

## THE BRIDGE BETWEEN.

## CHAPTER XVIII.—BENEATH THE SUMMER SKY.

The grasshopper sang its love song to the summer night, the stars came out and stared blindly down at her, and a gentle breeze rose and rustled among the tall grass and the tangled underwood; but still she did not move or stir. Dorothy understood it all now. For the past two years, nay, all her life it seemed to her, she had been dreaming, but now she was wide awake, and would never dream again. Yet she could not realise, after all, the time he had known her, and all he had said, and after those happy days just before her grandfather died, that he did not love her more than Netta. She had not scrupled too to let him see her own feelings, she had been too much of a child, and too innocent, to hide them, but now that she understood that her own heart and its knowledge had chased her out of her Eden into the world's beaten track, the remembrance of all she had said and done flashed upon her. And, so suddenly, pride was born to her, and she stood, her face still resting in her hands upon the fence, and struggled with that bitter sorrow which sometimes comes into a girl's life, yet only once, and while the world is still new and strange to her, and which is as keen and bitter as any that is placed on the world's long list of troubles. It was so dreadful, too, she had nowhere to hide herself, no one to tell, or to sympathize with, and the summer and the sun, and the world, and all it held, seemed to have lost their beauty for ever. She, who had waited for his return, and remembered his words and treasured his letter, to be forgotten for Netta, who had only been six or seven weeks in the house, it seemed cruel; and every time she thought of her sister's beautiful face, she knew how hopeless it was to think that he might ever return to her. There seemed nothing left to live for; no one loved her—no one save her brothers, and sister Sally, and even they were getting new tastes and new ideas, and learning to live their lives without her. She would have given anything in the world if some one would have cared for her if only a little, it seemed such a blessed thing, and she shivered in the warm air as she thought of Adrian Fuller's tender tone when he spoke to her sister, and remembered how different had been his manner to herself only that afternoon. She looked up presently, and stared back across the garden at the house, then went slowly down the pathway, and in-doors. She listened for a moment, and heard the sound of cheery voices in the sitting-room, it seemed like a world out of which she was shut, and then she went up-stairs to her own room again, and looked herself in.

"No one will miss me now," she thought; "and I feel as if I could never see him again."

## CHAPTER XIX.—THE SCENT OF THE ROSE.

It seemed to Dorothy when the morning came, that she was years older. "The world was under my feet the other day," she said; "but now I feel as if I carried it on my shoulders;" and the old vexed question came back to her, "What do we live for, I wonder?"

"Dorothy, what is the matter?" Netta asked—there was something in Netta's manner that made Dorothy recoil from her—"you look as white as a ghost. I expect Mr. Fuller this morning, and want you to put the study nice and neat." It used to be Dorothy who expected him once.

"I won't!" and she turned round and faced the Beauty with a firm set face.

"Dorothy, what's the matter?"

"Nothing is the matter, only I won't do as you tell me, and I won't let you order

me about. You have come home and spoilt my home for me, even the garden," and the tears came into her eyes, for she had so loved the garden; "and you have turned every one against me; no one cares for me, no one at all, and—and you have taken even Mr. Fuller away from me."

"I! how can you be so foolish, Dorothy! I have not taken Mr. Fuller. I have only tried to prevent you from making yourself foolish; why, he could see you were in love with him, and knew it as well as I did."

"He didn't!" said Dorothy, with flashing eyes and throat dyed crimson, as she stood almost chained to the spot on which she stood, while a faint sick feeling sent a chill into her very heart. Presently, slowly and deliberately, she turned round, and looked at Netta, at her beautiful face and golden hair, at her small white hands and the graceful snowy frill round her white throat, and (for she was so great a lover of all that was beautiful) she found an excuse for her old companion, though she read her own hopelessness in her sister's soft blue eyes. "He didn't!" she repeated softly, her head drooping, and the pride that was new stinging her till she felt almost cowed.

"He did," repeated Netta; "he told me so."

Then the pent-up passion in the girl's heart found expression.

"It is too bad!" she exclaimed, bursting into passionate tears. "And he shall see how mistaken he was, for I will never see him more! And Netta!"—for she determined to tell her sister all she had overheard. "Last night—"

"Netta!" called Mrs. Woodward; "Mr. Fuller is here, waiting for you."

"Say I am not very well," said Dorothy, pleadingly; "and let me lie down a little while; I am so very tired," she added, in a sorrowful voice, that touched even Netta, for she bent over and kissed her sister, though Dorothy shrank from the embrace.

"Lie down a little while," she said, and went down-stairs. "Poor little thing!" she said to herself, as she went; "I wish I had not been so cruel to her. She little thinks how well I understand it all!"

"Mr. Fuller is in the study, Netta," Mrs. Woodward said, meeting her at the foot of the stairs, "and I have a note for you from Sir George Finch," and she held it out.

Netta's fingers trembled as they took it, and she sat down on the stairs to read it, and having done so, went into the study to Adrian Fuller.

There was not much painting done that morning; they sat and talked—Adrian Fuller and Netta Woodward—not the Netta who domineered over the household, but a softer, better, more womanly one who seemed to have taken her place.

"Do you know that I am not half so good as you imagine," she was saying, gravely looking out at the wild old garden—"not half. I should not make you happy, as you think I should; and poverty—and she almost shuddered—"poverty would kill me."

"You shall never know it, my darling," he said; "I will work for you, and make a home worthy of you."

"You only love me in idea," she said calmly; "and because you think I am pretty; I believe in reality that you care more for my little sister Dorothy."

"She is a mere child," he answered impatiently.

"No, she is a woman, and you know it, Adrian," her voice was almost sad, for she thought of the weary face she had left above. "And she would love you far better than I should, and not mind being poor, and though you say you would work for me—"

"Work!" he interrupted, "I would do anything for you, Netta. Oh, my dar-

ling!" he said, going over to her, and looking down into the clear blue eyes that turned shyly from their long gaze into the garden to meet his own. "There is nothing in the world I would not do for you, if you would once say that you loved me."

She seemed to be struggling against her fate, as she answered—and there was no acting or make-believe in her voice—"I do love you, Adrian, but—" and she almost held him from her—"I must not be bound by these words, remember, and there is no engagement or anything like one between us." She gave a sigh of relief as she said the words, and let her head droop for a single moment on his shoulder—"I loved you from the very first, as you did me." How strange it was, that even as she said what he had so longed to hear, there crept over him a feeling of doubt and misgiving, something that was almost like regret, as he thought of the Dorothy whose rose was yet treasured, and whose happy feet had wandered by his side through the summer fields not three months since.

## CHAPTER XX.—ON HER WAY.

"I will take it, mamma," she said, eagerly; "it is the day all the people come, you know, and you must not be out, and I do so hate visitors."

"What is the matter?" asked Netta.

"An important letter has come for your father, sent here by mistake, and I thought I had better take it to him."

"Oh, you can't go," the Beauty said; "we shall have some people here presently; let Dorothy go." It was four in the afternoon.

"And I should like it," said Dorothy, eager to get away; "it is a long, long way to the Strand, but I shall walk it, and then I shall go into Covent Garden coming back, and walk down the centre avenue and look at the flowers. Yes, do let me go, mamma."

So Dorothy went.

It was a long way, but she was so thankful to be out of the house and thoroughly alone, and she drew her hat, a little black straw absurdity, with a tuft of black feathers, over her eyes, and trudged along. She was so wretched; so utterly lonely and miserable, and so tired with fretting; she longed to lie down by the way to sleep. "I am sure it would be a blessing," she thought; "and I am of no use in the world now at all," and pondering over that thought, she went into her father's office, and delivered the note. Mr. Woodward was engaged; she did not ask to see him, and came away at once.

"I am glad papa was engaged," she said to herself, as she made her way from the Strand to Covent Garden. She delighted in the centre avenue, most of all at spring-time though, when the primroses and the snowdrops and violets first came; but it was a pleasant dreamy walk always. There were summer flowers in profusion, though it was late for them, but they all seemed to Dorothy as if they belonged to a world she had left. She was getting angry with Adrian Fuller, more and more every time she thought of him, for even if he had seen she liked him he might have kept the knowledge to himself, and not have talked about it to Netta, and have told herself, as he had in manner if not in words, that it was useless. It was a terrible thing to remember, and pride and sorrow struggled for a mastery, till her cheeks burnt, and yet the sorrowful tears were in her eyes.

"I must go home," she said, with a sigh, and she took a last look at the masses of flowering shrubs and trees, all heaped together in a small space at the end of the avenue. Suddenly some one touched her shoulder.

"Miss Dorothy," said a quiet voice. She