

Grace, and we should be happier together. I cannot think of any other plan at present."

"I live in Dublin, too," he tells her, a little eagerly.

"I thought you lived with Mr. Sinclair?" Dulcie says, quietly; but all the time she feels glad that there will be at least one friendly face to see sometimes in the city whither she is going.

"I am only with Mr. Sinclair temporarily," he explains; "and I return to Dublin very shortly—in a few days, in fact."

"We must go next week," Dulcie says, sadly, still utterly unable to believe that she is really and truly leaving Loveleigh forever. "I wrote about lodgings to-day."

So she talks gravely to Mr. Carlton of their plans, and seems to find comfort in the young man's quick, ready sympathy.

In the evening Mr. Sinclair comes with a proposition from Humphrey Lovel; he wishes his cousins Dulcie and Grace to remain at Loveleigh and take care of it as long as they like. Dulcie's cheek flushes hotly.

"I could not stay here on sufferance," she says proudly, yet with sadness in her voice; and then suddenly she leaves the room.

Mr. Sinclair turns to Grace, while Mr. Carlton remains gazing out at the open door through which Dulcie has vanished, with a very grave look on his face. Grace is weeping quietly.

"I wish Dulcie would be reasonable," old Mr. Sinclair says petulantly. "I am sure this young Lovel won't be a bad fellow. She ought not to be so proud."

Grace looks up with sad, wet eyes.

"Dulcie is proud; she would never live on any one's charity, I know; and I think, Mr. Sinclair, we must let her have her own way."

"Humph—allow her to starve in her own way? Pride, indeed! Like most people, she mistakes obstinacy and temper for pride."

Mr. Sinclair speaks all the more crossly because his heart is aching for Dulcie, whose strong, bright nature has never known much real trouble till now. Mr. Carlton, after filleting all round the room, and avoiding looking at the mournful tears chasing each other down Grace's cheeks, has betaken himself to the garden outside; and presently he comes upon Dulcie on a rustic seat, her face covered with her hands, and with a throbbing heart, he sees that she is crying as if her heart will break. He can hear every choking, smothered sob, and he listens and wonders till he can bear it no longer, and comes straight over to where she is sitting.

"How you must hate your cousin!" is all he says; and Dulcie looks up, crimson, tear-stained and ashamed, her breath still coming in little gasping sobs.

"No," she whispers, very tremulously. "I do not hate him; I was only thinking of leaving Loveleigh. I shall not break down again; I was tired to-night."

"But perhaps you are wrenching Humphrey Lovel. He can not help being master here, and I think you ought to see him himself before deciding on going away."

Dulcie shakes her head.

"I will never see him; and I have quite decided. Perhaps—smiling a little through her tears—"we may meet in Dublin—you and I, I mean—not my cousin—and I was going to ask you to give me your advice sometimes, for I have never lived anywhere but in the country, and I am half afraid of 'pastures new.'"

So they talk of her plans—anything rather than discuss the new master of Loveleigh.

"When you want a friend, come to me," Mr. Carlton says at parting; and Dulcie looks up into his face and replies, simply—

"I will."

In the glorious summer sunshine Dulcie drives her ponies out at the gate of Loveleigh for the last time.

"Good-bye, Loveleigh, good-bye," sobs Grace, as they pass down the avenue under the sweeping limes; but Dulcie never speaks, never looks back; her lips quiver—that is all.

At the railway station, when poor Grace had been helped in, Dulcie goes back for a second, kisses the two ponies with a sorrowful gentleness, and turns, to find Mr. Carlton at her elbow. He does not speak; there is an odd distressed look in his face.

"Good-byes are painful," Dulcie manages to say, in a voice unlike her own. "I pity the living things most. Poor Punch and Judy—I wonder what will happen to them?" she adds, watching the gray ponies trotting away in the sunshine, and then turning aside to hide the tears in her eyes.

"How brave you are!" he says. "You are breaking your heart at leaving Loveleigh, and you will not admit it."

"Hearts do not break so easily," she answers. "And I hardly know what I feel now—very strong, I think, for I must work for Grace."

And then they are off, Grace weeping, with a Loveleigh kitten in one basket and a bunch of Loveleigh roses in another, straining her eyes for a last look at the familiar scene. But Mr. Carlton sees only Dulcie, with every scrap of color dying out of her face, and a great yearning sorrow in her eyes.

It is a damp and foggy day. Dulcie Lovel feels the influence of the weather very strongly as she pursues her way through the sloppy streets. She carries her head in the old erect fearless manner, and her face is brave and bright still; but there is an anxious look in her eyes which never shone there at Loveleigh; and

she walks straight on, heedless of the passers-by, turning over the old problem again and again how to make money.

It is the month of November; some of the shops are lighting up, and the rain is beginning to descend.

Dulcie has reached her destination, a fancy-work warehouse, and paused with a disappointed face to look at a table-cover and fender-stool, embroidered in crewel-work, hanging in the window.

Grace's work, and not sold yet! It is useless going in, and the girl wearily retraces her steps. She is not a good manager; Mr. Sinclair's regular remittances seem to melt away, and poor Grace requires wine and many little luxuries.

"A pound a week is too much for our rooms," Dulcie thinks sadly. "It leaves so little to live on—and I am in debt already."

As she walks slowly along the streets, her mouth takes its saddest curve. What is to be the end of it all—and poor Grace growing white and thinner every day? With a burning cheek and a beating heart, Dulcie steps bravely into a millinery establishment, and asks timidly if they know of any work she could get.

"I am rather clever at bonnet making and trimming," she says, with a pleading look in her true blue eyes; "and I can do any sort of needlework."

But she is eyed with suspicion, and once more goes out into the rain, tired and disappointed. Grace, working diligently by the fading light, looks up as she enters the dreary lodgings.

"Is my table-cloth sold, Dulcie?" she asks, quickly.

"Not yet, dear," Dulcie answers, wearily, standing limp and dragged in her wet garments.

Grace lays down the cloth she is embroidering. "There is no use in going on with this, as it appears impossible to sell anything," she says, despondingly.

And then there is silence, Grace lying back in her invalid chair, the sole possession brought from Loveleigh, and Dulcie, with her face to the window, looking down at the dreary scene below.

"I think these lodgings are too dear," Dulcie says presently, speaking slowly and painfully.

"Oh, Dulcie, we couldn't go to anything worse, a lower sort of place. It would kill me, sitting there day after day, never going out. It is worse for me than for you," Grace declares, shuddering, and her voice shaking pitifully.

Dulcie looks round the dingy room—at the vases of dried grasses, the glass shade of wax-flowers adorning the table, the horse-hair sofa with its ragged antimacassar, at all the miserable surroundings—and, in spite of herself, she smiles.

"Fancy fretting at leaving this?"—and she stoops and kisses Grace. "We will stay here, dear; I can easily get something to do."

She speaks more hopefully than she feels; but Grace has implicit faith in her strong, brave sister, and dries her tears.

"Mr. Carlton is coming to tea, Dulcie; he came this afternoon while you were out, and said he would come again."

It cannot be the faint flame from the very bad fire that Dulcie is so vigorously poking which brings the sudden beat of color to her cheeks. She looks transformed in a second; but only the sickly flush leaping into life sees the smile on her lips, the happiness in her eyes. All these months, he has been her friend; many and many a day have they met, and their poverty has brought them together as no prosperous time would have done. In the old days the proud happy mistress of Loveleigh would have laughed at the idea of her heart beating fast at the sound of a man's voice, the touch of a man's hand; and now if she had to choose between him and Loveleigh, even the dearly-loved old home would stand but a poor chance. Dulcie suddenly gets up from the hearthrug.

"And we have nothing for tea!" she exclaims, aghast. "And you know, Grace, he works so hard all day, he ought to have something substantial."

"Chops?" suggests Grace.

"Oh, we had chops last time!" Dulcie says, her brows knit, her poor little purse in her hand. "I will run out and get something before I take off my things," she adds; and off she goes, singing with the blithe voice of the Dulcie of old.

"What a pity he isn't rich!" thinks Grace, looking into the fire.

Dulcie, coming home with a full basket and an empty purse, looks radiant. She unpacks her basket proudly.

"I had to get the chops after all—there was nothing else; but I got some really fresh eggs, and some Cork butter; and—look, Grace—was it very extravagant?—I bought a bottle of Marsala—it is better than bad sherry—and some biscuits; so we can have a little negus before he goes away, the night is so wet." She speaks half apologetically, looking down at her purchases for fear Grace should see the happy light in her eyes. "And now I'll ring the bell," she goes on; "and while the table is being laid, I will run up and change my wet dress."

In ten minutes she is down again, looking like a picture in the shabby room, in a crimson dress and lace ruff.

"Loveleigh splendors," she says, laughing. "Oh, Grace, if we only had some flowers for the table!"

They hear a step on the stairs, and then Mr.

Carlton makes his appearance, also laden with a basket.

"Will you be very angry?" he says, looking at Dulcie. "It is my birthday. I wanted to give a party; but I knew Grace couldn't come, so I brought my birthday feast with me. Ma-homet and the mountain, you know."

"Mr. Carlton," begins Dulcie, blushing hotly. "Oh, if you are angry, I shall go! But it is so dreary drinking one's health all by oneself; and I got a lot of presents to-day," putting his basket on the floor and opening it without further comment. "Flowers first—chrysanthemums and a bunch of violets."

"Like the flowers at Loveleigh," whispers Dulcie, and, as he hands them to her, he looks up, and their eyes meet.

Then Dulcie takes the violets to Grace, and gathers up the chrysanthemums in her hands.

"They are just like those in my garden," she says softly.

"They are from your garden," Mr. Carlton says guiltily. "Mr. Sinclair sent them to me, and these birds," holding up a bundle of snipe and woodcock. "Would your landlady dress them for supper, and may I stay the whole evening?"

"You may stay," Dulcie answers gravely. "But why should you give us all your presents?"

"Because they came from Loveleigh," he answers quickly, "and you have the best right to them. And I want you and Grace to drink my health by-and-by," pulling out two bottles of champagne from the bottom of his basket.

"Those did not come from Loveleigh," Dulcie says with earnestness. "Mr. Carlton, you are very extravagant."

"Only for my birthday," he answers, with a smile. "And that comes only once a year, you know."

And all the evening, Dulcie wears some of the Loveleigh violets at her breast.

Three days later, three long November days. It is raining still, an indefatigable mizzle. Side by side, through the slushy streets, walk Dulcie and Mr. Carlton in earnest conversation.

"I will take anything," she is saying—"any situation; but poor Grace must remain where she is." Very gravely the eyes so deeply blue look up into his; the bright young voice is very brave. "I must work. Why should women never be able to make their own way in the world?"

"But you are not suited for this sort of life."

"I must learn to get suited then," she replies; and, as they turn down another street, she adds, "Oh, I hope I shan't see poor Grace's work still hanging in the window! Was it there last night, Mr. Carlton?"

"I am not sure," he answers, evasively.

"I suppose you never gave it a thought," laughs Dulcie, and, glancing up, turns crimson suddenly at the tender look in his eyes; and she turns away again quickly with a fast-beating heart. Was ever any joy in the old days equal to the knowledge of this unspoken love?

They have reached the shop by this time, and with keen delight Dulcie sees that the places where Grace's work hung are empty.

"I will wait here," Mr. Carlton says quietly, and stands with an amused face contemplating a row of children's knitted socks in the window.

In five minutes Dulcie is out again, flushed and excited.

"Three pounds! How glad Grace will be! I wonder who bought the table-cover?"

"What does it matter?" he rejoins, and then adds quite suddenly, "I heard a piece of news that may affect you and Grace."

"What news?" Dulcie asks, still smiling and happy.

"I believe your cousin Humphrey Lovel is going to be married."

"I do not see how that can affect us," Dulcie says, after a moment's silence.

"If he never married, you would be mistress of Loveleigh again," Mr. Carlton remarked quietly, keenly regarding the girl's face.

"Do you not think I can be happy without Loveleigh?" Dulcie asks softly, without looking up.

"Yes," he says with some eagerness. "But, if you heard to-morrow that Loveleigh was yours again, if anything happened to him, you would be so happy, and you would cheerfully go home again, and forget all these dark, miserable days here."

"Why do you say this?"

Only one look from her eyes, but into his face comes a great and sudden joy.

"Dulcie, is it so?" he whispers. "If you had to choose, what would it be—me or Loveleigh?"

"You," she answers, with a proud, shy, sweet happiness on her face.

So in the rain and wet the old, old story is told again.

"But I am so poor," Dulcie falters; "I shall be only a burden to you."

He laughs a low, soft, happy laugh.

"It will be happiness working for you, for my wife," he says, proudly and reverently.

"May I come home with you to tea, Dulcie?"

"Yes," she answers, with glad eyes.

It is Dulcie who is extravagant to-night, for very little is left of one of Grace's pound-notes by the time the purchases of various delicacies for this tea of teas are complete. And he stands by and watches her, with such a smile on his face that she, turning once and looking at him,

blushes and grows grave at the thought that she alone has brought this joy into his life.

Grace is very glad when she hears the news.

"We shall never feel lonely any more," she says, joyously. "And I will work very hard, too, Dulcie, and help to keep the house."

They are a merry party this evening, and somehow go back to Loveleigh; and Mr. Carlton draws Dulcie on to speak of her home, now hers no longer; and he notices how her voice trembles, and once her eyes fill as she speaks of the old days.

"You are not fretting and sorry for Loveleigh still?" he whispers; and she answers—

"I have greater happiness than all I lost."

And looking into her face, he is satisfied.

Poor Grace, who will never have a lover of her own, goes to bed early, and leaves them together.

"You will like to talk of your plans," she says, a little wistfully; "and I am very tired, Dulcie."

"Darling!" whispers Mr. Carlton, as he takes his first kiss from her lips. "Dulcie, my own!"

And the poor shabby room seems glorified in Dulcie's eyes. This last regret for Loveleigh has vanished; hers will be a life of poverty, but gilded with such love that all the riches in the world will seem nothing in comparison. And this is the foretaste of her happiness, her lover's arms around her, his kisses on her lips.

"You won't mind leaving Dublin, Dulcie?"

"No; I should be content to live wherever you like."

"Because I have given up my appointment here."

Dulcie does not mind, she sits with her hand in his, looking forward with shining eyes to all the sweet life to come. She sees it all—a poor lodging perhaps in some dingy street; but the wife's face will be alight with love as she watches for her husband's home-coming.

"Shall I picture our home?" he says fondly; and she, looking up at him with a swift beautiful blush, answers:

"Yes."

Gathering her other hand in his, he begins—

"It will be in the country."

"I am so glad of that," breathes Dulcie, softly; thinking of green fields and brawling streams.

"And it will be a long, low house, with many gables and chimneys all covered with creepers, and there will be a dear old garden, and on the lawns there will be grand old trees, and far away you can see the river winding in and out."

Dulcie looks up at him, with paling cheeks and wet eyes.

"That is like Loveleigh—and we can never have a home like that."

He takes her face in his hands, and holds it so that he can look right into the shy, troubled eyes.

"Wait, Dulcie, till I have finished. In our room I can see a long room, with oak rafters and oak floor and rare old china bowls full of roses, and my wife coming forward to kiss me, like this"—bending his face over hers. But Dulcie burst into tears.

"Why do you talk of a home like that when it can never be?" And then she goes on, with quivering lips. "Dear, you know I want no home but what you can give me."

The smile dies out of his face at sight of her tears, and a great tenderness takes its place.

"Dulcie, can't you guess? Shall I tell you?"

"Tell me what?" she asks, with wondering eyes uplifted.

"Shall I tell you," he whispers, "that the house is waiting for its mistress, the dear old home—Loveleigh?"

Flushed and startled, Dulcie gazes up into his face.

"Loveleigh! What has happened? Is my cousin dead?"

"No, indeed?" smiling gleefully down at her. "But he is going to be married, and to take his wife to Loveleigh."

A tide of color surges over Dulcie's face.

"I do not understand," she says slowly. And then he takes her in his arms.

"My darling, can't you guess? It will make you happy, won't it? And you will forgive me for having deceived you all these months! You know I should never have won your love in any other way."

Her startled eyes look gravely up into his. All her schemes of sweet poverty come tumbling down as the words pass her lips—

"Then you are Humphrey Lovel, and I—"

"You are mistress of Loveleigh," he says, adding quickly, "Oh, Dulcie, say it won't make a difference!" He has been quick to notice the change in her face, and he thinks he is a shade less dear to her than he was an hour ago. "Dulcie, look at me!"

There is a ring of pain in his voice, and it reaches her heart. One look, and the proud mistress of Loveleigh surrenders at discretion.

"I think Dulcie is sorry she is not to be poor," Grace remarks, smiling, still hardly able to realize that Mr. Carlton and Humphrey Lovel are one and the same person.

Dulcie looks quickly across at her lover's face, a soft blush rising to her cheek, and he smiles a fond response.

Grace keeps talking of the joy of going home to Loveleigh; but to the two whose eyes meet swiftly in question and reply riches and poverty weigh very lightly so long as they have each other.