

her innocent soul, and the conflict was reflected in her beautiful, flowerlike face, as if in some clear, unspotted mirror.

Her gentle bosom heaved with its load of love and pride, and joy, and timid fear; sweet maiden shame dyed her cheeks a deeper rose, that spread to brow, and neck, and down to her delicate finger tips, as she put out her hands appealingly, as if to keep her lover off.

The breath came fluttering from the parted, ripe, red lips, that Cyril thought he would have given his soul to kiss; and, as she gave him one swift tell tale glance from her deep blue eyes, the last remnant of worldly prudence and discretion flew to the winds, and he resolved, at all costs, to possess her.

"For what do I care for life, the richest, the highest, unless she shares it with me? I love this girl; I love her in truth; this is no passing affair, like others have been that I shall tire of and get over; just as this girl is different to other women, so is my passion for her different to other passions; I feel that I would rather lose life itself than lose her!"

And aloud he said, reproachfully, and gazing wistfully at her perfect lips and downcast eyes:

"You shrink from me? You put out your pretty hands to drive me away. What have I done? Why are you angry? Is it a crime for me to love you?"

"To love me!" The words were breathed forth low and sweet. "Oh, you have known me such a little time, how can you love me?"

He caught her little hands and pressed them to his hands—they were all alone in the old-fashioned orchard, no one saw.

"How can I choose but love? Ah, Dolly, to say I love you does not say enough; I worship, I adore you, my sweet, sweet darling! Why not, oh, my own, since you love me?"

And then she was in his arms, her own clung around his neck; she never knew, thought, questioned how.

Frank was forgotten; all care, fear, misgiving had fled away, the quiet orchard had become enchanted ground, and Dolly and lover were in heaven!

From this delicious dream her father's voice aroused her, calling her from the house.

She started, and turned pale, and would have withdrawn herself from Cyril's embrace, but he held her jealously.

"Papa!" she whispered, trembling. "What will he say? How shall I dare tell him?"

Her lover smiled, superior to her fears. He knew himself more than a desirable match for Mr. Lisle's daughter, and any expectation of that gentleman's disapproval was the last thought that troubled him!

"You shall not tell him at all. That is my duty, sweet, just as soon as you give me leave. For I must have you, I must!" he added passionately, "if all the world stood in the way!"

She raised her eyes to his in innocent surprise, not quite unmixed with a soft alarm at his vehemence.

"Of course you shall have me," she said, tenderly, blushing like a rose, as she nestled in his embrace. "How could I marry any one but you? Oh, it would be impossible! Surely, Frank himself, will see that!"

"Frank!" He started, and put her from him quickly, holding her at an arm's length, while he gazed into her face. "And who is Frank, pray?"

She was frightened now; her lovely color died away, and her violet eyes grew large and wet with tears.

Everything was going wrong she thought; she was offending Cyril, and wronging Frank.

"Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?" she cried, and wrung her hands in deep perplexity, looking around as if for some escape.

Her hesitation set the man on fire; quick jealousy sprang up full grown in his heart, and blazed from his dark eyes.

"Answer me!" he said, more sternly than he knew.

"Answer instantly—who is Frank?"

And trembling, weeping, she stammered out: "The man—whom—papa says—I must marry!"

In an instant he caught her to his breast again, kissing, again and again, her quivering lips and tear-wet eyes.

"My love! my sweet! my own! Did I make you cry? Forgive me, forgive me! I feel so jealous, Dolly—oh, child, I think I should kill you if you could be false to me! And so papa says you are to marry Frank, does he? And what have you said, darling?"

Then she told him all. Clinging in his embrace, hiding her flushed and tearful face upon his breast, she told him the story of her childish betrothal much as I have told it to you.

It needed only that to decide him. He had hesitated, he had wavered even while he held her in his arms and realized how bitter to himself would be the pain of parting—even then he had held back from the one decisive step which once taken could never be recalled—but he ceased to waver now.

Another man claimed her. Another who might return at any time and hold her bound, and her father would support his claim.

His claim! Frank Osborn's claim to the woman Cyril Vernon loved! Cyril Vernon, who had never known what it was to deny himself or be

denied a single pleasure from his birth up.

And he loved this girl so passionately that life seemed valueless without her.

If she had seemed to him lovely and desirable while he believed that he had to ask and have, oh, how much more dear and precious was she now—now that another claimed her and formed an obstacle to the fulfillment of his desires.

He held her in an embrace that was almost fierce in its jealous possession.

"Could you keep your vows to him?" he demanded; "could you marry him and say farewell to me, Dolly, now?"

She grew pale with anguish at the thought.

"Oh, no, no, no! It would be wicked—it would be impossible—I love you, only you!"

He kissed her again and again.

"Then make the fulfillment of your promise to him impossible. Become my wife at once. Marry me secretly—there are reasons, dearest, which I will not now explain, that make it impossible for us to wed openly without some delay, and for us delay may mean ruin; besides, in a week I shall be compelled to return to town, for a short time at least, and if I leave you here—still free—and exposed to this fellow's influence, we shall be parted forever. When I go let me feel that I leave a wife behind me, with whom no man's entreaties can prevail."

And his arms were around her, his pleading lips caressed her cheek, his words and eyes and kisses, all at once implored her, as well as her own fond heart—what could poor, simple, loving, childish Dolly do but yield?

Although she made conditions: their marriage was to be kept a profound secret, until her father's consent could be obtained.

"And you will leave me with him and never take me away from him, until he does consent—consents to give me to you as your wife?"

He agreed to that. Concealment was even more desirable to him than to her for the present, if only he did not lose her by it.

Bright dawned her wedding-day—a day whose importance and solemnity none guessed save only Cyril and herself; she was stirring with the lark, poor child—hopeful, happy, fearful—and had left the house "for a day's shopping in the neighboring town," she said, before Mr. Lisle came down to breakfast.

The day passed by like an enchanted dream—she lived, moved, acted, spoke, as if under the influence of a spell—doubtless she was so—the spell of consummated happiness and love.

First there was the quiet marriage, most like a dream of all, and the pretty breakfast in the charming private rooms that Cyril had secured where no one could stare at or disturb them.

Then there was the bliss of hearing him call her wife again and again, as if he could not say the word too often, and the delight of being caressed, and cared for, and cherished, by her idolized lover and husband. Afterward they went for a long, pleasant stroll in the summer woods, where no sights or sounds of common life jarred on the music of their souls, but the cool, green solitude and silence seemed like heaven. And then, when the long, sweet dream drew near its close, there was the homeward journey side by side in the cars—when to sit thus side by side seemed bliss enough, and their happiness was so perfect that even the thought of parting for a few brief hours, though it might cloud, was utterly powerless to mar it.

They parted at the station, Dolly returning home alone, and in time for tea, in order to avoid exciting suspicion. As Cyril stood, gazing after her retreating form, with love in his eyes, a gentleman, who had been watching him, suddenly approached and slapped him on the shoulder; he turned hastily, and held out his hand.

"Hastings! you! What's the matter, for God's sake?"

"Your uncle is dead."

"Dead!" Cyril fairly staggered beneath the shock. "Dead—and they never sent me word that he was sick! How dead? When? Where?"

"How? By apoplexy: frightfully sudden, dear boy; took us all by surprise, so couldn't let you know about it. When? Yesterday afternoon. I would have come down last night, but there was no train. Where? In his easy chair, sitting with May in the library."

"May!" At that name Cyril Vernon started and paled, a circumstance not lost on his companion.

"Of course you will come home at once."

"Of course. At least—that is, not at once, for there's a train directly, and I have adieux, preparations to make," and in his heart he thought, in great distress— "Dolly! How am I to break the news to her?"

Fred Hastings caught at the word "adieux," "To your pretty companion of the cars, I suppose. Jove! what a little rustic beauty! Looked at you with all her soul in her eyes, too. Take care, dear boy, take care—May will hear of it!"

"Curse May!" broke in Cyril impatiently. "At least, I beg her pardon, I don't mean that of course, but you drive a fellow wild with your clatter. What the devil is May Ellis to me?"

"Humph!" said the other, meaningly. "Not so much as she was two months ago, when you left town; rustic Hebe has cut her out, I guess. Well, that's all right if the fortune's yours without conditions, as it will be, I hope. What's the next move then?"

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