

the large fortune he intended to leave; but that time never came. One venture failed after another, till Mr. Vining grew embarrassed; his ships were lost, his debtors railed, and at last, in the vain hope of retrieving his losses, he embarked in mining speculations to a large extent,—and lost all. No one suffered through him. He satisfied his creditors to the last farthing, and found himself with one hundred pounds in the world. He sought a situation; but, before he entered on it, his health gave way, and after three weeks' illness he died.

The same sum had been left to Agnes as to her brother, and on the income it yielded, forty pounds a year, she and Mrs. Vining were to subsist, until some means could be provided by which to support themselves. Agnes, it is true, believed in the worth of her admirer, and trusted, with a girl's confiding faith, that he would shelter her from the rough world as gladly, now she was penniless, as when she was the reputed heiress to a large fortune. But so long a time had elapsed since her father's death that her heart had grown sick with hope deferred, and her courage had almost begun to fail when Philip's letter gave her new strength.

She had an affection for her stepmother, who had always been kind to her, in spite of her frivolity and fretfulness. She pitied her weakness and inability to bear misfortune, and, as far as she could, shielded her from annoyance. All the distressing duties of their situation were performed by Agnes, who was, indeed, far more fitted by nature for them than Mrs. Vining. Agnes, had a strong will to perform whatever she undertook; a mind to devise, and a hand to execute. Her disposition, though gentle, was firm and decided, and the sad experience and duties of the last two months had developed these qualities to the full.

Mrs. Vining was still turning over her letters. "There is one here from Lydia Gray. She is at Thorpe, with a large party. She says they are enjoying such a delightful visit, and to think that we were to have been there! However, she tells me one piece of news that surprises me. Did you know that Arthur Kendal was intimate at Thorpe?"

"Yes, I knew he visited there."

"Well, Lydia says—wait, I will read you the passage: 'Perhaps you will be surprised to hear that Arthur Kendal is to be really married at last. With all his flirtations no one has ever thought him a marrying man; but since he came here he has been very attentive to Lilian Ward, and it has ended in a regular engagement. I remember his once saying that he must have either much money or great beauty. Miss Ward has but a small fortune, but she is very pretty, and he seems very devoted.' Now is not that sudden, Agnes? I really thought he admired you, and I am sure you liked him."

Agnes had listened in silence to the words that destroyed her hopes, and levelled her faith to the ground. Her feelings almost overcame her, but she thrust them back, and answered, with the smile which most women can assume to cover a heart-ache: "There is not much to admire in my dark face and grey eyes. If it had been you now——"

The compliment restored Louisa's humor, and Agnes, taking advantage of the opportunity, produced her letter.

"I heard from Philip this morning. He wishes to know if we have formed any plans for the future."

"I wish you would not talk about plans, Agnes. I hate the very sound."

"I would not talk about them, indeed, if I could help it; but you know it is quite impossible that you and I can live on forty pounds a year, and as we have nothing else, and no friends to help us, we must decide on something before our money is all spent."

"Well don't ask me to decide. I leave it to you altogether."

Agnes' patience almost failed. "I can decide for myself," she said in a somewhat less gentle tone than usual, "but that does not help you. My own course is settled. I am going to Canada to Philip."

Mrs. Vining opened wide her lovely eyes. "To Canada!" she said. "I quite forgot Philip was there. How nice! And am I to go too?"

Agnes was much embarrassed. Philip had not hinted at his stepmother's being welcome, and Agnes well knew that she