

which was situated in one corner of the flower garden, into which I had unconsciously strayed. Curious to ascertain the cause of this sound of grief, I stepped softly up to the entrance of the arbor, and there a strange sight met my gaze: It was the form of a female who sat with her head bowed upon a table which occupied the centre of the floor. By the hat which lay at her feet, and by the flowing tresses which hung over the arm on which her head rested, I knew it to be none other than Alice Graham. For a few moments I stood regarding her in silent wonder, and then, without stopping to consider the impropriety of the act, I spoke her name.

At the sound of my voice she started up, and, on recognising me, said, with a look and tone of mingled indignation and reproach:

"Is it possible, sir, that you have presumed to follow me here? I thought that in this place at least, I would be free from intrusion!"

As she uttered these words she lifted her hat from the ground, and was about to sweep past me into the garden, when I caught her hand and gently detained her, saying,

"I beg you will allow me to explain, Miss Graham. I did not intend to follow you: it was wholly by accident that I came upon you here."

As she stood still and did not withdraw her hand, I added:

"And now will you not allow me to say a few words before you go? I shall not detain you long."

She did not reply but allowed me to lead her back to the bench from which she had just arisen. I seated myself beside her and said,

"You remember the subject of which I spoke to you this afternoon?"

"Perfectly," she replied; "and you no doubt remember the answer I gave you on that occasion, which you will of course consider final."

"I do not ask you to change your mind; I merely desire to make one enquiry. When you refused my brother's offer was it because you had already placed your affections upon another?"

"I did so because I felt I could not love your brother,—that is, well enough to become his wife," Alice returned somewhat evasively.

"One thing more I would ask, Miss Graham. Had I made that offer in my own name, instead of my brother's, would you have received it more favorably?"

"I might possibly have done so," was the reply; but her manner and tone of voice, which appeared to tremble as she spoke, told far more than her words. I knew that my suspicions were correct. Then, yielding to an irresistible impulse, which I could no more control than the beating of my own heart, I poured out an avowal of my love, in words as earnest and impassioned as those which I had employed a half-a-dozen of hours before to describe a similar feeling on the part of my brother. What an incomprehensible thing is the human heart!

When I escorted Alice back that evening it was as my promised bride! and I felt myself to

be at once the happiest and most miserable of mankind:—happy in the possession of such a treasure as I knew this fair young creature to be,—miserable, as the successful rival of my own dear brother.

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Another fortnight passed away and I had obtained the consent of Alice's papa and mamma to our marriage, which was to take place in two weeks more.

As yet, I had not written to William, to inform him of my engagement. A dozen times, at least, I had essayed to do so; but these attempts only resulted in the spoiling of as many sheets of writing paper, and a great deal of vexation and anxious thought. Sometimes I wrote as if to defend my conduct against the anticipated displeasure of my brother; at others, to excuse it by pleading force of circumstances; or, again, to shirk an explanation by making light of the whole matter. But none of the letters penned in any of these strains, appeared to answer the purpose, and they were written only to be destroyed as soon as finished.

At length, sick and tired of these unsatisfactory attempts to palliate my course of action in this affair, I sat down and wrote a letter containing a simple and candid statement of the facts of the case, trusting to my brother's good-heartedness to pardon all short comings. This once sealed up and dispatched, a load seemed to be taken off my mind, and I felt enabled to await patiently—almost cheerfully—an answer from William.

But as, day by day, the time went by and still brought no reply to my letter, I began to feel uneasy, and anxious again. I feared that my brother was too much incensed, at the information it contained, to write to me in return. Still I comforted myself with the thought that perhaps my letter, or, it might be, the reply, through some irregularity of the mail, was detained on the way.

On the evening previous to the day on which was to be tied the nuptial knot, we two were sitting in the front parlor busily engaged in the pre-arranging of certain little household matters, (a delightful species of air-castle-building, especially appropriate to inexperienced young lovers,) when I was called to the window by the sound of wheels upon the gravelled walk before the house.

On looking out, I saw the Squire shaking hands with a gentleman who had just stepped from a carriage which stood before the door. A second glance showed me that, it was William, and in a moment more I was on the piazza to meet him.

As he extended his hand to me I looked into his face, expecting to find there, an expression of severity, but, much to my surprise, it wore a good natured smile instead. Greetings over, I inquired somewhat anxiously if he had received my letter.

"I did," he replied, "and was very happy to learn from it, that you have made such good use of your time since your arrival here."