

Kitty ran up the steep, narrow stairs to the low-ceiled chamber. Mason went back to the sitting-room with Leah.

"I want you to go. You have hardly been anywhere this summer. Kitty will say yes with a word from you."

"I do not see—"

"There seems no reason why it should not be a success," ignoring her beginning of an objection, "and George Holland will be there."

"I do not know George Holland."

"That is precisely the strong part of my argument. I want you to know him. He is rich; he is wise; he is the best of good fellows."

Kitty came in then. Her toilets never took long. The disarray was all external. To kick off the ragged slippers and step into a pair of whole ones, to shake out and gather up into one loose coil the lovely hair that rippled and waved and dropped of itself in curly rings about her face, took only a minute. The white wrapper had its own finishings of frills and lace about the neck and wrists; the whole thing was complete in ten minutes. If Leah had the skirt and sacque and slippers to put in place by-and-bye, at least Kitty never kept anyone waiting.

That night, when Dick Mason had gone with a half-promise that his invitation would be accepted, and Kitty was gossiping in the moonlight with a girl friend, Leah and her mother sat on the cottage porch. Both had been quiet a long time. They had the gift of silence, these two women.

"Mother, if you had your life to live over, would you marry a poor man?"

Mrs. Allen did not answer for a long minute.

"If I loved him," she said rather faintly.

Leah did not know that her mother's marriage had been preeminently "a love match." Henry Allen had won her from a circle in which she was sought for and petted. He let her give up all the goods of life because she loved him, and then his fickle fancy tired of her. When he died, five years after their marriage, Mrs. Allen felt that as far as she was concerned, life had not been a success. And still she said, true to her womanhood, "If I loved him," to her daughter's question.

"Does it pay, I wonder?" Leah said again, moodily.

"It depends—a little. There are women—"

"And women," breaking in with a short laugh. "Mother, I shall marry for money—not an idiot nor a scoundrel, but certainly not a poor man."

And Kitty, singing to herself as she ran across the street through the flickering elm shadows, was thinking of the glories of Fanny Gorham's Bridal outfit. The afternoon rhyme came to her lips again: "If it's bad to have money, it's worse to have none."

And as if some fatality ruled the subject, Kitty repeated her sister's question when they were alone together that night.

"Leah, would you marry a poor man?"

"No," calmly.

"But I thought—" half bewildered.

"You thought I did not believe in mercenary marriages. Well—one learns. I know myself better now."

She went on plaiting the heavy braids with deft fingers, and said no more.

The last bundle of work went away from the house the next day. In the summer lull in business there was leisure in the Allen Household.

"Now we can make over our old dresses," Kitty said, as if the opportunity were a privilege. "I am going to finish the last chapter of *Anne*, and write two letters."

"And go to the picnic to-morrow?"

"Yes, if Dick comes again to see about it."

Dick came that afternoon. The arrangement as it originally stood had been that the two girls were to share the Mason carriage with Dick himself, his mother and sister. But, as Dick informed Kitty with perfect composure, Charley Morse was coming with an invitation. He had passed him on the way. Charley did not know of Dick's arrangement, and Kitty was to take her choice with the old school-girl freedom.

"Charley, of course," Kitty said, watching him sharply.

"I supposed so," with perfect good temper. "But I say, if you were one of my own sisters—"

"Well, if I were one of your own sisters?"

"Your gown, you know."

"Yes, I know," mockingly. "It's very kind of you, Dick. The blood ran into his face."

"Of course you know I don't mind. You are Kitty, and that's enough for me, in any thing. But a stranger—and Charley is so fastidious—and he'll be here in a minute."

She thrust out a small ragged foot.

"It is rather awful. I'll go and make myself fine. Don't you be afraid, Dick."

And not another glimpse of her did he get, though he lingered to the last possible minute.

Leah sat and swung placidly in her low rocker. Her cheap, neat-patterned lawn was as fresh as when she put it on three days ago; the lace-work in her slim hands looked like elegant trifling instead of having a money value for every inch. Dick's presence did not interfere with her train of thought; they had been neighbors all their lives; she had known him from the day when he attained his first jacket. So whether he talked or was silent it did not matter.

"What a wife you'd make for a poor man," he said, suddenly, out of a long pause.

It seemed as if every one who approached her in some way touched the trouble in her mind. She did not reply, looking at him with a kind of pained smile and going on with her lace.

It looked a very pretty summer picture—the girl in the shady porch, the handsome, idle youth lounging on the steps at her feet. George Holland thought so, driving past.

The stylish horses in their glittering harness, the elegance of the light vehicle behind them, caught Leah's attention.

"Who is it?" she asked, rather abruptly.

"George Holland."

He did not tell her, as he might have done, that Holland, having seen her at church the Sunday before, had left no stone unturned to find her out. If Leah had only known it, the cream-colored bunting over which she had hesitated so long in the buying was destined to be rather an important factor in that summer's history.

She had one of those sweet, pure New England faces, flower-like in delicacy, and yet almost severe in unobtrusive strength. The thoughtful dark eyes were deep and shadowy; her mouth had an unconscious sadness in its sweet curves. In her ivory-hued dress and bonnet she looked not unlike some precious bit of carving in the dusk of the hot, dim church.

George Holland could afford fancies. He was thirty-five, rich, and alone in the world. It was new riches coming after years of grinding poverty. Five years of possession had not worn off the charm of novelty. Perhaps he over-valued his new estate; certainly there were excuses for him if he did.

So Kitty went to the picnic with Charley Morse, and Leah occupied a part of the back seat of the Mason carriage, and chatted contentedly with Mrs. Mason all the way out to the High Rock.

The Allen girls, living all their days in this quiet country village where in childhood at least the lines were not very sharply drawn between the different social grades, had known as school playmates every other girl in the party. There was no question of education or breeding; it was simply the want or possession of money that made the difference between them. As the Allen fortunes had contracted little by little, Leah had dropped out of the village festivities. She could not afford the time nor the strength to keep up the struggle for appearances at the cost it involved. It was easier to accept the life of renunciation that lay before her, to spend her few hours of leisure over a book or her music. The world is all alike down to its very smallest piece. Slip out of the channel, and the current does not go out of its way to follow you. Leah's associates had always been older than herself. Most of them were married now, and that helped to make her feel that she belonged to a bygone generation.

The day was pleasant enough—a good deal like other days. It was only as they were preparing to come home that anything out of the ordinary happened.

She had met George Holland, and had looked at him with a new standard of measurement in her mind. She found him quietly common-place, not obtrusive and not young. There was nothing knightly about him. Leah had had her ideals like other girls.

They had waited for the sunset, and now under a white-moon moon they were starting on their homeward ride.