

turned, and I involuntarily passed my hand over her head, admiring the glossy tresses that gently fell from my grasp over her drooping shoulders. Her accustomed full expression of mirthfulness was no more visible, and the pitiable tenderness of her tones was mirrored in her beautiful countenance.

Was it any wonder I forgot Nellie Elson?

Who could blame me for tenderly caressing the girl's burning cheeks as she sadly laid her head upon my knee?

"Poor child," I mused, for she seemed like a helpless infant as she rested thus a picture of beauty and innocence.

My resolution gave way, and I impulsively promised to return.

And thus on the following day I left her, and as I imagined, as already hinted from the young teacher's conduct, that he was not over pleased with the manner in which the innocent girl manifested her feelings, undefined in her own mind as they were.

I never fulfilled my promise of returning to Shulton to see Jessie Harle; but unexpected chance threw me again into her society in the city, whither, for diplomatic reasons of her aunt Delby, she went before another year had passed.

"Yes; thus I went away from Shulton. Thus ended that never-to-be-forgotten visit—a visit which affected my after life more than any other period of a dozen times its duration.

And as the stage coach rattled along, bearing me away on that bright May morning, my heart was filled with sympathy for the welfare of the little beauty I was leaving. I pitied her because I could so readily imagine her being led astray by a less honorable being than myself. She seemed so weak, so tender, so yielding. But I didn't go far enough to question myself, Was it sympathy I felt? Was it pity? or was it love?

CHAPTER V.

If a woman will she will,
You may depend on't,
And if she won't she won't,
And there's an end on't.

The wonderful wiles of a woman to gain an object has many a time been beyond my comprehension. Such little schemes that man would never think about, it is often her's to plan and carry out. I have already hinted at the manner of Nellie Elson's mother toward me, and while I have so often felt the keenness of her diplomatic conduct I dare not attempt to particularize those actions. Mrs. Delby, too, was diplomatic in her way, though a very different woman from Mrs. Elson. However, I don't mean by speaking thus to depreciate the fair sex in general. If I included all in this, my own fair oyster-half would not be excepted; and though I would not be afraid of having my ears pulled in such a case, I can honestly commend her qualities, and furthermore believe her to be a model of the model sex she represents. But to continue.

More than a year had passed since my visit to Shulton, when I once more encountered my friend Walter Marston, and soon afterwards Jessie Harle, too. The young teacher had come to the city to study law, and through Mrs. Delby's management Jessie had come to live with another aunt. And now I found out definitely Walter's feelings. I saw it all now, and as my passion had cooled in a year's time, though Jessie was more beautiful now than ever, I hoped he'd win and marry her.

But there was more than a year's absence to account for my change of feeling. I had been almost constantly with Nellie Elson, and our association had led us into closer intimacy than before. Besides, I knew she was, from the average suitor's standpoint, more my equal. She was educated and refined, and belonged to a family of mental superiority; as well as—yes, I'll admit it—as well as of fortune. Because I had money myself was no reason that I should marry one without any.

There was no wild, romantic passion in my love for Nellie, but I conscientiously believed I did love her with the love that was not the passing fancy of a boy.

But fate, alas! threw me into Jessie's society again and again, and I felt flattered to see her preference for my company.

Walter Marston and I met often, and I felt guilty when with him for being held higher in the estimation of his adored one than he. But I was engaged to Nellie Elson, and

that, I meditated, was sufficient reason for its not being urgent that I should deprive myself of the sweet innocent Jessie's company at times.

But a change came, an unlooked-for circumstance marred the serenity of my enjoyment.

One beautiful Autumn evening I met Jessie in the street, and not having any means of passing pleasantly the next hour or two, I requested her to accompany me for a walk to the river.

She consented with the greatest readiness. In fact, she was delighted at the prospect, and we leisurely strolled along beneath the maple shade trees that lined the avenue upon our way; and while yet the bright red western sun of evening was throwing its warm rays on the gravelly shore, we sat upon the river's bank together, and talked of our first meeting and of subsequent meetings, of other conversations and of many a pleasing incident that had crossed our paths since first we met.

Foolishly, I thought I regarded the girl as a sister, a near friend and nothing more. But now my conscience began to rebuke me, for she, for the first time in the course of our companionship, spoke in words what I had so long felt was a burden upon me.

She loved me!

How conceited must a person feel to speak as I do in making that assertion, to know one is loved by a person of the opposite sex with all that such an expression implies. To think that there exists a genial spirit who has chosen one—the only being to be a future life-partner. If I loved her because of my certain knowledge of her preference for me—yes, of her love for me—will any one blame me, no matter what my circumstances were with regard to another.

"But don't you like Walter Marston?" I asked.

"Yes; I think I do, a little."

"And he loves you, I'm sure."

"Perhaps he does," and her lashes drooped over those lovely eyes, and a bright crimson spreading over her cheeks made her look more lovely than before.

"But don't you like me?" and her pleading eyes spoke volumes of the feeling with which she uttered the query.

"Yes; I think I like you," I replied with a humorous smile; "but—," I paused, the humor of the situation faded and I meditatively sat in silence.

Our conversation in the wood, before I left Shulton, came vividly before me now, for again Jessie rested on my knee and looked up in my face as then, and again, as before, I let my hand rest over her shoulder, and my fingers involuntarily played with her tresses.

But suddenly I aroused myself. I would—yes, I was in duty bound to tell her that I was not free to be more than a friend to her.

But how could I ruin the happiness of this sensitive maiden. My pity made me shrink from the task.

"It will hurt Walter Marston to find out that you love me," I began.

"But what difference if you love me?" she said archly, and the brightness of hope gleamed from her innocent eyes.

"But I am in honor bound to be Nellie Elson's husband."

The sentence which I had been revolving so long in my mind had been uttered at last and the words frightened me as they fell like the ghost of a dead thought from my lips.

The poor girl the next minute was senseless in my arms, and, strange to say, at that very moment Walter Marston was looking on us, *and* at the sight which met his gaze, he turned away and soon disappeared around a corner not far distant.

Matters had reached a climax.

I paused not to meditate on the strangeness of the circumstances.

We never do in like cases.

I pitied him—I pitied her, and I heartily condemned my own conduct.

But despite this, I had not the courage to tell her of the circumstance after; and some slight efforts on my part to meet Walter Marston and explain to him, were unsuccessful.

I, however, have since found out the events that subsequently transpired.