

A ROMANCE OF THE RIVIERA.

"Still, I don't see that I can marry you," said Felicia Brandram, with sad firmness, as she looked through the window across the promenade at the blue sea beyond.

"Oh, you are influenced, of course, like all women, by what the world says," angrily answered her companion, a young man who stood near her in an attitude of request.

"Is there not need?" she asked. "Everyone cannot be wrong. There is not one who has any good to tell of you—you have none even to say of yourself."

"Where would be the use if I began to blow the trumpet of my virtues—supposing I have any?" he replied bitterly. "Who would believe me against your 'everyone'? I never pretended to be better than—most men are."

"No; but I think you must be worse," she answered, forcing herself to hardness. "I don't know anyone else who has had to leave his regiment—to avoid being turned out of it, I suppose; nor who has had to take his name off his club—for the same reason; nor whom half of his former friends refuse to know in the street."

"There are some things a fellow can't clear himself of; you know that affair was one of them. Who would take my word only against such convincing appearances? I had to drop out of everything—there. I have said all this to you before."

"I know—don't protest any more, Rodney; it does no good. I have never been one, as you must acknowledge, to care for scandal, even for seeming—"

"In short, you don't believe me," interrupted Rodney, violently.

His cousin said nothing.

"And yet you love me!" he continued, watching her with increasing bitterness.

"Unfortunately I do," she answered. They were both silent for some seconds.

"Well," he began again, "isn't love what is most needful in marriage? Isn't marriage without it a sacrilege rather than a sacrament? Isn't love—"

"It is a great deal," she said, as he hesitated for a word, "but it is not all. If it were all, I would be your wife to-morrow; but I am something else than a heart, and I cannot marry you with a fraction of myself only, however large it may be. Besides, a husband is not all though he is a great deal. I have a mother; I have friends; I have principles; I cannot hurt and quarrel with all who are dear to me, who have made up my life hitherto and filled it with their goodness; I cannot defy and forget a man I have held closest for the sake of a thing so variable, so short-lived, as love."

"Is that what yours would be? Then you do well to spare me," he answered. "But, I ask you, where will you find a man whose life will bear inspection on your puritanic lines? I don't know him. There is hardly one anywhere who hasn't been a little wild."

"Well, there is no one anywhere whom I want to marry," she answered.

"Except me," he put in.

"Except you; and you I will not."

"Look here," he cried, "with your hardness, your cruelty, you are breaking my heart, Felicia! Is that nothing to you?"

"I break my own, too," she answered, not looking at him.

In a minute he began again. "I know I have no past to offer you; but I have the future. I love you with all my strength; you would regulate my life henceforth. Doesn't so great a man as Sheridan, or Goldsmith or someone, say that your best husband is a reformed rake?"

"I don't care about your Sheridan, or Goldsmith or someone," replied his cousin, unmoved. "I won't give myself to a rake whose past I cannot share. I won't devote my future to picking him out of the mud; there is mud of my own I must avoid. I am no saint, with works of supererogation available for his benefit; and if I were, I don't believe in them." She suddenly turned upon him her handsome face, with its setting of brown hair.

Looking at her he asked angrily: "Why on earth was I such a fool as to fall in love with a woman who has gray eyes, I wonder? There is no mercy in them, no love, no relenting—only judgment."

"Oh, my poor eyes! Never mind them!" she said, fretfully, "they have done me harm enough in looking so much at you." Then she sat down suddenly in a chair that was near and burst into piteous tears, saying: "Go away, Rodney, leave me to myself."

But he knelt down by her and drew her head to his shoulder, and kissed her tears away, and caressed and comforted her, and did so with much grace and real feeling. "There, you let me kiss you," he said; "you let me hold you like this; you are relenting, surely?"

"No, you know I love you, and I shall never marry anyone else, so it does not matter, so far as that is concerned," she replied. "I am weak of me, but one cannot be strong throughout. If I could I would shed no tears for you."

"I don't give you up yet," he said, a little later, taking his leave. "I shall see you to-morrow. You are going to be in the carnival?"

"Yes, of course," she answered; "but I shall be glad when you go away, Rodney."

With the grey eyes tear dimmed and their delicate lids reddened, she stood looking through the window at the white straight road which lay between the gate of the villa garden and the low sea wall; and beyond was the placid blue of the Mediterranean, and the red and purple tones of sunset deepening in the sky above it. Rodney's graceful form walked down

the short path between the palms and the aloe shrubs and, turning at the end, he raised his hat to her with a smile that was half an inquiry. "Never," she said aloud in answer to it.

Felicia Brandram was the only child of a poor man of good family, who in the days when it was not common to do so, had married a rich American girl, and their child had been trained in a strange mixture of New World puritanism and Old World luxury. Now, at 22 years of age, handsome, and of considerable force of character, she found herself possessed of strong tastes for elegance and ease which her moral principles did not allow her sufficiently to gratify, so that, going continually into society, dressing with the best, smiling with the lightest, she did so with a protest; so that having chosen, among all the men she knew, to love her cousin Rodney Rochester, she loved him with pain, with angry and inexorable renunciation, and her tenacity of purpose promised to make her feeling for him as lasting as her determination that it should not find its natural sequel was inflexible. She was wintering with her mother in the south of France, whither the brilliant and evil-doing Rodney had followed her. Some said his affection was for her fortune, others that he was piqued by her repeated refusals of him; but, in fact, he was as much in love with her as was possible for a handsome man whose *bonnes fortunes* were proverbial.

Felicia watched the tones of sunset deepen, then fade away into gray in the east, and then yellow in the west; she watched the starlight begin and the young moon take upon herself her nightly gilding; and still there was war in her soul; for all the youth and emotion that were in her cried out for Rodney, while reason held out, pitiless, that it must not be; that a man so blighted, so far backsliding, were he ten times as winsome, was a man she would do wrongly to marry.

In the road, as she stood thinking and looking from the window, a cart passed containing grotesque figures, followed by men with banners and poles.

"Oh, that sickening carnival!" she said aloud. "Much heart I have for all its folly! Yet, after all, what have I done that I cannot enjoy it as others do? I will! I will have two days' happiness! While it lasts I will let myself love Rodney, and be glad that he loves me. I will be among the merriest here; I will ask myself no questions; I will let myself go—just for two days. Then will come the ashes; then Lent, Lent that may last my life!"

There was no cloud or stir among the winds those two carnival days that year; all through the long hours of daylight the sun shone untiring, and the crash and scurrr of the waves upon the shore were softened till the sound was hardly more than a menace; and the stretch of the blue to the south spread up and out among its ripples broad smooth spaces, as though at such intervals oil indeed—perhaps in the sparkle one might be forgiven for thinking it the oil of gladness—had been poured upon the waters. In the streets, under the generous afternoon light, men and women of all nations crowded, unrecognizable, delightfully, preposterously fooling, in temporary willing forgetfulness of dignity, age, sex—of all but the frolic of the moment. Here they swept, in their fantasy of clothing, in their red, blue, black, white garments, in their headgear of any date and fashion, showering their confetti impartially on friend and stranger, laughing, romping, fleeing, pursuing, like a schoolroom of grotesques just released to their playground. At street corners parties huddled together, attacking and attacked; under the plane and pepper trees odd couples, suddenly smitten with a sense of each other, pranced briefly along, and usually demure souls in comic clothing, darted out the fight, joyous in the feeling of great deeds and forbidden freedoms. In the midst of them the carnival, with its cadence of bedizened humanity, made its way, trailing its procession of absurdities—of staring masks, of trumpeting females, of grinning old women tottering over their distaffs as they doddered along on donkeys, of local and national incidents in miniature and in mockery. Everywhere the ground was thick and white, and the air stinging and dangerous with the fall and swirl of chalky pellets and powder, and everywhere was laughter; the whole town seemed to have gone mad and to rejoice in it.

"Oh, Rodney! how much money you have been wasting on me these last two days!" said Felicia on the evening of the second, as they stood waiting for dinner in the drawing room of her mother's villa. "It was pure waste, you know, for I couldn't eat any of those delightful things you threw at me, because of my mask."

"How do you know they were delightful, then?" he asked, standing near her.

"Some fell in the folds of my domino—I have eaten them since," she answered, laughing with a face as different from that which looked from the window two evenings before as comedy is different from tragedy. "It was very wasteful of you," she repeated.

"I don't think so," he answered; "the idea gave me pleasure, that I was raining sweetness upon you. Don't you like to think of it, too?"

"Of course, of course," she replied; "but then there were my flowers, I saved none of them, not one; they all fell past me, and I had only the pleasure of the scent of them as they went."

"Well, that is enough for me," he answered gallantly. "I only wished you to see I made a difference for you—a difference between you and every other person in the world—as I do, indeed—as I always would—will."

Felicia's face clouded; the hours of carnival-time were numbered—with dawn of the following day her short love making would be over, and she would have entered on the Lent beyond. "Never mind about always," she said; "make a difference for me to-night. When the ball is done, mind, it is all to be done, put away—forgotten, too."

He frowned impatiently, for, although he had accepted her terms, and agreed for so much indulgence and no more, he had done so, naturally, by way of reaching out for the more as soon as the so much should be past.