

CHAPTER V.

"WELL?" asked Isabel eagerly, "what does Mr. Hardyman say? Does he think he can cure Tommie?"

Moody answered a little coldly and stiffly. His dark, deeply-set eyes rested on Isabel with an uneasy look.

"Mr. Hardyman seems to understand animals," he said. "He lifted the dog's eyelid and looked at his eyes, and then he told us the bath was useless."

"Go on!" said Isabel impatiently. "He did something, I suppose, besides telling you that the bath was useless?"

"He took a knife out of his pocket, with a lancet in it."

Isabel clasped her hands with a faint cry of horror. "Oh, Mr. Moody! did he hurt Tommie?"

"Hurt him?" Moody repeated, indignant at the interest which she felt in the animal, and the indifference which she exhibited towards the man (as represented by himself). "Hurt him, indeed! Mr. Hardyman bled the brute--"

"Brute?" Isabel reiterated, with flashing eyes. "I know some people, Mr.

Moody, who really deserve to be called by that horrid word. If you can't say 'Tommie,' when you speak of him in my presence, be so good as to say 'the dog.'"

Moody yielded with the worst possible grace. "Oh, very well! Mr. Hardyman bled the dog, and brought him to his senses directly. I am charged to tell you--" He stopped, as if the message which he was instructed to deliver was in the last degree distasteful to him.

"Well, what were you charged to tell me?"

"I was to say that Mr. Hardyman will give you instructions how to treat the dog for the future."

Isabel hastened to the door, eager to receive her instructions. Moody stopped her before she could open it.

"You are in a great hurry to get to Mr. Hardyman," he remarked.

Isabel looked back at him in surprise. "You said just now that Mr. Hardyman was waiting to tell me how to nurse Tommie."

"Let him wait," Moody rejoined sternly. "When I left him, he was sufficiently occupied in expressing his favorable opinion of you to her Ladyship."

The steward's pale face turned paler still as he said those words. With the arrival of Isabel in Lady Lydiard's house "his time had come"--exactly as the women in the servants' hall had predicted. At last the impenetrable man felt the influence of the sex; at last he knew the passion of love misplaced, ill-starred, hopeless love, for a woman who was young enough to be his child. He had already spoken to Isabel more than once in terms which told his secret plainly enough. But the smouldering fire of jealousy in the man, fanned into flame by Hardyman, now showed itself for the first time. His looks, even more than his words, would have warned a woman with any knowledge of the natures of men to be careful how she answered him. Young, giddy, and inexperienced, Isabel followed the flippant impulse of the moment, without a thought of the consequences. "I'm sure it's very kind of Mr. Hardyman to speak favorably of me," she said, with a pert little laugh. "I hope you are not jealous of him, Mr. Moody?"

Moody was in no humor to make allowances for the unbridled gayety of youth and good spirits.

"I hate any man who admires you," he burst out passionately, "let him be who he may!"

Isabel looked at her strange lover with unaffected astonishment. How unlike Mr. Hardyman, who had treated her as a lady from first to last! "What an odd man you are!" she said. "You can't take a joke. I'm sure I didn't mean to offend you."

"You don't offend me--you do worse, you distress me."

Isabel's color began to rise. The merriment died out of her face; she looked at Moody gravely. "I don't like to be accused of distressing people when I don't deserve it," she said. "I had better leave you. Let me by, if you please."

Having committed one error in offending her, Moody committed another in attempting to make his peace with her. Acting under the fear that she would really leave him, he took her roughly by the arm.

"You are always trying to get away from me," he said. "I wish I knew how to make you like me, Isabel."

"I don't allow you to call me Isabel!" she retorted, struggling to free herself from his hold. "Let go of my arm. You hurt me."

Moody dropped her arm with a bitter sigh. "I don't know how to deal with you," he said simply. "Have some pity on me!"

If the steward had known anything of women (at Isabel's age) he would never have appealed to her mercy in those plain terms, and at the unpropitious moment. "Pity you?" she repeated contemptuously. "Is that all you have to say to me after hurting my arm? What a bear you are!" She shrugged her shoulders and put her hands coquettishly into the

pockets of her apron. That was how she pitied him! His face turned paler and paler--he writhed under it.

"For God's sake, don't turn everything I say to you into ridicule!" he cried. "You know I love you with all my heart and soul. Again and again I have asked you to be my wife--and you laugh at me as if it was a joke. I haven't deserved to be treated in that cruel way. It maddens me--I can't endure it!"

Isabel looked down on the floor, and followed the lines in the pattern of the carpet with the end of her smart little shoe. She could hardly have been further away from really understanding Moody if he had spoken in Hebrew. She was partly startled, partly puzzled, by the strong emotions which she had unconsciously called into being. "Oh dear me!" she said, "why can't you talk of something else? Why can't we be friends? Excuse me for mentioning it," she went on, looking up at him with a saucy smile, "you are old enough to be my father."

Moody's head sank on his breast. "I own it," he answered humbly. "But there is something to be said for me. Men as old as I am have made good husbands before now. I would devote my whole life to make you happy. There isn't a wish you could form which I wouldn't be proud to obey. You must not reckon me by years. My youth has not been wasted in a profligate life; I can be truer to you and fonder of you than many a younger man. Surely my heart is not quite unworthy of you, when it is all yours. I have lived such a lonely, miserable life--and you might so easily

brighten it. You are kind to everybody else, Isabel. Tell me, dear, why are you so hard on me?"

His voice trembled as he appealed to her in those simple words. He had taken the right way at last to produce an impression on her. She really felt for him. All that was true and tender in her nature began to rise in her and take his part. Unhappily, he felt too deeply and too strongly to be patient, and give her time. He completely misinterpreted her silence--completely mistook the motive that made her turn aside for a moment, to gather composure enough to speak to him. "Ah!" he burst out bitterly, turning away on his side, "you have no heart."

She instantly resented those unjust words. At that moment they wounded her to the quick.

"You know best," she said. "I have no doubt you are right. Remember one thing, however, that though I have no heart, I have never encouraged you, Mr. Moody. I have declared over and over again that I could only be your friend. Understand that for the future, if you please. There are plenty of nice women who will be glad to marry you, I have no doubt. You will always have my best wishes for your welfare. Good-morning. Her Ladyship will wonder what has become of me. Be so kind as to let me pass."

Tortured by the passion that consumed him, Moody obstinately kept his place between Isabel and the door. The unworthy suspicion of her, which

had been in his mind all through the interview, now forced its way outwards to expression at last.

"No woman ever used a man as you use me without some reason for it," he said. "You have kept your secret wonderfully well--but sooner or later all secrets get found out. I know what is in your mind as well as you know it yourself. You are in love with some other man."

Isabel's face flushed deeply; the defensive pride of her sex was up in arms in an instant. She cast one disdainful look at Moody, without troubling herself to express her contempt in words. "Stand out of my way, sir!"--that was all she said to him.

"You are in love with some other man," he reiterated passionately. "Deny it if you can!"

"Deny it?" she repeated, with flashing eyes. "What right have you to ask the question? Am I not free to do as I please?"

He stood looking at her, meditating his next words with a sudden and sinister change to self-restraint. Suppressed rage was in his rigidly set eyes, suppressed rage was in his trembling hand as he raised it emphatically while he spoke his next words.

"I have one thing more to say," he answered, "and then I have done. If I am not your husband, no other man shall be. Look well to it, Isabel

Miller. If there is another man between us, I can tell him this--he shall find it no easy matter to rob me of you!"

She started, and turned pale--but it was only for a moment. The high spirit that was in her rose brightly in her eyes, and faced him without shrinking.

"Threats?" she said, with quiet contempt. "When you make love, Mr. Moody, you take strange ways of doing it. My conscience is easy. You may try to frighten me, but you will not succeed. When you have recovered your temper I will accept your excuses." She paused, and pointed to the table. "There is the letter that you told me to leave for you when I had sealed it," she went on. "I suppose you have her Ladyship's orders. Isn't it time you began to think of obeying them?"

The contemptuous composure of her tone and manner seemed to act on Moody with crushing effect. Without a word of answer, the unfortunate steward took up the letter from the table. Without a word of answer, he walked mechanically to the great door which opened on the staircase--turned on the threshold to look at Isabel--waited a moment, pale and still--and suddenly left the room.

That silent departure, that hopeless submission, impressed Isabel in spite of herself. The sustaining sense of injury and insult sank, as it were, from under her the moment she was alone. He had not been gone a

minute before she began to be sorry for him once more. The interview had taught her nothing. She was neither old enough nor experienced enough to understand the overwhelming revolution produced in a man's character when he feels the passion of love for the first time in the maturity of his life. If Moody had stolen a kiss at the first opportunity, she would have resented the liberty he had taken with her; but she would have thoroughly understood him. His terrible earnestness, his overpowering agitation, his abrupt violence--all these evidences of a passion that was a mystery to himself--simply puzzled her. "I'm sure I didn't wish to hurt his feelings" (such was the form that her reflections took, in her present penitent frame of mind); "but why did he provoke me? It is a shame to tell me that I love some other man--when there is no other man. I declare I begin to hate the men, if they are all like Mr. Moody. I wonder whether he will forgive me when he sees me again? I'm sure I'm willing to forget and forgive on my side--especially if he won't insist on my being fond of him because he is fond of me. Oh, dear! I wish he would come back and shake hands. It's enough to try the patience of a saint to be treated in this way. I wish I was ugly! The ugly ones have a quiet time of it--the men let them be. Mr. Moody! Mr. Moody!" She went out to the landing and called to him softly. There was no answer. He was no longer in the house. She stood still for a moment in silent vexation. "I'll go to Tommie!" she decided. "I'm sure he's the more agreeable company of the two. And--oh, good gracious! there's Mr. Hardyman waiting to give me my instructions! How do I look, I wonder?"

She consulted the glass once more--gave one or two corrective touches to

her hair and her cap--and hastened into the boudoir.