

The woman said: "As you will, my daughter," and hastened to join her son.

SECTION 4.

During the evening of that day, Rodney and Frances were driving in a cutter, and as they rode, Frances said: "Tell, Rodney, in what season of the year is one happiest. Is it not when spring is first suggested by a balmy February day? Or is it in later spring, when the birds are singing in the woods, the streams are purling by their mossy banks, and the leaves come out in verdant beauty on the trees? What says the poet, as he describes the seasons dancing before Time?"

*First, in green apparel dancing,*

*The young Spring smiled with angel grace."*

Rodney answered by saying: "But what says the poet of autumn?"

*More remote and buxom brown,*

*The queen of vintage bowed before his throne;*

*A rich pomegranate gemmed her crown,*

*A ripe sheaf bound her zone.*

Autumn is a favorite season to me; but I think, Frances, that the season affects very remotely our happiness; as also the environment. Many men are basking in the sun of Italy, miserably wretched; while perhaps on the frozen fiords of Norway the youths and maidens are supremely happy."

Frances maintained a silence, and the man resumed: "It is love, Frances, that makes all seasons glad, and all places beautiful. It is love that makes the heart of man invulnerable to all operations of time and situation. And of that quality, my own Frances, would I speak to-night. Why should I longer conceal my love? Permit me to repeat the old story, to say to you that your personality has enslaved me, and that my heart is at your feet. Tell to me, Frances, if you will accept the humble offering, if you have lost as well as won."

During the speaking of these words, Rodney was looking intently into the face of his companion; but the damsel had sat with downcast eyes, and now exuded from them tears, but she made no reply. Rodney perceived the drops of emotion, and put his arm about her shoulders, saying: "Weep not, my darling Frances, but say that you return my love."

Frances wept harder, but managed to say in broken accents: "I do return your love."

Rodney clasped her then in passionate embrace, and with tears suffusing his own cheeks, he kissed repeatedly the woman at his side. Presently he said: "You have made me very happy, Frances, very happy; for I had fears that your tender, pure heart would not bestow itself on such as I. But be composed, my love; let not those beautiful eyes, that have in them the very blue of heaven, be thus submerged in tears."

Frances wiped away her tears and said: "How you awaken, dear Rodney, my whole being to the music of love!"

The lover kissed away her pause, and she resumed: "My life is now interwoven with yours, for when your strong arms entwined me, I loosed my last faint hold upon myself, and surrendered all. And my heart is in pain, Rodney, being so full of love and joy."

"Then seal the compact by the soft impression of your lips," replied the man.