

meal ended and she arose, she slowly but surely froze again. She sat down, her ringed hands crossed in her lap, and watched her granddaughters as they moved about the room. There was a piano in a corner, and Marie opened it, and ran her fingers over the keys with a skilled touch. Reine stood at the windows, and watched the sweet summer twilight falling, and the sweet summer stars come out.

"There are one or two things I would like to say to you, young ladies," Mrs. Windsor begins at last, "but perhaps it is almost too soon to speak to-night. It is always best to come to a perfect understanding as speedily as may be; it saves possible unpleasantness in the future. But if you wish I will defer what I have to say until to-morrow."

"Whatever you wish, dear madame," Marie is gently beginning, when Reine turns suddenly from the window.

"Madame is right," she says, a ring of decision scarcely to be expected in her tone, "it is always best to know precisely how we stand at once. We do not wish you to defer on our account anything you may have to say until to-morrow."

"Very well." She looked surprised, and slightly displeased at the abrupt interruption. "If you will leave that window, and sit down, all I have to say can be said in a very few minutes."

Reine obeys. Marie takes a low rocker, Reine seats herself in Longworth's especial armchair, her small face looking white and still in the faint pale dusk.

"I need not tell you," begins Mrs. Windsor, in her very coldest voice, "that when your mother eloped with your father she was discarded from this house at once and for ever. I need not tell you that she wrote me many letters imploring pardon and—money. I need not tell you those letters, one and all, were consigned to the fire, and never answered. All this you know. When your father wrote of his wife's death, it did not move me. I neither grieved for her, nor regretted her. I had cast her out of my heart many years before; she had been dead to me from the hour she became Monsieur Landello's wife. When, later, you informed me of his death, it did not, as a matter of course,

concern me at all. But when still later, young ladies, you wrote announcing your intention of coming here it became necessary to take some decisive steps. You merely said you were coming, and you gave no address to which I could write to prevent that coming. Still I took decisive measures—the first being to make my will."

She pauses. The dusk is deepening in the room, the three figures sit motionless, the low, harsh voice of the speaker alone breaks the twilight silence. Marie sits, one hand over her eyes; Reine sits, both hands clenched hard and fast in her lap, as one might in the mute agony of physical pain, her eyes gleaming in the semi-darkness.

"I am a very rich woman," pursues Mrs. Windsor; "there are few richer than I am to-day. I made my will, and I bequeathed every atom of that wealth which has been accumulating in the Windsor family for nearly one hundred years to the only human being on earth I greatly care for, the gentleman who brought you here, Mr. Laurence Longworth. What I care for him you need not know—the fact remains. My will is made, and at my death all that I possess is bequeathed to him."

She pauses again. Still profound silence, and after an instant she goes on.

"The second step I proposed taking was to go to New York, meet you there upon landing from the *Hesperia*, pay your return passage, and send you back, settling an annuity on each sufficient, at least, to keep you from want. That was my fixed resolve. But before going I sent for Mr. Longworth and told him of my plans, showed him your letter, and informed him he was my heir."

Every few minutes Mrs. Windsor pauses, and in these pauses Reine can hear the beating of her own angry, rebellious, passionate heart.

"Mr. Longworth is a man of men, a gentleman of high honor and spotless integrity—he refused to accept the fortune offered him. He so positively refused it, that it became necessary for me to think of some other disposition of it. That, however, is a question for the future. I told him also of my intention of sending you back, and found him so resolutely opposed to it that I was forced to give it up. He pleaded your right to