children English. They have English relatives, and evidently want to marry off one or more of their six ugly daughters to them. I stayed there three months, and we had a pitched battle every day. You see, they thought they had done me a

favor in taking me, and I thought I had done them a favor in going. So we couldn't agree. Besides, their Italian way of pronouncing English made me want to fly in their faces, it was so soft, so cotton-woolly, so lisping. They would persist in pronouncing every vowel, and putting all sorts of little tails on to words. There were no bones to words in their mouth, they were all flesh. Well, I came to New York, and some nice people there got me a few pupils in French, Italian, German, and music, and they are very much obliged to me for teaching them, and don't consider me by any means a drudge-teacher. I dine in company at the same house where I give lessons, and, perhaps, go to the opera with them after. I wouldn't teach their lessons otherwise. I am wearying you, am I not?"

"Not at all; go on!" I said.

But here Tom and Nettie joined us, and confidences were at an end. Tom made Miss Elize an elaborate bow, as though he had just come in, and bade her a good-afternoon.

"I've seen you before this afternoon," she said, simply, with a look of surprise.

"But you didn't notice me," he said.

"Yes, I did. I gave you a little nod, but you were looking at Nettie," said Miss Elize, seeming never to dream that she could be expected to repeat a disregarded salutation.

Both Tom and Nettie colored at this; the one with pleasure, the other with vexation. And since neither of them found anything to say, and since Miss Elize sat tranquil and said nothing, I made a move to go. We became immediately very intimate with this young stranger. She came to us at all hours, and, though I don't believe we loved her very much, she was so amusing we were always glad to see her. Even grandfather, who was usually merely courteous, in his stately fashion, to my young friends, and left us to chatter by ourselves, got into the way of talking with Elize Blackburn. She told him of foreign places and people she had seen, describing them with spirit, and relating many a lively anecdote. Indeed, she seemed to take particularly to my grandfather when he was present, and rather turned the cold shoulder on Tom. But it was clear, nevertheless, that she had her eye on my cousin, and I knew that she was trying to captivate him just as well as if she had told me so.

Tom knew it, too, and at first used to smile at her provoking coolness. But did you ever see a little animal walk straight into a trap, knowing that it was a trap? I have. There was once a rat who just escaped choking in a certain trap, and knew well that his escape was almost a miracle. The next day he went again and peeped in at the trap, and eyed the nice bit of cheese there, and hesitated, and went away, and came back again. I have no doubt his thoughts ran something on this strain: "Now that cheese is put there just for a lure. I see the way that treacherous hook runs up and just catches the noose, and I know the way the thing snaps and catches you around the neck. Ugh! My respected grandfather, and my maiden aunt, and my two cousins have been bow strung by that machine. But—that is uncommonly nice-looking cheese, and I'm going to make believe that it isn't a trap." So he made believe it wasn't a trap, and shut his eyes to everything but the cheese, and in two minutes all was over with him. He had the best possible reasons for believing that it was a trap when it was too late.

That's just what Tom did. He said to himself, "She thinks if she hangs herself high, I'm just the fellow to climb, though I scratch and tear myself ever so badly. But I see the little hook and noose too plainly. She is getting on the right side of grandfather so as to secure his consent, doing every possible thing to prove that she is an accomplished lady fit for any station, as, indeed, she is; but, thank you, my dear, I've no mind to take you." And then he walked right into the noose. Only there was this difference—the rat got the bait, and Tom didn't. Tom told me afterward just what had occurred, I having been all the time as blind as a bat, considering him safe from her.

"You see, she had been behaving infernally," Tom said; "and after being amused for a while, I got mad. I didn't see the joke of always being snubbed. Besides, she was so sly, she didn't want [anyone] mad but me, and so was passably civil when you were by. But the moment we were alone, she would turn her back upon me completely, acting as though either I had done her some great wrong, or was so hateful to her that she could not look at me. I got out of temper at length, and flung out something to the effect that if I were such a disgusting object I had better keep out of her sight. 'I must say,' she replied scornfully, 'I am unable to reconcile your expressed sentiments with the fact that you do not keep out of my sight.'

"Of course I demanded an explanation; and the result was that I found out a careless speech I made about her when she first came had been repeated to her by Nettie. Girls are such spiteful things! I must say, I felt a little foolish as she flung out those words of mine over her shoulder, her scornful face flushed, and her attitude so full of grace, that confoundedly handsome foot of hers showing below her flounces. But when at the end of her smart little tirade she wound up by putting her hands over her face and bursting into tears and sobs, I was utterly overcome. I don't know all I did or said, but I know I was on my knees beside her trying to comfort her, and talking a good deal of downright nonsense. I am clear as to her manner, however, and have her answer by heart. She drew herself up a little, half, only half put me back, and spoke with a kind of sad composure:

" 'You are making a great mistake. You are not in love with me, and I am not in love with you. Don't fancy that because I cried I am heart-broken. Women cry from a variety of causes; sometimes temper, sometimes mortification, as well as grief or wounded feeling. Perhaps,' she said, with a delicious little sparkle of mirth breaking through her tears, 'perhaps I am crying in order to be interesting. Am I interesting?'

" 'You are beautiful!' I could not help saying.

" 'Am I? Thank you! I'm sure I'm delighted. That is the very first compliment you ever paid me, and I believe you mean it. Now, why can't we be friends?'

"And that's the way she and I happened to take such a turn about, and be such great cronies," he concluded.

I had seen this change with surprise, and with some uneasiness. That Elize should be a visitor and intimate associate, I quite liked; but that she should marry Tom was quite another thing. I

don't think I should have been willing Tom should marry an archangel. There were just people enough in our house, and I didn't want any more, particularly any more women. But I said nothing, only kept watch. I even invited her to spend a week with me, in order to have her all the time under my own eye. If Tom went sky-larking off on moonlight nights, without giving an account of himself, I would, at least, be sure he was not with her.

She accepted my invitation with delight, and seemed happy as a child to come. "I like to be in large houses," she said. "And where people can move without elbowing each other. Now there are so many at aunt's, you know. Nettie and I have to sleep together, which is detestable; for Nettie snores. Did you ever know anything so awful? My dear, if I were capable of snoring, I would never allow myself to go to sleep."

I wonder if she knew that Tom was loitering within ear-shot when she related this disenchanting fact regarding the lady who was well known to favor him? She didn't seem to notice, for grandfather came in just then, and she went to meet him with her slender hand outstretched, and a smile dimpling her fair cheek. She always appeared childlike and good with him, however she might cut up toward others. I suppose she knew he was master there, and that if he should take a great dislike to her, she would not find her stay either pleasant or profitable.

Let me describe my grandfather here. He was a small, homely-faced man with the manners of a prince. Indeed, there were times when I have thought him actually handsome, so graceful and gracious could he be. He was sixty-three, and had the look of full that age, though his hair was not white. But his health was good, and he had not begun to break up in any way. He took the fair hand she offered him, bowed profoundly to her, and thanked her for the favor she had done us in coming.

"O, the favor is quite the other way!" she said sweetly. "I like to come here, and was so much pleased with the invitation. When here, I seem to be living over all my best experiences, with a new flavor to them. For when I used to be happy I didn't realize my happiness, but took for granted it was to go on always, and grow better. Now, when I am happy I treasure every moment, not sure that I shall ever be so blest again."

She sighed as she concluded, and stood fixed in mournful thought for a moment, as though forgetting where she was; then tossing aside her cloud with a smile and a gesture, came to my side again, as though half fearful of having said too much. My grandfather looked at her with an expression at once pleased, admiring and sympathizing. I was quite prepared for the comment he made on her that evening when I found myself for a moment alone with him.

"That is a very superior young lady," he said empathetically. "I am willing you should have her here as much as you like. She is quite uncommon."

"Suppose she should marry Tom, and live here altogether?" I could not help asking, with a little spite.

My grandfather colored, and stared at me. He was hardly prepared for so thorough an adoption.

“Is there any sign of such a thing?” he asked, glancing toward where the two stood on the piazza.

“It does not seem the most unlikely thing in the world,” I pouted. “They are not a bad-looking couple, are they? And Tom is a very good match for a young woman who has to teach to support herself.”

He looked out at them uneasily. “I don’t want to stand in the way of Tom’s happiness,” he said, “but I don’t wish him to be hasty in an affair of this kind. I must speak to him about it. He should inquire very closely into her family connection. The family is very good, I believe, but one cannot be too particular when there is question of marriage.”

I felt better then, for Grandfather Stanhope was not one of those silly old men who drive lovers into each other’s arms by a too fierce attempt to separate them. He was careful and cool, but, at the same time decided. If he set out that Tom shouldn’t marry the girl, he would succeed in preventing it.

I couldn’t help being amused at the course my grandfather took to prevent matters coming to a premature crisis. Instead of finding business for Tom elsewhere, he devoted himself to the amusement of our visitor. He invited her out to look at improvements going on in the grounds, he accepted and acted on her suggestions in the most complimentary manner, he took us out to ride, and found out beautiful views, and nice farmhouses where we were regaled with glasses of rich milk, and the most glorified squash-pie. In time, he made himself so agreeable that my cousin seemed a mere unformed stripling in comparison.

Tom resented it after a while, and one evening when we came in from a ride, rather late, we did not find him waiting for us as usual, nor did he come home to supper. About eleven o’clock, as we sat in the drawing-room listening to Elize playing, he came up the yard, walked through the hall and [upstairs], whistling the while, and did not show himself that night.

The next morning I heard Elize go down early. Her room was next mine, and usually I had to wait for her. She had never before left her room before the breakfast-bell rang, but now she went down before the dressing-bell. I dressed hastily and followed, fancying she might be unwell. She was not in the breakfast-room, library, or parlor, and I stepped to the door to look out. No sign of her in the garden either. But as I went back into the house, I heard voices through a side-window that looked out on a little grape-walk. I went toward the window mechanically, and as I did so, heard Tom’s voice speaking pettishly.

“One would think the old man were making love to you himself,” he said.

I stopped short as her bubble of silver laughter broke out. Then in a voice as sweet, she replied, “Cannot you see that he is trying to keep me away from you? I don’t think it is treating either of us well; but what can I do? He takes pains to be courteous, and it isn’t for me to question his motives. But Tom—” There she faltered, and stopped, and I knew that she was trifling with a scarf, or a flower, or twisting the rings about on her fingers.

I couldn’t for the life of me stir, though I knew I was meant to listen.

“Well, dear?” said Tom, in a tone of fondness; and I could swear he held her hand.

“It—it makes me—makes me like you all the better,” she faltered.

Then there was silence, or only an inarticulate murmur of fondness.

I turned away with a burning heart. Aside from the sorrow of seeing a break-in, or an inroad into our family circle, and the disgust of seeing Tom make a fool of himself, there was the rage of finding that grandfather and I had been used just as tools, and that all our wonderful plots to circumvent this young woman had ended in ourselves being circumvented.

When the breakfast-bell rang, there came a little soft tap at my door, and to my summons entered Elize Blackburn, radiant. She bade me good-morning in her most bird-like voice, kissed me lightly, complimented my morning-dress, and asked if I was ready to go [downstairs].

I managed to be civil, and even gay; for the next day was to be the last of her stay with us, and I meant to have grandpa speak to Tom that very night.

Elize stopping a moment to shake out her white morning-dress, I went down stairs first, and, reaching the foot, turned to look at her as she came down. How pretty she was! Her figure was all grace, its slenderness contrasted by the full flow of drapery that swept the stairs. She wore white, delicately trimmed with Valenciennes lace, and a little coquettish square of lace lay on the top of her heavy hair.

She came down with that same radiant smile, stepping daintily, but just as she reached the landing, glancing aside at the opening of a door, she grew suddenly pale, and the smile dropped off like a mask. I followed her look, and saw Bertie Slade, the housekeeper’s niece, who had only the day before come down from the city to make her aunt her annual visit. Bertie smiled a little pertly at the sight of my visitor, and dropped a courtesy to her, then saluted me more respectfully.

“Why, Bertie,” I cried out, “do you know Miss Blackburn?”

“Yes, miss,” she answered, with a confident smile, “I live in a house where Miss Blackburn used to visit.”

“I’m glad to see you, Bertie,” said Elize, recovering herself, though still very pale. “Come up to my chamber after breakfast. I want to ask you a thousand questions about people.”

Bertie nodded, with a significant smile, and Elize turned and preceded me into the breakfast-room. She gave Tom a quiet good-morning, as though she had not seen him before, and put out her hand to meet my grandfather’s, assuming the affectionate smile with which she usually greeted him. But she was absent in manner during breakfast, and could scarcely command herself to answer intelligently. As soon as she rose, she gave a word of excuse, and left the room.

“Will you take a little drive this morning?” my grandfather asked.

“Thank you,” she said, smiling back on him.

His face reflected her smile as he went out to order the carriage, bidding me be ready in fifteen minutes. As he went out, the housekeeper came into the room, and, after glancing about to see if I were alone, came nearer.

“Are you going out for a ride this morning?” she asked, in a hurried half-whisper.

“Yes,” I said. “Grandfather has gone to order the carriage.”

“Couldn’t you let him and the young lady go by themselves this time?” she asked. “I want a chance to tell you something, and she’s always about.”

“Yes. Is it anything about her, Mrs. Slade?”

“Yes, something Bertie told me last night. She’s got Bertie up in her chamber, to coax her to keep quiet; but she’s too late. The girl told me last night.”

There was a step in the hall, and the housekeeper beat a hasty retreat.

I went [upstairs], and met Bertie coming out of Miss Blackburn’s room, and crumpling a bank-bill in her hand. Elize stood in the open door, looking uneasily after her.

“Grandfather says be ready in fifteen minutes,” I said, affecting to see nothing. “But, Elize, would you mind if I didn’t go this morning? I have something to do at home; and my grandfather is so agreeable when you are to the fore, that I think I shall scarcely be missed. Eh, mavourneen?”

She gave me a quick, suspicious glance, and hesitated an instant.

“Won’t he find it stupid with only me?” she asked, as though that were the reason of her hesitation.

“O fie! You know I only play duenna. I dare say he would pay you some very tender compliment, if I were away.”

“Well,” she hesitated, going to get ready. “Only I wish you would go. But I am selfish, I suppose.”

My grandfather was a little stiff about my staying at home, seeming to fear that our visitor might take it as a discourtesy; but I persisted, and Elize, who seemed to have recovered her spirits, excused me very gracefully, and flung me back a kiss from her fingers as they drove away.

Then I sent for the housekeeper to my chamber, and prepared to hear her story. She came eagerly.

“I haven’t liked that girl,” she said, as soon as she was inside the door, “and I see plainly what she is at. I have that to tell which will make Mr. Thomas think twice before he marries her.”

Seating herself then, Mrs. Slade opened her budget.

“You see, miss, Bertie exclaimed the moment she heard the name of our visitor, and the minute we were alone, she told me what was the matter. I thought it might be another lady of the same name, and so made Bertie go out into the hall when Miss Blackburn came down this morning, and meet her face to face. I was peeping behind the door, and you saw how her face changed. In a minute I saw that the story was true.”

Here Mrs. Slade made a dramatic pause, to allow me to express my curiosity, instead of which, I suddenly remembered the duties of hospitality.

“Miss Blackburn is my guest, Mrs. Slade,” I said, with an air of great propriety; “and it would not become me to let a girl like Bertie come here and report anything to her disadvantage.”

The housekeeper looked at me in angry astonishment.

“How long have I known you, Miss Camilla?” she demanded, reddening.

“About ten years, I should say,” I replied, tranquilly. “But that does not make you an equal, nor change the fact of Bertie’s indiscretion. It was not proper that you should help her to play a trick on Miss Blackburn.”

Rising stiffly, Mrs. Slade made me a courtesy so sharp and sudden that it’s a wonder it hadn’t dislocated her knees, and marched towards the door. I called her back, and said a few soothing words. “If you will leave Bertie out of the partnership, I will gladly hear what you have to say,” I said. “But I saw Bertie coming out of Miss Blackburn’s room with money in her hand, and I want nothing to do with a girl who takes bribes.”

Mrs. Slade commenced rather stiffly, but gradually warmed with her subject, into which she entered with the unction of a true gossip.

“Bertie lives with Mrs. Lawrence Symonds, as you know, miss, and has been there as a nursery-girl these five years. She says that three years ago Miss Blackburn began to come there and give lessons in German and French. The family got to think a great deal of her, and she held herself as high as they. They were people who had got their money in a hurry, and were no great aristocrats, and they knew that the great people, some of them, made a good deal of her. So the Symonds had her stay to dinner on her lesson days, and often sent her home in their carriage, or took her out with them in the evening. Bertie says that Miss Blackburn could go to any part of the house, and used to advise the young ladies about their dress, and tell them what was

becoming. When they were going to any great party, they always liked to have her come and see them dressed.

“One night they were going out to the grandest party of the season, and they sent for her in the afternoon to come and help them. They had the hairdresser before dinner, and after dinner they began trying on their dresses with different ornaments to see which would look the best. Bertie was in the room, taking care of little Miss Alice, who wanted to see her sisters dress, and the new waiting-maid was there, and some of the other servants, with Mrs. Symonds, were in and out.

“The young ladies had a good many jewels, and they were all spread out on the dressing-bureau, and they would try first one, then another. Finally they were dressed and off, and Miss Blackburn helped put away their jewels, then went home herself.

“Two or three days after, Miss Mary missed a beautiful diamond crescent pin, which she had not worn for some time. Inquiry was made, and they all remembered having seen it the night of the party, but no one had seen it since. They sent right off for Miss Blackburn, to find if she had any recollection of it. She came, as cool as a cucumber, and said she recollected distinctly having seen it that night, reminding Miss Mary that she had tried how it would look fastening a scarf. But she had no recollection of it after, and was sure she did not put it into the casket. She recollected counting the things she did put in, and having an idea that something was missing, but couldn't make out what, and so concluded that all was right. The new waiting-maid was called, and recollected Miss Blackburn's saying, after the others were gone, and they two were putting away the things, that it seemed as though something were missing. Jane couldn't guess what it might be, for she hadn't been there long enough to know what the young ladies had, and there had been no more said about it.

“Well, suspicion fell on Jane. Miss Blackburn wouldn't accuse her, but said she had thought the waiting-maid seemed embarrassed when she put the question about the missing article. Jane was wild about it. She was a respectable girl, with a sick mother to support, and such a charge was ruin. But appearances were against her, and Miss Mary was very angry about her lost jewel, which was a keepsake. The girl was arrested, but nothing could be proved against her, and she was discharged. But her reputation was gone, and she could get nothing to do. The grief and distress killed her mother, and then the girl went right down. Bertie says she is a lost girl, and all because of that false accusation.

“For a year nothing was heard of the missing jewel, and Miss Blackburn was as intimate with the Symonds as ever. Of course they all thought from Jane's behaviour that she was the guilty one, and never dreamed that they had driven her to evil.

“One day a common-looking man called at the house, and asked to see Mrs. Symonds. When she went down to see him, he took a little paper out of his pocket, and opened it, and showed her a bent-up piece of gold-work, asking her if she had ever seen that before. She knew it in a minute. It was the frame of the diamond crescent, and easy to be recognized, though it had been bent and broken. He told her how he came by it. He was a jeweler, he said, and the week before, a young lady had come to him to buy a watch. He was to take, in exchange for a new-fashioned one, an old watch, some old gold and trinkets, and a sum of money. Among the old gold, this piece

struck him from its being bent up so much, as though particular pains had been taken to destroy the shape of it. After she went away, he bent the frame out into shape, and saw that it must have held some nice stones, and that it was of beautiful pattern and make, and not at all worn. After a while, he remembered the diamond crescent which had been advertised the year before, the advertisements having given a particular description of it. He made up his mind immediately that he had found the thief. He remembered her dress and her looks, and gave a description to a detective, but without explaining any more than he wanted to know who the lady was. He soon found that she was Miss Elize Blackburn.

“Well, it so happened that the young lady was in the house at that moment, and Mrs. Symonds sent for her to come [downstairs]. At first she attempted to deny having ever seen the man, but he could tell the number and make of the watch she had in her belt, and the articles she had given for it, and so she had to confess.

“She made a great time about it, and promised to give up the diamonds if they wouldn’t betray her. She said that she hadn’t been earning enough to pay her board, and that the jewels tempted her. She had meant to sell them, but had not dared.

“Well, she plead so that the matter was hushed up; but of course she never entered that house again. And of course everybody in the house knew the truth. But that didn’t save poor Jane or her mother.

“Now, Miss Camilla, do you think that young woman a fit associate for you, or a fit wife for Mr. Thomas?” asked the housekeeper, in triumphant conclusion.

Flag of our Union, July 27 1867