

to love her betrothed. Exactly how or when the change had taken place in her heart, she could not have told. She was almost bewildered by the strangeness of it; and in the midst of her happiness she was conscious of a faint compunction for her own changeableness; it seemed to her that she must be a very weak-minded person to change so soon; and mingled with this feeling was a vague dread lest anything should come between Jack and her even now. Oh! if fate should wrest the cup of happiness from her just as she was about to place it to her lips, what a wretched, forlorn creature she would be! Just to think that she had coldly repulsed the love he offered her a year ago—had sent him unlovingly from her, rejoicing even that he was going so far away! Now, if anything happened to him or should anything occur to part them, she felt that she would be receiving only her just punishment; but nevertheless she prayed earnestly that she might not be so punished.

"How could I know I should love thee to-day,
Whom that day I held not dear?
How could I tell I should love thee away
When I did not love thee near?"

One afternoon, as Judith, accompanied by the ever faithful Trap, was wending her way to Bonny Woods, where she spent so much of her time—pleasant dreamy hours, her thoughts flying to the lover over the sea, while her busy fingers deftly plied the needle—she heard a gay voice calling her name, and on looking around, saw Lydia Graham running toward her at the top of her speed, her long strides taking her over the ground at an astonishing rate.

"Where are you off to—by yourself, you solitary child?" she asked, laughing and gasping for breath after her violent exercise.

"To Bonny Woods!" she repeated, after Judith.

"What a lover of solitude you are, child."

"Gently in the leafy forest
By the murmuring streams
Let me lull my happy heart in
Dreams, dreams, dreams."

Quoted, or rather misquoted Lydia.

"If you are not averse to solitude *adieu* this afternoon; I will go with you to the woods."

"I shall be delighted if you will," answered Judy, heartily.

"What a treasure store of pleasant thoughts you must possess, Judy, to be able to enjoy so many solitary hours."

"To be sure," she added, smiling, "you have a handsome lover to think about, and I suppose that makes a world of difference to dreamy, sentimental people like yourself. Does it not, mouse?"

"Oh, not quite so much difference as that," answered Judy, with a shy laugh.

"I think," she resumed, as they walked along—"it is a fortunate thing for me that I am not one of those sentimental young women who are always pining for a love; for here am I twenty-two years old, and have never had a lover all to myself yet. You see I have always had to share them with the other girls. Maria and Kitty and I are all so exactly alike that men are hard put to it to make a final choice between us."

That is rather hard, but it must be amusing, too," answered Judy, laughing. "But, Lydia, I am sure I know a certain person who admires you; who will probably be your own particular property before long."

"Oh, I suppose you are referring to Mr. Ross; but he is not my admirer. He was partly mine; the remaining parts of him were devoted to Kitty and Maria. He vacillated between the three of us till Kitty and I got disgusted at being wooed one day and overlooked the next; so as Maria appeared to be the favorite, if there was any distinction to be made at all, we retired from the field and left her in sole possession of Mr. Ross's wavering affections. The result has proved the wisdom of our action, for he proposed to Maria yesterday and was accepted. All the poor man wanted was a friendly shove in the right direction. As far as I am concerned he will be better appreciated as a brother-in-law than as a husband. He is a man who will need to be managed, and Maria has the bump of management (if there be such a bump) more developed than have Kitty or I."

"It is evident you did not lose any portion of your heart over him," said Judith, much amused.

"There is little danger of my losing that important possession on any one," answered Lydia, with a slight grimace. "I don't think it is every woman's destiny to marry. A good many women, I take it, are sent into this world for other purposes than matrimony, and the sooner that truth is recognized the fewer discontented females there will be. Fugh! I would scorn to be unhappy or to lead a purposeless life just because some lord of creation had never asked me to love and cherish him."

Here Miss Graham indulged in a hearty burst of laughter, in which Judy was obliged to join half reluctantly, and the former continued:

"If it were not for popular prejudice, single women would be as much regarded as the matrons, and would certainly occupy a higher plane of usefulness; for have not we, if we devote our energies nobly and unselfishly, more time and unrestrained liberty and often more physical strength, to devote ourselves to the welfare of those of our fellow creatures who are in need of sympathy and practical help? I do not doubt that it is the destiny of the majority of woman-kind to marry. Women like you, Judy, for instance."

"Why not your destiny, also?" asked the other, gently.

"You will say I have been imbibing Mrs. Laurie's opinions; but I have not. I have never wished to marry; though I do confess a liking for masculine society. So I have come to the conclusion that matrimony is not my destiny, and have accordingly enrolled myself in the noble army of old maids," replied Lydia, with one of her broad smiles.

"You speak as though you had formed some plan for your future life. Have you done so?" asked Judith, looking earnestly at the usually rollicking, fun-loving Lydia, who thus spoke so earnestly of woman's usefulness in the scheme of the universe.

"I have been trying to determine for several years what my proper vocation might be. I thought, at one time, of studying medicine, but father disapproved, and to tell the truth, though I believe that woman is intellectually man's equal, or would be if her intellect, like his, were cultivated, and encouraged to expand, I do not think that her place is in the dissecting room, the law courts or the pulpit. So I, not unwillingly, gave up the idea of a learned profession. But there is a profession, and a noble one, which it is a pity so many clever women overlook, or pass by contemptuously. In plain language, my dear little mouse, I am going to be a professional nurse. Father has given his consent, and I am going to St. Catharines to study."

"A nurse! you Lydia, with your love of fun and pleasure, and fresh-air exercise! Oh! I do not think you will like it."

"Probably I shall detest it at first. But how can a woman be useful in the world if she is not ready and willing to sacrifice her own little pleasures and selfish whims, and smother her dislike for the unpleasantnesses of her work," answered Lydia, with a shy gravity that was altogether new to her.

"I know just what you are thinking, Judy," she added, with a little laugh. "You think I am too boisterous and tomboyish, and brusque, and all sorts of objectionable things to make a good nurse; but I assure you I am not exactly all that I seem to the world—"

"Oh Lydia, I had no such thoughts as those; do you think I have not penetrated below that mask which you persist in wearing to deceive the world. Do you think I do not know what a kind, unselfish heart you have, even though you make believe to be careless and cynical? And—"

"Now, my dear mouse, please don't ascribe all sorts of good qualities to me which I don't possess."

"But what I say is true, and I was going to add that what you call your tomboyishness and brusque manners are more than half assumed to hide the gentleness and softness of which you were a little bit ashamed. Am I not right?" asked Judith, laying her hand caressingly on Lydia's.

"Perhaps you are," answered the latter, smiling; "only you will persist in magnifying my little good qualities into great ones."

"No I do not. But, Lydia, have you considered well all the—the unpleasantnesses of the work you are about to undertake? I can well believe that your hand can be as gentle