

"I don't think it is later than common, but I thought the clock was never going to strike. I was tired, and I wanted the work to be over."

"My darling, I wish you had it not to do; I cannot bear that you should have to work so hard."

"It can't be helped," returned the girl. "I am not strong enough for it, I know, but I can earn more by factory work than anything else, and now when Teddy is ill and my mother obliged to stay at home on his account, we want all that we can get; and, after all, everyone has to work, and these walks home from the mill are reward enough for all I do there."

"Do you think your parents could be induced to accept any help from me?"

Elsie started. "Oh no! never, unless—except—" she stopped a moment, and then added earnestly, and yet as if she were almost afraid to speak the words. "Oh, Mr. Challoner! I wish they knew!"

The young man's brow contracted slightly. "Elsie, if I could let you tell them, do you think I would deny you what you wish? I can depend on your discretion, but not theirs, and a sudden disclosure might ruin both my prospects and yours. Besides, dearest, am not I, and my love, enough to make you happy?"

The last words were spoken very tenderly, and the girl's face lost all sadness as she looked into his, and answered with a smile, "Enough! more than enough. I sometimes wonder why I was given such happiness. But after all it is not much wonder that the concealment comes hard. I never had a secret in my life."

"I hope, my darling, you will not have to keep this one long."

"I do not think it will be possible," said Elsie. "The girls at the mill already suspect, for I see them making signs and laughing when I take this road, and no one ever offers to come with me; and when Teddy gets well, and mother can come to work again, our walks will be at an end at any rate."

"Well, before that time comes, something may happen to render further concealment needless. We never can tell what may come; I always hope for the best."

In this sentence a keen observer might

have found the key to the young man's character, even without the clue afforded by his personal appearance. The fair complexion, the light hair and moustache, the grey eyes, whose expression was decidedly more pleasing than intellectual, the full-curved lips, and somewhat retreating lines of the chin; all showed Allan Challoner to be one of amiable disposition, but without much force of mind. Looked at separately, the component parts of his face were so far from being models, that the wonder was that the whole conveyed so agreeable an impression as it undoubtedly did. He looked about three-and-twenty, but was in reality two or three years older, the extreme fairness of his hair and complexion taking from his apparent age.

Elsie remained silent for some moments after his last words, and when she spoke again it was on a different subject. They pursued together a somewhat devious route through streets now fast thinning, for the weather was not such as to tempt anyone without a strong motive to remain abroad. Though most likely not of much general interest, their conversation engrossed their own attention, and it was only the sudden striking of a church clock close by that reminded them how the time had passed, and of the lateness of the hour.

"Oh dear!" said Elsie, with a start, "I did not know it was so late. They will think I am never coming. I must go."

"And I shall be scolded too," said Allan, "for I shall be late for dinner at home. You don't think that a great crime, eh, little one? You do not know my father, Elsie; I stand as much in awe of him as you can do of yours."

So they separated, with a shake of the hand, and a yearning look that seemed to say they would have liked a fonder parting, and went their different ways—Elsie pursuing her course with hastened step, and Allan returning to the nearest spot where a carriage was procurable to take him home. And neither was aware of the figure that had stealthily followed and watched them during the first part of their walk, and was now half an hour in advance of Allan, on the road to the same destination as himself.

It was a poor dwelling of which Elsie