

Merton did *not* know her; and often was Mabel mortified and grieved at the reception the lady met with on her first visits at the house. Of late, however, Mrs. Owens, out of kindness to Mabel, had ceased to come, not lessening, however, her kind attentions to Mabel herself. Mrs. Merton, more annoyed than ever at Mrs. Owens' conduct, never let an opportunity pass of saying something disagreeable with regard to her; but Mabel was wiser now, and seldom replied to such attacks—all this and much more she bore humbly and uncomplainingly.

When her mother and sister had gone, Mabel took her lonely meal, then drawing me forward, began her ceaseless work; but she seemed strangely restless, and started at every sound; and yet I think when the little gate opened and a moment afterwards Reginald's knock sounded, she was surprised; I don't think she expected him.

When Reginald came in, flushed with walking quickly, and looking brighter than usual, she glanced up proudly at him and smiled; he looked indeed handsome that night.

"How did you know I was alone?" she asked as he sat down.

"As I was going home I saw your mother and Kate going into the rectory, and so I thought you would be alone, and I was longing so much to see you, *ma belle*. But you are not going to begin that tiresome work again? Ah! not to-night," he pleaded, as she shook her head. "Come and talk to me just for to-night; you so seldom give me all your attention." So Mabel went, and as he drew her to him such a strange light shone in his dark eyes that she almost shrank back.

"Reginald, don't!" she said, half trembling. "You frighten me; I never saw you look so."

"Because," he replied, quickly, "you have always kept me back, always checked me; but, Mabel, I can't stand it any longer; are you not mine? never so much mine as now! So soon to be my very, very own! For I have really left that dull old office for ever, and I am going to begin a new life in a new world. I am going to Australia, Mabel." He watched her keenly, but

she did not move or speak. "I am going to be a different man, my darling. I am young and strong, and I shall soon build a home there, and Mabel"—he stopped, and his breath came short and fast. "Mabel, you will come with me! You will come and help and encourage me in my new life? Ah! my darling, I know you will." He bent over her, and I could see the damp drops like beads shining on his white forehead.

A terrible struggle seemed to pass over Mabel's frame. She clasped her hands tightly together, and bent her head so low he could not see her face.

"Reginald, I cannot!" she murmured at length; "oh, I cannot!"

"Mabel, darling," he said, tenderly raising her face between his hands, and trying to look into her eyes, but she closed the lids wearily, and her face looked strangely old and wan, "you do not think what you are saying, dearest. Don't say you cannot, you know you will—you know you love me too well to let me go alone exposed to so many temptations you alone can help me to resist. Ah! Belle, my darling, you know you will come!"

She bent her head again, shaking it slowly and still murmuring:—

"I cannot! oh, I cannot!" then she opened her sad, heavy eyes and looked up at Reginald, and he saw there her decision.

"You say you cannot; do you not mean you *will not*?" he exclaimed, almost shaking her off in his excitement. "Was it to cast me off thus you made me love you so truly, so deeply, that to be repulsed in this way almost drives me mad?" But, seeing she was trembling violently, and looked so pale and ill that she could scarcely support herself, he folded his arms around her. "Ah! my little Mabel," he pleaded, "you could not do without me! My Belle would be so lonely—she would fade away like a drooping flower! Ah! you are mine; no one can separate us. Don't drive me wild by making me think so!"

For a moment Mabel let her head rest wearily on his shoulder, then, gently disengaging herself, she said in a voice that