

"You mean I would be without the 'prunes and prisms' expression."

Mary struck her horse and rode forward a few yards, but presently fell back again beside her companion.

"What I asked you just now related to Eustace. Do you think——"

"I said I was not thinking."

"Well, begin at once. Is there any danger that Eustace will really try to marry Betty Clevering?"

"Danger is a wrong word, Mary. If Eustace is ever so fortunate as to win Betty, he should spend the rest of his life in thanksgiving. She is as true as steel, and better tempered than either of us."

"I am not disparaging Betty, and I have often wished our parents were not at outs, so that she and I might be better friends; we only meet at your house or places of entertainment. But, Joscelyn, you know—you must know what we all have hoped for you and Eustace."

Joscelyn turned her eyes fully and calmly upon her companion. "Yes, I know. I should have been even duller than you pronounced me just now not to see through your plan. Diplomacy is not your *forte*."

"You knew I—we all wanted you to marry——"

"Eustace? Yes; he and I have often laughed over it to each other. And now that you have mentioned it, I want to tell you frankly that there is not the faintest possibility of such a thing. As a friend Eustace is charming; but as a husband——"

"Don't! Your mouth looks as if you had bitten a green persimmon."

"Well, I think with Eustace as a husband life would be all green persimmons, without any prunes or prisms to break the monotony. It would be quite as bad on him as on me; you would make us both utterly miserable."

"I cannot believe it. I know Eustace looks at Betty with the utmost admiration and manages often to meet her; but 'tis much the same way with every pretty girl—he must be saying sweet things to them

all. But in his heart I feel sure he prefers you above all the rest, only your indifference holds him aloof. Here is a letter I had this morning, in which he devotes a whole page to happy imaginings about a soldier's welcome home when the war shall be over. He grows really poetic about shy eyes and the joy of holding a white hand in his. Whom can he mean but you?"

"Betty has shy eyes, and Janet has the whitest hands I know anywhere. As you said, Eustace has a roving fancy."

Mary sighed. "I intended to read the letter to you, but here we are at the bridge, and we will now be meeting so many people."

"Give it to me, I will read it at home," Joscelyn said, stretching out her hand with sudden interest. "It would be preposterous to waste all that sentiment on a mere sister; it takes an outsider to appreciate touches like that. Oh, it shall be read with all the accessories of a grand passion—sighs, smiles, blushes, and such-like incense." She laughed as she tucked the letter into her belt, but she did not say who the reader would be, and Mary took much comfort in the thought that she would appropriate the sentimental parts to herself. Whose eyes were softer than Joscelyn's, whose hands whiter or sweeter to hold?

And so, each thinking her own thoughts, they crossed the wooden bridge that spanned the river, the horses' hoofs making a rhythmic clatter on the boards. In the street beyond they came upon Mistress Strudwick carrying an uncovered basket heaped high with hanks of yarn. The road was a slight ascent, and the corpulent dame was puffing sorely.

"Why, Mistress Strudwick, you with such a load as that? What does this mean?" cried Joscelyn.

"It means that that little darkey of mine has run away again, and that there'll be one less limb on my peach-tree to-night when he comes back."

"Will you not take my horse and ride?"

"It's been thirty years since I was in