

ROSELIN
OR
A RUBY NECKLACE

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ROSELIN

OR

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BY

FREDA VIRGINIA METZ

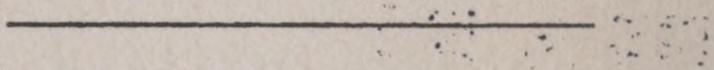
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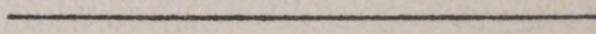
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ROSELIN

OR

A RUBY NECKLACE

CHAPTER I

THE FAMILY AT ROSELIN

“YES, Albert, I shall marry her some time in July, and, as for my children, I can care for them even better with Evelyn’s help.” These were the words which were silently echoing in Lillian Allington’s heart as she gazed out over the silent world; the soft murmur of voices on the veranda below and the gentle rustling of the warm spring wind were the only sounds that came to her; but above it all her father’s words kept ringing. Could she have been mistaken? Could it have been someone else speaking? Ah, no! She could not mistake those soft, deep tones. It was her father’s voice; it could be no other, and her head sank wearily upon her folded arms, and the slender form vibrated with emotion.

She fancied she saw that father leaving his children to bring home to them a new mother. She wondered what that mother would be like. Could she be as kind and loving as the mother who had left them but one short year ago? The thought of another taking that mother’s place and filling her vacant chair filled her heart with bitter pain. During the fifteen summers of her young life she had scarcely known a sorrow until her mother’s death had cast a shadow upon it, and now, as she realized that the shadows were becoming deeper, the tears which hung on the long lashes rolled softly down her cheeks.

The door opened and a tall, beautiful girl entered. The tresses of dark hair were done high on the well shaped head,

while pretty little curls fell upon the brow. Around her white neck was fastened a ruby necklace—the only jewel she wore—while her soft white dress contrasted beautifully with her dark, brilliant beauty. Advancing toward Lillian, she began:

“Oh, Lillian; you are here, are you? Up here alone in the dark! I have looked everywhere for you. I wish you would come down to the drawing-room and talk to me. Papa and uncle have gone to Ashville—that horrid, dull village!—and Willard has fallen asleep in his chair. I do wish papa had not come to Roselin so early this spring. I positively cannot see what attraction there is here. Everything is so dull! Just because Miss Marcusson’s health failed and we had to give up our studies, he seemed to think that a sufficient reason for coming out here to Roselin. Now, Lilly, do come with me. What are you doing here alone?”

Wilma paused and Lillian began: “I—I was just thinking——”

“Thinking, always thinking,” interrupted her sister.

“Wilma, did you ever think of papa marrying again?” Lillian asked.

“No, Lillian. I never think of such unreasonable things. Why, who are you going to have him marry?” she asked, as she drew near the white figure by the window and laughed a rippling little laugh.

“Neither had I thought such a thing probable, until I overheard him telling uncle that he would marry her in July,” continued Lillian.

“Lillian! did you hear papa say that? It must have been someone else; for whom do you think he would marry? The idea is absurd.”

“But, Wilma, I know whom I heard, and he said something about Evelyn helping him care for his children. It was papa’s voice; it could be no other.”

“Care for us; indeed!” burst from Wilma’s lips. “I think we are capable of caring for ourselves. Does he think we are babies, that we have to have someone to keep us out of mischief?”

“He didn’t mean that, Wilma,” said her sister. “But I wonder who this Evelyn is?”

"I don't know who it can be. Evelyn—Evelyn who, I wonder."

Then after a pause Wilma continued: "That makes but little difference, for whoever she is she will expect to manage the affairs at Roselin, but she will find it quite a task to manage me. A stepmother—horrors!" she exclaimed. "I'm not going to trouble myself about it, at any rate until I know it to be true. Come, now, and go down to the music-room with me, and say nothing about what you have heard."

Rising, Lillian slipped her arm through her sister's, and together they descended the stairs.

* * * *

James Allington had dined in the little supper room, with his family. After dinner the two Mr. Allingtons left the room and sought the cool, pleasant veranda. There they sat in the large easy chairs smoking in silence.

James Allington was a tall, square shouldered man of forty-five. His dark hair was threaded with gray, and his face wore a thoughtful expression. From his appearance one would know that he was a man of society. His brother was almost ten years younger, and of a slight build, but in his appearance, also, was the stamp of society.

Mr. Allington had left his Boston home and come to Roselin, his country place, near the village of Ashville, earlier than usual this spring, much to the displeasure of his daughter Wilma, and the delight of Lillian, who liked the country life. His brother had accompanied them, intending to remain a few weeks while his wife was visiting in New York.

Mr. Allington at last broke the silence.

"Albert, what do you think of my marrying again?" he asked abruptly, turning in his chair.

Albert leaned forward.

"Well, James," he returned slowly, "this is the first I have heard of it and I hardly know how to answer your question. That is a subject which concerns you and your children only."

"You remember Evelyn Thornton, do you not?"

"Yes, I remember her. You and Evelyn were quite fond of each other, when you were children together, were you not?"

"Yes, but somehow we drifted apart. She went south and

some years later married a well-to-do merchant in New Orleans."

They talked for some time and Mr. Allington finished a story of Evelyn's life in the south by saying: "Last October, while I was in New Orleans, I learned that Mr. Thornton had left the city some time before his death, and that his daughter was living in a small town several miles from the city. I made inquiries, and, as I had some time to spare, I decided to go to Western Springs and call. I found Evelyn in a pretty cottage there. Of course our old friendship was renewed and—well, Albert, you know the rest."

"So it is Evelyn Thornton you intend to make your wife," his brother replied, as he brushed the ashes from the end of his cigar. "But what about the daughter, James? I suppose you intend to bring her here when you marry the mother?" queried Albert.

"Certainly; Grace must go where her mother does. She isn't at all like Evelyn; a very pretty child, but rather delicate."

"But, James, what do you think your children will say to this marriage? Have you thought of all these things? Have you fully decided to marry?"

"Yes, Albert, I shall marry her some time in July, and as for my children, I can care for them even better with Evelyn's help," was the reply which reached Lillian's ears. "As yet, I have said nothing about it to them, but I shall soon. You say Jeanette will not return from New York for a month yet. Can't you make arrangements to stay at Roselin during that time?" he asked a moment later.

Each lighted another cigar, then Albert replied thoughtfully:

"Well, I don't know; I had intended going back to Boston next week."

"I'm going south in a few days, as I have business there," Mr. Allington explained, "and I will stop at Western Springs. I may be gone several weeks; I cannot say just when I will return, but I would like for you to stay here as long as it is convenient."

His brother promised to remain at Roselin as long as possible, then after awhile they rose and started for the village, and nothing more was said of the marriage.

It was quite late before the two gentlemen returned home. They found Willard, Wilma and Lillian still in the music-room. When they heard the footsteps in the hall they turned to greet father and uncle. Perhaps Wilma greeted her father a little coldly this evening, but he did not notice. Lillian met them with the same sweet smile she always wore.

"Now just one more song," said Uncle Albert. Lillian began turning over the music then placed a song before her sister.

"There, uncle; I know your favorite," she said.

Mr. Allington was very proud of his children as they sang. Willard was a tall, handsome boy of seventeen. He and his twin sister looked very much alike, and very different from the little golden-haired Lilly.

"How much my Lillian looks like her mother tonight," Mr. Allington thought. Then his thoughts wandered to the little grass-grown grave, by the brookside, just beyond the garden wall, and the cold white marble that marked it.

When the song was finished, he started. He had wandered from the present and had been dreaming of the past. Almost twenty years ago, he had brought his happy young bride to Roselin. Oh, what happy days those had been! But one April morning, only a year ago, the heart of their home was called; an earthly mound was made by the garden wall, and an expensive white marble, bearing the name "Margaret Allington," erected by the brookside, where several others were sleeping. In a short time he would bring another bride to Roselin and he hoped for a future as bright and happy as the past.

CHAPTER II

MR. ALLINGTON GOES SOUTH

SEVERAL days passed at Roselin, and Wilma and Lillian heard nothing more of their father's marriage. Wilma had almost decided that Lillian must have been mistaken.

She was in her room reading a letter which Clarice, the maid, had handed her, when she heard her father's voice calling to her from the stairs. He had returned from the office earlier than usual, and Wilma felt a chill creep over her as she heard him say:

"Wilma, will you come to the drawing-room a few minutes? I have something I wish to say to you."

"In just a minute," was the reply.

She felt that she could not go down just then. She could guess, from the serious tone of his voice, what it was her father would say, and she must have a few minutes in which to collect herself before she met him in the drawing-room to listen to the words that Lillian had heard, and which she had hoped were not true. That they were true, she now felt sure. She laid aside the letter and pressed her hands to her burning cheeks; then she raised the window and the cool air floated in. In a few minutes she arose and haughtily descended the stairs.

Mr. Allington found Willard and Lillian in the garden, where they had been setting out some plants which Lillian had brought with her from the city greenhouse. When Mr. Allington called them they looked up in surprise. Lillian brushed her apron as she followed her brother up the walk. She went into the kitchen where old Nan was preparing the evening meal.

"Oh, Nan, don't I look awful!" she exclaimed, throwing her light shawl over the back of a chair and turning for Nan to unbutton the big sleeved apron.

She washed her hands at the kitchen sink, then hastily brushed back the tangled curls. The old servant assured her

that she looked "fit to meet any lady she'd eber laid her eyes on yet."

Lillian found her father standing at the window gazing out as if in deep thought, while Willard sat turning the pages of a book. Just as Lillian leaned against the pillows of the divan the door opened again and Wilma appeared.

"Papa, I am here," she said; then Mr. Allington turned from the window and faced them.

"I have something of importance to say to you, my children," he began; a moment he hesitated, then continued, "I intend to be married soon and I would like, of course, to have the consent of my children. I am sure not one of you would object if you knew Evelyn Wilton as I do." He paused.

Lillian sat quite still, with her hands clasped tightly together. Every bit of color had left her cheeks and tears had gathered in her eyes. Willard did not look up from the book he held, but the words his father spoke struck him as a heavy blow.

Wilma's cheeks burned scarlet; her lips quivered, and it was with a mighty effort that she kept back the tears.

"Papa, how can you do such a thing!" she cried; "Our happiness is now at an end. Do you think our home will be a happy one? Oh, just to think of having a stranger here taking mamma's place; one whom our own father loves more than he does us." Her tone was one of mingled pain and reproach.

"No, no, Wilma, never say that. You know it would be impossible for me to love anyone more than I do my children," he replied in a trembling voice. "I am sure our home will be a happy one for I feel sure that you will all love Evelyn."

After a short pause, during which none of the children spoke, he told them of his intended visit to the south. "I shall leave in the morning," he said, "and I shall be very glad to tell Mrs. Wilton, when I see her, that my children will welcome her to their home."

He hesitated for a reply, and Wilma answered as she arose: "Welcome her, indeed!"

It was a very quiet group that gathered in the dining-room a half hour later. The little table was daintily set with delicate china and shining silver; the windows were open and the cur-

tains thrown back so that one could look far down the valley and across the lake.

Willard went to the village that evening. He had no desire to remain at home where everything was so quiet. Mr. Allington and his brother were busy. Several letters must be written and other business attended to preparatory to Mr. Allington's departure. The girls sat for a short time in silence after they were left alone.

"You see, Wilma, I was not mistaken," said Lillian at last.

"No! but, Lillian, why didn't you say something? Neither you nor Willard said a word; you just left everything for me," was the impatient reply.

"There was nothing to say, Wilma; it could do no good," Lillian answered.

"I don't care; do you suppose papa really thought we would be delighted to 'welcome her to our home' as he says?"

"I suppose he did. He said we would love her, and oh, Wilma, I do hope she is as nice as papa seems to think she is, and I hope we shall love her."

"Love her, indeed! are you losing your mind or what is the matter with you, Lillian?"

"Well, don't you want her to be nice and good to us?" asked Lillian.

"Stepmothers never are, and I imagine you will find out a few things before Mrs. Evelyn is here long. I really shouldn't be surprised to hear you call her 'mamma,' first thing."

Tears came into Lillian's eyes, but she did not reply. She soon arose, and saying her head ached, went to her room and Wilma, tired of being alone, soon followed.

The next morning was dark and dreary and by the time the master of Roselin appeared in the lower rooms, where the servants were already busy with their morning work, the drops of rain had begun to patter against the windows.

Lillian came down looking pale and worn, for the headache of the previous evening still remained. As she entered the kitchen for the shawl she had left there, an interesting conversation was interrupted.

The servants had often wondered why Mr. Allington went south so often and this morning when Ruby, the kitchen girl,

came with the news that "Master Allington's goin' south again," old Nan said "Wal, Ruby, I 'low thar's more 'traction down thar than business, fo' this is the fourth time he's gone in de las' seben months."

"Why, Nan, do you reckon he's got a girl down there?" asked the astonished girl.

"Sho' I do reckon dat very thing," answered the old colored woman; "but Lo'd-o-massy, I do hope he won't take a fool notion and bring a woman heah to be a bossin' us 'round. I hain't no use fo' dem aih so'then ladies, nohow."

"Why don't you like southern ladies, Nan? I don't think I know any of them; are they different from other people?"

"Lan' sakes, chil', I say dey air. Dey's all stuck up, and knows how to boss de servants, too, I should reckon. Jist wait till you have one a bossin' yo' an' yo'll fin' out.—Why, good mo'nin', Miss Lilly. How pale and purty yo' look dis heah lobe'ly mo'nin'," she continued, as Lillian appeared.

"I don't feel very pretty this morning, Nan," returned Lillian with a smile.

"Law, chil', is yo' sick?"

"No, no, only a headache, and I don't like dark, rainy days. I do wish the sun would shine. Where is my shawl, Nan? I think I left it here, didn't I?"

"Yes, heah it is, honey; I dun laid it over heah whar 'twould stay nice." She took the neatly folded shawl from the corner table and gave it to Lillian, who, with a simple "Thank you, Nan," left the room.

"I do hope dat chil' ain't goin' to be sick. Law, but wouldn't it be a shame if she'd have to have a stepmother. Lo'd, gal, don't you know dat sass is burnin'? It's most time fo' breakfas' now, and all you've dun dis blessed mo'nin is stan' 'roun' and talk."

Nevertheless breakfast was served in due time, and Mr. Allington sat waiting for the carriage which was to be ready at nine.

"Oh, papa, don't be gone long, for I know we shall be awfully lonesome without you," said Lillian in a pleading voice, as she bade him an affectionate farewell.

"Yes, dear, I shall be back before long; and I hope my little girl will feel better soon," he said, looking at the pale face.

She slipped her hand into his and they went into the hall together just as Wilma came hurriedly down the stairs.

"Why, papa," she said, "you were about to leave before I knew it. I didn't know it was so late."

Mr. Allington kissed the pretty face and left them.

Many times that day, as the train rushed on, carrying him farther from home and nearer New Orleans, did he think of his children;—how proud he would be when he could show them to Evelyn—his beautiful Wilma, handsome Willard and fair haired Lillian.

CHAPTER III

MRS. WILTON

THE little village of Western Springs lay in a quiet, peaceful valley a few miles from the large, noisy city of New Orleans. At the edge of the village stood a pretty little cottage. The southern Rambler climbed gracefully up the veranda and the crimson blossoms, with which it was loaded, filled the air with sweet perfume.

It was a very cozy home, but very different from the elegant place in New Orleans which Mrs. Wilton once called "home." Almost ten years had passed since she left that home, where she had been happy with husband and babies, and for over eight years had she lived at the cottage alone with Grace and her maid.

Mrs. Wilton could hardly be called beautiful; there was always a sad expression on her face, and, although only thirty-eight years of age, her brown hair was threaded with gray; but one who knew her story would not wonder at this.

Her father had been very wealthy, and her slightest wish had always been gratified. Her brothers and only sister were older than she, and the family had always loved and petted the baby Evelyn. A few months after the family moved south, Evelyn, then a young girl of nineteen, had met William Wilton, a prosperous merchant in the city, and they had become friends at once. In a short time friendship ripened into love. Mr. Thornton did not approve of the little love affair and did everything in his power against it. At last he forbade Evelyn to see Wilton and for awhile she obeyed, though her love grew with every passing day.

One day Mrs. Thornton was taken quite ill, and Evelyn forgot her love while she kept her untiring watch over her mother; but when the end came and her mother had gone forever from this world, it was to Wilton she went for comfort.

The father in his grief had forgotten his daughter and her lover, and many an hour did they spend together.

One day she went to her father and poured out all her story. She had promised to become William Wilton's wife. She had no other thought but that he would forgive her for those stolen meetings and give his consent to the marriage; but she was greatly surprised and distressed when the father, whom she had loved and who never before had refused her what she asked, turned from her. Wilton was an honorable young man, but he was not of the class from which Mr. Thornton would choose his son-in-law, the husband of his daughter. He was doing well in business, but he was by no means what Mr. Thornton would call a wealthy man. "It must never be," he said to himself as Evelyn left the room without a word of hope.

A week later she went to him again. Her sister Carrie had been there before her, pleading her sister's cause. And as Evelyn came in, he noticed the sad white face and it softened his heart and he spoke tenderly to her. She repeated the story of her love and this time he listened. When she had finished he arose from his chair and said: "Evelyn, I have loved you and tried to make you happy; if you think you will be happier with him than me, go to him—marry him. Evelyn," he continued in a cold, hard voice, "most fathers would send you from them and never look upon your face again if you dared disobey them. I will not do that; I cannot do it; but remember this, you may some day regret your rash act, my child."

William Wilton was determined to give his wife a beautiful home and every comfort she enjoyed at home. He purchased a beautiful residence on one of the most fashionable streets in the city, and he was sure Evelyn would be pleased with her new home. Many an expensive piece of furniture was purchased, and when some time later he took his young bride to his home, she was delighted to think it was hers and William's. In a short time her father left the city and went west with Carrie and the boys, and Evelyn felt quite lonely for awhile, but her love for her husband and her interest in home duties soon drove away all thought of loneliness.

After several years two bright babies were added to their number. First a little boy with dark curly ringlets, then a

brown-eyed daughter, four years younger. Several times during those eight happy years their doors were thrown open to society; then came a sad day. William Wilton stood on the brink of failure. For weeks he worked day and night to save a part of his fortune, but when the last creditor was paid, there was little left for the family. Mr. Thornton had died the year before, leaving only a small portion of his fortune to Evelyn, and now thoughts turned to Wilton's people, in England, and he decided to go at once and see what he could do. Perhaps he could go into business with his father, and thus regain his lost fortune.

He took Eldred with him, and, if he decided to remain, Evelyn and little Grace were to come later with a party of friends. They parted with hopes of a prosperous future in England.

Evelyn never forgot that parting; how she took her darling boy in her arms and kissed him again and again. She was saying good-bye for a much longer time than she knew, for they sailed out on a quiet blue sea in the ill-fated vessel, *Atlanta*. She never forgot the kisses her husband pressed on her lips and brow—the very last he would ever give her. Then, standing on the wharf, she watched as they waved the last good-byes from the deck. She watched until they disappeared from view and nothing could be seen but a vast stretch of blue waters; then she caught little Grace tightly in her arms and hurried back to her home, heartily wishing that she had gone with them instead of waiting until later.

It was a long week that followed for Evelyn, without a word from the *Atlanta*—then came the dreadful message. The *Atlanta* had sunk only a few miles from Cuba; only five were saved to tell how their fellow-passengers had gone down to a watery grave on the ocean bed. Three rescue boats had gone to their aid, but the wind was so strong that two of them were soon carried out of reach of the sinking vessel. One was left to help the drowning victims; then after a fierce struggle with the wind and waves the life-saving boat landed on the Cuban shore. As Evelyn glanced down the list of the lost, her eyes fell upon "William Wilton and son." She uttered one cry of pain, then became unconscious. For several weeks she hovered

between life and death. When at last consciousness returned she asked the nurse if it were a horrid dream, but the nurse bade her be quiet and sleep. Then it all came back to her; she knew it was not a dream. Then she thought of Grace and she knew that for her sake she must live. What would her baby do with neither father nor mother? She would be left alone with no one to care for her. It must not be—she must live; and from that time she began to grow stronger day by day.

She must leave her home, for it was no longer hers. Her father had left her "Vale Cottage" at Western Springs, and there she and Grace would go. At present it was rented and she must wait almost a year. Of her handsome furniture, which had not been touched by the creditors, she kept enough to furnish her cottage and the remainder was sold. Two small rooms were rented and one bright spring day she, with her only maid, Delia, left her elegant home for the dark little rooms, which for a year were to be her home. All the other servants were dismissed. She had fallen from the society which had once been proud of the rich Miss Thornton and the elegant Mrs. Wilton. Now those who had once been her friends had forgotten her.

The year passed and she left New Orleans and took possession of her little home. There she was quite comfortable. Grace grew to be a pretty child. She looked much like her father, with her dark hair and brown eyes. She was her mother's constant companion outside of school hours, and to her Mrs. Wilton longed to give every advantage she herself had received when a young schoolgirl. But she found that with her limited means, she must trust her education to public instructors, at the village school, and the thought of giving Grace a governess was put aside.

Mrs. Wilton was very much surprised when, one morning late in October, Delia came to her room with a card bearing the name of James Allington. She was very glad to see him, for it had been many years since they had met. They spoke of old friends in a conversational way, and at last, by devious paths he brought the conversation back to their youth; then she told him the sad story of her life and he spoke many sympathizing words. When he left her he said: "Evelyn, I

come south on business quite often and when I have spare time I shall be pleased to visit Vale Cottage, if I may." She assured him that he would be a welcome visitor at the cottage any time he found it convenient to come.

Evelyn seemed more like herself that evening than she had for years. She had talked of her younger days with an old friend and she felt better for it. After Mr. Allington was gone she sat thinking of the past and of the future. Grace was her only comfort—the one bright star that shone upon her horizon. Had William lived, how different would have been her story. Had her father divided his property equally between his children, her daughter could, at least, have received an education such as the mother wished for her—but that could not be.

* * * *

Mr. Allington came again to Vale Cottage. He was staying several weeks in the south, and he came to call often. The last day of his visit he startled Mrs. Wilton by declaring his love for her. She had liked James Allington when they were children, but she had loved since then, and she had never thought of the fancy of her childhood until now; but she liked him still. She told him that she could never go to his home, take her place as mistress there, and be a stepmother to his children. No, never! They, she knew, would not consent to their father's marriage, and without it she would not consent to become his wife. "Your first duty is to care for your children and do nothing to make them unhappy," she said. Then he described to her the loving, tender-hearted Lillian. "I know she will love you," he said; "and I know all of my children will welcome you and Grace to our home. Grace will receive every advantage my children do; that will be a great thing for her, Evelyn, and I am sure you will both be happy. Willard and Wilma, in a few years, will leave for college, then Lillian and I will be alone. With you and Grace we will be much happier." Mrs. Wilton would not give her consent then; she would write it later. She must think a while. After he had gone she found how much his presence had really meant to her. She had looked forward to each call, and, now that he was gone, she began to wonder if she really loved him. She had never thought of love for anyone but her lost William.

When she wrote her answer to Mr. Allington, she thought of the interest of her daughter quite as much as of her own. Grace would be happy there. She would receive every advantage and could go in better society than she otherwise could. She would try to be a mother to his children; try to make them happy, and perhaps they would learn to love her; and, with these thoughts uppermost in her mind, she wrote her consent.

Letter after letter came to Vale Cottage, bearing the Boston post-mark, urging her to an early marriage. She would rather go to Roselin first. "Some time in July," she had said, "when you are settled in the country, then you may claim me as your wife—not until."

* * * *

The sun shone bright and warm over the little village and at Vale Cottage everything looked bright and happy. The birds were warbling their morning songs and the roses in the garden were nodding in the gentle breeze.

Mr. Allington walked slowly down the broad avenue toward the cottage. He had left the dark, stormy north, and now drank in all the beauty of the south. The trees that shaded the avenue stood in long, stately rows on each side, and in the distance he could see the rose-covered cottage, shadowed by the branches of the sweet magnolia trees. Evelyn was there—his Evelyn—how he longed to claim her as his very own. He quickened his step and was soon at the gate.

A week passed—yet he lingered at the cottage. One day he was telling Evelyn of Roselin and ended by saying: "Evelyn, you said you would come to us when we were settled at Roselin; we are there now, but it is not yet July. Don't you think you could give an earlier date?"

"I hadn't thought of going earlier," was the reply.

"Yes, but we are there much earlier than we expected, and I think it would be well for you to go back with me. We can easily arrange things. My children do not expect the marriage until July, but it makes no difference with them; I dare say they will be glad to see us coming. Say the first of June, dear, and I will write them this very day."

"I suppose it will be as well, but Grace feels rather timid

about going to a fine home like you describe, though I feel sure she will like it after awhile."

That afternoon Mr. Allington puzzled over his letter; how should he tell his children that when he returned he would bring with him his wife and her daughter. As yet he had not even mentioned Grace. What would Wilma say? Would she really be "glad to see them coming" as he had told Evelyn? Lillian would say nothing against it, he felt; but Wilma—would she treat Evelyn as she should treat his wife?

Preparations began at once for the little wedding.

A short trip was to be taken through the south before Mr. and Mrs. Allington went to Roselin. Grace had planned to spend the week with a friend in Western Springs, and Delia, as Mr. Allington had written home, was to see to the packing at Vale Cottage, then go to Roselin, where she was to arrange the rooms for the mistress and her daughter.

CHAPTER IV

AN INVITATION

THE days passed slowly at Roselin and Wilma longed to be back in the city, until one day the mail came, bringing an invitation to Lakeview.

"Isn't it dear of Mrs. Carrelton to think of us? I am perfectly delighted!" Wilma cried rapturously. "This is far better than the city. Think of a two weeks' house party at Lakeview with Mrs. Carrelton and Marie. Isn't it glorious!" and she danced gayly about the room, waving Mrs. Carrelton's letter in the air.

"Great!" shouted her brother, bouncing up from his nap and joining the dance. "Two weeks at Lakeview will be jolly!"

"Now I'll have something good to tell Genevieve when she comes!"

Wilma stopped short and frowned angrily upon her sister.

"Genevieve Layton! Horrors, Lillian! I'd been hoping you had forgotten her!"

"Forgotten Genevieve? No, indeed! I've just come from there. I've seen her every day since we came to Roselin."

"You'd better tell her you are engaged for this evening," returned Wilma.

"But I'm not engaged!" Lillian answered.

Genevieve Layton was the daughter of a poor but honest farmer who had died several years before, leaving his wife alone to care for the two children and her invalid mother. Though the struggle had been a hard one, Mrs. Layton had succeeded in keeping her children in school until they had both—first Robert, then Genevieve—completed the high school course taught in the village; and Genevieve, along with her school work, had managed to assist with the office work at one of the village stores.

They were the nearest neighbors of the Allingtons, and Genevieve and Lillian had always been friends. During the

summer days, as they rambled through the leafy wood or rested on the long green slopes, near the sparkling lake, Lillian would relate many a story of her winter's schooling or of parties she had attended in the city, and Genevieve was always interested.

According to her promise, Genevieve came to Roselin that evening and found Lillian waiting for her in the garden.

"Oh! Genevieve, we are going away Thursday to be gone two weeks," exclaimed Lillian, delightedly, taking both her friend's hands and pressing them affectionately in hers.

"Are you, Lillian? I shall miss you dreadfully. It will seem lonely now without you."

"I do wish you could go with us, Genevieve. Wilma, Willard and I are going to a house party at Mrs. Carrelton's. It will be grand, for everything she has is always so perfectly planned. She is one of the leading ladies in Boston during the fashionable season there, but she spends several months each year at her beautiful country home. Her daughter, Marie, is just Wilma's age and is very popular, although she isn't as pretty as Wilma. I really think Marie would like for Willard to make love to her." The last sentence was confided to Genevieve in a whisper; then Lillian arose to call Wilma to play some songs before Genevieve left, but Wilma only answered:

"I think you had better be making preparations for going to Mrs. Carrelton's, Lillian. I have no time for music this evening," and she continued to examine the lace on the thin party dress Clarice had laid before her.

Robert was to have come for his sister at nine, but an hour passed and, as he did not come, Lillian proposed walking home with her friend.

"Willard," she called at the library door, "will you walk down to Mrs. Layton's with Genevieve and me? Bob hasn't come and Genevieve says she must go home tonight."

"I shall be delighted to go with you," said Willard, laying down his book and coming into the hall.

Lillian ran up to her room for a shawl, and Wilma remarked with a sneer:

"I think I would have my brother take that girl home if I were you, Lillian Allington!"

Lillian was soon in the hall again where Genevieve and

Willard were waiting, and taking his hat from the halltree, Willard opened the door and the three passed out into the cool night air. The clock on the church steeple at the village was striking ten and the deep, mellow tones sounded like sweet music as they echoed and re-echoed among the huge branches of the trees and were then carried away on the May breeze. The full moon was shining brightly above the trees that bordered Roselin on the east and the sky was studded with stars. It was only a short walk and they did not hurry for it was pleasant walking down the moon-lit lane, shaded here and there by a tall maple. As they parted at the gate, Lillian said:

"Now, Genevieve, I do hope you will come over again before I go. Won't you come?"

"You will be so busy, I am afraid I shall bother you, Lillian. I fear I have kept you from your arrangements this evening."

"Oh, bother their arrangements!" said Willard; "Wilma is always making a fuss over a new dress, or making over an old one that doesn't need it, but Lillian isn't so bad. You will not bother Lillian, Genevieve."

"No, indeed, you won't. Please come," added Lillian, and they turned their footsteps toward home, calling back "good-night" to Genevieve, who stood at the gate watching them as they hastened down the lane.

"Wilma never has liked Genevieve, because she isn't one of 'our class' she always says; but she is my friend, and Wilma should treat her as such, but she simply will not do it," said Lillian sadly, when the little brown house was left in the darkness and only the faint light gleamed from the window.

"No, she will not, Lillian," Willard replied, and they walked on in silence.

The next day was Sunday, and the carriage drove up to convey the family to the village church. Wilma wore her proudest air, and as they passed Genevieve at the door she did not even recognize her with a bow, but brushed haughtily past and followed the usher to the cushioned pew which the Allingtons always occupied. Lillian noticed her sister's haughty coldness, and slipping her arm around Genevieve she whispered:

"Never mind Wilma, dearie; and remember, I shall expect you to see me before I go to Mrs. Carrelton's."

Genevieve smiled and nodded, and Lillian hurried on to join her sister.

Albert Allington, finding it necessary to return home, took the train for Boston on the following day and on Thursday the carriage was again seen at the depot. This time it carried Willard and his sisters, and the servants at Roselin were left alone. After much packing of the delicate silks, fine rose-colored brocades and thin crêpe tissue party dresses, the girls were at last ready. Genevieve, who came to Roselin the day preceding their departure, looked on in amazement, while Wilma, with Lillian's help, folded dress after dress and placed them carefully in their traveling trunks.

When the little station of Greenfield, some fifteen miles from Boston, was reached, Wilma called to Willard and Lillian, who sat on the opposite side of the car:

"Oh, look! there is Mrs. Carrelton's carriage waiting for us."

As she arose from her seat, one of her gloves fell from her lap. The young man who sat in the seat just behind her had heard the remark about the Carrelton carriage, and sat intently watching the young girl. The blue broadcloth traveling suit fitted perfectly, and a pretty blue hat crowned the masses of dark, waving hair. The man leaned forward, took up the little glove, and returning it to her, bowed politely.

"I beg your pardon; you attend Mrs. Carrelton's party, I believe."

Wilma answered in the affirmative and left the car, wondering who the tall, handsome stranger could be, and what he knew of Mrs. Carrelton's party. Two other guests entered the Carrelton carriage and were swiftly rolling through the village. As Wilma looked up from smoothing down the folds of her dress, she was surprised to see the fair-haired man she had seen in the car, seated opposite. Then he was one of Mrs. Carrelton's guests, too. Oh, wasn't he handsome! So tall and stately! and such a frank, open countenance.

The road after leaving the village streets, led through a beautiful park. The tall trees were whispering softly, and the music of the fountains could be heard, as the carriage moved down the broad drive. Lillian was delighted with the scenery

and when she saw the clear blue lake sparkling in the distance, she longed for a row on its smooth surface.

"Willard, you must take me for a row tomorrow! It will be delightful, and we haven't had a single one since we went to Roselin," she said, with a happy smile.

While Lillian was enjoying the scenery, Wilma and the other guest—Frances Higdon, a young lady from Baltimore—were talking gayly of Boston and its people.

"Oh, didn't we enjoy the ball Mrs. Carrelton gave for us!" Miss Higdon was saying.

"Yes, it was perfectly grand," returned Wilma.

"I am confident her house-party will be just as nice; everything she has is a success."

"And she has such a pretty place. Isn't the lake beautiful," said Wilma—Lillian's remark drawing her attention to the lake. "So calm and serene, isn't it?"

"Beautiful hardly describes it," answered Miss Higdon, when a turn in the road brought the lake directly into view; "it is more than beautiful. I am like your sister; I long for a row, and I am sure we shall have one before many days, Miss Lillian."

The carriage drove up a long hill and stopped before a large beautiful building, with towers and turrets and large bay windows. The majestic old oaks were wearing bright green, and they bent their stately heads as if to welcome the guests to Lakeview.

CHAPTER V

THE HOUSE PARTY AT LAKEVIEW

MARIE herself led Wilma and Lillian to their room. It was a pretty little apartment commanding a view of the lake. The room was perfumed from bouquets of roses that stood on the marble mantel over the fireplace, where the bright flames were now flickering. The evening was cool, although it was the first of June, and Mrs. Carrelton thought it would add to the comfort of her guests to have a little fire in their rooms. Nothing could have been prettier than that little room with its snow-white bed, draped with curtains of delicate blue.

"Come, Lillian, we must hurry and dress for dinner," said Wilma, as she took from her trunk a pretty dress of rich green voile. "I think I shall wear this," she added, shaking out the folds.

Lillian looked like a little fairy, in her soft, white dress, with pale blue ribbons, as she went down the broad staircase with her queenly sister.

They entered the drawing-room where they found most of the other guests.

"How sweet you do look," said Mrs. Carrelton, softly, rising to meet them. "Let me see," she said thoughtfully; "I think you know all my guests excepting Mr. Mandel. May I introduce the Misses Allington, Mr. Mandel: Miss Wilma and Miss Lillian."

Then as the other guests entered the room, the dinner bell sounded and they left the handsomely furnished drawing-room and entered the magnificent dining-room. Everything was arranged with perfect splendor there. The grand old silver shone, in the rose-colored light, and a bouquet of rich red roses stood in the center of the table, which was neatly set with delicate china.

After dinner they went for a walk through the moon-lit park. Willard and Marie led the merry party as they descended

the long hill, while Wilma found Mr. Mandel a very congenial companion.

They returned by way of the gardens, which were beautiful in the moonlight, with the winding walks, statues, urns and bubbling fountains.

The next day was spent in boat-riding. Everyone enjoyed a ride on the lake. Four boats were in use. Willard was rowing for Lillian and Adelaide Richard; Marie and Wilma occupied Louis Mandel's boat, while Miss Higdon was rowing for Mrs. Carrelton. The fourth was occupied by three other guests.

The day was warm, the sun shone brightly, and the tall grass on the banks waved gently in the breeze, but the surface of the lake was clear and calm, excepting where the little boats were plowing the smooth surface.

Willard pulled his boat alongside Louis'. "Mrs. Carrelton has great plans for tomorrow," he began; "we are going to play tennis before lunch, then we may go horse-back riding."

"Won't that be fine?" asked Lillian and Adelaide simultaneously.

"Capital!" returned Louis.

"Oh, I do love riding," said Wilma.

"How about the fishing party you two have been planning?" interrogated Marie.

"Can't that be postponed until later? Riding is so much the better," said Wilma.

"No, indeed, Miss Wilma; remember your promise," Louis answered.

"Did I promise, Marie?" she asked smilingly.

"I think you did, Wilma," was the answer.

"Very well then; I never break a promise, but must we give up both tennis and riding?"

"We can join in the riding at least," Louis answered.

As Mrs. Carrelton left the lake Marie joined Miss Higdon; but Lillian exclaimed:

"Please, Marie, take my place and let me row for Miss Higdon. Willard won't let me row his boat." And Marie, who was anxious for a place in Willard's boat, exchanged places with her. Marie had felt disappointed that afternoon when Adelaide had taken the place she had fully expected to occupy

herself, and now she mentally wished that her friend Miss Adelaide were in Boston.

The next morning the sun shone brighter than usual, and everyone was happy at Lakeview. Before nine, the young people had gathered at the tennis courts.

Where is Miss Allington and Mr. Mandel?" asked several.

"I saw them going toward the lake almost an hour ago," answered Miss Higdon. "I think they were going fishing. Mr. Mandel was carrying rods and tackle."

"I wish they had extended the invitation," said Adelaide Richard; and several others agreed with her.

Mr. Mandel was exceedingly polite to everyone and Wilma liked his kindly manner; while he had never been more content than now, when she was near. He liked to listen to her gay words and merry laughter and to watch the pretty face. He felt that he had known her for many weeks, instead of the few days they had spent together at Mrs. Carrelton's. They were on the lake again. Wilma wore a large white sun hat that shaded her face from the morning sun. It was tied with a large bow beneath her chin, and Louis thought she could never be prettier than she was that morning.

In the afternoon the groom brought six pretty horses to the gate, where a laughing group was awaiting them. Some of the guests were again on the lake, as they preferred rowing to riding.

"Select each your horse, girls, and let's be off," said Marie.

"I like this one," said Lillian, laying her hand on the neck of a gentle bay that bore her own name; and Louis Mandel lifted her gently to the saddle. The white-footed sorrel was chosen by Adelaide and the two girls rode off together.

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Wilma; "if this pretty black only had the other saddle on, he should be mine." She turned to the groom. "Would it be asking too much to have the saddles changed? I just must ride him," she added to her companions.

"No trouble at all, Miss, but Joker is rather a spirited animal. The ladies never ride him," the groom answered, as he prepared to obey.

"I am not afraid. I like a horse that has some life," returned Wilma.

"Joker may have more than you care for, Wilma," said Marie, who was seated on Kid, her favorite riding horse. "I never ride him, but Louis will take care of you, I suppose."

"Certainly," returned the young man, as he and Willard mounted their steeds, and they were soon dashing down the hill and through the park, calling merrily to those in the boats, as they passed the lake.

Marie was never happier than she was that afternoon. She seemed to discover new beauties in every object, when Willard was near her, and for many days following she managed to keep him at her side, always frowning when she saw him conversing or rowing with Adelaide. The sun had disappeared beneath the horizon before they returned to Lakeview, and Mrs. Carrelton smiled a knowing smile, as she saw Willard help Marie to dismount, and saw her daughter's radiant face as they came into the room.

"Mrs. Carrelton, I must have a ride on Joker every day. He is the best saddle horse I have ever ridden," said Wilma, who was delighted with the ride.

Every day after that the horses were brought from the stables and Joker always bore the saddle which Wilma used.

One day a number of the party were playing tennis when some one called: "Listen! what is that?"

"The clatter of horses' hoofs in the park," came the quick answer.

"Coming at a terrific speed," added some one, and all looked up in astonishment as Joker, with mane and tail streaming, rein hanging, and without a rider, dashed past the house and on to the stables.

"What has happened?" cried Lillian, with white, trembling lips.

Willard did not wait for words, but ran to the stable and, taking Joker's rein, was in the saddle before anyone thought of a plan of action. As he reined the horse in at the gate, where the excited mistress, guests and servants had gathered, he said:

"Some one may be hurt, Mrs. Carrelton. From all appearances Wilma has been thrown from her horse and if I do not return soon it might be well to——"

Here Mrs. Carrelton interrupted him. "I shall send a carriage immediately, Willard. It may be needed, but I hope and pray nothing serious has happened."

"They intended riding on the South Boston road," he called back, as he galloped down the hill.

"What a thoughtful boy he is; what would I give for such a son," thought Mrs. Carrelton, as Willard and Joker disappeared down the drive.

The carriage was soon at the gate. No one could persuade Lillian to stay at the house. She would go; she must know the worst. "Let me go to my sister," she cried, and no one could refuse her; so it was Lillian and Marie who entered the carriage and were quickly driven down the road, through the village, and out on the South Boston road, over which Joker had flown only a short time since.

Louis and Wilma had gone for a ride alone that evening.

"I know we shall be late for dinner, Mr. Mandel," said his companion, as she looked at the sinking sun and turned her horse's head toward Lakeview. The road was wide and smooth and the horses, anxious to reach home, quickened their pace, until Wilma drew up on the rein.

"What a beautiful road," she said, looking down a lane leading to the right.

"Would you like to ride down that way?" asked her companion.

"Some other time, perhaps, but it is too late this evening."

"We can go that way and enter the South Boston a mile this side of the village, if you choose."

"I shall certainly enjoy it!" exclaimed Wilma, and they were soon riding down the shady lane.

They were several miles from Lakeview when upon turning a bend in the road, Wilma's horse became frightened and, with a sudden bound, threw his rider from the saddle and ran down the road at a furious pace.

"Merciful heavens!" exclaimed Louis, and in a moment he was kneeling by her side with her head pillowed on his arm. Her face was very white and she did not move. He took the icy hand in his large warm one and as he felt the faint throb of the pulse a fervent "Thank God!" burst from his lips in a

hoarse whisper. He remembered the little brook they had just crossed and, leaving Wilma lying on the grass by the roadside, he hurried back. In much less time than one would think, he was again at her side, bathing the cold white brow with the water he had carried in his hat.

It was several minutes, but it seemed like hours to Louis, before the large brown eyes opened and looked wonderingly at him.

"Don't be frightened, dear," he said softly; "you'll be all right now."

"The last thing I remember, I was riding Joker," she said weakly, as her head sank heavily back upon his arm.

"Yes, but you shall never ride him again," was the firm reply.

"But I am not hurt;" and freeing herself from the strong arms that held her, she attempted to rise to her feet, but quickly sat down upon the green bank again. "I can't stand—I feel as though I shall faint," she gasped, burying her face in her hands. Again his arm was around her and he said gently:

"Let me bathe your face, Wilma, and I am sure you will feel better soon."

"I'm all right now," she said, a few minutes later, the drops of water glistening on her hair and brow. "Everyone will be so frightened when Joker reaches Lakeview without us. Oh, what shall we do! I must at least ride to the first farm house."

Louis knew that they would not reach a house until they came to the South Boston road and that was more than a mile; but the sun had disappeared beneath the western horizon and Wilma would not consent to being left alone, so what better could they do?

"Do you think you can ride now?" he asked, as the summer twilight began to fall around them.

"Oh, I must!" was the reply; and leading his horse close to the grassy bank he lifted her gently and placed her in the saddle.

* * * *

Mile after mile galloped Willard, thinking every one would be the last of the search. On and on he went, until at last he turned back in despair. Where could they have gone? He knew they intended riding on this road, for Louis had told him

as much, saying that it was the prettiest road near, and that they had ridden in every other direction. He stopped at several places to make inquiries but could hear nothing of importance. He was heartily discouraged and convinced that he was on the wrong road, when he met the carriage.

"Have you found them?" asked two anxious voices simultaneously.

"No. I've looked every place on this road, and I'm sure, went farther than they would have gone, and I can't hear a thing from them. No one has seen a runaway horse on this road. I think I'll ask at this place, though."

"Oh, dear! will we ever find them," cried Lillian, as they waited for Willard's return.

"They may have gone back by the lane," he called to them, as he hurried down the walk and sprang into the saddle. "The lady here thinks they passed going north, but the horse didn't return this way. They may have turned into 'Lover's Lane' as this lady called it. I'm going to try it at any rate," and turning back, he dashed off leaving the carriage to follow.

The last rays of the sun had faded and the stars, one by one, were peeping out from the solid blue above, as Willard turned into Lover's Lane. Here and there along the green hedge bordering either side of the road were tall trees, and now and then Joker would spring from one side of the road to the other as some new object appeared in the shadow.

Louis and Wilma were making slow progress toward home. Her head and back ached and she felt so weak she at last gave up, saying she could not ride farther. Louis was preparing to help her from the horse when a dark figure, that of horse and rider, appeared over the top of a distant hill behind them.

"Perhaps that is someone who can help us," said Louis, as the horseman came nearer and nearer.

"Is anyone hurt?" shouted a voice, as Willard came near to them; and in a moment he was at Wilma's side.

"But, Willard, why didn't you bring a carriage?" Wilma said impatiently.

"But how did this happen?" he asked.

Louis related the story, while they helped her from the horse and seated her by the roadside to wait for the carriage.

In a short time it came, and Wilma was glad to recline on the soft velvet cushions.

Everything was in a state of excitement at Lakeview until the two boys arrived.

"The young lady will be all right in a few days," the doctor said to Mrs. Carrelton. "It was certainly a hard fall but I think she will be better soon."

It was several days before Wilma could join the others on the lawn and lake. All day she sat at the window in a large easy chair, with pillows around her, watching the others while they rowed on the lake or played tennis. Occasionally Louis was with them, but he was very kind to her and spent hours in her room talking or reading to her, while Lillian was always thinking of her sister's comfort.

Many a time did Wilma wish she had taken good advice and left the saddles as they were the first morning. Everyone was kind to her but she longed to join in the pleasures the others were enjoying, just as a bird in a cage longs for its freedom.

When she was well again, she and Louis often went for a row, and when the others went for a ride they never joined them, but rambled through the park or gardens instead.

Those happy days soon passed, and before anyone realized the fact the two weeks were at an end.

CHAPTER VI

CHANGES AT ROSELIN

MEANWHILE, at Roselin everything was astir. The maid Delia had arrived with Mrs. Allington's belongings and was busily engaged preparing the rooms for the bride and her daughter, while the old servants looked on in horror.

The day after the departure of Willard and the girls, Mr. Allington's letter had arrived, but in some way it had been misplaced and never reached the ones for whom it was intended; therefore, no thought of their father's marriage marred their happiness while they were at Lakeview. When the telegram came to Roselin, a few days later, announcing the marriage and ordering the carriage sent to meet Delia the following day, the servants were surprised beyond measure. Nan declared: "The children shall neber hea' dis, fo' 'twould spile dar visit and dar's no use to sen' dem wurd nohows." Then she added to Ruby: "Didn't I tel' yo' so, gal; though I didn't 'low 'twould be so suddin."

Upon her arrival, Delia surveyed the lower rooms and asked: "Will you please show me the rooms belonging to Mr. Allington and his daughters?" then added, as she saw the astonished look on the fair face of the little maid, "I have orders to arrange rooms for Mrs. Allington and Miss Grace."

"Wal de Lo'd only knows who Miss Grace is," broke in Nan, who had just come from the kitchen and stood in the door with her sleeves rolled to her elbows, and great drops of perspiration gathered on her brow.

"Mrs. Allington's daughter, Miss Wilton," replied Delia, sharply, and waiting for no reply she turned again to Clarice. "Are the young ladies at home? Perhaps they can show me about the rooms."

"They hain't to home," snapped Nan as she hurried back to her work.

Delia watched the old woman as she left the room, then dropped wearily into a chair.

"The young ladies not at home! When will they return?" she asked.

"It will be more than a week before they come," replied Clarice.

"Mr. and Mrs. Allington are coming about the same time, and I have orders to arrange the rooms for them and to see that the others are in order. I suppose I must go on with the work; will you show me the rooms now, please?"

"Very well," said Clarice, "I will show you upstairs." She led the way, Delia following in silence through the elegantly furnished suite of rooms belonging to the girls, then to Mr. Allington's more plainly but tastefully furnished rooms.

"This room was formerly occupied by Mrs. Allington's maid, during her illness," Clarice explained, opening the door and entering the bedroom which opened into Mr. Allington's sleeping-room.

"The very room for Miss Grace," said Delia, looking about the large room. "You know she must have a room near her mother's, and I think Mr. Allington, too, would be pleased with this arrangement."

The next day she ordered the furniture removed and Mrs. Allington's brought up. When the room was at last finished she surveyed it with pleasure. She was sure it would comply with the wishes of her mistress, and she could imagine Grace's delight when she saw the room which was to be hers.

The former Mrs. Allington's private sitting-room had been left just as it was at the time of her death. It was a cozy little apartment and the children often visited here. When Delia entered the room the curtains were drawn low, and as a flood of light streamed in from the open door, she saw directly in front of her a portrait of Mrs. Allington. It was a beautiful painting, and for a moment the girl stood looking at the fair face. How lovely it was, with the deep blue eyes and waves of golden hair.

"I think it would be much better to have some other room for the bride than the one which the former mistress occupied," she soliloquized. "This could be easily arranged for

the music-room. The rooms are precisely alike and I think Mrs. Wilton—or Mrs. Allington, I should say—would like the change. I should think the family would like it better than to have a new mistress occupy the mother's room. The girls will like their mother's picture in their room.

"Ned, bring the stepladder into this room," she called.

The boy obeyed and, placing the ladder before the painting, he mounted it, disengaged the cord from the hook, and carefully handed it down to Delia, who carried it up to the girls' room, while Ned followed with the ladder. Little did Delia know how much pain this little act would cause Wilma and Lillian; but the big blue eyes seemed to look down reproachfully at her from the wall, as she left the room and hastened on to her work.

"What's de meanin' of all dis commotion?" It was Nan's voice that abruptly asked the question, and at the same moment her ebony face appeared at the door. "Dat pianner don't need movin', Miss Delia. I jist cleaned dis heah room, and der hain't no need doin' it ag'in."

"I have my orders, you know. The other room will be much better for the music-room, and this will be the bride's," replied Delia. "Do you see?" she added, as she left her to direct the moving of the furniture.

"Here, John, this way a little—There, that looks better. Roll the piano here; how do you like that, Clarice? Yes, it is a fine place for a piano—I like it very much. No, no, Ned, put that cabinet here—in this corner near the piano. Hang that curtain a bit higher, Clarice; that's better. Now bring the divan from the next room and put it here."

Nan looked on in amazement; then muttering to herself she rushed from the room.

"I neber saw de like in all mah life. She'll be puttin' de kitchen in de parlor de next thing I knows. I guess if Miss Wilma wuz to home she'd show her how to boss. She'd not hab her a changin' her muddah's room fo' nobody, eben if she did hab her o'ders—an' I jist bet dat Wilton woman did gib her o'ders, too. She wouldn't hab Mis' Allington's room jist as it wuz, dat she wouldn't; an' de Lo'd knows, I don't care whethah she hab one at all er not, on dis heah place. What

does dat man want anotha young 'en heah fo' I'd like to know. Wal, I don't know but I'll be glad when tomorrer's over. Dey won't come 'til late an' I reckon all dis heah fuss and stir will be ovah 'fo' den."

The next day dawned bright and fair. The servants hastened here and there about their work. Flowers were arranged in the vases and all the rooms put in order. Just at sunset the carriage, drawn by the spirited blacks, came swiftly down the long avenue, shaded by stately pines, and drew up before the gate. The bridal party had arrived at last and Roselin lay before them in a bower of roses—roses everywhere—a cataract of them fell from the broad veranda. A profusion of roses, red, white and pink, mounted the ornate Corinthian columns, and hung in festoons over the stone balustrade. The sun, like a fiery ball surrounded by a mass of blue, was just sinking in the west; while the trees cast weird shadows over the lawn. The long, white walk looked like pearl as it wound over the emerald lawn. At the center, where it divided to form two, a little fountain murmured softly in the shadows, and falling over the marble statue, fell into the stone basin where several gold-fish were playing.

"What a beautiful place," said Mrs. Allington. "James, I do not wonder that you call it Roselin. A very appropriate name, indeed."

Ah! this was home. It reminded her of former days. Vale Cottage was dear to her, but the memory of the earlier home was far more dear. The tears came to her eyes, but resolutely forcing them back, she followed her husband up the walk with a stately tread, and no one knew of the emotion Evelyn Allington felt as she climbed the steps of the veranda and entered the long hall. They passed down the long line of servants assembled to receive them;—the children were not there. Her arrival at Roselin was quite different from the picture she had mentally drawn. A vague fear swept over her. Why were they not there? Had they no welcome for their father and his wife and her child? Mr. Allington, too, felt his heart chilled. Not even Lilly to meet them! What did it mean? It was far worse than he had anticipated. What must Evelyn think? He dared not ask himself that question.

"Where are my children?" he asked of his valet, at the first opportunity.

"At Lakeview, sir."

"Lakeview! What do you mean? My children at Lakeview?" he asked in astonishment—a shadow clouding his brow.

"Attending a house party there, sir—have been gone almost a fortnight. Expect them home ere long. Your brother left about the same time. A business call, I believe. Neither party know of your marriage, sir."

"They received my letter, did they not? I wrote them of my intended marriage some two weeks ago."

"I do not know, sir; if they did they said nothing about it. The first we knew of the marriage was your announcement and the arrival of the maid, sir," replied the valet.

"That will do, Phillip; I won't need you again this evening."

Thus dismissed, Phillip strode from the room, and Mr. Allington sat quite still while heavy drops of perspiration moistened the cold white brow. He felt that his children had been wronged. Could it be possible that they knew nothing of the stepmother who had come into their home? Could it be that they had never received his letter, or had they purposely planned to be absent when the bridal party arrived? Lillian would never have consented to a plan like that. Her father knew that it was beneath her principle; but it was so like Wilma. There was a difficult question in Mr. Allington's mind; he could not tell what course was best to take. Turn which way he would, he must face Wilma's wrath and bear her insulting conduct toward his wife, and he looked forward to their return with mingled shame and fear.

Grace had left her home in New Orleans at so early an age that she had not the faintest remembrance of the luxury in which she had lived, and now, as she viewed Roselin with wondering eyes filled with tears, she trembled with excitement, and there was a sensitive shrinking from the new and unaccustomed splendor which surrounded her on all sides. But when Delia took the little girl to her own room she gazed about her for a moment, then throwing her arms around the maid's neck, kissed her tenderly, and smiling in spite of her tears said—

"Oh, Delia! how kind of you to fix my room so much like home. You know exactly what I like."

Every article was familiar to her. It seemed that she had entered her own home in a foreign land. Her own little bed with its snow white curtains stood opposite the big window draped with her mother's rich damask curtains and her rich velvet rugs covered the polished floor, and throwing herself into the depths of the sofa she looked up and saw her father's painting hanging on the wall just as it had done in her mother's little parlor in the south.

CHAPTER VII

A LETTER FROM HOME

"A LETTER, Miss."

The servant handed Wilma a letter with the words "In Haste" written in a large hand across one end of the envelope. It was the last day but one of their stay at Lakeview, and Louis and Wilma had wandered through the park and were sitting on a moss covered log in a shady nook near the lake when the servant found them.

"Pardon me, Louis; I have a letter from papa."

Wilma looked up at the young man by her side, who smiled and kindly nodded his consent. Tearing open the envelope she hastily read the contents. Louis watched her closely as she read. At first her face was scarlet and her eyes flashed, then she suddenly grew pale.

"I must find Lillian and Willard; they will want to read my letter," she said, making a great effort to conceal her chagrin.

"You have bad news, I fear," said her companion.

"Well, no, only papa is home and anxious that we shall come," she replied in an unconcerned tone, arising to go.

"Oh! if that is all, we need not hurry. Remember we leave tomorrow; this is probably the last stroll together; so let us make it as long and pleasant as possible. Willard is enjoying this last afternoon with Marie, and I dare say he would not like to be bothered with a letter.

"Perhaps not, but he must be bothered just the same. We must go now."

She spoke firmly, and they started up the path, walking with more haste than usual. What could it be in that letter that had so affected her? Louis could not guess. It was something more than the mere fact of her father's return, he was sure; but he did not question her. She did not seem inclined to talk and they walked on in silence. Just as they reached the paved drive Lillian came cantering up on the bay.

"My last ride on Lilly," she said gayly, drawing up before them.

"You have certainly enjoyed it," said Louis. "This is a lovely day for riding."

"I should say we have enjoyed it; haven't we, Lilly?" She patted the horse's neck and smoothed the glossy coat.

"We were just looking for you, Lillian. I have a letter from papa. Come up to our room and we will read it together." Wilma spoke hurriedly.

"Oh, good! Is he home?"

"Yes."

"All right, I will be there:" and shaking the rein she dashed on.

She was waiting in the hall when Louis and Wilma reached the house. She was wearing a dark blue riding habit, and a jaunty little hat still crowned the mass of golden hair.

When the two girls reached their room Wilma turned the key in the door, for she would not be interrupted, then turning to Lillian she silently placed the letter in her hand.

"Why, what is the matter?" asked Lillian. She noted the pallor of her sister's face and the slight tremor in her voice. "What has happened, Wilma? Do tell me."

"Papa is married and at home with his wife, Lillian," Wilma replied.

"Oh! it can't be! He told us he was not to be married while he was gone. Oh! Wilma, it can't be true!" Lillian buried her face in her hands and burst into tears.

"He told us what he did not mean, Lilly, for he writes that they are there—he and his wife. Ah! Lillian, he has deceived us—wilfully deceived us!" Wilma's voice trembled with anger, and taking up the letter she read it through aloud.

Lillian still sat with her face in her hands and as her sister finished she sobbed: "What shall we do?"

"Go home as papa wishes us to, I suppose. I don't believe he ever wrote us that first letter! He has certainly forgotten, for it was not received."

"Does Willard know of this? Perhaps he has received that letter."

"No I have not seen him but I dare say he knows nothing of it."

"No, I know he would have told us; but, Wilma, it may not be so bad after all, for papa didn't mean to deceive us. But how I dread to go home."

"I, too, dread to go, but yet, I long to tell them what I think of them. Papa did mean to deceive us! Lillian, you know full well he did, or why did he do this thing. 'Tis bad enough to marry at all!"

"Wilma, you must not tell them all you think," cried Lillian, drawing near her sister; "that would never do. It cannot be helped; it would only make matters worse! Wilma, sit down; you frighten me." Lillian laid a trembling hand on her sister's shoulder. "Don't look so. What will Mrs. Carrelton think when you go down to dinner?"

"Don't talk about my looks, Lilly. Look at yourself; you look like a little ghost. Go down and give this to Willard; I must rest awhile, for I can't go down now." Wilma glanced in the long mirror as she spoke and saw reflected there a pale face, with dark, flashing eyes.

Lillian took the letter, and started in search of her brother, while Wilma, after rubbing her cheeks with cologne, threw herself upon the bed.

Willard had returned from a row on the lake, with Marie, and was reading in the library when Lillian handed him the letter, then seated herself on the stool at his feet.

"Well, a pretty mess he's made of it now, hasn't he? I declare what's going to happen next?" he said, as he finished the letter. "Never mind, little sister, we'll find what's to pay, tomorrow when we get home," he added, as the tears again rolled down Lillian's cheek. For awhile they sat in silence, then, as they heard the sound of footsteps in the hall, Lillian hastily dried her eyes and fled up the stairs.

"All alone are you, Willard, enjoying the solitude of the library with a book as your only companion," said Mrs. Carrelton, laying her white, jeweled hand on his shoulder. "We will be quite lonely when our guests leave us; if we could only keep you and your sisters awhile longer. I can't see the need of your going back to Roselin so soon. Although our party is at

an end, Marie and I shall be delighted to extend our invitation for another week in your honor."

"Thank you, Mrs. Carrelton; I should be very glad to accept your kind invitation, and I think I can answer the same for my sisters, but papa is at home now and anxious that we should come."

"Oh! I did not know of his return and, although we are disappointed, I cannot urge you further."

She noted the drawn look about the compressed lips, and thought, "Ah! what a splendid match that will be. I do not wonder at that sad expression. He loves Marie, and tomorrow noon they part. Well do I remember how my heart ached years ago, when I was a girl like Marie, when Donald said 'good-bye' to me, and that these young lovers feel the same I do not doubt."

"Remember this, Willard, come to Lakeview any time you feel so disposed and you will always be welcome," she said aloud.

"You are very kind, Mrs. Carrelton. Thank you."

* * * *

When the train left the little Greenfield station the following afternoon, leaving only a cloud of smoke behind, it carried among its passengers several of Mrs. Carrelton's guests.

It was with a feeling of regret that they crossed the winding river, and saw before them the little town of Ashville.

As Louis Mandel assisted Wilma to the platform, he held the little gloved hand tightly in his: "Now that we are acquainted, I hope we may meet frequently," he said; and hastily bidding "good-bye" to Willard and Lillian, he sprang upon the steps of the moving train.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MEETING

THEY drew up before the little office in the village and Mr. Allington entered the carriage, greeting his children with as much affection as usual, and, as the carriage whirled on down the street, he told them of his marriage, of his disappointment when he returned home, and of Evelyn's sorrow at finding them gone; then very cautiously he mentioned Grace. They had listened to his explanation in silence, but now Wilma was white with rage.

"Papa, how dared you deceive us as you have? When you told us of your intended marriage, you did not even mention her name! You have purposely deceived us, and I dare say, you will be sorry of your bargain before the year is passed, but you may know it is your fault, not mine, nor anyone's, but yours, and yours alone. My home shall never be a happy one for that girl! She will soon find that she is not wanted there. 'Tis bad enough to marry at all without marrying a whole family. Oh! that I had died with my mother," she said in a bitter voice.

Mr. Allington turned away in silence.

Willard looked reproachfully at her. "Ah, Wilma," he said, "you say too much. I am sorry, very sorry that things are as they are, but it is irretrievable now, and we must accept it, come what may. Do be considerate, Wilma, and judge not until you see the ones you fancy you shall despise. They may not be the detestable intruders you imagine them to be."

"Considerate, nonsense!" she replied with a sneer, as she stepped haughtily from the carriage and hastened up the walk, and on to her room, followed by her sister. She opened the door and hastily crossed the room, throwing back from the window the heavy curtains that shaded it. Lillian's cry of "Oh, Wilma!" caused her to turn suddenly. Lillian stood in the

center of the room with her eyes riveted on the wall. Following her glance, Wilma's eyes met those of her mother.

"Oh! Lilly, how can we bear this?" she said, turning to her sister, her white face showing plainly the agony it caused. "Mamma's picture carried from her sitting-room, where it has hung every day since I can remember. How dared Mrs. Evelyn move it? The last thing on earth she should have touched is mamma's little sitting-room! It was just as she had left it, and now that her own dear picture must be taken from that room, where the other family paintings still hang, it is more than I can bear," continued Wilma, in a bitter voice, while tears rolled down the cheeks of both girls.

* * * *

Mrs. Allington waited, what seemed to her like hours. She had dressed earlier than was necessary and gone to the drawing-room, where she and Grace were to meet the heirs of Roselin. She wore a gown of black satin which hung in heavy folds and trailed gracefully over the velvet carpet as she passed softly up and down the room, her white hands clasped nervously together.

She turned hastily toward the door as she heard Grace's tripping step in the hall, and the little girl was soon clasped in her mother's arms.

"My dear little darling," she exclaimed, "I hope you will like your new sisters and brother, dearie. How I wish it were your own dear brother. How we would have loved him, had he only been spared; but we must try to love Wilma and Lillian and their brother, Gracie darling."

"Yes, I'll try—and I hope they will be nice to me, mamma; but I'm afraid they won't." Grace pressed closer to her mother and looked up into her anxious face.

Mrs. Allington felt sure that they would be welcome. Her husband had told her as much, and yet she waited nervously. The girls had luncheon in their room with their brother, and Mrs. Allington was momentarily expecting their arrival in the drawing-room. She had heard from Delia of the proud and beautiful Wilma, of whom the old servants talked, and she wondered if she could ever win her. Mr. Allington's face had looked sad and troubled when she saw him at luncheon an hour

since, and it was evident that he dreaded the meeting between his children and his bride. Mrs. Allington held her treasure close. To dislike Grace, she felt, would be impossible. Everyone loved her delicate little daughter with her long, dark curls and sweet smiles. Even the proud Wilma must love her in time.

Neither Grace nor her mother heard the gentle tap at the door nor the soft footsteps as a slender white figure entered the room. The lights were shaded and cast a mellow glow over the room, and its two occupants. Lillian stood for a moment in silence, then said softly, as she advanced toward Mrs. Allington, with one slender hand outstretched:

"Pardon me; I am Lillian."

Grace slipped from her mother's lap and Mrs. Allington rose to meet Lillian. She took the cold little hand in one of her own while the other slipped around the young girl's waist and drew her close. "So this is our dear little Lilly," she said, kissing the pale cheek. "Grace this is Lillian, about whom Mr. Allington has been telling you." She stood with an arm around each girl. "I know you girls will be excellent friends," she said, "and I sincerely hope, Lillian, that you will learn to love, not only Grace, but her mother, also."

Lillian sank wearily into the chair Mrs. Allington brought for her. "I know you must be tired after your ride," she said in a motherly voice, drawing the chair near her own.

Lillian smiled faintly. "Yes, I am tired, but I am very glad to get home again."

In a few moments Mr. Allington entered the room followed by Willard and Wilma. Wilma had looked everywhere for the missing Lillian.

Lillian had sat for awhile watching her sister completing her toilet and heard her declaring that she would astonish the simple girl downstairs with her elegant dress. She had listened to the little clock as it slowly ticked the seconds. How could she wait longer? She would rather meet her stepmother alone, with no criticising sister to watch her movements; no teasing brother, or anxious father to correct her. She could follow the dictation of her own soul. She would go alone; she would wait no longer. Silently leaving the room, she had

crept softly down the stairs. Her white dress was very simple but she looked like some small, wandering fairy as she passed down the long dimly lighted hall. Wilma would have been astonished had she seen her sister then, but she did not, and when she turned from the long mirror, Lillian was gone, but where, she did not know.

Mr. Allington led the way to the drawing-room in silence, and in a few simple words introduced his children. Wilma came a few steps into the room, then halted, head high, eyes wide, breath fast. Her wish to astonish the "simple girl downstairs" was fulfilled as she stood before her—this beautiful girl surrounded by a cloud of pink.

She barely touched the hand Mrs. Allington offered, and with a haughty inclination of the head, she swept past Grace and on to Lillian's side.

"Lillian Allington, why did you come here alone without papa's permission?" she said in a low voice which trembled in spite of her effort to control it.

CHAPTER IX

SHADOWS

"WHERE are you going, Lillian?"

"Over to Genevieve's, to give her the book I told her she might read, and neglected to give to her."

Lillian selected several books from the long rows before her. Taking them in one hand and swinging her hat in the other, she started down the lane. It was the morning after her return, and she was more anxious to see her friend than she was willing to acknowledge to her sister. She enjoyed walking down the shady lane in the fresh morning air. She and Genevieve often watched the first beams of the sun as it kindled diamonds on every dew-beaded leaf, and silvered every fringy fern.

As she swung back the little wooden gate on its rusty hinges, she heard a cry of delight from the path leading to the spring, and hastily turning about, she saw Genevieve hurrying toward her, a tin pail swinging in her hand.

"You can't imagine how glad I am to see you," she exclaimed, dropping her pail, throwing her arms about Lillian, and placing a warm, affectionate kiss on each delicate pink cheek. "I began to think you were never coming home. How nice of you, Lilly, to come to see me so soon after your return."

"Yes. But I'm sure you will pardon my early call when I tell you I was just dying to see you. I positively could not wait another minute," Lillian replied, returning Genevieve's caresses. "Here is the book I promised you, and two others I think you will enjoy reading; I will leave them here on the step until we return;" and taking up the fallen pail, she started with Genevieve toward the spring.

For awhile they sat upon the mossy bank, watching the cold water, clear as crystal, bubbling up and murmuring softly as it flowed over the smooth, silvery pebbles, falling over the

larger stones in small cataracts, and winding its rippling way among the waving grass. Then filling their shining pail, they started slowly up the hill toward the farm house.

"Oh, if you could have been with us, what lovely times you and I would have had wandering about the park and that wonderful garden," Lillian said, as she finished a glowing description of Lakeview.

The pail, by this time only half full, was safely deposited on the small table, and the girls stood laughing over dripping skirts and wet slippers, when Bob entered with the milk.

"Why hello, Lillian!" he exclaimed, as his merry whistle ceased and he entered the kitchen. "Oh you careless girls!—couldn't carry a bucket of water without spilling over half of it," he laughed. "What will your——," a pause, "your sister say," he finished. He dared not say mother.

Wilma sat dreamily for a while after Lillian left her. She was alone in the library. A book lay unnoticed in her lap, while her thoughts were wandering among the memories of the past—all so bright and happy that it made the once more brilliantly painted future seem dark and shadowed, and it sank back into the dim outlines of a sadly faded sketch—one from which she shrank. Suddenly she started from her reverie.

"This will never do," she said, half aloud, with emphasis. "I cannot sit down, and ponder and pine. I will not!—I will not! I must show her that I care little for her presence—that she can't interfere with my plans, nor anything that concerns me. She may crush Willard and Lillian, and rule them, but she shall never crush me! No never!" she said resolutely. "I shall hold for my rights and theirs."

She arose with a sigh, opened the door and went down the hall until she came to the door of the music-room, which she found closed. "Why are the doors closed? They have always stood open. But of course a new mistress rules here," she thought. Then a sudden determination to dispel the surrounding gloom took possession of her. Playing always quieted Wilma when in one of her bad moods, but for a moment her hand rested motionless upon the knob. Something within her seemed to whisper, "Don't! Don't turn it!" But without glancing at the open doors behind her, the cool

inviting room, and the open piano, with pearly keys waiting for her nimble fingers to call forth from them the sweet, mellow tones her heart longed for, her white fingers moved on the knob and the doors before her were thrown open.

Ah! could it be possible, or was she only dreaming? She stood like a marble statue, with hands clasped and lips pressed firmly together, while her stepmother came softly toward her, as if to take her hand; the sweet voice murmuring softly: "Oh! it's Wilma. I'm glad you came, dear. Come on in; I shall be very glad to have you with me, here. It is such a lovely morning." But she was cut short in her words of welcome, by the burst of wrath from Wilma's white lips.

Mrs. Allington was never more surprised than when she stood facing the angry glare of those black eyes, and listening to the torrent of wild, meaningless words that seemed to gather all her hopes and sweep them away, while she stood silent, motionless, with pain and astonishment written on her face. At last she managed to gasp: "Oh, child! What can you mean?"

"Mean!" repeated Wilma, scornfully. "You know what I mean; there's no use asking that absurd question. You need not act so innocent; how can you, with your conscience pricking you, as I know it must?"

"My conscience!"

"Aye! your conscience—if you have any," was the reply; and Wilma came a step forward.

This was more than Mrs. Allington could bear. Could this be the girl she had hoped to win and love—this wild, gesticulating figure standing before her? Wilma tossed her head with a haughty air, and the little white rose, nestling in the black coils, wafted its sweet perfume, all unnoticed; while her hands grasped the folds of her pink dress. She paused, for a moment; Mrs. Allington looked steadfastly at her, then sank into a chair with the tears moistening the pale cheeks.

Wilma turned, and was leaving the room, when a hand clutched her arm and a voice, quite unlike the sweet tones she had heard only a short time since, said: "Wilma, I demand of you, explain yourself; tell me what you mean by coming to my room and insulting me as you have." For a moment Wilma

hesitated; the hand on her arm tightened its grasp. "Tell me," repeated Mrs. Allington.

"I have nothing to explain," and shaking off the hand, she fled from the room, leaving her stepmother bewildered.

* * * *

The sun shone brightly over the green, velvety slopes where the yellow buttercups tossed their golden heads and modest little daisies quivered in the morning breeze. The lake danced and sparkled as the fiery ball peeped over the neighboring trees and smiled at the bright surface, which its rays flooded with sunlight. Across the narrow meadow path that led through the wood to the farmhouse shadow and sunshine were playing hide-and-seek, while a frisking little squirrel ran across the path, scampered up a tree, and sprang from one swaying branch to another.

The exercise had brought a bright glow to Lillian's cheeks and she came tripping along the path, with her hat suspended by the ribbon streamers and falling back upon her shoulders. Her thoughts were far remote from the changes at home and she was humming a quiet little air as she neared the lake and stopped to look at Willard's new canoe, which was lying near the path not far from the water's edge. She suddenly raised her head and looked about her. What was that sound she heard? It sounded like a soft tread behind her and she turned expecting to see some one near. There was no one to be seen, and after glancing up and down the lake shore, she again bent over the canoe but started as the sound of a mourning sob fell upon her ears. Again and again she heard it. It came from the woods behind her, yet she stood, still looking out across the lake. Whom could it be? "Some one in pain and distress," she thought.

Slowly and softly she turned and drew a step nearer the trees, half wishing she had returned by the lane, but there was some one in distress and she must help them. As she turned to one side, she caught a glimpse of a dark figure, and for a moment she stood breathless. Before her, Mrs. Allington sat on the mossy trunk of a fallen tree. A white, filmy scarf was thrown across her shoulders; her head rested on her hands and moans of anguish shook her slight frame. She

raised her head as Lillian approached, and it was a white, tear-stained face that Lillian looked upon while half the color faded from her own.

"What has happened?" she asked, in an excited tone, but Mrs. Allington turned from her.

"Do not ask me; I cannot tell," was the sobbing reply.

Lillian stood looking pityingly at the bowed figure near her. What could she say; what could she do? Her step-mother's reply was final and she could not ask her again the cause of her grief.

"Won't you come to the house with me, now?" she at last ventured.

"No, I'll come soon."

Lillian turned from the woods back to the meadow path, but all was changed now. The glory of the day had faded; all the happiness and the sunshine had vanished. Why had the shadows fallen so soon, so soon?

She hurried from one room to another in search of Wilma, for she felt sure she could explain the mystery. The sitting-room, library and parlors were visited but they were all silent. She was on her way down the hall when the sound of Wilma's voice in the room above startled her, and for a moment she leaned against the polished colonnade as her sister's sneering tones reached her; then softly she climbed the stairs.

"Your mother didn't need to rush things so; she has taken entirely too many privileges here. Of course you are welcome to store your plunder in this room; and claim it if you like; but you should have asked for my opinion before arranging it. I could change all your mother's plans for your future if I wished, for remember this, I am an heir of Roselin, while you—you have not a penny, save that little Southern Cottage, Vale, of which you boast." Wilma's lips curled, and the dark eyes were now flashing upon the child, instead of the step-mother.

What privileges? Grace could not think. Wilma must have meant the arrangement of her own little room, the only one at Roselin which seemed like home, and she knew that it had been arranged by Delia before their arrival. She shrank back into the depths of her mother's divan and glanced about the

room; her dark eyes were very bright, but there was a hurt look upon the thin, sallow face, and the pretty mouth trembled. The eyes again rested upon Wilma as she stood with one hand resting on the back of a chair, richly upholstered, which she designated as "plunder."

"I told you once, Miss Wilma, that mamma did not do it. She hasn't moved a thing since we came. It is just as we found it, believe me or not as you will." The voice was very low, and Lillian, who now stood in the upper hall, failed to catch the words.

With an impatient gesture Wilma exclaimed: "Oh, you are like most other children, I see; you're posted;" and as she heard Lillian's footsteps she turned and faced her.

"Come, Wilma," she whispered, "I want to see you."

"See me? For what?" was the sharp reply.

Lillian did not answer, but taking her sister's hand, led her from the room, while Grace, glad to be left alone, buried her face in the pillows and wept long and silently, until Lillian's hand caressed the dark curls, and Lillian's voice whispered: "Don't cry, Grace, I want to talk with you."

Lillian had heard the story from beginning to finish and believed it; how could she think otherwise? All evidence was against the stepmother; the rooms had been changed, pictures and furniture moved; and who, other than Mrs. Allington, would have done it; yet that dark, bowed, weeping figure seemed to Lillian the picture of wronged innocence. At least she could not let Grace suffer, and while Wilma was still in her room, Lillian stole in to comfort her.

After awhile Grace raised her hot, tear-stained face from out the cushions and looked steadily at her companion, who was seated on a low stool near her, and, with a sudden impulse, Lillian pressed the little hand in hers and exclaimed: "You'll try to like me, won't you, Grace?"

"I like you now," was the reply.

The ice was broken and Wilma, as she passed the door some time later, was shocked and disgusted to hear her sister's voice mingled with the tones of "that lying little pauper."

CHAPTER X

AFTER THREE WEEKS AT ROSELIN

"WA'AL, how do ye like ye'r new neighbor, Misses Layton?"

Mrs. Haley raised her eyes from her sewing and leaned back in her chair as she asked the question, while the corners of her mouth (which was unusually large) quirked up into what was intended for a smile.

"New neighbor? Oh, you mean Mrs. Allington, I suppose. I know very little of her, Mrs. Haley; I have called but once. I liked her very much then, and Genevieve likes the little girl, too."

"Called only onct? My! but ye'r neighborly," continued the prying old woman, rocking back and forth, and gazing about Mrs. Layton's little sitting-room. "I just dropped in a minit as I come past an' I guess they warn't lookin' fer company, fur that oldest girl wuz jist goin' it about somethin' Missis Allington had said er done. I'll tell ye, if she keeps ahead uv that Wilma she'll have to git to goin' some, I 'low. Step-mothers can usually settle the children though, and it's to be hoped she'll git settled; an' that little Lilly looks like she wuz already settled; but land sakes! Mrs. Allington wuz awful kind to her while I wuz there; but then I reckon ye can't judge by outer'd appearances, fur no tellin' how mean she can be when her dad's back is turned, an' all her friends out of sight. Of course that girl uv hers will have the advantage in everything, an' its only natural that her mother'd want it that-a-way. I allers did think Mister Allington wuz a lackin' somewhere and now he's showed it. I hear Lilly is quite chummy with her young'en; but I'm afraid that won't last long. Two families of children can never git along after they onct git acquainted. I hearn that the boy and girl are goin' off to school a year from this comin' winter, an' I 'low Mrs. Allington'll be glad to git rid of that boy, too. An' I can't say I blame her fur that, either."

"Willard, I think, is a very good boy, and I don't think Wilma is as bad as you think," Mrs. Layton began as her visitor at last stopped for breath. "I have no fault to find with any of the family. Lillian and Grace are both such dear little girls. Genevieve spends much of her spare time with them. But the dear child has so little time for pleasure," she added, accompanying her visitor to the door; then with a feeling of relief she turned back to her work.

Mrs. Layton was a neat, refined woman, and although her house was small, it was a model for cleanliness. She had at one time seen better days, but since her children were quite small she had known nothing but work from morn till night. She was ambitious and would rather work the remainder of her life than to see her children shabbily dressed, as were many in the neighborhood. Genevieve was a great help to her mother and for hours, after her work at the store was done, she would care for and entertain her invalid grandmother, who sat day after day and week after week in her big armchair, wholly dependent upon her daughter for support. Although poor and troubled, Mrs. Layton had never given up, and now that her children were almost grown, was looking forward to better times. She had a strong intellect, and never for a moment had she lost that sweet, refined, lady-like way, which won the love and respect of all who met her. The first Mrs. Allington had proven an invaluable friend to her, and she hoped she should like the second Mrs. Allington. She would not say a word against the haughty Wilma, who had never, since a little girl (when with her mother she had visited at the cottage) stepped across the threshold. And while Mrs. Haley was peddling the news from house to house, Mrs. Layton was busy with her sewing, while in her heart she was finding excuses for the wrathful Wilma, as well as the stepmother, at whom her caller had thrown such broad insinuations.

The reader knows, no doubt, how false those insinuations were. Mrs. Allington was the same when the father's "back was turned and all the neighbors out of sight," as when their fault-finding eyes were upon her, or her husband present. Since that first night, when Lillian had gone alone to the library,

she had liked her—even loved her—and although Lillian stood firmly by her sister, she knew she was not hated by her as she was by Wilma. When alone with Lillian she practically forgot her troubles, for the icy wall which stood between them when Wilma was present melted and Lillian for the time forgot the wrong Mrs. Allington had done them and the shadow she had cast over their home.

Wilma always stood aloof and never did she see her stepmother, but her brow clouded and her lip curled. Very few words had been exchanged between them since that first morning when the storm had burst. Wilma never for a moment doubted her stepmother's guilt, and when the latter, hearing from Grace that it was only the arranging of her room that had caused Wilma's wrath, went to her trying to explain that it had been arranged by the servants before her arrival, and that Grace had told her the truth when she said her mother had not changed anything, she flew into a violent rage. "Who said anything about her room?" she demanded, with sharp emphasis on the word 'her.' "I have not, and I'll assure you, she is perfectly welcome to it if she only remains there," she snapped, and left the room. Neither had referred to the matter since, and Mr. Allington knew nothing of it. Apparently he did not notice the change of the two rooms and the disappearance of his wife's picture, for not a word on the subject passed his lips. In fact, he did not know who did it, and thinking perhaps it was one of Wilma's whims, he thought very little about the matter, and when, on seeing the mother's picture in the girls' room, hung in full view of the door, he was satisfied. Neither the wife nor the daughters mentioned the clouds which were left from that first storm. His wife did not care to bother him with what seemed to her now a trivial matter; while Wilma imagined herself capable of managing her own affairs—of which her stepmother was her greatest trouble—without the assistance of her father; and, advising Lillian to keep it to herself, she retained her frigid coldness toward both her stepmother and Grace.

Lillian was very kind to Grace, for with her loving nature she could not well slight the delicate little girl, who had begun to wear a sad, lonesome look. More than once she had ac-

accompanied Lillian in her walk to the cottage, and Genevieve was fast learning to love her, and half envied Lillian her pale, but pretty little stepsister.

One day as Wilma lay in the hammock which hung just beneath the dining-room window, her attention was attracted by the voices of the servants inside the open window.

"Say, yo' Clarice, hab yo' eber hea' ob Miss Wilma's eber makin' a fuss ober dem rooms dat wuz changed fo'ah Miss Wilton cum heah as Mis' Allington?"

It was Nan's voice, and Wilma raised to a sitting position that she might not lose a word that followed and yet could not be seen, while Clarice stopped short in arranging the flowers in the cut glass vase, which she was preparing for the "young ladies" room, and replied:

"Why no, I haven't heard anything of it! Did they have trouble over that? Do tell me, Nan, quick; you know I'm just dying with curiosity."

"Wal, law chil', yo' know I hain't hearn a word now or I'd a tol' yo long foah dis time; but I jes 'lowed thar wud be trouble when Mis Wilma come home an' foun' dat air music-room of hern all tor' up, an' a stepmother's settin-room 'ranged in thar, an' her mudder's picture packed off up in thar room; I jis' 'lowed thar'd be some thunder-bolts and lightenin' a flyin' 'round heah, but I hain't seed nothin' but jis' ice-bergs fo' mor'n dese three weeks, an' I 'low July weatha hain't de best weatha fo' 'em eithe'; I know'd Lilly—de little lam'—wouldn' say nothin', but law, I didn't think Wilma could hold her temper dis heah long and I'll tel yo', Clarice, if dey had a come to dis heah niggah to a 'splained anythin' 'bout it in de fust place, I'd a shore a held up fo' Mis' Wilma, fo' I didn' know Miss Allington den, yo' know. Most of dem suthen ladies is stuck up, good-fur-nothin' things; but I hearn Miss Grace tellin' Ruby dat her mutha wuz raised in de no'th. I 'low'd when she fust cum heah dat she wuz as bad as Mis' Wilma or wus, but de Lo'd knows, I've changed my mind a pow'ful lot since den."

The face beneath the window assumed an expression of hatred and a clenched fist was shaken threateningly at the open window as if it were the offender. But alas! the ex-

pression of scorn and hatred changed into one of puzzled astonishment, as, after a pause, Nan's voice again floated out on the breeze.

"When Delia had eberythin' in a stir 'round heah foah dey cum frum de weddin', I jis' 'lowed dat she did hab her o'ders, when she wuz bossin' us 'round an' sayin' 'I hab my o'ders yo' know', to ebery blessed thing we said to her; but she's sech a smart, big-feelin' gal dat I jis' doubt it mightily and reckon she was jis' a tryin' to show off, an' I wonder if she ebber tol' her mistress how bossy she wuz an' how she changed dem rooms 'ginst all uv us. I'd jis' like to see her set off de place, but I reckon as long as she stays out ob de kitchen it's none ob dis heah nigga's business:" and as Clarice left the room, with a low reply, which Wilma did not hear, Nan's voice burst out into one of her favorite songs:

"Way down in sunny Alabam,
Land of watermelon, cane and ham,
Law, dem niggers how they shake their feet,
When they hear somebody holler possum sweet,
Basted all around with candy, yam, yam, yam, yam,
'Way down in sunny Alabam
All dem coons are happy as a clam
They wrote the answer to the word called shirk,
They don't want anything that looks like work,
'Way down in Alabam:"

while the occupant of the hammock sank back among the pillows.

From what Nan had said she gathered that her stepmother had not arranged the rooms and possibly knew nothing about them. Could it be that she was really innocent and knew not of what Wilma had accused her? "It must be so," she muttered to herself, and for a moment her better nature arose within her and she felt ashamed of her conduct toward her stepmother. "If she really is innocent——" she whispered to that better nature; then resolutely crushing it and beating her little French slipper against the stone walk she thought: "I'll never tell it! never! Lillian is such a foolish little goose; she's even good to that girl, now, and I wonder what she wouldn't be if she had heard what I have. I had a hard enough time to make her believe

it, and then to keep her from explaining what she knew, to either Grace or her mother; but now, that the web of distrust is spun—and with innocence on my part—I shall not trouble myself to break it nor explain it to anyone. Eh!” and she shivered, “I can picture Lillian going to her and asking pardon for even thinking wrongly of her.” She laughed a sneering little laugh; then as she thought of the way the old servant had expressed her feelings toward herself the words “The wretch” were audibly hissed between two rows of teeth.

Half an hour later she met Clarice in the hall. “Clarice,” she began, as the girl was about to pass on, “tell Nan that it is the wish of her mistress that she shall ’tend to her own affairs and hold her tongue concerning the affairs of the family. Tell her those words and nothing more. Do you hear?” she demanded.

“Yes, Miss, I’ll tell her that and no more,” returned the obedient maid; and going immediately to the kitchen she began: “Say, Nan—”

“Dis am me,” returned the old woman.

“Well,” continued the girl, “I have a strict order for you.”

“Yo’ don’t say;” and Nan suspended her duster while Clarice repeated the message entrusted to her care. She had been told to say nothing more and she knew full well what that meant, so she did not say that it was Wilma who had given her the order, or the ever-suspecting Nan might have “’spicioned some-thin’,” as was her usual expression, but now she burst out. “De snoopin’, pryin’ critter, I reckon she’s to blame wif de whole lot after all, er she wouldn’t be so skeered of my tongue; an’ I’s e heah long foah she wuz, an’ I’d jis’ like to see her keep dis ol’ woman still when she wants to talk, I would.”

Clarice did not dream of the falsehood she had told when she said it was the “mistress’” wish, for Wilma had referred only to herself when she said “Her mistress”; but it had the effect she wished and as she slipped noiselessly from the dining-room, where she had listened to the conversation in the kitchen, she smiled to herself and felt satisfied with her success.

She was searching in the library for a padded volume of Browning’s Poems, when Clarice opened the door: “I thought Miss Lillian or Mr. Willard might be here—Miss Genevieve to

see them," she added in reply to Wilma's inquiring gaze. Wilma rose and accompanied her to the door. Genevieve was waiting in the hall, and Wilma in her sweetest tones, which she so seldom used when speaking to Genevieve, said:

"I'm exceedingly sorry to tell you, but Willard and Lillian are both engaged this morning. Willard is busy with another of those horrid sketches and will be bothered by no one. Lillian isn't at home just now; so you will be obliged to content yourself with me."

Genevieve had no intention of remaining longer and Wilma knew as much. With a quizzical smile she was about to turn back to the library when Willard, who had heard Genevieve's voice, came bounding down the stairs, two at a time, exclaiming: "I'm never too busy to keep my promises, Wilma. Lillian and Grace have already gone to the lake, but I preferred waiting for Genevieve."

As he came up to them Wilma, with a frown, bade him to remember that he was in the house and not to be quite so rude. "You are awful, Willard," she declared, and turning to Genevieve she resumed her sneering tones: "I wonder, Miss Layton, that you, with your fastidious notions, would even go rowing with a scapegrace like him;" and without waiting for a reply, she shut the door with a bang and stamped her foot vigorously, wondering what would become of her brother if he kept on. The very idea of him rowing with Grace and Genevieve! How absurd! and to think Lillian approved of it, and even accompanied them, when he hadn't once asked her to go; and again her foot was planted upon the rich Brussels.

The sun shone brightly over the tremulous lake while Lillian and Grace watched the red canoe as it lay silently in the water, and then again, tipped from side to side. "There they come at last," suddenly exclaimed Lillian, starting up the path to meet them, closely followed by Grace, who skipped along in happy schoolgirl fashion.

Genevieve felt puzzled over Wilma's words and manner. She was sure that her amiable tones were prompted by no good feelings toward herself, and she felt that her last words were intended as an insult toward herself rather than Willard. It was not Genevieve's nature to long harbor hard feelings to-

ward anyone and soon her merry words and ringing laugh mingled with those around her, while the usually quiet Grace forgot her timidity and her gay words and lively sallies awoke a deeper interest for her in the hearts of her companions. Heretofore Willard had alternately teased and neglected the little girl, and as many times incurred the commendation or wrath of his sister.

That was the happiest day Grace had known since she came to Roselin. Lillian had not slighted her once that day; Genevieve was always good to her, and Willard had not forgotten her when the little boating party was planned, and all that day he had been kind to her, treating her in a brotherly manner he had never before assumed, while Wilma, who never let an opportunity pass for reminding her of her dependency upon "Mr. Allington's generosity," had not given her a cross look nor word—in fact, she had not spoken to her at all that happy day.

But alas! with the setting of the sun the happiness vanished and her cup, which she felt was about to overflow, was suddenly drained of the last drop.

CHAPTER XI

GRACE DECEIVED

FOR half an hour after the light was turned out, Grace tossed restlessly on her pillow, while hot tears wet the lacy ruffles. She could not sleep, for the tears kept coming, in spite of her efforts to keep them back.

“Oh! why were they so good to me? Why did they ask me to go if they didn’t want me?” sobbed the child. “None of them like me, not even Lillian. No one loves me here, but why did she tell me tonight? Wouldn’t morning have done as well?”

The long brown curls were thrown out on the pillow and the little white figure quivered as she drew the covers close about her face. One whole happy day at Roselin had been hers; but that was past. The evening clouds had driven out all thought of the brightness of the day. So Willard really didn’t want her with them on the lake that day—had only asked her to see what she would say; Lillian, too, was sorry she had consented to go, and Wilma was surprised that she would go where she knew she was not wanted. Yet Willard had asked her in no teasing way and Lillian had seemed delighted when she told her she would go. Genevieve, at least, was glad to have her with them—Wilma had acknowledged as much, but had added: “Who is she? Only another pauper that Willard and Lillian have taken it into their heads to flatter, tease, and then break her heart—that’s all, if you must know. Be thankful, Grace, that you have some one to warn you.” She had left her then; but her heart was broken, her trust in those whom she was beginning to love was shaken, and her happiest day had, after all, proven the darkest.

One after another, sobs broke the silence until a light step was heard and the half-closed door was pushed back. A figure clad in a kimono appeared. The door was softly closed behind her. “My dear child, why aren’t you asleep?” asked a tender voice, as the soft footsteps approached the bed; and Grace was soon clasped in her mother’s arms.

Mrs. Allington's sleep had been disturbed and at last, hearing the sounds in the next room she had thrown on her kimono and hurried into Grace's room to see if she were asleep and from whence came the sound.

"Oh! mamma, mamma!" cried the little girl, burying her face on her mother's shoulder; "why did we come here when we were so happy, and we never will be here? No, never!"

"Why my darling, I thought you were happy all day."

"No one loves me, though; no one wants me here, and I wish I'd never come," she sobbed.

"Oh! yes they do, Gracie dear; Lillian and Genevieve like you and——"

"No, no, they don't—Genevieve may, but Lilly doesn't—she only pretends. I thought she did today and I was so happy but I know better now. They all hate me and wish I wasn't here. Lillian and Willard didn't really want me to go rowing with them. I wish I'd known it and hadn't gone. Oh! I do; I do!" Her arms clasped her mother's neck and her tears fell fast upon her shoulder.

"Then why did they ask you?"

That was the question Grace had been asking herself and now her mother asked it. Broken sobs was the only answer.

"Never mind, darling, they will learn to love you. They were all so nice to you today, and how do you know they didn't want you?" Mrs. Allington's voice was troubled and had in it a tone of soothing sympathy, and her hand smoothed the tangled curls. At last Grace raised her face from the folds of her mother's kimono and repeated to her a part of Wilma's conversation; when just before going to her own room, she had stopped for a moment at Grace's door, to tell her something which she thought "best for her to know."

"Perhaps Wilma doesn't know how they feel toward you, Grace," her mother said, as Grace's head again sank upon her shoulder. Perhaps she is mistaken."

"No, she isn't mamma. They laugh and make fun of me and she hates me, too; but she isn't mistaken. No, I know she isn't."

"Come, dear, don't cry any more about it. It will all come right and you must go to sleep or you will make yourself sick.

Lie down now and I will stay here until you are asleep. Mamma will always love you, darling, and do anything to make you happy." She kissed the flushed cheek, then it sank upon the pillow.

"Oh! but you can't take me home to Vale Cottage," sobbed Grace.

No, Mrs. Allington knew that she could not do that. Some time they might visit there—that would be all—they would never live there in sweet, peaceful freedom as they once had done. The mother had others to look to and think of now, while then, everything had been for Grace. Now she had other duties as well. A vision of the rose-covered cottage came before her, of the joy and happiness she had had there in spite of the dreadful sorrow which had darkened her life and sent her to the little village of Western Springs. She had never before seen Grace affected as she now was. A shadow had so seldom clouded her bright face, and now, as the tears fell thick and fast, Mrs. Allington's mingled with them. The sobbing was past and Grace lay upon her pillow weeping silently.

Mrs. Allington drew the large chair to the bedside, and taking one of the little hands in both of hers, she sat for awhile in silence, trying in vain to keep back her own tears. At last Grace broke the silence. "Mamma," she whispered.

"Yes, dear, I'm here," was the quick reply.

"I wish—I wish my brother had lived. I know he would have loved me," came in broken whispers.

"Yes, yes, Eldred would have loved you, Gracie. He loved his baby sister, when he was at home with us. And how we should have loved him, too, had he only lived."

"I like to hear you talk about him, mamma—my poor little lost brother, drowned in the sea."

"Your brother would have been a big boy by now, Grace; and a noble boy, too, I think. He was always kind and gentle with his little sister. He was always ready to do anything for you. He loved you then, dear, and I think his love would have grown with his body. How I wish you could remember him as I do, Grace."

There was a silence and the other little hand nestled into the mother's—mother and child saw the vision of a boy; but

had the pictures been painted, one would never have recognized them to have been the same. Mrs. Allington's was that of a little five-year-old, clad in a dark blue sailor suit. The dark brown curls clustered around the little white duck cap, with its band of navy blue. Even the little white anchor was on the front of the waist—the stars on either corner of the wide collar, and the narrow band of white on the left sleeve. The round, rosy cheeks glowed with health and happiness; and the big brown eyes looked wonderingly at her. On a finger of his right hand was a narrow band of gold, upon which was engraved "E. L. W." She saw, too, the little black slippers she had reverently kissed, as she put them on him for the last time. She saw him just as she had seen him then—just as he had left for that deep, dark grave on the ocean bed. Oh! why did she let him go—her boy—her darling child?

Grace's picture was that of a tall handsome youth of sixteen such as she imagined her brother would have been. He too, had dark curly hair, but it was not crowned by a little sailor cap. The eyes were bright and laughing; his manner kind and affectionate. Oh, why couldn't it have been? If she only had him to love her, she felt that she would not care for the love of the whole world.

"Oh, what would I give to have my little boy back again and my little girl happy!" murmured Mrs. Allington, more to herself than to Grace. "But it can never be. All I can do is my best to make Grace happy."

At last silence reigned supremely. Grace had fallen into a peaceful sleep. Mrs. Allington still held the slender little hands in hers and now and then she caressed a long, dark curl, so much like the father's wavy locks, over which the dark waters of the ocean had lashed for ten long years. An hour passed and Grace still slept, yet her mother did not leave her side. Now she looked long and lovingly upon the pale face in the moonlight, then tenderly kissed the thin cheek; bending now and then an anxious glance upon the young sleeper.

Grace had always been delicate and it seemed to her mother that her face was even more pale and thin than it was wont to be. She had never known a sorrow, and regardless of her delicate health she was always bright and happy.

With a last loving caress her mother crept back to her room, leaving the door wide open. The village clock tolled out the third hour of the coming day before the angel of sleep hovered over her pillow. Then she was troubled by dreams of her lost husband and son, of the family at Roselin and of Grace's sorrow.

The sun was shining in brightly, at the open window, when Grace slipped from her bed the following morning. In the hall below she met Lillian just starting out for a morning walk.

"You're late this morning, Grace. If you were ready, I should take you with me," said Lillian, hesitating at the door.

"What of it? I wouldn't go if I could," was the tart reply. And Grace passed on without another word.

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Lillian, as she watched her disappear into the breakfast room; "wouldn't go walking with me if she could! What has come over her? She has always before seemed glad enough to go."

When she returned she found Grace, alone in the library, but she immediately left the room to hide her tears. Lillian looked at her in astonishment and the expression of her face showed plainly how much Grace's conduct pained her. After that morning Grace spent the greater part of her time alone or with her mother. She never walked or rowed with Lillian or Willard and several times when Willard had asked her to accompany them she had so coldly refused that he at last declared he would never ask her again.

The icy gulf which had already existed between Mrs. Allington and her stepdaughters widened as the days passed. Wilma's scheme had proven far more successful than she had hoped, and she was delighted with her efforts. One day when she heard Lillian and Willard puzzling over the change in Grace, she exclaimed: "Oh, I would worry over that child's conduct! She's only feigning." But could Willard and Lillian have known how Grace had longed to be with them; how she had watched them from her window and listened to their happy voices, while tears rolled down each pale cheek, they would have thought differently of her. Now they saw her only as Wilma had pictured her—an independent, ill-tempered little girl, who cared naught for their society.

CHAPTER XII

A WINTER SPENT AT ROSELIN

THE summer days at last passed and the time had come for the family's return to the city, when one day Mr. Allington announced that they would spend the winter at Roselin. Two years before they had remained there on account of his wife's failing health, but now he was greeted by a storm of complaint.

"One of my reasons for remaining is that Miss Marcusson will resume her school work in my family if we are at Roselin," said Mr. Allington. "Her health is much improved and she is anxious to take up the work. Another reason is that my wife prefers remaining here."

Wilma scolded and entreated, but to no avail, while Willard was far from pleased with the arrangement; but Lillian forgot the disappointment she may have felt, in her plans for Genevieve.

Miss Marcusson came a few weeks later and began her school work. This year she had five pupils instead of three, Lillian herself had carried the message to Mrs. Layton that Genevieve could take the studies she had been longing to take with Miss Marcusson if she could find time outside her office work. For awhile Mrs. Layton hesitated to accept, but when she was assured that it was the wish of both Mr. and Mrs. Allington, she decided to let her study there, much to the delight of everyone excepting Wilma, who had at first declared if Genevieve studied with Miss Marcusson, she herself would not; but Lillian, perched on the arm of her father's chair, with her arms around his neck, had at last obtained his consent, in spite of the opposing Wilma.

Genevieve loved books but she had hoped for nothing better than the village school, from which she had graduated in the spring, and now that the opportunity was offered, she very gladly accepted it and was the most industrious of Miss Mar-

cusson's pupils. Her lessons were always perfect, and while Wilma frowned and complained, Willard looked on approvingly.

Early in the winter the Angel of Death visited the farmhouse and carried away the aged spirit of the invalid grandmother, and now Genevieve no longer had to hasten home when her school and office work was over. Half the burden of home duties was lifted and after school hours she was always ready for pleasure, and frequently, through her influence, Grace joined them.

Thus, the winter passed all too soon, and again spring unfolded her fairy wings, called forth the tiny plants which for months past had been sleeping beneath the winter snow, dressed the trees in brightest green, and opened buds and flowers.

When the first days of June came, Miss Marcusson left Roselin. Grace had perfect confidence in her teacher and loved her more than anyone besides her mother, and at parting she could not keep back the tears; although Miss Marcusson had promised to return in September and resume her work. Genevieve was to continue her studies there the following winter, too, and Miss Marcusson was anxious to have her, for she was exceedingly bright and had made wonderful progress during the past winter.

The friendship between Genevieve, Grace and Lillian strengthened as the days passed, and Grace often doubted the truth of what Wilma had told her. She knew that her dark-haired stepsister was no friend of hers, and at times she was half inclined to think it was only a plan to deceive her, but things had gone quite smoothly that winter and without her knowledge she had twined herself about the hearts of those around her.

Wilma gladly welcomed the coming summer and with it Marie Carrelton, who came to spend a week at Roselin.

"I think your mother is lovely, Wilma," Marie remarked, after she had been presented to Mrs. Allington and the two girls were alone in their room that night.

"Oh, pray, Marie, don't call her a mother of mine," returned Wilma in tones of disgust. "Mrs. Allington is very nice but only my stepmother remember."

For a moment, Marie looked puzzled, then replied:

"Oh! you call her Mrs. Allington, do you? Well, I'm glad you like her, Wilma, and I'll remember after this." She playfully caressed Wilma's cheek as she finished.

Wilma had ceased to complain of her stepmother, only when alone with her brother or sister, but all censorious remarks were now hurled at Grace.

"But wait until you see the child, Marie—quite different from her mother you will say, but I should let you judge for yourself, I suppose." With a little self-reproachful laugh she changed the subject and began telling Marie about Willard and Genevieve.

"Oh! I do wish you could see them together sometimes, Marie," she said; "it is perfectly disgusting to watch them. Why, Willard is really daffy and I can't see why, over a girl of her class—so far below us, you know, Marie." Wilma's head was tossed a bit higher and Marie's eyes, which had wavered in their first steady gaze into Wilma's, now raised from the ribbon she had taken from her collar and rested again on her face.

"I am surprised, that a boy of Willard's position and good sense should fall in love with a girl such as you describe, Wilma," she said slowly, trying to crush back her emotion and disappointment.

"Oh, it won't last long, when he sees you again, Marie. He will never think of his silly country love while in your presence," was the consoling reply.

A delicate flush mounted Marie's cheeks and brow, and slipping her arms about Wilma's neck, she whispered softly, looking up into the smiling face above hers:

"You must have guessed in what regard I hold Willard, but don't think I am in love, I only admire him very much and enjoy being in his company. I doubt if he is more than courteous to me, as he has always been."

"I know I'm right, Marie, so don't be silly and have horrid dreams tonight." Wilma kissed the blushing cheek and left her.

Marie had no opportunity to meet her country rival, for, during her stay, Genevieve did not come to Roselin. Every day she could hear the voices of the young people and often

saw them pass her gate in the carriage or on horseback, and Willard always rode beside the plump, fair-haired stranger, for through Wilma's schemes and plans, Willard was kept always with them and near Marie's side.

Marie met Grace with a haughty coolness and Grace, with no admiration for the society girl, no desire to be in her company, returned each greeting with as much spirit and coolness as a child of thirteen could.

One evening, when the others had gathered in the music-room, Grace slipped away into the library and began reading a book which Miss Marcusson had given her. Presently the door opened and Willard came in.

"I am tired of that;" he nodded toward the music-room. "So I'm going to keep you company for a while. Will you accept it as gladly as some other people do?" taking the book from her hand.

"Always gladly," she replied, looking up at him in surprise.

"What do you think of Miss Carrelton?" was his next question.

For a moment she hesitated, then replied, quite truthfully: "I do not like her."

Willard only smiled. "Have you seen Genevieve this week?" he asked, a moment later.

"I was there awhile yesterday."

"Would you like to go over there this evening?"

"Now?"

"Yes, right away."

"Who is going?"

"No one unless you will go with me," he replied.

"Aren't the others going?"

"No, they don't know we are, and I don't intend that they shall."

"Not even Lillian?" asked Grace, in some surprise.

"Oh, I don't care for Lilly; but there is no use telling any of them. Run and tell your mamma that you are going."

He sat dreamily turning the leaves of Grace's book until she returned saying she would go with him; then he silently led her out onto the veranda and down the moon-lit lane. A tiny

light gleamed out in the silence before them, while the music and mirth at Roselin faded as they hurried on toward Genevieve's.

"I wonder what those girls will say when they find us gone?" said Willard.

"They won't miss me, but with you it is quite different," Grace returned. Then she began wondering why Willard wished to go to Genevieve's and, above all, why had he asked her to accompany him? She had never known him to go there without Lillian before, and why he should leave the society of his sisters and their elegant guest for that of Genevieve and herself was more than she could tell. All that week he had constantly been at Miss Carrelton's side with apparently no thought of any other. But he had thought of Genevieve more than Grace could guess. He had missed her gay words and merry laugh from Roselin that week, as had both she and Lillian; and that evening when he found Wilma so determined to keep him with them he was equally determined not to stay and, when she was seated at the piano and Marie going into ecstasies over a piece of embroidery beneath a rose vase on the piano, he quietly left the room in search of Grace from whom, he felt sure, he would hear something from Genevieve. Then partly to tease Marie and Wilma and partly because he wished to see Genevieve, he suggested going to the cottage, and before the girls in the music-room knew that he had left the house, he was in Mrs. Layton's little parlor.

Some time after Grace left her, Mrs. Allington was resting in her sitting-room when she heard the girls searching for Willard. "He's just teasing us, I know," she heard Lillian say; "I'll find him in his room;" and she ran joyfully up the stairs. She was used to her brother's teasing pranks and had no doubt but that he would be found hiding from them in one of the dark or dimly lighted rooms; but Wilma had greater fears, for Willard had, the evening before, threatened to go to the farmhouse if Genevieve did not come to Roselin. But Marie, deceived by his devoted attention in the days past, laughingly joined in the search with Lillian.

"Gone to Layton's! Impossible!" Wilma's voice suddenly echoed down the hall in reply to Mrs. Allington's. With an

air of disgust she turned from the door and joined Marie in the library: "Now, Marie, you see what comes of having a beggarly child in the house all the time. It is quite reasonable that she has persuaded him to go there with her."

Just then Lillian came into the room. "Willard and Grace gone to Genevieve's and never asked us?" she asked, the cherry lips pouting prettily.

"No, indeed! Grace wanted no one but Willard, Lillian; and why should they ask us? The invitation would have been only an insult," returned Wilma haughtily.

"Why, Wilma, how can you say that! It wouldn't have been to me—I wish I were there now, and so would Marie if she knew Genevieve."

"Pray don't disgust Marie with your praise of Genevieve," said her sister reproachfully, and Lillian fell into a moody silence, curled up in a corner of the spacious davenport, thinking of the pleasures her brother and Grace were enjoying with Genevieve and Robert.

Wilma sat beneath the gas jet, crumpling the leaves of Grace's book, mentally accusing Willard of discourteous manners toward Marie and unbrotherly conduct toward herself; while her guest—buried in the velvety softness of a large chair in a shaded corner of the room—was vainly trying to force back the tears as the words "Gone to Layton's" re-echoed in her heart. There Willard was sitting at Genevieve's side, preferring that to a place near her own; making love to a poor country girl in preference to the popular Miss Carrelton; one of the belles of society and belonging to one of the richest families in Boston. Could it be that he, whom of all her admirers she liked the best, should so desert her? How could she tell her mother (who had hoped so much from this visit) of the girl whom she feared had supplanted her in the affections of the only boy for whom she had really cared.

An hour passed; a dreamy silence reigned in the library; then a merry whistle was heard on the lawn, and Willard, with Grace, came bounding into the room. Exercise had brought a bright color to Grace's cheeks, which now resembled the summer roses; her dark eyes sparkled and a happy smile parted the rosy lips. Willard's face, too, was bright and smiling and sur-

veying the three silent figures, his eyes shone mischievously, and he burst into a merry laugh.

"Ha! Ha! Quite an old maid's party," he teasingly began, slipping Lillian from her place on the davenport, and tipping Marie's chair; "and do we really have to leave?" Assuming a disappointed air he glanced toward the door.

"You seem to be your own master about such matters." Wilma looked volumes at her brother, who only pulled one of the smooth, shining puffs of her waving hair from its place, and replied that in this case he would remain, adding, as he drew a chair near Marie's, "but, Grace, don't let these old maids rope you into their club."

CHAPTER VIII

THE BEGINNING OF SCHOOL

AFTER Marie's departure, days and weeks rolled past all in the same dull monotony, until the middle of September came, bringing with it the stately golden-rod, loads of rosy fruit, and changing the forest leaves from green to red, brown, and golden. Then came arrangements for the winter's schooling. Willard and Wilma had planned to attend school in Baltimore that year. Marie and Adelaide Richard were going, too, and as Lillian listened to her sister's plans for winter gayeties, she felt that the home atmosphere would be unbearable with both her brother and sister absent, and at last Mr. Allington was persuaded to give his consent that she, too, might go.

Lillian was delighted and began, at once, her arrangements to join them. Wilma had planned her own wardrobe without asking her stepmother's advice about anything. Only once or twice had Mrs. Allington ventured her opinion, unasked, and then her advice was met by a cold look, which plainly said: "I shall do as I please;" but with Lillian it was different. Her wardrobe was given entirely into Mrs. Allington's charge and planned with great care.

Grace and Genevieve had already begun their studies with Miss Marcusson and each day Genevieve came to Roselin for her lessons. She and Lillian were better friends now than ever before; and she listened to the arrangements for her friend's departure with a sad face.

One evening, much later than usual, she arose from her seat in the school-room and began gathering up her books, when Lillian entered.

"I'm going to walk home with you, Genevieve. This is the last time till the holidays, you know."

"Then you are going in the morning, Lillian?"

"Yes, on the ten forty-five from the village. I'm so sorry to leave you, Genevieve; but of course Grace is here and you

will be company for each other. You'll study hard, I know, and learn lots, and I expect to study more this winter than I did last; but oh! we had such good times last winter."

"We certainly did and how we shall miss them this. Rose-lin won't seem the same to me when you are gone; of course I love Grace, but she can hardly fill your place, Lillian." She looked affectionately upon Lillian's face and the tears glistened on her long, dark lashes.

Willard joined them as they neared the lake and they walked on to Genevieve's gate. "You girls must not shed too many tears over this parting, for remember we return some day and who knows but that we shall have Genevieve with us at school in Baltimore next winter," he said, as he and Lillian were about turning homeward.

"Oh, Willard, don't speak of it; I shall never have a better teacher than Miss Marcusson, and it is so kind of your father to have me study with her. I shall study hard and try to do justice to my teacher and benefactor."

"As if you didn't last year—you'll do them justice, I assure you, and not half try," he returned.

Long after they had left her, Willard's words kept ringing in her ears. That night she could not sleep; "who knows but that we shall have Genevieve with us at school in Baltimore next year." Would it ever be? Would she some day enjoy the advantages of which she heard so much and saw so little? No! it could never be; she must be satisfied with what she had. Miss Marcusson's school was far better than she had once hoped to attend, and now, why should she wish for better? Then murmuring sadly to herself, "it can never be; it can never be," she fell asleep.

Next morning she hurried through with her few home duties and, ere the clock struck eight, was again in the school-room. Miss Marcusson assigned her some puzzling propositions in geometry, then excusing herself she left Genevieve alone. For awhile she bent over her book, trying in vain to settle her mind upon her lesson—it was impossible. Her thoughts kept flying away; following Lillian here and there as she hastened about, picking up small articles which had hitherto been forgotten; listening to Willard's voice as he called to passing servants;

and dozens of other things which broke the silence of the school-room.

At last the door opened and Lillian appeared, carrying in her hand a large, beautiful chrysanthemum. In a moment her arms were thrown about Genevieve's neck and her coral lips kissing Genevieve's cheek again and again. Now the tears hung heavily on Lillian's lashes and one by one rolled down her cheeks. Genevieve quite bravely forced back her own tears and was about to whisper something to Lillian when another arm was around her and, ere she had time to protest, another pair of lips was pressed to hers.

"Oh, I couldn't help it! Honest, Genevieve, I couldn't resist and you'll acknowledge that it isn't fair to give all your kisses and caresses to one. Lillian has already had more than her share." Willard released the blushing girl.

"Come, Lillian, or we shall be late for our train." So saying, Willard left them, and putting her arm about Genevieve, Lillian drew her into the hall just as Wilma's step was heard on the stairs above; but instead of assuming her haughty air as usual, she extended her hand to Genevieve—as, indeed, she had to all the members of her father's family—with a stiff "good-bye."

The carriage was soon rolling away and Lillian's slender, gloved hand, waved the last good-bye as they disappeared around the shaded bend.

"Oh, you are all here," called a voice from the rear coach, as the train stopped and Adelaide's bright young face appeared at the window.

"Isn't Marie with you?"

"Yes, here she is;" and Marie's face appeared beside her own.

After Willard saw his sisters fairly settled with their friends, he left them and took a seat at the further end of the car. When, for a moment, Adelaide left her seat to speak to a friend seated opposite, Marie began:

"What do you think, Adelaide positively refuses to room with us at Mrs. North's. She has already engaged a room at another private house."

"Possible?" exclaimed Wilma. "At Mrs. North's we shall

have an opportunity to become acquainted with some of the other students, and that's the part I wouldn't miss. My! you wouldn't find me at any other private house. I don't understand why Adelaide should prefer it."

"Perhaps I know," whispered Marie, as Adelaide returned to her place beside Lillian.

"Aren't you going to room with us, Adelaide?" asked Lillian, who felt more genuine regret that the bright young Adelaide was not to be their companion than did either of the other girls.

"No, I have promised to stay with an old and very dear friend of mamma's, who lives only a short distance from the college," Adelaide replied. "She so wished for me to be with her this winter that I could not refuse, much as I would like to be with you girls. You will have great times, I know, and I hope to see you quite often. Mrs. Mandel will be glad for you to visit me any time you can."

Wilma gasped as Adelaide finished. Mandel! Mandel! Then that was Adelaide's reason; she wished to be near Louis Mandel, to gain a place for herself in the hearts of his mother and sisters, and win him by her sweet smiles and quiet winning ways. With a bitter feeling toward Adelaide, Wilma thought these thoughts, but she smiled as she answered lightly: "How naughty of you to thus desert us for an old lady—a friend of your mother's."

It was the beginning of school at Baltimore and about the depot there was a scene of confusion, as each train brought a number of students—some from as far west as the Mississippi. Trunks, boxes and suit cases were piled upon the platform, while anxious passengers hurried about in search of their belongings. It was late in the afternoon when the long train from Boston came puffing in. More trunks and boxes were tumbled upon the platform and more than one group of college boys and girls streamed from the cars.

Willard and his sisters, with Marie and Adelaide, were soon on their way toward Mrs. North's. At No.— Fifth Avenue, they left Adelaide standing before a large beautiful building—the home of the Mandel's—and a moment later they drew up before a big stone residence with broad white steps leading up

to it, tall evergreens shading it on either side and a rolling lawn, which was emerald still, stretching out before it. This was No.— Moreland Place.

Mrs. North, a friend of Mrs. Carrelton and the Allingtons, had been forced by financial reverses to convert her beautiful home into a rooming-house, and here a number of the students had procured rooms. Here they received the comforts and every privilege of home life.

The best suite of rooms had been engaged for the Allingtons, and Marie's apartment adjoined theirs. She had confidently expected Adelaide to share her room but now she declared she would have no other room-mate. There was a door opening from her room into that of Wilma and Lillian, and, as the former often said, it was as if they were one family.

After the first days of examination were over and everyone settled in their school work, the confusion ceased and at the Moreland Place there reigned only the college spirit. Everyone was satisfied with his surroundings and days and weeks flew past, each bringing with it something new. But not so at Roselin, where Grace bent industriously over her books, and where Genevieve was kept busy with her work at the store and her studies in the school-room, hoping for nothing outside the daily routine.

CHAPTER XIV

LLEWELLYN GREYMORE.

"You can't guess what I have for you."

Adelaide burst unannounced into the little parlor of the Allington apartment, where Lillian was poring over a volume of French, Wilma idly fingering the keys of the piano, and Marie talking lightly with Willard. Adelaide held four small white envelopes to view as she continued:

"Alice and Helen are going to give a party for me Thursday evening. Will you all come?"

It was the third week of school and, although Adelaide came often to their cozy little apartments, neither of the girls had as yet called at the Mandel's. They had met both Alice and Helen at a college reception, and now the prospect of meeting Louis again brought a bright flush to Wilma's cheek. As yet she had not seen him and she often wondered why he had not called, but always accusing Adelaide of his seeming neglect, her cool attitude increased. And now, when the invitations came from his sisters, with no message from him, she, for a moment, hesitated; but as Adelaide talked on about the arrangements for the party she decided to go by all means. It was to be a small party, Adelaide said—a few friends she had met at the college since her arrival and several college boys whom Louis had met the year previous, with other friends of the family.

Presently she turned to Willard and asked: "Who was that young man with you on the lawn as I entered the hall this morning?"

"That was Llewellyn Greymore, a chap who just entered the University a week ago. I only met him yesterday. He was looking for rooms and I persuaded him to take one here."

"Llewellyn Greymore," Adelaide repeated; "I think—yes, I'm sure, Helen had his name on the list. He's a General's son, I think she said."

An hour later Adelaide was gone and Wilma, now left alone, sat thinking of Llewellyn, the son of a General Greymore. She too, had seen him on the lawn with Willard and had admired his bright, open countenance. She would meet him at Adelaide's party and exert all her efforts to keep him near her. She could fancy Louis Mandel's annoyance as he watched her, while Llewellyn Greymore danced with her and paid her homage in a dozen little ways. Wilma had been told of her beauty since babyhood, and now a glance at the mirror opposite only confirmed the fact, and she knew that both Louis and Llewellyn Greymore—in fact, everyone—would admire her. This was her first party at Baltimore and she intended to look her very best.

In a fever of excitement she waited for the evening to come when Louis Mandel would compare her brilliant beauty with that of Adelaide Richard, and see another her hero, at her side where he, of course, would long to be. At last Thursday came—the day of the party—bright, warm, and fair as a spring day.

It was almost eight o'clock when the carriage drew up before No.— Fifth Avenue, and Wilma, with Lillian, followed their brother and Marie into the brightly lighted hall and up a marble stairway. When they again descended and entered the drawing-room, where most of the guests were assembled, a slight murmur ran around the room.

Marie wore a gown of delicate pink, with emeralds nestling here and there among the dainty laces, while a necklace of diamonds encircled the short plump neck and a pink rose was held in place among the light coils of her hair by a Roman band of emeralds. Willard, tall, straight and with an air of self-assurance, was at her side.

Lillian wore a gown of pale blue satin which fitted the slight form perfectly, and contrasted beautifully with her sister's rich old rose. Among the waving tresses of her golden hair there nestled a white rose, just touched with a delicate tinge of pink on each waxy petal. She wore no jewel save a pearl brooch, which was fastened in the pale folds of her bodice.

About Wilma's neck was fastened a small gold chain and suspended from it, just above the rose of her gown, there

sparkled a diamond crescent, while another shown in the black waves of her hair. Her eyes glanced hastily about the room and a bright glow passed over her hitherto white face. But before her she found not the face for which her eyes searched, and with a nod or a smile to those whom she knew, she passed on to the open door, through which she caught a glimpse of the dancers. There were only a few and Wilma found no familiar form among them. At every public gathering, since her arrival in Baltimore, she had viewed the sea of faces surrounding her, but never had she seen one that even resembled that of Louis Mandel, and now turning about, she drew a chair near Adelaide's.

"Isn't Louis at home?" she inquired; and she wondered at the strange note in her voice as she asked it. What was he to her? She had not seen him since that morning when he left her standing on the platform at Ashville, and it had been months since she had received a letter from him; and what did it matter to her whether he was at home on this particular evening or not? She could not analyze her feelings when Adelaide exclaimed:

"Why, Wilma, I supposed you knew that he is spending the winter in California! How can it be that you have not heard it—that we have not mentioned it before—but I really hadn't thought but what you knew."

At first she felt a momentary pain that she should not see the face of which she sometimes dreamed; but Adelaide's next words conveyed to her a new thought. He often inquired about her, Adelaide said, and she would rather know that he thought of her, even beneath the sunny skies of California, than to feel, as she had for the past weeks, that he had forgotten the golden days they had spent together at Lakeview.

A moment later Helen Mandel entered with a guest whose late arrival had caused several of the girls some little anxiety. Adelaide arose to meet them. He was then presented to Wilma as Llewellyn Greymore; but forgetful of her intentions to keep him at her side, she only sat watching him as she spoke to one after another of his acquaintances, and was at last led away to the next room.

Willard and Marie had joined in the dance and Lillian stood

watching them when Helen came up to her and presented the tall, handsome stranger. His large, dark eyes looked straight into hers as she turned from the dancers and raised them to his face, which was rather thin, with lines of self-repression about the lips and nostrils. The heavy, brown hair was combed in soft dark waves back from the white brow. Lillian looked for a moment into the handsome face of Llewellyn Greymore—a stranger, yet a strangely familiar bearing.

Half an hour later Wilma was surprised beyond measure as she saw the glimmer of Lillian's pale blue satin float past the door with Llewellyn Greymore's face bent close to the fragrant rose in her shining hair—a vision of perfect grace and beauty—as the sweet music of a waltz sounded through the rooms. After them came Willard with Adelaide, who, clad in a dainty gown of white silk, looked up into his face with bright, sparkling eyes and smiling lips.

Marie, thus deserted, soon found her way to Wilma's side.

"Do you know, Wilma, I can't like Adelaide of late," she whispered, as the vision again floated into view; but Wilma, in whose opinion Adelaide had suddenly risen, only answered: "She looks quite pretty tonight."

"Ye-es," was Marie's reply.

A moment later they were joined by Leon Worthen, a tall, thin youth, and a fastidious bachelor of forty-five, and with them soon joined in the dance.

Wilma's brilliant beauty and dignified manner attracted Llewellyn Greymore quite as much as the fairy form and the quiet sweetness of her sister's fair face had done, and ere long he found himself at her side. At a suggestion from Adelaide—who, with Willard, passed them on their way to the conservatory—he, with Wilma, followed them mid the green, blossoming bowers, listening more to his companion's silvery voice than to the gentle murmur of fountains, and drinking in her beauty rather than that of the rare flowers surrounding him. But when from between the waving boughs of a palm, he caught a glimpse of the glimmering blue and saw Lillian, close to Alice Mandel's dark figure, bending down to examine one of her favorite flowers, the spell was broken, and Llewellyn began to wonder which was the more beautiful—the tall, dark girl at his side, exerting all

her efforts to please him, or her bright, unaffected little sister before them.

It was quite late that night when Wilma, well pleased with herself and the world in general, sat before the glowing grate, in her dressing gown. The party had been a success, everyone had agreed, with the exception of Marie, who was somewhat piqued at the marked attention paid to Adelaide by Willard, and the change in Wilma's demeanor toward the girl whom she had professed to dislike. Marie had heard that evening, from his sisters, of Louis Mandel's absence, but she never thought of attributing that to the change in her friend, nor to the jealousy she felt rising in her heart against Adelaide.

CHAPTER XV

THE FIRST VACATION

THE snow-flakes were softly fluttering in the cold December air and fast covering the brown old world with a blanket of white, while in the kitchen Nan bent over cranberry jelly, pies, cakes and candies, which she was preparing for the morrow. The young ladies and Willard were to arrive that evening, for the next day was Christmas. Holly boughs and evergreens had been twined together in every room, with here and there a bunch of mistletoe, the white berries gleaming against the dark green background, and at every window a Christmas bell was suspended.

Grace sat in a low chair drawn into the arch of the big bay-window, that she might be first to see the carriage, which was to bring them home from the station. They were coming to spend the holidays at Roselin, and a bright glow of Christmas warmth was waiting to welcome them home.

Growing tired of her watch, Grace was about to turn from the window when the carriage appeared, and almost before she reached the door, it stopped before the gate. For a moment her heart sunk, but followed by her mother, she rushed on, and their welcome home was a hearty one.

Although the wind was sharp and cold and the snow flurry continued, Willard took Grace and Mrs. Allington, together with Lillian, for their first ride in the new automobile, which had arrived only the day previous. As they neared Mrs. Layton's little brown cottage, Willard, quite thoughtful of his sister's wishes, turned to Lillian and asked if she would like to stop; and when Mrs. Allington suggested that they take Genevieve with them, the two girls were delighted and soon Genevieve was seated beside Willard, so bewildered with the pleasure she

was enjoying, she could scarcely think. "It was so unexpected and so grand," she said, when describing the ride to her mother, who was delighted more, if possible, than Genevieve herself.

Even Wilma was glad to rest at Roselin once more, after weeks of gayety and study; for Wilma, as well as Lillian and Willard, had spent much time with her school work. Lillian was never before so happy as she was during the holidays, when, with all studies dismissed from her mind, she was free to go where her fancy led her—coasting with Robert Layton or Grace, skating with Willard and Genevieve or riding with her father—and she declared there was nothing better than the delicious things old Nan had prepared for that Christmas dinner. Nan only wiped the beads of perspiration from her dark brow, and felt that she was well repaid for her labors of the past week, if she had in some way pleased "Little Lilly." Anything at home pleased Lillian, and with a hearty squeeze of the fat, black hand, a loving caress of the little fluffy white kitten, purring at her feet, she tripped from the kitchen.

Roselin was not the same with Lillian absent as it was with Lillian present, and she made more than one heart glad that Christmas Day, by her sunny smile, kind words and loving manner.

Mr. Allington felt that he had lost something of life when he had quietly consented for all of his children to leave him. Lillian always seemed to him the spirit of her mother, which hovered so lovingly about him. And during their absence, he often came home from the office, tired and moody, hardly noticing Grace. Once he had told her stories about Roselin, and caressed her dark brown curls, but now it was all changed. But a year and a half at Roselin had changed other things as well. It had softened Wilma's manner toward her; it had made Genevieve Layton her friend and constant companion, and above all else, it had dispelled from her mind all fear that she was disliked by Lillian or Willard. So if Mr. Allington was not as kind as he once was, it mattered but little to Grace.

Mrs. Allington's path had not been all roses and sunshine, even with Wilma absent, for she had noticed her husband's manner of late and the cloud which darkened his brow, and

it had annoyed her very much; but now that the girls and Willard were at home, the cloud lifted and the sunshine shone once more in the home; while the cold, wintry wind, laden with snow-flakes, blew without.

Toward the close of the holidays, Marie and her mother came to Roselin, but their visit added nothing to anyone's pleasure, save, perhaps, Wilma's, who looked brighter and smiled sweeter when in their presence, than she had before their arrival.

CHAPTER XVI

AFTER VACATION

THE warm spring days were just opening and the golden edge of the full moon peeped over the tops of the distant buildings and sent a silvery ray of light into the gathering darkness. Down the broad steps of No.— Fifth Avenue came a tall, dark figure, and made its way through the crowd of students moving along the street. Several times he paused to speak to a passing friend, and once stopped for some time before an astonished group, who, in the brightening moonlight, could be recognized at once as Willard, Marie and Lillian; then raising his hat he moved on.

Most of the students had gone to the concert and the Moreland Place was more quiet than usual, as the same stately figure crossed the lawn, hurried up the steps and into the dimly lighted hall.

Wilma had refused to attend the concert that evening and in silence she watched the others depart. Llewellyn Greymore, she knew, was not going and she sat down, wondering if he would not come down to the parlor when he learned that she had not gone with the others. And for awhile she forgot her aching head, as she thought of the marked preference paid her by the boy, whom all his classmates and fellow-students revered above all others; while many of the young girls of Baltimore had cast their nets in Llewellyn Greymore's path, in the vain hope that he would be entangled. But as yet he was hers—her hero and her servant.

He was a year younger than she, but often as she looked upon the calm, fair brow and tall, manly form, she felt that he was by years her senior. But little did age matter to her as long as his father was the General Windford Greymore, who had only the year before returned from Europe, where his son had received every educational advantage possible and borne away the laurels of his class. He was now taking a preparatory course in medicine and some day hoped to be a noted physician.

Llewellyn was a great friend of her brother, and often spent his evenings with them, at first dividing his attention equally between the two sisters, but at last giving all of it to Wilma, who seemed to expect him always at her side; while Lillian met him with the same warm, friendly greeting and talked with him much in the same manner as she did with Willard—always bright and always smiling.

While Wilma sat thinking how she had won Llewellyn Grey-more, even from her sister, of whom she had at first felt a pang of jealousy, there was a gentle tap on the door and the maid, mindful of Wilma's headache, said softly:

"A caller, Miss Allington, and Mrs. North wishes to know if you will see him downstairs or shall she send him up to your parlor?"

"Yes, you may send him up here;" and Wilma, pushing back her curls and pinching her cheeks which were unusually pale, pressed one hand to her brow and waited.

Presently the door opened and the maid stood aside to admit the visitor. An exclamation of surprise escaped from Wilma's lips as she saw before her, not the form of Llewellyn Grey-more, but the stately form of Louis Mandel. Quickly collecting herself, she extended her hand, expressing her surprise at seeing him when she had supposed him to be in California.

"Have you nothing to express save surprise?" he asked, with a note of disappointment in his voice.

"Oh! yes, but please, Mr. Mandel, give me time for words. I am certainly glad to see you again; glad you came tonight, but perhaps you may be disappointed when I tell you that Willard, with Marie and my sister, has gone to the concert." While saying this, she withdrew her hand from both of his.

"I met them as I came," he said seating her on the divan and sitting down beside her, talking on of California and its beauty, of his early return, how he surprised the family at No.—Fifth Avenue, and adding; "I thought of calling last evening but my mother and sisters would not listen to my going out on the first evening of my return.

"His mother, his sisters—and Adelaide," Wilma mentally added, while the slight flush on her cheek deepened to a burning red, which only increased her beauty.

Ere long the others returned and with them Llewellyn.

"Glad to see you home, Louis," and Llewellyn Greymore grasped Louis Mandel's hand with a hearty shake, then with a word to Wilma, in which she could not detect a spark of the jealousy she had hoped for, he turned to Lillian and drew a chair near hers, while the bright glow on Wilma's cheek faded and she listened quietly to the gay conversation about her.

Louis and Llewellyn had known each other since the latter's return from Europe and it was with a feeling of disappointment that Llewellyn had heard, after his arrival at Baltimore, of his friend's departure for the West the month before, and now, when he found him so unexpectedly by Wilma's side, it did not for a moment mar his pleasure; but turning to the sister, whom he was beginning to admire even more than he did the beautiful Wilma, with her many charms, he devoted himself to her for the remainder of the evening.

After they were gone and Lillian and Marie were fast asleep upon their pillows, Wilma still sat—her headache unabating—thinking of Louis and Llewellyn. Once she had thought of causing Louis Mandel pangs of jealousy by her seeming preference of the young Greymore; but now, as she sat staring into the glowing grate, seeing only the two faces before her—one with the large, brown eyes, from whose sparkling depths there shone a mild light of dreamy tenderness; while the other's, large, clear and blue, had in them a singular fascination—there crept over her a feeling of anger that Llewellyn, so calm and unannoyed, should, with an air of satisfaction, turn from her to Lillian—Lillian, who at that moment lay peacefully dreaming of those same brown eyes which were looking out from the grate upon her sister—all unconscious of the pain she had caused her, and of the dark frown clouding her brow, as she crept softly to bed by her side.

As days and weeks slipped past, Louis and Llewellyn often came together to the Allington apartments, and to them it was evidently understood that while Louis played the devoted to Wilma, Llewellyn honored and admired her bright, unaffected little sister. At parties, operas and concerts it was the same, while more than one maiden, who had felt the cold sharpness of Miss Allington's manner, smiled at her ignominious defeat;

while others sneered at the unsuspecting Lillian, who, never dreaming of having defeated her sister, received Llewellyn's attentions as if he were only a friend of her brother, for Llewellyn and Willard had become fast friends. Lillian, it is true, often noticed the change in Wilma's manner toward Llewellyn, which now assumed a touch of coldness—when once it had been so warm and cordial—and she sometimes wondered that her sister should prefer the fair-haired Louis, upon whom she now lavished all her smiles.

Wilma had dispelled every ill-feeling against Adelaide, with whom the girls were now on the most intimate terms—Louis often carrying messages to them, which he delivered as from "my sister Adelaide." He and Adelaide had been friends since the days when they had played together among the old New Hampshire hills, years ago, and now that she was a member of his family, he treated her as if she were indeed his sister; teasing, petting and caressing her as he did Alice and Helen, while his mother, who loved "the child" dearly, smiled at his brotherly conduct toward her. And Adelaide often followed him to the door, with the same bright smile, to send some messages to Wilma, to Lillian or Marie and now and then one to Willard, which, strange to say, Louis Mandel always neglected to deliver.

At first Marie's conduct had annoyed Willard exceedingly, for she was always at his side when in his presence, but when he saw how others strove for a smile or a word from the wealthy girl he felt flattered, and in spite of having once declared to Wilma that he hated her, he was quite content to have her with him. And he admired her when he found that she was not the coquette he had thought her to be; for Wilma had told Marie how thoroughly he detested a coquette, and she always frowned on all other suitors.

Thus the spring days passed and with the first days of June came the last of school and the parting of many students; some with hopes of meeting there again, while others left the old University to start upon the path of duty which lay before them, bright and hopeful.

CHAPTER XVII

CARLSON & COLLINS' NEW EMPLOYEE

SUMMER, winter, and another summer had flown past and again the October sun was sinking. It hung low in the west and only the mellow glow of its last rays tinted the red and golden leaves, touched the evergreen trees surrounding Moreland Place, and fell over the city of Baltimore. Moving slowly down the street in the direction of Moreland Place, came a young girl—tall, slender, and graceful in every movement. She had apparently forgotten every duty. Her face, tired in its expression, was raised to the sinking sun, whose lingering rays seemed to caress the shining bands of dark hair which were visible beneath the plain brown hat. Slowly—almost wearily—she turned from the western sky, quickened her step, and was soon at Moreland Place.

Just as she was about to ascend the stairs, a pair of soft, white arms were thrown about her neck and a kiss, which brought a bright smile to the tired face, was placed upon her cheek.

"You're coming down tonight, aren't you? It will rest you, poor tired dearie," said the pleading voice.

"No, no, Lillian, I can't come down tonight; I have some studying to do and a report to make out for Mr. Collins, so you will please excuse me tonight."

This was not the first time Carlson & Collins' employee had refused Lillian Allington's urgent invitation to spend her evenings with them, and Lillian only wound her arms closer about her.

"You shall not go till you promise."

"But, Lillian, do you want me to lose my position in the office and class, and leave Baltimore forever? I don't think you do," she said smilingly.

"Oh, you wouldn't do that, but just as you like. If you don't come down I shall come to your room."

"I shall expect you then;" and the young girl ran up the stairs, down the hall and into a small, plainly furnished room. Yet it had about it a home-like appearance, with a book or a sofa pillow lying here and there, a picture on the mantel over the open grate, and a clean ingrain rug upon the floor. Throwing herself into the chair by the window, she glanced out over the city, forgetful of the lessons to be gotten and the report to be made out for her employer; and her thoughts drifted away to the past.

"Ah! is it truly I, Genevieve Layton, who holds a position in the law office of Carlson & Collins?—possible that I am attending the College and have the opportunity to gain the knowledge for which I have so often longed?" she asked herself, as she at last gathered up her books and began her work.

Two years before when Willard had said, "Who knows but that we shall have Genevieve with us at school in Baltimore next year," she had answered, "It will never be." It was not to be the next year, it is true, for while the Allingtons spent their second year at Baltimore, Genevieve and Grace had studied in that little school-room at Roselin, where Miss Marcusson had taught them the lessons they had learned so well.

It was late in the summer, when upon the death of a distant aunt, Genevieve came into possession of a few hundred dollars, which seemed to her quite a small fortune. Robert's wages, together with what Genevieve and her mother earned, made the little family an ample support; so Genevieve's money was laid aside for a while, until one evening after she had returned from the store, as she and her mother sat sewing, the latter broke the silence by saying:

"Genevieve, I think I have heard you wish that you could go to school as the Allingtons do." Genevieve looked up in surprise for she had never before heard her mother mention it.

"Well, yes, I've sometimes thought I'd like it," she said, crushing down the wild longing for school and knowledge which she felt rising within her.

"I've been thinking that perhaps Aunt Clara's money would help you a great deal, providing you choose a cheap school. I should like so much for you to be well educated, Genevieve."

"Do you mean for me to take the money Aunt Clara left me and attend school next winter, mother?" Genevieve's voice had in it a hopeful thrill, and she dropped her sewing and moved close to her mother's chair.

"That is what I mean, dear;" and the mother looked lovingly at Genevieve's face as the joy broke out over it, brightening it and making it beautiful.

"Oh! mother, can it be that that for which I have most longed and least hoped, shall at last be given me?" she cried joyfully, then after a moment's thought she added: "I had never thought of using Aunt Clara's money for that purpose, and I don't think I can leave you, mother dear."

"I shall miss you very much, Genevieve, but I want you to go," Mrs. Layton had said, drawing her daughter to her and kissing her. Thus it was that Genevieve Layton had decided to attend school the coming winter and at last, through the influence of Mrs. Allington and Lillian, it was settled that she should attend the College in Baltimore. At first it had seemed an impossibility, but when Willard, through Chester Collins, his friend and the junior partner of Carlson & Collins law firm, secured for her a position in that office, it was decided, and at the beginning of the school term she found herself a roomer at Mrs. North's.

When Wilma heard of the arrangements for Genevieve's schooling her anger burst forth in a violent storm. How poor, ignorant girls like Genevieve could attend school in Baltimore she could not see; what would a few hundred from a relative amount to? "Why it won't buy her decent clothes for the school-room, much less clothes in which to appear at Mrs. North's with my sister," she exclaimed; "and where is her tuition coming from, I should like to know! I suppose some of her Roselin friends have taken it upon themselves to pay that." She looked accusingly at Mrs. Allington.

"Genevieve will do very well, I think, without asking aid from Roselin. A girl with a good position can make her way very well through school, and your brother thinks a better position for her than in Carlson & Collins' office cannot be found," said Mrs. Allington, slowly.

"Carlson & Collins, indeed! I suppose if she had a position there she could do very well, but the difficulty is getting it," Wilma answered.

"Oh! hasn't your brother nor Lillian told you?" asked her stepmother, in evident surprise. "Have they not told you that she has the position?"

"I had not heard the good news," sneered Wilma.

"It was very kind of Willard to help her," Mrs. Allington replied, half to herself; and Wilma left the room as she hissed: "Kind indeed!"

In the library she found her sister and brother with Grace and again the storm burst forth. Grace fled from the room; Lillian soon followed her, and Willard was left alone. At last he said with quiet composure:

"You will please leave me to judge my own actions hereafter, Wilma. I've had enough of your censure and advice; kindly keep it to yourself in the future."

He had never before spoken in that manner and it puzzled Wilma. She had always known that she could not influence him as she did Lillian, but he usually replied with a teasing remark. This time he strode from the room without a smile or jest. He meant what he had said, and Wilma knew it, and after that she had never mentioned Genevieve to him, but toward her she assumed a cold, haughty manner of ignorance. Genevieve felt frozen when Wilma's eyes rested upon her with a cold gaze, and she avoided her presence as much as possible. This was the reason she always refused Lillian's kind invitations to come to their rooms during the evening hours.

Genevieve had met but a very few of the students since her arrival in Baltimore. She left her room before the others were up, and hurried to the office to begin her work. There she remained until school time and after school hours until late in the evening, going back to her room at Mrs. North's, tired and weary. She had a hasty breakfast at a restaurant, and there also she ate dinner and supper. Was this the life for which she had longed? Was this the life of pleasure and happiness, such as most of the students enjoyed? Ah! no, theirs was a life of freedom compared with hers, and yet, she was satisfied. The thought that she should some day be able to make her own

way in the world was very sweet to her. Then she should have her mother with her and enjoy life. This was her highest hope; her highest aim.

This evening she was more tired than usual and after awhile she laid aside her books, folded the report for her employer, and placed it in her purse. Presently the door opened and Lillian, according to her promise, came tripping in.

She often came to Genevieve's room, but Genevieve had refused all invitations, until on this occasion, when on leaving her, Lillian said solemnly: "Genevieve, you really haven't any excuse for not coming down once in awhile. I shall never enter this room again if you refuse to come tomorrow evening. Will you come?" For a moment Genevieve hesitated, then said slowly:

"I have very good reasons for having refused so often, Lillian, but if you wish it, I shall try and find time to come down for awhile."

"I do wish it," said Lillian, with emphasis, "and Willard said tell you he is coming for you so you can't refuse."

Then she was gone, and Genevieve turned slowly from the door and sank down on the rug by the grate, and resting her elbow upon a chair, her head sank wearily upon her hand as she thought, "Why did they ask me? If they knew how their sister hates me, how I dread to be in her presence and meet their fashionable friends, they would forgive me; I know they would. But I have promised; Willard will come for me, and I must go. Oh, but for Wilma, how I should enjoy it; though for Lillian's friendship I can endure."

Genevieve had seen Marie on the lawn and in the hall with Wilma, and she knew that the fair-haired heiress was as proud and haughty as her companion. She was sure to meet her when she went to the Allington apartments, and she felt that Marie would despise her for the little attentions paid her by Willard, and in this she was not far wrong, for Marie's dislike for Genevieve had grown much of late.

For Genevieve, the next day seemed all too short; evening came all too soon; and she found herself at the Allington apartments, clad in a simple dress of deep crimson, with white bands of dainty embroidery at wrists and throat. Llewellyn

Greymore was there, and a moment later Louis Mandel came in, accompanied by Adelaide, who had been especially invited by Lillian, that she might meet Genevieve.

Genevieve noticed Marie's contemptuous sneer and Wilma's haughty ignorance. They scarcely spoke to her during the evening, and, when they did, it was with an air of one far superior. As their cold attitude increased, Lillian and Willard became more attentive. At last Wilma turned to Llewellyn, who sat near her, and said in a low voice:

"Isn't it surprising how some poor, low, ignorant people are sometimes patronized by those far their superior? Somehow I could never bring myself to do it."

Llewellyn did not reply, but he raised his eyes and they instantly met those of Genevieve. She sat opposite them at the farther side of the room. Her face was flushed and for a moment her dark eyes flashed upon them, then sank beneath his kind, courteous glance, and the color died out of her cheeks, leaving them very pale. He knew that she had caught those low spoken words and his sympathy went out to the girl whom Lillian loved most devotedly, whom Willard seemed to respect and admire, and whom their sister had thus irretrievably insulted. He knew only one other had heard Wilma's remark, and Louis was now so interested in his companion that neither of them noticed Genevieve, who, during the remainder of the evening, sat silently listening to the others. Occasionally she met a cold glance from Louis Mandel's blue eyes and frequently her own rested upon Llewellyn Greymore's face with a long, steady gaze, which instantly gained his respect and confidence.

As she at last went to her room with Willard, she resolutely resolved never again to enter those rooms in Wilma's presence. "No, I cannot do it," she sobbed, as the door closed and the sound of Willard's step died away. "I'll never again thrust myself into her presence, even if it costs me the friendship of those I love. I wish I had never come to Baltimore; then I should have avoided Marie's cold, envious eyes, avoided Wilma's

remarks, retained Lillian's love, Willard's friendship, and some time, perhaps, have gained the respect of those in whose opinion I have fallen—in their estimation 'poor, low and ignorant.'”

Her head sank down among the pillows, and her hands clasped together before her, as she poured out her griefs and sorrows before the great white throne of her King and Master; He who is Father to the fatherless and comforteth those who trust in Him.

CHAPTER XVIII

GENEVIEVE

ONE evening, as the month of December was nearing the holiday season, Genevieve rose from her desk, put the books in the safe, and turned to Mr. Carlson, who sat at the desk opposite.

"I think I can finish up the work tomorrow, Mr. Carlson," she said.

"You are doing very good work, Miss Layton."

Her employer looked up at her and a pleased smile parted his lips. She had gradually won the respect and confidence of both Mr. Carlson and Mr. Collins. Her work was done well and always on time; and her employers were now beginning to realize and appreciate the full value of their employee. No matter how heavy the load pressing down upon her heart, Genevieve was always pleasant and, although her face was sometimes pale and worn, there was a smile lingering about the mouth, and a quiet gentleness in her manner, which completely won the hearts of everyone who saw her at the office.

"Just a minute, Miss Layton," Mr. Carlson added, as she was about to leave the office; "I have a package of invitations I would like for you to deliver to some of our friends at Mrs. North's, if you will be so kind."

"I am only too glad to do it for you," she said, taking from his hand the package of white envelopes, and he continued:

"I hope you can spare the time from your studies to honor us with your presence, Miss Genevieve. You can hardly refuse, I think."

For a moment she looked at him in astonishment. Could it be that one of the invitations she held was for her? Mr. and Mrs. Carlson were to entertain a number of their society friends, the next week, but it was hardly probable that they would think of inviting a plain, country girl, who worked several hours each day at their office, to come to their elegant home and

mingle with their fashionable friends. And Genevieve only murmured: "Thank you, Mr. Carlson, but I fear it will be impossible," as she turned from the desk and left the room; while Mr. Carlson's eyes followed her.

"A most noble girl!" he said to himself as he turned slowly back to his work. I fear Chester Collins will be more than disappointed, for I'm confident she will say she can't leave her studies."

When she reached her room, Genevieve carefully untied the dainty blue bow, and began looking over the invitations—invitations for the Allingtons, for Marie, for Llewellyn, one for Mrs. North, and three or four others. The last one she took up with a cry of delight, for there she read her own name—"Miss Genevieve Layton"—written by the same hand that had addressed the others. A dainty perfume floated out on the air as she removed the linen card from its envelope; and she gazed long at the engraved words.

"I in society? Never, never!" she cried, choking back the sobs which rose to her throat, as she thought that after all she had a friend in Mr. Carlson, who had not forgotten the poor, lonely girl, even in his plans for society.

Slowly she gathered up the other envelopes and started down the hall. She had often seen Llewellyn since that October evening spent with the Allingtons, and he had always passed her with a kind, friendly smile, and a courteous bow; and now as she paused at his door she saw him coming up the hall toward her.

"Pardon me, Mr. Greymore; Mr. Carlson requested me to deliver this," extending one of the envelopes toward him.

"Thank you. Are you going to Lillian's now, Miss Layton? Pardon my impertinence," he added hurriedly.

"Yes, I have invitations for them, also."

"But aren't you going to spend the evening with her? She will be very much pained if you refuse again, Miss Layton." Llewellyn came a step nearer as he spoke, and turning quickly toward him, she looked steadily up into his face, as she answered:

"Do you imagine, Mr. Greymore, that I could go there after hearing that contemptuous remark?"

"I sincerely beg your pardon, Miss Layton; but you should value Lillian's friendship, and that of her brother more highly than you do. You should not let her sister's thoughtless remarks come between you."

"My love for Lillian and my regard for Willard will always remain unchanged, Mr. Greymore, but my visits there are more painful than you may imagine."

"Then you will not go, even for Lillian's sake?"

"No, I will not; I cannot."

"Does Lillian know your reason for refusing?" he asked.

"My work and my studies are my only excuses."

"Miss Layton," said Llewellyn, "Willard and Lillian are your best friends and mine."

"They are not only my best friends, Mr. Greymore, they are my only friends here, with the exception of Mrs. North and my employers," she said.

"Do you mean that you wish for no others?" Llewellyn asked.

"I did not say that I wished for no others. But wishes do not make friends," she returned, somewhat sadly.

"One must not number one's friends. I assure you, you at least have one more than you think; but Lillian Allington loves you most devotedly. She loves you as if you were her own sister."

The tears which glistened in Genevieve's eyes and hung upon the long lashes, was a sufficient answer, as she silently turned away.

For an instant she had thought of asking him to take the invitations to the Allingtons, but only for a moment. Mr. Carlson had asked her to deliver them and she would not shirk her duty, however, hard it might be. A moment later she stood at the door, which was opened by Wilma. Assuming an air of indifference she tried to speak naturally, as she gave the envelopes into Wilma's white, jeweled hand. Lillian sat at the farther side of the room, studying, but as she heard Genevieve's voice, she sprang to the door, just as Wilma was about to close it.

"Oh! Genevieve, can't you come in?"

"No, Lillian, Mr. Carlson entrusted these invitations to my care and I must deliver them."

"If you will wait, just a minute, I will go with you."

"Certainly, I shall wait here"; and Genevieve stood at the open door.

"Who are those invitations from, Wilma?" asked Willard, moving from Marie's side and coming near the door.

"From Mr. and Mrs. Carlson," was the reply.

"Oh, yes! The last party before the holidays!" Then turning to the door, he stepped into the hall. "How is work this week, Genevieve?" he asked.

"Very well, thank you; "I'm always busy, but I like it as well, perhaps better, than ever."

"Glad you do. I presume you have an invitation to the party at Mr. Carlson's, have you not?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered, quietly.

"Will you allow me the pleasure of being your escort?" His voice fell to almost a whisper, and quickly Genevieve looked up. Marie's blue eyes were fastened upon her with a cold, questioning gaze, while Wilma's sharp black ones rested full upon her, watching every movement and striving in vain to catch their words. The hot blood rushed to Genevieve's cheeks and the words she might have uttered, but for those eyes fastened upon her, were crushed down, and she said slowly and earnestly, in a low voice:

"It is absurd for me to think of going, Willard. I shall stay at home with my books. Thank you very much for your kind offer; I am very sorry I cannot accept."

Willard took her arm and walked slowly down the hall as he answered: "You can if you will, Genevieve. Your books do not need you half as much as society does. If you accept this invitation, there will be others after the holidays, while if you refuse this you refuse the chance of your life. Believe me, Genevieve, you must go; society has need of more girls like you."

"Girls like me, Willard? The idea; what could society do with homely country girls like me?" Genevieve laughed a mirthful little laugh she did not feel, and went on; "No, Wil-

lard, no one can possibly miss me, when there are so many others. I think I shall remain at home."

"Have your way then, as you always do, but I am very sorry." Just then Lillian came up to them and he added: "You may remember, Genevieve, that while you study alone in your room, some one is missing you, and some one is wishing for you."

"Did she say she was invited to the party?" asked Wilma, when Willard came back to the room.

"She did," was the answer.

"And you, of course, immediately offered yourself as her escort," said Wilma, feeling confident that he would reply in the negative, but great was her surprise when he turned to her and said sharply:

"I did; but what is that to you?"

"Nothing at all," answered his sister, in a smooth voice. "I presume she accepted."

Willard did not reply, but taking up his hat, left the room without a glance or word to Marie, who could scarcely keep back the tears as the doors slammed together and she was left alone with Wilma.

The days passed, and Lillian's visits to Genevieve's room became more frequent than they had been for the past month, but all of her entreaties availed nothing, Genevieve would not consent to attend the party.

One day Lillian came to say that Willard was going to take Marie.

"Now, aren't you sorry you wouldn't go? She knows that he asked you, too, and she is only too glad that you refused," she said.

"I'm glad I pleased someone by my decision," was Genevieve's reply.

She had seen neither Llewellyn nor Willard since the day she had delivered their invitations, and after Lillian left her she sat thinking of what Willard had said, "Then, remember, Genevieve, that while you study alone in your room, someone is missing you; someone is wishing for you."

Genevieve was surprised at the comfort those words gave her, and angrily shaking herself, she tried to believe that they were

not sincere, but she knew that he had spoken the truth. Even though he attended the party with Marie, he would think of her and wish for her. But she would not be there, she would be studying alone, here in her small lonely room, and for a moment her heart longed for the gay scene, the spacious drawing-rooms filled with laughter, mirth and music; and she half wished that her answer to Willard had been different. It was only Wilma's scorn and hatred that had kept her from consenting, and beneath the cover of her work and studies, she had shrunk from the contemptuous remarks that were sure to fall about her on her first appearance in society, and refused the cup of pleasure offered her.

It was the day of the party that Mr. Carlson came into the office, laid his hand on her shoulder in a fatherly manner, and remarked:

"I hope you have changed your mind and decided to give up your books for one evening. We must have you at our home this evening, Miss Layton. I advise you to leave your studies for once; and it is not entirely a selfish motive that prompts me to advise you thus; I think it is best for you. Perhaps you do not notice your impaired looks, but others do, and you must not confine yourself so much to study."

"It was so kind of you to remember me with an invitation and I am very sorry to refuse. I thank you very much for your kind interest, too, Mr. Carlson, but how can I succeed without study?"

"Yes! Yes! A little, Miss Layton, but not too much, you know, or you may fail ere the time for success." Then Mr. Collins came in and presently Mr. Carlson left the office.

"Mr. Carlson has been speaking to you of the party, has he not, Miss Layton?"

"Yes, he thinks I should give up my books and attend, and he doesn't know how it pains me to refuse his request." Genevieve's voice trembled slightly, and Mr. Collins said:

"Miss Layton, as your employer, I claim the privilege of being your escort this evening, and introducing you into society at the home of Mr. Carlson. If you refuse, Miss Layton, we shall be more disappointed than you think. Will you allow us the privilege?" He took her hand and looked down at her;

but her face did not change in its expression, as she at last raised her eyes from the desk, and looking up at him, slowly replied:

"If you think it best for me to leave my work, I suppose I must comply with your wishes."

Genevieve hardly knew how she passed the remainder of that day. The sky that had been bright above her seemed suddenly to have become darkened, and she tried in vain to shake off the dull pain that crept over her, and the bitter feeling of resentment that kept throbbing in her heart.

"Oh! what will Willard think of me; what must he think of me!" she kept crying to herself; and she continued her work as one in a dream.

Upon reaching her room, she tried to reason it to herself and think that everything was for the best.

"I shall explain to Willard," she thought. "How could I refuse my employers, who have been so kind to me, and advise me only for my own sake. Oh! how could I refuse them! Surely Willard will understand and forgive me! Why did I shrink from meeting Wilma on equal ground; why should I care for her insults? They cannot affect those who are now my friends, and for whose opinion I care most. Llewellyn Greymore, I believe is my friend; my employers will not forsake me, and Lillian and Willard have proven true, thus far. If I remain here alone, in my dreary little room, he will think of me; he will wish for me; while if I go—if I go—." She could not finish; but burying her face in her hands she only sobbed: "Can he forgive me?"

CHAPTER XIX

GENEVIEVE IN SOCIETY

It was a cold December evening and the wind came sharply from the north. A few dim stars shone with a cold, faint light in the wintry sky, and fleecy clouds scudded across the moon, hanging in mid heaven. An automobile stood before the Moreland Place, and presently a party of young people came down the walk and entered it. First came a tall, fair-haired young man, who seemed in the best of spirits; and on his arm leaned a girl—tall, straight, and with an air of haughty dignity; behind them came another young man, tall and dark. On his brow there rested a shadow and he did not join in the gay laughter and conversation as did his companion, a fair girl of short plump stature. Then came another stately form and by his side was the slight, willowy figure of a young girl, fair and beautiful, with bright smiles wreathing her face, and golden curls tossing in the air.

Slowly the big car started down the avenue, and half an hour later, a closed carriage stood in its place, while the driver tapped the toe of his boot restlessly, as he waited for the approaching figures.

“Drive to No. — street, John; and don’t be long, for we are now rather late,” said the man, as he took his place beside his companion.

The Carlson mansion was flooded with light and the sound of laughter and mirth rang through the spacious drawing-rooms. From the music-room there floated out the soft, sweet strains of a waltz, and mingled with it, the gentle murmur of voices, as the dancers glided almost noiselessly over the floor.

Willard stood silently watching them, but between him and the scene before him, there quivered another picture, that of a slender figure bending over an open book. Presently Marie’s plump, jewelled hand touched his arm;

"There! Willard, look! I suspected it," she said, with a piercing little laugh, and looking up, Willard saw Chester Collins—at whose absence he had wondered—entering the room, and with him was Genevieve Layton, looking more beautiful than he had ever seen her, he thought. Her brow was white and pure; her cheeks were of a seashell pink, and her eyes shone with a brilliant light; a faint, sweet smile curved her delicate lips. Her dress was of a fine cream voile which hung in soft folds about the slender figure. It was a vision of rare beauty, sweet, pure, refined, and untarnished by the world. This was the same figure he had mentally seen bending over that open book, but how different, how different!

He started violently and the shadow on his brow deepened as he realized the truth. Genevieve had refused him and accepted Chester Collins in his stead; accepted her employer rather than he who had always been her true friend. She had only said, "I think I shall remain at home with my books," instead of truthfully saying, "I prefer Chester Collins to you."

Her eyes met his—for a moment her smile lingered, then faded beneath his cold, calm gaze, her eyes fell and her thin cheek paled.

"Would you like to see the flowers?" Willard asked, turning abruptly to Marie.

"Most assuredly, I shall be delighted," she answered.

Lillian and Llewellyn were as much surprised as Willard, and they stood speechless as Genevieve entered the room. They saw Willard start, saw her eyes meet his, and as he and Marie started for the conservatory, Lillian turned to Llewellyn.

"Genevieve! Genevieve here, after so earnestly refusing? What can it mean?"

The music stopped and Wilma moved close to Lillian's side.

"There, Lillian, that is the girl you have so kindly befriended, at whose feet you and Willard have lain everything—love, admiration and devotion unlimited—and upon which she has so lovingly trampled. With Chester Collins, she is so far above you—you her most devoted servants. Perhaps Willard will beware of her hereafter and listen more to my advice." As she spoke, she nodded carelessly toward Genevieve, about whom a little group of admirers had gathered; and, as Lillian did not answer her whispered remarks, she moved on.

"Do you know the young lady with Mr. Collins, Miss Allington?" asked a richly dressed lady, as Wilma passed.

"I happen to know who she is, yes," she replied.

"A very beautiful girl; a relative of his, I presume?"

"Oh, no, indeed!" laughed Wilma. "She is only his office girl, and her name is Layton, I believe." Luckily for Wilma, none of Genevieve's acquaintances heard the remark.

"Possible!" exclaimed the lady, looking questioningly at Wilma, who nodded and said: "I assure you, it is true; she is only an office girl."

Wilma left her, and the richly dressed lady turned her scrutinizing gaze upon Genevieve, in whose appearance she could now find more than one defect. The moment before, the supposed relative of Chester Collins had been perfect, but now she was only his employee and many were the remarks concerning his marked attention to her.

"Mr. Collins seems quite devoted to Genevieve, doesn't he?" said Lillian, as she watched him bending over Genevieve's chair with an air of a lover rather than that of an employer. "I'm so glad she came after all, for she can not fail to enjoy the party. It is so nice of him to think of her; but I am sure Willard is thinking of her, too," she added, as she and Llewellyn started toward the conservatory. They passed close to Genevieve, and Lillian stopped.

"I am glad you came, Genevieve; but why didn't you tell us?" There was a peculiar emphasis on the last word and Genevieve's cheek flushed as she turned to Mr. Collins.

"Mr. Collins will tell you, Lillian, that I refused until to-day," she said.

"Yes, Miss Genevieve prefers books above everything, and this is the first time she has been kind enough to give them up, even when I asked it." Mr. Collins laughed merrily; and Lillian left them with a promise to go to Genevieve's room the next evening.

Genevieve felt relieved. Half the load was lifted; Lillian, at least, was not angry with her, and Willard would not be when she explained. Lillian would help him to forgive and forget, she thought, and her face brightened, her smile became sweeter, and Chester Collins noticed more than one turn to look at the beautiful girl.

"Do you like flowers?" he asked, as their hostess left them to show one of her guests the conservatory.

"I like nothing better!" Genevieve exclaimed, with delight; and he silently led her away to the conservatory.

The electric lights shone down with a silvery brightness; a fragrant perfume filled the air; the tinkling music of fountains mingled beautifully with the faint sweet strains from the music-room, and its silvery spray could be seen sparkling among crimson and white blossoms. They were surrounded by palms from foreign lands, blossoming shrubs and wonderful flowers. Genevieve eagerly drank in the beauty surrounding her, and her companion watched her admiringly as she stooped to caress some pale, fragrant blossom, or stood in awe beneath a stately palm that stretched its green branches heavenward. It was like an unknown world to her; she had never before seen anything so lovely, and she was lost in wonder when the sound of voices startled her, and a moment later they came upon Marie, Adelaide and Lillian, seated near a bubbling fountain, with Willard and Llewellyn standing near.

Genevieve's heart gave one throb of mingled pain and joy; then it seemed to stand still. Willard surveyed her with that cold, calm gaze, which reminded her so much of Wilma's (save that it lacked the look of envious hatred) then his manner changed; bowing courteously, as they came near, he turned to Mr. Collins and said:

"Well, Collins, where have you been all evening? This is much more pleasant than dancing, and I'm sure Miss Layton will enjoy it more." Carelessly he pushed a chair toward Genevieve; and something in his manner puzzled and annoyed her exceedingly. Why should he call her Miss Layton? She had never before heard it from his lips; but his manner had changed so completely—perhaps, after all, he did not care.

Presently Alice and Helen Mandel came for Adelaide and her farewell to Genevieve was so full of genuine affection that the latter felt confident that she had gained another friend.

Then supper was announced and the little group reluctantly left the bubbling fountain and joined the others in the dining-room. Wilma turned with surprise as she saw them enter—an apparently happy group. Her remarks that evening had assured

more than one of the admired and flattered Miss Layton's low origin and her position in life; and now, as she watched her beaming face and graceful form, and saw the admiring glances bent upon her, her eyes flashed enviously. The marked attention paid her by her employer annoyed Wilma far more than she would acknowledge, even to herself.

That evening was to Genevieve a strange mixture of joy and bitterness and for an hour, after Mr. Collins left her, she sat thinking of all that had passed. She half wished that she had kept her promise to Willard and Lillian, and remained at home; yet she was glad she had gone; glad she had seen a glimpse of society; glad that her employers had so highly honored her; glad Lillian and Adelaide had been so kind to her; and that Marie had even been gracious. But the one great pain was, "After all, is Willard only glad that I refused?"

The next evening she left the office an hour earlier than usual and hurried to her room with the jubilant hope of seeing Lillian.

"Oh! Lillian, I am so sorry if I have offended you," she began, as Lillian at last appeared.

"You are mistaken, Genevieve, I am not offended, but it is only natural that I should feel pained for my brother," she replied, as they seated themselves upon the sofa; then Genevieve told her how she had refused both Willard's and her employer's urgent requests to attend the party, and how at last she could not refuse the kind offer of Mr. Collins, and ended by saying:

"Willard didn't seem to mind, though, and I'm glad he isn't offended."

"He feels it more than you think, Genevieve, but you will tell him how it was, won't you?"

"Certainly I shall explain," was Genevieve's answer.

That evening after Lillian had left her, she wrote a note and went with it to Willard's room. No one answered her knock, and as the door stood partly ajar, she pushed it open and slipped the corner of the envelope beneath a book, which lay on the table within reach. As she turned back down the hall she heard a door open and in her mind there wasn't a shadow of a doubt but that it was Willard coming from his sister's room, and that in another moment he would have her note safely in

his hands; so she did not glance back. But it was not Willard who stood in the hall watching her as she returned to her room. It was Marie Carrelton and as the sound of Genevieve's footsteps died away, she turned slowly and moved toward Willard's room.

He had promised her the book he had been reading, and but an hour before had told her he had left it on the table in his room. She opened the door and going to the small bookcase she looked over some other books before she took up the one on the table. It was with evident surprise that she turned over the envelope, whose edge lay beneath it. She had wondered where Genevieve had been, and now in an instant she recognized the handwriting. She had seen it before on notes which sometimes came to Lillian. She saw vividly before her Genevieve's beaming young face, her dark, sparkling eyes, her shining hair and her blithe, graceful figure, and her heart throbbed with jealousy, envy and hatred; and hastily slipping the letter between the pages of the book, she turned back with a resolute step. Her brow was contracted and her hands clenched nervously as she entered her room, turned the key in the door and sat down on the hearth rug to read that stolen note.

"Willard:—Will you kindly forgive me for going last night, after telling you so firmly that I would not leave my books? For believe me, Willard, I did not intend to go until yesterday, when Mr. Carlson and Mr. Collins most earnestly requested me to attend, and they being my employers, I could not refuse. I knew then that you were to take Miss Carrelton, so it was useless to explain. But I do so now, and most sincerely hope that you will not think I did it intentionally.

"As ever, your friend,
"Genevieve Layton."

Slowly she read it through, then with a sudden motion tore it into shreds, and tossing it into the open grate, sat dreamily watching it as bright flames flickered up over it and blue curling smoke rose and disappeared; then springing up, she exclaimed: "There! vanished forever, and Willard shall never know! No one can suspect me;" and with a satisfied smile, she went back to Wilma and Lillian, never for a moment regretting what she had done. And as the days passed she watched with interest

Willard's manner when Genevieve was mentioned and she knew that between them there existed the coldness which even Lillian's loving nature could not span.

One evening Lillian entered her brother's room and found him reclining in an easy chair, his feet on the sofa and a cigar between his lips.

"Have you seen Genevieve since the party?" she asked, seating herself on the sofa.

"No, I haven't," was the somewhat sharp reply.

"And you don't care to, it seems," retorted his sister.

"Under the circumstances, no!"

"But when you know just how it was, Willard——" she began, but he interrupted her.

"Hang it, Lillian, you needn't mind making excuses for her!" he said.

"I'm only going to tell you why she went with Mr. Collins."

"Well, cut it out, let Genevieve explain her own affairs."

"But, Willard, listen."

"No! I do not care to hear; I know she refused me and accepted Chester. Isn't that enough?"

"Enough? No, not until you know why she did it."

"It matters but little why, and if she cares for me to know, she is the one to tell me; not you, Lillian," and he abruptly left the room, while Lillian sat staring at his vacant chair in bewilderment.

Again and again she broached the subject, always with the same result.

Day after day, Genevieve looked for some answering token of forgiveness, but none came. The Allingtons departed for Roselin several days before Christmas, and when Lillian came to say good-bye, there was no word, no message, from Willard.

"Have you explained to Willard, Genevieve?" she asked, and Genevieve only answered, "Yes."

There was no other mention made of him and, with the hope of seeing her at Roselin soon, Lillian left her, and Genevieve burst into tears. A sudden longing to be home once more came over her, and the days that followed were long and dull; but each brought with it the assurance that it was one day nearer Christmas, when she could be at home once more—in the dear

little brown cottage with mother and brother. At last the day came and Genevieve, with a light heart and smiling face, received the "Best Christmas Wishes" from her employers and left the office with a buoyant step.

Her vacation was very short and she spent all her time at the cottage with her mother and Robert, and Lillian's fond hope that she would come to Roselin vanished. Both Mrs. Allington and Grace came to see her and the latter almost smothered her with kisses and fond caresses, but she saw neither Wilma nor Willard.

After the holidays, time passed with the same dull monotony; from morning until night it was school-room and office, kind words and advice from her employers, but never a word from Willard.

CHAPTER XX

A NIGHT AT THE CLUB

THE night was cold and dark; a mist came steadily from the east, hanging like a heavy cloud over the city and dimming the lights, which strove in vain to send their rays through the dense darkness. Even the windows of the Rockford Club Room, where a number of young men were spending the evening, only glowed in a dim, yellow, blurred way; while within, the brilliant light of chandeliers shone upon the polished tops of mahogany tables, about which groups of the company were gathered. The clatter of silver and china sounded through the room as plates were removed, then upon each polished mahogany top there sparkled a dozen cut glass goblets, together with bottles of delicate hued wine. Simultaneously, two chairs were slipped back, and, with a look of reproof, Llewellyn Greymore and Willard Allington refused the sparkling beverage set before them. Several times before, Llewellyn and Willard had been invited to the club with these young men—boys belonging to the best families of Baltimore—but this was the first time wine had been served; and the lines about Llewellyn's mouth and nostrils deepened, and the rosy color of his cheek paled as one of the boys held his glass toward him and in a daring tone said, "Come on, Greymore! you don't refuse."

The bantering tones continued, as glass after glass was filled and refilled; but Llewellyn and Willard did not waver.

"Believe what I say, Worthen; I'll never touch it," Llewellyn declared with emphasis, as Leon Worthen urged him further than the others.

Willard, perhaps, might have wavered in his strong resolutions, had he been alone to refuse the ruby liquor, but with one of Llewellyn's resolute character to stand before him, to shield him from their sneering remarks, he could refuse as firmly as his companion. Willard's father, it is true, belonged to that class of society in which the wine-glass is often seen, but he had

learned the lesson of total abstinence, and this he had tried to teach his son, who on this occasion proved worthy of those teachings; and from a remote corner of the room—to which they had withdrawn—the two looked on in horror and disgust, hoping—but alas, in vain—that each glass would be the last.

“Enough of this, Allington;” and Llewellyn turned to him with a look of mingled contempt and pity for the group before them, some half dozen of whom were already swaying in their chairs. Willard’s lips moved in reply but the words were inaudible, for just at that moment there was a crash of glass; slivers flew through the air and a stream of rosy wine, mingled with fragments of the broken glass, flowed over the table and in a stream fell upon the polished floor. Immediately they left the room and hurried into the street, where the heavy mist surrounded them; but they heard the loud boisterous laugh and the words that Leon Worthen shouted after them.

“Ah! Ha! Going are you?—you who wouldn’t touch it. Saints you are; Saint Greymore and Saint Allington—how glorious; give me another glass, boys, and I’ll be a saint, too. Come on, you, Lockhart; I’m going now, if you want a ride behind my bay; round past the west end if you like.”

The loud laugh died away; the last faint glow of light from the windows disappeared; yet neither spoke. There was no sound to break the silence of the streets, for very few ventured out on that cold January night, where the falling mist was fast covering the pavements with a sheet of ice, and a chill dampness settling over all. They were almost home when the clock tolled out over the city, the midnight hour; then they stopped to listen, for as the last note died away, they heard in the distance the sound of voices.

“That’s Worthen,” whispered Willard, as, with an oath, a loud voice rang out: “Whoa, here, Bester, not so fast, I say;” then the clatter of horses’ hoofs, and the whir of wheels on the icy pavements came nearer, mingled with the loud voices of the driver and his companion. It was quite evident that Bester was beyond the control of the struggling Worthen, who tried in vain to stop him; the animal rushed on, turning so swiftly at the corners that the occupants of the vehicle were almost thrown from the seat, then dashing on down the avenue.

Llewellyn and Willard stood breathless as they came near, and when they dashed beneath the glow of the electric light, they saw Leon Worthen, weak and exhausted, lean heavily against his companion, who seemed now to be in a drunken stupor; while his hands relaxed their grasp. Bester made a mad plunge forward, out of the glaring light into the darkness.

In an instant Llewellyn grasped the situation, and eagerly springing forward, he grasped the bit of the steed; Willard pressed close behind, and in an instant his hand, too, would have been upon the rein; Bester struggled forward; the ice slipped beneath his shod hoof, and with a mighty force he fell to the pavement, crushing Llewellyn beneath him.

Willard's heart sank within him; he was alone—alone to rescue his friend and perhaps carry him home dead—dead! That word seemed frozen on his lips as he murmured it, and a chill, desolate feeling crept over him. Quickly grasping the struggling Bester's rein, he helped him to his feet, then threw his whole weight against the bit to keep the spirited animal from making another dash forward. He could see the dark figure of Llewellyn, dimly outlined against the ice-covered pavement, motionless and still; not a sound could be heard save the crouching of Bester's bits, the striking of his hoofs upon the pavement, and the crushing of ice beneath the wheels. Willard called loudly for help and moved nearer Llewellyn's side. He could see the white upturned face now, with the blood trickling from beneath the damp, brown hair and fast crimsoning the white brow; and now a low moan came tremulously from the white, quivering lips; it was just audible; the lips closed; there was no other sound, no movement.

"Heavens! Llewellyn, I fear 'tis done!" fell sadly from Willard's lips, as the horse whirled suddenly to the left, but he still clung to the rein.

Again he called for help, and a moment later he heard hurried footsteps and saw by the glare of that same electric light, swaying over the street in the distance, two night-watchmen coming toward him. At that moment, Worthen roused from his exhausted sleep and, stumbling from the vehicle, staggered forward.

"Wh-wh-at has ha-hap-pened?" he stammered. Willard made him no reply; but giving Bester's rein into the hands of one of the policemen, he rushed to the dark figure still lying motionless upon the pavement, and bending down beside it, he took the cold limp hand in his—the hand that had fallen so suddenly from the bridle but a moment since. The slow faint throb of the pulse assured him that there was still life; but how long would it last—how long? Slowly wiping the blood from temple and brow, Willard watched the policeman, who, kneeling on the other side of the prostrate form, felt for some signs of life.

"I can't tell that he is breathing, but there is a weak throbbing of the heart, which may cease before we reach his home," he said, as he felt, rather than saw, Willard's dark eyes fastened upon him. "We must hurry," he added.

Leon Worthen now fully realized what had happened, and as they carried away the almost lifeless form, he peered after them through the darkness, with great glittering eyes, then slowly returned to Bester, who was fully under the control of the big fellow who held him. Lockhart was still in the drunken stupor; and thus they left him at his father's home, where his mother wept over him the remainder of the night; and it was with a look of shame that Leon Worthen left the watchman who had guided the vicious Bester so quietly to his gate.

* * * * *

Lillian had been with Genevieve that evening, and had returned to her room quite late. Wilma had long been asleep, and soon Lillian's golden head was beside hers. For awhile she could not sleep, but tossed restlessly upon her pillow, and when at last she had fallen into a sweet, peaceful slumber, the loud shout of voices roused her, and raising her head from the pillow, she listened. The sound continued; and silently slipping from her bed, she raised the window and leaned out.

The cold, damp air rushed in; she drew a shawl close about her, straining her ears to catch every sound. She heard the clatter of horses' hoofs; she heard the wild voice of the driver, but only the darkness met her view. Everything was dark, save where the street-light shone with a dazzling brightness; dimmed only by the drizzling rain which fell between it and the Moreland Place.

A block further on, another light shone faintly, but the voices were still in the distance. Lillian little dreamed of the two figures standing near that light, just in the shadow, listening to the same voices which had awakened her. The loud shout of "Whoa, Bester!" ceased; the sound of hoofs and wheels sounded near that distant light, then all was silent. Lillian shrank back into the darkness of the room. Only a moment, and the silence was broken. "Help! Help!" rang through the silent street. Quickly Lillian's hands were clasped together; her lips parted, and her breath stopped as she again leaned forward. There was a longer silence; then again came the call for help—loud and clear. Lillian still knelt by the window, and as that last call for help floated in, her head sank upon the sill, and she uttered a low cry of horror. Could it be—ah! was it her brother's voice calling for help at that midnight hour?

For a moment she remained motionless, almost paralyzed by the dreadful fear which seized her; then she sprang to her feet and again she listened. Again there came the sound of voices; she could not catch the words, but she knew from the tones that help had come, and a momentary prayer for the safety of her brother poured from her heart and trembled on her lips. She turned from the window and groped her way to her sister's side.

"Wilma, Wilma!" she whispered, laying her hand on her arm and gently shaking her. "Did you not hear those cries for help? Was it not Willard's voice?"

"I've heard nothing, Lillian; don't be silly. Why should it be Willard? Some fellow drunk, I dare say. Willard came in from the club some time ago, I think."

"Are you sure?"

Wilma did not answer, and hastily slipping on her dressing gown, Lillian left the room.

"I shall not sleep until I know," she murmured, as she ran down the dimly lighted hall, toward Willard's room. The door was unlocked and pushing it open, she gazed in; there was no one there. She was hurrying back through the hall, when the sound of the door in the hall below startled her, and breathlessly she crept to the head of the stairs, where she sank down upon the carpet, listening and watching.

There was the sound of footsteps approaching the stairs and a moment later the policeman and Willard appeared, carrying the motionless form of Llewellyn Greymore. Slowly they ascended the stairs. Neither saw Lillian on the landing, her hands clasping the railing, and her face as white, almost, as the one resting on her brother's arm. Her breath came quick and fast, and leaning forward she gasped:

"What has happened? Oh, Willard, what has happened?" The blue eyes looked almost black as they turned from Llewellyn's face and gazed into Willard's.

"Lillian!" came quickly from his lips, as he saw the figure clad in the pink dressing-gown, now standing a few steps above them.

"Tell me what has happened!" she repeated, and in a few words he told her.

Then the doctor, accompanied by Mrs. North, came up behind them, and Lillian fled to Llewellyn's room, threw open the door, turned on the light, and stood by in silence as they placed the death-like figure upon the bed. The doctor, with a grave face, bent over it. After a hasty examination he shook his head and in answer to Willard's inquiry, said:

"He may live. Quite fortunately there are no broken bones, but he has received a severe blow on the back of the head and here." He pushed back the heavy hair and touched a deep gash, as he finished.

Lillian moved to Llewellyn's side and bending over him, gently wiped the drops of blood from his forehead, while the doctor prepared medicine and bandages. Presently the long, dark lashes, laying against the pale cheeks, raised; the big, brown eyes opened and rested on the face above. A look of recognition made its transient passage across his face; the eyes closed; he turned wearily on his pillow and was again unconscious. But the death-like stupor had passed; he no longer lay still and motionless, but tossed from side to side, murmuring to himself and occasionally gazing about him with wild, unnatural eyes.

The dim light of day was stealing into the room, before Lillian left the bedside and went down the hall, at the further end of which was Genevieve's room. The face which greeted

her was as fresh as a half-blown rose, but the smile which brightened it, faded as Lillian came in, pale and worn. Genevieve's manner was kind and loving as she placed her in a chair and said:

"You look as though you had been out all night, Lillian; where have you been, and why up so early?"

"Up so late, you mean. I have scarcely been asleep since I left you, Genevieve. Mrs. North and I have been with Llewellyn all night." Then she repeated the story of the accident, and the expression of astonishment written on Genevieve's face gradually changed to one of sympathy.

"The doctor has just been in again," Lillian continued, "and he says there's so much sickness now, that he hasn't succeeded in finding a nurse; and Llewellyn is sadly in need of one, for a fever has set in now, and Dr. Dallas says if he lives, it will be a long time before he is well again. But there is little hope." Her voice sank low and tears shone in her eyes as she went on. "He is Willard's best friend, and I shall do all for him I can. I wish I were more experienced."

"A dear little nurse you would make, Lillian. I wish I could stay with you; you are all worn out now." Genevieve knelt beside the chair and pressed Lillian's head against her shoulder. For awhile they remained silent, then Lillian said:

"I'm keeping you from your work, Genevieve; I won't bother you longer."

"Are you going back to Llewellyn, and may I go with you?" Genevieve asked.

"Yes, come if you have time, Genevieve; then I am going to Wilma."

The room was quiet when they entered, save for the ceaseless murmur of inaudible words, and the restless turning, as Llewellyn tossed from side to side. Willard sat by the bed, his head bowed on his hand. He raised his face at the sound of their footsteps, but Genevieve did not see him; her eyes were fastened upon the white face on the pillow, the mass of thick tangled hair, the snow-white bandage upon the brow, and the wild glittering eyes. How sad—how sad the change! Only the evening before she had heard his merry whistle in the hall and watched his stately figure descend the stairs. The

murmuring ceased, and he gazed steadily at them as they came near. They could hear the heavy breathing, and, with a sigh, Genevieve turned away. Willard stood near her and, as she turned, their eyes met.

"Where have you been keeping yourself of late, Genevieve? I never see you," he said, coming up to her and taking her hand.

"At the office and school mostly," she replied.

"Do you know, this winter has not been exactly what I pictured it to myself, when you said you were coming to Baltimore, Genevieve."

"Hasn't it? I should like to see your picture on canvas," she returned lightly.

Willard had spent much of his time at painting. He had made several magnificent paintings and the teacher with whom he did his work had once remarked to a friend: "Some day you may hear the name Allington mentioned among the artists of the world;" and now, as Willard released Genevieve's hand and held the door open for her, he replied:

"Some time, perhaps, I'll paint it and your wish shall be gratified;" then, as Lillian and Genevieve disappeared down the hall, he resumed his former position at the bedside of his friend.

CHAPTER XXI

THE FEVER

Chicago, Jan. 28, 19—.

"TO WILLARD ALLINGTON; No.—, Moreland Place, Baltimore Md.

Mrs. Greymore very ill. Can't come. Save no expense. Wire me daily. Windford Greymore."

Willard took this telegram from the messenger boy's hand and read the answer to the message he had sent General Greymore, telling him of the accident and of his son's immediate danger.

"Can't come!" he repeated, looking at his watch; then he poured into a glass a spoonful of the medicine on the table and turned to Llewellyn who, with neither father nor mother, not even a nurse to care for him, lay murmuring of home and friends.

"School or no school, Lillian and I shall stay by you, Greymore," Willard said, bending over him and raising the glass to his lips. He felt that the weight of responsibility rested upon him and he resolved, if necessary, to stay by his friend until the end.

All day he and his sister, who soon returned to the room, kept watch over Llewellyn. The fever raged and his quiet murmurings changed to delirious ravings, which only the sound of Lillian's voice or the gentle touch of her hands could quiet. Both Wilma and Marie came to offer assistance, but their presence only tended to increase his excitement and it was with an effort that Willard kept him on his pillow; so it was Lillian who was left alone with Willard to care for him—with now and then Mrs. North to assist them. Late in the afternoon, Dr. Dallas came, finding Lillian alone by the bedside.

"I have succeeded in finding a nurse who will take the case tomorrow," he said; "but I see you have great influence over your patient, Miss Allington, and I think you will do as well—perhaps better—for the present, than one more experienced. I

think there will be no change tonight, only keep him as quiet as possible and give the medicine as directed.

After he was gone, Lillian buried her face in the pillows beside Llewellyn and choked back the sobs as she thought, "Another night; oh, how can I bear it!" Her head ached dreadfully and she felt faint at the thought of watching another night at the bedside, but it was her duty; she alone could quiet those delirious ravings and she must stay. Llewellyn was quiet now, and a long time she sat with her face among the pillows; then a soft step aroused her and rising, she saw Genevieve bending over her.

"Why, Genevieve, why are you home so early?" she asked.

"It wasn't a very busy day at the office and I thought I could help you here; so Mr. Collins excused me and here I am, at your service," Genevieve explained.

"Oh, I'm so glad you came!" exclaimed Lillian.

Half an hour later when Willard entered the room, he found Genevieve seated near Llewellyn, gently pushing the brown hair back from the hot, bandaged brow, while Lillian lay peacefully sleeping in the big Morris chair by the window.

"Well!" he exclaimed, drawing a chair near the bed; "Grey-more has many willing nurses, I see. Marie and Wilma are longing to assist us, but he doesn't want them to come near. There have been dozens of people here today, wanting to see him, but the doctor hasn't admitted anyone; and now I find you soothing him almost as well as Lillian."

Genevieve did not answer and after a moment he added: "I wonder if people would be so kind if it were I instead of Llewellyn."

"I am sure I would do my part for you, just the same as I do for Llewellyn, if it were needed," Genevieve answered, as she continued smoothing the tangled, brown locks.

"But if it were I, it would not be needed, I presume."

Genevieve longed to rush from the room and leave him to himself. He had spoken to her that morning, for the first time since the Carlson party. That was the only time she had seen him. Now as she thought of that unanswered note, a glow of pride came to her cheek and she sat straight in her chair.

"Will you kindly explain what you mean, Willard?"

"If you do not understand, I shall not explain." His tone insinuated much, and with a sudden impulse she exclaimed:

"Then tell me, why has my note remained unanswered?"

"Your note to me?" he asked. She nodded stiffly in the affirmative and he continued: "Then so far as I know, that unanswered note is yet unwritten."

"It is not unwritten and you know it!" she declared. He rose and came toward her, attempting to take her hand.

"Pardon me, Genevieve; but if you have ever written me a note, it has not been received," he said; and the cold look of indifference vanished.

"Do not try to deceive me, Willard; I took it to your room myself."

"Nevertheless, Genevieve, I have not found it."

She looked at him in astonishment, but his manner was so changed she could not doubt him.

"Will you tell me what was in that note?" he asked, and in a few words she told him why she had refused him and accepted his friend and her employer, Chester Collins.

"Will you forgive me, Willard?" she asked, when she had finished, for he made no reply.

"Yes, yes, Genevieve! If you can forgive me for not listening to Lillian, when she tried to explain to me, and for refusing Llewellyn's advice. He said that you, no doubt, would tell me why you did it, but I would give you no opportunity. Forgive me, Genevieve, and I can surely forgive you."

Genevieve's heart gave one joyful bound as she thought "forgiven at last," and Willard, looking down into her face, saw that it was only with an effort that she kept back the tears.

"It has caused me pain and disappointment, Genevieve, and I think it has you, too, so let us forget the whole horrid subject," he said. "Where that letter is I cannot say, but it does not matter, now that I know its contents.

A knock at the door interrupted them, and the maid announced a man wishing to see Mr. Allington. A moment later Willard returned with a tall, thin fellow whose elegant dress denoted wealth, but in whose appearance there was something Genevieve did not like. With only a glance at her, he followed

Willard to the bedside. His thin cheek paled, and into the large, dark eyes, there stole a look of shame and fear as he stood looking down upon Llewellyn.

The twilight was gathering over the city and gradually creeping into the room. It hung with a fast fading light over the bed where Llewellyn lay, now tossing wearily, and over the figures near him; then faded into a deep shadow.

"The best, most generous fellow I ever saw, and now, if he should die! But for Greymore and yourself, Allington, I——" He broke off abruptly and turned to Willard, who answered: "I know, Worthen, but he may live."

He made no reply, but turned to the window, where the fading light still lingered and where Lillian still lay sleeping. Presently she awoke and moved slowly toward the bed, while her eyes rested reproachfully upon Leon Worthen, who a moment later left the room.

Although Lillian felt much refreshed, Genevieve insisted upon staying with Llewellyn for awhile, that Lillian might rest, and at last she left them and went to Genevieve's room. It was almost midnight when she came back to the sickroom, where a shaded lamp was dimly burning, and where Llewellyn talked continually of father, mother, home and friends. Occasionally they could catch their own names, strangely mingled with others; then again he seemed to be at the club and his excitement increased as he talked of Worthen, Lockhart and Bester.

As Genevieve turned from the room, Lillian looked after her, then bent lower over Llewellyn's pillow, attempting to quiet him. As the doctor had said, there was no change that night, and when in the morning the nurse came, she examined her patient with an air of a professional, then said to Lillian, who stood watching her:

"This is a very bad case. Is he your brother?"

"A very dear friend of my brother," Lillian answered, then looking up into the kind face of the nurse—a tall, strong woman of middle age—she added: "If there is anything I can do to help you, at any time, Miss Klive, please call me."

"Very well, if I need you, I shall call," Miss Klive answered, and silently Lillian left her.

Days passed; almost day and night Miss Klive sat by the bedside and frequently either Lillian, Genevieve or Willard were with her, while occasionally the former was called from her studies to quiet his excited ravings. Then there came a change; he fell into a deep slumber from which he could not be aroused. Even Lillian's voice, whose quiet, persuasive tones he had obeyed from the first, could not awaken him. The dark Angel of Death hovered over the white, motionless form, and it seemed that every moment would bear away the soul, which clung so weakly to the exhausted body. His life hung as a slender thread, which only a breath might carry away into eternity.

Shortly after the accident, Willard had received a draft for eight hundred dollars from General Greymore, and a letter imploring him to see that everything was done for his son, which would add to his comfort or give some hopes of recovery; and this Willard had done. Each day a telegram went to the general, and now, while Llewellyn lay in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, there came a message, telling of the death of Mrs. Greymore, and as doctor, nurse and friends moved silently through the room, they felt that it would only be a short time till mother and son would be together in the Great Beyond.

Only slow, faint breaths floated past the white, parted lips as the night wore on. The physician could just feel the faint throb of the pulse which seemed to grow weaker with every heart beat. The nurse sat silently watching the thin, pallid face and by her side stood Lillian. Mrs. North, Willard and Genevieve, too, were there, silently waiting for the crisis which would surely come tonight—life or death. College friends, classmates, Wilma, Adelaide, Marie and Louis Mandel, had been admitted that day and they had left the room with tear-dimmed eyes, as they thought that the next time they looked upon that face, which but little over a week ago had been so full of life and bloom, it might be wrapped in death.

Now Lillian's face was pale and her blue eyes were dark with anxiety. She could hear Genevieve's breath—quick and fast—as she pressed close to her, with one arm around her waist. Willard stood by the window, almost breathless. Silence had fallen over the city. Hardly a sound broke the stillness of

the room, until at last, the doctor spoke, slowly, but earnestly: "He will live. The fever is broken." Lillian leaned eagerly forward to catch the words, and an involuntary exclamation of thankfulness came—almost inaudibly—from her lips. Willard turned and silently gazed out over the sleeping city, while Genevieve only pressed closer to Lillian and whispered: "He will live."

It was late in the afternoon of the next day, when Llewellyn, so weak that he could scarcely turn his head on the pillow, opened his eyes and looked about him. For a moment he thought he was alone, everything was so still, then his eyes fell upon a figure by the shaded window—trying to study in the dim light. "Lillian," he murmured, faintly. She started up at the sound of his voice and moved toward him.

"You are much better today, Llewellyn," she said, bending over him; and his eyes rested questioningly upon her face.

"Have I been very sick, and how long?" he asked slowly.

"Yes, for almost two weeks; you are better now though."

"Did anyone come to care for me?" was the next question.

"Your nurse, Miss Klive, has just gone for a walk and I promised to stay with you until she returned." Her answer did not seem to satisfy him and she added: "Your mother was ill for awhile and your father could not come, but he is coming soon. You must be quiet now."

She laid her hand tenderly on the white one which moved feebly toward her; the eyelids closed wearily and again he slept.

CHAPTER XXII

GRACE GOES TO BALTIMORE

It was a beautiful day during the second week of February. The late afternoon train sped swiftly out of Boston and was soon dashing on toward Baltimore. The train boys passed back and forth with their baskets of fruit and rolls of daily papers. Some of the passengers lounged dreamily in their seats, while others read their papers or gazed out upon the flying scenery. At each station, others came on until every seat was taken. As they at last neared the little river which flows down the Ashville valley, a young fellow, who had been dozing over his paper, folded it up and threw it carelessly upon the suit-case at his feet, pushed his hat back from his forehead and turned toward the window. He was of medium stature. His black hair and eyes added much to the dark, handsome face, and his manner had in it something of ease and carelessness, which made him an attractive personality. One could readily guess that he was the son of wealth. As the train stopped and the man occupying the seat beside him left the car, he pushed up the window and leaned out. Near the automobile at the end of the platform, not far from his window, stood a young girl, clad in a red traveling suit. Dark, brown curls were tossing about her fair face and brow, and for a moment her arms were wound lovingly about her mother's neck; then she hurried toward the car. A moment later the train was moving, and, looking toward the entrance, the young man saw her standing in the aisle; and silently he motioned her to the only vacant seat in the coach—the one beside him.

Grace Wilton was at last, after many weeks of anticipation, on her way to Baltimore to visit the girls. She had often thought of going, and both Genevieve and Lillian had plead with Mrs. Allington to let her come, while Wilma had offered no remonstrance.

The train flew on. The young man sat gazing out at the window, with now and then a desultory remark as to the

weather, the crowded coaches, etc. Grace answered him in a frank, courteous way, but made no further remarks, and for a long time they rode on in silence, while about them was a continual stir as passengers left the car and others took their places. Grace sat watching those about her but now and then she felt the magnetic gaze of the man at her side bend upon her, and at last he broke the silence. She had removed her gloves, and as his eyes wandered to the little white hands, he asked abruptly: "Why do you wear that ring?"

Her eyes fell to the little, golden circlet on her finger, set with its single pearl. There was no asking of pardon, no excuse for that question, and instantly the thought "a flirt" passed through Grace's mind. For a moment she hesitated, then raising her big, brown eyes to his, she replied with emphasis:

"For no special reason! Why do you ask?"

"I hadn't the least idea; that's why I asked," was the annoying reply, as he repressed the smile that for a moment had brightened his countenance. She turned from him and looked toward the window opposite, and after a moment he added, as if speaking more to himself than to her: "So many of the young girls now-a-days are wearing wedding rings." There was no answer and he continued: "The girls that aren't married wear rings and try to make people think they are; but the married ladies usually leave theirs at home."

The frown on Grace's brow deepened while a look of amusement settled upon his and he regarded her in silence.

"Do you live in Ashville?" he asked presently. She answered in the affirmative and he went on: "Have you always lived there?"

"For several years; yes."

"Oh, well! you are young yet; you will outgrow Ashville, some time," was the consoling reply, and again he relapsed into a silence which Grace had no desire to break. Carelessly he brushed the dust from his trousers and, with a restless movement, turned again to the window.

"Almost a summer's day," he remarked after awhile.

"Yes, quite!"

"Will someone meet you at Baltimore?"

"Yes," she answered in an unconcerned tone.

"Your sweetheart?" and again she answered "yes," but her face plainly said: "It is none of your business." Apparently he did not notice for he continued: "Oh, these sweethearts! they come in handy sometimes; but I thought perhaps I could help you find your number."

She fully realized the ludicrousness of his remark and, quite unlike Grace, her chin was tossed a bit higher, her brow contracted, and she gazed straight ahead. How dared he? He had said he was going to——, and she never for a moment thought he meant what he said, although he assumed an air of disappointment when he learned that her friends were to meet her, and she knew that her wrath only furnished amusement for her tormentor, whose next question was:

"This sweetheart of yours, I presume, will come for you in a farm wagon?" This was asked with a teasing air and a smile of amusement, and she only answered:

"Oh, certainly;" and for a moment the mirth that glistened in his eyes was reflected in hers.

"Do you know this is the best train I have been on for some time!" he went on, after a moment's silence. Apparently she was very much interested in some scene at that moment and did not answer him; and he added, half to himself: "I suppose it's because you are here."

"Indeed!" Grace's lip curled, and she half turned to him, as she said it in a sneering tone.

"I only wish you were going on further than Baltimore," he continued.

"Indeed!" she retorted again, and she turned from him with an air of disgust.

When she entered the car, she had carried with her a small package, which he had kindly placed on his suit-case near the window, that she might not be crowded and uncomfortable, and as they neared Baltimore, she turned to him with dignity.

"May I have my package now, please?"

"Certainly you may," he replied, with a different tone from that he had hitherto used, and he handed her the package with a courteous bow.

"Thank you." She took it from his hand and began putting on her gloves.

"I am glad I have met you, Miss White," he said, with the vain hope that she would correct him as to the name, but she did not, and he continued, "and I sincerely hope that we shall meet again. Would you mind giving me your name?" he ventured.

"I am very sorry but I have forgotten whether I am White or Green," she replied, with a smile which completely upset the young stranger, and, without noticing the card he took from his cardcase, she arose and left him, mentally hoping that his wish to meet again would never be fulfilled.

The lights were on and a noisy crowd moving up and down the platform when Grace stepped from the train and looked about for some familiar face. There were only strange faces and strange forms all round her, and for awhile she stood silently, watching each newcomer.

"Hello, Grace, did you think we had deserted you?" It was a voice behind her and turning about she faced Willard.

"I knew you would come after awhile," she exclaimed.

"Genevieve intended to come with me," he explained; "but she had extra work at the office today, and came home all worn out with a headache. Llewellyn insisted on keeping Lillian with him, so I was left alone to come for you." By this time she was seated beside him in a carriage, rolling away toward the Moreland Place.

Grace was all unconscious of the black eyes which had watched her every movement from the car window. The young stranger had watched their meeting and now, as the engine puffed and hissed and moved slowly out of the busy city, drawing behind it its many coaches, he settled back in the seat, wondering what the relationship was between the pretty and attractive young traveler and the fellow who met her. Was it that of brother and sister, or were they, as she had said, sweethearts? At the moment, he had caught a note of irony in her voice, but now, he half believed she had meant it, and fell asleep thinking of that meeting on the platform and, strange to say, the faces of Grace Wilton and Willard Allington were strangely mingled in his dreams.

CHAPTER XXIII

GENERAL GREYMORE'S ARRIVAL

LILLIAN laid her book down, moved to the window, looked out into the street for a moment, then adjusting the shade on the light, went back to the bedside and bent low over Llewellyn, whom she thought was sleeping, but as he felt her breath upon his cheek, he stretched out his hand and took hers.

"Are you tired of my quiet room, Lillian?" he whispered.

She started slightly as his brown eyes opened and rested upon her face. "No, no, Llewellyn, I am not at all tired. I have been studying and thought you were asleep." She did not know he had been watching her while she studied and he only smiled weakly and she continued: "Are you tired of your nurse, Llewellyn? Shall I call Miss Klive?"

"Oh, no, please don't. Sit here, Lillian." Silently she took the chair toward which he feebly motioned her, then both of his hands clasped hers. "Perhaps I am keeping you from your visitors; did you say that Willard went alone for them?"

"Yes. It is our sister who is coming to visit us; and Willard went for her alone, as Genevieve could not accompany him. They haven't arrived yet."

"Call Miss Klive when you wish to go, Lillian." For a moment he looked upon the fair, young face near him; his long white fingers tightened their weak grasp; his eyelids sank wearily, and he was soon asleep. Lillian still sat watching him when the door noiselessly opened, and looking up she saw Willard standing in the doorway. Grace was with him and came hurrying toward her. Llewellyn's fingers still clasped hers, and almost before she could disengage them, Grace's arms were thrown about her and she kissed her heartily.

"It seems so good to see someone from home, Grace. How are you and how is everyone at Roselin?" asked Lillian.

After answering Lillian's rapid questions, Grace said: "Both Mr. Allington and mamma sent their love to you both, and you should hear them worry about the welfare of the young Mr.

Greymore you write so much about, to know just how interested they are in those you care for." She hesitated and turned toward Llewellyn, who looked so white and exhausted while he slept that Grace gasped and turned to Lillian.

"Are you sure he will live?" she whispered.

"Oh, yes, he is out of danger now. Have you seen Genevieve?"

"No, I haven't. We only stopped for a minute with Wilma and Miss Carrelton, and then hurried up here to you. I must go now and see her, if I may."

"When you come from Genevieve's room bring Grace to me, Willard, and I will go down with her." Lillian watched her brother and Grace as they went down the hall, then softly closed the door and again took up her book.

Presently Llewellyn awoke. "They have been here, have they not? I think I heard her voice; a strange, sweet voice it was," he murmured, almost dreamily.

"Willard and Grace you mean? Yes; they were here; they have gone to see Genevieve now. I shall go down with Grace, when they return, and Willard will stay with you until your nurse comes."

"Yes;" he said, closing his eyes; but this time not to sleep, but to think of Lillian's sister, whose voice, as he had heard it, so unlike Lillian's soft, gentle, persuasive tones, was nevertheless so unmistakably sweet and thrilling, Lillian and Grace, he fancied, were much alike, with the same golden curls, deep blue eyes and slight, willowy figure; and half an hour later as Lillian slipped her arm about Grace and drew her close to the bedside, he looked at them in surprise. Grace's dark red dress deepened the roses on her cheeks, and her face, wreathed with its curls of dark brown, was very different from Lillian's spirituous beauty.

"This is my sister Grace, Llewellyn," she said simply.

"I am glad you are so much better, Mr. Greymore," said Grace as he took her hand and smiled.

"I do not wonder that you like him, Lillian," she whispered, after they had told Llewellyn good-night and left the room.

"Who said I liked him?"

"No one; but I know you do." Grace's tone implied that

he was more to her than a mere friend and Lillian's face flushed as she answered:

"I like all of Willard's friends, Grace, and everyone likes Llewellyn; the story of his brave act has been repeatedly read in the papers and he has the sympathy of everyone. Mrs. Greymore died a short time ago, but he will not know until his father arrives, and the doctors fear the effect even then."

"Oh! how dreadful, to think he doesn't know!" Grace exclaimed, and her eyes filled with tears as she thought what if it were her own mother, instead of that of Llewellyn Greymore; and instantly her sympathy went out to him as it had done on that first day, when Lillian's letter had told her of the sad accident which had almost cost him his life.

As the days passed, she often went with Lillian or Genevieve to his room, where Marie and Wilma were now often found, and where the latter did her utmost to throw about him the halo of her charms; but Llewellyn now looked deeper than the brilliant exterior, into the character of the girl, and it was always Lillian whom he wished to stay with him, Lillian whom he loved to listen to, while she read, talked, or sang to him in her soft, sweet voice; Lillian's fairy figure that brought brightness to his lonely room, and it was Lillian who never tired.

"Miss Klive is very kind, but she and Lillian are so different," he would say to himself, as he reluctantly watched her depart for class-rooms and study; and now Grace sometimes came and read to him when he was alone. A few days after her arrival, she had come to the room with Lillian, and Llewellyn, when speaking to her, had said: "What shall I call your sister, Lillian?"

"Oh! call me Grace, please," she had exclaimed in her impulsive way, before Lillian could answer him. From that moment he had liked her and often as she read to him, he lay watching her face, so full of emotion and attractive sweetness. He liked to watch her and Lillian together, and one evening a week after her arrival, as he lay back upon several large pillows, listening to them while they talked of the party they had attended the evening before, there was a tap at the door and the maid announced General Greymore's arrival. For several days

they had been expecting him, and now, hastily gathering up her books, Lillian arose.

"We will leave you now," she said, but quickly he caught her hand and held it fast. "No, you can't go yet, Lillian." Before she could free it, a tall, broad-shouldered man with iron gray hair appeared. There was a sad, mournful expression on his face, and as he came forward and clasped his strong arms about Llewellyn, she turned away to hide her tears.

"I am so glad you have come at last, father," Llewellyn exclaimed, his voice trembling with joy and excitement. For awhile the older man did not reply but only clasped his son more closely to him, and when he at last spoke, his voice shook and his words came slowly.

"I would have been here long ago, my boy, but it was impossible—utterly impossible. I am glad you have had such good friends to care for you."

Llewellyn stretched one hand toward the girls. "Lillian," he said, "I want you to meet my father. Father, this is Miss Allington, to whom I owe more than I can tell—my life, perhaps."

"No! no!" exclaimed Lillian hurriedly, and coming forward she put her hand in General Greymore's and the color in her cheeks deepened as the General thanked her for her kindness to Llewellyn.

"And this is Lillian's sister, Miss Grace, who came to Baltimore last week to visit us, father."

"I am glad to meet you—very glad to make your acquaintance, Miss Grace." He looked steadily into her face; then his eyes went back to Llewellyn's, with a tender, loving gaze.

"They tell me mother has been ill. How is she now and why didn't she come with you?" Llewellyn asked, as his eyes met those of his father. Instantly General Greymore's face paled and with a gasping breath he turned quickly away. What should he say? What should his answer be? He hardly dared to tell him the truth, even yet.

"Llewellyn, we will leave you with your father now," said Lillian, as, with all the color fled from her cheeks, she came quickly to his side; then, as she met the imploring gaze of the father, she laid her hand tenderly on his arm and added:

"Remember your condition, Llewellyn, you are very weak and must be quiet and not allow yourself to become excited about anything."

"I cannot very well forget my weakness," he replied; and the shadow on the faces about him gradually stole into his, and as Lillian and Grace left the room, he turned to his father, who stood with his face half averted.

"Tell me, father, tell me the truth. Is mother better or is she—is she——" He hesitated.

"Ah! Llewellyn, canst thou finish it?" General Greymore's voice was sad; and with white lips he came to Llewellyn and took both his hands. "You have guessed the truth, Llewellyn. Your mother is now at rest in the Wonderful Eternity, with the Father whom she loved and trusted to the end, and whom she taught you and me to love."

"Tell me all. I would rather hear it now than later," whispered Llewellyn, after a silence in which both father and son struggled to crush down their emotions.

His father repeated the particulars of Mrs. Greymore's illness and death and, how at last, her prayer had been for her son, that he might remain faithful unto the end; that she might be reunited with husband and son in Heaven.

"I have much to be thankful for," he said, as he finished; "you have been spared, Llewellyn, and without you, I could not have borne this trial. When your mother died, you were very near death's door. The telegrams which came to me carried but little hope of recovery, and for awhile the whole world seemed dark; I turned in horror from everybody and everything; then came the telegram from Willard Allington which sent a ray of light into the darkness, and I knew that you would live. You do not know the joy that came to me through my sorrow, and now we will bear it together. Will you always feel toward me and think of me as you do now, Llewellyn, my son?"

"Always," repeated Llewellyn emphatically; then after a pause he continued mournfully: "My whole life has been one mystery, father; it has cast a shadow over my whole being, for with all of your and mother's love and kindness, I could never quite forget it."

"I know, Llewellyn; I understand."

"I have not loved you and mother because I felt it my duty; I have loved you always, for yourselves. I could not help it; it could never change; and now, that the mystery is suddenly crowned by the deepest sorrow of my life, it only deepens my love for you. Oh mystery, sorrow and pain!" he exclaimed, bitterly, and with a sudden motion he drew his hands from his father's, turned his face to the wall and buried it in the pillows.

For a long time there was silence—no movement—no sound broke the stillness of the room—only the wind moaned and whistled as it swept around the huge building and among the boughs of the evergreens. At last General Greymore bent over him. The whole horrible truth seemed to be burning into his brain and all his father's efforts to arouse him were in vain. Frantically the General rang for a maid, and sent at once for Lillian. Llewellyn still lay with his face among the pillows, and his father strode up and down the room when she came in.

"I have told him all, Miss Lillian; he did not seem so excited as I had feared, but now—now—see if you can rouse him." A frown of anxiety clouded Mr. Greymore's brow and he leaned his head against the marble mantel, as Lillian knelt beside Llewellyn. Softly she called his name—again and again she repeated it—yet he did not answer, and at last, as she drew his hand from the pillow, her nerves, which had endured so much of late, gave way; her head sank upon the hand she held and her tears fell, thick and fast. For awhile she wept in silence, then Llewellyn, as if suddenly awakened from a deep sleep, turned his eyes, bright with unshed tears, upon her.

"Lillian, Lillian," he whispered gently, slipping his arm about her shoulders. A little thrill of joy shook her slight form as she heard his voice, but quickly she collected herself and arose to her feet.

"It is weak of me, I know," she said, after a moment; "but a few years ago my own mother was taken from us, and I sympathize most deeply with you."

The tears now coursed their way down Llewellyn's white sunken cheeks. "I shall always bless you for all you have done for me," he exclaimed. He caressed her hand and released it.

"Shall I call the nurse now, General Greymore?" Lillian turned to him with quiet composure, though her face was tear-stained and her eyes still dim. The General nodded and she hurried from the room.

A strange feeling, which was entirely new to her, had suddenly come over her and, try as she might, she could not put it aside. Every nerve trembled with a strange thrill of mingled joy and sadness; a strange longing (for what she could not tell) filled her heart, and her eyes shone with a strange light. As she leaned her burning cheek against the window-pane of her room and looked out into the darkness, from which the mournful sobs of the wind still emanated, a feeling of desolation swept over her. Perhaps had she known how passionately Llewellyn had kissed the hand, wet with her tears; how, through the sleepless hours of the night, he would live over again the moment, when for an instant, his arm had been around her, it would have comforted her. But she did not know; and with a little shiver she slipped into bed, and throwing her arm about the sleeping Grace, she clung to her as though she, alone, could comfort her, and thus an hour later she fell asleep.

CHAPTER XXIV

LLEWELLYN AND LILLIAN

THE sun peeped in at Llewellyn's window, the following morning, finding him weak and exhausted; but as days came and went, he began again to improve, and all fear of the returning fever was dismissed. His father was continually with him, ministering to his every want, in the manner of a most devoted parent; and thus relieved, of what she had hitherto considered her duty, Lillian shrank from meeting either Llewellyn or his father, and very seldom went to the room. She knew that the change which had come over her recently was in some way connected with her daily association with Llewellyn. Before the night of his father's arrival, she had thought of him always, as her brother's friend—therefore hers—nothing more. But now it was different, and, with various excuses she kept from the room as much as possible, devoting all her time to her studies and to Grace, whose entertainment was left entirely to Genevieve and herself.

Llewellyn listened, with interest, to their plans to make Grace's visit a pleasant one; then, in silence, he would let Lillian go from the room, put aside the selfish wish to keep her with him, and look eagerly forward for her return, but after Grace had gone back to Roselin he saw no reason why she should stay so much from the room. He had improved quite rapidly; the old pallor had gradually left his cheeks and the former bloom taken its place. He now sat for hours at a time in the big leather chair in his room; and one evening when Lillian was alone with him he took her hand as she drew his chair nearer to the window. Looking up steadily into her face, he said:

"Lillian, why do you stay away from my room, so much of late? I can see no reason now that Grace is gone." There was a note of pain in his voice and she replied:

"Why, Llewellyn, I come almost every day!"

"Yes; but you will not stay."

"I am no longer needed, now that your father is with you."

"Needed!" he exclaimed. "If you could know how I have missed you, how I have longed to keep you with me, when you would not stay, I am sure you would think differently." She made no reply, but busied herself arranging the pillows, and he continued: "If you have no engagement for this evening, I shall keep you with me. May I have the honor of your company, Miss Lillian?" he asked, smilingly.

She laughed lightly as she sat down near him, and answered: "I think you may, if you wish it."

"You have no other engagement then?"

"None that will prevent my keeping this one. Marie and Wilma are going to the sorority meeting tonight, but I really do not care to go."

"I cannot ask you to give up the meeting for me, Lillian." A look of disappointment settled on his face but it vanished as she replied:

"You need not, for I shall give it up, just the same; so please don't try to break the engagement, for, now that I am here I shall remain until you are, perhaps, tired of me."

"Tired of you! Impossible! Where you are, there is perfect rest for me. You know it, Lillian; you know it," he repeated, as she began laughing.

"How can you talk so?" she exclaimed.

"One must not shrink from the truth; and that statement is nothing more nor less than the truth. I speak from experience, you see; so it is useless to deny it."

"If it is useless, I might as well not attempt. Shall I read to you, now?" She turned slowly through the pages of a book as she spoke, and apparently her every thought was centered in it.

He sat watching her as she read—head bent, cheeks pink, and bright golden curls falling over her white neck. Suddenly her eyes were raised to his. "I don't believe you want me to read," she said, slowly closing the book and placing it on the table. Her hands settled down in her lap, dimly outlined against her soft white dress, and the delicate color of her cheeks deepened beneath his long, tender gaze. In silence he adjusted the shade over the electric bulb. The light streamed to the

opposite side of the room; and they sat in the shadow. Quickly leaning forward, he drew her chair to the side of his, into the flood of moonlight coming through the window.

"I always enjoy listening to you, Lillian, but somehow tonight I have not heard a word; I only knew that it was your voice to which I was listening; your face I was looking upon. I would rather sit here in the moonlight with you." He leaned eagerly toward her. "Will you listen to me, Lillian?" His voice was low and pleading.

"You would not listen to me," she returned, sitting straight in her chair and speaking with an ease she did not feel.

With one hand he drew her chair quite close, while the other clasped both hers. "Lillian, I have loved you since I first saw you, at the Mandels. Do you remember that first meeting, dearest, that first waltz you gave me? You were my fairy queen that night. I loved you then, though I scarcely realized it; but since then—since that night—I have loved you more and more. I love you passionately, Lillian; I love you with my whole heart. Have you not seen it in my face? Have my eyes not told you every day that you were loved?"

He paused, for a moment, but she sat silently gazing out into the moonlit street, with only the passionate words "I love you," ringing in her ears and silently echoing in her heart.

"For more than two years I have loved deeply, silently," he continued. "I could endure silence no longer; I felt that I must speak; I must know, if even a small part of my love is returned. Tell me, my fair, beautiful Lillian—my peerless sweetheart—that I have not loved for naught. I am not yet twenty-one, Lillian, but I have loved as I shall never love again; my whole heart is yours; it shall always be yours. Will you keep it, or will you send it into exile and on to death? Tell me, Lillian, will you try to love me; will you some day be my wife?"

He leaned toward her, with his face very near to hers, and his hand involuntarily tightened its warm clasp. For a time all was silence. It was a still, calm evening—quite warm for March—only a faint breeze stirred the boughs of the evergreens on the lawn, while above them, numberless stars shone in the deep blue of the sky, and the moon—full and round—

hung in their midst, sending out the silvery rays, which fell with a soft, mellow light over the two at the window; then a thin filmy cloud floated over its face, casting a slight shadow about them. Lillian saw it all, her heart beating with a wild, uncontrollable joy, her cheeks crimson, her eyes shining with the brilliant light of happiness, and her soft, golden curls moving to and fro as Llewellyn's breath floated past them. He was waiting for her answer. His big, brown eyes rested imploringly upon her, and she felt that he could hear the wild throbbing of her heart; that he could feel the thrill of joy, as the telegraphic nerves sent the message of love to her very finger tips. It was all so beautiful, she dared not break the silence.

"Have you no word for me? One word of hope, dear, and I shall be content. Can you not learn to love me?" he pleaded.

Then she turned her half-averted face toward him; "I think I've learned that lesson well," she murmured softly, but he had already read the message that love had written upon her face. At last it had overflowed, and her face shone with a light that made it beautiful.

"Darling!" he whispered, as he encircled her with his arms and pressed hot kisses upon her sweet, trembling lips. The next few moments were golden moments to them both; moments never to be forgotten. They had no thought of the past; perfect love filled their hearts, and dwelling long in the glorious present, they slipped away into the future—the bright, happy future, when Lillian should be the light and pride of his home. Life would be one perfect dream of happiness then; but they must wait long for that glorious time. He was to return to Chicago with his father and there he would continue his studies.

"The time may seem long, dearest," said he; "but I shall study as I have never studied before. I shall make my way through school and then, when I am a practicing physician, I shall claim you. Is it long to wait, Lillian?"

"Oh! no, I shall be happy while I wait for you, Llewellyn," she replied, and there was a low, loving accent on the name.

"We shall wait and love till then, shall we not?" he whispered.

The moon appeared above the long, silvery cloud, the stars twinkled like diamonds in the turquoise heavens; Lillian nodded, and they sat in silence. A moment later, they started as a bright light fell upon them. They had not heard the soft tread as Miss Klive entered, nor had she noticed them, until, on turning the shade, the brighter light drove out the moonlight, and revealed the two near the window.

"Oh! pardon me; I thought you were alone—I thought Miss Lillian had left you," she exclaimed.

"We have been enjoying the moonlight," Llewellyn replied, smilingly, without releasing Lillian's hand. She blushed deeply and a moment later, as the General came in, she bade them good-night and left them.

Time passed all too swiftly and, at the end of two weeks, Llewellyn began preparing for the journey home. The day before his departure, he came to the Allington apartment, where he found Wilma alone. Lillian had not returned from class and he sat down to wait for her. Wilma had watched her sister and Llewellyn, closely, during the past week, and she instinctively felt that there was something between them; and now, as she sat talking with him, her heart throbbed bitterly as she thought how Lillian had, perhaps, won what she herself had lost.

"I hope you will visit us at Roselin. The summer is beautiful there," she said, looking into his dark eyes; then laughingly she continued: "but I presume you and Lillian have arranged that."

"Thank you," he returned; "I fear I shall not have that pleasure this summer, much as I would enjoy it; but I have promised myself the honor of visiting Roselin some time in the future."

"It will certainly be a pleasure to entertain you." Wilma's tones were very cordial and Llewellyn replied:

"One could not find a more charming trio for one's hostesses than you and your sisters, Miss Wilma."

"My sisters?" she repeated, somewhat scornfully, her black eyes looking straight into his. "May I ask, who is included in the trio besides Lillian and myself?"

His eyes did not waver beneath her gaze as he replied: "Your sister Grace."

"Don't call Grace Wilton my sister!" she answered, with a hauteur, a proud amazement that should have crushed him.

"Grace Wilton," he repeated; and the lines of self-repression deepened around his white lips and nostrils. For awhile he sat in deep thought, entirely oblivious of Wilma's presence, then suddenly rousing himself, he said: "Then I am mistaken, I thought her name was Allington. Did you say it was Wilton?"

He looked searchingly at her as she replied; then his long lashes veiled the eyes that would not meet hers, as she continued:

"It seems incredible that you could have imagined her to be one of our family. 'Tis true, she is living at Roselin at present, but she is only the stepdaughter of my father. A sister of mine! an Allington!—indeed!" Wilma laughed scornfully, and the hot blood rushed into Llewellyn's colorless cheeks.

"Pardon me, Wilma, but where was Grace's mother living at the time of your father's marriage to her?" he asked abruptly.

She paused and looked at him. "Can it be that you are so deeply interested in her?"

"I was interested in her as Lillian's sister and now, that I know she is not, it does not change," he replied.

"I think I can answer your question," Wilma continued. "My father had known Mrs. Wilton in early years. He married her in a little town in a western state. I could tell you a great deal of her early history, as well as that of her daughter, but it is a very disagreeable topic and seldom mentioned in our home. I do not wish to awaken the ghost of the past, so please let us discontinue the subject."

"Certainly, if it is so unpleasant to you," he replied, with gallant politeness.

"It is unpleasant for us all," she answered.

"I have confided to you, Llewellyn, that which concerns our family alone; but I trust you. You will repeat it to no one;" she said in a softened voice, after a moment's silence.

"I assure you it is perfectly safe with me;" and again Llewellyn seemed so lost in thought that he was entirely unaware of the questioning, black eyes fastened upon him, the look of puzzled astonishment that accompanied the gaze—wholly oblivious that there was another present, and when at last Lil-

lian came tripping into the room he started. Then the look of tender love came into his eyes, his cheek regained its usual color, and rising he moved toward her. Gently taking both her hands, he led her from the room, leaving Wilma puzzled and bewildered. His manner, when speaking of Grace, had annoyed her and his tender, loving manner toward Lillian caused her to wonder which of the girls he really loved. Could it be that Grace Wilton had at last stolen the love which her only sister had so unwittingly taken from her? An indignant flush overspread her face and she planted the heel of her dainty shoe deep into the soft velvet of the carpet.

It was some time before Lillian came back to the room, her face radiant with blushes, her eyes shining with a light of mingled joy and sadness. Wilma looked up from her music as she sat down upon an ottoman near the piano, then she continued her practicing, while Lillian sat with her hands folded over her knee and her eyes following her sister's graceful fingers as they flew over the pearly keys. The piece ended, and turning to her, Wilma asked:

"You have been walking with Llewellyn, have you not?"

"Yes; it is delightful out today; the sunshine is quite warm and the air is so refreshing." The glow of Lillian's cheek deepened, and drawing a letter from her belt, she continued: "I had almost forgotten Grace's letter."

Wilma watched her as she opened the envelope and drew out the folded sheets.

"Do you realize, Lillian, that Llewellyn is greatly interested in Grace? In love with her, I think."

Lillian looked up. "In love with Grace?" she laughed. "How absurd, Wilma. Where did you ever get the idea?"

"It does not matter. I know what I am talking about."

"Pardon me, sister, but I do not think you do. Llewellyn does not love Grace," she declared.

"Your authority?" questioned Wilma.

Lillian's eyes drooped. "Because he loves someone else," she replied softly.

"Have you his word for it?" Wilma continued, determined to find how affairs stood between her sister and Llewellyn.

"I could hardly make that statement, truthfully, without his word for it."

"Well, then I presume you are engaged!" exclaimed Wilma; "and when does this lover of yours intend to make you his wife?" she went on in a mocking voice.

"Not until he is through school," Lillian answered, in a matter-of-fact tone.

"Through school! Oh dear me! How dreadfully long to wait for a husband! but believe me, Lillian, he is only trifling with your love; he does not mean what he said. He is deceiving you. I tell you, he loves Grace Wilton. He has acknowledged his interest in her and his manner proves his love."

"Oh! nonsense, Wilma, he cares for Grace only as my sister and my friend."

"Trust him if you will."

"I do trust him," Lillian answered firmly, as, with elevated chin, Wilma turned to the piano.

"I have warned you; you will some day learn your fate," she said; and mingled with her words were the soft rippling notes of a sonata, but Lillian did not heed her.

No thoughts of jealousy marred that next day—the last hours with Llewellyn—but mingled with her love was a tender sympathy for her lover, who was leaving her, for the home, where there was no mother—as on former occasions—waiting to welcome her college son; and at last when he took her in his arms and whispered: "I shall always love you, darling; I shall be true to you always. You will love me; you will trust me, Lillian, my sweetheart?" She answered, "I will trust you before the whole world, Llewellyn."

Then with a last passionate kiss, he was gone. As he passed down the walk and took his seat at the General's side, he glanced back at the huge stone building and up to the window where, framed by the rich curtains on either side, was Lillian's fair, sweet face; and she smiled through her tears as his eyes met hers. She did not for a moment doubt his love for her.

Will her trust in him always remain as now, when during the first weeks of love—the hour of parting—she would believe him—trust him—before the whole world?

CHAPTER XXV

"AH, GENEVIEVE, YOU ARE MY MODEL, MY IDEAL"

THE April rain was falling, softly, steadily. Willard sat idly watching the big drops as they beat against the window and coursed their crooked way down the glass. Before him lay a number of penciled sketches in black and white, but the hand that lay upon the table had dropped the pencil; between the fingers there lay a cigar, from which a thin white wreath of smoke curled upward and circled above the head of the young artist. Not far from him was an easel. Over it a dark curtain was drawn, completely hiding the picture beneath. Presently he turned from the window, tossed aside the cigar and glanced carelessly over the sketches; then throwing back the curtain, which veiled the recently finished painting, he looked longingly upon the delicate features. The graceful curve of the smiling lips, the slight flush on the cheek—as fair and delicate as a pink-tinted apple blossom—the soft waves of the rich brown hair, the lacy fullness of the dress about the white neck and shoulders—all were perfect, but, as the large dark eyes looked deep into his, Willard exclaimed: "I have not done it justice."

With his hands folded above his head he sank back into his chair, but his eyes still lingered upon the canvas. It was a picture of Genevieve as he had seen her at the Carlson party; her first evening in society, when Chester Collins had been her escort. It was in the music-room that her eyes had met his, just as those in the picture before him; the lips were smiling, too, but how quickly the smile had faded and vanished when her eyes met his. Willard could not forget it. At that moment, he had been pained—he had been angry. Since then he had forgiven her but he had not forgotten. Forgotten?—No, he would never forget the sweet fascinating beauty which had won more hearts than his that night, and which he declared he had not done justice.

"What would the girls say if they could see you?" He nodded emphatically toward the picture, and his musical laugh

echoed through the studio as he thought of Marie looking upon his latest picture. Then he thought how a few weeks before, she had asked him to do her likeness, how he had refused, saying he had more to do than he could well do at one time, and how disappointed she had seemed when he had shattered her pet hope. "You should have a model for your pictures," she had pouted: "and I've been kind enough to offer my service and consequently been rejected." Her words came back to him now.

"Perhaps I did wrong to refuse her, for she really loves me," he said to himself. "Yes, she really loves me; but ah, Genevieve, you are my model; you are my ideal. Can I say that you, too, love me?"

His eyes looked long into those before him as if he expected there to find the answer to his question; then slowly his eyes closed, but the picture was ever before him, and now, beside it, he mentally saw one of Marie. She was a belle—an heiress—yet he did not think her one-half as lovely as the poor country girl who was making her way through school, gaining for herself that which would otherwise have been denied her. She was only an office girl, while Marie was a child of luxury, caressed and flattered by society; but he could not deny his preference—his love—for the former. His comparison detracted nothing from Genevieve. Only in one point could Marie excel, and that was in wealth. Wilma might judge from that point; he would not—he was no fortune seeker—if necessary he could make his own fortune by his painting.

Thus he sat thinking of the two girls, comparing their beauty, their wealth, Lillian's love for the one, and Wilma's for the other. Did Genevieve care for him as he half believed he had always cared for her? Did she think of him only as a friend? What would her answer be if some day he should ask her to be his wife?

The rain had ceased and the sun was shining when he awoke from his reverie and looked out into the street below. Far up the avenue he saw Genevieve coming, and hastily drawing the curtain over his painting, he left the room, locking the door behind him.

"What would she think of me, if she knew that I have been

dreaming of her, confessing myself in love with her, and almost resolving to propose to her at once—besides painting her picture?" he thought, as he ran down the steps and across the lawn. "She would laugh at me; she would say that I had made a fool of myself, and perhaps I have, for I know she would reject me; she is so different from Marie," he continued in answer to his own thoughts.

Soon he was at Genevieve's side, strolling leisurely toward Mrs. North's, while about them, the warm raindrops sparkled and splashed in the sunshine as they fell from the budded branches that cast their shadow over the wet pavements, and the warbling note of a spring bird floated to them from above.

"Pardon me; Clinton is my name. Do I address Mr. Allington?"

It was a dark young southerner of medium stature who approached them, raising his hat with an air of politeness as he asked the question. Looking up Genevieve saw the young stranger, who had that morning visited the office, talking for some time with Mr. Carlson, and at last leaving the office in company with Mr. Collins, just as Willard had passed in the automobile with Louis Mandel.

"I am here looking up some real estate," he continued. "Your father is well known to the firm of 'Clinton and Van Brunt,' of New Orleans, and Mr. Carlson thought perhaps you could help me."

"I have often heard my father speak of the firm you mention. I am very glad to know you, Mr. Clinton, and shall be glad to offer you any service in my power."

"Thank you. I have rooms here at present, and if I may see you this evening, I shall feel myself very much indebted to you for your kindness."

"Certainly, I shall see you at eight-thirty if satisfactory."

"Very well; I shall not detain you longer;" and again raising his hat he was gone.

"A nice chap—this Clinton—I think," Willard remarked, as they walked on.

"Yes, an attractive person, at least. I met him at the office this morning, but I did not know he was the occupant of Llewellyn's room. I presume Mr. Collins has sent him to Mrs. North."

As they were about to part at Genevieve's door, Dale Clinton came up the hall with a careless, swinging stride, and entered the room which was formerly occupied by Llewellyn. He was the son of a rich southern lawyer—dark, handsome, and attractive, with heavy locks of black hair falling upon the dark brow, and long, black lashes shaded bright, mischievous eyes. He had come to Baltimore to see about some business for his father, and for several weeks remained at the home of Mrs. North. As the days passed, he and Willard became quite intimate—Willard attracted by the easy, polished manner of the southerner, while he found Willard's calm, dignified manner equally attractive.

Between Wilma and Louis Mandel there existed a slight wave of indifference; and now, she flirted with the young southerner, in a way that pleased and amused Marie, who, had it not been for her love and hopes of winning Willard, would have been a merciless coquette; and Dale Clinton—jolly, good-humored fellow—rode, walked and danced with Wilma, attended parties and concerts as her escort, with seemingly the greatest of pleasure.

"I am positively ashamed of you, Wilma! I never thought you to be the heartless coquette you are proving yourself!" exclaimed Lillian, one evening as her sister stood before the mirror, fastening a flower in her belt.

"I am not a coquette!" she returned; "I really like Mr. Clinton, and perhaps in time, I might love him; but he goes south next week, and I presume Louis will be ready to play the devoted, ere then."

"But Mr. Clinton thinks you love him, and no doubt may return that love."

"Oh, you need not worry yourself needlessly, about Mr. Clinton!"

Wilma spoke truthfully; for upon the beauty of Willard's sisters—both fair and lovely, and dark and stately—he looked with criticizing eyes; for he had some weeks before met his fate. And, as he flirted with Wilma, or talked with the other girls, he frequently found himself comparing with them, the pink, dimpled cheeks, glossy, chestnut curls, and slender form of another young girl; and when he was again in New

Orleans—in his southern home—while all other faces faded from his memory, that one remained—luring him on to higher things, and causing the boy of two and twenty to become a man, more noble—more true—than he might have been had not that face—fair, pure and charming—crossed his northern path.

As days and weeks passed after his departure, Wilma found herself beginning to love Louis Mandel with a deep, passionate love that could not be controlled. She had put aside her likings for Llewellyn, as useless; she had forgotten her flirtation of the past weeks, and all her thoughts now turned to Louis, who, after the slight wave of indifference, was now very attentive. At home he was equally attentive to Adelaide. His irresistible, brotherly attitude at times became quite lover-like and Adelaide often puzzled over his conduct toward her; and she found herself, much against her will, gradually falling in love with him. In vain she tried to break the ties which bound her, she only found herself becoming more deeply in love.

CHAPTER XXVI

AFTER THREE YEARS

It was commencement at Baltimore.

A hushed murmur ran through the crowd which filled the University Hall, as the valedictorian, with sweet, quiet dignity came before them, her face gleaming marble white above the black gown which hung in soft folds about her; then the murmur ceased; friends and strangers alike leaned forward breathlessly as her voice—soft, sweet, untremulously clear—floated out, with words of inspiring grace and beauty. Then as the eloquent words ceased, and the last echo died away, there arose a burst of applause which rocked the building to its very foundation, and a shower of bouquets fell upon the platform, at her feet. With queenly grace, she—Genevieve Layton—accepted the superb cluster of American Beauties, which an usher placed upon her arm, and instinctively, her eyes fell upon the group at the left of the platform, where sat Willard, Grace and Lillian, and with them, Llewellyn Greymore—now a graduate of a Chicago University, and a practicing young physician. (At last, after two more years of hard study and one year of successful practice in the city, he had come again to Baltimore, where his many friends warmly welcomed him.) Then her eyes smilingly met those of her mother, whose face shone with pride and satisfaction, as she sat beside Robert, leaning eagerly forward, while Genevieve gathered up the bouquets at her feet.

Among them was one of white, half-open rosebuds, whose delicate fragrance breathed to her more than friendship, for Chester Collins—her employer still—she knew, had loved her long, and as she gently placed the waxy blossoms among the rich, long-stemmed American Beauties, which nodded on her shoulder, a slight color dyed her cheeks. But avoiding the eyes of her employer, she again glanced at the group on the left and with the same sweet, graceful dignity, with which she came, left the platform.

Mr. Carlson, with a fatherly interest in the girl who had served so faithfully—so willingly—in the office, was the first to meet her. “Well done, Miss Genevieve; well done,” he exclaimed, grasping her hand, with hearty congratulations. Willard pressed close behind him and a moment later was guiding her through the throng that surrounded them. At last they reached the door, where Llewellyn, with Lillian and Grace, were waiting for them, while her mother and Robert were slowly making their way toward them.

“Dale Clinton is here!” Genevieve exclaimed, turning to Willard.

“Of all things! He wrote he wasn’t coming until later.”

“Nevertheless he sat with Mr. Collins this evening. Perhaps we shall see him. There is Mr. Collins now,” she continued, as the people moved on and Chester Collins, with Dale Clinton, came full into view.

“You are the fellow I was looking for, Allington, and I knew I would find you here. Congratulations, Miss Layton; you were certainly the belle of the commencement. Good evening, Miss Allington, it is a pleasure to see you once again; and where is the sister?”

“She did not come to Baltimore with us, Mr. Clinton. Willard and I only came up for a few days to attend the commencement; and it is an unexpected pleasure to see you here; and I want you to meet my friends.”

Lillian turned to Grace and Llewellyn, the former of whom had scanned him as he came up to them, and involuntarily she shrank from him; for she knew that she had looked upon that face before—for although now a man of twenty-five, one year Willard’s senior—he was Dale Clinton still, and in him she recognized the young fellow whom she had met on the train, several years before. A vision of her ride from Ashville to Baltimore floated before her. Could it be that this fellow was Dale Clinton, of whom she had heard Willard and the girls speak so frequently, and with whom Willard was on the most intimate terms—this fellow whose memory she had so much disliked, that Willard was expecting to visit Roselin that summer? She had hoped never to meet him again, but here he was before her, and she hoped that she was not recognized, But alas! vainly did she

hope; for it was her memory which Dale Clinton had carried with him, from the time of that attempted flirtation with the young girl on the cars between Boston and Baltimore. It was the memory of her face that lingered still, and for her, it was, that he had striven to become what he was—a prosperous lawyer, a junior member of his father's firm, "Clinton and Van Brunt"—for he felt that, sometime, he would meet her again, and now, although she had changed from the charming girl, as he remembered her, to a grown young lady, equally as charming, he could not fail to recognize her. There were the same pink, dimpled cheeks, brown eyes, and chestnut curls, the same willowy form, though somewhat taller.

"Have we not met before, Miss Wilton?" he asked, as her eyes met his.

"I do not remember the name, only as I have heard Willard and his sisters mention it," she replied coldly, but as he noted the malicious twinkle of her brown eyes, he knew that he, too, was recognized; but he also found her quite unwilling to acknowledge it.

The crowd moved on, bringing with it those for whom they were waiting, while Genevieve, standing on tip-toe, frequently caught sight of her mother's black, ribbon-trimmed bonnet, as Robert whose bronzed face she could plainly see above the many others, guided her nearer and nearer. "I thought you would never get through that awful throng," she exclaimed, taking the thin little hand in hers and looking down into the mother's eyes, filled with happy tears of joy and pride at the success of her only daughter.

The warm summer moon was shining brightly as they came out into the street, and the young people—all save Genevieve—at once gave up the idea of occupying a place in the automobile waiting for them. They preferred walking down the moonlit streets and shaded avenues, through which the way to the Moreland Place led them. But Genevieve, at first, could not be persuaded to accompany them. She preferred going with her mother in the car, she said, and Robert and the others remonstrated in vain, but at last her mother dissuaded her from her purpose, and when the big car whirled down the street. Mrs. Layton and Robert were its only occupants.

By dexterous management, Dale Clinton gained the place at Lillian's side and Llewellyn—quite willingly it seemed—fell into step with Grace. She had frowned upon the young southerner and now his adroit plans to leave Llewellyn to her did not escape her notice. How glad she was when she saw him at Lillian's side and found herself alone with Llewellyn—one whom she felt to be a true friend. Then her brain seemed whirling as she tried to think of the young fellow on the cars and Dale Clinton being one. It seemed impossible! Her imaginary Dale Clinton vanished and the real, the only one—a flirt—remained.

The balmy June breeze floated over them and the moon looked down with the brightest smile he had worn, during all the few, brief summer evenings. His mellow rays seemed to penetrate the deepest shadow. Grace walked silently by the side of her companion, who, all unnoticed, bent an eager, searching gaze upon her, and mingled with it, there seemed to be a look of puzzled annoyance. He carefully scanned each feature, from the pure white brow upon which fell the thick brown waves, to the thin, though dimpled, rose-tinted cheeks, delicately curved lips and beautifully molded chin. Suddenly she raised her eyes to his and, with a sigh, loosened her light cloak at the throat, throwing it back and displaying a ruby necklace.

"Forgive me, Grace, if I tell you how pretty and charming you look this evening," he said. "Rubies are splendid! and if I were you, I should always wear them." He lightly touched the crimson stones as he spoke.

"I dearly love them, but seldom—I may say—never wear them," she returned.

"What! you love them and yet do not wear them? They are very becoming, I assure you."

"I know," she said, smiling at him; "but you see, I have none of my own. These are Wilma's and I wore them very much against my wishes. Lillian brought them with her jewels and nothing would please her until I promised to wear them to-night."

Her fingers caressed the rubies at her throat and her eyes met his with a look which plainly said: "Do you think Wilma would be pleased if she knew? What do you think she would say, could she see her precious rubies?"

CHAPTER XXVII

THE FIRST LINK

“CAN it be that I have at last, after so many years of thought and mystery, found the small link which may connect the present with the past?”

Llewellyn paused before his dressing table and for a moment gazed thoughtfully at the reflection of his face in the mirror, then upon the small golden locket which lay open in his hand; then his fingers slowly closed over it and when they again relaxed, the thin, golden surface of the locket hid from view the childish face of the small boy upon which his eyes had been resting.

“Yes, they are alike; very much alike,” he soliloquized, replacing it in its velvet case, and, quite forgetful of the late hour, sank carelessly into a chair. “For three long years—long years they have been—this new thought has haunted me, and now, I feel sure that it is true.” For a moment he was silent—lost in thought too deep for words—then he arose, and moving toward the window, he exclaimed: “Oh! the joy to know it!—to feel it!—to tell it—but I must wait—yes, I must wait;” and again he lapsed into silence.

The dim grayness of the coming day had begun to gather over the city before he arose from his reverie; and when he at last laid his head upon the pillow, thoughts of his arrival in Baltimore and of the past evening spent with Lillian and Grace at the commencement mingled and intertwined themselves with vivid fancies of the past and future. He could not sleep, and just as the sun rose into view above the horizon, sending its rose and golden tints far out over the eastern sky, he stole from the room and out across the green lawn which lay just back of the house. But his thoughts were far remote from the beauty surrounding him, and he started when he came suddenly upon Lillian and Grace, almost hidden beneath a drooping, vine-covered branch of a tree.

"Pardon me," he exclaimed; "I hardly expected to find you here; for I was just congratulating myself upon being the earliest riser."

"You need not have been flattering yourself; we have been here almost half an hour," Grace returned, as she raised her dark curly head from Lillian's shoulder and looked up at the tall figure before them.

"How do you like our leafy bower, Llewellyn?" Lillian asked, as he hesitated for a moment, with half averted face.

"It is certainly a beautiful place at sunrise," he replied, turning again to look upon the two girls, with their fresh white dresses gleaming against the dark trunk of the old tree. "May I join you here, or must I stroll on alone?" he asked pleadingly.

"Oh! please stay!" Grace exclaimed; and the radiant blushes which stole into Lillian's cheeks, the shy drooping of the bright blue eyes, as he threw himself upon the grass at her feet, told him that she had been true to the promise she had made three years before.

"Grace has been telling me of Vale Cottage, her old home in the south," Lillian said after a short silence, during which past thoughts and fancies had been flooding Llewellyn's mind, and at the sound of her voice, he started and the blushes in Lillian's cheeks were reflected upon his; but quickly collecting himself, he turned to Grace.

"Vale Cottage," he repeated thoughtfully; then after a pause continued: "please go on with your story, Grace; but tell me first where is Vale Cottage—this southern home of yours?"

"In Western Springs not far from New Orleans," she replied, without looking at him and her thoughts seemed to drift away to the little rose-covered cottage of her childhood. Llewellyn listened with interest as she described the cottage, the garden, and the big, vine-covered tree, of which the one whose branches were now waving above them reminded her. "Then almost seven years ago, when I was but twelve years old, mamma and I came to Roselin. A more beautiful place I have never seen," she added; "but Lillian and I are hoping to visit New Orleans and Vale Cottage, before the summer passes."

There her story ended and Llewellyn knew but little more of her life than he had obtained from Wilma, years before save

that her home had been near New Orleans—in the south—in-
stead of a western state.

Half an hour later she left them and went in search of Genevieve, whom she found busily engaged preparing her mother for her homeward journey. Mrs. Layton and Robert were to leave on an early train for Ashville, while Grace, with Willard and Lillian, was to remain until the day following. Genevieve now held the position of book-keeper at the office; and she hoped for only a short vacation a few weeks later. Soon after her mother's and Robert's departure she started to her work, accompanied by Willard.

The gay groups of noisy students, which usually gathered on the lawn, had disappeared. Some of them had departed on earlier trains, while those who still remained were busy with their preparations, in their own apartments; and to Grace, everything seemed grave and still as she turned from the door and looked down the long, silent halls. Swiftly she returned to the apartment which this year had been Genevieve's and hers, and as she knelt down beside the table, piled high with books, and began to place them one after another into the trunk, about which numerous other articles were strewn, the tears began to glisten upon the silken lashes and roll slowly down her cheeks. This winter had been a happy one for Grace, who had, from the beginning, loved both teachers and classmates, and in turn been loved by them; and now she could not contentedly put aside her books and go back to Roselin—where the family had recently returned, having spent the winter in Boston. There Wilma had reigned supreme, as the belle of fashionable society, and consequently was more proud and haughty than ever before, and Grace shrank from spending the summer under the same roof with her; for while seven years of life at Roselin had made her love Lillian more and more, drawing them nearer and nearer to each other, it had not lessened the icy gulf which lay between her and Wilma, and had it not been that her mother needed her love and comfort, she would have much preferred spending the summer with Genevieve in Baltimore.

“If it were only to Vale Cottage I was going—just mamma and I—how happy I should be,” she murmured to herself, as with the vain hope that the summer would pass smoothly at Roselin, she wiped the tears from her eyes and continued her work.

When at last every article was hidden away in the trunk, she slowly turned the key in its lock and stood looking about the room. The small bookcase in the corner had lost over half its burden. Dark spaces showed plainly between Genevieve's cloth bound volumes, and more than one shelf was quite empty. Other little things, too, had disappeared from their usual places. Poor Genevieve; how sad and lonely this little room would seem to her when on the evening following she would return to it, alone. How she would miss the young girl who had brightened the winter days; how she would miss the companionship and love, which had formed a part of her happiness. She would no longer be here to greet Genevieve when she returned from her day's work, tired and worn; and the tears again dimmed her eyes as she sat down by the window and looked out over the lawn, toward the shaded bower she had called hers during the past autumn and spring days, and where Llewellyn and Lillian were sitting now, hidden from view by the swaying branches. For awhile she sat silently watching it, then carelessly pushing the curls back from her brow, and rubbing her handkerchief vigorously over her face, she started from the room. She had not heard the footsteps in the hall and as she opened the door, she looked up in surprise.

"Good morning," she said, with a cold little air, as she was about to pass the dark, young southern lawyer, who was walking slowly down the hall in her direction.

"Pardon me, Miss Wilton," said he. "You seem to be in great haste this morning. In fact, you passed me on your way from the lawn, over an hour ago, but you would not glance my way;" and the man of twenty-five looked smilingly down upon the young girl of nineteen.

"Truly, Mr. Clinton, I did not see you," she said.

"You were dreaming of someone else at that moment, I presume."

"Yes," she answered truthfully, and a slight frown clouded his brow.

"Well, at least, I shall forgive you, if you can spare me a few minutes on the veranda. 'Tis quite pleasant there, and I'm sure you will enjoy it. You look tired, Miss Wilton;" and with no reasonable excuse to offer, she allowed him to lead the way

down the broad stairs and out upon the cool, pleasant veranda, where he perched himself upon the balustrade near her chair.

"There are many changes here and at the University, since I first visited Baltimore," he remarked.

"Yes, many," she replied; "and the place seems so dull and lonely since so many of the students have departed."

"Yes; but still there are a few attractions; though I must confess, I did feel a bit lonely strolling alone on the lawn."

Grace tried in vain to conceal her dislike for the handsome southerner, but each time she spoke, her tones became more frigid and her manner more reserved. His gallant politeness, his easy winning manner, had no effect upon her—certainly not the effect he wished it to have—for he knew now that she disliked him, if possible, even more than before. As she arose, saying she must go back to her rooms and finish her work, he gently took her hand and looking up into the brown eyes bent upon him with a stern, cold gaze, said:

"Miss Wilton, can't you please forget our former meeting? I see it is an unpleasant memory for you, and I now most sincerely beg your pardon. For my sake, you will forgive and forget, will you not?"

The pleading pathos in his voice, the hopeful expression of the dark eyes raised to hers, touched Grace more than anything else could have done. A ghost of a smile trembled about her mouth, and drawing her hand from his, she replied:

"I can forgive you, Mr. Clinton, but I find it much more difficult to forget."

"I may see you at the Mandel's to-night, may I not?" he asked, as she hastily turned from him, and with a silent nod she was gone.

* * * * *

It was late in the evening that Llewellyn sat with Willard in the little sitting-room of Grace's apartment, waiting for the girls to finish their toilets. Presently Lillian's sweet persuasive tones reached them. "Won't you wear these rubies again to-night, Grace?"

"No; I cannot wear them again," was the low answer.

"But, Grace," came the emphatic reply, "you need more color with that white dress. Please wear them, just this once."

"Do not ask me to do it, Lillian. They are Wilma's, and I have no right to wear them. I have long wished for some of my own, but I do not wish to wear Wilma's. I wore them for your sake, alone, last night; but I shall never do it again."

"Fool!" burst impetuously from Willard's lips.

For awhile there was silence, then again Lillian's voice reached them—this time in soft tones of comfort.

"Never mind, Grace, some day you may have jewels even more beautiful than Wilma's. There! those pearls look quite well, and I mean to ask papa, again, about getting those rubies for you."

"No use; she'll never get them," exclaimed Willard. "Hang the rubies! I'd buy them for her myself if I thought I dared, but there'd be no peace at Roselin for me then."

Llewellyn's cheeks were flushed, his eyes shining as he murmured softly beneath his breath:

"I shall succeed at last."

CHAPTER XXVIII

GUESTS AT ROSELIN

WILMA had for a long time been planning a summer house party at Roselin and now, when she learned that both Dale and Llewellyn were spending some time in Baltimore, she determined to have it the following week; and the servants began at once their hasty preparations to make Roselin ready for its guests; and when the morning of their arrival came, it looked more beautiful than ever before. It was one huge bower of roses. Only here and there the white stone pillars gleamed from between the superb clusters and trailing vines which entwined them. Roses hung in a profusion from the low balustrade. The balmy June breeze, floating gently among them, carried with it a sweet, delicate perfume; and every room was perfumed by the same fragrant blossoms, gathered and arranged by Grace's fairy fingers.

Alone in her room, shaded by the rich damask curtains, she watched the arrival of the guests. It was a merry party that alighted at the gate, greeted by their young hostess, and with a great effort, she forced back the tears as she watched them coming up the walk—Louis and Wilma leading the way, followed by Llewellyn and Lillian, Willard and Marie, Dale and Alice Mandel, Helen Mandel and Mr. Bartell (to whom she was to be married in the early autumn.)

Grace realized full well that she herself had no part in the joys, the pleasures of the days to follow, and with an aching sob in her throat, a feeling of loneliness in her heart, she turned from the window and again took up her embroidery. Only a few days before, her mother had received a letter from the west, telling her of the serious illness of her sister, and asking her to come at once to her bedside; and on the morning previous she and Delia had departed, leaving Grace alone to face the trials and sorrows of that summer's house party. Now only one ray of hope brightened her heart as she sat listening to the

voices below; perhaps after a few days Genevieve would come. (For at last—in submission to her brother's will—Wilma had written a short, cold note asking her to spend a part of her vacation at Roselin. This had been accompanied by another from Willard, begging her to accept his sister's invitation and saying, "Both Grace and Lillian are anxious that you shall come.") But until then she determined to stay in her own room and her mother's apartments, which were at present unoccupied.

It was her daily task to arrange fresh flowers in the rooms below, but this she did each morning before the guests had arisen and thus as much as possible avoided meeting them. She had an early breakfast with Mr. Allington and Willard in the family breakfast room, at which meetings Mr. Allington was silent, while Willard sternly remonstrated with her upon what he called "her selfish determination"; then she would go back to her room, while Willard painted in his studio across the hall and later joined the guests in the parlor. At noon she dined alone in her mother's little sitting-room and there also, Ellen, the new maid, served her supper.

Several times she met Alice and Helen Mandel and each time they greeted her with friendly words and pleasant smiles. Once only she had met Marie, and then that young lady had passed her with a bow, so cold, so stiff, as she haughtily held back her silken skirts, that Grace could scarcely keep the tears back.

Lillian often came to her, asking her to join them, but the memory of Wilma's tone and manner, when speaking to her of "my party," each time made her more determined to keep to herself. Once, too, Llewellyn and Lillian had spent an evening with her, in Mrs. Allington's sitting-room, while the rest of the party were canoeing. He seemed to understand perfectly, the sad yearning of the young heart, the longing for the gayeties and pleasures which Wilma's haughty hatred deprived her, and his manner toward her was kind and gentle. Dale Clinton and the others she had not seen, only as she watched them from the window; then she had noticed that the young southerner, with his bright, winning manner, seemed to be a favorite with them all.

On the fourth morning of the party, Grace, with basket and scissors, went as usual to gather the flowers for the vases. Genevieve was to arrive at the cottage that morning, and her heart was lighter than usual, and she softly sang the strains of a song as she cut the crimson and white blossoms she could reach from the veranda. Her basket was soon filled, and leaving it on the emerald lawn, she started down the garden path bordered on either side by roses. Her broad-brimmed straw hat had fallen back upon her shoulders, suspended by its ribbon streamers, Carefully she began clipping the choicest rosebuds. Her white, lace-trimmed apron was almost full, when a voice behind her said:

“Well! Miss Wilton, I have at last found the fairest flower of them all.”

The hot blood rushed to her cheeks and a white rosebud fell from her fingers, but hastily extending her hand she exclaimed: “Good-morning, Mr. Clinton; I did not know there was another in the garden.”

“Yesterday I watched you from my window as you gathered your roses, and you looked so pretty—so happy among the flowers, that I thought perhaps it would revive my own spirits,” said he, restoring the fallen rosebud. “You love your flowers, do you not, Miss Wilton?” he continued.

“Yes, I love the roses. As I cut them each one seems to me more beautiful than all the others.”

“Why need you hurry away with your flowers?” he asked, laying a detaining hand upon her arm as she was about to leave the garden. “Come with me to my favorite arbor, at the further end of the garden;” and not wholly unwillingly, Grace followed him down the narrow path to a shaded corner of the garden, where a small lawn-seat was almost hidden by the vines and roses surrounding it. There they sat listening to the birds warbling their morning songs, and watching the dew-bedecked branches swaying in the brightening sun. There also, they arranged the roses into bouquets, twining with them the slender green-leaved vines which Dale cut from those trailing about them.

“Miss Wilton,” he began slowly, as he thoughtfully twirled a crimson rose in his fingers, “Miss Wilma tells me that you

have positively refused to take any part in her party. May I ask your reason for that decision?" He looked up at her as he finished. She did not move; her expression remained unchanged.

"I have no part to take," said she.

"No part?" he asked in surprise. "Yes, indeed, you have, and hereafter you must take that part. You cannot desert us now, Miss Wilton. You owe it to us all."

An hour later all the flowers were arranged in the vases, and Dale Clinton followed Grace into the little breakfast room, where a delicious breakfast was served by old Nan, who later remarked, as she busily washed the dishes in the kitchen:

"Dat air young southe'nah wuz up foh breakfast wif Mistah Allington dis heah mo'nin', an' Lo'dy, gal, he's like Miss Allington and Miss Grace—you'd nebbah know he wuz frum de south."

CHAPTER XXIX

A RUBY NECKLACE

THE dusky twilight was slowly falling about Roselin as the guests gathered in small groups upon the lawn and veranda. It was the first day of July and a warm breeze blew gently from the south, bearing away with it the sound of merry voices, mingled with silvery peals of laughter. For a moment a small, dark figure paused at the gate and stood silently listening, then slowly it trudged up the walk, with a small package tightly clasped in one hand and a book swinging in the other.

"Mr. Greymore here?" he inquired, hastily grasping his gilt trimmed cap as he approached the nearest group.

"On the veranda, I believe," replied Wilma carelessly. "It is a boy from the village post-office," she remarked, as the others glanced after him with a look of curiosity.

"'Evening," said the boy, again raising his cap, as he neared the stone steps upon which Willard and Genevieve were sitting.

"Why, hello, Bill! Whom did you say you were looking for?"

For a moment the lad hesitated.

"Mr. Llewellyn Greymore," he said, with a broad grin.

"Alright, Bill; there he is." Laying one hand on the boy's shoulder, Willard motioned with the other toward a corner of the veranda, where Llewellyn and Dale sat upon the rose-covered balustrade, near the hammock where Lillian and Grace were seated.

"A package for you, sir. Your signature here, please." He placed the package in Llewellyn's hand, and holding the book toward him, indicated with one finger the place for the signature.

The usual color of Llewellyn's cheek deepened and slowly it mounted to his brow as he placed the small package in his pocket and drew forth his fountain pen. A moment later the lad was gone; and ere long the flush on Llewellyn's brow faded, but during the remainder of that evening, he was more quiet

than he was wont to be. Now and then his thoughts seemed to drift quite away from his surroundings to some remote scene of the past or future days, then again he would exert himself to appear his usual self, but never did he mention the package which had come to him by registered mail, and which lay unopened in his pocket.

The village clock was chiming eleven when Dale Clinton—the last of the party to leave the veranda—entered the drawing-room. The lights burned low there and at first he did not perceive Llewellyn's tall form leaning against the marble mantel, his arms folded upon its shining surface.

"Grace," trembled softly on his lips, and the faint vibrations of that name reached Dale's ears. Suddenly he paused; his hand grasped the bronze statue at his side. For a moment he stood watching the dark figure by the mantel, then with a soft, firm step he went back to the veranda. His dark face paled, almost visibly, in the moonlight, as he leaned against the marble pillar.

Alas! 'twas Grace whom Llewellyn loved—the queen, the hope of his own heart. He had heard rumors of an engagement between Llewellyn and Lillian, but 'twas false, for he, too, loved Grace. His very posture, his every expression, whispered of love for the girl whose name his lips had so tenderly, so lovingly breathed. No 'twas not for him—Dale Clinton—to claim the prize for which he strove. 'Twas lost; forever lost to him; for he had, as yet, only partially restored himself in Grace's favor; and with these disturbing thoughts he at last went to his room. Once the faces of Grace and Willard had disturbed his slumbers, but now, it was Llewellyn's form that gleamed out of the darkness—Llewellyn who should at last win the only girl for whom he himself had ever cared.

A warm, drizzling rain was falling when the guests gathered in the dining-room the following morning, and while Llewellyn seemed more like his usual self than he had for many days past, Dale sat in silence, and immediately after breakfast returned to his room. Willard, who was absent as usual, was busily engaged in finishing a painting in his studio, while Grace, who had had breakfast earlier, was arranging fresh flowers in the upper rooms.

"Mr. Greymore wishes to see you alone this morning, at the first convenient moment, Miss Grace," said Ellen, the little maid, appearing at her door an hour later.

"Mr. Greymore?" she questioned. "You must be mistaken, Ellen, for Mr. Greymore cannot possibly wish to see me."

"'Twas Mr. Greymore asking for Miss Wilton," replied the maid, with her head poised on one side and her sharp grey eyes fixed with a look of admiration upon the young girl.

"Then tell him he may come to mamma's sitting-room. I shall go down at once. I wonder what he wants," she added, half to herself.

Ellen stood silent, with her hand upon the bronze knob.

"Is there nothing I can do for you before I go, Miss Grace?" she asked, after a moment.

"No, thank you, Ellen, only my message to Mr. Greymore," was the reply, and the trim figure of the maid slowly withdrew from the room; and with one glance at the fair face reflected in the mirror before her, a hasty arrangement of the dark curls caressing the pure white brow, Grace hurried down to meet Llewellyn.

He was waiting for her and as she softly—almost noiselessly—closed the door, she hesitated to admire the tall, stately figure before her. He stood in the arch of the small bay-window, looking out across the lawn in the direction of the lake, upon which the sun was now shining. His tall, supple form was bent slightly forward, but almost instantly he turned at the sound of her light step, and came toward her. For an instant a smile brightened the finely chiseled features, then it faded; the lines of self-repression about the lips and nostrils deepened; and taking both her hands in his he led her to a chair near the window.

She looked wonderingly at him as he drew one of the gilt chairs near her silk upholstered rocker, and her cheek flushed as she noticed that the one red rose she had that morning placed among the white ones in her mother's room had found a place in the button-hole of his gray sack coat.

"Lillian and Dale have gone with the others to the lake, since the rain ceased, and you must pardon me, Grace, for seizing this opportunity for a moment alone with you," he began, quite seriously. "That lawyer claims you the moment you appear

and gives no one else a shadow of a chance, but thanks to Lillian—she has dragged him off to the lake for the morning, in spite of his efforts to remain.”

He smiled, and Grace replied with an unassumed ease:

“I shall pardon you, Llewellyn, but I can not understand how you could contentedly see Lillian drag the protesting Mr. Clinton off to the lake.”

“Only for the morning, you see, and I had letters of importance to write.” The dark eyebrows were slightly lifted; then drawn into almost a straight line across the brow.

“I have something I wish to ask of you, Grace, and you must not refuse to grant it,” he continued in a more serious tone, then hesitated; his hand closed over one of hers and the brown eyes, shaded by long, dark lashes, looked down into her face.

“I can hardly refuse until you tell me what you wish me to do,” she returned.

“And even then you cannot refuse. For my sake you must not refuse,” was the emphatic reply. “And you will repeat our conversation to no one; I trust you, Grace. Sometime I shall explain to you my reasons, but until then, no mention of it will pass your lips. Do you promise, Grace?”

“I have no right to listen to that which you would keep from everyone else—even Lillian—your betrothed. Could you not trust her? Can you ask me to keep it from Lillian?” Drawing her hand from his warm, tight clasp, she sat straight in her chair.

“This is a matter which concerns us alone, Grace. No other secret would I ask you to keep from Lillian, and I hope we shall not, of necessity, need keep this long from our friends, but I will trust you, and you must hear me, Grace, even though you may, if you will, reveal it to Lillian—to them all.”

He sat silently, thoughtfully gazing at the velvet rug at his feet for a moment; then raising his eyes to those fastened upon him with astonished inquiry, he continued:

“As a token of our friendship, in regard for the love Lillian Allington bears for you, and for other and deeper reasons, which I cannot at present explain, even to you, Grace, I wish you to accept this gift.”

As he finished he placed a velvet case in her hand, then moved to the window, where he stood with folded arms watching her. Her eyes followed him, but she did not move.

"I do not understand you," said she.

"Just what I've said, Grace, I wish you to open that case and tell me, are you pleased with its contents?"

A moment longer she hesitated, then slowly—almost carelessly—she pressed the golden clasp and there in her hand, on its bed of soft green velvet, lay an expensive ruby necklace. Suddenly the room grew dark; one hand tightened its clasp upon the velvet case, while the other weakly grasped the arm of the chair. But only for a moment did it last. Almost before Llewellyn could reach her, she was herself again, and the big, brown eyes which were raised to his were almost overflowing with tears.

"Take it, Llewellyn," she said, extending the open case, with its crimson gems, toward him. "Do not ask me to accept them, for I cannot."

Taking a step backward, he stood looking down at her.

"You cannot accept the necklace?" he repeated, with an air of disappointment. "But, Grace, they are yours, and you must keep them."

"Do you think, Llewellyn, that I will accept that expensive necklace as a gift from you? I most sincerely appreciate your kindness, but accept them, I cannot." She arose and placed the case on the chair nearest him as she spoke.

"If you could know the pleasure it affords me, Grace, you would not hesitate to accept," he said, coming up to her and taking her hand. "You will at least allow me the privilege of fastening them about your neck."

"Please do not tempt me," she replied, drawing away.

He took the rubies from the case and drew them slowly over his fingers. The crimson stones gleamed in the ray of sunlight which fell upon them, and Grace stood admiring their superb beauty.

"They are very beautiful—more beautiful than Wilma's," she said at last.

"Very nearly like them, I think."

"I shall not be disappointed; I shall succeed at last," he

thought, and a pleased smile parted his lips as he fastened them about her neck.

"Listen to me, Grace," he began, standing back to admire the beauty of the necklace. "You love those rubies and, for my sake, you must keep them and wear them. I shall sometime tell you my secret, Grace, and if you do not think it a sufficient reason why you should accept the necklace, you may return it; but until then can you not trust me? Have I ever been to you anything else than a friend?"

He came quite close to her now, but she made no reply. Her cheeks burned scarlet and her eyes sank beneath his imploring gaze. Her slender white fingers clasped the precious rubies.

"You dare not refuse to grant my only request, Grace." His hand closed over hers. "Keep them, for me, until you have just cause for returning them."

"If it were only a matter of keeping them for you, Llewellyn, I should not refuse; but am I the only person with whom you can trust your jewels?"

She drew herself to her full height and the eyes, which were now raised to his, did not waver in their inquiring gaze.

"You are the one person to whom I wish to trust them," he replied; "and, Grace," he continued with emphasis, "would you force me, by persisting in your refusal, to reveal to you, now, the secret which I feel it my duty to keep, for the present, to myself?"

"Indeed! I should not listen to you if you were to tell it," she returned, in a voice which ignored the tender, pleading look of the eyes following her as she moved across the room, and the deepening lines about the lips of the man whose heart was filled with a secret which his lips dared not reveal. Slowly he turned to the window and silently gazed out across the lawn. She replaced the necklace in its case, then, with her hands still lingering on the green velvet, she stood looking at him.

Could she fail to trust him—Llewellyn, whom years before had proven himself a friend—Llewellyn, who was to claim Lillian as his bride before another year had passed—could anyone mistrust him? With a soft tread she approached him, and gently laying her hand on his arm she said:

"Yes, Llewellyn, I will keep it; but I shall never wear it."

"As you like about that, Grace, but in time, I hope you will think differently."

"Perhaps, when you tell us your secret; but until then, no one, save myself, shall have an opportunity to admire their rare beauty; for I give you my promise, Llewellyn, the moments we have spent here this morning shall be hidden away with the rubies."

"That is kind of you, Grace; but I do not wish you to hide the rubies. I would much rather you would wear them, but I trust they will, at least, remind you of my friendship; for you may remember, I am always your friend—your—" he broke off abruptly and paused.

"I had almost forgotten the picnic for this afternoon. You, of course, will accompany us?" he asked after a moment's silence?

"I had scarcely thought of going."

"Yes, but you must think of it now, for our party is hardly complete without you. Please do not disappoint us, Grace;" then silently pressing both her hands in his, he left her. For a moment she stood staring at the door, which closed behind him.

"How strange that Llewellyn should give this to me," she murmured, sinking into a chair and trying in vain to force back the tears of mingled joy and astonishment.

The precious ruby necklace, for which she had so often longed, was at last hers; but she dared not wear it, for how could she explain to the others? Could she tell them that she had accepted it from a friend—a young man? And then could she refuse to give his name? Ah, no; she must lock the rubies away in their velvet case until Llewellyn revealed to her that mysterious secret. How a secret of his could affect her acceptance of the necklace she could not guess; but about Llewellyn there was something which commanded her respect, her confidence and her trust. She had promised, and with Grace Wilton a promise was never broken.

CHAPTER XXX

WILLARD'S PAINTING

ERE the noon hour came the dark clouds which had been hovering above the western horizon, gradually growing heavier and darker, had begun their steady march in the path of those which had hidden the sun during the morning hours, and the low rumble of distant thunder warned the young people that their picnic must be given up for that afternoon.

Wilma, though thoroughly angry, contented herself by taking the girls to her room, immediately after dinner, to see the family jewels, while the boys gathered in the library where Willard displayed a collection of his latest sketches and a few paintings.

The rain had just begun falling, when Lillian and Grace, who had been to the cottage, came in with Genevieve, all three faces shining from the exercise; and shaking the drops of water from hair and shoulders, they appeared at the library door, and were met by a chorus of exclamations from within.

"I declare, you girls don't look the least bit disappointed about the picnic," was Llewellyn's reproachful remark.

"And I think we can say the same of you. You look quite comfortable and contented here," Genevieve returned.

"Gee! who could fail to be contented when one has such an art gallery displayed for one's entertainment?" Dale asked in reply.

"Indeed; 'tis far more interesting than many picnics," was Mr. Bartell's enthusiastic remark.

"And is it not glorious to watch the rain fall and know that everyone is pleased?"

"I'm thinking you will find a different atmosphere on the second floor, though, Lillian," laughed her brother.

"Unless, perhaps they, too, have found something of more interest than picnics," Llewellyn broke in.

"I think we shall investigate, at least," Lillian said, as they

withdrew from the room, while Willard's voice called after them.

They found Marie, Alice, Helen and Wilma surrounded by sparkling gems. The massive cases were empty and upon the mahogany table lay a profusion of diamonds, pearls, amethysts and other precious stones, mingled with gold and silver, and the case containing Wilma's jewels set in the midst of them. Grace only glanced at the brilliant array, the splendor of which she had never before seen, and moved on to her own room where she looked at her own small collection of inexpensive jewels and again caressed, with loving fingers, the brilliant rubies which were her only valuable jewels.

"Oh! I'm glad we came, girls," exclaimed Lillian, turning around to find only Genevieve at her side. "You have never seen our family jewels have you, Genevieve? Some of them have been worn by my great-great-great-grandmother, and each one has its own history. Dear me, I wish I could remember them all. Mamma often told them to me, and I can remember many," she went on, taking up one after another of the jewels, with a word as to their value or the story with which they were connected. Wilma watched them for awhile, then went on talking with the others, only now and then glancing toward her sister and Genevieve.

"They are all so beautiful; so grand," Genevieve exclaimed, with quiet admiration, as Lillian placed a ruby brooch on the table.

"You are like Grace, I see you, too, like rubies. You have seen Wilma's necklace, I know," Lillian said, taking it from the case; "but everyone admires it so much, I know you won't mind seeing it again. Grace has always wanted one like it, but, owing to their expensive value, papa has refused to get it for her." She fastened the rubies around Genevieve's slender, white throat as she finished. "They are quite becoming," she exclaimed joyfully, standing back to admire them.

Wilma looked up with a frown as her sister's words reached her.

"I admire rubies very much," Lillian continued; "but for myself, I prefer this slender thread of pearls, which was given to mamma by her grandmother, years ago."

She wound the pearls among her golden curls, bending her head before the mirror to see the effect, while Genevieve unfastened the clasp, took the necklace from her own neck, and carefully placed it in a red heap on the table, among the other stones of contrasting color, and turned again to Lillian.

"Do you like them?" Lillian asked, turning to the girls, who were watching her. "I think there is nothing more beautiful than a pale, delicate little pearl."

"Only your own curls, Lillies and pearls, and golden curls are all for you, Lillian," Alice Mandel said, shaking back her auburn locks.

They watched Wilma as she began replacing the jewels in their cases, her arms gleaming white beneath the lacy ruffles of her short sleeves; then they left her and went down to the library where Willard was just gathering up his sketches.

"Are you really going to put them away without showing them to me?" Marie asked, coming up to him with a pretty pout.

"Certainly not, if you wish to see them," he returned, preparing to place them again on the table.

"Come, let us take them to the music-room," she said, hastily touching his arm. "Perhaps the young men will not care to see them again;" and with her hand still lingering upon his arm, they left the room.

"I can enjoy them so much more when I have them all to myself, you know; and I do love to listen while you explain your drawings," she said as he seated himself at her side and placed in her soft, plump hands the first of the drawings.

Many were the questions she asked, and often, at her request he would repeat the explanation of some exceedingly interesting picture. She was quite profuse with her appreciation of his art, and, by her flattery and constant efforts to draw him out on the many interesting points of the subject, she managed to keep him at her side for hours. More sketches and other paintings were brought down from the studio and a prolonged explanation of each was given to the enthusiastic Marie, and the lips of the young artist were parted by smiles of appreciation, as compliment after compliment was poured out upon his work. It was almost time for supper before she permitted him to leave her; then she hurried to her room where Clarice was already waiting to arrange her toilet.

Genevieve was just leaving the house, when Willard called to her. "Are you in a great hurry, Genevieve?"

"Yes, rather," she said, hesitatingly.

"I want to show you something in the studio, if you have time. We'll take time for these some other day," he said slightly swinging the roll of sketches toward her. "Come, Genevieve," he added; "we will just have time before supper." Hesitatingly, she turned back, and followed him to the studio. It was the first time she had been admitted, and she looked about her with interest. Upon the table lay piles of black and white sketches. Some of them were scattered about over it and a few books were strewn among them. A long black curtain was drawn over the recently finished painting which still stood upon the easel at the center of the room, and before it was the low chair Willard had used that morning. Upon the wall were a number of pictures, some of which she had seen before. Willard began straightening up the scattered books and sketches, while Genevieve stood looking at her surroundings, then in silence she began to view one after another of the paintings hanging upon the walls. Willard did not disturb her, but carefully he watched every movement. Not one change of the expressive face escaped him. He read there her silent admiration, her delight, and her appreciation.

"They are all beautiful, magnificent!" she exclaimed, turning, at last, to him.

"And yet, that is not what I brought you here to see," he returned, smiling at her.

"Something still more wonderful?" she asked, with childlike simplicity.

Her rosy lips were parted with eager expectation as he led her to the curtained easel.

"You are to be the first to see this picture, Genevieve, for I painted it especially for you, and upon it I have put my most skillful efforts," he said, looking down into the surprised face raised to his. "It was your wish to see my mind's picture upon canvas, Genevieve, though perhaps you have forgotten; but here it is at last. I put the last touch to it this morning," he added, as he drew aside the heavy curtain and displayed a magnificent painting, beneath which was written, "AT SCHOOL TOGETHER."

It was a picture of a man and a maiden standing before a huge bank of rhododendrons. Scattered upon the grass at their feet were a number of books, one of which lay open, as if it had just fallen upon the bank where the girl had recently been sitting. Now, apparently, all thoughts of her studies had flown, and her fair, young face, radiant with smiles, was raised to the one bending above her. A faint, rosy color touched the perfectly moulded cheek and the soft waves of dark hair, which was done in a soft coil at the back of the head, covered all but the tip of a small rosy ear. His left arm was around her waist, while hers rested upon his shoulder, its round whiteness showing plainly against the dark grey of his coat. Her right hand was clasped in his. 'Twas a beautiful picture, with her sweet innocent face raised to his, her dainty blue frock contrasting so beautifully with the green and white background, and the small black slippers showing beneath its hem.

Genevieve stood silently looking at it. There was something about the girl, in both style of hair and dress, which reminded her of herself, and her dark eyes turned inquiringly to Willard.

"Do you remember?" he asked. "It represents Genevieve Layton and myself as I wished it to be during the first year of your schooling at Baltimore—all flowers, sunshine and smiles. I promised I would paint it for you, Genevieve, and I have kept that promise."

Genevieve looked at him in astonishment, then her eyes went back to the picture.

"Yes, I remember," she said. "It was only a passing thought and I never really expected to see it—this wonderful painting of your mind's picture."

"That wish of yours gave me a grand inspiration, Genevieve, and although it was years afterward that I began this picture, I was always thinking and studying how I could, in one painting, picture that whole year as I had wished it to be. I had a resolute determination to make the picture and at last I decided on this; but long before the brush had touched the canvas, I had given it this name." He touched the words beneath the painting and turning again to Genevieve, continued: "I am satisfied, Genevieve, with my efforts; it is one of the best of my paintings, although I hope for far greater things in the future."

"And you shall certainly attain them, Willard; I have every confidence in your art; though, for myself, I cannot realize a painting more wonderful than this."

"You gave me the thought, Genevieve, and I shall give you the picture. You, I think, can appreciate it more than anyone else, for you know and can understand the whole story, and I painted it for you."

"Me, Willard?" she asked, turning quickly from him to hide the tears which suddenly filled her eyes.

He made no reply, but going to the long, low bookcase, he took a key from his pocket, opened a drawer, and taking from it a smaller picture, placed it upon the easel in front of the painting.

"Yes, Genevieve, but this one I shall keep for myself," he said, turning her about to face the easel.

"Me!" she exclaimed, again, as her eyes fell upon the painting Willard had made of her three years before, when she was a girl of twenty. No other words fell from her lips, for, with a sudden impulse, Willard drew her up to his heart and held her there.

"And, Genevieve, there is something else you must give me!" he exclaimed, but he stopped short, for the door opened on the instant and Wilma, clad in a soft rose silk, appeared, a scornful frown furrowing her brow as she saw the two figures in such close proximity to each other.

Genevieve started and trembled away from the detaining arms, and her cheeks flushed scarlet. In an instant the heavy curtain was drawn over the easel, but the painting had not escaped Wilma's searching gaze; and a scornful, "Ah!" fell from her lips as her brother turned toward her.

"Have you forgotten that we are waiting for you in the dining-room," she asked in cold, icy tones. "You will please come at once," she commanded.

Genevieve hastily turned from the room and Willard followed, holding the door open for his haughty sister and locking it behind her, and with an air of impatience she placed her hand on his sleeve as Genevieve quietly thanked him for showing her the pictures and left them.

"The 'pictures,' indeed!" Wilma repeated scornfully. "It was I who saw the real, life-sized, moving picture, and I presume it was that she enjoyed so much," she sneered.

"Wilma, you are talking of things of which you know nothing, and you saw what you had no right to see and have no right to repeat. Do you understand?" He stopped short and placed his hand upon her shoulder.

"I'm neither blind nor deaf," she retorted.

"I never knew you to enter my studio so unceremoniously, Wilma," he continued. "May I ask you why you did it this evening?"

"You may not," she returned, almost before he had finished the sentence, and haughtily shaking his hand from her shoulder she whirled from the room like a small cyclone.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE PATH OF FATE

EVEN the thought of the scene in the studio brought the hot blood rushing to Genevieve's cheeks and brow. She knew what it was Willard would have said to her, and with a quickly beating heart she tried to think what might have been, had he told her of the love she was sure he bore for her; but it was all passed now—that one short moment of breathless bliss. "Will it ever be repeated?" she wondered, and the sad, yearning heart sank low; the crimson flush died from her cheeks. Genevieve Layton had learned to love. She had always thought of herself as only a business woman, but during the few days of this summer vacation, she had learned that friendship, alone, could no longer exist between Willard Allington and herself; but the hostile Wilma would always stand between them as she had done that evening in the studio, she thought; for now that she had heard his words, had seen his arms around her, she would never cease to darken her slightest hope.

"I have given no one a cause to believe that Willard's love is returned," her thoughts continued; "and now, I shall not purposely avoid him, but I certainly shall not throw myself in his way by continually visiting Roselin. If he wishes to see me, he must come to me; and if he does not come, he shall never know of the pain it costs me."

With this resolution, she entered the tiny kitchen; and tenderly kissing her mother, she whispered to her of her intentions to spend the remaining days of her vacation at home.

Much to Genevieve's surprise, a wagon came from Roselin, quite early the following morning, bringing the painting and a note from Willard, saying he would have much preferred bringing the picture himself, but it was quite impossible as the girls had decided to give an all-day picnic, and urgently requesting her to accompany them. She read it over and over, then stood looking at the painting, wondering what her reply should be; and at last, writing a short note, thanking him for both painting

and invitation, but refusing the latter, she gave it to the boy, who was waiting, and with tears flowing down her cheeks, stood watching him as he turned the horses toward Roselin.

"Any reply?" asked Willard, as Ned came up the drive.

"Yep," returned the boy, taking the dainty envelope from his pocket.

Willard took it and hurried to the studio, where, buried in the depths of a leather rocker, he opened it.

"The deuce! She can't go," he exclaimed, angrily crushing it in his hand as he arose. "'Tis no more than I expected, after last night. She'll never want to face Wilma again, and I can't blame her, knowing Wilma as I do. But she will find that her brother isn't so easily entangled in her snares!"

He strode up and down the room with his hands deep in his pockets. "Marie Carrelton! Marie, indeed! I almost hate her," he exclaimed, stopping before the table and bringing his fist down emphatically upon it. "No picnic for me," he declared, continuing his march. "I'll never do it. I shall see Genevieve before yonder sun is set; I have waited long, and now I must know my fate; and the wife of Willard Allington shall never bear the taunts and scorn of a haughty sister-in-law."

"Hurry up, Allington," called a voice; and throwing open the door Willard saw Llewellyn hurrying down the hall.

"I'm not going," he called after him.

"What? Not going?" Llewellyn turned about and faced him. "How is that? Not starting another picture are you?"

"No, not that, but I can't go. Hope you have a great day, Greymore."

"We are sure of that, and you may be sorry that you are not with us; especially if Genevieve joins us. Lillian and Grace have gone for her now."

For a moment Willard hesitated, then replied: "No, Llewellyn, I'm not going. I really do not care for picnics."

"All right, old fellow, I'll tell you all about it tonight anyway;" and Llewellyn swung his silk cap above his head as he disappeared down the stairs.

It was near the middle of the afternoon when Willard, choosing the path leading past the lake, turned his hurried footsteps toward the cottage. Everything was silent about the lake, upon

which the sun was shining with a dazzling brightness, but the trees cast their shadows across the path, almost to the water's edge. Willard walked along, his eyes bent upon the grass at his feet, until suddenly looking up, he caught sight of a pink dress fluttering between the trunks of the trees, and with swift steps he turned from the path and entered the woods, there to find Genevieve, leisurely strolling about the velvety, wooded slopes.

"Well, Genevieve, I'm lucky to have found you here," he said, coming up to her.

"Willard Allington!" she exclaimed slightly starting: "I didn't know you were about the place. How came you here? I thought you were picnicking today." Her tone was half reproachful and her manner so different from the Genevieve he had come to woo, that he crushed down the intense longing to take her at once in his arms, and replied:

"Not I! your decision was mine, Genevieve."

He saw the delicate flush mount to her brow, and her eyes fell as he continued: "Do you know, Genevieve, that picnics and parties are horrid, infestive things when your love is not there?"

She made no reply and taking both of her hands, he led her to the old moss-covered rustic seat against the huge old oak near by and, seating her there, bent over her until his lips touched the smooth forehead. Neither of them heard the footsteps upon the grass not far away, hushed by the gentle breeze murmuring softly among the leaves above them, and sitting down at her side, with her hands still clasped in his, he continued: "My love was not going, Genevieve, and with her my heart always remains. Can you reproach me, Genevieve, for refusing to join the others, when you yourself had refused; can you reproach me for disturbing your solitary stroll?" he asked tenderly, with his eager face bent close to the dark hair of the girl whose face was turned from him.

At that moment there was a voice near by, and Willard arose to his feet just as Mr. Allington appeared. Raising his hat to Genevieve, he turned to his son: "I have brought Mr. J. F. Ancille, of Boston, out from the village to see your latest pictures, Willard. He has waited some time now, so please come at once. I'm sure Miss Genevieve will excuse you and pardon me for interrupting."

"My latest picture is not for sale; you may tell Mr. Ancille." Willard sat down again with an air of ease.

"Come, Willard, you must at least show him something. He is greatly interested in your work." Mr. Allington's voice had in it a stern command and Willard reluctantly arose and followed him, leaving Genevieve sitting alone on the old moss-covered bench.

Almost mechanically he displayed his paintings, for ever before him was the picture of Genevieve, and in his heart was a wild desire to rush from the room, down to the lake shore and the green woods, and to be once more at her side. Presently Mr. Allington arose from his chair.

"Willard," he said, "I shall leave Mr. Ancille with you and you may bring him to the office. Will you do that?" he asked, for Willard did not reply.

"Certainly I shall bring him," he said, noting the anxious, annoyed look upon his father's face as he left the room.

Mr. Allington's eyes had been opened and, with a slow step, he walked back to the office, trying in vain to believe that all he had seen and heard was but a dream. Was it possible that his son—his only son—had fallen in love—gradually but surely fallen in love with the poor country girl, who was so far beneath him? Had his eyes really seen his son kissing the brow of this girl of poverty, or was it only his disturbing fancies. He had reached Roselin soon after Willard had left the house and, upon hearing from the servants that he had gone to the lake, he, too, started in that direction just in time to see Willard turn from the path and enter the woods. He had followed, and hesitating within the border of the timber land, he had heard his son's loving words, had heard the tender caressing accent of each and seen his lover-like attitude. All this was a new phase of affairs to Mr. Allington, who, for some time past, had thought of Marie—the lovely heiress and only child of the wealthy Widow Carrelton—the petted and spoiled child of fashion—as his future daughter-in-law. But Genevieve Layton—a farmer's daughter; poor and obscure; unknown to society—only a book-keeper, who had made her own way thus far through life—as the wife of his son? Never!

"He shall not so easily give up Marie," Mr. Allington said,

busying himself about the office. "So long as my influence can prevail upon my son, he shall never marry Genevieve."

When Willard came to the office he gave him some work to do, which kept him busy until Mr. Ancille left them; then laying his hand on his shoulder he began: "As you know, Willard, I found you alone with Genevieve Layton, and am I mistaken when I say you have given the girl the impression that you are in love with her?"

Willard looked up in surprise.

"No, sir, you are not mistaken," he answered.

"I thought not; I thought not," Mr. Allington said, sitting down facing his son. "I do not wish you to deceive the girl, Willard, and I am sorry you have given her cause to think that you really love her, for, being a country girl, so unused to the ways of the world, she may consider your words of love as good as a proposal. She, no doubt, thinks more of them than you think for; and while I know that my son is higher minded—looking for higher, more noble things—she, no doubt, herself already in love, will scarcely give that thought a consideration."

"Nor is it worth considering," burst forth Willard, his face flushed with indignation. "You are very much mistaken, father; I know of nothing higher, more noble than Genevieve Layton. I have never thought to deceive her."

"But, Willard, as one in your social standing—a successful artist, belonging to one of the best families in New England—can you not think of another girl who would be better fitted for the responsibilities which would fall upon the wife of Willard Allington? Could you proudly introduce this book-keeper to Boston society as your wife?"

"Yes, gladly, proudly, would I introduce her to kings and queens as my wife."

"Willard, my son! has it gone thus far?"

"Yes, sir, thus far; and, with Genevieve's consent, it may some day go farther, for I know no other more noble, sweet, pure and true—no one more fitted to become my wife than Genevieve Layton."

Mr. Allington moved uneasily in his chair and Willard, with his hands clasped behind his head, leaned back comfortably, watching his father's agitation. Presently Mr. Allington arose

and after a few turns up and down the room, stopped again with his hand upon the young man's shoulder.

"Then, Willard, you are actually contemplating a marriage with this girl?" he asked.

"I am," was the impatient reply.

"Then listen to me. Take an older man's advice—the advice of your father—and give up all foolish thought of her. Think of your noble ancestors—of whom you are in every way worthy—not one of them, in the history of the Allingtons, was ever wed to poverty."

Mr. Allington became slightly agitated as he thought of his own marriage with Evelyn Wilton, which had, to a certain degree, violated that rule, but hurriedly he continued: "Think of other things beside sentimental love, Willard, and give me your promise to forget that you have ever loved Genevieve Layton."

"Forget that I love Genevieve? Not so long as there is a hope of winning her shall I forget. I have loved her always, and even when the last hope has vanished, I shall not cease to love her." He arose, and angrily shaking the hand from his shoulder started from the office.

"Do nothing rash until you can assure yourself that you will be satisfied with your lot," his father's stern voice called after him, but scarcely heeding the words, he rushed on.

"Bring supper to the studio," he snapped to Ellen, whom he met as he entered the hall at Roselin. His manner was usually kind when speaking to the servants, and now, the little maid looked after him in astonishment as he sprang up the stairs—two steps at a time—and locked himself in the studio.

When the others arrived—a jolly party, though somewhat tired after their day's outing—Mr. Allington was sitting alone on the veranda, and as they came up to him Lillian bent over him, tenderly kissing the furrowed brow and murmuring: "Poor papa, you have been working so hard today that you are all tired out. Dinner tonight at eight? You thoughtful dear; I'm glad you've ordered it late, for even then I shall have to hurry. Wilma and Marie take all of Clarice's time, and when Ellen isn't helping Helen or Alice, she is always busy with something else; but really, I don't mind," and kissing him again, she left him and followed the other girls; but tonight he needed more

than Lillian's sympathetic caresses to clear the frown from his brow, the fear from his mind. He needed Wilma's help more than he had ever needed it before. She would help him to prevent the undesirable marriage of his son and do all in her power to bring about an alliance between Willard and Marie; and with this determination, he called her to him, in his wife's sitting-room, for there he was sure of perfect privacy. As they entered, Grace, who had been sole mistress of the little room since her mother's departure, arose from her chair, her face very white and her hands pressed to her throbbing temples.

"You will leave us alone, Grace, and dress at once for dinner," Wilma said, as if addressing a servant, and Grace moved slowly toward the door.

"I think I shall not come down to dinner tonight," was the low reply.

All the beauty had fled from her face and with a racking headache she could not appear as well as usual and this one thought decided Wilma.

"All the servants will be engaged tonight," she said, with authority, "so we shall expect you to dinner at eight. At any other time you may keep your room but tonight—;" she turned to her father who added: "All picnickers should be able to be present at dinner, Grace."

"Very well," was the low reply, and turning from the room, she left father and daughter alone.

Hurriedly, Mr. Allington repeated all he had seen and heard that afternoon, told of his fears and of Willard's conduct, and then turned to Wilma for her help and her sympathy. She would gladly do all she could to prevent a marriage between her brother and Genevieve, but sympathy for her father, she had none.

"I have known all along how it would end, and I have done everything in my power to save Willard," she said. "I shall never give up to this low marriage, so long as I can prevent it. But you, papa, have wilfully and apparently with your eyes open, brought this girl—to whom you so seriously object as a daughter-in-law of yours—into your home and helped to educate her with your own children—with their private teacher. You have given her the basis upon which to build an education and, in a

devious way, encouraged your son's daily association with her, his many attentions, therefore his love for her and at last his marriage."

This Mr. Allington could not deny but all this he had done unintentionally, never for a moment dreaming that it was possible for his son—an Allington—to fall in love with Genevieve Layton.

"Your own marriage, too, is accountable for this," Wilma went on. "Had you never brought Grace Wilton" (this in scornful tones) "to Roselin, this crisis might never have come. It is through her intimacy with Grace that she has been such a continual visitor. You were married to poverty; can you expect anything better of your son?" she said, taunting him with his own marriage.

"But, Wilma! my marriage was different; quite different. Mrs. Allington was never a daughter of poverty. Hers was only a fortune lost."

"But Grace, Grace, what can you say for her? A child of fortune? No! if we are at last defeated and Genevieve Layton becomes Genevieve Allington, I shall lay the blame at Grace Wilton's feet."

Mr. Allington believed that Wilma spoke truthfully and his love for Grace, which had grown at first but which had for the last years been silently, gradually, and without a cause, ebbing, now died a violent death, and a feeling of something akin to hatred for his wife's child took its place.

"Willard shall never marry Genevieve Layton so long as his father has the power to prevent it," he declared, throwing a book down upon the table with a force which upset the vase of roses in the center; but with no thought of the water soaking the burnt leather cover and dripping down upon the velvet rug, he and Wilma planned together to keep Genevieve from Roselin, and Willard, as much as possible, within the halo of Marie Carrelton's charms. Not that Mr. Allington did not like Genevieve and approve of her courage, her strength of character, her home and school training. Margaret Allington—the mother of his children—and Evelyn—his living wife—had both loved Mrs. Layton and approved of her Christian character; but he did not stop to think of all these things. The great problem of wealth stood out before them.

“Our purpose shall be accomplished if we can only prevent an engagement before the end of Genevieve’s vacation,” Wilma said. “I shall keep Marie for a few weeks longer, if possible, and, as my brother, Willard will—for courtesy’s sake—spend much of his time with her, and in this way an engagement may be brought about. Even an engagement with Genevieve may be easily broken, when Willard realizes that a marriage with her would mean that he must share her life, her poverty, and her friends,” Wilma said, assuringly, as she left her father and hurried away to dress for dinner; but the delay of that engagement was accomplished in a far different way from the one they had planned. Fate had already marked out the path—the hard cruel hand of fate.

“Dress my hair as becomingly as possible, Clarice,” she said to the maid. “I’m quite tired this evening and Louis does so hate to see a worn look upon a young woman’s face—especially mine—that you must do something to atone for it. Put this red rose in my hair and rub my cheeks with cologne; and, Clarice, do hurry. I’ll put on that white dress of net over silk, I think, for I always look fresh in it, and with a red rose at my belt and rubies, it will do very well for tonight.”

Clarice brought the dress from the wardrobe and soon her young mistress was clad in its soft whiteness, her cheeks of a delicate pink, a cluster of crimson roses at her belt and another in the coils of her black hair. A perfect queen she was as she stood looking at her figure reflected in the long mirror. Only one thing was lacking—her ruby necklace. With the crimson stones surrounding her white throat, Louis could not fail to be pleased with her toilet, but without them—. She turned to the case containing her jewels and unlocked it. With her eyes upon the roses at her belt, she reached forth her white hand for the necklace. Her fingers touched the soft silk in the corner of the case where the rubies always lay, but they were not there. She raised her eyes and carefully searched among the other jewels, turning them out in a mingled mass upon the table. Clarice came to her assistance but the necklace was not there.

“I have certainly put them in the wrong case,” she said, recalling the afternoon before, when she had opened the family jewel cases. “It is so exasperating, that they should be missing

at this time, when I *must* have them. I will search every case before dinner, if necessary; I'll never go down in this white dress without them," she declared, as with Clarice's help, she examined the cases, one after another. Yet the ruby necklace was no place to be found. "Send Miss Carrelton and Lillian to me at once, Clarice," Wilma sat down in perfect bewilderment. "Oh! girls, I can't find my necklace! What in the world shall I do!" she exclaimed, as Marie and Lillian came in.

"Perhaps it is in one of the other cases," said Lillian.

"It is not, for Clarice and I have searched them all."

"Perhaps they are somewhere about the room, Wilma," Marie suggested. "Have you had them today?"

"No, not since yesterday, when I had them here with all the jewels."

Marie's eyebrows were slightly elevated as she joined in the search with Lillian. Every corner, every possible place about the room was investigated, but the necklace was not found.

"Is it possible that Miss Layton could be so covetous?" Marie leaned her plump cheek upon her hand, her elbow resting upon the table, and a meaning glance accompanied the slowly spoken words.

"Genevieve! Never!" Lillian exclaimed, her eyes dark with excitement; but her face grew pale, her breath came quick and fast as Marie recalled the scene among the jewels, and the look of admiration bestowed upon the rubies by Genevieve.

"Then Lillian fastened them about her neck," she said; "and——," here she paused.

"And I haven't seen them since!" Wilma finished, in a burst of indignation.

For a moment the three girls looked at each other, each one silently, secretly, searching in her own heart for some other clue to the mystery of the missing necklace, but there was no other solution. None of them had seen the necklace after it had been fastened about Genevieve's neck, and although, for the first time in her life, Wilma searched for an excuse for Genevieve, she could find none. Quickly the news circulated through the family, guests and servants. Genevieve Layton had stolen Wilma's ruby necklace. All evidence was against her and only two persons in the house, who heard the story, disbelieved it. Those

two were Llewellyn and Willard; but the former wavered in his trust when he saw how Lillian was affected.

"I have always absolutely trusted Genevieve and now that she should so deceive me," she cried with her white face hidden against his shoulder.

"Perhaps we are all mistaken, darling. Genevieve may be quite innocent."

"Oh, if there was the least shadow of a doubt, how I should cling to it, but there is not; there is not," was the passionate reply.

"Come, dear, the last dinner bell is ringing," he said, gently wiping away the tears, but with an impatient gesture she drew away from him.

"I shall not go down, tonight," she said. "Send Ellen to me please, Llewellyn."

"Good-night, darling," he said bending over her.

At this moment there was a far different scene in the studio where Wilma had carried the news to Willard.

"I do not believe a word of what you have been saying, Wilma Allington!" burst contemptuously from his lips as Wilma finished her story.

"I do not ask you to take my word for it, Willard. You may ask Helen or Alice; ask Marie; ask Lillian! I have not wavered from the truth, I am as much surprised as you are, Willard, but I do not shrink from the truth. The others will tell you the same story."

"Lillian will not tell me this! Lillian call Genevieve a thief?" Willard's eyes flashed.

"Yes, Willard, she will tell you the very same!"

"Nevertheless I shall not believe it until I have heard it from Genevieve's own lips!" he stormed.

"Do you think she will acknowledge her guilt?" Wilma asked calmly.

"No!" he shouted; "for she is not guilty! I shall do all I can to prove her innocence, and, Wilma," he said sternly, laying a hand upon each shoulder and facing her, "do not let me hear one sneering remark, one word against Genevieve fall from your lips. In fact, refrain from all mention of this affair, whether in my presence or not. What you know, keep to your-

self, only when speaking to me in private. Tell the others, who have already heard the story, to hold their tongues, for if I hear one word—one word, Wilma—you will repent it! Do you understand?"

"I think I do," Wilma replied, as the grasp upon her shoulder tightened.

"Then mind what I tell you."

"I have no desire to communicate the news," Wilma returned, with an elevated chin; "and I'll do my best, for your sake, to quiet it."

"Yes, and for your own sake," Willard called after her as she turned from the room.

Thus it was hushed up, among both guests and servants, and Grace, who came down to dinner, her face still white, her head still aching, knew nothing about the missing necklace; although she wondered at the delay of dinner, the quiet, anxious faces of the others, and at Lillian's and Willard's absence.

CHAPTER XXXII

GENEVIEVE ACCUSED

IMMEDIATELY after breakfast, which was finished in silence, the following morning (neither Wilma nor Mr. Allington being present) Willard went to his father's room.

"Father, do you, too, believe the story which Wilma tells in connection with the missing necklace?" he asked bluntly, as the door opened and he faced both Mr. Allington and Wilma.

"I should be sorry to misjudge her, Willard, but I see no cause for doubting the story," Mr. Allington said slowly.

"I doubt it; I disbelieve it!" Willard returned emphatically.

"You doubt the truth of your sister's words; you disbelieve your own sister?" Wilma arose with dark flashing eyes, and taking a step toward him declared: "I'll prove it! If Genevieve Layton can say a word in her own defense, I'll gladly listen to it; if she can prove herself innocent, I'll gladly say, 'She is not guilty.'"

"Heavens! you think she cannot clear herself of this accusation? I dare say, she could easily shatter this story and, if it is in my power, it shall be shattered," Willard returned.

"I think it best to see Genevieve about this matter," interrupted Mr. Allington. "I shall go to the cottage with Wilma this morning, Willard, and this affair shall be straightened, if possible. Perhaps she can at least give us some clue to the mystery."

"I trust you will have success!" exclaimed Willard, hastily leaving the room, and Mr. Allington turned to Wilma with a smile.

"Yes, Wilma, you should gladly give up a dozen necklaces to save your brother from this marriage. Although he may doubt the truth of the story, he will never think of a marriage with a girl who cannot prove her innocence."

"But if she should prove herself innocent, papa?"

"If she is innocent, we must follow our former course," he

replied, with a darkening brow. "Be ready at ten, Wilma," he added, as she, too, left him.

Shortly after ten they reached the cottage. It was a picture of homely comfort—the small brown cottage with its garden of flowers at the right, its neatly kept lawn, with the narrow path leading up to the door, and the wide spreading maple at the left. Only a few minutes before Willard had arrived; and now, as Wilma and his father came in, he arose, and standing behind the chair, looked at Genevieve, with a pitying gaze. A look of surprise made its transient passage across her expressive face, but there was no guilt written upon it. It was as pure, as fair, as innocent, as the half-blown rosebud swaying to and fro past the open window.

"You, no doubt, are surprised at receiving a call from my father and myself," Wilma began, turning to Genevieve, after one piercing glance in the direction of her brother, and refusing, with a gesture of impatience, the chair Mrs. Layton brought for her; "and yet," she continued, in a tone of insolent softness, "I imagine a person who has in their possession a valuable ruby necklace would certainly be expecting the appearance of its owner."

Genevieve's eyes looked straight into hers. "What do you mean?" she asked in a strangely harsh voice.

"I am asking you to immediately restore to me my ruby necklace," was the scornful reply. "If you comply with this request, at once, this affair will not be made public—richly as you deserve it, Genevieve Layton."

"Wilma," came audibly from Willard's lips, and he involuntarily moved toward her, as if to stop her words of accusation; then his eyes went back to Genevieve. She stood for a moment as one paralyzed, her eyes still fastened upon Wilma with a steady unflinching gaze; then suddenly she sank to the floor, with her white, unconscious face turned upward. Instantly Willard was at her side.

"Don't touch her, Willard," Wilma commanded, attempting to draw him back; "a girl so low, so deceitful, is not worthy of so much from you."

"Dare not repeat that," Willard muttered, and angrily shaking her off, he raised Genevieve in his arms, and carrying her into an adjoining room, placed her upon the bed.

Mrs. Layton, bewildered by what had passed, sat for a moment silently gasping, then she rushed to her daughter's side. "Oh, my poor child, why should they so falsely accuse you," she cried, bending over the death-like form of her daughter, exerting every effort to restore consciousness. As soon as she could leave her, she went back to the parlor.

"Sir," she said, addressing Mr. Allington, "will you please tell me why your daughter has brought these cruel, false accusations against Genevieve?"

"I shall tell you the story from the beginning, Mrs. Layton, and as you would hear it from the young ladies who were present at the time when the jewel was last seen—about your daughter's neck." Mrs. Layton listened in silence, her face as white, almost, as that of her daughter. Apparently she did not heed the scornful remarks which Wilma inserted as the story progressed, but their sharpness pierced deep into the mother's heart as she listened.

"Mr. Allington, I am surprised, that you—a man of the world—knowing Genevieve from childhood, as you have known her, should accept, upon such a weak evidence against her, a story which would blight her life—a character sweet, pure and innocent, as the Father in Heaven knows hers to be."

"How could he, Mrs. Layton, doubt his own daughter? How could anyone doubt it? Have you any evidence for her?" asked Wilma.

"Is it not possible that the necklace could have been lost in some other way, Miss Allington?"

"Possible, but not probable," Wilma replied sneeringly. "The room has been thoroughly searched; it positively is not there; and I have little doubt but that your daughter can give us the clue to the mystery."

"Do you mean to call Genevieve a thief, Miss Allington?" Mrs. Layton asked, with dark flashing eyes, looking straight into hers.

Wilma drew herself up haughtily but did not reply.

"The rooms are here before you," Mrs. Layton continued, "and you are at perfect liberty to search for the jewel, but I dare say, the search will be as fruitless as the one in your own room; for I tell you, my daughter is innocent, and One more mighty than myself can—and will—protect her."

"We do not wish to form a searching party, Mrs. Layton," Mr. Allington replied; "we much prefer waiting until your daughter is able to give her word on the subject. If she is guilty, she will perhaps be willing to return the jewel in order to avoid publicity. Kindly tell Willard we are waiting for him."

Willard arose as Mrs. Layton came in, but Genevieve, who had lain with closed lids, straining her ears to catch the words which came through the half-closed door, now raised wild unnatural eyes to theirs and wildly swinging her arms through the air cried: "No, not yet, Willard; don't go until you have told me that you don't believe this harsh, false story. Tell me that you believe me innocent, Willard, for I am; oh, Willard, I am innocent!"

"Yes, Genevieve, I do believe you innocent," he replied, imprisoning both of her hands in his; and his low, firm tones fell soothingly upon her ears.

"And you will tell them, Willard?" she asked pleadingly.

"Yes, Genevieve, I'll tell them," he said tenderly, and releasing her hands, he continued: "I must go now, but I shall see you again."

She heard the door open, then close behind him, and slowly turning to the window she watched the tall figure until it reached the little gate, then burying her face in her hands, convulsive sobs shook the slight body; Mrs. Layton bent over her, gently smoothing the dark bands of silken hair.

"Never mind, Genevieve, my child," she whispered; "only put your trust in One who is more mighty than your accusers; One who always stands for the right, and He will prove your innocence in His own way, dearest."

"Yes, mother, for I *am* innocent," she said, suddenly lifting her head, and the hopeful light of her mother's tear-dimmed eyes was reflected in hers, and with the blessed assurance that her Heavenly Father would stand by her, during this great trial, her strength grew and she became calm.

Late in the evening she sent Robert to Roselin with a note for Mr. Allington.

"Mr. Allington:"—she wrote, "You are asking me to return to your daughter, a jewel—a ruby necklace—which is not in my possession—which I have not seen since I took it from my

neck and placed it upon the table among the many other jewels, in your daughter's room. I can give you no clue which can, in any way, account for its disappearance, but I can truthfully say that your accusations are harsh—cruel—false. Believe me, sir, I am innocent.

"I shall leave tomorrow morning, to resume my work at the office of 'Carlson and Collins'; so if you wish to see me, you will please call at once.

"Genevieve Layton."

Mr. Allington read the note, then hastily scrawling, upon a piece of note paper, the following, he handed it to Robert:

"Genevieve Layton:—I have no wish to bring up further trouble between our families; so we will drop the affair where it is. If you are unwilling to return the ruby necklace, you are at perfect liberty to keep it. My daughter joins me in this decision.

"J. M. Allington."

Mr. Allington wrote truthfully, when he said: "My daughter joins me in this decision;" for Wilma far preferred to let the guilt rest where they had now placed it than to proceed in a search for her ruby necklace, which might in the end prove Genevieve innocent, and bring her into the Allington family, as Willard's wife; and now both father and daughter, into whose hands Genevieve's note fell, gladly welcomed the morning of her departure. Willard knew nothing of her plans, and as he sat thinking of an afternoon call at the cottage, he little dreamed that Genevieve, weak and exhausted, scarcely able to stand the journey, was speeding away toward Baltimore. Genevieve had thought it unnecessary to inform him of her immediate departure, as he would, of course, hear it from his father, but both Wilma and Mr. Allington had carefully guarded mentioning the fact until after the whistle of the east-bound passenger train had sounded through the valley. Then seizing the first opportunity, Wilma said to him in a sneering tone:

"And the guilty bird has flown."

"Flown?" he queried.

"Yes; Genevieve has gone back to Baltimore. Had you not heard it? She went on the nine-twenty this morning. Papa heard it directly from Bob."

With this information, Willard turned away and after that, at Roselin, there was no mention of Genevieve.

Grace, who had not been feeling well, had scarcely left her room since the day of the picnic; and as only Ellen came to attend her, she knew nothing of the accusation of her friend; and when Ellen, after placing a dainty supper before her, ventured to remark that Genevieve had that morning gone back to Baltimore, she only gave an exclamation of disappointment that she should have gone so unexpectedly, without coming to see her and tell her "good-bye."

CHAPTER XXXIII

BY THE GARDEN WALL

THE July twilight was swiftly coming to a close, when Grace, with a slow step, drew close to the garden wall, past which the path led to the lake. The feathery clouds in the west were tinted a delicate pink and edged by a brighter hue, by the sun's last rosy light, then slowly it faded to a dull gray, growing deeper and darker, as Grace leaned wearily against the stone wall, watching the marvelous beauty; then she turned and looked out across the grass grown valley where, not far away, the little lake lay, glistening like a sheet of silver, surrounded by the wooded slopes.

Shortly after supper she had left her room and strolled about the lawn and garden, while the others were spending the evening in the music-room, and were not aware, she thought, of the fact that she had left the house. And after so many long, lonely hours, spent alone in her room, she enjoyed the free, refreshing atmosphere; and regardless of the weak and exhausted condition of her body, she walked on, drinking in the natural beauties surrounding her on all sides, and manifesting so clearly the love and power of an Almighty Ruler. The last light of day had faded and the silvery moon was hanging high in the heavens, when she turned to retrace her steps, but she stopped as she saw a dark figure coming down the path toward her. It was Llewellyn.

"The air will be cool on the lake, Grace, so I've taken the privilege of bringing an extra shawl from your room," he said, wrapping it about her; "and now I'm going to take you for a ride in Willard's canoe; for, Grace, I'm going to tell you my secret. I'm going to tell you, tonight, that which only a few days ago I refused to tell, but I can keep it no longer, and though I may be wrong in relating it, even to you, I shall keep it no longer, my secret alone; but it shall be yours, too, Grace."

"Can you not tell the secret here as well as on the lake?" she asked, in a business-like tone, drawing away from the arms which, after placing the shawl about her shoulders, still lingered around her.

"It is a long story, Grace, and I do not wish to keep you standing here. You look pale and tired. It is bright and beautiful on the lake and we shall, at least, find a place there for you to rest in the canoe." His voice was low, and full of tenderness, and, taking her hand, he led her down the path to the lake shore. There, seating her in one end of the canoe, he sat down, facing her and taking both of her hands in his, and looking straight into her dark brown eyes—with the light of love and mystery glowing in his own—began his story.

* * * * *

Shortly after Llewellyn left the house, Lillian, tired and sick with the thought of Genevieve's guilt and hasty departure—Genevieve, whose name never passed her lips only in solitary reveries—slipped away to Grace's room, which she had not visited for several days; but Grace was not there, and, sitting down by the window, she looked out across the valley toward the cottage. Then her eyes fell upon the lake. There she could dimly discern two figures, seated in the canoe at the nearest margin of the lake, outlined against its gleaming surface. "Wilma and Louis," she thought, as she watched them; then a sudden wish to be out in the brightening moonlight, took possession of her. "I shall go down to the garden and get a rose for my hair; it will keep very well in water, until morning," she murmured, as she hastily descended the stairs.

Down the garden path she went, searching among the flowers for a rosebud to suit her particular fancy, and having procured it, curiosity led her to the garden wall. Standing on tip-toe and pushing aside the shrubbery bordering it, she could just see over it. The two figures had left the lake and were coming slowly up the path toward the garden. With a quick breath she leaned forward. It was not Louis and Wilma! Who could it be! All the others she had left in the music-room, save Llewellyn, who, saying he was tired, had gone to his room. The two figures drew nearer and nearer. Her hands grew icy cold and her cheeks blazed as she recognized the tall figure

of the man. His low musical voice floated to her on the breeze as they came nearer; but she could not catch his words. Breathlessly she stood, holding back the green foliage of the shrub, which otherwise would have hidden them from view. "Llewellyn and Grace!" she gasped beneath her breath. When they reached the garden wall just opposite her, they paused, and taking Grace in his arms, Llewellyn kissed the face upturned to his, again and again, on lips, cheek, and brow.

"My darling Grace; my own little——;" the last word was so low that Lillian's strained ears failed to catch it, but she could readily guess what it was. Llewellyn—her lover—was calling Grace Wilton his 'darling,' his 'little sweetheart!'"

"I have been dreaming of you so long, Grace; I have always felt that it must be so," the tender voice continued; "but for awhile it must be our secret alone, dearest. Please keep it from your mother—from every one—for a time, Grace."

"Yes, Llewellyn, I shall tell it to no one until I have received your permission, but I am so glad you have told me; it makes me so happy," Grace answered, winding her arms closely about his neck.

"And, Grace, you don't censure me, now, for insisting upon your acceptance of that gift, do you?" he asked, kissing her again.

"No, Llewellyn, not now; but then I did not know. Now I shall keep it and always love the memory of the day you gave it to me."

"My little darling!" he exclaimed, as they moved on up the path.

"Lillian stood quite still until they were gone; then hastily rushing to the stone gate farther down the wall, she stepped out into the path, and standing like a marble statue, her cold white hands clenched at her sides, her face colorless, she gazed after them; then turning, she threw herself down at the foot of the tall marble, pointing heavenward, which marked her mother's grave.

The little brook which ran past it, babbled on, as it wound its way lakeward; the silvery moon flooded the world with a mellow glowing light; the warm breeze, wafting upon its bosom the sweet, delicate perfume of flowers, breathed softly

above her, but she did not move, save when an agonized sob shook her. Her face was hidden against the cold, white marble; one arm stretched across the grassy mound and the other hand—cold and trembling—was pressed to her heart. There the pain had entered—pain too deep for tears.

“Oh that Llewellyn—Llewellyn whom I have loved so dearly—should deceive me,” she moaned. “Only this evening he called *me* ‘darling’ and spoke of the day when I should at last be his—his bride—and now I’ve found him false. Genevieve false—Llewellyn false—the whole world false. Oh, that I should have lived to have known this hour, when Llewellyn’s love has failed. Oh God, give me strength to bear it. May my angel mother be my guide and point out the path which my weary feet should follow. Give me the strength, the courage, to follow her spiritual guidance.” Then again silence fell over the stone-studded cemetery. A few clouds had gathered and now the sky grew dark; the moonlight faded and the warm, round raindrops began to fall, softly, gently, as if the Heavens were weeping tears of sorrow and sympathy. Presently she arose, and, drawing the shawl closely about her, turned from her mother’s grave and, with a long-drawn, shivering sigh, started toward the house, where only one light burned dimly, in the hall. Noiselessly she stole up the stairs and down the hall, until she came to Grace’s room, where at that moment she, perhaps, was sleeping peacefully, dreaming of Llewellyn; and there with a threatening gesture, such as Lillian Allington had never before assumed, she paused before the closed door.

“Oh! Grace, how dared you, too, deceive me?” came in a hoarse whisper. “But what am I—small and fair-haired—in comparison with your beauty—your tall, graceful form—that he should love me? His love has always been yours—not mine, Grace Wilton, but yours—but I am undeceived at last, thank God—at last—before it is too late. I shall break the last tie which binds me and he shall be yours! Yes, Grace! it shall be as he wishes it.”

With the air of a tragic queen, she moved on to her room, and slipping the superb diamond from her finger, put it in its velvet case, and going to her desk, she wrote a note to Llewellyn. The last thread must be broken at once and forever. Hastily

she sealed and addressed it and laying them together, she threw herself upon the small white bed and burst into a passionate fit of weeping.

"Oh, Llewellyn, how can I give you up?" she sobbed, as the tears fell thick and fast upon her ruffled pillow.

The light of day was peeping in at the window when she awoke from a restless sleep, still clad in her pale blue evening dress. As one in a dream, she gazed at the reflection in the mirror.

During sleep, the combs had fallen from her hair, and now it fell about her shoulders like a golden veil. Her face was almost as white as marble; the eyes had lost their brightness and deep lines showed beneath them; the lips, which were of a ghastly hue, were slightly parted. With a shudder, she turned from her own image, and taking the sparkling ring from its box, she pressed it to her lips.

"Good-bye, my beauty—my darling——," she whispered; "you must carry my last, sad message to Llewellyn—a message of love, sorrow and a broken engagement. Breathe to him, dear heart, my last good-bye."

Again she pressed it to her lips, then placing it in its tiny case, she wrapped it in white paper, and, tying it with a dainty blue ribbon, rang for Clarice.

"Has Mr. Greymore left his room this morning?" she asked calmly.

"I think not, Miss Lillian," was the reply, and Clarice looked curiously at her.

"Take this to him at once then, Clarice," she said, handing her the note with the little package; then as the door closed behind her, she again burst into tears.

"Once I believed him to be true to me," she sobbed; "once I would have trusted him before the whole world, but alas—Llewellyn—I have found him false—false to the love I gave him! Once I dreamed of a happy future as his wife; how quickly has it faded and now—now only a dark, lonely path stretches out before me, through that untried future—a future without him—without love—without happiness."

CHAPTER XXXIV

A BROKEN ENGAGEMENT

A BRIGHT sun was shining down upon a dew-bedecked world when Llewellyn arose from his bed and drew the curtains back from the window. Raindrops still clung to the green leaves of the vines, trailing around it, glistening and sparkling like brilliant diamonds, and one by one fading in the warm glow of the morning light. A robin hopped here and there, about the green lawn, in search of some small, unlucky insect, which might form a part of his morning meal. Everything looked fresh and bright, and Llewellyn whistled softly to himself an air which he had heard Lillian sing the evening before. After a long, restful slumber, he felt ready for the joys and pleasures which the day might bring forth.

Twice was the tap at the door repeated, and with the third Clarice's voice called simultaneously: "Mr. Greymore, are you in?"

"Yes, I'm in; pardon my thoughtlessness," he smilingly answered, opening the door.

"Thank you," he added, as she placed the small, white envelope, together with the little package tied with blue ribbon, in his hand and turned away.

"Lillian's writing; the dear girl!" he scanned his own name, written daintily across the front of the envelope; "and this—what can it be?" he asked of the tiny box, as he untied the ribbon.

The paper wrapper fell from it and there, in his hand, he held a velvet case quite familiar to him. Hastily raising the lid he gazed in astonishment at the sparkling diamond.

"What can it mean! Lillian's diamond ring! her engagement ring returned to me! I do not understand," he gasped, tearing open the envelope. Taking out the single sheet he read:

"Llewellyn:—Permit me to return to you the ring which has been mine for three happy years—which I have loved for its memory of you—but it is all changed now, and it is my wish

that our engagement shall be broken. With my own hand, I break, now and forever, every tie which binds us. It is also my wish that you leave Roselin without seeing me. Do not ask it, for it shall not be granted. I trust you will consider this final; I am fully decided that it must all end here.

“Good-bye Llewellyn—forever.

“Lillian Allington.”

“Our engagement broken? Oh God, why should it be?” he asked, in a voice full of sad, broken hearted pathos, and the paper fluttered from his fingers. “Leave Roselin without seeing my darling’s face? I knew not till now that her dear, white hands could be so cruel. Oh! Lillian, my darling Lilly, how can I give you up? I have loved once; and only once shall I love—loved and lost—lost the most precious jewel which earth can give—Lilly, the idol of my heart. Oh! I had never thought that her love—a gift sent directly to me from Heaven—could fail me. Does she love another now, as she once loved me, or has she grown tired of the love which shall still live on and on forever—tired of the ties which would stretch beyond land and sea and which my darling has broken ‘now and forever?’ Forever——.”

He paused; and the deep lines, drawn about the white, trembling lips of the man, told of the pain which throbbed wildly with every heart beat.

“Forever stretches through eternity,” he went on. “Must I consider it final till the end of time? Ah! No! Lillian, my darling, I cannot do it. I must see you once again. I must kiss your rosy lips, hold you to my heart, and call you mine. Only one moment would I ask it, then, if you still wished, if it would make you happy, you should send me from you forever—never again to look upon your sweet, spirituous face—but now, darling, how can I do it?”

He sank into a chair, with his head bowed on his hand, and his waving brown locks, damp with a cold perspiration, fell upon it. A long sigh shook the square shoulders, and he sat in silence.

Could it be that his dear little Lillian had forgotten him—that she no longer loved him as she did in the dear old college days, when she had first whispered that she loved him? So,

like a golden fairy of dreamland, she had vanished just as the time was dawning when she was to be his—his wife. Why had she not warned him of her dying love? Why had she gone on in her tender, loving manner, talking of the future with him, when her young heart was throbbing bitterly against it? Why had she not told him with her own sweet voice, with her hand resting sympathetically on his, instead of sending him this cold, piercing note, which completely vanished his golden dream. He would leave Roselin on the morrow, but he must see Lillian, or at least receive some message from her before he went back to Chicago—back to the office to a daily round of labor—brightened not by the thought of a beautiful young face glowing with love for him, a tender loving heart waiting and throbbing for him.

He must decide upon some plan of action; and half an hour later he sent to her this note:

“My Darling Lillian:—

“You cannot imagine how you have stabbed a heart which is wholly thine. How cold and inadequate are words to express my sorrow. Only grant to me, darling, one last request; only let me see you once again, before I leave Roselin, and perhaps you will repent the cruel words you have written. Give to me, at least, one explanation of that broken engagement—the cause of a broken heart. Oh Lillian! I must see you; I must hear it from your own dear lips. If you still persist in your refusal to see me, I shall leave Roselin at once, but I pray of you, grant it.

“As ever yours,

“Llewellyn.”

If he could have seen her as she read that note; if he could have heard the broken sobs of, “Oh, Llewellyn, you are even more false than I suspected,” he would have forgotten a part of his own grief in sympathy for her, but the cold little note which came in return did not soothe, but only deepened the pain in the wounded heart.

“I cannot comply with either of your requests,” she wrote; “An explanation is quite unnecessary.

“Lillian.”

"It must be as she wishes," he said, pacing up and down the room with the paper crushed in his hand. "It must be good-bye, but God grant that it may not be forever."

Then nerving himself for the unexpected task which lay before him, he consulted his railroad timetable for a moment, then went down to the library. There he found Willard, dreaming of Genevieve, who, while he still believed her innocent, was, for the time, quite lost to him.

"Hello, old fellow; you're late getting down this morning!" he exclaimed, as Llewellyn came in, slapping him on the shoulder at the same time in his old familiar way.

"Yes, rather," he replied; then after a moment's silence, he continued: "To tell you the truth, Allington, I've been contemplating an immediate return to Chicago; I should have been back to my work ere this, and sorry as I am to be the first to leave you, I feel that I must go today."

"Today, Greymore? Impossible! A few more days from your work can do you no harm."

"Yes, Willard, I must go today. What time is the afternoon train?"

Again he consulted the timetable and Willard, noting the melancholy tone in his voice, looked at him curiously as he replied:

"The four-fifteen makes good connections for Chicago; but come, Greymore, say you're not going."

To say he was not going was quite impossible for Llewellyn, and he only shook his head, and replied:

"No, Willard, do not ask me." He was hardly able to control his voice, and Willard argued no further.

The other guests, too, showed plainly their astonishment and disappointment when they learned that Llewellyn was so soon to leave Roselin; but the only explanation he gave for his sudden departure was: "I am needed at my home and office in Chicago and should have been there ere this."

Thus it was that Llewellyn left Roselin—no one dreaming of the sad, aching heart hidden beneath that calm exterior.

CHAPTER XXXV

A FADING LILLY

LLEWELLYN was gone—Lillian had watched him from her window—had seen his eyes raised with an expected gaze to the window, where, the moment before, her pale face had been pressed, but quickly had she drawn back into the shelter of the curtains, and Llewellyn knew not that a sad, loving face was hidden beneath the fleecy fullness which met his view. She had seen him turn away then and enter the carriage, but she had failed to see the look of disappointment which instantly clouded the noble, manly features. She only knew that Llewellyn was gone, and with him her love, her heart, her joy—forever gone from her.

She had seen no one since Clarice had left her two hours before, and no other person had been admitted to her room that day. Her head was aching and even Wilma must not disturb her. Left alone, she had cried herself almost into a fever before the hour for Llewellyn's departure came, first weeping passionately, then sobbing convulsively; and now, when she realized that he had really gone, that the light of his love had forever vanished, and that she was left alone, to live through the long, lonely years to come, she grew dizzy and sank down upon the floor. With the setting of the sun upon her horizon of happiness, and the approach of the dense darkness of night, consciousness had almost gone and she lay motionless.

There upon the floor by the window Clarice found her, and calling for Wilma, they together lifted her to the bed.

"He is gone and it is all over," she murmured, with a mournful sob, as her sister bent over her.

Wilma looked at her in astonishment; she had changed since last she saw her, the evening before; the full, pink cheeks were now white and sunken; the eyes, too, were sunken, and red from weeping; her voice usually so sweet and cheerful, was now sad and mournful and the blithe young figure seemed to have grown thin during those hours of suffering.

"Yes, Llewellyn is gone, but you cannot expect to keep him always with you," Wilma said, in an unusually tender voice, bending close to her sister.

"Don't talk of him, Wilma," she replied, with a strange little quivering accent, as she turned from her. "My head aches so dreadfully I cannot bear it."

"Tell me, Lillian," Wilma asked, after a moment's silence; "is there something between you and Llewellyn?"

"Nothing," came tremulously, between broken sobs, and from between the white lids, round, glistening tears stole, one after another, and rolled slowly down her cheeks.

"Can you not trust your sister, Lillian?" Wilma asked, somewhat impatiently.

"I tell you there is nothing between us, save—save a broken engagement."

"A broken engagement! Lillian Allington, what do you mean?"

"Do not ask me, Wilma; I cannot explain; but believe me, every tie is broken; my ring is gone, and Llewellyn Greymore is forever dead to me." She stretched out the hand upon which the engagement ring had once sparkled and laid it upon Wilma's. "See, it is gone," she said, softly.

"Is it possible, Lillian!" Wilma exclaimed. "I can hardly believe your words, but tell me this, Lillian, which of you suggested that it should be broken?"

For a moment Lillian was silent, then with a steady voice, she replied: "I broke it of my own accord when I learned that his love was not mine. Yes, gladly did I break it, when I knew that he wished to be free from the ties which bound him to me."

"Lillian, how dared you give him up, even though he wished it?" Wilma asked, indignantly. "You certainly do not realize his full value as a husband; a more handsome man cannot be found, and you, Lillian, can never secure a more brilliant companion than Llewellyn Greymore. He would have found it hard to have gained his liberty, had it been your sister's hands into which he had fallen. Lillian, you are more foolish than I thought you to be."

"The love of the man I marry, Wilma, must be equal to my own; his was lacking—but I fear my love shall never die."

Love like hers could not die, and, although the hand could willingly break the promise her lips had given, the heart could not give up its treasure. During the days which followed, Lillian stayed in her room. She was so white, so weak and exhausted, that those who remembered the last year of Margaret Allington's life, feared that the same result was dawning for her child. It was sad indeed, that a fair, fragrant Lilly, just budding into fullest beauty, should droop and fade, and when the guests left Roselin, it was with a silent prayer that health and bloom should return to the fair young girl.

No one knew the cause of the broken engagement. Mr. Allington and Willard could find out nothing more than Wilma had succeeded in learning; and at the mention of Llewellyn's name, Lillian would become so excited that at last they ceased to speak of him. Not a word of accusation against Grace had fallen from her lips, but that name, also, seemed buried away with Llewellyn and Genevieve, and memories of the sad past—for it never passed her lips.

For awhile Grace came frequently to her room, but from her tender loving touch, Lillian never ceased to shrink, and Grace, noticing the change, stayed away; leaving the many little acts of kindness undone. Everything was changed for her, and at last, wondering at what seemed to her strange mysteries, she resolved to stay by herself as much as possible. The names which were most dear to her, she never heard, except when she whispered them to herself; and now, when Lillian turned from her, she felt that life at Roselin was almost unbearable. No word came to her from Llewellyn, no word from Genevieve, and only her mother's letters came, to brighten those last days of July. She looked eagerly forward to the time when her mother would return, for she felt that every member of the family at Roselin had ceased to be her friend. Willard treated her in the same brotherly manner, when in her presence, but the beautiful Marie, who still remained a guest at Roselin, took the greater part of his time and as the days passed, the shadows of her young life deepened. In the future, she could see a bright ray of happiness, which Llewellyn's secret might bring into her life, but now it lay hidden deep in the heart which longed for her mother's loving presence.

One day a letter came for her from a girl living in Greenfield, not far from Lakeview, whom she had met at school in Baltimore, asking her to visit her in her summer home. Grace grasped at once upon this invitation, as a release from the lonely life she had been living at Roselin, and a week later she had, with a great effort, cast aside all unpleasant thoughts, and with a heart lighter than it had been for many a day, started for the home of her college friend. There the days passed swiftly and happily, and in an atmosphere of liberty and freedom, where she felt that those around her were her friends and considered her in every respect their equal, Grace's face became brighter and rosier.

The end of her visit was drawing near, when invitations came for a party to be given by Mrs. Delmar, the most popular lady in Greenfield, and Grace was urged to remain. Mrs. Delmar herself called to say that she would be very much disappointed if Miss Wilton did not attend the party.

"It will certainly be a success if you come, dear, for your sweet, smiling face and easy, unaffected manners are so refreshing and are sure to win the young men," she whispered, as she left.

The evening for the party came and Grace stood before the mirror, putting the last touches to her toilet. She wore a dress of dainty white silk, trimmed in soft folds of lace, which fell in pretty waves about the pearly shoulders and over the round satin-like arms. Her hair was done in soft waves, among which lay a single white lily. She raised the lid of her small golden jewel case and taking from it the single string of pearls she held it against her slender throat. "They'll never do!" she exclaimed. "I need something more brilliant; but do I dare to wear the rubies?" She softly breathed the last word, and taking the green velvet case in her hand, she looked longingly at it. "I've never worn them," she continued, nodding toward the case, as if addressing it; "but why not wear them, now that I know Llewellyn's secret. What harm can there be, when there will be no one at the party to know—no one to care. It will help me through the evening, for it breathes to me of love, hope and joy."

She took the crimson necklace in her fingers and kissed it;

then with a determination to wear it, she fastened it about her neck.

"I really do look well tonight," she said to the face reflected before her, just as her friend's voice called to ask if she were ready, and grasping her coat and scarf, she left the house.

Donald Delmar, the younger brother of the host, seemed quite attentive to her, and during the greater part of the evening he was at her side. She found him an interesting companion and when a stroll through the gardens, where many of the others had wandered, was suggested, she readily consented. The pale new moon was shining dimly, and artistically decorated lanterns lighted the garden paths at intervals; and the sound of music floated to them, from the music-room, in the soft, mellow strains of a waltz. Suddenly they came upon a small group, almost hidden by the swaying blossoms of a hydrangea. A hot flush touched Grace's cheek as she recognized Wilma. Only a faint light, from the lantern swaying directly above the gaily conversing group, fell upon them, and with the vain hope that Wilma had not seen them, she and her companion turned into another path.

"What can I say to her if she sees my rubies?" was Grace's first thought, as they moved slowly on. "I shall never tell Llewellyn's secret, so how can I explain? Perhaps it was wrong for me to wear them, even here, when I shrink from wearing them at home, where all the family would see them. Wilma will ask who gave them to me, when she sees them, and what can I say? Oh, what can I say! Can I tell the truth? Can I say they are a gift from Llewellyn—an expensive gift like this? No, never! She must not see them!"

Mr. Delmar was talking to her but she scarcely heard his voice, and when he was not noticing, her hand went to her throat, and pressing the golden clasp she slipped the necklace beneath the laces of her gown; then with a little sigh of relief she turned again to her companion.

"Let us go back to the drawing-rooms, now," she said. "I have enjoyed the gardens most thoroughly, Mr. Delmar, and I owe all my thanks to you."

"Not at all, Miss Wilton 'twas only a pleasure for me I assure you," he said, leading the way up to the flower-bordered walk and on to the drawing-room.

Apparently, Wilma had not seen the young lady in white, with Donald Delmar, for when one of the others remarked upon her beauty and asked who she was, Wilma remained silent, but the rubies had not escaped her casual glance. Their warm, red glow (even though in the dim light) had attracted her attention, and as Grace and her companion turned into the other path, Wilma's black eyes had followed them with a piercing glance, of mingled surprise and hatred; then with scarcely a pause she joined in the gay conversation about her; but she did not forget Grace and the ruby necklace. After all, Genevieve was innocent—innocent of the sin of which she had been accused—for had she not seen her ruby necklace about Grace Wilton's neck? Grace guilty of such an act! Grace Wilton rob the daughter of the man whose roof sheltered her! How dared she! 'Twas jealousy—mad jealousy—which had led her on. She had taken the jewels, no doubt, in order to detract from Wilma's beauty and, upon rare occasions, like this, when no one from Roselin was expected to be present, to add to her own charms, by wearing it. And, indeed, Grace was beautiful tonight! Wilma acknowledged it to herself and her hatred grew more intense with every moment. But when next she saw her, in the drawing-room, the brilliant rubies were gone from the pearly throat and as Wilma's eyes met Grace's, she exclaimed beneath her breath:

"Ah, Grace, thou canst deceive me now!" Her lip was curled with a scornful smile, and from the depths of her piercing eyes there gleamed a look of hatred such as Grace had never seen before; then as she moved on, Grace watched the beaming smiles which brightened the haughty visage, and the softening glow of the sparkling eyes. How quickly had the storm vanished and the sunbeams began playing in its stead.

Grace stood before her dressing table a long time that night, looking at the rubies as she removed them from her waist. "I'm sorry I wore them," she said. "'Twas vain of me to think of my beauty."

The morning train carried her back to Roselin, and there she took up life just where she had dropped it. There were but few changes; Lillian still continued to droop; Marie had returned to Lakeview, and Wilma had gone with her, but she

was coming home on the evening train—she could not be away from her sister very long. These facts Grace obtained from the servants. Neither Mr. Allington nor Willard were at the house, and Lillian refused to see her; so she busied herself about the lonely rooms, trying to keep back the tears which, in spite of her efforts, kept trickling down her cheeks.

The clock was striking eight when she heard the automobile stop at the gate and Wilma enter the hall; and from her mother's sitting-room she heard her footsteps as they went up to Lillian's room; then for an hour everything was still. Again Wilma's step sounded on the stairs and in the hall, and the next moment the door was swung wide open and, clad in a dark red traveling suit, she advanced toward Grace.

"I think I saw you at the Delmar party, did I not?" she asked; and Grace involuntarily shrank beneath her searching gaze.

"I saw you at least," she replied, calmly.

"Yes!" Wilma said, scornfully. "First I saw you in the garden, with Mr. Delmar—a young lady in a white gown, purchased with my father's money, and a ruby necklace purchased also, with his money—Ah, Grace, my rubies!"

"'Tis not so!" Grace exclaimed, the hot blood dyeing her cheeks; but Wilma continued:

"When next I saw you the rubies were not there. Tell me, Grace Wilton, where are they now?—my rubies which we have all falsely accused Genevieve Layton of having in her possession!"

"Your ruby necklace, Wilma?" Grace asked. "Is it not in your case? Accuse Genevieve of theft? Impossible!"

"No!" Wilma returned, emphatically, "Genevieve Layton is no longer called a thief, for that name now falls upon its rightful owner." She pointed accusingly toward Grace.

"Wilma Allington! you think I would commit a sin so great as that? You dare not accuse me, for your eyes had never before rested upon the rubies I wore last night. They were given to me by a friend—no matter whom—but most assuredly they were not purchased with Mr. Allington's money."

Grace faced her with an unequalled courage. "Will you please explain to me about your own necklace; I have not heard of Genevieve's accusation?" she continued truthfully.

"Impossible!" Wilma turned from her with a gesture of impatience. "But you do not deny that you wore a ruby necklace to the Delmar party and that you removed it from your neck the minute you saw me? You cannot deny that!"

"I do not deny it. But I do say, that they were *never* yours."

A mocking laugh rippled from Wilma's lips.

"Do not expect me to believe that, Grace, for I shall not for a moment consider such unreasonable statements as you have made. A friend gave it to you, indeed!"

The color faded from Grace's cheeks and lips and she burst into tears just as Mr. Allington came in.

"Papa, I have at last found my necklace."

Wilma turned to him, with her hand extended toward Grace, who instantly recoiled beneath her stepfather's glance.

"What, Wilma! Is Genevieve innocent?"

"Grace was at the Delmar party last night, and with my own eyes, I saw my ruby necklace about her neck. If it was not mine, why did she remove it, when I surprised her by my presence?"

All Grace's exclamations of surprise and weak explanations were of no avail.

"Grace, bring the necklace to me," Mr. Allington said sternly, to the sobbing girl. "Wilma shall be the judge whether or not it is hers. She will know her own rubies."

For a moment Grace hesitated. Bring her precious rubies—the necklace which Llewellyn had given her—to Mr. Allington—to Wilma, her accuser—how could she?

"Go at once, Grace," Mr. Allington commanded again, and she moved toward the door.

Perhaps, after all, Wilma would know that the necklace was not hers. There were several points wherein they were different, and upon close examination, Wilma ought to see that they were not the same; and with the assurance that they would still be hers, she groped her way, through blinding tears, till she reached her room and procured the green velvet case. To her, the rubies represented Llewellyn's secret, and as she placed it in Mr. Allington's hand, she felt that she had almost revealed that cherished secret, which she had so faithfully

promised to keep, but she would never utter the words; and with tightly compressed lips, she stood by while Wilma drew near to her father, looking wonderingly at the velvet case.

"They are mine," she exclaimed, as Mr. Allington opened it and the light fell upon the rubies.

"Oh, Wilma, they are not yours!" Grace cried, springing forward. "Examine them! Look at them! They are different! See?"

"Do not excite yourself, Grace; I think Wilma is capable of recognizing her necklace." Mr. Allington drew the rubies from her fingers and gave them to Wilma. "Examine them, Wilma, and tell me, are they yours?" he said.

"Mine! Certainly they are mine. You can see for yourself; they can be no other."

Mr. Allington turned to Grace. "Grace, why have you willingly and willfully kept silent, while the guilt of this act has fallen upon another—a friend of yours—who was perfectly innocent and who has been more deeply wronged; who has suffered more than you would have done, had you truthfully said, 'the rubies are in my possession.' You have not only committed the sin of taking the necklace, but you have ruined Genevieve Layton's life and you have attempted to deceive Wilma by removing the necklace, after she had once seen it. Now, you expect us to believe that a friend gave them to you. How absurd! Your mother will be horrified when she hears this story."

Grace was weeping passionately.

"You may go to your room at once," he continued; "and you may take this with you as Wilma has no wish to keep that which does not rightfully belong to her."

He placed the green velvet case in her hand and motioned her toward the door. Only broken sobs came from the lips which strove to oppose him.

"Do you hear me, Grace? Go to your room and there you may stay."

A maddening passion rose within her and, springing toward Wilma, she grasped the rubies once more in her hand.

"Give them to me and I'll go forever," she exclaimed, still clinging to the rubies in spite of Mr. Allington's firm hand upon her arm.

"Do not assume what you do not feel, Grace. The rubies are Wilma's and you are going without them." He roughly unclasped her fingers and pushed her toward the door, and with another burst of tears she rushed from the room.

"Wilma, your necklace is again yours, but we now have a more serious proposition to face," Mr. Allington said, seriously; "Genevieve Layton is free from the guilt which has, thus far, separated her from Willard, and when he learns that she is innocent, I do not doubt but that he will, immediately, offer her his heart and hand."

"He shall not," Wilma declared. "She shall never be his wife! He shall not disgrace our family, forever; and, papa, we must plan as we have never before done; we must keep it from him; she must never be his wife!"

CHAPTER XXXVI

LEAVING ROSELIN

THE last light had been turned out, and Roselin lay in the full moonlight that flooded the world with its mellow light and streamed in at an unshaded window, between crimson damask curtains and across an empty, snow-white bed. The ruffled pillow was undented by the dark curly head that should have rested there in sweet, peaceful slumber, while a white-robed figure knelt by the bedside. Now and then a sob broke the peaceful silence, then again it reigned supremely. Then the white figure stole softly to the open window, drew a chair near and laid her aching head on the cool window sill, and the long, dark curls fell upon the white marble. The heart was aching, too, but there was no cool marble to rest it on, no golden moon-beams to flood it with rosy light. Her heart ached on while her thoughts flew. How could she live on at Roselin—live alone from day to day? Could she bear the taunts and sneers which would fall from Wilma's lips? Could she bear the look of distrust which would be written in the depths of Lillian's blue eyes? Could she longer bear Lillian's shrinking away from her? Willard's face, too, would picture, more vividly than Mr. Allington's words had done, Genevieve's innocence, and her own guilt. Everyone, from Mr. Allington to the servants, would turn from her; would hate and despise her. She had already suffered so much and now, during her mother's absence, that she should be accused of so great a sin, was more than her sensitive nature could bear, and her heart longed for her mother's tender sympathy and loving counsel. What should she do? Should she leave Roselin—leave her own dear rubies—give up forever the tender remembrance of Llewellyn which they had breathed to her? Only the velvet case and the precious loving memories of the past to tell her of his love, his hope, his secret.

An owl, from the wood near the lake, began to hoot his sad, lonesome call, out over the silent world beneath him. The

white figure by the window shivered and again the stifled sob broke out. How she longed for that little southern cottage, with its crimson Rambler and rose-perfumed garden. Oh, for a taste of the peace and happiness she had had there. She could no longer quiet her emotion and one sob after another mingled with the hooting of the owl. Everything else was silent; at last even the owl hushed his midnight song; perhaps, flew away to a more distant part of the woods.

"Oh why should it be?" she whispered, between broken sobs. "I'm alone and forsaken, but I shall stay here no longer. I've lived the last day of life like this—surrounded by distrust and hatred."

She arose and turned from the window. "Am I really going?" she asked, throwing the long curls back over her shoulders and pressing her hands to her brow. "Going alone—without mamma—without Llewellyn—without my necklace? Going alone—and where?" For a moment she stood quite still, her hands clasped before her and a silent prayer trembling on her lips; then the sad, forsaken look slowly vanished and one of resolute determination took its place. She would go to Genevieve—Genevieve, who, like herself, had been so seriously wronged—back to the dear little room at Mrs. North's. There she would find love and sympathy; Genevieve could comfort her. Her loyal heart, so deeply grieved, would be filled with true sympathy for the girl who was starting out to live her life alone.

"Mamma will come for me at once, when she comes home and finds me gone, but I shall never live again at Roselin. Mamma will never forsake me," was a comforting thought which passed to and fro through her mind as she donned her traveling dress, combed her long hair high upon her head, and gathered together the articles she wished to take with her.

At last she was ready and with a noiseless tread she left the house. The whole bright world was silent and sleeping. "Alone!" she whispered again, as she paused at the gate and looked back at the white building, over which dim shadows were falling.

"Good-bye, Roselin; with you I leave many sad memories of the past, but with me I shall take the loving memories—mem-

ories of mamma—of Llewellyn—of Willard and Lillian, though they hate me now. My rubies I must leave with Wilma. May God forgive her for her sins and lead Mr. Allington to realize his cruel mistakes.”

Slowly she turned away and tears hung heavily upon her lashes, as she glanced down toward the garden wall and the path which led to the lake. There Llewellyn had told her his secret.

“Of all the memories, I love that most,” she whispered, extending her arms toward the lake as if in a last farewell; then she hurried on toward the village. The moon was drifting through fleecy clouds now, and here and there dense shadows fell about her; the trees along the roadside were swaying their branches to and fro, and the distant hooting of the owl seemed to follow her to the very edge of the village. There the streets were deserted, and the silence was broken only by the sound of the clock as it rang out the midnight hour.

“Twelve-fifteen,” she whispered. “I won’t have long to wait.”

When she entered the depot, she found some half dozen men sitting about the waiting-room, but with only a glance in their direction, she walked to the ticket window.

“Not going back to school now, are you, Miss Wilton?” the ticket agent asked, as she called for a ticket to Baltimore. “No sir,” she replied, in a voice that slightly trembled, and she laid the money before him and closed her purse which contained only a few remaining dollars.

The whistle of the locomotive sounded and she hurried to the platform. The huge black monster came puffing in, and for the first time in her life, she climbed upon the steps without a good-bye kiss or a word of farewell. Settling down in a seat near the window she burst into tears, and as the train flew on she thought of her first journey to Baltimore. How different would it be now if Dale Clinton were with her—a friendly voice, a kindly beaming face to cheer her lonely, aching heart—how gladly would she welcome his presence. She had learned that he was not what he had seemed to her then. But Dale Clinton was far away in his southern home, and her thoughts wandered from him, back to her own southern home, once so dear to her.

Clad in a soft blue kimono, Lillian lay back among her pillows, the following morning, waiting for her sister, who had promised to tell her all about the necklace. It had been found, and how glad she was that Genevieve was innocent; but why had Wilma refused to answer, the night before, when she had asked where it had been found? Wilma would come soon and tell her, and she waited anxiously for her arrival.

"Bring me my pen, Clarice," she said, "and another pillow. I must write, at once, and tell Genevieve how sorry I am that I so wrongly judged her. She went away heart-broken, I know, and I never told her that I, for one, could forgive. Now I must ask her to forgive and forget how we wronged her. You may leave me now; and tell papa that I feel quite strong this morning."

"Is Willard home from Boston?" she asked hurriedly, as Clarice started from the room.

"He is going on west for two weeks, I think Mr. Allington said last evening."

"Going west, Clarice? He didn't tell me when he left."

"It's other business, Miss Lillian, and your father sent a message from the office. He told me to send an extra suitcase to Boston for him."

"Oh, I'm sorry, for I want Willard at home;" and Lillian could scarcely keep back the tears.

'Twas a pathetic letter that she wrote to Genevieve, full of love and sympathy, sorrow and self-accusation. "Yes, Genevieve, I did wrong; and I hardly dare to hope for your forgiveness," she wrote; "but I have suffered so much since you left me; and when I look at myself in the mirror, I sometimes think you would not know me; but if you were here—if I could put my arms about your neck and tell you how changed the future is for me, while yours, Genevieve, will surely be so bright and happy—I know you would kiss me and promise to forgive, and forget the day when once my love and trust failed you. Believe me, Genevieve, from this moment I shall be true to you forever, and I pray God that my life may yet be one of usefulness for Him."

Tears had dimmed the blue eyes when she finished, and with an exhausted hand she laid down the pen. Wilma was

coming up the hall, for she heard her step, and a faint color came to her cheeks as she came in.

"Tell me about it," she said simply, and wearily she turned her face to watch that of her sister.

In a few words Wilma told the story of Grace and the rubies. And as she finished, Lillian's sad blue eyes looked up into hers.

"Send Grace to me, Wilma. I refused to see her yesterday, when she came home, but now, I must see her."

"Send her to you, Lillian—you, who have not called her name for weeks past—you, who become excited when she is near you? What has possessed you now that you know the worst?"

"I have learned the lesson of forgiveness, Wilma. I can forgive and forget her sin and help her to atone for the wrong she has done. I turned from Genevieve; I shall not turn from Grace; and in helping her, I can atone for my own sin."

"Why do you turn to her now, when during all your sickness you have turned from her?" Wilma demanded, standing back and gazing at the white face. The expression was unchanged.

"I have so much to forgive; but it is God's will and I have grown reconciled to the life I must live. I can live on, and forgive as I hope to be forgiven."

"Nonsense, Lillian, you have grown to be quite a baby of late. Grace shall not leave her room."

"Oh, Wilma, for me, let her come! Papa would not refuse—you cannot. Let her come, Wilma," Lillian pleaded.

"She may come, but I shall not see her," Wilma said at last, turning from the room.

As Lillian said, she had learned to accept life as God willed it and, in days past, she had asked herself the question: Could Grace have resisted Llewellyn's caresses? Could she herself have resisted that tender, loving voice which had so deeply pained her on that sad night? Who could resist Llewellyn? After all was Grace to blame? And yet Grace was unforgiven, and involuntarily she shrank from her, while deep in her heart she had forgiven her deceitful lover; for the sake of her love for him, she had forgiven; but in vain she strove to forget—

to cease to love. Now she had found Genevieve innocent and she had fully decided to forgive Grace her every wrongdoing, and live her life, pure, true and forgiving; but Grace was gone from Roselin. Lillian looked with sad, tearless eyes into Ellen's as she told her that she could not be found; her room had been unoccupied the night before and her hat, with several dresses and other things, were gone from the room.

"Where can she be? Where has she gone—alone and at night?" Lillian asked, her thin hands clasped and her eyes raised pleadingly to Wilma's undisturbed face.

"I cannot say where she is, and you need not trouble yourself about her absence, Lillian, for papa will never make an effort to bring her back to Roselin, even for you. It is best that such a character has vanished from our home," was the calm reply.

Tears rolled softly down Lillian's cheeks when she was again left alone.

"Oh, how great are Grace's sins," she murmured; "and yet, how gladly would I put forth my every effort to win her back to truth and purity, if I could only reach her; but I have waited long and now it is too late, for she has flown—the girl who has come between me and my future happiness—who has taken love and joy from my life—but Llewellyn loves her, and my heart aches to tell her how hard I am striving to forget."

Days passed and no word came from Grace; but a letter came saying that Mrs. Allington would reach Roselin on the day following the arrival of her letter. This news was quite unwelcome to the master of Roselin and his daughter. The servants, too, dreaded the scene which was sure to take place upon her arrival; but to her husband it did not occur that she would doubt his word when he told her of her daughter's guilt. She would only be astonished and grieved, but the congenial atmosphere of Roselin would be disturbed by the presence of its mistress.

On the morning of her arrival the sun was shining brightly upon the black, damp earth, upon which a light rain had recently been falling. Mr. Allington went in the carriage for her.

"See that the house is as bright as possible, Wilma. Evelyn will be grieved when she hears of Grace's disgrace. She has wandered sadly from her mother's training, and from Roselin, as well, and you must make our home as bright and cheerful as possible for her return," he said, as he left Wilma in the hall.

"I dare say Roselin will be bright enough when she returns," she laughed, as she watched the carriage drive away. "It will be bright with the flash of stolen rubies, on the tips of blazing tongues. Evelyn Allington's eyes will be more piercing than the point of a polished sword, when Grace is accused of theft. They will need nothing more to brighten our home, and I dare say the battle will end by crowning me mistress of Roselin;" and Wilma was not mistaken.

Mrs. Allington's first question, after greeting her husband, was of Grace, and resolving that he might as well tell her at once, he began his story as they started toward Roselin, telling her first of Genevieve's accusation. When he finished describing the scene with Grace in the little sitting-room, she interrupted him.

"You shall go no farther," she said, firmly. "You do not realize what you are saying."

"I am telling you the sad truth, Evelyn. I am telling you that Grace is guilty of taking, from Wilma's jewel case, her ruby necklace, and all her efforts of explanation are so weak, that they bear no weight."

"You forget yourself, James. You are speaking to your wife—the mother of the child whom you accuse." She faced him with a gaze of defiance. "You cannot force me to believe her guilty! I have watched over her through the nineteen years of her life and never have I known the slightest sin to darken her character. I tell you, 'tis all false! I can scarcely wait to reach Roselin and be once more with my accused darling. The poor child needs my comfort and I've left her alone so long."

"I think she can do very well without your comfort," Mr. Allington returned, biting his lip to hide his wrath; "and besides you will not find her at Roselin."

"What do you mean? Grace not at Roselin? Pray tell me where is she? I shall go to her at once!"

"I do not know where you will find her. She told no one of her intentions, but she acknowledged her guilt by stealing away from Roselin at night."

"James Allington, how can I ever forgive you? You have driven her to this! How dared you!"

The unshed tears, which had been glistening in her eyes, seemed suddenly turned to burning coals of fire, and her white fingers grasped his arm. "Tell me how dared you?" she repeated.

He roughly shook her hand from his sleeve.

"I think I have some authority in my own house, have I not?" he returned scornfully. "And after all it was not my order that she obeyed when she left Roselin, for I had told her to remain in her room. She disobeyed me—she left Roselin without my consent."

They drew up before the gate and the carriage stopped:

"I will see you later," Mr. Allington said, assisting her to alight.

"You must not wait long if you want to see me, for where Grace cannot stay, I shall not remain longer than is absolutely necessary."

Mr. Allington did not reply and she hurried on up the walk. Wilma met her in the hall and greeted her with the grace of a mistress addressing a servant. From Mrs. Allington's face she knew that the battle had already begun, and she smiled to herself as she watched the trim figure ascend the stairs.

An hour later Robert Layton met Delia on the lawn. She had come out from the village in another carriage and was now engaged in carrying in a part of Mrs. Allington's baggage.

"I have a note for Mrs. Allington. Can I trust it to you?" he asked.

"Certainly, I shall give it to her at once," Delia replied, taking the note from his hand and turning toward the house. She found her mistress in her sitting-room, her face still buried in the pillows of the divan, but drying her tears she eagerly grasped the note.

"My dear Mrs. Allington:—

"I feel it my duty to tell you at once, that Grace is safe

in Baltimore with Genevieve. They have the same room at the Moreland Place and Genevieve is glad to have the dear girl with her.

“Mrs. N. Layton.”

A look of relief flashed across Mrs. Allington's features, and she turned to her maid.

“Delia,” she said, “I'm going to Baltimore this evening, then Grace and I are going to Vale Cottage. I want you to see to the packing of all my belongings and follow us in a few weeks.”

With mouth and eyes wide open, Delia stood for a moment looking at her.

“I will explain to you more fully, later, Delia, but I wish to see Mr. Allington now.”

“I have learned, easily enough, where my child is,” she began, as she entered the library and advanced toward her husband's chair, her eyes again sharp and flashing. “And I've come to tell you that I'm going to her on the evening train.”

“Prove her innocent before you bring her again under this roof,” Wilma commanded, drawing near the back of her father's chair.

“Ah, child, do not worry; there is another roof far more dear to us both, than the one which is now above me, and neither of us can have a desire to visit the place where Grace has been hated and accused.” She turned to Mr. Allington and continued: “We shall leave Roselin as nearly as possible as we found it. Delia will see to the packing of Grace's belongings, as well as my own, together with the pictures and furniture which I moved here from Vale Cottage; and in that little southern home I hope to find, again, a part of the happiness I left there seven years ago.”

“Evelyn, do you mean that you are going back to Vale Cottage to live alone—you and Grace?”

Mr. Allington arose and came toward her.

“I do,” she replied, firmly.

“Evelyn, you cannot leave Roselin! You forget that you are now mistress of Roselin and your duty lies here.”

“Where Grace is, there my duty lies; and I tell you I shall leave Roselin today. I'm going to Grace and you haven't the authority to keep me.”

She struggled from his grasp and rushed from the room; he stood silently gazing at the door through which she had vanished.

"Does she really intend to go? What can I do, now, to keep her?" he asked weakly.

Wilma stood looking at him, a smile curling her proud, scornful lips.

"Can you wish to keep her when she prefers Grace Wilton—a thief—rather than you—her husband, the master of Roselin?" she asked.

"No! She shall leave Roselin as she wishes. If she goes forever, I shall not put forth a hand to stop her," he declared; and a gleam of hatred, which Wilma's voice had aroused within him, shone from his eyes as he strode from the room and started toward the office.

Mrs. Allington made hasty preparations for her departure, and long before train time, she was ready for the journey to Baltimore, and to Grace; and in her anxiety to be with her child, she scarcely gave the family at Roselin a thought. She could hear Wilma's voice singing gay snatches of songs in the rooms below, but that was the only sound which came to her, except the footsteps of the servants as they passed through the halls, until Clarice's voice called softly from the opposite side of the half-closed door:

"Miss Lillian wishes to see you, Mrs. Allington. She is weaker and more excited than she has been for days, so please come at once."

Mrs. Allington arose and followed her to Lillian's room. In a silk kimono, she lay back among the pillows, her face as white almost as the pillows about her, but a slight flush came to her cheeks as Mrs. Allington drew near.

"I'm so glad you came," she said, extending her hand toward her. "They didn't tell me you were here, till I heard your voice."

Mrs. Allington leaned forward and kissed the cheek which was now burning.

"I'm sorry you are sick, Lillian," she said gently, looking down at the face so unlike Lillian's as she remembered it.

"Please tell me, where is Grace? Wilma says that you

know and that you are going to her at once. I'm so glad, and you will bring her home with you, will you not?" Lillian looked up into the brown eyes, which slowly filled with tears.

"No, Lillian, we are going home to Vale Cottage again—Grace and I. She is in Baltimore with Genevieve, and I am going there this evening. God knows Grace is innocent of what your father accuses her; but we can never return to Roselin."

"Then I'll never see her." Lillian murmured weakly; then after awhile she continued: "Tell her, I have forgiven her and am striving to forget. She will understand, and I trust hers will be a life of happiness."

"I will tell her, Lillian, and my prayer is, that you may grow strong soon, and some day be happy as the wife of your young physician."

With a quick breath Lillian turned from her.

"No, that happiness is not for me. My life is changed, but I can not tell you now. I'm sorry you are going away from us and I hope you will find Grace as true and innocent as you think."

"I have no fear, Lillian; I know she is innocent. I must go now, dear."

She kissed the girl tenderly and tears fell upon the golden curls as the white arms were wound closely about her neck, then taking the cold white hands, she pressed them lovingly in hers.

"May God bless you, Lillian, and yet crown your life with happiness as you deserve," she said; then slowly left the room.

Lillian turned wearily to the window and looked out upon a group of servants, gathered to bid farewell to their mistress. In every face was written sorrow and disappointment, and tears glistened in several eyes as they took the daintily gloved hand and listened to her kind words of farewell.

As the clock struck six, the carriage drove away. Mrs. Allington was gone, and Wilma was again mistress of Roselin.

CHAPTER XXXVII

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING

THE sun was swinging above the rose and golden waters of the bay when Lillian opened her eyes and gazed from her hotel window, out toward the east. A cloud of pearly gray, its broken edge burnished with gold, floated beneath the blazing sun, whose bright rays streamed out over the water and fell with a ruby light upon the polished floor of the room.

Lillian's health had been only slowly improving and when the last days of August came, hot and dry, the doctor advised Mr. Allington to take her to a health resort. "The change will do more for her than my medicine," he had said, and it had proven more beneficial than Mr. Allington had ever hoped. Even the few days of their stay at the S——— Hotel had brought a faint color to her cheeks; her eyes had grown brighter and her step less feeble.

"It is all so beautiful here," she murmured, slipping into her flowered dressing gown and crossing the room. "It seems to me that the sun will surely rise again for me, just as it does above that huge expanse of water, tinting the dense gray with orange, ruby and rose. God help me to forget the past and live only for the future."

She leaned her cheek upon her hand and looked out along the shore, where, dotted here and there over the sand, groups of people were already gathering. Presently her father's footsteps interrupted her thoughts and she turned to the door, which opened to admit him.

"I'm feeling quite strong this morning," was her reply to his inquiry. "So strong, in fact, that I think I shall go out along the beach immediately after breakfast." She pointed toward the people along the shore.

"I'm glad you feel so well, but I fear the exertion will be too great for you just yet," he replied calmly.

"Oh, I know it will help me, papa!" she exclaimed, with a note of disappointment.

"A short walk at a time, then, Lilly. I'm going home today, you know, and you will be left entirely to the care of Wilma and Clarice."

"Yes," she said, simply.

"Would you like to go with me, dear?" he asked.

"No, oh no; I have no desire to go now; I like it here," was the answer.

"And Willard will return from his western trip next week; and I'll send him down here, ere long," Mr. Allington continued; "then if you are tired of this place, you may try some place else."

"I think I shall like it best here," she said.

Mr. Allington took his watch from his pocket and looked at it a moment.

"I shall have to hurry for my train, Lillian," he said, replacing it in his pocket; "but I shall run down, now and then, to see how rapidly you are improving, or I fear I shall not know you when you come home. Good-bye, dear."

"Yes, I am improving," she said to herself, as he turned from the room; "and Willard will find me changed even when he comes down."

And changed she was when Willard found her two weeks later, strolling along the white, sandy beach, her colorless cheeks now rounded, and tinted with a sea-shell pink, a bright light shining in her eyes and a faint, sweet smile curving her lips. She was no longer the sad, frail invalid he had left at Roselin, nor was she the blithe, childish sister he had known a few months before. The love she had once given Llewellyn seemed lavished upon those about her and she moved among them with a smile of loving tenderness, giving sympathy and comfort to those who most needed it; but while others watched the young girl with smiles of love and admiration, her brother turned away, for he knew how the heart, beneath that calm, loving exterior was aching and longing for the love that was lost. His heart, too, had almost lost its treasure and, now that he had heard from Lillian's dear lips, how Genevieve had long been proven innocent before them all, and realized how it had

purposely been kept from him, he crushed his wrath beneath his joy and his sympathy for his sister.

"I only wish you were as happy as I hope to be when I receive the reply to this letter, Lillian," he said, holding up a sealed letter as she entered his room one evening.

She leaned over his shoulder.

"Genevieve Layton," she read aloud. "I hope the answer will please your most particular fancy, Willard; and if I rightly guess the contents of this," she lightly touched the envelope, "I assure you I shall be happy, too."

On the following morning, while Willard and Lillian were out on the beach, Wilma went to her brother's room to gather up the laundry, and carelessly she ran through the package of letters on the desk.

"Oh, horrors! Genevieve, indeed!" she exclaimed, holding up the letter addressed to Genevieve. "I dare not let that letter enter the office. Genevieve Layton shall never know its contents, whatever it may be, and as Clarice always gathers up the mail, Willard will be none the wiser."

She slipped it into her blouse as she spoke, and with an air of decision, replaced the others.

"Collect the mail immediately, Clarice," she said, entering her room; and Clarice arose to comply with her request.

With a steady hand she took the letter from the blouse and, opening it, drew forth the folded sheets. It was a declaration of love, which she perused line by line. Her proud lips drew straight and her eyes flashed angrily as she read her brother's endearing words, written to the girl who should never be his wife—no never so long as it lay in her power to prevent it. She must never become a member of the Allington family. And now, the letter which Genevieve Layton would have held most dear was crushed in Wilma's cruel, cold hands and torn to shreds. For awhile she sat thinking.

"Willard Allington's sister is still able to control his affairs," she laughed, sneeringly, as she arose and opened the writing desk.

Wilma had never written to Genevieve to acknowledge her false accusation and she determined to write to her now and end forever, if possible, Willard's hope of winning her. If

Genevieve played the part as Wilma felt sure she would, Willard's love would die, just as Lillian's had. But if she failed to play that part?—she could only hope that other plans would come to her aid; so with careful thought and a determined hand she wrote the following:

“Miss Genevieve Layton:—I realize my tardiness in acknowledging your innocency, but now that I beg your pardon, I feel sure that you will freely grant it. Lillian, I believe, stated fully our feelings in regard to the unfortunate affair, so it is useless for me to say more regarding a subject quite unpleasant to us both. My time has been quite entirely taken up by my sister's illness; as well as by my brother's love affairs; but now that Lillian's health is so wonderfully improved, I find some time to waste for my own pleasures.

“Please pardon my impertinence, if I write in a more personal manner than you perhaps think necessary; but I feel it my duty to tell you (both for your own sake and that of my brother) that Willard is in love—deeply in love. Once he thought he loved you, and I believe told you as much; but now that he has found his true love, it is his wish, as well as that of the family, that you forget those trivial love affairs and free him from the bonds which he feels still bind him. I advise you to write to him at once, that his wedded life may be happy.

“Yours sincerely,

“Wilma Allington.”

“P. S. It may be best not to mention my letter as Willard shrinks from asking this favor of you. W. A.”

That Genevieve would not mention her letter, she felt sure, and hastily sealing it she went, herself, to the postoffice, and with a smile of satisfaction returned to the hotel.

“Have you seen about the boats for tonight, Willard?” she asked pleasantly, as she met him on the steps. “I'm determined to have a ride tonight, and I'm tired of the bay. The river is beautiful by night and quite safe above the dam.”

“There are only a few boats on the river and they may all be taken now, Wilma; the bay is far more safe and I think Lillian still enjoys it,” Willard answered.

"Nevertheless, I wish to go on the river tonight, for my own pleasure. Lillian will enjoy it quite as well."

"I'll see what I can do, and if a boat can be procured, I'll order a car to drive us up there," Willard answered, after a moment's thought.

The boat was procured, and shortly after sunset, the little party of three alighted from the automobile at the landing, a mile and a half above the dam. In the moonlight they could dimly discern other boats as they paddled up the stream; and the soft splash of the water, as it rippled over the paddles, floated musically on the breeze. In the distance they could see the brilliant lights, dancing above the rushing waters of the dam; then suddenly a bend in the river hid the blazing signal of danger from view and they paddled on up the river, lighted only by the silvery moonlight, which danced along in sparkling flecks of silvery light over the rippling surface. For more than an hour they paddled up the river, creeping slowly along the shaded shores or dashing up the center of the stream, and now and then as the boy paused, to point out to them some object of particular interest, the little boat floated silently back with the current.

"I'm tired tonight, and my head aches dreadfully," Lillian said at last, passing her hand over her brow, from which a lacy scarf had fallen.

"Perhaps we had better return," Willard suggested; and regardless of Wilma's complaining remarks he told the boy to turn back.

Swiftly they floated down the stream and the boy, with his oars resting on the edge of the boat, sat idly watching Lillian and Willard who sat facing him.

"Isn't that our landing?" Lillian asked suddenly, pointing toward the shore where a launch (the only boat in sight) was landed.

"Looks something like it, but you see the lights at the dam are not yet in sight," the boy replied; and they floated on down the river.

Presently they noticed that the boat was moving at a more rapid rate and the boy sat straight and looked about.

"Can't be that we are near the dam," he remarked.

"Are the lights always kept burning or do they sometimes fail?" Willard asked, with a note of alarm in his voice.

"I've been on this river for several years; and I never knew them to fail. They've burned from sunset till sunrise the year around," the boy replied with an air of assurance, dipping his oars in the water. With a powerful stroke he pulled up stream but their speed down stream seemed only to increase. "There seems to be something wrong," he exclaimed, paddling wildly against the current, but 'twas of small avail; the water was rushing wildly about them, carrying the little craft nearer and nearer the dam; and in a space of breathless silence they could hear the rushing roar of the falling waters. Instantly Willard grasped the oars from the boy's hands, and with strong, steady strokes battled with the rushing torrent; but his efforts served only to retard their speed down stream. The boy called for help.

"A launch can safely come this far, but nearer the dam—I doubt if they can reach us!" he exclaimed, excitedly, and Wilma's proud voice, broken with sobs, joined in the cry for help.

"Some one will come to our rescue; I know they will. They will save us before we reach the falls," Lillian kept murmuring; and in a soft, trembling voice she breathed an earnest prayer for help.

It was Lillian's hopeful words, just audible above the roar of the water, that helped Willard in his strong fight against the death they were facing. That the helpless craft would be dashed over the dam, before help could reach them, he felt sure; but Lillian, pale and calm, was so confident that a watery grave was not to be their fate, that he struggled bravely against the current.

"Help! help!" rang out above the rushing roar; then, mingled with it, came the sound of a launch, and lights flashed out over the water toward them. Help was near—but would they venture, at the risk of their own lives, so near the dam? Could they reach them before they were carried over the falls? Nearer and nearer they came. A voice called out to them. A thrill of hope vibrated in the hearts of those who were face to face with death. A moment later the same voice called again; a rope came whirling through the air; with

a splash it fell across the boat and into the water. With hands made strong by mingled hope and fear, Willard grasped it. Instantly it tightened and slowly the little boat was drawn near the launch.

"All safe?" shouted the voice, which to them now sounded strangely familiar.

"All safe," Willard shouted in return; and still clinging to the rope which had brought them back from death, they were drawn quickly in to shore and safety, behind the launch which had rescued them. It had scarcely touched land when a man, tall and straight, sprang upon the shore and rapidly drew in the rope. The boat safely landed, Lillian, weak and exhausted, with her brother's arm around her, arose to her feet.

"How can we thank you enough, sir!" she exclaimed, addressing the man on the shore. "I shudder to think of the danger we have faced, and from which your bravery and kindness has saved us. Ere this we should have been beneath the cold, dark waters of the river. Oh, how can we ever repay you?"

Her voice was soft and sweet and the words came with trembling breaths.

The man's stern face, shaded by a broad brimmed hat, paled; his firm lips trembled, and for an instant he silently recoiled from the fairy form of the girl he had saved from death; then suddenly—almost involuntarily—he stretched out his hands to assist her. She placed one cold little hand in his, and as he gently helped her to the ground, a sudden thrill shook her, and her big blue eyes were raised to the face above her—pale and sad, a look of longing, undying love beaming from his eyes—sad, hopeless.

"Llewellyn!" she murmured softly, in quick surprise; and yet there was more of love, more of tenderness, in her tone than astonishment.

For a moment her hand lingered within the circle of his warm clasp. Then quickly she drew it from him. A look of pain made its transient passage across her pallid features; her eyes drooped, and silently she turned from him.

"Oh! Lillian! you have no word for me now?" he asked, in a low voice of pleading pathos.

Willard sprang from the boat at that moment.

"Greymore! Is it possible that you are our rescuer?" he exclaimed, heartily shaking his hand.

Lillian turned toward them and quickly extended her arms out to them through the darkness which had suddenly surrounded her. Her slender figure swayed and her breath came quick and fast, past white parted lips.

Instantly Llewellyn, who stood nearest her, was at her side, and with his arms around her, she lost consciousness. Gently he laid her into her brother's arms and vainly striving to compose himself, he turned to Wilma, who was yet unaware of her sister's condition.

"I, myself, am surprised to find that I have assisted in rescuing dear friends, instead of mere strangers, as I had supposed until a moment ago," he said, in response to her words of thanks. "I fully realize the horrors you experienced during those terrible moments, when you faced death amid the rushing torrents."

He hastily left her, and hurrying to the launch, returned with a small medicine case. Kneeling down beside the prostrate form of the girl he loved, he put forth every effort to restore consciousness. The pillows from the launch were placed upon the grass and the face lying back upon them gleamed white in the pale moonlight. It had sadly changed since Llewellyn Greymore had last seen it, round and rosy, and as he looked down upon the closed lids, with the long lashes lying darkly against the cold cheeks, he sighed and bent lower over her. His Lillian; the flower of his aching heart; the girl he still loved—would always love—more than his own life—he had brought her back from death; he had saved her from a grave beneath the rushing falls. In silence he had listened to her question of "how can we ever repay you?" and now, could he answer her truthfully? Could he say, "Give me your love, your heart, your hand, darling, and I shall be repaid?" Could he tell her that until that hour should come, his heart would ache on? The sparkling diamond ring, which only a few months before had encircled her finger, now lay near his heart; and with the memory of his rejected love he bowed his head for a moment. No! those dear white hands had cruelly stabbed him, and he could not tell her. Life must continue as it had since last they

parted. He must forget this night—he must erase it from his memory and live on—interested only in his profession—in the welfare of the world in general—standing always in the right—ministering to the sick and encouraging those whose paths are darkened.

For a moment he was left alone with her, and bending low, he tenderly pressed his lips to her brow. Could she have known the tender love of his noble heart—her aching heart would have wildly bounded and the flickering flames of love would have burned brighter; but as consciousness returned he moved slowly away from her side.

“It was only the effect of the fright and excitement,” he said in a low, professional tone, which fell upon Lillian’s ears and caused her to shudder as her thoughts flew back to the night when he had addressed Grace in tender, loving words—the night that her own heart had been pierced so deeply.

“I’m glad that I was sent to assist you at that perilous moment,” he continued. “I came from Chciago only a week ago to assist in an operation—a near relative of my father—a place some distance up the river—and they insisted that I should run down here, to see if this was a suitable place to send the patient for a few weeks. Luckily I chose this for my day of investigation. I was preparing for my return when the lights—which I understand were never before known to fail—went out. We did not see your boat as it passed the landing, but for some reason—I can scarcely explain—we hesitated about starting on our way up stream. A divine power must have been guiding us; and I trust it may continue to guide us in the right direction, as it has tonight. I leave for Chicago tomorrow, so it is quite necessary for me to go now.”

Lillian listened as he bade her brother and sister a hasty good-bye, and with tears glistening on her lashes she watched him enter the launch and disappear up the stream. He had bravely rescued them from death, but she had greeted him as she would a stranger, save for the name breathed involuntarily in the unguarded moment when first she recognized him, and now he—the man to whom all her precious love was given—had left her without a word of farewell. But what did it matter to her? Had she not sent him away from her, without re-

gard for his wish to see her? With a single glance at his face she had found it pale and thin. The lines about his mouth had deepened and his manner, too, had changed. After all had he really cared, or was it only her imaginative fancy which had changed Llewellyn Greymore? Perhaps, even now, he was going back to Chicago to a beloved and happy wife, for had she not heard his endearing words to another? Had she not heard him call another "darling," his "own little sweetheart," so lovingly, tenderly spoken that the last words came in a low whisper, which vibrated upon the air almost inaudibly? No; he could not care, and as they had met and parted on this occasion, so they must live—always strangers.

Llewellyn had attributed the cause of her unconsciousness to the excitement of the moment when death had stood out before them; but Lillian, bravest of them all, had not for a moment looked with horror upon death, even though her grave be beneath dark, rushing waters, and while her lips had trembled with a prayer for safety; while her heart had throbbed with a hopeful assurance, her will was wholly reconciled to that of the Master, and both brother and sister knew that it was due more to the surprise of meeting again her deceitful lover, than to the shock of that moment when, with every breath, they seemed drawn nearer to death and eternity.

"Take me home, Willard; back to Roselin," she murmured, raising dark, burning eyes to his. "I cannot stay here longer; all the joys I've had are flown and I want to go home to Roselin."

After that night nothing at the seashore could interest her; nothing could take from her mind the memory of that meeting up the river, whose waters she could see from her window, continually flowing into the calm, blue ocean. Llewellyn's dark form seemed to stand out before it all, and her plea to return to Roselin continued, until one bright, warm morning, near the last of September, they started homeward; and as the ocean faded in the distance she bravely strove to bury there the memory of their unexpected meeting with Llewellyn.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE RESULT OF WILMA'S PLAN

As THE autumn neared the winter months, Wilma urged her father to leave Roselin and go to Boston, insisting that the change was best for Lillian, who remained unchanged. There were times when she would ride with Willard or go on long tours with her father in the automobile; then again she would spend whole days in her room, never weeping but always sad.

"In Boston I'm sure she will improve. Society will interest her, and ere long she will have forgotten her childish love. The memory of Llewellyn will be only a relic, in Boston, where other admirers surround her," argued Wilma.

Lillian was satisfied at Roselin. She wished for no change, but when her father told her that he had decided to spend the winter in the city, she made no complaint and they began at once preparations for their departure.

One day as Clarice was busily engaged in Wilma's room, taking her dresses from the wardrobe, Lillian sat silently watching her as she laid them, one after another, upon the bed, and now and then she fingered the rich laces or smoothed the silky fullness; and as she shook out the folds of a filmy gown, she caught a gleam of red amid its cream laces. Again she held it up before her and a sudden cry burst from her lips. Wilma, who had entered the room only a moment before, looked up from the frock she was folding, and an exclamation of astonishment came from her lips, for her eyes fell upon the thin, filmy dress she had worn on that afternoon among the family jewels, and among its soft folds, caught in the dainty laces, gleamed her own ruby necklace.

While gathering up the other jewels the laces had swept over it; and it had become securely fastened there. She had locked and replaced the cases, with no thought of the necklace, and turned at once to arrange her toilet for dinner. As Clarice had been busy at that moment, she herself had thrown the dress carelessly upon the hook in the wardrobe, where it had hung

ever since—hiding the lost rubies. But now that the mystery was solved and Grace, too, proven innocent (and upon comparing them with those which rightfully belonged to Grace), Wilma exclaimed:

“How could I have thought them mine! They are so different—even more expensive perhaps! You may take them now and do as you like with them;” and into Lillian’s hands she placed Llewellyn’s gift to Grace.

“I’ll send it to Vale Cottage,” she said, with a slight shudder, for she wondered if it would find Grace there—or would it be sent on to an elegant home in Chicago to be worn by the wife of Dr. Greymore. Silently she slipped away to her own room and placing it upon the table, stood looking at it, and within her a silent voice seemed to echo: “Ah, you beautiful jewel! Grace loved you because you were Llewellyn’s gift. She would not tell, but ’tis no longer a hidden secret; I know he saw you; he admired you; he purchased you and gave you to Grace—the girl he truly loved.”

To Lillian the thought was entirely new. Quite suddenly had it come to her but she felt that it must be true, for, now that she paused to think, she remembered that Llewellyn had given Grace a gift—they had spoken of it that night on the lake; and a wish to crush the jewel which Grace had so lovingly caressed, came over her, and hurriedly pushing them from her, she turned to the window.

“I will do what is right; I will be true to myself and to them,” she murmured, as the first bitter pangs of jealousy ceased and the rosy flush faded from her cheeks. “Come what may, I shall remain always faithful. What more can I do than my duty? I loved Grace, and I love her still and—and Llewellyn—my love for him cannot die!” she exclaimed.

On the following morning her letter, together with that of her father, and the ruby necklace, started on its southward journey. It was a letter of love and forgiveness, mingled with a plea for her sister, who had so cruelly, though unintentionally, wronged her, and upon reading it, one could feel the grave sincerity of the writer. Mr. Allington, while freeing Grace from all blame, and asking that they forget the whole unfortunate affair, urged them to return to the family in Boston, where

they expected to go the week following; and Lillian, after reading her father's plea for their return, added a postscript to her own, in which she intimated that they were expected home. But no amount of urging, no matter how strong the argument, could induce Mrs. Allington to return to them. Now there were no sorrows, no shadows to darken her pleasures and chase the sunshine from the field, and there was no desire to return to the life they had lived at Roselin.

Great was the excitement among the servants at Roselin when they learned that Grace, too, had been wrongly accused and driven from the house by taunts and sneers and cruel, false words. Among themselves, they reviewed the troubles of the summer months and a cold feeling of enmity against Wilma arose among them and now, together with the false accusations of Grace and Genevieve, they laid at Wilma's feet the trouble which had come between Lillian and Llewellyn.

"Dat aih gal will be de deaf ob Lilly, de poh chil'; and Grace do mighty well when she lef' dis' heah hous', eben tho 'twuz in de da'k, fo' I's a tellin' yo', 'twuz only de beginnin' of de trouble dat would a come fo' her an' all de res' of us," old Nan declared, as the group broke up and each one took up their work where they had left it.

A few days later the house at Roselin was closed and the family departed.

For days Willard had been expecting an answer from Genevieve, but so far, he had received none. Each mail brought for him a disappointment, until at last, one day shortly after they were settled in Boston, the postman brought a letter bearing the Baltimore postmark, and as Willard took it from the library table, Wilma looked up from her book with a quizzical smile and he went at once to the solitude of his studio. At last it had come—Genevieve's reply to his letter. But quite unlike his own, it was thin, almost transparent—and with anxious fingers and fast beating heart, he hastily opened the envelope. In breathless silence he held the single sheet, for a moment, still unfolded. Could it be that that small piece of dainty linen held for him the key to future happiness? Could those few words, written by the hand so dear to him, satisfy him? Genevieve could not refuse his ardent plea, and ere long he would be with

her—tell her in words, what he had written on paper—and hear from her own dear lips, her sweet words of consent to be his wife.

A moment later the paper slipped from his fingers and floated to the floor at his feet. With a heavy groan he sank into a chair and his head bowed upon his hand. Genevieve's answer—how cruel—how cold—how it stabbed a heart which was wholly and forever hers, crushing beneath it his hopes and plans for the future. For almost an hour he sat as motionless as the bronze statue in the opposite corner of the studio; then suddenly he arose and caught up the fallen sheet and slowly, thoughtfully read it again.

"Willard:—," it began, "I trust you do not feel yourself bound to me by any of the trivial words of our childish love affairs and, I assure you, I shall think always of you only as a dear friend. Wishing you success and much happiness in your future life, I remain,

"Your friend,
"Genevieve Layton."

"'Trivial words'; 'childish love affairs'!" he repeated, half mournfully, half scornfully. "Does she think so lightly of my love? Could Genevieve—always so kind and gentle—speak so sneeringly of my appeal? Why has she waited until now to show me that I could be no more to her than a 'dear friend'? Has she not known that I loved her? Dear innocent Genevieve; could she not guess my real feelings toward her? Yes! Yes! She knew; she has always known, and now and then I fancied I could see the half hidden love beaming from her eyes, a tell-tale flush mount her cheeks, and a shy drooping of her lashes. Was it all false? Was it only to deceive? Is Genevieve—my model—my ideal of sweet womanhood—false? After all, is she like Wilma and Marie and many others? Is Lillian the only one whose life is all purity and truthfulness, or has Genevieve, during the months since I last saw her, learned to love another? Yes—perhaps it's that. Chester Collins may have won her—is now engaged. But how cold—how formal—is her note. How could she, after dashing from me and tearing to shreds my dearest hope, wish me success and happiness for the future, which I had fondly hoped to share with her? Oh, those words—

how they are filled with mockery and contempt for the love I have offered. I've lost and it is ended, but I shall still hold dear the memory of her as I knew her; but God grant that I may never meet her as the wife of another man."

He strode up and down the room, dashing aside, now and then, a book, a picture, or a pillow which seemed to offend him. He would not judge Genevieve falsely. He could not believe her false and untrue, and again she was to him the model of noble purity; but she had given her love to another, no more worthy of it than he. The thought frenzied him and he dashed madly from the house, scarcely realizing where his steps were leading him. Suddenly he drew up before a huge stone front building—the home of one of the young married men of society—and with only a glance at it, he turned and was about to retrace his steps, when a voice called to him:

"Wait, Allington, don't rush off in that manner. A few of us fellows are meeting here for the evening. Come in with us, can't you? Bradley and his wife entertain royally; so come. No excuse, old fellow;" and without a word Willard allowed himself to be turned back.

Many times he had been invited to spend evenings with this company of young men, but never before had he joined them; but now, feeling as he did, he could not return home. With the thought of the faded future burning in his heart and mind, he could not appear his usual self; and he could imagine Wilma's haughty sneers if she guessed what that letter from Baltimore had held for him, as no doubt she would if he met her that evening. On the morrow he would tell Lillian, and her sympathy would soothe him; but now—he must drive the thought from him and avoid, as long as possible, the meeting with his haughty sister. For one word against Genevieve, one sneering remark regarding his rejected love, he felt, would drive him to insanity; so with the hope of prolonging the time when the grave realities of the future must be faced, he entered the elaborately furnished drawing-room and was cordially greeted by the host.

Mrs. Bradley, it proved, was absent, and Bradley consequently entertained more royally than he would have done in his wife's presence, and Willard, for a time, succeeded in driving

from him all thought of Genevieve; for there, in the dining-room of the Bradley mansion, driven on by the sneers and jeers of his companions, he took his first social glass of wine. Willard Allington, who had stood strongly against it when by the side of Llewellyn Greymore, during the old college days in Baltimore, had at last fallen; but in after years he grievously repented that first glass, for it did not prove to be the last.

Instead of telling Lillian of Genevieve's letter, as he had intended to do, on the following morning, he purposely avoided her, and for days he scarcely saw either her or his father. But Wilma bewildered him by her kind manner and sunny smiles. Never before had she treated him in the kind sisterly fashion she now assumed and, apparently, she knew nothing of the letter hidden away with the painting of its writer, or of his defeated hopes to win Genevieve for his wife.

The painting which he had presented to Genevieve in memory of their school-days came back to him, and in a state of hurried excitement, he ordered it taken to the studio. Wilma looked wonderingly at him, but he did not heed her. Upon taking the last covering from the picture, a small paper fell from it and Willard—alone, locked in his studio—hastily took it up and read the simple words:

"I thank you for your kindness toward me and I shall greatly miss your picture from my room, though I feel it my duty to return it."

"Confound it! Of course, Chester Collins' wife can have no wish for it, but it is kind of her to say that she will miss it!" he exclaimed. "I should have expected it, after that letter. It's a wonder that all my other little 'trivial, childish' gifts did not come with it, for what does she care for them now?" he continued, in a voice of scorn which changed to one of pathetic sadness as he went on: "And for me—it can only remind me of what might have been—peace, love and happiness—all taken from me and given to that successful Collins, I presume; but I'll strive to forget her; and if Lillian wins in her battle against love for Llewellyn, I—strong and wilful—can surely conquer."

Then the evening spent at Bradleys' came up vividly before him. Would Genevieve have called him 'strong and wilful,' if she had seen him then, lifting the champagne glass to his lips?

Would she have been proud to have acknowledged his love? No; she would have turned from him; she would have scorned his weakness.

"Yes; I was weak then," he acknowledged, shamefully, to himself; "but it was only once. I'll conquer my love; I *will* be strong," he declared emphatically, "for I must live it down, alone. I cannot tell Lillian now; her sympathy cannot soothe, for if she knew how and where I spent that evening, she would turn from me. Can I fail to tell her all and yet accept her sympathy? No; I must, alone, forget that I ever loved Genevieve Layton."

Could Willard have seen the tear-stained notes she had first written, then crushed and torn them, and could he have read the dictations of her aching heart, he would not have been striving to forget her. He little dreamed that she, too, was striving to conquer her love—that she had read over and over again his sister's smooth, piercing, untruthful words instead of his own endearing ones. He did not know of her mind's fanciful pictures, which always associated him with Marie Carrelton, nor of the tears shed during sleepless hours of the night. He could not imagine the loving words which the heart had almost compelled the hand to write upon the paper which had carried to him only a cold, formal message—nothing of love—nothing of hope.

For him, life now seemed empty and, as days and weeks passed, he found that society could not fill the space which tender hopes for the future had occupied, and much to Wilma's chagrin he began refusing to attend the largest and most brilliant parties and social functions to which they were invited. Most of his time was spent in the studio, at his work, and with an air of assurance he refused all invitations which came to him. The horrified faces of both Genevieve and Lillian seemed to float warningly before the cards of invitation which came from the young men he had once joined and they, too, were refused.

To none of the young ladies would he give his attentions—least of all to Marie—who was continually planning to throw herself in his pathway and to whom he often found it difficult to be even polite. In fact, his manner toward her was some-

times almost rude; and while Wilma had almost given up hope of having Marie for a sister-in-law, she did not cease to plan. She had her at the house almost continually, and as much as possible in Willard's company. At least Genevieve Layton would never be his wife and that was more than half the game. There she had succeeded and, though she should fail in this last plan, she felt that she would still be victor.

Lillian, too, shrank from society, but she dared not offend her sister's wishes, consequently she was continually mingling with the elegantly dressed throng of which her sister was a belle; and while many admirers thronged about the beautiful, brilliant Wilma, there were a few who looked deep into the heart of the pure, sweet Lilly and paid to her most loyal homage. This she accepted with the grace and sweetness of a fairy queen, and Wilma often assured her father that Llewellyn was forgotten.

But Wilma was too intensely interested in the fascinating whirl of society to see more than the surface events of her sister's life. She herself had become engaged to Louis Mandel, who was now in Boston and who, seeing only the sweet winning side of her life, thought her still the most noble woman in the world.

To Adelaide Richard he paid the most devoted attention until Wilma appeared, then carelessly he would turn from her, quite unaware of the tender love for him, throbbing in the heart of the one, and the piercing thorns, hidden beneath the smooth, attractive surface of the other.

CHAPTER XXXIX

WILLARD'S PROMISE

It was nearing the New Year when the plans for the grand Allington party came suddenly to an end because of the serious and sudden illness of Mr. Allington, and instead of the gay throng which would have filled the spacious rooms, to watch the gray old year fade and die, only a small, sad group gathered in the quiet chamber where Mr. Allington lay. Mrs. Allington had been sent for, and momentarily they were expecting her. Outside a soft, feathery snow was falling; surrounding the place with a dense grayness, and silently covering the cold, dark earth with a white, drifting blanket. Noiselessly it beat against the windows and drifted in soft, white waves across the broad piazza. No resounding of hoofs, nor crushing of wheels was heard, as the carriage drew up, and silently Mrs. Allington's step fell upon the walk. But Lillian, standing at the window, straining her eyes that she might catch the first glimpse of the carriage, saw, through the fleecy cloud of snow, the dimly outlined figure approaching, and turned quickly to Willard who stood at her side.

"They're here," she whispered, and silently nodding, he left the room.

As the door softly closed behind him, Mr. Allington moved restlessly. "Is Evelyn coming, at last?" he asked anxiously, and with the trained eye of a professional, the nurse bent over him.

"Yes," she said softly; "but must you see her at once?"

"Yes, yes, at once!" he exclaimed, impatiently; then he continued in a tone of authority; "send her to me, now; I shall not rest until I see her."

"I shall send her your message," she replied, and moved from the room, leaving Wilma and Lillian alone with their father.

"Wilma;" he called, when the door had closed behind her.

"Yes, papa, I'm here," she said, coming close to the bed.

"Evelyn has come at last, Wilma, and remember, she is my wife and must be treated as one of the family. Can I trust you, Wilma? Will you be kind to her and treat her in a manner more respectful than you have heretofore assumed?"

"Do you wish me to assume something I do not feel?" she asked. "Is she more to you now, than during the years past? You never before asked this of me; why do you ask it now?"

"Don't, Wilma, don't," Lillian protested softly, but the words had already fallen reproachfully upon her father's ears, and for a moment he was silent; then sorrowfully he continued between spells of coughing.

"I have suffered much during the past month. Lillian's sorrows are mine, also, and her frail health has deeply pained me, while Willard's love affairs have cost me sleepless nights and hours of worry, and mingled with it all were the sad thoughts of my own affairs. Evelyn had left Roselin—my home—and with just cause. May God forgive us for misjudging her child—but Evelyn—how I have missed her. It has been during the days since I last saw her, that I have learned how much she really was to me. I have pleaded for her return, but she would not come, until now I am dying—for—Wilma—Lillian—my children—I know I shall never recover. The doctors need not strive to deceive me for I know I cannot live. The disease has securely fastened itself upon me and I feel that death is steadily approaching. The doctors perhaps have told you as much, for in your faces I can read hopeless sorrow and pain. Do not grieve for me, my dear ones, but for my sake, promise me this—pay to Evelyn Allington the respect you have always shown your father. Can you promise me this?"

He paused and a fit of coughing ensued.

Lillian's face was buried in the pillow at his side, and convulsive sobs shook her frame, as she replied: "Though I had refused every other request, I could not refuse this."

Large, bright tears coursed their way down Wilma's cheeks. "I shall do my utmost to comply with your wishes," she said. Then the door opened again, and Willard admitted Mrs. Allington. She had removed the damp garments she had worn on her long, stormy journey, and now wore a soft, dark wool.

Mr. Allington was the first to see her, and raising himself from the pillow, he stretched his arms out to receive her.

"Evelyn!" he exclaimed.

Then Willard and his sisters withdrew and left them alone.

* * * * *

The dim shadows of a winter's twilight had fallen over No. 5248 and a silver moon swung its slender crescent high in the pale, clear, star-bedecked sky, which over-arched a world white with drifted snow. The world seemed solemnly quiet and the reigning silence was broken only by the sound of Willard's step as he hurried up the walk, bordered on either side by the banks of snow.

Since he had left the house, on a short errand, Mr. Allington had grown steadily worse. The coughing spells had become more frequent and more severe, and now and then his breath seemed almost lost. Continually he asked for his son.

"He must come before it is too late; I must see him before I die," he said again and again, between short struggling breaths, and a look of longing anxiety settled upon his face.

"I do not shrink from death. I have lived my life and it has not all been wrong, but my son—my son—once more——" again he choked, and his words were lost.

"Yes, you will see him. He will come, I know," Mrs. Allington assured him.

"'Tis only a short time now, but, doctor, you must save me until he comes."

Both Wilma and Lillian stood bravely by Mrs. Allington's side, and as the coughing again ceased, he raised his eyes to their faces and a faint glow of love shone for an instant from their fading depths.

"Willard, Willard," he murmured again, and in another instant his son stood at the bedside.

"I'm here, father; I returned as soon as possible," he said, bending over him and gently pressing one hand in his.

"Willard, my son!" he exclaimed; then after a while he went on. "There is only one thing I wish to say to you—my boy—one thing I wish to hear you say before my ears become forever deaf to the sounds of earth—to the voices I have loved. Tell me, Willard, that you will some day call Marie Carrelton

your wife. She loves you, and, I think, will make you happy. I have fought death in order to direct your footsteps, Willard; will you accept my dying advice and grant me this last request?"

The other hand feebly sought his son's, and the cold, weak fingers slightly pressed the strong, young hand. Silently Willard's face turned from him and a fierce struggle convulsed his heart. To him Genevieve was lost—forever lost—his father's request could not affect that, but could his true, loyal nature bring itself to the task his dying father set before him? Could he kneel at the feet of the girl he did not love and profess for her that which he did not feel?—Love—the most sacred thing earth affords. Could he ever pay her the respect, the admiration, a husband should? His heart—his love—belonged wholly to another, while for Marie, he bore nothing except a feeling of contempt and dislike. Marie Carrelton his wife? Bound forever as her husband his life would be lost, but after all, what did life hold for him? Was not Genevieve—his heart—his love—lost, and without these what was life to him? Without love it held nothing of happiness, and it mattered little whether he lived it alone or as the husband of an unloved wife.

Again his father struggled for breath and again he spoke.

"Willard, my son, do you promise?"

"Let me think, father; let me think. Marie Carrelton my wife——?"

"Yes, yes," he replied, and again his breath seemed forever gone.

Willard's head was bowed upon the hand which still lay upon his own, then instantly it raised.

"Yes, father, I promise. If Marie will consent, she shall be my wife," he said bending close to his father's ear.

"My son—may your life be happy—may you forget——." His words were lost, but Willard knew that he was thinking of Genevieve. His eyes closed and life seemed almost gone. Again Willard's head sank down upon the icy hand. Lillian, kneeling by the side of Mrs. Allington's chair, buried her face in the folds of her dress, while her hands clasped one of Wilma's, who stood beside her, her tears falling silently upon her sister's golden curls. Again he stirred and the nurse bending over him, caught the faint, whispered names of his children and lastly came the name "Evelyn."

The howling voice of the cold, bleak wind died low. Faintly it murmured and moaned amid the bare, icy branches, its mournful tones echoing sadly in the silent chamber where the Angel of Death had so recently laid his icy hand. Cold, dim stars looked down upon the magnificent home, where the sad-faced wife ministered, tenderly and lovingly, to the weeping daughters, now bereft of both father and mother. Willard gazed solemnly out upon the night with unseeing eyes, then turned again and looked down upon the cold, rigid features of his father.

“Oh, father, that I could call back the promise I gave you!” he exclaimed. “I would give all the wealth and luxury that shall ever surround me, just to recall it—the promise I have given to the dead—but it’s too late; my words are recorded in heaven, and I must accept the sorrows, the joys, which Marie Carrelton’s wealth may bring me.”

He strode restlessly up and down the room, his hand pressed heavily upon his cold, perspiring brow.

“Oh, why did he ask it? Why did I not linger longer at the office? Oh, that I could erase this night from my memory; that I could forget the hour which took from us our father and bound me, forever, to Marie Carrelton. Oh! could he not realize his mistake? Can the Carrelton wealth make me happy? Genevieve—my love—my darling—could the Carrelton millions have bought my love from you? No! but you cast it aside as though it were nothing, and now, though you are lost to me, I would cast aside the Carrelton fortune and live my life alone—but now, I cannot—I cannot.”

Again his eyes rested on his father’s face and he stood motionless.

“My home filled with wealth and luxurious splendor—my wife unloved! Ah, father, you did not know your son; I want something far more precious than wealth. You did not know that Genevieve was already lost to me; you did not know that I was striving to crush my love for her, and yet, you would ask me to give up that precious hope for the dollars in Marie Carrelton’s purse, and think that could make me happy. You strove to direct my footsteps toward wealth and luxury, and, as you thought, toward happiness; but alas! I see only a path

leading out midst darkest gloom. Wealth! Wealth! The very word mocks my love, my deepest sorrow. To you—to Wilma—it would mean the world's choicest treasure, but to me—to me——! I shall not shrink from my promise; I shall follow that path to the end.”

His cold stern face turned from the white, stony one, and his heart trembled and quaked, from the fierce storm which had swept over it. His eyes were burning and tearless, and his every movement indicated pain and sorrow. Again he looked out over the world, wrapped in its snow-white mantle, sparkling in the warming light of day. Above the eastern horizon, one rosy, rounded edge of the sun peeped, tinting the dull gray, with blazing lines of ruby and gold.

Noiselessly the servants passed through the long, richly-carpeted halls, wiping away the tears, as they passed the chamber, where all night long Willard had watched by the side of the departed master. Perfect stillness reigned all about them, and with a feeling of awe and sadness, they went about their household duties.

Slowly the sunbeams brightened and with a sad, low music the melted snow-drops dripped one by one, from the closed shutters while, contrasting greatly with the whiteness around them, the dark knots of crepe continued to stream from the small clusters of white carnations fastened at every door-knob, telling to every passerby, the same sad story—a story of death and mourning.

* * * * *

It was a cold moonlight evening when Willard and his sisters went back to Boston, to the magnificent home of which he was now master; leaving behind them another dark, earthy mound beside their mother's snow-covered grave, by the garden wall at Roselin, where the tall, gleaming marble pointed Heavenward.

Lillian, pale and worn, went at once to her room, and as Louis had called to see Wilma, Willard was left alone, and his thoughts went back to Marie—the girl who was to share his future, his fortune and his life. As yet, she knew nothing of his plans for the future; he must not wait or his courage would fail him, and he had promised to follow the guidance of his

dying father, no matter where that path might lead him. Hastily taking up his hat, he left the house and turned his footsteps toward the home of Mrs. Carrelton. There he found Marie alone. Extending her plump, white hand, sparkling with its many diamonds, and smiling coyly up at him, she explained in flattering tones :

"Oh, Willard, I'm certainly delighted to see you, though I had supposed you too tired tonight to care about seeing me. And how are those darling sisters of yours? Exhausted from their journey though, I'm sure."

"Yes, quite, thank you," he returned, barely touching the jeweled hand, which would willingly have lingered in his. Then seating himself he began abruptly: "I came to ask you a question, Marie—one single question—and, with your permission to ask it, I shall not long detain you."

Marie noticed his excitement and became slightly bewildered and the hot blood burned her cheeks but she arose, and going over to him, seated herself upon the davenport beside him. Laying her hand on his arm with a sisterly freedom, she said :

"I assure you, Willard, I shall gladly listen to anything you wish to ask me, and I shall help you, to the best of my ability."

"Thank you," he replied, in a low voice, then paused.

After all, should he ask her that all important question—the question which would destine all his future days—the question which would join, forever, his life with that of the girl for whom he had no love? What would that life hold for him?—gold, silver, luxuries and riches—but what were they, when the love, for which he pined, was denied him. Then the last moments of his father's life came up vividly before him and he turned abruptly to Marie :

"I come asking you for yourself, Marie," he said simply.

"Oh, Willard! that is so like you!" she exclaimed, leaning close to him; "the question I least expect to hear is always the one you ask."

"And what is your answer?" he broke in impatiently.

"I can hardly believe your words, Willard. Are you really and truly sincere?"

"I assure you I am; I came purposely to ask you to be my wife."

This was not the ideal proposal, of which Marie Carrelton had often dreamed—for which she had long been hoping—he did not even say he loved her—but this was her opportunity to seize the prize for which she and her mother had long been striving, and she would not lose it now, so she only nestled quite close to his side and laying her cheek on his shoulder, with drooping lashes, whispered her reply. Then silently he bent and kissed the rosy lips.

“Engaged!—Engaged!—actually engaged—and to Marie Carrelton, the last girl in Boston I should have chosen for my wife!” he exclaimed, as the door closed between him and his betrothed, and he rushed madly down the broad, stone steps. “Why was Genevieve not thus easily won? Why is my future to be so dark, so void, when it might have been bright and glorious, with Genevieve as my wife. But a life with Genevieve—how different from the one destined to be my future. Marie my wife—Horrors! What have I done! Yes! I have kept my promise, and had I waited longer, I fear I should have failed.”

Days and weeks passed and Willard began more and more to mingle in society. Not that he enjoyed the gayeties of the social affairs he attended, but he was engaged to one of the most fashionable of society's pets, and it was his duty to play the devoted to her; besides, it occupied his mind and kept him from dreaming and pondering over the future, which each day became more horrible to him. The wine-glass, too, which quite frequently touched his lips, during the weeks following his engagement, helped to drive from his mind the tender memories of Genevieve, as well as the thoughts of his wealthy fiancée, so distasteful to him.

Lillian, with a dull pain in her heart, carefully noted every change in her brother's face and manner and silently, earnestly, she prayed that the future, which looked so dark to him, might bring with it some ray of brightness. But she did not realize that he had disobeyed the lesson of temperance his father had taught him in early years—not entirely forgotten but wholly disregarded. Silently she listened to Marie as she talked happily of plans for the coming wedding, which was to be more grand, more beautiful, than Boston had ever before witnessed; then her eyes would go from Marie's bright, glowing face, back to her

brother's, who now and then, with feigned gayety, joined in the conversation, and she wondered what the future held in store for him. And when the first day of May came, bringing with it all the glories of spring—beautiful, warm and bright—she watched, with tear-dimmed eyes, as, with a cold, stern, expressionless face, he led his beautiful bride to the altar, and took upon himself the solemn vows of matrimony.

They departed on an evening train for Florida, where they were to remain until the middle of June, when they would be at home, at Lakeview, for the remainder of the summer. The place was being wonderfully improved during their absence; new rooms were added and others refurnished, so that when Willard and his bride arrived, there was nothing lacking about their home to make life beautiful. On all sides they were surrounded by luxuries which only wealth could afford. But Lillian, who had waited anxiously for their return, and who came with her sister to Lakeview the week following their arrival, found a far greater change in her brother. Carefully she watched his calm, sad face, as he sat listening to his wife's gay conversation, and then she noticed the marks of dissipation she had failed to see two months before, but they had become more clearly defined, during the few short weeks of wedded life. But Marie—though she loved and admired her husband, lavishing upon him many caresses—apparently failed to notice the change which had come over him. He was hers now—she had won him at last, and with him, she had gained the wealth which had meant so much to her—for, after all, Willard Allington had wedded an almost penniless bride—his money alone had rescued Lakeview from the mortgagee's hands—had paid for every improvement—had saved Marie and her mother from suddenly dropping from society, and had given her everything for which she could wish—save a husband's love—and now, both she and her mother looked blindly on as he started on the downward road to ruin. Wilma, too, intensely interested in her own affairs and happily contented in the presence of her much loved sister-in-law, did not seem to see the look of sorrow and disappointment which settled heavier and heavier upon her brother's brow, and Lillian, alone, wept over the brother, for whom she had hoped a future far different.

The girls knew nothing of Marie's lost fortune, until one day when conversing with Willard, Wilma remarked upon the beauty of his wife, her many charms, her attractive manners and her immense fortune. He listened in silence, his expression unchanged.

"I wonder sometimes," she continued, "if you realize what a valuable prize you have secured. Your wife, Willard, is one whom many a man would gladly claim, because of her personal charms alone, but her fortune, Willard—her fortune—I suppose one can hardly estimate her value as a wife, when that is considered."

"I assure you, Wilma, her fortune adds nothing to her value."

"To you, perhaps, no! But to others—to one in Genevieve Layton's circumstances—wealth is of more value than you may think."

"Marie's wealth can matter little to anyone, Wilma; if she is to be valued by her wealth, she is worth little more than Genevieve herself."

"What are you saying, Willard; do you estimate Marie's wealth at so low a price?" She looked searchingly at him.

"She has her jewels; she has her gowns," he replied, calmly scanning his sister's face; "everything else is mine; for, Wilma, Marie Carrelton had very little she could call her own when she became my wife. My money saved the place in Boston; it saved Lakeview from public sale, and Mrs. Carrelton is as dependent upon me, for support, as you are upon the fortune our father left you."

"I can scarcely believe your words, Willard; Marie's fortune lost?—it seems impossible!"

"But it is not impossible; I tell you it is lost. Only a few weeks before our wedding day, the last investment failed, and they were left penniless."

"Penniless—Willard—penniless!—and yet you married her? Wedded a penniless bride? Oh how dared you!"

"Indeed, Wilma, do you think Marie fool enough to speak of her poverty to me, then? Do you think she would confide that secret to the man whose wealth was to save them? No!

it was not until after the ceremony which made her my wife that the secret of their circumstances was revealed to me."

"And then it was too late! She is cruel; she is false; she is wholly unworthy of the name she bears! She has deceived you!" Wilma burst out in angry tones, but Willard's firm, calm voice arose above hers.

"Wilma, would you yourself have done otherwise? Would you have ventured to tell the truth, with the possibility of losing that for which you had long been striving, would you have revealed the truth, at the moment when wealth was most needed? No, no! you speak of my wife in terms which you yourself would not shrink to bear!"

Wilma stood before him, looking at him with angry, flashing eyes.

"But I am your sister, Willard Allington, and I can never again meet your wife on equal footing; for—though you refuse to acknowledge it—I am far her superior and, had I realized in time, to what level she had fallen, I should have saved you!"

"Saved me; Wilma!—you, who have driven me to the life I live! You could not have saved me! If she had told me truthfully of her poverty; if you had begged of me to break the promise I gave my father—I should have married her—she should have been my wife! Marie Allington is the same to me as if she now possessed every dollar of her father's millions."

"Willard!—how can you! But you do not love her!—you will never love her, and—though she is your wife—deep in your heart you almost hate her! I know! It was only papa's will you obeyed, when you married her!"

"I obeyed your will, as well as that of my father, when Marie Carrelton became my wife—but it was her fortune alone you wished me to wed, and now, when you know it is lost, you turn from her, you hate her—my wife, whom you have professed to love—and who, had it not been for you, would never have borne my name."

"You made me no promise! Was it I who forced you to give up Genevieve Layton—to take Marie instead? No, Willard, you cannot say it was!"

"You used your every influence, Wilma; you cannot deny! But had Genevieve Layton given me the love, for which I once hoped, I would have died rather than to have given that promise—even to my dying father."

"Willard! do not be deceived; Genevieve Layton loves you with her whole heart—has loved you always, and, I do not doubt, she loves you still."

It was in a moment of anger, of scorn for the penniless Marie, that the words slipped out, but a moment later, when Willard faced her with blazing eyes, she repented for having uttered them.

"How do you know she loves me?" he demanded.

"I have every reason to believe it, but to you I shall give none. Is it not enough to know that you are loved?"

"Yes, it is enough!—it is maddening!—it is more than enough—now that it is, forever, too late!"

"Too late—yes, it is too late!—and you may as well content yourself with Marie—your penniless wife."

She left him, and burying his face in his hands, moans of anguish shook his frame.

After all did Genevieve love him? Were Wilma's words to be considered? How many times had she deceived him? How many times had she proven herself false? But why should she tell him that he was loved, when—alas—she knew nothing; how should she know? Was not Genevieve's letter—her refusal to him—locked away with her painting in the studio—the spacious studio, which his money had added to the building at Lakeview? Of that, Wilma could know nothing, but if she knew—would she continue to declare that Genevieve loved him? Oh, no! in those few, cold, icy words there was nothing of love—only the sharp, piercing coldness of professed friendship, which had borne away his every hope. Wilma strove only to make his future darker, his life more bitter; she wished him to believe he had lost that which could have been easily gained—to deepen his hatred for his wife, whose wealth alone had made her friendship valuable, and—though it brought to his mind fresh memories of Genevieve, brought vividly before him the realities of the life he was

living—it could not change the future. No annoying thoughts, however maddening, could make it darker—could make it more bitter, and, though his very soul trembled with undying love for Genevieve, he hoped for nothing—wished for nothing. He had become hardened to the life which lay before him, and lost in the solitude of the studio, where he spent the greater part of his time at painting, he would dream of the past or of the future for which he had hoped, then look deep into the life—dark and empty—which stretched out before him, with expression unchanged.

CHAPTER XL

VALE COTTAGE

THE delicately mingled perfume of magnolias and arbutus pervaded the veranda, lawn and garden at Vale Cottage and floated with a refreshing sweetness among the trailing vines and gently swaying, flower-laden branches, which hid from view the hammock and its occupant. Her mother had been relating to her again the story of her early life, telling her of the sad, sweet memories of husband and son, who had been hers only those few, short, happy years, and which were still so dear to her; and as Grace watched the trim, dark figure disappear on the opposite side of the flowery wall, she dropped her embroidery and with eager, happy eyes, gazed after her. After all, was there not a ray of brightness gleaming out before them in the future? Was there not a strange, bewildering happiness in store for them?—and when that time should come, would their love and joy ever cease to shine?—would it ever grow dim by the shadow of time? She leaned forward, her face glowing and flushed. Oh, how she longed to tell her mother of her joyous hopes; how she longed to whisper to her the secret, which, after all, might prove untrue. And if it did—the brightness of the future would vanish; life would continue at Vale Cottage as it had during the year past—and how much longer, she did not ask—but it must be true; how could it be otherwise? How many hours she had spent puzzling over it, wondering if that joyful hour would ever come, and after each spell of pondering she would reach the same conclusion—it must be true.

The mother, who never for a moment guessed that Grace held from her a secret, hidden deep in the heart, which had given the promise quite sacred to her, was again busy with her sewing in the little sitting-room; and sinking back with her cheek pillowed on one hand, Grace held back the surrounding branches with the other, but the green and red of the crimson Rambler

shaded the window, past which she was sure her mother's chair was swaying. Her hand slipped from the magnolia branch and the big white petals shattered down from above. How beautiful, how fragrant they were; and slowly gathering them up she recalled, vividly, the days when, as a little girl, she had played about the rose-covered cottage, tripping along the garden paths, gathering up petals like these, and standing on tip-toe to reach the swaying blossoms. How much had passed since then. How much of sorrow and joy—and yet, how much like the old life was the life they were living—with the same sweet, peaceful freedom—nothing to mar the days of pleasure, save the memories of the past. And that past—had it been less sad for her than for her mother during her early life? Had not the deepest sorrow of her mother's life overshadowed her own? But now, after the years of life at Roselin, filled mostly with bitter tears of sorrow, should she not forget the bitterness of the past and live only in the peaceful present, eagerly hoping for the brightness of the future? And with her embroidery forgotten, she lay dreamily reviewing the days since last she looked upon Roselin. How sadly had her heart ached then, as in the darkness and sorrow of that hour of false accusation, she had stood looking up at the house, gleaming and white in the moonlight, and then slowly turned from the place which, for almost seven years, had been her home. Could she ever forget that hour? How many memories Roselin held for her!—how many sad hours had she spent there—the saddest of her life—but it also held memories, tender and loving, and sacred to her. How Roselin must have changed since then! The doors were closed; the servants were gone, and the place was silent; but the roses were blooming there—yellow, red, pink, and white—it must be Roselin still, but how different!

Things had changed for Genevieve, too—Genevieve who had comforted her sad, lonely heart in the early dawning of the day, when she had gone to Baltimore for her sympathy. Her mother had come to her there; and how gladly had she thrown herself into her loving arms and sobbed out a part of the story, whispering to her of the morning in the little sitting-room, when Llewellyn Greymore had given her the rubies, to keep until he should reveal to her a secret which fully justified

him in presenting her with the gift. "He would be compelled to tell me his secret then, he said, if I persisted in refusing the necklace; and, mamma, could I have listened to a secret which he wished me not to know—which he promised to tell me when the proper time should come? How could I refuse Llewellyn Greymore what he asked? But you do not know Llewellyn—you have never seen him—or you would know how impossible it was for me to refuse," she had explained; and as her mother kissed her flushed, tear-stained face, she had added: "and how I wish you could know him!"

Her mother had asked for no other explanation; she was satisfied, for she knew that Grace had told her the truth—never had she doubted her, and she could not doubt her then—but she often wondered what Llewellyn's secret could have been. Why had he not told Grace then? Why should he wait; why should he wish to give her a jewel so expensive? Was it only friendship which had prompted that act, or was it something deeper? Why had his engagement with Lillian been broken? Lillian had told her that Llewellyn was not to be hers. Had Grace quite unwittingly come between them; had she won his love; was that the secret he could not tell her? Yes, it must be so, she had decided over and over again.

But Grace had heard the secret—heard it from Llewellyn's lips—and though she had found it necessary to tell her mother the story of the rubies, she could not reveal to her that which she had so faithfully promised to keep to herself. She had told her mother all she herself had known at the time the necklace had been received, and yet she had kept her promise to Llewellyn.

But even at Vale Cottage the feeling of that false accusation had pressed heavily upon her; then the rubies had come from Lillian, and the load had been lifted. Never for a moment had they considered returning to Roselin; Vale Cottage was far more dear. Here almost a year had passed, but the quiet peacefulness of the little home had seldom been broken.

During the days when her mother had been at Roselin, at Mr. Allington's bedside, she had been left alone with Delia; then the days had been long and dreary, but they had at last passed; her mother had returned, telling her of Lillian,

Wilma, Mrs. Carrelton and Marie, and of Willard's promise. Almost three months had passed since Marie had become his wife and she wondered what his life was now. Now and then a letter came from Lillian, always addressed to her mother, but she told nothing of the life at Lakeview; letters came from Genevieve, in Baltimore, and from Donald Delmar, but never a word from Llewellyn. For a time, she had felt the pain of disappointment because he did not write; but how should he know that she had left Roselin? How should he know of the trouble his precious gift had caused her? She had heard no word from him since that night when he had told her his secret. Quite suddenly had he left Roselin on the day following—and why? She could not tell. He had asked for her Ellen had said, but she had been unable to find her and Llewellyn had gone without her knowledge; gone from Roselin, leaving for her, only a hastily written note of good-bye. Was it the broken engagement which had sent him so hastily from Roselin? Why had she heard nothing of it during the weeks she had remained there? Why had Llewellyn not told her that Lillian was lost to him; but perhaps, after all, it was something else that had taken him back to Chicago. Her mother had not heard his name during her stay in Boston, and to Grace the cause of that broken engagement remained a mystery. But Llewellyn—when would he ever write; when should she ever see him?

Slowly she took up her embroidery, but her thoughts still lingered with Llewellyn, until a step sounded on the walk; the drooping magnolia branches parted; the glow of the sinking sun streamed across the hammock, and Grace started:

“Dale!” she exclaimed, as the green and white branches closed behind Dale Clinton. “How you surprised me; I had not expected you this evening.”

“I know you were not expecting me, but I thought perhaps you would not mind. I attempted to call you from New Orleans, but I found it impossible as there was something wrong with the lines out this way. Pardon me, Grace, for taking this privilege.”

Dale bowed exceedingly low before her as he finished his hurried explanation.

"Oh! Not that I am sorry you came!" she exclaimed, cordially.

"Thank you, Miss Grace; but I fancy I interrupted a solitary reverie when I came so unceremoniously upon this pretty little scene."

"Yes, I was dreaming of our northern friends when the sound of your step awakened me," she said, ignoring the compliment he had paid her.

"'Northern friends,'" he repeated. "Well! My thoughts were far remote from them; although I often recall the days of last summer's house party. Of whose memory did your dreaming mostly consist?" he laughingly continued.

"Of Lillian; of Willard; of Llewellyn—of them all, in fact," she returned.

"Lillian; Willard; Llewellyn," he slowly repeated, his brow clouding as he recalled the night when he had found Llewellyn leaning against the marble mantel at Roselin, softly, almost inaudibly, breathing Grace's name. His eyes looked straight into hers; "And had you no thought of me, Grace?"

"I hardly associate you with memories of the past—memories of Roselin—you are connected with more recent events."

"Then you dream of a past in which I have no place."

His eyes fell from her face to the magnolia petals in her lap.

"You forget, Dale, that those of whom I dream have passed out of my life, while you—you are of the present."

"Yes, I understand; but do you expect them always to remain out of your life?" His eyes came slowly back to her face.

"I cannot say, I assure you; I always hope to meet again with true friends; though sometimes our wishes are not fulfilled."

"True," he returned; "but let me make a prophecy for the future; you will at least meet again with one of those friends of the past."

Grace looked wonderingly at him, a look of puzzled astonishment gleaming in the brown eyes. "Now that you have begun prophesying for the future, will you please continue?"

She stretched her hand toward him, palm upward. "Tell me which one it will be."

He took her hand and, for a moment, gazed at it thoughtfully; then his eyes, with their old mischievous, laughing expression, went back to her face.

"Really, Grace," he exclaimed, "I am no fortune teller, consequently I think it wise to keep my prophecy to myself."

"As you like," said she, drawing her hand away; "I was becoming quite interested; I wish you would continue."

"I should gladly continue to hold your hand, if you would permit."

"Indeed, no!" Grace returned icily; and Dale could not refrain from laughter.

"I shall get down on my knees and ask for pardon, Grace, if you request it!" he exclaimed; and with a graceful toss of her head, a slight wave of her hand, she replied:

"Oh, no, you need not trouble yourself; that is quite unnecessary."

"Thank you; though seriously, Grace, I would do anything to gain your good opinion." The expression of his face had changed; his black eyes looked straight into her face, and beneath that earnest gaze, her own drooped and her cheeks grew scarlet. "But you know, better than myself, Grace, how utterly I fail," he continued.

She looked up quickly.

"I cannot understand you today, Dale; has something gone wrong at the office; is Mr. Van Brunt gone for a second vacation, that the Junior Mr. Clinton—usually so congenial—should be in such a mood?"

"Oh, no—not that—it is really nothing, Grace," he assured her, and again he assumed his old mischievous air.

But deep in his heart, it was not, as Dale Clinton said, "really nothing"; it was the sudden and startling thought that Grace had been thinking, dreaming, of Llewellyn. Once he had found Llewellyn dreaming—unseen, unheard, he had slipped from the room—but the memory of that picture—of that whispered name—had lingered with him and, for a time, had crushed his greatest hope—the hope that Grace Wilton would, in time, be his. But if Llewellyn loved her—as he surely did—could there be the slightest hope of winning? No! No! Grace

would be lost to him; for he felt that Llewellyn's friendship was valued, while his—his love would be ignored. Then Llewellyn had gone back to Chicago and Dale to his southern home. He had scarcely seen Grace during the latter part of his stay; and during the days and weeks which had followed, he had wondered how much Grace knew of his real feelings—how much she knew of Llewellyn's love. But no word had come from the north, no word from Willard, until the letter which had told him that Grace and her mother were at Vale Cottage, in Western Springs, only a few miles from New Orleans; then his surprise, his pleasure, had been unequalled, and during his frequent visits at the cottage, he had almost forgotten that another had ever loved Grace Wilton.

He was always cordially welcomed by Mrs. Allington, who from the first had considered him a true friend. In early years she had been personally acquainted with both his father and mother, and during the months which had passed, she had become warmly attached to Dale. With Grace it was different. Though she always gladly welcomed him—though she seemed, always, happily contented, she gave him only a firm, true friendship, and if she felt for him anything deeper than a real liking, it was carefully hidden and neither her mother nor Dale could detect it. But Dale was satisfied—satisfied to be her friend. "Friendship like hers has often turned to love," he would repeat to himself; but now, when he found her dreaming of Llewellyn—Llewellyn whose name was seldom mentioned between them—all was changed, and again it seemed that Grace was lost—lost to him and gained for Llewellyn.

CHAPTER XLI

CHESTER COLLINS' LOVE

FOR a time we will leave Vale Cottage and go back to the north—back to Baltimore—where Genevieve spent day after day at the office, where gladly, happily, diligently, she had worked for over four long years. Long years had they been? As she looked back to the day when first she had stood on the steps at the Moreland Place, when first she had entered the University, bent on gaining the knowledge for which she longed, it seemed but a day since she had first entered that office; yet how much had passed since then; how many changes had taken place all around her. Yes, she herself had changed—changed from a bright young school-girl of nineteen years, just entering college, to a woman of twenty-four—a business woman, with only a business life before her. Once, she believed she had been loved—how long ago that was! Four years since then?—ah, no; only a year had passed since Willard loved her. He had loved again and wedded since then, while she—her heart melted by its first love, no other love could mold it. She had loved and lost.

Genevieve Layton did not pine long over that which she knew was lost; she forgot the lost amid thoughts of what might be gained. She did not surrender her every hope for the future; though her life was changed, the future was still bright. For what had she been striving? Had not her supreme hope been to gain the education which would put her in her rightful place in the business world? Was not that the thing for which she had been working?—for which she had always hoped? For only a short time it had seemed her life had swerved into a new channel—that was when she had first learned that she loved and was loved. Then suddenly she found the same path leading out before her—the path over which she had so often, in imaginary dreamings, traversed—and now, why should it be less brilliant than she had at first

hoped? Was it not what she had planned for herself before she had thought of love? Why should her life be changed? Why should she be so selfish? If Willard loved—truly and devotedly loved another—could she wish for his life to be changed that hers might be made brighter? No; that greater brightness—the brightness and ardor of love were for Willard, for Marie; they were not to be hers. Willard had loved Marie and now she was his wife—his wife—how wildly Genevieve's heart throbbed as she repeated: "Marie Carrelton—Marie Allington—Willard's wife—Willard's wife, and he loves her—yes he loves her and I am forgotten;" and, alone in the office, her head sank down upon the desk and almost instantly tears hung tremblingly on her lashes. The moment before, she would have tossed her head indignantly, dashed them from her eyes and turned resolutely to her work, but now one after another they dropped upon her folded arms and vivid memories crowded her brain.

One year since she had seen him; one year since she had heard his voice, but his loving tones, his tender accents, seemed to sound again in the silence. He had not loved Marie then; no, he had not loved Marie. But guilt—false accused guilt—had fallen upon her since then, had come between her and Willard's love—yes, Wilma's rubies had come between them—had separated them forever. But how tenderly, how earnestly he had said, "Yes, Genevieve, I do believe you innocent;" but his love had failed—yes, his love had failed—regardless of those words. He had added, "I must go now but I shall see you later;" but she had gone—gone back to Baltimore and he had not seen her. No word had come from him since then; she had been proven innocent—the guilt transferred to another equally as innocent as herself—but still no word had come from Willard. For a time she had forgotten her own sorrows while she comforted Grace. Grace could tell her little of Willard; little of Lillian; little of anything save her own sad life, but Genevieve's understanding had been perfect and she had listened and soothed to the best of her ability, wondering upon whom the guilt would at last fall. Then months had passed, with letters coming frequently from Lillian—first from Roselin, from the seashore and then from Boston. The letters from Roselin

told that Willard had gone west and of her own failing health; from the seashore came the news of Willard's return, with little bits of teasing phrases directed toward Genevieve and her brother. These had pleased and puzzled Genevieve; then came the letter from Wilma. Willard had loved another and wished to be free from the weak, trivial bonds which had bound them. Yes, how trivial were those bonds. Yet Willard had shrunk from asking that which his sister had asked for him. It was only a slender thread to be broken and she had broken it in order that his wedded life might be happy. The past had seemed but a faded dream, the future a vague reality.

But Willard had made no reply to her letter—the letter over which she had pondered for days and weeks, wondering what her words should be—wondering if Wilma had written truthfully, and trying, with sheer resolutions, to crush her emotions—the emotions which struggled to rule supremely. That they should not rule she had been determined and at last she had conquered—conquered her heart, her love, and she had written that note—short and cold—but she could truthfully assure him that she was only his friend. “Only a friend,” she had repeated; “yes, for his dear sake, I shall be only a friend and God will help me.” Then she had sent back the picture he had painted for her. How much that picture had been to her she did not know until after she realized that she must part with it. It had not only pictured to her that which had been lost during school days but that which might be gained in the future; but now all was lost and with tear-dimmed eyes she had watched, as it was carried from the room—the room left desolate without it.

Lillian's letters still came—came to lighten her burdens, to comfort and soothe her—but they did not contain the items of news which she most desired; the one most dear to her, was never mentioned. They told of the past, the present and the future, but it seemed that Willard had died with his father; his name was never penned, and save for the one sentence, “I am visiting at Lakeview with my brother,” Lillian's letters would have communicated nothing, so far as Willard was concerned. Over and over again Genevieve had read those

letters and she wondered if dear little Lillian had guessed the secret of her heart and had refrained from mentioning her brother's name rather than add another pain to the already aching heart of her friend. She had thought that no one knew; that no one could guess; but after all Lillian must understand. But, alas, Genevieve was mistaken. There was nothing more remote from Lillian's mind. She did not think that Genevieve loved her brother. To her he was a rejected lover—rejected, for what reason she did not know, nor would her pride permit her to ask. She could not be inquisitive, nor could she mention her brother's name to the girl who had refused him and who wrote nothing, asked nothing, about him. Had Genevieve known as much as Lillian knew of Willard's life, her heart would have broken; but she did not know—she could not guess—nor did she once suspect Wilma. She had not been intimately enough connected with Wilma Allington's daily life to understand the unscrupulous nature which lay beneath the cold outward sharpness. But Lillian was as ignorant of the real facts—as much deceived—as was Genevieve herself. Wilma alone knew who had won the victory. She had guided her brother's steps in the way she had wished them to go. But after all a part of the victory was lost, for Marie had been a penniless bride.

That Wilma influenced Willard, Genevieve knew; she knew too that she would not shrink from deceit, but that she would undertake a plan so great—that she would so greatly sin—Genevieve did not suspect, and she did not doubt but that Willard's wife was loved.

“It is wrong—it is wrong—to wish for that which rightfully belongs to Marie. I have no right to her husband's love—no right to a place in his thoughts; I am wholly a business woman—nothing but a business woman. That is my destined future and I must be content!” she exclaimed at last, shaking off the thoughts of the past and resuming her work.

This was not the first battle Genevieve had fought and won in her own heart, and ere Mr. Carlson and Mr. Collins returned, the smiles were again playing about her mouth, and her eyes were sparkling and bright. Unobserved, except by the older man, Chester Collins stood looking at her. Her head,

bent gracefully, rested on her hand, her elbow on the desk, and the white, tailored cuff had slipped back, showing her wrist, round and white; her fingers threaded the glossy brown hair, and her brain was pondering over the words beneath her pen. She knew that Mr. Collins stood near her—a step seldom sounded in the office that Genevieve did not hear—but she had no thought of him. Her mind was bent upon her work. She was wholly a business woman—how sweet, how pure, how beautiful, and how different from many of the business women of the world.

“As unfitted to the life she lives as a tropical plant to the sharp, bleak winds of the north,” Chester Collins thought, and turned slowly to his desk—not to study and work, but to dream of Genevieve, who sat at the desk opposite.

Mr. Carlson leaned back in his chair, looked over the top of his paper and glanced from one to the other. Chester’s whole attitude was changed; the firm, resolute air of business had vanished and he gazed vacantly into space. Was this the same man who had entered the office with him only half an hour before?—alive to the slightest incident connected with the firm? But Mr. Carlson understood his mood perfectly; he understood the look of passionate tenderness he had bent upon Genevieve, and again he turned to look at her. She had completed her work and instantly her eyes met his.

“Is there any other business you wish me to attend to now, Mr. Carlson?” she asked, in a strictly business-like tone, and though his manner puzzled her, she looked him squarely in the face as his eyes were raised from the paper, to which they had fallen.

After a moment’s thought he replied in the negative, and she was about to continue, when Chester Collins turned about in his chair and faced them.

“Have you any arrangements for vacation, Miss Layton; have you spoken to Mr. Carlson on the subject?” He leaned his head carelessly back on his hands and looked at her.

“No sir, I have not; but that was the subject on which I was only hesitating to speak. I dislike asking for a vacation at a time when I am needed here, but if you think this a suitable time, I should prefer taking my vacation next week—I feel that I need the rest,” she added.

"Yes, yes; you must have a vacation—no doubt about that—I had almost forgotten that we have kept you continually engaged all summer long, when you should have had a vacation weeks ago—weeks ago! and here you are, still working," Mr. Carlson said, thoughtfully. "You are faithful, Miss Genevieve—more faithful than any of our employes before you. Certainly; take your vacation any time you wish, aye, Chester?"

"That is exactly what I was going to suggest, Mr. Carlson, and as Miss Genevieve has so patiently given up the summer vacation and waited until so late, I think we may trust to her judgment as to the length of her vacation—providing, of course, that she be reasonable." Chester Collins smiled.

"Yes, yes, take as long as you like, Miss Genevieve. I agree with you—you need the rest—and you are deserving of more than we give you."

"Thank you, Mr. Carlson; thank you, Mr. Collins; it is kind of you indeed to give me so much freedom. No one could appreciate it more than I do."

Her eyes were sparkling, her face glowing, when she left the office, after making all the necessary preparations for her absence. Quite by accident, it seemed, Chester Collins was leaving at the same time and for a moment they stood together on the office steps; then she turned toward the Moreland Place, and much to her surprise, Mr. Collins walked beside her. He seemed lost in thought and she did not disturb him.

"I'm going to make a suggestion, Miss Genevieve," he said at last. "Tetrazzini sings tonight; I have tickets for the concert and I am at your service. Would you not like to hear her?"

"Tetrazzini!" she exclaimed. "Yes, I should like to hear her!" Mr. Collins' face brightened for a moment, but she continued: "I can hardly think of going, Mr. Collins; as it is, I must make hurried preparations for my journey home."

He interrupted her:

"You refuse me all these little things I would do for you," he said, impatiently. "Miss Genevieve, you will accept nothing from me; 'tis a wonder you do not refuse your vacation, seeing that it came from my suggestion."

"Indeed, Mr. Collins, I trust you do not think that I fail

to appreciate your thoughtful kindness; forgive me if I seem ungrateful."

"No, it is not that you are ungrateful. If you were less grateful you would refuse nothing; as it is you refuse everything—accept nothing." His voice was low; his words came slowly. Genevieve looked wondering up at him; his face was stern and drawn and the deep lines of a frown showed plainly on his brow. She had never seen him look like this and instantly she was sorry for her decision, but she made no reply until they reached the Moreland Place.

"Are you fully resolved not to hear Tetrizzini tonight?" he asked.

"I should be sorry to refuse; perhaps I can manage it. Yes, I will go," said she.

An hour later she was busy about her room, forgetful of her toilet when the maid came to her door and handed her a small package. "A gentleman brought it for Miss Layton," she remarked.

It was a violet box, tied securely with violet ribbon, and as the wrapper fell from it, the fragrant perfume of violets came from within. Excitedly she lifted the lid and there lay a beautiful bunch of the purple flowers, dainty, fragrant, and fresh. She took them in her hand and held them up before her, uttering a joyful exclamation of surprise.

"From Mr. Collins, I am sure!" she exclaimed. "It is lovely of him to think of it! Flowers to wear to the concert!" Her expression changed; she laid the violets back in their box. "I doubt if I should have allowed him the privilege, myself the pleasure, of going tonight."

This was not the first time flowers had come from Mr. Collins, but never before had they been violets; never before had they been intended for her to wear, and with a strange feeling of resentment, she arranged her toilet; and as she stood before the mirror she whispered softly to herself:

"Yes, I shall wear violets tonight, when I hear Tetrizzini. Willard always loved them, and I've heard him speak of Tetrizzini; yes he always loved the little purple violets."

The auditorium was almost filled when Genevieve and Mr. Collins entered the theater and followed the usher to their

places. The orchestra was playing and the mingled murmur of voices sounded unceasingly. Genevieve sat looking about her, idly straightening a crumpled leaf of the violets which lay against the soft, snowy whiteness of her gown. Her light cloak was thrown back, her chin slightly elevated, her eyes carelessly wandering from one box to another. Many of them were as yet unoccupied and she turned again to her escort.

"My violets are beautiful, Mr. Collins; how thoughtful and kind of you to send them."

Her tone was unchanged; it still contained the air of business, which she always used when speaking to either of her employers. Although Chester Collins was her escort, her friend and—as he had often times acknowledged to himself—her lover, her voice continually reminded him that their companionship, their friendship, was that of employer and employe.

"You like violets then, Miss Genevieve? I was at a loss to know what to send, for I have never known your favorite flower."

"I'm glad you sent violets; I love them," she said, and her voice was suddenly changed; soft, sweet and thrilling it was. Mr. Collins did not understand.

As he had finished speaking, a party had entered one of the boxes at the right. Genevieve had observed them; a gentleman and two ladies—one middle-aged, clad in a gown glittering with jewels; the other, short, plump, fair-haired and young, wearing a cloak of glimmering satin. The man's back was toward Genevieve, but he was tall, his hair was black. He stooped, placed the cloak he carried over the back of a chair and turned to his wife—yes, his wife. He bent over her—lovingly, it seemed to Genevieve—assisted her to remove her cloak, and gently drew a spangled scarf about her shoulders—it was a cool evening near the middle of September—the pale lavender bodice was cut low and a sparkling necklace of diamonds interlaced with satiny pearls lay against the smooth, white throat. The man drew his chair quite close to hers and leaned forward.

From her place in the auditorium, almost on a level with the box, Genevieve could see his face distinctly. She could hardly recognize it to be Willard Allington's—the one which leaned

over the golden balustrade viewing the sea of people below him—it was changed; yes, it was changed. The first glimpse she had caught of his stately form, in the box, she had recognized him, but now, she almost doubted; then his eyes almost met hers; her face flushed; her lip trembled and her eyes drooped. Yes, it was Willard Allington, but his searching eyes had wandered past her; she had not been observed.

She did not dare to look in that direction now, and she sat silently, until the first notes of Tetrizzini's voice floated out over the now breathless audience. They fell upon her ears as upon one in a dream and brought her back abruptly to her surroundings. Chester Collins was at her side, listening intently to the superb voice of the singer.

Willard did not seem to hear the wonderful voice, the soft, sweet strains of the orchestra. His eyes were now fastened upon Genevieve with an eager, hungry expression which brought a glow, bright as a crimson geranium, to her cheeks and brow as she met it, but she looked at him long and earnestly. Neither wavered; they seemed to look deep into the very heart of the other. Willard leaned slightly forward—his face paled—his dark eyes were as sharp and glittering as polished steel—then with a quick breath, he turned away. He turned to Marie, with a sudden movement so like Wilma that a slight shudder ran over Genevieve; and the look he bent upon his wife seemed, at that distance, one of loving tenderness; his every attitude toward Marie seemed, to Genevieve, a silent caress, and sadly her eyes fell to the stage, and in another moment she was lost in rapt attention, as were all those about her.

She did not look again toward the box where Willard sat; but his chair was drawn a little back now, so he was observed by neither Marie nor her mother, and the former little dreamed that, all during the concert, her husband sat like a statue, gazing upon the hated face of Genevieve Layton, with a look so tender, so loving, so sad, that, had she seen it, it would have sent a bitter pang of jealousy to her heart.

The curtain went down for the last time; the concert was over; Mr. Collins turned to Genevieve. For some time he had been watching her. Her face, now calm, was bright and smiling; again she had fought the battle in her heart—though

neither of the men watching her had suspected it—again she had won.

Following her quick, careless glance, his eyes fell upon Willard and his companions.

“Upon my word! there’s Allington and his wife!”

“Yes,” was the careless reply, and her face showed no emotion.

“It is long since they were in Baltimore.”

“Not since the week of my graduation, I believe; Willard was here then, you remember.”

“Yes; I remember every incident connected with that commencement;” he hesitated. Genevieve did not reply, and he went on: “Willard has always been a good friend of mine—yours as well, Miss Genevieve—and, I do not doubt, will come to the office before they return home. I’m sorry you will not be there, for I’m sure his wife will expect to see you. I wish we could have caught Willard’s eye and we should have seen them tonight.”

“Yes,” Genevieve replied unhesitatingly, but she was glad for the covering darkness which hid her face from the view of her companion.

“They came purposely to hear Tetrazzini, I presume,” said she; then adroitly she changed the subject and began talking of Tetrazzini and her wonderful voice.

As Genevieve had said they came purposely to hear Tetrazzini, but above the desire to hear Tetrazzini was the longing desire to see Genevieve’s face once more. Had it not been for the frail hope of seeing her there, Willard would never have so readily consented to making the trip to Baltimore. Just one glimpse of her face, he felt, would tell him something of her life, and it did. She was with Chester Collins—if not her husband, her accepted lover at least, he thought—but in that instant when their eyes had met he felt that Wilma was not mistaken when she said Genevieve loved him. What was it that called that brilliant color to her cheeks? Was it love?—was it shame?—was it hatred? Her eyes seemed to send the former message; and there were the violets! That innocent cluster of purple seemed to say she loved him. A sudden thrill of something akin to gladness ran to his very finger tips; her gaze did not

waver; he turned away, and when next he looked at her, she seemed to have forgotten his very existence.

But he was not forgotten. Even when they reached the Moreland Place and stood on the stone steps—the full moon rising over the treetops, making lawn and veranda bright as day—Willard was not forgotten. The words Chester Collins murmured only brought his memory nearer—made it dearer.

“Genevieve, I have waited long and I am now decided to confide to you my dearest hope and secret,” he began; “though I doubt if, to you, it is a secret. I must tell you, Genevieve, how dear you are to me—how much your presence in the office has been to me—and how I love you! I have always loved you, shall always love you; and tell me, Genevieve, that when you go to your home on the morrow, you will go as my promised wife. Say you will, Genevieve, and I shall be happy.”

While he was speaking slowly, passionately, she stood as one petrified, her eyes riveted on his face—she did not move, and as he finished, he clasped her hands and drew her gently to him. She had no power to resist.

“Can you not learn to love me, Genevieve? Give me at least your promise; give me the privilege to continue loving you and I shall ask nothing in return. Four years I have loved and waited, and now say you will be mine,” he pleaded.

She looked up at him with a pitying gaze and drew herself from his loving embrace. “My dear Mr. Collins, I am sorry—so sorry you love me.”

Her eyes were shining with unshed tears. He longed to take her again in his arms but he dared not; his arms fell at his side.

“You wish I did not love you,” he said sadly; “then you mean that you cannot be mine? Oh, Genevieve, is that what you wish me to understand?”

“I mean that I am sorry that I ever came to Baltimore, Mr. Collins; sorry to give you cause for pain, but I cannot give you the promise you ask; my heart is not mine to give; oh, how I wish it were! My promise, Mr. Collins, could never make you happy; my heart is lost to another and the broken remnants of love will never give happiness to a man like you—you deserve something more.”

"But, Genevieve, I love you; I cannot be happy without you—I will make you forget you have ever loved—I will give you everything love and money can give. Come to me, Genevieve, and make me happy."

"No, Mr. Collins," she said firmly, "I can never make you happy; I can never be yours. I should do you wrong—do wrong to myself. I have told you the secret of my heart that you may be convinced; but I trust you, Mr. Collins, as I trust no other, save Mr. Carlson."

"Then I must believe that I have no hope?"

"No hope," she murmured; "no hope. I cannot come back to the office, Mr. Collins; I should only pain you by my continual presence there. We must part, Mr. Collins, but please let us part as friends."

He had turned as if to leave her but at her last words he turned back and clasped the hand outstretched to him.

"Yes, we will part as friends, Genevieve. I would give back your lost love if it were possible; I would make you happy if it were in my power, for believe me, Genevieve, I shall love you always."

"Forget me, Mr. Collins; for your own sake forget me," she advised; then briefly thanking him for the kindness of the past, she watched him depart, ran to her room and sank down upon the bed.

Long ago she had guessed Chester Collins' secret, but she had scarcely thought of it going thus far—she felt bewildered—she felt paralyzed—but she felt that she had done right. She had left the office never again to return. Her vacation was to be longer than she had imagined. She had suddenly dropped from the business world; love, position—everything was lost—the world seemed to be slipping from beneath her grasp—the room seemed to be swaying—she felt that she was fainting, and springing to the window she threw it open and leaned out. Memories of home rushed to her confused brain and all other thoughts fled. She was going home, and there was so much to be done, for she would not return—she was going from Baltimore, and before the first light of day crept over the city she had fallen asleep, with mingled dreams of Chester Collins, Willard and home.

The slanting rays of the sun streamed from the west when Genevieve reached the little brown cottage; she paused and looked at it—it was white now and the newly painted shutters were opened, gleaming green against the white—then suddenly the door opened and she threw herself into her mother's arms. This was home; this was comfort and rest.

At sunset she walked alone to Roselin. She looked at the unkept lawn and garden, the last of the summer's withered roses, the closely curtained windows, and with awe she listened, but the silence was unbroken. Everything was desolate and lonely and she turned away wondering if she were not, after all, happier than the family who had left Roselin thus desolate.

CHAPTER XLII

WILLARD AND MARIE

MATTERS had grown steadily worse at Lakeview, and while the autumn days were still warm and bright, the surrounding slopes still green as in the months of summer, Marie had grown tired of her quiet country home—tired of her husband's silent, dreamy moods and careless, distant manner—tired of the loneliness. The whole life had become irksome to her, and she longed for the society of Boston. At Lakeview, Willard's money lay idle and useless; in Boston it would give them what money alone could give—a place of honor amid the whirl of society, and that was what she most longed for. She had learned by daily association with him that her husband did not love her, nor had Wilma attempted to conceal that fact from her during the last days of her visit at Lakeview. She was surprised that the knowledge gave her so little pain. She had loved Willard—loved him for himself and for the sake of his wealth and position—she thought she loved him still, but so long as he was hers, and she could share his fortune and name, other things mattered little to her; so once more settled in Boston, occupying her former place in society, she did not ask for even a husband's love to make her happy.

Gayly she danced and mercilessly she flirted. To Willard this was a new phase of Marie's character and it puzzled and annoyed him. The girl he had married was as far from being a coquette as any he had ever known. Marie Carrelton had never been the flirt Marie Allington—his wife—was fast proving herself to be. But it was because she hoped to gain favor in his opinion that she had refrained; now that he was her husband and she found none save her mother's love at home, there was no longer a reason for retaining the distant, dignified manner she had hitherto assumed toward the other men of her circle.

All through his life the word coquette had held for Wil-

lard a certain horror, and now his wife had lost the only thing for which he could admire her. The society world was bowing at her feet but her husband stood aloof. He shuddered as he watched her dancing, singing, playing, babbling to those about her. He never felt a thrill of pride except when he heard someone say: "She is beautiful;" then on rare occasions, he felt a faint gleam of pride in saying: "She is my wife;" for, indeed, Marie Allington was beautiful in the silks and jewels with which her husband's money arrayed her.

Yes, she was his wife; she bore his name, and as he watched group after group of her admirers gather around her—saw the caressing, approving smiles her mother cast upon her—a feeling of horror seemed clutching at his heart and passionately he turned to the wine glass, sparkling and red. There he sought comfort—there he found it—and while his wife rushed madly on with the tide of society, he sank lower and lower in sin. No invitations were refused now, and night after night was spent at the clubs and the houses where the young men of society met alone. There was no restraint there, and he rapidly fell into the ways of his companions. Drink had a strange, though powerful effect upon him. When under its influence the memory of Genevieve rarely came to him; Marie, unless in his presence, was forgotten, and life became a pleasure. He appeared more like his former self. Without wine and champagne he could not paint; without them he could do nothing worth doing; without them he could scarcely be civil to his wife. Horror and disgust seemed to fill his very soul as he watched Marie and her train of admirers; the world seemed to him only an emblem of deceit and himself the most miserable of men.

Deceiving as others strove to deceive, Willard Allington had not yet lost the respect of those around him. They scarcely paused to realize the cause of his changed manner, but to the greater part of society he was more attractive, his manner more pleasing than during the previous winter, when as the escort of his fiancée—the wealthy Marie Carrelton—he had been silent, distant and dignified; and many remarked as they looked from one to the other: "What a grand match it is—Mrs. Allington so beautiful and he so handsome and attractive. They

are well suited to each other; and no other than Willard Allington would willingly stand by and hear and see his wife thus flattered by other gentlemen; he seems to care little. It is well that she has him for her husband, for nothing is so fascinating to Marie as the life she is living."

Both Wilma and Lillian were visiting an aunt in a distant city and, happily for them, knew nothing of their brother's life in society. Often he longed for Lillian; he sometimes felt that he could tell her everything and ask her to help him; then again he felt that he would shrink before her pure, innocent face and clear, scrutinizing gaze. He would need to tell her nothing; she would guess it all.

Alone in the studio, when free from the influence of wine, he would often pace up and down the room for hours at a time or sit gazing at the painting he had made of Genevieve years before. The picture Genevieve had returned hung behind a heavy curtain and he seldom looked at it. The door of the studio was always locked and Marie had never entered it—never looked upon that painting. Her time was taken up exclusively by society; she had little thought of her husband and his work.

Thus the winter passed and the first days of spring came.

One morning Willard, clad in his riding clothes, went to the studio for his whip, leaving the door slightly ajar, and turning about, he faced Marie.

"I saw you were ready for your ride, dear," she said unhesitatingly; "and I came to ask if you will go with me to the McGregor dinner tonight; it is necessary for you to tell me now."

She glanced about the room as she spoke—Genevieve's picture lay, face downward, on the table.

"Yes, yes, I will go," he answered impatiently, and holding open the door, motioned her to pass.

"I think I shall stay here," she said softly, sweetly, and noting his look of annoyance, she continued: "you see, Willard, it has been so long since I saw your paintings and I'm determined to take the time now. I have been so occupied during the months past; I know you can forgive me."

Willard could easily have forgiven her for neglecting his

studio and paintings in the past, had she been less determined now. He hesitated:

"Come, Marie," he said; "my horse is ready and waiting; I will show you the paintings when neither of us have an engagement; I must be off now."

"Oh, indeed! I shall not detain you; go on for your ride!" she exclaimed. "I assure you, I shall be perfectly contented here. You are so thoroughly satisfied when left alone here, I can certainly entertain myself for a few short hours." She looked piercingly at him and her voice assumed an accent of scorn; he moved uneasily; then she turned and glanced along the row of paintings hung along the wall. "Which is the most interesting of your pictures, Willard? Tell me before you go," she said gayly.

Willard had no intention of going now, and sitting down in the nearest chair, striking his riding whip sharply across his boot he replied:

"Every one's opinion does not correspond with that of the artist; I dare say that the painting which interests me would be of no interest whatever to you."

Quickly she turned to him: "And tell me, please, which of them is your favorite? I shall attempt to be interested in it, dear."

Again there was a touch of scorn in her tone and the last word sank deep. Willard was fast losing his temper. He arose:

"I'll tell you, Marie," he said firmly, "if you have the least respect for my opinion you will come with me at once and leave the pictures for some other time; I tell you I must go."

"Go!" she exclaimed. "I have never before attempted to enter this room—you have not wished it—you need not strive to deceive me, Willard—you do not wish to trust me here—your paintings are far too precious for your wife to gaze upon, without the artist by her side—you may stay or you may go, as you like, dear—I am here—here I shall stay."

He stood dumbly staring at her.

"Oh, you need not be so surprised!" she exclaimed.

"Indeed, Marie, you have never before evinced so great an interest in my studio; you have scarcely mentioned it; why should you so suddenly become determined to take an interest?"

"Are you not glad to have your wife interested in your work?"

"Ah, Marie, interested in society!" he exclaimed. "It is not a year since we went to Lakeview—when I painted your picture, then you were interested, but now—now—what has possessed you?" he demanded.

She did not dare to say that she had given up the club the afternoon before to watch the door of the studio. Every time she had tried it she had found it locked—only the morning before, she had asked Willard's valet for the key and he had refused it—refused it!—but she was determined to enter the studio when she was not expected, and she had succeeded far more easily than she had anticipated. While he was speaking she leaned her elbow on the table and moved several of the sketches, and as he finished, her fingers touched Genevieve's painting. Willard did not move—he stood watching her as she slowly turned it over and her eyes met those of Genevieve Layton—the girl who had been her rival—the girl whom her husband loved.

"There, Willard, I know your secret!" she exclaimed, her voice hoarse with anger, her eyes dilated and black. "Because you feared this discovery, you attempted to persuade me from the room, but you have been foiled. 'Tis well for this portrait that it was discovered in the presence of its artist."

Willard, with arms folded, stood looking at her; his lip curled, but he was silent. His silence only increased her rage and she continued:

"Now that I've found the idol you worship, I do not wonder that you waste so much of your time here. You have forsaken your wife, Willard Allington, for the painting of the girl you love—yes, I have always known that you loved her, but I did not think you guilty of this—hiding from your wife, who has a right to claim all your love, a picture of a girl unworthy of my thought, but who has robbed me of my husband's love. I would that I could burn it as I did that note years ago, and I may yet succeed. Genevieve Layton's picture will leave your studio when Marie Allington—your wife—goes from it."

She looked defiantly at him.

"You will give me back your love, Willard Allington, or this picture is mine, and you dare not touch me."

The picture was clasped tightly in her hands and she moved resolutely toward the door. Willard made no reply but quickly stepped before her, turned the key and dropped it into his pocket. He turned to her with a look equally as resolute as her own.

"Marie Allington—my wife—must stay here always then," he said, slowly; carelessly he dropped into a chair and leaned back as he finished; "for the picture she holds is not going from the room and I cannot tell my wife that I love her."

His quiet manner annoyed her more than violent rage would have done.

"I shall crush it before your eyes if you do not open that door!" she exclaimed, and quickly she raised it above the chair, whose wooden back would, in another instant, have penetrated the canvas.

"How dared you!" she gasped, as she felt her grasp violently loosened.

"How dared you!" he muttered, almost simultaneously.

"You have a few things to explain before you leave this room, Marie," he continued, vainly trying to compose himself. "Sit down," he commanded, pushing a chair toward her. She obeyed and he went on: "You know, Marie, I never told you I loved you—I could not say it truthfully—you have not lost my love—you never gained it. You have known it from the first."

"Yes; yes, I've known it, but I thought you had forgotten Genevieve. You have been deceiving me—silently, secretly painting her portrait that you might not forget her, that you might not learn to love your wife."

"You are mistaken; you do me a wrong. You should know that this picture is not a recent likeness; the brush has not touched it since you became my wife. The painting there," he pointed toward the corner easel, "is curtained that I may forget her."

"I wish never again to hear her name—I hate her!" she exclaimed angrily. Rising, she drew the curtain from the paint-

ing and instantly recognizing the characters it represented, she turned swiftly toward him.

"Open that door, Willard; you will be sorry if you keep me here longer!"

"You can certainly entertain yourself here for a few short hours, Marie," he repeated mockingly.

"Alone, yes; with you, never! Leave me alone and I shall be entertained!" she exclaimed, madly gesticulating.

"One other thing, Marie, and you may go. You spoke, a moment ago, of a note;" he paused, and looked piercingly at her. Her face flushed crimson and she moved forward.

"Do you refuse to unlock that door, Willard?"

"I do," he returned.

"Very well, I can wait," was the reply, and she ignored the questions which followed. She had hoped that the mention of the note had been forgotten during the conversation, but she found Willard quite determined. At last he laid his hand on her arm with a firm grasp.

"Marie, will you not answer me? Tell me; you say it was a note you burned—by whom, to whom, was it written? Explain yourself, Marie, or you may be sorry for what you said."

His face was calm, his voice low, but it had in it a tone of command.

"You have no authority to command me to explain, Willard, but it is a deed for which I have no regret—if it were today, under the same circumstances, I should play the same part. If you are so anxious to learn the facts I can gladly tell you. Genevieve Layton wrote to you, asking forgiveness for accepting Chester Collins as her escort. She left it in your room and there I found it. I read it; I burned it; and I am glad!"

Her figure seemed to have grown in height; her eyes were flashing.

"You burned it, Marie? How could you! Though months afterwards I learned its contents, it might have changed my future," he said, bitterly.

"And mine," she murmured with an air of contentment. "Now if your wish is gratified, you will open the door."

"I never suspected you, Marie; I thought better things of

you," he went on, then paused and finished weakly: "But you are my wife."

His voice was mingled with anger and sadness, and as she passed him she exclaimed triumphantly:

"Yes, I am your wife!"

She was gone, and forgetful of the waiting groom, his head sank upon the table and he groaned aloud. After all, how many times had he been deceived; how many things had come between him and Genevieve—driving their paths farther and farther apart! As he thought of Marie's confession, something seemed to tell him that he had been deceived to the end—his eyes were only beginning to open—when would he see the light—when would he know why Genevieve had written so coldly in reply to his ardent appeal? The memory of that note which Marie had destroyed seemed to bring back to him Genevieve's love, blooming and fresh. It was his; she had loved him; she loved him still.

He did not know how long he had remained there—the sound of Marie's voice came to him from an upper room, happily warbling the notes of a song—he shuddered; she had forgotten the studio, the paintings, her husband and Genevieve—again she was happy in the thoughts of society—the one joy of her life. He was alone in his sorrow. Her clear, sweet voice warbled on; madly he rushed from the house. His horse stood restlessly pawing at the curbing. Grasping the rein he sprang into the saddle and dashed off—he cared not where the animal carried him.

Marie and her mother were leaving the dining-room as Willard entered it.

"I cannot attend the McGregor dinner tonight, Marie; I have made other arrangements which will prevent it. I shall order the carriage for you and your mother."

Mrs. Carrelton cast a bright, beaming smile upon him, and Marie replied:

"You need not trouble about the carriage; I have ample time to see about everything. I have rung for Mary; she will serve your lunch at once."

Silently, moodily, he sat in the spacious, sunny dining-room, alone, while Mary flitted noiselessly in and out. The room was

the picture of ease and comfort—large, bright and airy—but he felt that on all sides had arisen a dark wall, through which he could not penetrate. On the opposite side love was shining for him, but he could not reach it. He had kept a promise he should never have given—he had ruined his own life by accepting the mistaken guidance of his father—the father who had thought wealth could make him happy. But the wealth had not been gained; happiness had instantly vanished and, regardless of the money he received for his paintings, his fortune was fast slipping from him.

While Willard was dreamily finishing his lunch, Marie and her mother were in the midst of their arrangements for the McGregor dinner.

“I am delighted that Willard has other arrangements!” she exclaimed. “Lord Bonhuer is delightful, and at the theatre last evening he offered himself as my escort for tonight. He is splendid and the most congenial of companions. Indeed, I do not care to have my husband order the carriage for tonight; that honor I shall confer upon Lord Bonhuer,” she laughed. “I shall send a message to him at once if you are willing, mamma.”

“Indeed, my dear, send him your message by all means. I like him very well and if you admire him I could not think of depriving you of his companionship. He is very interesting and I think Willard would offer no objections so long as I accompany you.”

“Indeed, mamma, Willard shall have no opportunity to object. It is quite unnecessary to inform him of my every movement.”

“Certainly, dear, you know what is best,” Mrs. Carrelton replied, and glancing for a moment at the jewels her daughter had carelessly dropped into her lap, she murmured softly; “and I am glad you are happy, Marie.”

“Yes, mamma, without wealth I think I should die!” she exclaimed; “with it I can be happy, regardless of aught else.”

During the weeks which followed, Willard often heard his wife’s name linked with that of Lord Bonhuer. “Say, Allington, Lord Bonhuer is quite attentive to your wife,” his companions would frequently remark; “you should watch them more

closely than you do." But these remarks had no effect upon him. His manner was unchanged; he continued to join them in their nights of dissipation, and Lord Bonhuer was still unwatched. It mattered little to Willard what Marie did; she was as free to follow her desires as though her husband were in a foreign land.

Marie shrank from spending another summer at Lakeview. She detested its quiet freedom more thoroughly than ever before. Willard could do as he liked; she was fully resolved to spend a part of the summer at a summer resort, and when the first week of June came she and her mother departed for Atlantic City. At Willard's request, his sisters came, the week following, and he felt that the old life was renewed.

The first day in Boston told Lillian that her worst fears were realized; it brought before Wilma a dreadful truth which she had never before suspected. Their brother had wholly disregarded the lesson the father had so earnestly tried to teach. Had he whispered to him of the path of truth and virtue instead of marriage and wealth, Willard would not have been thus changed. In their hearts neither of the sisters could deny it—their father had unwittingly done wrong.

Louis Mandel was in the city and the greater part of Wilma's time was taken by various engagements, but Lillian was almost his constant companion. When he painted in the studio she sat silently by, busy with her embroidery; when he laid down his brush she would look up from her work with some remark as to the progress of the painting; when he left her for the evening she would follow him to the steps with a sweet, cheery good-bye, the memory of which lingered with him during the evening hours, and during his absence she silently prayed that he would be safely led past the temptations with which he was sure to meet. Before the balmy month of flowers and sunshine had passed he had realized the danger of the life he was living. Lillian's sweet, innocent presence had brought it vividly before him, and now and then he gave up a night "with the boys" to remain at home with his sisters.

One evening they were sitting on the veranda—Louis Mandel had joined them and they sat in the bright moonlight conversing—when the telephone bell rang violently. Lillian sprang

up and a moment later she called: "A telegram for you, Willard."

"From the fellow for whom I'm doing the painting, I suppose," he said, as he took the receiver from her hand; but the face which turned to her, the next moment, struck terror to her heart. To her anxious questions he only replied: "Let me think, Lillian; let me think! It cannot be true!"

It was a message from Mrs. Carrelton, telling him of the death of her daughter—his wife. Marie had met death quite suddenly, quite unexpectedly, while motoring near Atlantic City. His face was buried in his hands; he could not analyze his feelings; the shock was so great that he seemed suddenly paralyzed and for a time they strove in vain to ascertain the cause. He must go at once to the grieving mother; he must bring his wife back to her home, and with an effort he aroused himself; but as one in a trance he prepared for his journey—so sad, so unexpected.

Later it was learned that Marie had been motoring with Lord Bonhuer when the accident occurred. The car had been overturned—the chauffeur and Lord Bonhuer seriously injured—Marie Allington killed almost instantly.

The home in Boston was suddenly changed to deepest gloom—society mourned and wept. The bright, sparkling Marie was coming home; but how different from the home-coming she had expected when she had departed full of life and beauty.

Often, in the days following the funeral, Willard would say sadly to himself:

"Poor Marie; I am sorry she was my wife; with someone to love her she might have found more happiness in life. I wish the past could have been different."

CHAPTER XLIII

LLEWELLYN AT VALE COTTAGE

THE days of that summer were hot and dry—the smoke-laden atmosphere of Boston was almost intolerable. July and part of August passed, still Willard and his sisters lingered in the city. Lillian had grown quite strong again; her cheeks were full and rosy, her eyes bright; but there were new fears arising in her heart and she often looked anxiously from her brother's worn face to that of her sister. For many months her cheeks had been paling, her lips losing their brilliant hue, her step its tripping bouyancy. As the heat of the summer increased, racking headaches had confined her, day after day, to her room. Her face would sometimes flush crimson, then the color would die as quickly as it had come, leaving it whiter than before. Wilma never spoke of her failing health, but she complained continually of the heat.

Few invitations came now. The greater part of society's circle was spending the summer at fashionable resorts or at country homes; and at last, Wilma proposed going to Lakeview. To this Willard gave a solemn refusal. He would not go there; he had given Mrs. Carrelton the privilege of making Lakeview her home for the summer and coming winter. Now that she had no claim on his possessions, she had no other place to go. He would not go to Lakeview, and Lillian timidly suggested Roselin.

"No, I shall not go to Roselin," Wilma said, firmly, and with one glance at Willard, Lillian saw that she had spoken his sentiment. She had been mistaken in thinking of Roselin; Genevieve was at the cottage and, had Wilma consented, Willard could not have thought of going to Roselin.

It was not until the middle of August that they fully decided to leave Boston; then upon consulting a physician, Wilma was advised to leave the city. A trip through the west would greatly

benefit her, he said, and Willard, striving to forget that she had played an important part in the molding of his past life, willingly closed the doors of his home and accompanied her.

His face was thin and haggard, his eyes large and black, his breath seldom free from the odor of liquor, and Lillian felt that he, too, had much need of rest, and the fresh western breeze would be beneficial. Vainly she remonstrated with him on the subject of intemperance, but she hoped that getting away from the old companions would do much for him.

Carefully they planned the trip; Willard and Wilma were going over the Northern route through the Great Lake region to Chicago, then southward to St. Louis. They would stop at a number of places along the way and it would perhaps be several weeks before they reached St. Louis. There Lillian would join them. She was going south—to Vale Cottage. Both Mrs. Allington and Grace had written in the early spring, asking her to visit them, and now she had resolved to see Vale Cottage. Two years had passed since she had seen Grace—Grace who had taken Llewellyn from her—but she had long ago forgiven—she had almost forgotten that Grace had sinned; and now, while her brother and sister lingered along their northern route, she was going south, then up the river from New Orleans and join them on their journey further west.

The day previous to their departure she started on her way—stopping for a day at Roselin. Genevieve, who during the year, since she had left the “Carlson and Collins” office, had been at home helping her mother with the sewing and assisting Robert about the farm, warmly welcomed her to the cottage, and together they wandered slowly about the place.

“Roselin is still the dearest place to me, Genevieve,” Lillian said, as they sat down upon the step; “the happiest days I have known were spent here. I feel that I am almost a child again when I sit here and watch the birds and flowers. I can hardly realize that I am a woman of twenty-four, and you—you, Genevieve, twenty-five.”

“Yes, but the sweetness of childhood still lingers with you, Lillian, while I—I have lost all the beauty I once possessed.”

“Indeed, Genevieve, you have changed, but to me you are more beautiful than ever before,” was the sincere reply.

"I'm glad you can say it," Genevieve returned, faintly smiling. "But with Roselin changed, our little home seems strangely changed; I never suspected that it could make such a difference."

Lillian arose and looked up at the carelessly trailing vines; at the swaying, unkept roses above her; then at the closely curtained windows; and lastly out to the forsaken garden.

"Yes, Genevieve, the dear old place is sadly changed. I have always thought of Roselin with its well kept lawn, carefully trained vines and roses trimmed and tended. I have never thought of it in this condition—overgrown with grass and flowers and shrubs untrimmed."

Slowly they started down the path beside the lake, which, during the past year, Genevieve's feet had kept dimly outlined. All about it tall grass was waving. The margin of the lake was choked with tall, dank sedges, forming a green, rugged outline. The whole place had an appearance of desolation and neglect; and tears silently fell upon Lillian's cheeks, as they walked back to the cottage. They paused at the little brook, just back of the cottage, and for a time sat idly watching the clear babbling water, just as they had done in childhood.

"Will you not come to Boston some time and visit us, Genevieve?" Lillian asked at last, and as Genevieve hesitated she continued: "Please do not hesitate, Genevieve, because we are with Willard now; I think he considered your refusal in every way final; and I do want so much to have you visit me, dear. You will come when we return from the west, will you not?"

Genevieve's cheeks burned scarlet: "My refusal?" she asked simply, wonderingly, as Lillian's arm slipped about her waist.

"Yes; he considered it final; he was confident he could never win you before he married Marie—and now that she is gone, do not hesitate to visit us, Genevieve; if you refused him before he was married he would not think of striving to win you now."

Genevieve sat bewildered; when had she refused Willard? Lillian had been deceived! Dear, innocent Lillian believed her brother had asked her to be his wife and she had refused him! The memory of the lonely days when she had loved another's

husband, almost forced her to reveal the secret, but she uttered not a word—now that his wife was dead, now that he was free, he was as far from her as during the year past—he was still the husband of another. Lillian had been deceived!

“He never told me your reply to his letter, Genevieve,” Lillian went on; “but I saw by his face that you had refused him. Every hope of gaining you died then, I think; and you cannot imagine my disappointment when I knew that you were not to be my sister. When I knew he had written, I thought you would not refuse.”

“Refused, Lillian; I do not understand. I have never refused your brother; I have never received a letter from him since I went back to Baltimore, two years ago. I was charged with sin and guilt—he told me then, that he believed me innocent—but while you and your sister asked me to forgive and forget, he remained silent. You have been deceived, Lillian; I have had no word from him.”

It was Lillian who was now surprised and bewildered, and she gazed at her in dumb astonishment.

“It seems to me a strange mystery, Genevieve,” she gasped at last; “I know Willard wrote you while we were at the seashore, almost two years ago; I saw the sealed, addressed envelope with my own eyes. He held it up for my inspection, and said, the reply would make him happy—but he was disappointed, Genevieve, it made him sad. You wrote to him after he went to Boston did you not, Genevieve?”

“Yes; on request I wrote to him telling him he was free from the early ties which he felt still bound him by honor to me—though there was really nothing between us. I wrote nothing more, save to wish him happiness in his future life—I received no reply; only the account of his marriage to Marie reached me.”

“He asked you to release him from those ties, Genevieve?”

“No; *he* did not ask it, but he wished it.”

“He did not wish it!” Lillian declared emphatically. “I wish I knew who asked it.”

“It matters not, now—it cannot be changed,” Genevieve replied; “but you see, Lillian, how impossible it is for me to think of visiting you in Boston.”

“Yes, I understand, Genevieve; it is useless for me to insist.”

There were other reasons, too, why Genevieve could not visit Lillian; Wilma's and Willard's presence formed equal parts of the barricade between them. Wilma, who had so cruelly slighted her in the past—how would she receive her now? How scornfully had she ignored her in Baltimore; in Boston—in her brother's home—how much more haughty would she be? She had, perhaps, written falsely too, and Genevieve wondered if she could forgive the wrong she had done her. As she recalled the words of that letter she could almost detect its falseness—how adroitly had Wilma planned it—how smoothly was it written, how deceiving were those lines. Yes, Wilma had deceived her as Lillian had been deceived by Willard. Her opinion of Willard was unchanged—he had forgotten her—he had loved Marie and married her—she had died—but the future for her remained unchanged. She was going back to the business life and had already procured a position in Lowell for the winter, and that alone was ample excuse for not visiting Boston.

There were many things over which Lillian pondered as she sped southward. Why had Genevieve not received that letter? Who had told her that Willard wished to be released? How had it all happened? Did Genevieve really love him? Did she mean to say that she would not have refused? Her tone, her manner, had revealed nothing, but Lillian half believed she loved him.

A light rain had fallen when she reached Vale Cottage, and the southland was fresh and bright and beautiful. Mrs. Allington and Grace were quite cordial in their greeting and she felt that the weeks would pass quietly, smoothly and happily with them at Vale Cottage.

Days passed and there was no mention of Llewellyn and she began to wonder if he had deceived Grace, as she herself had been deceived. She had some times dreamed of Grace as the wife of Dr. Greymore, but Grace was still free, still bright and happy, with apparently no thought of Llewellyn. Perhaps, after all, he had proven himself false; and indeed Grace herself had begun to think Llewellyn false. It was two

years since he had left Roselin—two years since he had told her his secret, and yet, not a word had come from him. The secret—still withheld from her mother—had almost died in her heart—it was false—false, or he would have found her ere this.

One evening, a week after her arrival, Lillian sat at the open window of the little parlor when suddenly looking up from her embroidery she saw a motor car stop at the gate and two figures alight. Grace sat at the piano, idly fingering the keys, and before she turned from her music they were coming up the walk. It was Dale Clinton and—and—who was the taller man?—his step, his form, seemed familiar—was it—was it—yes, it was Llewellyn. Quickly she turned to Grace, whose face was as brilliant as hers was colorless.

“You did not tell me, Grace,” she said.

“No, Lillian, I’ve not seen Llewellyn since I saw him at Roselin—have not heard from him? I little suspected his coming today with Dale.” Her voice plainly showed her surprise.

“Do they know I am here, Grace?”

“No, I wished to surprise Dale—I did not tell him.”

Dale and Llewellyn were at the door.

“Let me go, Grace; let me go; I will not see them,” Lillian exclaimed, attempting to free her hand and escape through the sitting-room, to the kitchen, and up the back stairway, but Grace held her fast.

“No, Lillian, you cannot run away from me now. You are no more surprised than I am; and I dare say, a surprise is awaiting them as well. Stay, Lillian,” she added in a whisper, as Delia admitted them.

As Grace released her hand and turned to greet them, Lillian, realizing that escape was now impossible, sank down in the chair in the corner, and, assuming a careless attitude, her eyes fell again to her embroidery. The summer twilight was just falling, and the light streaming through the open window only deepened the shadow about her and for a time she was not observed.

“I was beside myself with joy when I learned you were here!” Llewellyn exclaimed to Grace after the first words of greeting. It was the same low, musical voice, and Lillian felt

the burning blood rush back to her cheeks as she heard it; her eyes involuntarily raised to his face. It was slightly changed since she last saw it—on the river after he had rescued their helpless craft—it was bright and gleaming with happiness now, and like her own, had regained a part of its former bloom. Though the lines about the mouth were deeper than before, the eyes slightly sad, there was a light of love shining from their dark, dreamy depths as they looked down upon Grace's radiant, excited face. His hands still retained one of hers and she made no attempt to withdraw it. Love, joy and gladness seemed thrilling her very soul and for a moment Dale was almost forgotten.

A dark frown settled upon his brow; with a simple word of greeting she had turned from him to Llewellyn. "Confound it!" he muttered inaudibly; "of course, Greymore had to appear just as I was nearing a chance. 'Tis just my luck! Confound it!"

"I reached New Orleans last night," Llewellyn went on, without releasing her hand; "I found Mr. Clinton at the office this morning, learned from him that you and your mother were here, that he would be calling this evening, and begged him to allow me to accompany him. At last he consented and promised not to inform you of my arrival."

"I had begun to think you had forgotten your old friends or had been swallowed up by the turmoil of Chicago, Llewellyn. I cannot express my pleasure at——" Grace was interrupted.

Dale, who had been standing silently by, jealously watching them, turned suddenly on his heel, started toward the window, then suddenly stopped.

"Lillian Allington!" he exclaimed; "who ever thought of seeing you here?"

At the sound of her name Llewellyn started; his hands fell at his sides and he stared vacantly after Dale; then Lillian moved, arose and extended her hand and her white figure—her face equally as white—was gracefully outlined in the shadowed gloom.

"Grace wished to surprise you," she replied softly, calmly.

Llewellyn's face was changed—the color, the brightness, the happiness, all faded,

"Lillian?" he breathed.

"Yes, you and Dale have corporated together to surprise me and after all I have a surprise for you—Lillian has been my guest for almost a week." Grace spoke half gayly, but the sadness of Llewellyn's face pained her.

He moved toward Lillian, and turning from Dale, she extended her hand with the same calmness. Her greeting was no less cordial. It was a strange meeting—the meeting between them—each secretly striving to compose themselves—each attempting to appear with a natural calmness, which they did not feel. The moments dragged slowly on; then Dale came to the rescue and adroitly mingling mirth and wit with topics of general interest, he led them into the conversation with unrivaled ease and the hours slipped smoothly by.

Shortly before they departed, Llewellyn, seizing an opportunity to speak with Grace alone, said:

"May I come again tomorrow, Grace? May I see you and your mother alone?"

"Come when you can, Llewellyn. Had I permitted it, Lillian would have left us this evening—mamma and I can see you alone when you wish it."

"I shall come tomorrow," he returned.

The moon had not risen and it was dark on the veranda when they took their leave. At the gate they met Mrs. Allington, who had been driving with a neighbor. Dale addressed her:

"Mrs. Allington, you have met Dr. Llewellyn Greymore, have you not?"

"No; we have not met, though I have heard a great deal about you, Dr. Greymore, and I am very glad to know you." She extended her hand—he took it. A moment later he was gone—his heart in a turmoil of emotion.

Half an hour later Grace, wrapped in a brilliantly flowered kimono, burst into her mother's room.

"Oh, mamma!" she exclaimed excitedly, "you know Dale came this evening, and guess!—guess who was with him!" Her face was radiant, and throwing her arms around her mother's neck she kissed her, then slipped to the stool at her feet. "Oh,

mother dear, you can never guess who it was." She folded her hands in her lap and awaited the reply.

"Could it have been Llewellyn Greymore?" Mrs. Allington asked, smilingly.

"Yes, it was Llewellyn! How did you guess?"

"I met them as I came in, dear. I could not see his face but I liked his voice."

"Yes, you will like him too," Grace broke in; "he is coming again tomorrow, and—and—he wants to see you and me alone. I think he has something to tell us, to make us happy."

"Happy?" Mrs. Allington looked wonderingly at her. "I think you are very happy tonight; I think my daughter loves Llewellyn."

"Love Llewellyn! Who would not love him? Lillian loves him; I love him, and you will love him. But oh, how different is our love," she returned.

"If you both love Llewellyn Greymore, I fear your friendship cannot last forever," was Mrs. Allington's serious reply, and her hand caressed Grace's fallen curls.

"That very fact would save our friendship if it were almost severed; he loves Lillian as—as I scarcely hope to be loved. I could see it all, tonight, though they both were silent—each knows not what the other feels."

"You puzzle me, Grace, I cannot understand you."

"I cannot explain tonight, mamma dear; tomorrow you shall know."

Again she kissed her and fled from the room as joyfully as she had come, leaving Mrs. Allington to ponder alone. She could not understand her daughter's love; she had thought she loved Dale Clinton. She could not understand Llewellyn's wish to see her alone with Grace. Would he ask her for her daughter's hand?—had Grace already given him her heart? Why was she so happy? Was not Lillian—her friend, her guest—suffering from the visit which had given happiness to her? Would Grace be happy to leave her mother—leave her southern home—and go to the north with Dr. Greymore? Would she be happy to break Lillian's loving heart, marry the man who—as she had confessed—continued to love Lillian, and crush Dale Clinton's hopes? Could all that make Grace happy?

At last she arose from her reverie and her heart cried out:

"Yes, I must give her up; I must give my little girl to Llewellyn Greymore and I must be content. Oh, my son, my dear, lost son, if you were only here to comfort me when she goes. But it cannot be! I cannot deny Grace Llewellyn's love."

Grace had hurried back to her room, there to find Lillian softly sobbing, her face buried in the pillows. Instantly the brightness of her own face faded; she crossed the room and knelt at Lillian's side.

"Please do not do it, Lillian—it is useless to shed tears—it will all come right in the end, for Llewellyn loves you still."

"Loves me still, indeed!"

There was a touch of scorn in Lillian's voice in spite of the mingled tears, and she drew slightly away from Grace's touch.

"Yes, I'm sure he loves you and I'm glad you were here tonight. You played and sang so beautifully—no one could have read your heart."

Lillian was silent and she went on:

"I'm sorry your engagement was broken and, though I have never known the cause, I trust it will some day be renewed."

"Pardon me for saying it, Lillian," she added as Lillian raised her face and looked searchingly at her.

"Yes, I will pardon you; but no one can know the cause better than yourself, Grace."

"I?" she asked in astonishment.

"Willard and Wilma know but little of the story, Grace; you know it all."

"I?" she asked again; "I know nothing."

"Very well; it matters not—our engagement has long been broken and I'm sorry we have met tonight."

Grace was puzzled and silently she turned out the light and crept into bed, but she could not sleep—Lillian could not sleep—Mrs. Allington could not sleep.

The sun was blazing, the birds singing, when the occupants of the Vale Cottage arose on the following morning—a day destined to be one of importance in the lives of both Mrs. Allington and Grace—a day never to be forgotten. Apparently the morning passed with the usual smoothness, but beneath the outer surface each heart was in a turmoil of emotion.

Shortly after noon, the friend who had taken Mrs. Allington driving the previous evening, came for Lillian. "I want Miss Allington to see the beauty of our southland," she said, as Lillian seated herself beside her. "We are going south and up along the seashore, but I promise to return her before dark." The big, black horse dashed off and Lillian waved a fluttering, lacy handkerchief on the southern breeze. They were gone, and Grace, slipping her arm around her mother's waist, turned her toward the house.

"How easily that was arranged," she said; "and Lillian will never suspect that I planned it."

It was almost an hour later that Llewellyn came and as Grace met him on the rose-covered veranda he drew her to him and kissed her.

"I can at last claim this privilege, Grace, though once—the last time I saw you at Roselin—I took the privilege, I was not so confident of my right. Now I know it is true."

"I knew it was true when you came last night with Dale. I have been faithful to my promise, and, though I have been tempted many times to tell our secret, I have kept it safely. Mamma has never suspected that I held anything from her. I have continually reminded myself that it might prove untrue, and at last I came to believe that it was all false. Two years have been so long to wait."

"I know, Grace; it has been long to me, but there has been much to do in that time and I feel that I have done it well. I have made a chain of every link; I think nothing has been lost in waiting. I have so much to say to you, Grace, before I see your mother. Let us walk through the garden; I love this little home of yours; I love its surroundings. I have many times pictured it to myself.

They talked long of the past, of the present and of the future; then slowly they went back to the house and Grace led the way to the sitting-room, where Mrs. Allington stood at the open window. Crimson roses clustered in a profusion around it, and, after breaking one red, swaying cluster from its stem, she was turning about when they entered. Her gray dress made a somber background for the brilliant flowers in her hand. Her face was slightly sad, her hair softly tinted with gray.

For an instant Llewellyn paused in the doorway and Grace hurried on to her mother's side; but Mrs. Allington's glance went past her to Llewellyn's face. It was strikingly handsome with its big, brown eyes, its firm, expressive mouth, its fair brow shaded by dark locks of waving brown hair, and a nose and chin which gave character to the face. The lines about the mouth were deep, and showed more plainly than aught else the character of the man. Without them he would have been less handsome, less attractive. Llewellyn's face was one to be admired—one to be trusted—and as Mrs. Allington looked at it for the first time, she did not wonder that Grace and Lillian loved him. His head was poised on shoulders broad and square; and clad in a stylishly fitted suit of gray, which gave both style and neatness to his form, he stood looking at her with an expression so much like Grace sometimes bent upon her that Mrs. Allington slightly started.

For only a moment he stood silently, then came forward, took both her hands with a grasp so firm it almost pained, quickly released them, turned from her with a sudden movement which brought a look of astonishment to her face, and seated himself upon the divan opposite, vainly striving to compose himself.

Grace pushed her mother's chair nearer the divan. "Sit here, mamma," she said, drawing her lovingly toward it, "I'm glad Llewellyn can at last tell you his secret."

Still Llewellyn was silent, and sitting down beside him she slipped her ruby necklace into his hand. "It is a secret connected with my rubies, mamma," she explained, and his eyes went from the crimson stones back to Mrs. Allington's face, and in a voice low and steady he began:

"I come to you with a story, Mrs. Allington—a story over which I have long pondered; and I trust you will listen to the end—it is a story which some, perhaps, would doubt, but I think you will listen and be interested."

He paused for no reply and he spoke slowly, thoughtfully, as he went on:

"Two years ago I gave Grace this necklace; it was not friendship—it was not love alone which prompted me. It was a story, a secret I could not tell her then. Shortly afterward—the last

time I saw her at Roselin—I told her the story I am now bringing to you.”

“I could not tell you, mamma,” Grace broke in, “for I had given my promise; and had it not been for the promise, I could not have told, for I feared it would bring disappointment to us both.”

“Very well, Grace; we will talk of that later.” Her mother’s voice was calm and firm. “Go on with your story, Dr. Grey-more; I will gladly listen to all you wish to say.”

“Thank you,” he replied; “but to you I can be no other than Llewellyn.”

His voice was strangely unsteady and he paused a moment before continuing his story.

CHAPTER XLIV

LLEWELLYN'S SECRET

SILENTLY he drew from his pocket a velvet case.

"I remember but little of my early life," he began; "I only know that the days of my early childhood were happy ones, with a father and mother whom I loved and a tiny sister—my only playmate. Then dreamily, to me, they slipped suddenly out of my life and I became the adopted son of General and Mrs. Windford Greymore. For nineteen years the General has been to me a kind and loving father; at the death of Mrs. Greymore, five years ago, I lost a mother's love, and had it not been for the faint, sweet recollections of the early past I should have thought myself their own and only son. But child though I was at the time of my adoption, that memory has lingered with me through the years and my life had been, to me, a mystery. My father—General Greymore—a sister of his and Grace are the only persons, to my knowledge, who are acquainted with the story of my life—to you I am bringing that mystery solved."

Slowly he unclasped the velvet case and took from it a golden locket. He arose and moved to Mrs. Allington's side.

"Tell me," he said, opening it and laying it in her hand; "have you ever seen a face like this?"

With arms folded he stepped back, and with a strange expression of mingled hope and expectation, stood looking down at her.

It was the picture of a small boy upon which Mrs. Allington's eyes fell—a boy with dark, waving hair and big, dark eyes—a face she had seen before. Suddenly a mist floated before her; she could scarcely see the picture, and her grasp on the little locket tightened.

"Where did you get it?" she gasped. "My darling Eldred—my little son! Where did you get it?"

Instantly Llewellyn was kneeling at her side and his arms were stretched out to her.

"Mother!" he exclaimed. "It is I—I who was lost at sea—I am Eldred Llewellyn Wilton, your son."

Mrs. Allington drew back.

"It cannot be!" she exclaimed. "My son was drowned—he is dead."

"No, he is not dead! Believe me, mother; I am your son. I faintly remember the day I left you and Grace—for what, I did not know. I was rescued from the sea and in Cuba I found a home with General Greymore. At last I have found you, mother—will you not claim your lost boy—will you not love him as you did those first six years of his life?"

Mrs. Allington did not move; she made no reply and Grace came to her side.

"Believe him, mamma," she exclaimed; "he has ample proof of his identity. Llewellyn is my brother; he is your son."

Grace was now kneeling beside Llewellyn and Mrs. Allington silently studied the two faces, her eyes frequently going back to the little locket.

"Yes, they are alike; very much alike," she murmured at last, and Llewellyn recalled having uttered those very words when studying his face in the mirror years before and comparing with it Grace's features.

"It must be so," she gasped; "it must be so."

The room grew dark; she felt dizzy and faint; she swayed in her chair, but Llewellyn's arms were around her and a moment later Grace bent over her, raising a glass of water to her lips.

"Go on with your story," she said at last; "I must know it all; I must know you are my son;" and still kneeling at her side, with one hand clasped in his, he related to her the story of his life—the story, a part of which, he had told Grace two years before. Grace stood with one arm around her mother's neck, her hand on Llewellyn's shoulder.

Nineteen years before, the *Atlanta* had sunk near the shores of Cuba and Llewellyn faintly remembered the horrors of that day. He remembered the wild excitement on board. Sailors and passengers rushed madly up and down the deck. He remembered the sadness of his father's face, the strangeness of his voice as he spoke to him. He could recall the angry roar

of the water as it swept over the wreck, carrying them out into the ocean; then for a time all was lost. He could recall nothing until, on opening his eyes, he found himself in the arms of Mrs. Greymore. The General was bending over him. Dear, loving faces they were; full of tender sympathy for the little orphan boy.

The life-boats had saved only a few and Llewellyn had been picked up by a fishing-boat further down the shore. At first they had thought the little form lifeless, and carelessly they had lifted him from the floating timbers and carried him to a house near by. There General Greymore had seen him and taken him to his home. Mrs. Greymore had received him with open arms and held the little, limp, unconscious body close to her heart. The brown eyes had opened, but again they had closed; and it was days before they had opened again to consciousness—months before he regained his strength. Day after day, night after night, he had cried for his mother, begged for his father to come back to him, and talked of his little sister. Mrs. Greymore always tenderly soothed him; often talking to him of his mother and home. He remembered his name as Eldred Llewellyn Wilton and his foster parents chose to call him Llewellyn. He had forgotten his father's name. He knew they had left the mother and little sister, but for what reason he did not know, and the Greymore's naturally supposed that the father and mother had been divorced—the one taking the son, the other keeping the daughter. And after one feeble attempt to find the mother they gave up all effort and gladly accepted him as their son. They had no children and upon him they lavished all their love. For six years they remained in Cuba, during which time General Greymore's sister, an accomplished teacher, was his governess. He was twelve years old when they went to England and there he received the best educational advantages the country afforded and bore away the laurels of his class. At the age of seventeen he came, with the family, back to the United States. The General and Mrs. Greymore seldom talked to him now of his adoption; they strove to fill every vacancy in his heart—to make him feel that he was their own son, and partially they had succeeded. But beneath the love, the honor, he bestowed upon them, was the faint, sweet memory of his own mother's love;

and perhaps that mother was living, some place in America. There he might some day find her; and at last that day had come.

"When I met Grace in Baltimore, I was strangely drawn to her; I knew not why," Llewellyn continued. "I did not remember my sister's name; to me she was simply 'sister'—a name I have always loved. Strange to say, during her visit in Baltimore I have never heard the name Wilton. I was quite feeble at the time. Lillian often spoke of her as 'my sister'; with the others it was always 'Grace', and I did not doubt but that her name was Allington.

"I cannot describe my astonishment when once I spoke to Wilma of her sister Grace and in tones of scorn she called the name 'Grace Wilton'. During my three years in America I had met none other by that name and as it fell from her lips I felt as I had never felt before; I felt that ere long my own dear mother would fill the vacancy my foster mother had so recently left and my heart was strangely thrilled. But Wilma misled me; she said her father had met you in a Western State, and I felt sure I had left my mother in the south—in New Orleans—from which place General Greymore said the Atlanta had sailed. She went on to say that she could tell me much of Grace's life, as well as that of the mother, but she had no desire to awaken 'ghosts of the past.' In her home the story was never mentioned; it was unpleasant to them all; and she begged of me to repeat nothing she had said. Surely this could not be my mother, I thought, connected with a story from which her step-daughter would shrink to speak. I did not know Wilma Allington then as I know her now. She deceived me; and I was silent on the subject which lay deepest in my heart. On the day following I met a fellow whose name was Wilton. He did not know Grace; he did not know the Allingtons and I came to believe that a common name in the east.

"I went back to Chicago with my father—General Greymore—with no reason to believe that Grace was my sister, I went back to a home lacking a mother's love, but in spite of my effort to put it down, I felt that Grace Wilton's mother was mine also. I had thought I loved her because she was Lillian's sister—Lillian my betrothed—but now that I knew they were not

sisters it did not change. Three years later I came again to Baltimore and this time I was determined to prove that Grace was or was not my sister. I told my father of my expectations and, although he felt that he was losing his son, he hoped, for my sake, that the mystery would be solved. He himself had noted a strange resemblance between us. I had finished my education and was beginning my practice in medicine then and in another year Lillian was to have been my wife.

"Grace was in Baltimore when I arrived and as I walked with her, back to the Moreland Place, after the commencement, I studied each feature of her face. I had found among Mrs. Greymore's possessions this little locket, containing the picture which had been painted shortly after my arrival in Cuba. With Grace's face I compared this picture; I compared with it my own face and I found the resemblance my father had found. Quite accidentally I came upon Grace and Lillian while they were speaking of Vale Cottage. It was then I learned that hers had been a southern home—that it was not far from New Orleans. And there I wrote for information. I did not once think I was mistaken; I felt sure of the path I was taking. Constantly I was compelled to crush down the impulse to take Grace in my arms and call her 'Sister'—I dared not—I had no proof save this little locket.

"Then came the house-party at Roselin. There I expected to meet you—my own dear mother—for such I had come to think of you. You were not there, but during those weeks I learned what Grace's life was, and I longed to make her happy. As yet I had heard nothing of importance from New Orleans; but I determined to give her this ruby necklace, for I had heard from Willard how Mr. Allington had refused to grant her wish. At first she refused—I told her I would some day tell her my secret—and a few days later I found I could keep it, my secret alone, no longer. That evening on the lake shore at Roselin I told her the most important facts of my story—my life—my secret.

"I was happy that evening—for Grace had not doubted my story. She had told me what she knew of her father's sailing on the Atlanta and of her brother Eldred. She told me the story as you had often told it to her. And now that I knew it, the

letters from New Orleans could be of little importance, for I knew that she was my sister—you my mother—and Grace accepted me as her brother. But where were my proofs? Would you—my mother—accept my story? Would you believe me to be the boy which, to you, had been dead seventeen years? Those were my fears and I determined to secure every proof possible before I brought my story to you. I asked Grace to keep my secret for a time, and she gave me her promise. On the morning following, before I had left my room, a maid brought me a note from Lillian and with it her engagement ring. Our engagement was broken and to this day I know not why. She would not see me; she would not explain, and I left Roselin without seeing the two faces dear to me. Lillian refused to see me and Grace I could not find—she was not at the house. After a time I wrote to her—my letter was returned unopened, as were all those which followed it. I could not write to the family for I felt that they had forsaken me, and it was certainly they who saw to it that my letters were returned. I could receive no word and, until six months ago, I had supposed you and Grace still with them. My father's failing health and my practice have taken all of my time since then or I should have searched for you ere this. When I came to New Orleans, I scarcely hoped to find you and I have nothing with me to confirm my story, except the picture in this little locket."

"I cannot doubt that this is the picture of my boy," Mrs. Alington said, as he paused for a moment. During the beginning of the story, she had frequently interrupted him with anxious questions but for some time she had sat in silence.

"And can you not believe me that same lost boy?" he asked.

"Yes; yes I can accept you as my son upon the evidence of your story alone. My darling Eldred! I have you home once more! My poor lost darling!"

"Mother!" he exclaimed again. "This is the happiest day of my life—the moment for which I have been longing since the day I left you on the wharf at New Orleans—to have my own dear mother's arms around me; to have her kiss upon my brow."

"Oh, how I wish that you had found us years ago, Eldred; how happily the years would have passed; how happy the future is to be for us—we three together. Thank God," she mur-

mured, "my darling boy is given back to me; and you, dear, have your brother." She drew Grace to her and tears of joy and happiness fell upon the heads of her children.

Grace and Llewellyn were silent, then suddenly he clasped both mother and sister in his arms and kissed their happy faces.

"My mother! My sister!" he exclaimed. "I have loved you always, even though the waters of the Atlantic rolled between us."

"How many times we have talked of you, Llewellyn, and wished for your presence, your love," Grace whispered softly.

"Yes, but you thought me dead, while I—I——. To me it was all a mystery; I have dreamed of troubles, separations, divorces, of which I knew nothing. But I knew my mother and sister were living and that sometime I might find them and I felt that they were pure, noble and true; and such I have found them to be—my own dear mother; my darling sister!"

"I never doubted that you died with your father, Eldred. This is a moment for which I have never hoped—the moment when my little son would be returned to me, a man as handsome as my baby boy was beautiful. How can I believe that I am not dreaming?"

"It is all true, mother dear," he assured her; "but I have many proofs to bring to you before it is publicly known that your son is risen from the sea. Every doubt must be vanquished; there must be no possibility of a mistake; there must be no reason for the most scrupulous person to doubt."

"Oh, Llewellyn, must we still keep it a secret?" asked Grace.

"I have written to my father—General Greymore—and it will be only a few days before I hear from him. He will repeat the facts of my rescue, my life, and send to me the blue sailor suit, the slippers and a ring I wore on the voyage from New Orleans and which I procured from General Greymore's sister—my former governess—some time ago."

Mrs. Allington interrupted him.

"You need no other proof, Eldred," she said: "I shall know them. I can see them now as plainly as if they lay here before me—that little blue sailor suit, those tiny patent leather slippers and the ring bearing your initials."

"E. L. W." Grace prompted.

"Yes, you will know them," Llewellyn replied; "you will know them. But you must see them, you must hear the story as my father writes it to be fully convinced that you are not dreaming, mother—that I am Eldred Llewellyn Wilton—your son."

The reply came slowly and thoughtfully: "Yes, yes, we will wait. But you will not leave us, Eldred; we cannot give you up now."

"No, mother, if you wish it, I shall not leave you," Llewellyn answered.

"We wish it, Llewellyn; we wish it!" Grace exclaimed. "But may we not tell Lillian tonight; please let us tell Lillian."

For a time Llewellyn was silent then slowly he replied:

"I would rather even Lillian did not know until I have given every proof."

The sun had set and the dim, dusky light of evening had fallen when the three left the sitting-room and went out upon the veranda, then the conversation went again to Lillian.

"I know she loves you, Llewellyn," Grace assured him. "I cannot be mistaken; I think that must have been the cause of the change which came over her. They feared for her then, the fate which she now fears for Wilma. But I have often wondered why she turned from me during the days following the house-party—I was quite alone—mamma and Delia were gone; you were gone; Lillian had forsaken me and—and Dale, too, had come south." She paused for a moment then went on: "She told me last night, Llewellyn, that I know better than any other, the cause of the broken engagement, and, Llewellyn, I know nothing, save that Lillian loves my brother."

"Then, Grace, why did she send me back my ring? Why did she wish to be free? Why did she refuse to explain?"

"I cannot tell, Llewellyn; I only know that she loves you."

"If Lillian loves me," Llewellyn replied slowly, "I can ask for nothing more. Now that I have my mother—my sister."

In the shadowed twilight the carriage drew up at the gate and Grace hurried from the veranda to meet Lillian. The fresh, salt breeze had brought a bright color to her cheeks and the loosened curls were clustering about her brow, as she came up the walk. Her greeting to Llewellyn was cold and formal and

with a silent bow she accepted the chair he offered her. She spoke of the drive along the seashore and of the beauties on every side, then silently she wondered at the brightness of the faces about her. Grace and Llewellyn were happy; Mrs. Allington's face was brighter than she had ever seen it, while she herself longed to be away from Vale Cottage, its beauties and its joys.

All during the evening Llewellyn watched her. The expression of her sweet, spirituous face seldom changed. It was calm and sad, and as she and Grace left them for the night Llewellyn bent over Mrs. Allington and tenderly kissing her whispered:

"They are the most beautiful girls I know, and you are mother to them both—my own dear mother."

CHAPTER XLV

A PROPOSAL RENEWED

THE sun was just sinking. Only one rounded edge could be seen above the horizon and the western sky was tinted with glowing colors—pink, purple, orange, ruby and gold. The brilliant blue above had paled and here and there a small, fleecy cloud drifted eastward. Lillian stood in the narrow path which wound through the marshy meadow west of Vale Cottage, silently watching the setting of another day's sun. A moss-covered log lay near, half hidden in the tall, tangled grass, and sinking down upon it she turned for a moment to the south. A long, level line of trees stretched out in the distance, hiding from view the waters of the sea—their dark green foliage outlined against the sky. To the east Vale Cottage was almost hidden in the bower of climbing roses and blossoming shrubs.

It was the fourth evening of Llewellyn's stay, and sitting alone on the old log she forgot the beauty of the sunset as she pondered over the joys of the past, and thought of the future in which Llewellyn had no part. How many times had she looked into that future; how many times had she reviewed the past? She had forgiven Llewellyn; she had forgiven Grace, but she could not forget her love, and, without seeming to do so she had avoided them on every possible occasion. The brightness of their faces pained her and she wished to be away from Vale Cottage—away from the south. Tears stole softly down her cheeks as she thought of the home in Boston, closed—of Roselin, silent and forsaken. How many changes since they had left Roselin two years ago—how many pains—how many sorrows. Alas, what might the future bring!

A step fell almost noiselessly on the soft grass not far away and quickly raising her eyes, she found Llewellyn standing in the path, with folded arms, silently surveying her. From the window of his room he had caught the glimmer of her white dress

as she hurried through the garden, and leaning out he had heard the gate open and close. A moment later he had followed in pursuit and for some time had been watching her.

"Lillian!" he exclaimed, as her eyes met his.

Instantly she arose and her eyes fell beneath his deep, scrutinizing gaze.

"I had forgotten that it is getting late," she said, apologetically.

She hurried up the path toward him and toward the garden-gate. Llewellyn did not move until she came up to him, then gently turning her about he said:

"I did not come here, Lillian, to remind you of the lateness of the hour; I did not come to take you back to Vale Cottage. I came because I knew you were here alone; I came because I have so much to say to you and because I know you will give me no opportunity to speak with you alone."

"Come, Llewellyn," she remonstrated, as he led her back to the moss-covered log; "it is getting late and Mrs. Allington will miss us. We must go back to the house now."

"No, Lillian; my—er—Mrs. Allington can have no objections. I must ask you one thing, Lillian—the thing you have before refused me;" he sat down by her side and her cheeks flushed crimson as he finished; "I ask you once more for an explanation, Lillian; will you not give it?"

"It is I who should demand an explanation, Llewellyn," she returned, rising and facing him. "You ask an explanation? For what?"

He drew from his pocket a folded and worn note and a velvet ring box.

"For this," he said, rising and holding them out to her. She only took a step back and stood looking at them.

"Please be seated, Lillian, and allow me to read this note to you," he continued.

"I have no wish to hear it," she returned.

"And, though I have read it many, many times, I have no wish to read it now; but you must hear it—your own words, Lillian."

Slowly he unfolded it and sadly he read the dimmed words, their piercing coldness sinking deep into Lillian's heart as she

heard them repeated in Llewellyn's firm, sad, musical tones. She had not realized before how icily cold they were.

"I trust you will consider this final; I am fully decided that it must all end here; Good-bye, Llewellyn—forever!" he finished.

He paused. Lillian stood quite still and her eyes were not raised from the grass at her feet. Slowly he folded the paper, replaced it in his pocket and drew from its box the diamond ring. Then he moved toward her:

"Must I consider it final, Lillian? You are fully decided that it must all end? Will you say now that you do not love me?"

He held both her hands in his and leaned slightly forward. She made no reply, but the tears which slipped one after another from beneath the drooping lashes told him it would not be "forever."

"Tell me, Lillian, that even here it cannot end, for, darling, I love you."

His voice was full of sad, pleading pathos but still there was no reply. She made no attempt to withdraw her hands and a moment later he had slipped the ring upon her finger. Passionately he raised them to his lips. Instantly she drew them from him, and with the diamond still sparkling upon her hand, she stepped back. There was no shy drooping of the lashes now and her eyes, black and tearless, rested full upon his face.

"Llewellyn Greymore!" she exclaimed; "how dared you! Can you ask me to love you; can you wish, now, to renew an engagement which your conduct has, in every way, broken? You say you love me! Llewellyn, you have deceived me once; can I fail to disbelieve you now? I trusted you then—yes, I trusted—and I lost."

"My conduct, Lillian?—I deceived you? I have loved you always; I shall love you to the end of the world, even though you reject me."

"Ah, Llewellyn, you professed to love me once when you loved another; how can I trust you now?"

"I loved another, Lillian!" he exclaimed. "What do you mean? You are the only girl I ever wished to make my wife. Believe me, Lillian!"

"Believe you, Llewellyn! How can I believe you when I

heard your words of love to another—when I saw you kiss her lips, cheek and brow? How can I believe you when my eyes revealed to me the truth? How can I doubt that you love her still when I watch your daily association with her? Do not deny that you love Grace Wilton—my friend—the daughter of my stepmother. Recall, if you please, the scene on the lake at Roselin and judge for yourself, whether or not I can but doubt it.”

Llewellyn stood motionless, speechless. Lillian’s gaze did not waver.

“You saw—you heard—that night on the lake?” he stammered at last.

“Yes! Quite by accident, it was; but that doesn’t matter—I saw—I heard—and I am glad my spiritual guide led me to the garden that night.”

“And it is Grace who has come between us! I need no other explanation; I understand now what has before been a mystery to me.”

“And you do not deny that you love her—you need not deny it!”

“I have no wish to deny my love for Grace Wilton. I love her!—but my love for you is very different—I have much to explain, Lillian—;” he hesitated. No, he could not tell her now, that Grace was his sister—that her mother was his. He had asked them to keep it from her—he himself would not reveal it. He must have every proof before he told Lillian, and there was only a few days to wait. He could wait, now that he knew she loved him, and Lillian did not suspect the joy which was overflowing his heart as she took the ring from her finger and placed it in his hand.

“You need not explain,” she said coldly. “You love Grace and I trust you will never deceive her as you have deceived me.”

“Sometime I shall explain, Lillian, and I do not doubt that there is a future of happiness yet in store for us. It is useless to ask you to keep the ring. But some day, I assure you, even though you doubt it now, this ring shall again be yours.”

“I do doubt it,” she replied emphatically; and silently they went back up the narrow path to the garden gate, Llewellyn’s

heart wildly throbbing with love and joy—hers aching with bitter pain and the love that she thought was lost.

At the little gate he stopped her:

“Dear Lillian, you do not know how wholly my heart is thine!” he exclaimed.

She drew away from him: “No, I do not know,” she answered indignantly, and turning from him she walked away with a step as decisive and firm as it was graceful.

Through the dim light Llewellyn watched her until she reached the veranda and the crimson wall of roses came between them. She was no longer lost to him—again she was his darling, peerless sweetheart—his fairy queen—her heart was his—she loved him.

“It is the hand of a guiding Father that has led me to this spot—to mother—to sister—to sweetheart. I am not deserving of the joys which have gladdened my heart—the heart which was sad and grieving when I came to New Orleans—the heart that was longing for love,” he murmured.

For a time he leaned silently against the gate-post, his head bowed down upon his folded arms. The surrounding twilight darkened—the swaying, flowering shrubs bordering the pathway became dim shadows—the south wind died low—the little village of Western Springs was clad in silence and all the valley surrounding it was solemnly still. Then the sound of a motor car far out on the New Orleans road aroused him. It must be Dale Clinton; and quickly he turned toward the house. The lights from the front windows streamed out across the veranda and here and there stole through the crimson laden rose-vines. The window above was dark. Suddenly a light streamed from it—it was open—the shade was not drawn, and he could see Lillian moving slowly, languidly, about the room. He thought she had been weeping, and a moment later, when she came to the window, glanced out, then laid her golden head on its wooden sill, he knew he had not guessed wrongly. He fancied he could almost hear her stifled sobs.

“Darling!” he whispered, “when you know the story of my life, you will forgive me—yes, you will forgive, and together we will forget.”

He walked swiftly on and bounding up the stairs, he hurried to Mrs. Allington’s room.

"Eldred, my darling boy!" she exclaimed, as he came in.

"Yes, mother dear, it is I," he returned, bending over her.

"You look happy, my son, though strangely pale and worn," she remarked. "Sit down and rest awhile, will you not?"

"If I may sit here," he replied, throwing himself down on the floor at her feet. "You will find, mother, that I am only your little boy after all, even though to others I am 'Dr. Greymore, M. D.'—a man of twenty-five."

"Yes, my dear, each day I am with you I find you more like my little boy used to be—more like your father was when he left me, and to me you are Eldred still."

"I like for you to call me Eldred, mother, for I have heard that name from no one else. From you it must always be Eldred; from Grace and Lillian nothing but Llewellyn. I have been talking with Lillian and I now know why she refused to be my wife."

As he began relating to her their conversation Dale Clinton's car drew up at the gate; Dale's step sounded on the walk and his voice, mingled with Grace's, floated up from the veranda.

Half an hour later Llewellyn arose:

"Of course, she will not leave Vale Cottage until Willard and Wilma reach St. Louis, and the letters from Father Greymore may arrive any day now," he said; "and I think it best, for us all, that I should be absent for a few days, so I shall leave her to the care of my own dear mother. You have so successfully comforted me, I think you can comfort Lillian. I may return at any time—call at least—and after all it may be Mr. Clinton will not want to carry a passenger back to New Orleans with him tonight. If I go, I shall come up again to say good-bye."

"I dislike having you go, Eldred; but as you say, it may be best, and we will keep Lillian safely with us until you return. She will not think of going until Willard and Wilma reach St. Louis."

"My own dear mother," he whispered again, as he kissed her.

The moon had risen and the sky was thickly set with stars when Dale guided his car back over the New Orleans road. Llewellyn was with him—silent and moody as was Dale himself. The latter had frowned darkly as he greeted Llewellyn; he frowned as he watched his parting with Grace and now his mind

seemed wholly occupied with the steering of the machine—he looked neither to the right nor to the left, and they sped into New Orleans before either of them spoke. The car crept smoothly along the moonlit streets then, and Dale suddenly turned to Llewellyn:

“I have always considered you a friend, Dr. Greymore.” He paused.

“Certainly,” was Llewellyn’s only answer.

“And if I ask you a question will you, for my sake, answer it truthfully?” Dale continued.

“I shall answer it truthfully if I can answer it at all.”

“Then tell me, is Grace Wilton more to you than a friend—a mere friend?”

For a time Llewellyn was silent, then slowly he replied: “She is.”

“Then I must believe, as I have always suspected, that you love her?”

Again the answer was in the affirmative.

“And Grace knows of your love, I presume?”

“Yes, she knows all.”

“Then you are engaged. It is well, Dr. Greymore, that I found you there this evening—it is well that I asked the question. May I offer my congratulations—you—you have certainly won a prize.”

The car rushed madly forward as he finished but the speed was again lessened as Llewellyn replied.

“You are mistaken, Mr. Clinton; I am deserving of your congratulations—I have won a prize, but—but you are mistaken—I am not engaged to Grace.”

“Not engaged!” Dale exclaimed. “Not engaged! and yet you confess that she is more to you than a mere friend—you love her—and she knows of your love.”

“Yes, yes, all that.”

“All that,” Dale repeated; “all that, but not engaged? And why?—I know she has not refused you.”

“No, she has not refused me—I have never asked her to be my wife—I never shall—ere long you will understand me—now, I can give you no other explanation—I can only say, Grace will never be my wife.”

"Then you do not love her; you do not love her," Dale repeated and Llewellyn replied:

"I have answered each question truthfully; and I give you my word upon it, I shall never stand in the way of another man who loves her."

Dale was silent—the car drew up at the hotel and Llewellyn alighted.

"Thank you, Dr. Greymore; thank you," Dale exclaimed, extending his hand.

"Not at all," Llewellyn returned. "I am greatly indebted to you for my ride. Good-night, Mr. Clinton;" and he watched the car speed down the avenue.

Two days later Llewellyn came again to Vale Cottage, bringing with him the package and letter from General Greymore. He found Mrs. Allington, Grace and Lillian on the veranda, but after a time Lillian slipped away. Then Mrs. Allington led the way to her room—there they would not be disturbed—and untying the cord of the package which Llewellyn placed upon the table, Grace reverently took from its box the carefully folded sailor-suit of navy blue. There was the little white anchor on the front of the waist—the stars on either corner of the wide collar—the narrow band of white around the left sleeve, and tears came to Mrs. Allington's eyes and her voice was choked as she said:

"How dear this little suit was to me—how dear was the boy who wore it."

Fondly she caressed the little half-worn slippers which Grace placed in her hand; eagerly she took from Llewellyn the little golden ring, plainly engraved with the letters "E. L. W."

"And where is the cap—the little white duck cap with bands of navy blue—have you the cap, Eldred?" she asked at last.

"No, mother! I suppose the cap was lost in the sea. It was never found."

"Oh, how near my boy came to being lost!" she exclaimed. "How long he has been lost to me! How dear was the husband—your father—who went down with that burning, sinking wreck! How thankful I am to say once more 'this is my son—my Eldred!'"

Attentively she listened to General Greymore's letter, never

taking her eyes from Llewellyn's face as he read. It was only Llewellyn's story repeated.

"Are you satisfied with my proofs, mother?" he asked, as he finished and laid the letter in her lap.

"Satisfied, Eldred? Yes, your story and the picture in the little locket were sufficient proofs to satisfy your mother."

"And the simple word 'sister' as fully convinced me," Grace laughed.

"Convinced you for the moment, Grace, but you doubted in the year which followed," Llewellyn reproached.

"For one year I did not—I trusted—I believed—I thought you would come to us and prove yourself my brother. I never once thought that Llewellyn Greymore could deceive; but you did not come and another year passed and—and, yes, Llewellyn, I fear I disbelieved that you were the same Eldred Wilton—my brother—who had been lost nineteen years before. Yes, I'm sure I doubted."

"You doubted," Llewellyn repeated. "But I trust you will never need to do so again, Grace—I trust my mother will never doubt."

"Why, Eldred, I cannot doubt—no other proof is needed—Dr. Greymore is my son—I cannot deny it—no one can deny." Mrs. Allington smiled through her tears, and again Llewellyn drew both mother and sister within the circle of his arms.

An hour passed and the three talked on. The house was very still except for the murmur of voices. Delia had gone to New Orleans for the day and Lillian, alone in her room, knelt by the window asking for strength to bury her love beneath a calm exterior, during the remaining days of her stay at Vale Cottage. She longed to be away—she had written to Willard, urging them to hasten on to St. Louis, but several days must pass before she could hear from him, and daily association with Llewellyn was now, she felt, almost unbearable. Calmly she arose from her knees and silently she left the house. She was quite composed now, and slowly she walked through the garden, gathering here and there a swaying blossom. At last she wandered through the little gate and out into the meadow again. Almost daily she walked there, but she did not stop at the mossy log where Llewellyn had found her. It brought back so vividly each word he

had said that day—it brought back the memories of the past, and she had no wish to recall them—she only hoped to forget.

Some time later as she entered the garden-gate, she met Grace and Llewellyn. Grace's face was bright and smiling—Llewellyn's attempting to be grave. She would have retreated but it was too late. Grace came up to her and seizing her hand almost dragged her forward to Llewellyn.

“Oh, Lillian, I want to introduce my brother—Dr. Eldred Llewellyn Wilton Greymore—my brother whom we thought was dead!” she exclaimed jubilantly, and turning she fled up the path to the veranda and left them alone.

“Lillian, my darling—will you not forgive me?—you have not judged me wrongly—I have deceived you—I love Grace—she is my sister—Mrs. Allington, my mother. Tell me, Lillian, that you forgive—tell me that you love me—now that you know I am Eldred Llewellyn Wilton—with the same true heart you gave me years ago. Tell me that our engagement is not broken, dearest, and make this day a happy one, with the love of mother, sister and betrothed.”

Again the diamond ring was placed upon her finger and she made no attempt to free herself from the arms which quickly drew her to him and held her fast.

“Lillian, my sweetheart, I have loved so long,” he whispered, passionately kissing the beautiful, blushing face.

CHAPTER XLVI

A SETTING SUN

"THIS horrid dark room! I can never spend the day here—never!" Wilma complained, as she sank wearily into a chair and looked about the neatly furnished apartment of the St. Louis hotel. "You have not the least consideration for my wishes—your sister's comfort—Willard, or you would not have taken this apartment—so dull and dreary."

"I telegraphed for the best they had, Wilma, and after all it is the rain falling outside—the darkness of the sky—which makes the room dark and dreary."

"And have you forgotten that Lillian is perhaps waiting for us alone some place in this building? Her trip to the south was a foolish one. Vale Cottage is the last place I should wish to visit, and I do not wonder that she urged us to hurry on to St. Louis. Leave me alone with Clarice and bring her to me at once," she commanded, and obediently her brother left her, and went to see if Lillian had yet arrived. She had not—the train was not due for half an hour—and he determined to meet her at the station with a carriage, but when he went back to Wilma's room, he found her so weak and exhausted from the trip that he decided not to leave her.

The trip through the lake region had not proven beneficial, as the doctors had hoped, and her cheeks were thinner and more sunken than when she had left Boston, little more than two weeks since—her eyes were larger and more brilliant—the deep circles beneath them darker and more distinct. Her lips were colorless, but a crimson spot burned on her cheek and her white hands were blue-veined and thin. As Willard looked at her he recalled the year of his mother's failing health and he felt that his sister was fast following in her footsteps.

He waited anxiously for Lillian's arrival. She would find him changed, too, he thought, for in a little town, on the shore of Lake Michigan, he had resolved that the wine-glass should never again be raised to his lips. For the sake of his invalid

sister—the sister who had done him so great a wrong in the past—for the sake of his love for Genevieve, whom he had learned was still free—for the sake of Lillian's earnest prayers—the sister he so dearly loved—he would reform; and for more than a week not a drop of alcoholic liquor had passed the lips which had uttered that solemn promise, made only to himself and God. But it was as faithfully kept as was the promise he gave his dying father, for Willard had fully repented for the folly of the years past, and he was as fully resolved that the future should be different. Genevieve could not even respect him now—her love would die—and he determined to become the man he was when she had known him—the man he was two years before—a man whom Genevieve could gladly call her husband—a brother for whom his sisters need never shrink.

Patiently he listened to Wilma's complaining remarks; gently he strove to soothe and comfort her. It was of little use; she had grown quite restless and the flush upon her cheeks had deepened.

"It seems that Lillian will never come," she said impatiently. "Put my shawl around me, Willard; and, Clarice, bring me a drink."

Willard drew the shawl around her and a moment later Lillian burst into the room. She was not alone as they had expected; Llewellyn Greymore was with her, and quickly throwing off her damp cloak she hastened to Wilma's side.

"Are you not feeling better, sister?" she asked anxiously, caressing Wilma's thin cheek.

"Better!" she returned; "I am only worn by these three weeks of travel—tired of this dreary place. Do not think me ill, Lillian!"

But one glance at her face told Lillian that Wilma was indeed ill, just as Willard's manner—everything about him, in fact—told her that he was successfully striving, fighting, against the habit which had almost dragged him down to the lowest level of sin; and her heart beat with mingled sadness and joy as she glanced from sister to brother.

To Llewellyn they were more greatly changed. In Willard's face he found, plainly written, the marks of dissipation, which one week of temperance could not wipe out—but his face was handsome still—his form proudly erect.

"Llewellyn has something good to tell you," Lillian began after a time; "something wonderfully good!"

"Go on, Greymore; do not keep us waiting for the good things you have to tell," said Willard; and again Llewellyn told the story of his life; again his listeners were surprised and bewildered.

"It cannot be!" Wilma exclaimed. "You the son of Mrs. Allington?—Grace's brother? Impossible!" and a look of disappointment settled upon her face, for after all it was not the son of General Windford Greymore whom she was addressing—he was the son of Evelyn Allington, the stepmother whom she had hated. "It cannot be!" she repeated.

"I assure you, Miss Wilma, my mother has accepted me as her son—Lillian has accepted me as her retrieved lover, and I am now asking you to accept me as a brother—the future husband of your sister."

"Accept you, Greymore;" Willard broke in; "gladly will we accept you; and I offer my congratulations, that you have found your mother and your sister. Glad for you, Greymore!" he exclaimed, heartily shaking Llewellyn's hand.

A touch of scorn curled Wilma's lips, but Eldred Wilton was as irresistible as was Dr. Greymore, and rising, she moved slowly toward him, one white, blue-veined hand outstretched:

"Yes, I am very glad you are happy," she said simply.

"Thank you, Wilma; I am happier than I have been for many years," he returned, and the glowing brightness which overspread the handsome face was very different from the pallidness—the gloom—which settled upon the features of the girl whose hand he held.

Vividly she remembered the day when she had said to him, "Don't call Grace Wilton my sister! It seems incredible that you could have imagined her to be one of our family. A sister of mine!—an Allington!—indeed!" and she felt that Llewellyn Wilton—Grace's brother—must necessarily hate her. Once she had striven to gain his love and she knew not until now, how utterly she had failed, but Louis Mandel's love was hers and the likes or dislikes of Llewellyn Greymore—the son of Mrs. Allington—Lillian's betrothed—could matter little to her. When she returned to Boston in the early spring, the bloom of health

would be upon her cheek again, she thought, and in the first days of summer she would be a bride—a more beautiful bride Boston would never see—and lost in the dreams of the future—the future she would never see—she partially forgot the wrongs she had done in the past—and which were now continually coming up before her—she forgot Llewellyn's joys.

On an afternoon train Llewellyn departed for Chicago and on the morning following, Willard and his sisters started for Southern California.

There the winter passed amid sunshine and flowers and for a time Wilma's health seemed improving. She often touched the crimson spots which burned brighter on her cheeks and remarked: "You see the color of my cheeks grows brighter—the air of California has made me well, and Louis will be proud of his bride. I shall wear orange blossoms from this sunny land," she would add, twining a spray of the waxen blossoms into the black waves of her hair. But while she was planning for her bridal, the deep shadowed twilight of death was swiftly approaching, and as brother and sister looked upon her—tall, willowy and fragile, her face pallid, save for that spot of burning crimson—their hearts grew faint, hope fled, and tears dimmed their loving, watchful eyes, for they knew that the disease was nearing its crisis and a rapid decline would surely follow. The death they had once feared for Lillian was now surely dawning for her sister, while she had grown strong and rosy—her sister's ill health her only sorrow.

* * * * *

The warm sun of April was shining down upon mountain and prairie as the puffing engine with its long line of coaches wound its way eastward from the sunny valley of lower California, and feebly raising herself from the numerous pillows, upon which she reclined, Wilma looked out upon the green, blossoming world, so full of life and beauty; but to her it seemed a far distant land—a world in which she had no part—and sinking back, the white lids closed and a shining tear slipped from beneath the heavy lashes, laying upon the now colorless cheeks. Was she going back to Roselin to die? Could it be that the sun was sinking for her, thus early in life? Was this to be her fate? How could she die?—so young—so beautiful! A long,

shivering sigh shook her and Lillian drew the heavy silken folds of her shawl more closely about her. For a moment the big, black eyes unclosed and looked questioningly at brother and sister. Why were their faces so lovingly tender and sad? Why did each passenger look at her with the same long, pitying gaze? Yes, they thought she was going home to die; but after all they might be wrong, for how could she die! How could she leave Louis! She must not die—no she must not.

Over and over again Lillian's heart had echoed that same sad cry: "She cannot die; she must not die!" and earnestly she had prayed that she might live to know the brighter path of Righteousness before the light of life grew dark forever.

During that homeward journey Wilma grew strangely calm and patient. Suddenly she had come to realize that another life was dawning for her, that the sun which had shone brightly during the twenty-seven years of her life was dimmed and sinking. She felt the pleasures, the joys of life, slipping from her grasp and, as if in answer to her sister's prayers, she felt a golden thread stretching out through the darkness of death and drawing her nearer to the bright, shining lights of Heaven.

Tired, weary and exhausted, she reached Roselin and sank down upon the bed in her own room. The old servants had been gathered together again and the place had regained a part of its former beauty. She was again surrounded with the luxurious comforts of home and gladly she rested there—the bouquet of orchids, which Louis had sent, lying on the pillow with their dainty pinkness just touching the crimson of her cheek. Each day following, some rare, fragrant or beautiful flowers came to brighten the room which she was now quite unable to leave, and now and then Louis came to spend days at Roselin. Then her eyes would grow brighter, her voice stronger, as for a time she dreamed of the day when she would be a bride. But when he had gone she would smooth the satin folds of the gown which was to form a part of her trousseau and crushing down the choking sob which arose to her throat she would murmur sadly: "No, I must die; I have come back to Roselin to die."

The days wore slowly on; the hills grew green, and at last the sun set for the last time in the fading month of April, rising again to kiss the sparkling dews of May. Wilma opened her

eyes and looked out upon the world—bright, green and joyous with the song of birds. Then wearily she turned on her pillow and for a time lay so still that Lillian, thinking her asleep, moved softly toward the door. Again her eyes opened and reaching out her hand she called her to her.

“My dearest sister,” she murmured; “you are so good to me—so kind—so patient—and I—I——; forgive me, Lilly, for every piercing word I’ve spoken—for everything I’ve done to cause you pain. For my sake, forget that your sister was aught save gentle and kind;” and Lillian, laying her round, rosy cheek upon her sister’s thin, white one, only sobbed: “Forgive you, Wilma?—I have nothing to forgive.”

“There are several things I wish you to do for me, Lillian,” Wilma went on, struggling hard to crush the pride which had reigned supremely before this moment. “I want Grace and her mother to come to Roselin,” she hurried on. “I want them to be with you when I am gone—she will be your mother always, Lillian, when you are Llewellyn’s wife—and I want them with us now. I want to tell them I’ve repented—before it is too late.”

The last sentence was almost whispered and Lillian, bathing the hair which lay in waving coils upon the pillow, with her tears, silently kissed the smooth, white brow.

“Will you send for them, Lillian—will you telegraph for them at once?”

“If my sister wishes it, I will gladly do it,” Lillian replied.

“Yes, Lillian, I wish it, and I must see Mrs. Layton—I must see Genevieve before I die.”

It was the first time she had spoken of death and with a quick shudder Lillian exclaimed: “Oh, Wilma, you cannot die! You must not die!”

* * * * *

The evening sun was setting and the warm red glow of the western sky was softly reflected on Wilma’s pale cheek. It was the second week of May, and a warm, gentle breeze floated in at the open window, whispering to her messages of love and flowers, but her strength was fast failing and with colorless lips, and eyes that had become dull, shaded by almost transparent lids, she lay quite motionless. For days Mrs. Allington and Grace had been at Roselin, and Llewellyn, too, was there; but

Genevieve had not come. She was busy with her work in Lowell and there was no vacation for her until after the middle of May, and Wilma might live to see the first days of summer.

"Will Genevieve never come?" she had asked again and again, and Lillian had as many times written to Genevieve, begging her to come as soon as possible, to Roselin.

"Will she never come?" she asked again one evening, as she looked up into Mrs. Allington's face. "She has just cause to hate me, but will she not come?"

"Yes, she is coming, Wilma," was the gentle reply, as Mrs. Allington smoothed the curls back from her forehead. "A few more days and Genevieve will come."

"I am glad," was the only answer, and again her eyes closed; then again they opened. "It is kind of her—it is good of you and Grace—it is more than I deserve," she said softly. "Oh, have you really forgiven me? I was wrong—I was cruel—when I might have loved you," she went on; "but I am most severely punished—I am receiving my reward—I am dying when I had hoped to be a bride."

"Do not talk, Wilma; it tires you and you should sleep."

"I shall not grieve over that part of life I am losing if I only know that I am forgiven for the past. Let me hear you say once more that I am forgiven; then I can sleep."

Mrs. Allington's face was white, her heart throbbing with pain and grief as she stooped to kiss the brow of the proud girl who was bowing low for her forgiveness. "My dear, I have long ago forgiven you," she replied. "I shall leave Lillian with you now while you sleep."

"No, Grace, too, must tell me again that all the wrongs I have done her are forgiven, before I sleep. Oh, how great were those wrongs!" she exclaimed, pressing one thin hand to her eyes to force back the tears which burned on the long lashes.

"Can she ever fully forgive me; can she ever forget the sins—my sins—which drove her from Roselin?"

A smothered sob choked her and her hand fell from her face only to raise quickly, though feebly, and stretch upward to Grace whom she found standing at her side.

"Oh, Grace, why didn't I love you when I could have helped you?" she asked sadly, drawing Grace's face down near her own.

Grace's head sank down upon the pillow beside the pale face of the girl whose arms clung so closely about her.

"Yes, Wilma, I have forgiven everything," Grace whispered at last, raising her head and looking down tenderly upon the earnest, repentant face, white with bitterness of past sins and the steady approach of death.

"'Everything'—'everything'," Wilma repeated slowly; "you do not realize, Grace, how much that means."

"It matters not how much I am forgiving, Wilma, I only know that I have forgiven all."

"Everything," Wilma repeated again; then slowly she went on: "What more can I ask of you, Grace, except that you forget my very memory? Yes, forget me, for otherwise you can never forget my sins."

"I have no wish to forget you, Wilma, and to ask it would be asking for a promise which my heart could not truthfully give—which my mind could not faithfully keep—so do not ask for it; but, remember, Wilma, that while you are forgiven for every wrong, your memory is not forgotten; you cannot wish us to forget you."

"No, no; you all know best. You will think of me as kindly as you can and I must be satisfied."

Grace gently unwound the arms from about her neck; and firmly pressing both the cold, white hands in hers, she placed them again upon the covers.

"Rest now, Wilma, and sleep if you can, and know that you are forgiven."

She bent and kissed the snow-white brow, then turned and noiselessly followed her mother from the room.

"Lillian," Wilma began, when they were gone, "if Genevieve does not come until it is too late, you must tell her what I wished to say and I trust she will forget that Willard's sister ever did her wrong. It was I, Lillian, who wrote her that letter—it was I who found the one Willard wrote to her—I who destroyed it—but I have repented—yes, I have repented. I have seen Willard's life at Lakeview—I know a part of what he suffered—I saw him starting down the drunkard's path, and I know that the fault was mine. If my letter had been unwritten, my brother would have been noble, pure and true—but I could not

sympathize—I could not help him—my pride would not stoop so low. But thank God, he has reformed and is in every way worthy of Genevieve Layton's love. Tell her for my sake to make Willard happy."

Only the short quickly drawn breaths revealed to Wilma the pain, sorrow and surprise her words brought to her sister, and raising large, pleading eyes to her face, she asked: "Can you forgive your sister so great a sin; will you tell Genevieve all, Lillian?"

"Yes, I can forgive you any sin, Wilma; and I shall gladly do all you ask; but you will see her, sister, for she is coming day after tomorrow."

"Yes, I may see her," Wilma returned doubtfully. "Is Louis coming tomorrow, Lillian?"

"No, he cannot come tomorrow, but ere long he will come again."

"Yes, he will come;" and turning wearily on her pillow she fell asleep, while Lillian still caressed her white hand.

She slept long and heavily and Llewellyn came softly in to watch with Lillian. The hours wore slowly on. The glowing red of the sky had faded, and in the shadowed twilight Wilma's face gleamed marble white; her long, loosened hair wreathing it with a frame, black as midnight, and only her sister's smothered sobs mingled with the heavy breathing of the fair sleeper.

Another day came and went and again the sun was setting—the last that would ever set for Wilma, for as its long, slanting rays streamed in at the windows of her room, she knew she would not see the dawn, and clasping her brother's hand in hers, she whispered:

"Genevieve will not come, but tell her, Willard, that I would gladly call her 'sister'; I should gladly welcome the day that would make her my brother's wife. But I can not live to see my wish fulfilled. I'm sorry I did you both so great a wrong; but God has forgiven me, Willard, and for my sake, think tenderly of your sister's memory."

The long, dark lashes sank heavily upon the thin, colorless cheek, and as often as they raised, her eyes sought the faces of brother and sister. "I loved you, but I did you wrong," she murmured; and striving to catch the first sound of another foot-step, the first sound of Louis' voice, she fell asleep.

When at last she awoke, Genevieve was bending over her.

"Genevieve——," she whispered, as her long, white fingers closed over hers, "forgive me—I was wrong." Her hand, still weakly clasping Genevieve's, moved feebly toward Willard and voluntarily his closed over them both—his sister's and his only love's. "Make Willard happy," she went on slowly; "and do not hate his sister."

Again her eyelids closed and for a time she seemed sleeping. The sound of Louis' voice aroused her and, looking up into his face, a faint, trembling smile made its transient passage across her face—faded—and was gone, but she could only whisper:

"Louis—you have come——;" and with her head pillowed on his arm, one hand clasped in his, the other still held with Genevieve's in Willard's grasp, Wilma Allington again slept—the last, long, unawakening sleep of death.

A solemn stillness settled upon Roselin, and Lillian, exhausted from weeping, fell asleep with Llewellyn and his mother bending over her. Louis sat in the library, his head bowed on his hand, while Willard paced restlessly up and down the hall past the open door.

Hours later as Genevieve passed him, he caught her in his arms and whispered: "At last, Genevieve—at last—Wilma has made it right;" and the tender, loving look in the dark, tear-dimmed eyes raised to his, seemed to echo: "At last—yes, at last;" and she hurried on to assist Grace with the many duties which the morning brought for them.

For hours preceding the funeral, Louis Mandel sat by the side of his lost, beautiful bride—for Wilma, clad in her satin bridal robes, surrounded by their many soft, creamy folds, with the rosebuds of the bridal bouquet strewn about her and clasped in her waxen hands, was far more beautiful now than she had ever been in life.

CHAPTER XLVII

WEDDED

AGAIN the June roses were blooming at Roselin, twining gracefully up the ornate Corinthian columns, and almost hiding them with the crimson and white of their blossoms. Roselin was one huge bower of roses. In heavy cataracts they fell over the stone balustrades and hung from the veranda roof—a mass of yellow, pink, crimson and white.

Little more than a year had passed since Wilma had been laid by her mother's side, down by the garden wall, in plain view of the little lake, upon whose smooth surface the sun shone down with a dazzling brightness; little more than a year had passed since Genevieve had promised to be Willard's wife, and on this day Wilma's wish was to be fulfilled and Genevieve was to be a bride.

The little white cottage was clad in sunshine and flowers, and Genevieve's expressive face, bright and smiling, surrounded by the white cloud of her bridal veil, was as sweet and beautiful as the fairest of June brides, and as Willard led her to the floral bower beneath which the ceremony was to be performed, he looked lovingly down upon her queenly form and gracefully bent head. The diamond bandeau—his gift to her—was sparkling among the fragrant bells of the lilies-of-the-valley in her hair; the diamond necklace was sparkling at her throat, and his face gleamed with love and the joy of claiming her.

The little wedding, solemnized in the presence of many of the village folk, was very different from the grand wedding in Boston when Marie had been his bride and when with a firm, sad face he had led her from the church—his wife. Now he looked eagerly forward to a future of happiness with Genevieve—his model—his ideal—and at the first opportunity he drew her into his arms and whispered:

“Genevieve—my wife—I love you now even more than I have loved before.”

But even before the marriage at the cottage, the village was astir with rumors of a double wedding at Roselin. Grace's engagement to the young southern lawyer had been announced, and during his visits, Dale had been admired by all the village, while Llewellyn—the lost and recovered son of Mrs. Allington—was the hero of their little town—the man whom all would select as the husband of Lillian Allington. And two weeks later, while the June roses were yet blooming, and Roselin gay with the song of birds, perfumed by the fragrance of flowers, both Grace and Lillian were wedded.

Brightly the sun arose on their wedding morn, and in the full glow of its rosy rays Llewellyn drew Lillian's arm through his and strolled to the margin of the lake.

"My little sweetheart needs to forget the hurried preparations inside—she needs to have a breath of fresh air—she needs to see how beautiful the world really is, on this—our wedding-day—and, Lillian darling, when next we stroll here you will be my own dear wife."

He paused, and bending down, kissed her rosy lips and golden curls. Her cheeks grew delicately pink, her lips faintly smiled and her eyes looked out across the little lake to the green, velvety slopes beyond as she murmured softly, sweetly:

"Yes, Llewellyn, only a few more hours and I shall be your wife—you my husband—but our feet are to tread the lands of Europe before we stroll here again at Roselin."

She finished half sadly, and taking her face between his hands, Llewellyn raised it till her eyes met his.

"And would my bride prefer remaining here, at Roselin, rather than traveling through Europe and seeing the wonderous beauties of the foreign lands?" he asked.

"Oh, no, no!" she exclaimed. "Not that; our ocean voyage, our travels abroad, will be grand—Willard, Dale, you and your brides, and your mother to accompany us!—how dear of her to consent to all our plans. It will be beautiful, Llewellyn; but it was Wilma who always longed to visit Europe—she, who was denied the joys which are given me—while I could be happily contented here—alone with you, my husband."

"We shall always be happy, dear, no matter where our feet may wander," he whispered; "and my wife deserves many joys."

They walked slowly back to meet General Greymore, who, with feeble steps, came down the path toward them.

"Miss Grace is waiting for your opinion about some flowers, my dear," he said, laying a fatherly hand tenderly on Lillian's shoulder and she tripped lightly away, leaving General Greymore alone with his adopted son—his only child.

"My boy," he said, as they watched the slight figure hurrying away from them, "I rejoice in your happiness, and to her I am giving the gift I prize most highly—a man whom, I have no doubt, will prove a true and worthy husband—my dear and only son."

There was a slight tremor in his voice and Llewellyn's strong, young hand closed over the one which had fast grown feeble. "Have no fear, my dear father; I shall strive to prove worthy of her love—a worthy gift from you—my father to my bride."

And when the appointed hour came and he looked upon Llewellyn—tall and noble, his handsome face gleaming and bright as he moved up the aisle, which the guests had formed, to meet his bride—he felt all the love and pride of a father fill his heart. 'Twas the little boy whom he had taken from the fishermen—cold, wet and limp—almost twenty-one years ago, and now he was standing at his sister's side—she herself a bride—taking for his wife the daughter of his mother's husband.

Every guest stood breathless as they met beneath the white and pink canopy of roses, gathered from the gardens at Roselin. Very different were the brides—one tall, dark and willowy—the other, small, golden-haired and fairy-like. Lillian's sweet face was almost lost in the folds of her bridal veil, while Grace's cheeks flushed and her dark eye-lashes drooped as Dale—more solemn than she had ever before seen him—answered firmly, distinctly, the questions which bound them for life.

They were wedded—and the moon cast upon Roselin a light as soft, as mellow, as the sun's last rays had been brilliant. Llewellyn and Lillian—Dale and Grace—Willard and Genevieve were wedded, and Mrs. Allington was mother to them all.

* * * * *

Five years later, and one glance at Baltimore, where the office of Carlson & Collins remains unchanged, shows us

Chester Collins a bachelor still. Mr. Carlson's dark locks have grown quite grey, but his quiet manner remains the same; and more than one girl has occupied Genevieve's chair, but never has one filled the place which she had left vacant.

Adelaide Richard has, for more than two years, been the wife of Louis Mandel, and though the memory of Wilma—his lost bride—lingers still, he has learned how dear the sweet winning ways of the former have always been to him since the days when they played together in the old New Hampshire hills; and from the windows of her home, just opposite the University, Adelaide—a loved and happy wife—watches the students come and go during the school term and listens to the birds singing in the evergreens during the summer days.

Turning from Baltimore we look upon the little cottage in Greenfield where Mrs. Carrelton and her single maid live. Miserably the days pass for her, and enviously she looks from her doorway upon Lakeview—clearly visible amid the green of the swaying trees which shadow it. Robert Layton and his young wife live there with his mother, and the prospering young farmer and his family are thoroughly hated by the poor woman, who for years had called Lakeview her home and who now owes the few luxuries she still affords, to the generosity of Willard Allington.

Five years—and the sun is still shining upon Roselin—the home of Dr. Eldred Llewellyn Greymore. For a time after their return from Europe, Llewellyn had resumed his work as a physician in Chicago, but after the death of General Greymore, they went back to Roselin. The prospering little village of Ashville had more need of him than the bustling city, and there he determined to devote himself to the work of his chosen profession; and as we look upon Roselin for the last time it is upon a gay and happy group.

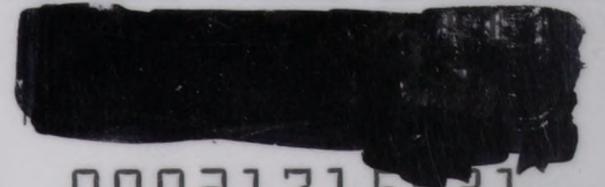
Willard and Genevieve have come down from Boston—Grace and Dale from their New Orleans home—to visit Roselin while the June roses are blooming—and with them is Mrs. Allington, who spends a part of her time with Grace and a part of it at Roselin with her son and Lillian. She is never happier than

when little Algerine Clinton and Margaret Evelyn—Llewellyn's brown-eyed, fair-haired daughter—are lispng at her side, and Genevieve's tiny son nestling in her arms; and Lillian—bright, smiling little hostess—often looks lovingly at them as she whispers to Willard her wish that he might paint them.

Willard is now a noted artist of Boston, while his wife is petted, flattered—but never spoiled—by society; and often times as he bends lovingly over her shoulder to kiss his son's small cheek, he exclaims:

“God grant that I shall never ask my child to wed for wealth.”

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