

booding of failure and misery. I did not misjudge him so far as to suppose for a moment that he was as insensible as he appeared, but I perceived that his tenacious and inflexible nature had been cut to the quick both in its intense pride and love, and that though the wound bled inwardly—bled mortally, perchance—he would never utter a cry, or even allow a pang.

Alas! alas! he would never forgive me. The concealment, the deception, as he would call it, which had appeared to me justifiable, would seem crime and outrage in his eyes. I lowered my head beneath his searching gaze, and remained silent.

"You have nothing to say?" he inquired, after a vain pause for me to speak. "You cannot deny that letter? God is my witness," he said solemnly, "that I wish to be a merciful judge. I may hold extreme views of a girl's folly, a woman's weakness; you would only be vain and faithless, like your sex, if you had played with this young man's feelings and deceived his hopes. Is this your explanation?"

It was a very snare of Satan offered for my fall—one easy lie. "I deceived him but never you." And the way of forgiveness was open. I saw he was clinging to the hope with a concentrated eagerness it was impossible for him entirely to disguise. Oh! was it necessary for my punishment that the hard task should be made harder by that relenting glance?

I only hesitated for a moment; the discipline of the last five years had not left me so blind and weak as even in this supreme emergency to reject truth for expediency. However he might judge me, I must stand clear before God and my conscience.

"No, Malcolm," I said desperately; "the truth is rather as it first appeared to you. I have been guilty in this matter, but my fault is surely one that you will consent to pardon; for even were it greater, I think our five years of happy union might turn the scale in my favor."

"Yes," he said; "you have borne with the difficulties of my temper with angelic patience, until the passion which induced me to marry you, despite of many obstacles, was weakness in comparison with the love I had for you—yesterday. Only tell me I have not been your dupe throughout—only—" He broke off abruptly. "I can bear no more fencing round the point," he said harshly; "one word is enough—did you love this youth?"

"I did, from childhood, with all my heart and soul."

"Up to the date of that letter?" he asked quietly, but the muscles worked round the clenched lips.

Yes, and beyond it," I found courage to say; but hardly had the words been spoken, when I felt I had exceeded the limit of his endurance. An involuntary oath escaped his lips.

I saw there was no hope for me in deprecation and irresolution: I must speak to the point, and decisively. "I have a right to be heard before I am condemned," I said, "and I claim my right. I confess I loved the youth who wrote that letter, but it would have been a miracle had it been otherwise. You know from what a life you rescued me; a prisoner in the dull rooms above my father's book-store, without a pleasure, a friend, a hope in life. You were astonished at my proficiency in unusual studies; if at that time an active brain had not driven me to intellectual labor, I should have gone mad in the midst of my austere and desperate loneliness. I was scarcely fifteen when Duncan Forsyth, a kinsman of my father's, came to study medicine in our city university, and to live as boarder in our house. I say it was inevitable that such a connection should in due course ripen into love: He was young, gifted, and attractive, but it would have needed but half his endowments to win my heart then. I was nothing but a blind, passionate child, neglected utterly till he flattered, caressed, and wooed me. I think he loved me with all the faculty of love he had, and for a time we were very happy. To me it was a delicious dream—Have patience with me, Malcolm; I must tell all the truth. My dream, at least, was brief enough; I soon awoke to discover,

it little matters now, that the lover I was canonizing in my imagination, as the type of heroic virtue, was unworthy. For, a while, I would not believe: when conviction became inevitable, I clung desperately to the forlorn-hope of reform. It was in vain; his vices were too confirmed and tyrannous for even my influence—and it was great—to overcome. Then I gave him up. I thought the struggle would kill me, for my foolish soul clung to him desperately, but I could not mate with dishonour and dishonor. My father who had approved of our engagement, and who did not know or believe the facts concerning him, upbraided and coerced me; Duncan himself, relying on my weakness, tried all the skill he had to move me, till I was nearly frantic in my misery.

"It was just at this crisis that you first saw me, visited my father's book-store, and desired to be made known to me. What followed, I need not tell. You told me you loved me well enough to marry me, despite of social inferiority, if I thought I could love you in return—if I had a young girl's free heart to give you. You insisted upon this Malcolm—I dare not deny it—and I came to you with a lie in my right hand! Here lies my offense, and, God knows, I do not wish to palliate it; but before you utterly condemn me, consider the temptation. My father forbade Duncan the house, and threatened me if I dared to tell you the truth concerning him; but I hardly think that would have moved me, had I not persuaded myself also that I was justified in deceiving you. Had I told you I loved Duncan Forsyth, you would have given me up, and shut against me all the vague but glorious hopes such an alliance offered; but more than a lie, I knew this unworthy love must soon die out, and that my deep recognition and reverence for your goodness and excellence would end in an affection stronger and deeper than the weak passion of a girl. Before God, I vowed to do my duty; from that hour, I have striven, with his help, to keep my vow; and save in that preliminary falsehood, Malcolm, I have never wronged you."

My husband had recovered his self-command while I was speaking, but the last phrase seemed to overthrow it again.—"Wronged me!" he repeated, and the intonation, quiet as it was, thrilled me like physical pain, it was so hard and unrelenting. "I wish to be calm, Ellinor," he continued, "and therefore I will speak briefly. You seem to think that you have extenuated yourself by your confession. To my heart and mind you are condemned past forgiveness. Nay, do not plead or protest," he said, with a haughty movement of restraint, as I was about to approach him; "it is a point for feeling, not casuistry to decide. You understand fully the delusion under which I married you. I imagined I took to my arms a pure-hearted girl, fresh and innocent as her seclusion warranted me to believe her; instead of that, I find myself to have been cajoled by a disappointed woman, with a heart exhausted by precocious passion. You think it excuse sufficient that it was your interest to deceive me; to my mind, the fact adds only insult to the injury. Ellinor, you have ruined the happiness of my life. While I have been resting on the solace of your love, worshipping you for your sweet patience with a temper roughened by many causes unknown to your inexperience, it has all been the insensibility of pre-occupation, or at best a miserable calculation of duty. So gross is your sense of conjugal faith, that because your treachery has been only of the heart, you dare to say you have never wronged me, and to call upon God to approve your virtue because the lapse of time and better influences, I trust, have enabled you to school a disgraceful passion, and offer a measure of regard for the immeasurable devotion I have felt for you."

He paused in spite of himself, unable to proceed, and before he could prevent me, I had thrown myself at his feet. It was in vain to argue—to fight against his hard words—I could only implore.

"Malcolm," I cried, "you cannot believe what you say. Your affection has been the chief happiness of my happy life; you could not desire, you could not exact from a wife

a deeper love, more entire and minute, than I feel for you. Forgive this one deception, Malcolm; believe me now."

I would fain have been eloquent, but sobs choked my voice. I was completely overcome; and when he forcibly extricated himself from my hold, I fell almost prostrate at his feet. He lifted me up coldly, but courteously, and placed me on the sofa.

"Pardon me," he said, "this excitement is too much for you, and can do no good. When you are calmer, we will conclude this matter."

There was the same cool decision of tone and aspect in his manner which had marked it throughout the interview, and which convinced me he still adhered to his original purpose. I felt my situation was desperate, and that the time for prayers and tears was over. Were all my hopes of the future—his happiness, too, in which was involved my own—to be dashed to pieces against the rock of his unjust severity? Was it required of me to submit passively to disgrace and misery? In a moment, I too had taken my resolve, and conquered my agitation; I rose up nerved and calm, and spoke accordingly.

"One word before you leave me," I said. "However this ends between us, you do not, I suppose, desire to inflict upon me unnecessary shame and exposure. I request you, as a personal favor—it may be the last I shall ever ask—to postpone your decision till tomorrow, and help me to-day to entertain our friends as much as possible in the accustomed manner. Do you hesitate, Malcolm?"

His face flushed; some impulse seemed to incline him to refuse, but he checked it. "It shall be as you desire," he said coldly; and left me alone—alone with the conviction of a blasted life!

For a few moments, with my hands clasped over my eyes, to shut out the redundant sunshine, I sat trying to realize my position. Granting that the threatened separation was effected with a so-called due regard to my honor and future relations with society, all that I valued and cared for in life would be irredeemably destroyed. What honor remains to the wife repudiated by an honorable husband? What chance of happiness for her when at the same time he is the centre of her affection, of all her worldly ambition and hope? Doubtless I was tolerant to my own transgression, but I alone knew the force of the temptation. I alone knew—what, alas! I felt my husband would never believe—how near extinction was the old love smoldering beneath its own contempt, and how strong was the gratitude and esteem he had already excited. Oh! could I but convince him of my love for him! I: so up and paced the room. I felt he judged me harshly, was severe even to cruelty; but then I knew the innate inflexibility of his temper, and his rigorous sense of truth and duty. I knew how love, pride, and self-esteem had been all alike wounded, and I pitied him even in the extremity of my misery almost more than I pitied myself. Still, I would not accept my ruin at his relentless hands; I was a true wife, and would not submit to the position of a false one. I had vowed to love and honor him till death parted us, and nothing but compulsion should make me abandon my post.

I scarcely know how I got through that day; but the necessity for self-command was so stringent, that I could not but meet it. Fortunately, our guests were only a few country neighbors, for it was in the height of the London season, and I in some measure supported myself by the belief that their unsuspecting cordiality was not likely to make any discoveries. Mr. Anstruther's hospitality was always splendid, and his deportment as host peculiarly gracious and inviting, and if there was any difference on this occasion, it would be impalpable to all but a very keen observer. I perceived, indeed, a change in the aspect of the countenance I had long studied so closely, and beyond that, the intonation of his voice when addressing me, fell hard and constrained upon my shrieking ear. It was over at last; and I saw our last guest depart smiling and congratulatory, with the consolation at least left me that I had acted my part successfully.

The next day, the trial was renewed, Mr.

Anstruther wrote me a few words, saying it was his intention to return to his parliamentary duties that day, and that he deemed it advisable I should remain in the country. His final determination and all accessory arrangements should be made known to me through the family lawyer, which would spare the pain of a second interview. "Cruel!" I said to myself, crushing the letter in my nervous hand, and for a moment a passionate feeling rose in my heart that I would suffer things to take their hard course, and leave duty and effort unattempted. It was but a brief paroxysm; for, at the same instant, I saw a tiny, white-robed figure flitting across the lawn toward my open window, and the sweet shrill voice of our little daughter crying aloud: "Mamma, mamma, may I come in?" I stepped out and met her; stooped down and kissed the eager, upturned face; and with that quiet kiss I renewed my vow, and strengthened it with a prayer.

"My darling," I said, "go into papa's study, and tell him mamma is coming to speak to him, if he is not busy." She ran away on her errand, and I followed at once; I did not mean to be refused. It was well I did so, for he had already risen, as if to leave the room, and had taken the child in his arms, to carry her away with him. As I entered, his face flushed with a mixed expression of anger and pain; but he was soon calm again, sent away our little girl, and then placed my chair. "There is no occasion for me to sit. I said, with a voice as steady as concentrated resolution could make it; "I shall not need to detain you long. I come to say, Malcolm, that I am quite willing to obey you so far as to remain here while you return to London, but that I must positively refuse to have any interview with your lawyer."

"You refuse!"

"I do refuse, and that finally," I pursued, "for it would answer no end. I could only tell him what I came here to tell you, that no power save physical coercion shall separate me from you. I know it is vain to extenuate my fault in your eyes, but it is at least one on which no legal proceedings can be raised; you cannot divorce your wife because she told you an ante-nuptial lie. It remains to you to abandon or magn her, but I will be accessory to no mutual arrangement. My duty is by your side while life lasts, whether in weal or woe, and I shall hold my post. That is, henceforth I shall consider this our home, and will remain here unless driven from it. I am now, as before, your true wife in heart and soul, as in word and deed; as anxious to fulfill my sweet duty to you, with no hope in life so strong as your forgiveness."

I had said my say, and was going, for I dared not trust myself longer, dared not even to look into my husband's face to read the effect of my words, but he arrested me with a peremptory motion.

"Am I to understand, Ellinor, that you mean to defy my determined purpose; and in spite of alienation and contempt, to insist upon the shelter of my roof, or rather to exile me from a place which would be intolerable under such circumstances? Do not be afraid, if you will consent to a formal separation, that the terms of it shall fail in all possible delicacy and liberality, but I cannot live with the wife who has cheated me of her first kiss."

"I am resolved," I answered. "I am able to say no more. I think I see my duty plain, and I mean to strive to do it. You must follow your own will; it will be for me to endure."

He paced the room in strong excitement. "I cannot bear it," he said, "it would eat my life out! You shall have our child, Ellinor, if she is the motive of this strange unwomanly resolution; far be it from me to torture the heart of the mother! She shall be yours unreservedly, and her interests shall not suffer one whit. You know how I love that little creature; there was but one thing dearer: judge, then, by this, of my intense desire to sever the connection between us."

"Cruel! unmerciful!" I exclaimed, with an impulse of bitterness I could not resist, but I stopped as soon as the words had escaped me: to upbraid was no part of my purpose.

"It is in vain," I said, "to think to move me by any words, however hard. I have nothing more to say. Let me go, Malcolm," and I turned and fled from the room.

[TO BE CONCLUDED IN OUR NEXT.]