

the satin dress. It fitted admirably, and nothing could have been fairer than the round, clubby arms and plump, well-shaped shoulders which the short comings of the dress showed to good advantage. Now the lace over-skirt—now the berthe—and then the veil, with the orange-wreath twined among the flowing curls, and Rosamond was dressed at last.

'How do I look?' she asked, but Marie Porter made no immediate reply, and as she gazed upon the young girl, so beautiful, so innocent and unsuspecting, who can tell of the keen anguish at her heart, or how she shrank from the bitter task which she must do, and quickly, too, for the clock pointed to three, and her plan was now to strike the dove and then flee ere the eagle came. She would thus wound him more deeply, for the very uncertainty would add fresh poison to his cup of agony.

'How do I look?' Rosamond asked again, and after duly complimenting the dress, Miss Porter added, 'I promised you my story, and if I tell it at all to-day, I must begin it now, for it is long, and I would finish it ere Mr. Browning comes.'

'Very well, I'm all attention,' said Rosamond, and like a lamb before its slaughterer she knelt before the woman, bending low her graceful head to have the wreath removed.

This done, Miss Porter said, 'have you any camphor handy, hartshorn? I am some times faint and may want them.'

'Yes, both, here, in the bathing-room,' said Rosamond, and she brought them to the lady, who placed them upon the table—not for herself, but for one who would need them more—for poor, poor Rosamond. The disrobing proceeded slowly, for the little girl was well pleased with the figure reflected by the mirror. But Miss Porter could not wait, and when the wreath, the veil, and berthe were removed, she seated herself by the window in a position which commanded a full view of her victim's face; and forcing down the throbbings of her heart, which it seemed to her were audible in that silent room, she commenced the story.

CHAPTER X.

THE STORY.

'My home,' began Miss Porter, 'is, as you know, in Florida. I am an only child, as were both my parents, so that I have now living no nearer relative than a great-uncle—a superannuated clergyman, who superintends my affairs, and who, in case I die

before he does, which is very probable, will be heir to my possessions.'

'It is now nearly ten years since my father started for Europe, and I went to an adjoining state to visit a widow lady, whom I had met in New Orleans the winter previous. It is not necessary that I should use real names, consequently I will call her Mrs. Le Vert. She was spending the summer on her plantation, which she called her country-seat. It was a large, old-fashioned, wooden building, many miles from any neighbors, and here she lived alone—for her only son, a lad twelve years of age, was at some northern school. At first I was very lonely, for the secluded life we led at Holly Grove was hardly in accordance with the taste of a young girl. Still, I did not mind it as much as some, for I cared but little for gentlemen's society, and had frequently declared that I should never marry.'

'Towards the last of July, Mrs. Le Vert's brother came to visit her. He was a handsome, boyish-looking youth, six months older than myself—just out of college—full of life and very fond of pretty girls, particularly if they chanced to be wealthy.'

'That's a little like Ben,' said Rosamond, and Miss Porter continued:

'From the first, Mrs. Le Vert seemed determined to make a match between us, for her brother was poor, and she fancied it would be a fine idea to have the Porters' estate come into the Dunlap family. So she threw us constantly together—talked of me to him and of him to me, until I really began to believe I liked him. He, on the contrary, cared for nothing but my money. Still he deemed it advisable to assume a show of affection, and one night talked to me of love quite eloquently. I had been to a dinner party that day, and had worn all my diamonds. He had never seen them before, and they must have inflamed his avarice, for I afterwards heard him tell his sister that he never should have proposed if I had not looked so beautiful that night. I was irresistible in my diamonds,' he said.'

Miss Porter paused a moment to witness the effect of her last words, but Rosamond was looking over her shoulder at a wrinkle she had just discovered in the waist, and did not heed them. Still she was listening, and she said, 'Yes—go on. You were looking beautifully that night. Did you consent to marry him?'

'Unhappily, I did,' returned Miss Porter, 'for I had made myself believe that I loved him. I wished that he was older, to be sure, but he said we would wait until he was of age. This plan, however, did not suit his ambitious sister. She knew I intended