

had not what he called common sense checked the words about to be spoken.

Like a fresh breeze blowing through pine woods, came Olivia Waite into the old house she elected to make her home. The Squire, Molly, and even old Catharine fell under the spell of the new-comer's personality. Her gay good-humor captivated everybody but Julian.

'What you people see in that girl is a mystery to me,' he groaned, sitting with Molly in a corner of the hall one Sunday, 'she is downright ugly!'

Which was true so far as regularity of feature or beauty of complexion went; but Molly, glancing at her chatting merrily over the tea-table with the Squire and John Benet, wondered how anyone could consider that bright animated face ugly.

'It's like coming into a new world,' said Olivia. 'Now, I have been here a month, and—where do you go to church, Mr. Julian?'

The question came with an abruptness displeasing to that gentleman.

'I—ah—do not go to church, Miss Waite.'

'Dear me! That's interesting. You're the first atheist I've met.'

'My dear!' from the Squire, much perturbed.

'Well, a person who doesn't go to church must naturally be an unbeliever,' observed the young lady, unabashed. 'Your brother is a Catholic like ourselves, you say, Mr. John? In my country Catholics go to Holy Mass; don't they do so here?'

'I—er—claim freedom of opinion, Miss Waite,' began Julian, intensely annoyed, but Olivia smilingly interrupted him.

'Of course you do. That's what I said. An atheist is a person who doesn't believe in God, but follows his own opinions. You see, uncle dear, I was right. Some more tea, Molly? Oh, I quite understand.'

A troubled look came into Molly's eyes, a look still there when Julian, inwardly raging, took his departure.

Nothing tries a girl more, or is more unfair on the part of a man, than what is known as an 'understanding.' No word of love is spoken, though much is looked; no promise is made, none exacted; yet the man appropriates the girl's society, makes tender confidences to her, always seems on the verge of saying 'I love you,' and keeps her on the tenterhooks of expectation.

'When he asks me to marry him,' said Molly to herself, crimsoning at her own boldness, 'I shall have a right to speak to him about sacred things. Till then I can only pray for him.'

Which she did with a fervor he by no means deserved.

Her eyes were full of a wistful hope when, a few days after, Julian appeared with a new poem.

'You will appreciate this,' he said, his tone making Molly's heart tremulous with anticipation; 'it's the best thing I've done. By the way, I've read it to Vallett. Your new tenant is quite a literary man.'

A dilapidated old mansion belonging to the Squire, for want of repair fast becoming a ruin, had been taken by a Mr. Vallett, who, in a most unbusiness-like way, was willing to undertake repairs at his own cost, and also to rent the long-neglected land lying round it. A stroke of luck which seemed to have taken years off the Squire's age.

'Vallett and I have struck up quite a friendship,' went on Julian; 'he pronounced this poem remarkable.'

It was. Molly listened to its reading with a pucker between her eyebrows, caused by the intensity of her unavailing attempts to understand it.

'What is the title?' she asked, hoping thus to gain light on the subject.

'The Philosophy of the Non-Existent.'

And at that instant in came Olivia.

'Dear me!' she exclaimed merrily, 'in the name of all that is reasonable, what can the Philosophy of Nothing mean?'

'The idea is a recondite one, Miss Waite—' began Julian stiffly, rolling up his manuscript.

'So I should think. Good gracious, Molly! Don't look so bewildered. Even Mr. Benet can't expect you to understand the philosophy of what there isn't!'

Julian held Molly's hand lingeringly as he took his leave.

'You at least know how to appreciate the outpourings of a poetic soul,' he murmured.

And poor Molly, who had expected outpourings of quite a different kind, felt sick at heart with disappointment.

'A detestable young woman, that Miss Waite,' remarked Julian to his new acquaintance, Mr. Vallett, a week or two later; and the conversation that followed, with Olivia as its topic, would have interested that young lady considerably.

Banaghree chapel was a mile away among the hills. The Squire and his household entering it as usual one Sunday morning, Molly caught her breath with a thrill of joy, for there besides his brother knelt Julian.

There was no opportunity to exchange a word with him on their homeward way, however, for—contrary to all precedent—Julian paired off with Olivia, and Molly, walking with John Benet, left a keen pang of disappointment, longing to know what the two in front were talking about.

'What you said of my neglect of religion convinced me of my error,' Julian was saying, in his most impressive manner; 'your words made me think.'

Olivia was unusually grave. She made no answer.

'I hope you will honor me now with your friendship,' he said, deferentially.

'Any friend of my cousin should be my friend,' replied Olivia, after a pause.

Julian looked at Molly, then at the slim figure beside him, and—for the first time—drew comparisons not in Molly's favor.

'I should like to ask your opinion—' he began.

'Not on poetry, I hope,' returned Olivia, with a smile; 'we're not sympathetic on that point, you know.'

'No, but—'

'Nor yet on theology; there's Father Casey to settle your doubts, if you have any.'

'You are laughing at me,' in a tone of injury.

'Well, perhaps I am,' returned Olivia frankly.

'What do you want my opinion about? Your choice of a profession? Wouldn't your brother or Molly be better advisers?'

'Oh, John is utterly unsympathetic; and Miss Creagh—oh, poor, poor Molly! lacks that insight—'

'That I possess,' laughed Olivia. 'Thank you, Mr. Benet. Oh, yes, certainly. You may call upon my insight and other good qualities whenever you please.'

From that Sunday Molly dated the period of the keenest unhappiness she had ever known. Without any warning she found herself suddenly relegated to the Arctic environments of the unwanted third person, and for the first time felt the attacks of the fiend of jealousy; and her struggles against them made life a misery.

From her window she daily saw Olivia with Julian setting off for long walks, or chatting confidentially in the garden, and wept over her unwomanly folly in giving her love to a man who had felt nothing but friendship for her.

Now and then she met John Benet, and his companionship helped her, for he had the rare and exquisite gift of a delicate comprehension of the troubles of others, though his anger was hot against his brother.

'Seems to me,' said the Squire one day, 'that young Benet is paying court to Olivia.'

Molly made an inarticulate reply.

'What's he going to marry on?' continued the Squire, 'he's nothing, and Olivia has little enough. He's not the man I should choose for a daughter of mine.'

'He's very clever, father.'

'Clever!' echoed the Squire, 'any lunatic could string together a pack of senseless words, and his brother working hard all day on the farm! Making it pay, too, at last, is John!'