

this afternoon," he says. "Is it any thing in which I can be of service? Anything about the mills——"

"Nothing about the mills. Thompson is a very competent man of business, and sees to that. Laurence, when I was in Washington, I made my will."

She says it abruptly. Longworth, lying easily, looping and unlooping his watch chain, lifts his eyebrow.

"Always a wise precaution," he answers, "but in your case quite premature. Still it is well to have these things settled and done with."

"And, Laurence, I have made you my heir."

It has come. In spite of her marked partiality for him, which he understands and which touches him, in spite of O'Sullivan's words, he has hardly ever glanced at this possibility. He is a man absorbed in his work which suits him thoroughly; he has no special ambition for sudden and great wealth. Yet sudden and great wealth is offered him here. He sits quite still, and there is a brief silence, her face slightly agitated, his showing no shadow of change. At last!

"I am sorry to hear this," are his first words. "It cannot be! I am deeply grateful, but it cannot be."

"Why not?"

"Dear madam, do you need to ask? You have a daughter——"

"I have no daughter," she interrupts, her voice low and cold. "I have had none for twenty-one years. I have double none now, for she is dead."

"Is she dead? I regret to hear that."

"I do not," says Mrs. Windsor, icily.

"But she has left children—you mentioned the fact to me once yourself. She has left daughters, and your daughter's daughters are your heirs, not I?"

"The daughters of the Frenchman, Landelle, will never inherit a penny of mine."

"My dear Mrs. Windsor, pardon me—they ought, they must. They are the last of your line; your blood is theirs. Do not visit the sin of their father, if sin it was, upon them. In any case I shall not usurp their right."

"You absolutely refuse!"

"I absolutely refuse. It is quite impossible for me to take this inheritance of your granddaughters."

"You are magnanimous," she says, with a brief and very bitter laugh. "You are one of the world's wonders—a man who can refuse a fortune."

"I don't think I stand alone," he says, coolly. "Think better of mankind, my dear madam. I fancy I know some men who would decline to rob two orphan girls of their birthright. It must be theirs, dear lady, not mine."

"It shall never be theirs," she retorts, cold, repressed passion in her tone; "they were nothing, less than nothing to me before. If you persist in thwarting me for their sakes you will make me absolutely hate them."

"I must persist, and you will not hate them. Do you not see I shall be utterly unworthy of the regard with which you honour me if I do this? In your heart you would despise me, and your contempt would be as nothing to the contempt I should feel for myself. It is best for a man to stand well with himself. I should be simply robbing your granddaughters if I accepted their rightful inheritance—be nothing better than any other thief. I feel all your great goodness, believe me—feel it so deeply that I have no words to thank you; but if, indeed"—his voice grows low and tender—"you give me some of that affection you once gave your son, let me use it to plead for your grandchildren. Send for them, bring them here, if their father will resign them, and my word for it love will follow, and the right will be done."

"Their father is dead," she says drearily.

"And they stand in the world quite alone. Then truly it is time they were here. This is their home, you are their mother. Forget the past; let death blot it out. Send for these young ladies, and let them be the comfort and blessing of your later life."

She sits, her quiet hands folded, stung, deeply stung, in her affection for this man, and in her pride. He sees the diamonds darting rays of fire on her fingers and at her throat, sees the hard, cold look that sternly sets her face.

"This is your final and absolute decision?" she asks, in a low voice. "You will not think twice—you will not change your mind?"