

## A WOMAN'S HEART.

*A Love Story.*

"FORGIVE me if I wound you, but what I have just told you must be final."

"Then, this is indeed final," said Warren Blair, whose voice, so full of pain, belied strangely his cold, calm face.

Margaret Falkiner bowed her head.

But before he had reached the door she sprang towards him impulsively and laid both her hands on his.

"Oh! forgive," she cried, tears springing into her eyes. "I never thought in all my life to give such pain to anyone. Tell me that you forgive me if ever by word or deed I seemed to have done anything to make you care for me as you *do* care for me, and as I don't deserve, even if I were free to love you."

He bit his lip hard, and his strong hand trembled under her little gentle ones.

"See, I am unworthy; know, I am unworthy; feel, I am unworthy," she went on rapidly and passionately. "Think that I flirted with you; that I tried to make you love me; that I would have married you just for your money—think anything you will of me that is hateful and vile, but don't, don't suffer for me as you are suffering now!"

He uttered an exclamation of despair, as he shook his hand free from hers.

She stood motionless where he had left her, with her eyes fastened on the door that had closed behind him.

Then she walked slowly to the farthest corner of the room, and sitting there, she thought and thought so long that the twilight came and went, and it was almost dusk. She was frightened, horrified at herself. Who is it has said a woman is never so near to loving a man as just after she has refused him?

"I love Alec," she kept repeating to herself over and over again, as if to force it into her heart, which seemed to shut against it. "I have always loved him, always. I love him now, I shall always love him—Oh! Why does Warren Blair stand before me like a ghost, with that calm, still look in his eyes? Am I a woman or a weather-cock, that I should be twisted and turned about in this way? Warren Blair is rich, rich, rich, and I am poor, very poor, and Alec is poor, too, we shall both be horribly poor. Oh! why does Warren Blair stand there, always, always, with that white, sad face! Surely I am going mad. It's ridiculous," she cried fiercely, pressing her hands to her temples and over her eye, as if to shut out the vision. "It's ridiculous! Why am I thinking about him so much? He'll soon forget me. If I had said yes to him he would have thought—I would have thought I was marrying him for his money, and yet if he were poor and had come to me, I wonder if my answer would have been different?"

And she shut her eyes and conjured up visions. Those thoughts had evidently carried her very far away, for as the door opened softly, she gave a little start at hearing her own name spoken, and looking up she saw Alec Deane standing before her.

"Is that you, Alec?" she asked irrelevantly, nervously, and half guiltily.

"How dark it is!" and she rang for lights.

She had never called him by his first name before, and she had not noticed that she did so now; but it made his heart beat faster, and when they were sitting beside the mended fire a little later, and had discussed a few trivialities, he bent nearer to her and said:

"I had not hoped to find you alone, but I am glad because I want to tell