

Knoll. Alice was with Joanna, who had sunk into a state of the most hopeless despondency and weakness. Her heart seemed literally broken. Harald had been speaking of Mr. Warrender, whose sudden departure had both vexed and grieved him.

"He is a noble fellow," he said, "and you might have been his wife, Helen. He has birth, intellect, consequence and wealth, equal to any man in England, a man of talent and action, brave as a lion, energetic and strong-minded, and you have given him up for one who is nothing but a dreamer, an idealist, the painter of great deeds which he can never achieve."

"Rather their voice, their oracle and inspiration as genius ever is!" exclaimed Helen, proudly.

"There now you look like a sibyl," cried Harald, laughingly.

"Do you remember the night we went to the sugar-bush? I shall not be such a fool as to trust any of your deceitful sex in such matters again. But never mind, it cannot be helped. Here comes your oracle—isn't that what you call him, beautiful priestess? and Ernest with him; I suppose my father is still with the gallant Colonel Orrin."

Thus saying, the young sailor ran to open the door for Max and Ernest Tennyson. They had just returned from the inquest which had been held on the body of D'Arcy, and after saying a few words to Helen, Ernest went in search of Alice. Max then approached the table where Helen sat, and, bending over a basket of moss and wild roses, said,

"Fauna wishes very much to see you; will you accompany me to the Hollow now?"

Helen instantly agreed, though her heart beat quickly, and her cheek flushed, and, leaving the room, returned in a few moments prepared for her walk. Harald watched his sister and her lover till they disappeared among the trees; "poor Warrender!" thought the young sailor, "but *he* is not a man to break his heart for any woman!" and taking up a volume of the "Last Days of Pompeii," he soon forgot the present in the exciting scenes of the long vanished past so picturesquely and powerfully presented to his view. In the mean time Helen and the young painter pursued their way to Leafy Hollow. With that shrinking sensitiveness which makes a woman dread that which yet she most longs to hear, she sought to lead the conversation in any direction but that which lay nearest to the hearts of both. Max answered her remarks mechanically, and in the fewest words possible, till Helen, finding it

impossible to feign any longer an indifference which she did not feel, also sank into silence. Then Max said,

"Helen, since last night I seem transported into a fairer and brighter world than I ever before knew. This moment must place my happiness beyond doubt or destroy my short dream of bliss for ever. Oh! Helen, tell me—I may hope now—is it not so, dearest?"

Helen trembled violently, and, withdrawing herself from her lover's arm, sat down on a fallen tree, which lay beside the path, while Max, not less agitated, and already beginning to feel his hopes waver, endeavored to see her face. In a moment she looked up at him, and while her eloquent eyes, her quivering lips and crimsoned cheeks confessed her struggling emotions, said with touching earnestness,

"Oh! Max! your lightest word has always been truth, and by that truth I pray that you will answer me now! Can you love me, can you trust me, are you sure that you will always love me and trust me as you would have done if I had never loved any but you?"

Max answered her appealing look by one which spoke more eloquently than all words.

"Aye, Helen, perhaps better," he said; "for if you will now give me the heart I have so long sought, I will know that your love is not that of the fancy, which may fade as the bright colors it has painted grow dim, but the firm and settled conviction of the heart and soul which no time or change can alter!"

"And yet I have so often heard you speak of the glory which the *first time* imparts to all things, of the beauty of the dawn of day, of the early spring, of the freshness and purity of the heart ere its bloom has been brushed away—that I tremble lest you should remember that the freshness has faded from mine."

"Helen!" exclaimed Max, passionately, "be more just to me, more just to yourself. The freshness of outward forms of inanimate nature may fade, but that of a pure heart, an immortal soul can never! True love cannot die, Helen, because it is based on those qualities which like itself are immortal, and while the one lives so must the other. Can you not feel this love? Oh! Helen! can you not feel it for me?"

"Yes!" exclaimed Helen, once more for an instant meeting his fond glance. "ah! yes!"

Max cast his arms round her who was at last his own, and murmured from his full heart,

"Again, Helen, oh! again say those words which my heart has so long yearned to hear from your lips! Say once more, I love you!"