

"But I must say so, Gretchen. When you were put under my charge, I determined to do my duty by you as if you were a young relative of my own. I must tell you that it is indecorous for a female to think of the other sex at all. I have never done so myself," added Miss Pinkin, virtuously drawing herself up with conscious pride. "Throughout my life I have made it a rule to myself to avoid rather than seek the other sex; and look at me!" Gretchen did look at her, and mentally reflected that possibly the other sex had also found it more prudent to avoid than to seek that hard-featured visage. "Look at me," she continued; "honoured, respected, and esteemed by all the gentlemen; you would wish to be so too at my age, would you not, Gretchen?"

"I should wish to be loved too," said the girl in a low voice.

"Hush, hush, my dear! I am shocked at you!" cried Miss Pinkin, throwing up her hands. "A girl should never mention such a word in connection with a gentleman. Come, dry your eyes, and be thankful that it was only I that found you with such improper tears in them. What would people think to find you weeping over Mr. Cecil Travers's engagement? why, it would be shocking!"

"I am not ashamed of loving him," said Gretchen, with scarlet cheeks; he is the only person in the world who has ever shown me any kindness; but for him I should have starved and died. If I did not love him, I should be a monster of ingratitude; but you make a mistake, Miss Pinkin, in thinking that I have lifted my eyes above my station. I have never dared to do so. I was crying because if he marries I shall hardly ever see him; but I am very glad to hear good news about him, and I hope he will be very happy." The last words were spoken, for all her bravery, with a little choke in them, as Gretchen prepared herself to put on her bonnet and go out on her daily rounds. And Miss Pinkin, although she thought her words most strange and forward, and turned up her eyes in wonder at what on earth the young women of the present day were coming to, yet felt a pang of pity as she watched the girl pass out, patiently and humbly carrying her roll of music under her arm, with her sad white face bent downwards, and her eyes still swollen with tears.

Late that night, when her work was all over, and long after Miss Pinkin overhead was snoring the sonorous snores of the just, Gretchen Rudenbach sat up, by the light of her one candle, writing to the man whom she was not ashamed to own that she loved—a laborious letter, much pondered over, and all written in fine, delicate German-looking characters—the only foreign things about her were her name and her handwriting—a letter in which she invoked every good gift in heaven and earth upon her benefactor, and prayed that the good God would bless him and make him happy, as he deserved to be; and then she told him that she would never forget him, however many years she might live, but always remember him morning and evening in her prayers. She told him that she knew the woman he loved must be good and beautiful, and it made her, Gretchen, glad to think how happy and proud of his love his chosen bride must be; and lastly she told him that if ever he was sad, or sorry, or in trouble, if he would come to her, he would always find in her a devoted and faithful friend, who would at any time give her life to serve him and to comfort him.

Poor little high-flown letter; yet with truth and earnestness breathing out from every line! it was written with so many prayers and tears, and with such simple devotion of a love that only asked to spend itself, and expected nothing in return!

And Cecil Travers read it with a smile thought first he would show it to Juliet, and then, with a better feeling, decided not to show it to anyone, but tore it to pieces and threw it into the fire, and then—forgot to answer it! Meanwhile the preparations for Juliet's wedding went on apace. As it would be only six months after poor Georgie's death, it was, of course, to be a very quiet affair, but still it was impossible, on an estate like Sotherne, to prevent a certain amount of feasting and rejoicing among the tenantry and labourers. A dinner for all classes in tents on the lawn, and a tenants' ball and fireworks in the evening, were unavoidable on such an occasion; and although Juliet herself would not be there, she had nevertheless all the settling and arranging to do beforehand.

And her trousseau was also, of course, in progress. Here she found an invaluable ally in her stepmother who was quite in her