

"She is mine, my very own!" he said, in that low, hushed tone that we ever use, when a feeling sweet and solemn oppresses us.

"I am glad, dear children, it is thus. Clare has told me. Is my May content? Is she happy?"

"Oh, so happy! Oh, mamma, God is very good to me. Is it right I, who have been so weak and repining, should be thus blessed? I have been so wicked!"

Stuart drew her into his arms, and looking down, said softly:

"My May is not wicked. She is one of God's angels, left to comfort our hearts!"

When I had stayed with them a little while, I stole off to where my poor Clare lay, alone and suffering. But though I stayed until I heard Stuart leave my room, with my head laid beside him, he only murmured:

"My comforter, my only love now!"

I have thought this all over, and I wrote it down with many sad misgivings; but now I think I can see a glimmering hope shining out from all this darkness.——Clare's love is a wild, deep passion, but I think not like Stuart's, rooted deeply in his very soul. With the latter, I think, did he live for years unloved, even never seeing the one he loved, at last, as deep and true, would that love be found shrined within his heart,—a bright, unwavering flame, unquenchable, although un-fed, ceasing only with the heart's last pulsation.

But Clare would be chilled by indifference; he would pine and droop did not love like to his own keep the flame alive. May's love, so quiet, would never have sufficed him. He suffers now the more that his love is so vehement; but had he found too late the heart he prized was not all his own, I dread to imagine what his life would have been.

God directs all our ways. He knows the best way for us; and this is the best,—hope of a happy life for my gentle daughter. Now, her love is surely grounded, and I cry, "Happy Marion Percy!"

## CHAPTER LV.

SEPTEMBER 1.

"MAMMA," said Lela to-night, kneeling beside me, "mamma do you think I am to be trusted with a secret which no one else knows?"

"Yes, pet," I replied, smiling, "I think I would trust you, but why?"

"Because——" and her voice trembled, "because I have a secret which I would rather tell no one in the world, no not even mamma," and she stroked my face tenderly, "not even mamma, who knows every other thought of my heart."

"But cannot my daughter trust me with this secret also, is it a very important one which requires such care?"

"The greatest, the most important of my life, mamma," she said in a low hushed tone, "that is why I cannot tell it, it is so near my heart."

"Oh, Lela, my child, is it right you should not tell me? My pet knows I am not a harsh judge, that even did my judgment, my larger experience of life, lead me to say it was wrong, yet I would do it in kindness."

"But it is something which concerns another, not myself alone. And it is not wrong, nor will anything ever come of it. It will not change me ever, mamma, to you or to myself, only I cannot tell it, at least not now, perhaps by-and-bye I can, but please let me keep it now, do not ask me to tell it to you, please do not, trust me, sweet mother, this once."

"I will, Leанore, I think I may, my good child," and I sealed the promise with a kiss of faith and love.

Who may I trust if not my child? In all the years in which she has gladdened my heart, she has been all mine in thought and word.

But I fear so sadly, Mr. Livingstone has somewhat to do with this, and yet she said "it was nothing wrong," and he is very wrong I fear, but she may not.

I do not know—— I will try to trust, and watch and pray, that no harm come upon my dark-eyed beauty.

Oh! after this grievous restlessness about Lela, how it has quieted me to sit beside Marion looking into her gentle

face, and listening to her tender words of hope and comfort. In heart and life is she a child of God, and her sweet face bears the impress of that peace which passeth understanding.

Oh, I am glad one of my own boys instead of a stranger has won my treasure, what should I do without her gentle helping hand.

"Have you told your mother of your offer, ma belle?" asked Mr. Audley of Lela to-day.

"Which one, sir?" was her careless reply, as she turned a saucy smile upon him.

"The last of course, you minx, *le grand offre de la saison*, was not that the last?"

Leanore's face turned crimson, and I caught a quick, half-frightened glance thrown upon Mr. Marstone, who was holding a skein of silk for May, his eye met hers, and a proud cold smile rested upon his face for an instant; but was gone so quickly, that I know no one but myself noted it. What does it mean, I wonder? what have her offers to do with him, I wish I knew?

"Of course," said Lela, recovering herself immediately and laughing gaily, "I am not going to own to any 'last' offer, at least not for many a day. If I conclude to tie a knot matrimonial sometime in the dim distance, then you may ask for the *dernier offre*."

"But have you told of this one, to which I was an awed but insignificant witness, you plague?" asked Mr. Audley.

"Non, *mon ami*, I will grant you the privilege, for which I doubt not you are in torment," and she carried her work to a window.

"Merci, ma belle, I have but one torment, 'an' she is one, she is one, but who she is I may not tell, never tell," then turning to me he went on, "my dear Bertha, you must know had this damsel been less difficult to please, you might to-day style yourself la mère de Madam la Baronne, for before we left London, we were pursued post-haste by the Baron S—, minister extraordinary from Russia to the court of Versailles, who in the most approved manner in my presence, sued most humbly 'for this fair hand,' &c."

"Of course you said yes," cried Mrs. Lawrence, "my dear girl of course you never thought of refusing him?"

"Of course I said no, dear madam," answered Lela, with flashing eyes, "yes, forsooth, as if I would deign, no,

no, I am too proud of being an American girl, too fond of liberty, to put myself into the hands of any minion of the Czar, beside," and she drew herself up with an air of dignity, mock, but so natural, "queens do not mate with subjects, if I cannot find an American sovereign to rule me, I must be content to remain a maiden queen to my life's end; and to tell the truth, I believe I would quite as leave, —but" she added, rising, "what nonsense, do let us do something better than listening to a record of my love-adventures, what shall we do, take a walk to the cliffs?"

And they went, all but Mr. Marstone, who pleaded business at home.

I wish I knew the meaning of that glance of half-confusion half defiance she threw upon him, and which, though he answered it haughtily, left his cheek strangely pale, and unerved him so; for afterward May said:

"Mamma, do you know when we were all talking, and Mr. Marstone was holding my silk, suddenly without any apparent cause he turned so white, and I felt his hand tremble like a leaf as I touched it in untangling the skein. I fear he is not well. I saw he tried to hide this attack, whatever it was, for he began some jesting remark to Ada the next moment; but afterwards before we started he came up to me and said:

"I think, Miss May, you noticed a sudden spasm which attacked me a while ago: it is caused by a disease of the heart.' And he smiled sadly. 'Please if I am ever unerved again, do not notice it. I shall depend upon you indeed, to cover over my spells with some quiet manœuvre.'

"Indeed I will, sir," I answered. 'Depend upon me. Oh sir, I am so grieved to hear that you have anything the matter with your heart! Papa died with a heart-disease, you know. It is very terrible to us always.'

He smiled a strange, grave smile, saying in a musing kind of way:

"Mine is not that kind, Miss May,—not mortal in its effects, though it is in its agony. Oh, little girl,' he added passionately, 'may you never know what I endure! And yet I stay like a martyr tied to a stake, while a ruthless hand pierces my tortured heart!'

"Was it not strange in him mamma? Could he mean in another sense than the one he meant to reach my ear—

that some one tortured him? and if he did, oh mamma, can it be Lela, who thus with her cold proud rejection of his most trivial kindness, makes the heart that loves her wretched? Oh it is a fearful thing to wound the loving heart of a true friend!"

I fear me much May's surmise is correct. What can it mean?

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CHAPTER LVI.

SEPTEMBER 20.

WITH many songs, dancing, and divers excursions, the summer-tide is ebbing out, going all too soon for the happy party assembled in this old country-house.

The time passes gaily between Rosedale and here. It is a difficult matter to tell to which place the young people belong, so equally do they divide their time between the two.

But among all the pleasures and happinesses of the time, Ada and Carrol are still unfriendly, although Harry Lester and I have done all we dare do towards cementing the shattered vase of their friendship or love, whichever it was. How true it is that hearts once parted are hard to come together again.

Poor Mrs. Lawrence is horrified that Ada should be unmarried at the great age of twenty, and rates her soundly.

"When you have every advantage, and suitors without number, to remain an old maid, precisely as though you never had a chance."

"But I do not want some great, cross man saying, You shall and you shall not," cries Ada, laughingly.

"Nonsense! I should think you might find some one among the many you know. There is Mr. Marstone. The girl will be happy who catches him."

"Which I never shall. Oh how I hate that idea of husband-seeking! As if that was all one had to live for. As if a girl's life, instead of being a beautiful, pure, self-sus-

tained existence, was only made up of the desire of entrapping a husband and making a good match!" said she, petulantly.

"But then all girls do so Ada, and you must marry some one."

"But to think of laying a snare to catch such a man as Mr. Marstone. I do not see how even you, mamma, can dream of such a thing. I think one glance from his cold, proud eye, would frighten all schemes away."

"Well, there are many others beside him, although he and Rolf Livingstone are the two most eligible. But you could never get Rolf I know. He will only marry a great beauty."

"Well," said Ada with a comical air of resignation, "since you are so weary of me, please—since I must get me a husband—ask old Mr. Wayne if he will have me. I am *une tres excellente bonne*, although not experienced in the gout."

This little dispute took place in my room; but after it was over Ada came to me.

"Oh, if I might only be happy my own way!" she said, wearily laying her head upon my shoulder.

What that way was, she did not say; but her sad tones struck painfully upon my ear. With all her wealth and fashionable pleasures, that my poor pupil had an aching heart, in her bosom, I could but see.

May's happiness now is a very different thing from the seeming of the old time when Clare had a part in it, that faint glow like the delicate coloring in the leaves which a tea-rose folds away in its heart, is on her cheeks again, and the clear eyes have only the old clear peaceful look in their hazel depths, not a sad shade of a something hard to endure, yet hidden, lying in them.

Bless my sweet child, such a glad life lies before her, with Stuart's strength to shield and comfort her always.

But Lela, my Lela, why do you thus cruelly steel your heart against the glorious beauty of a manly soul. Oh, child! child! he is so strangely like your father, I should think you would bow before him involuntarily, such a strange gravity, and yet with all, such an entrancing halo of manly perfection seems to hang about him, even from my obscure corner, to which none ever penetrate unbidden;