

place, that he had a secret, bashful self-depreciation in regard to his power of pleasing women, which made him ill at ease in their society. Not that he did not mean to marry. He certainly did. But the fair being that he was to marry was a distant ideal, a certain undefined and cloud-like creature; and, up to this time, he had been waiting to meet her, without taking any definite steps towards that end. To say the truth, John Seymour, like many other outwardly solid, sober-minded, respectable citizens, had deep within himself a little private bit of romance. He could not utter it, he never talked it; he would have blushed and stammered and stuttered wofully, and made a very poor figure, in trying to tell any one about it; but, nevertheless it was there, a secluded chamber of imagery, and the future Mrs. John Seymour formed its principal ornament.

The wife that John had imaged, his *dream*-wife, was not at all like his sister; though he loved his sister heartily, and thought her one of the best and noblest women that could possibly be.

But his sister was all plain prose,—good, strong, earnest, respectable prose, it is true, but yet prose. He could read English history with her, talk accounts and business with her, discuss politics with her, and valued her opinions on all these topics as much as any man of his acquaintance. But, with the visionary Mrs. John Seymour aforesaid, he never seemed to himself to be either reading history or settling accounts, or talking politics; he was off with her in some sort of enchanted cloudland of happiness, where she was all to him, and he to her,—a sort of rapture of protective love on one side, and of confiding devotion on the other, quite inexpressible, and that John would not have talked of for the world.

So when he saw this distant vision of airy gauzes, of pearly whiteness, of sea-shell pink, of infantine smiles, and waving, golden curls, he stood up with a shy desire to approach the wonderful creature, and yet with a sort of embarrassed feeling of being very awkward and clumsy. He felt, somehow, as if he were a great, coarse, beehemoth; his arms seemed to him awkward appendages; his hands suddenly appeared to him rough, and his fingersswelled and stumpy. When he thought of asking an introduction, he felt himself growing very hot, and blushing to the roots of his hair.

"Want to be introduced to her, Seymour?" said Carryl Ethridge. "I'll trot you up. I know her."

"No, thank you," said John, stiffly. In his heart he felt an absurd anger at Carryl for the easy, assured way in which he spoke of the sacred creature who seemed to him something too divine to be lightly talked of. And then he saw Carryl marching up to her with his air of easy assurance. He saw the bewitching smile come over that fair, flowery face; he saw Carryl, with unabashed familiarity, take her fan out of her hand, look at it as if it were a mere common, earthly fan, toss it about, and pretend to fan himself with it.