

CHAPTER II.

"I want to talk to you" said Mrs. Pemberton, "and so I sent Laura away. I want to talk to you about your marriage. Laura and you intend to be married, eh?"

Carl bowed gravely. "Yes, madam, it is our intention. We have loved each other——"

"Oh, yes, I know all about that. A lot of sentimental nonsense. That is all very well in a story but not for real life."

Carl was silent, he thought it was better to let the old lady have her say out.

"You cannot live upon love. Love won't put furniture in your house, nor pay your servants, nor give you food to eat. Tell me in plain words: what is your income?"

Carl told her, naming a sum that he thought would be sufficient for his own and Laura's requirements.

Mrs. Pemberton sighed. "And you expect to succeed with your writing?"

"I trust I shall," said Carl. It was very hard to discuss these matters with this very worldly woman. He loved his profession, and, aside from any mercenary motive, he hoped to be a success in the literary world. He would like to write so that people would be the better for his work.

Mrs. Pemberton nodded.

"But you do not have to depend solely on your pen, do you?" she asked.

"Well, no, not exactly. My mother left me a small sum, you know."

"And I suppose you have it invested well?"

Carl smiled.

"Oh, my money is safe enough. It is in the hands of a trustee. My uncle saw to that."

"Well, I suppose you intend to see about a house?"

"We thought, Laura and I," said Carl, "that we would take one or two more rooms in the house where I am, for the present, until we can see our way to something better. There are several very nice rooms vacant over there."

"I suppose you will settle this money, that you speak of, on Laura, when you marry?"

"I intend to do so," said Carl. "You may be sure I shall provide for her the best I can."

After a little more conversation Carl left, without seeing Laura again that evening.

Laura was sure that Mrs. Pemberton was making herself as disagreeable as possible, and felt very sorry for Carl, but she could do nothing.

Carl left the house and walked down the street. The air was warmer than it had been, and he felt more like taking a long walk, than returning to his rooms. So he walked on.

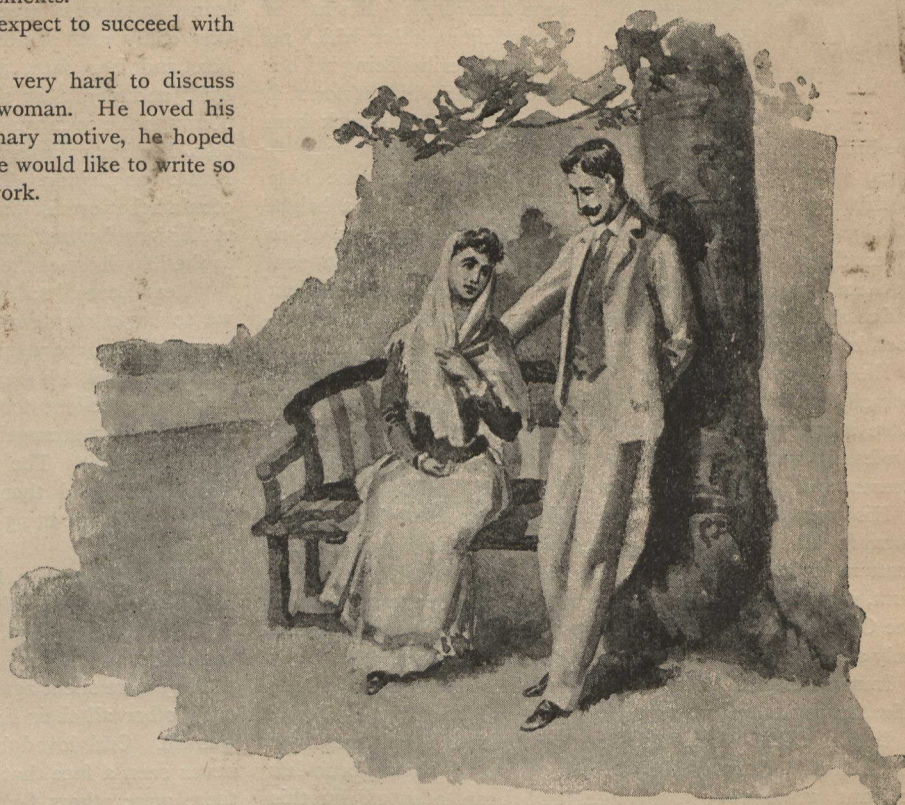
As he went, his thoughts wandered over the past, present and future. And now his marriage was all settled. He had never doubted Laura's love, but he could not fully trust Mrs. Pemberton. He knew that she had never looked with favor on the marriage, he knew she thought Laura might have done better, and he felt that her power over Laura was very great.

But he threw all these thoughts off, and his heart was full of thanksgiving.

Laura was to be his own! He thought of her sweet, beautiful face, with its radiant crown of golden hair, and of her trust in him, and he vowed that nothing should be left undone to make her life as happy and as full of joy as she deserved it should be.

The hour was late when he turned towards his home. He hastened on, and in a short time he was ascending the stairs to his rooms.

How dreary they seemed to him as he entered the small reception-room. Yes, but they would not be so, much longer. He pictured Laura's form flitting about. He saw in her the fairy who should transform these dismal rooms into a very wonderland. He longed for the next day when he should see



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her again. They had left a little supper ready for him, and by the tray was a letter. He saw the postmark was "London," but thought it a letter from a friend there, with whom he corresponded. He did not, therefore, hasten to open the letter, but ate his supper first.

At last he opened it. It was not from his friend as he expected. As he read it his face grew pale, and when he had finished, he sank back in his chair, his form shaken with overpowering emotion.

The letter was a long one, but the news contained therein can be explained in a few words.

The trustee who had the power over Carl's money had made away with it, and not a cent remained. He was gone, no one knew whither.

The blow to poor Carl was very great, for the thought would