

## A REVERSE OF FORTUNE.

The time was half-past seven in the evening—a May evening; but the day had been so dull and rainy that it was almost dark. The gas was not yet lighted at Mr. English's house in South Kensington, for the servants, who had discovered for themselves that something was wrong, were too busy putting two and two together in the kitchen to notice the increasing dusk.

Janet English stood in the hall with her hand on the handle of a door, hastily drying her eyes. She was a young-looking girl, with a roundish face and large, dark gray eyes; her brown hair, which was out short, was not bound or confined in any way, but fell about her face and neck in natural waves.

Having put those troublesome tears in her pocket with her handkerchief, and squeezed back some others that tried to force their way, she turned the knob and entered the room.

In here it was so dark that she did not at first see the only occupant. A long-drawn breath, however, saluting her ears, caused her eyes to seek the most shadowy portion of the apartment, when she made out the figure of a man kneeling by the table with his head bowed upon it, and his arms outspread.

It was Carr English, her brother. The tears made another rush, and one or two tumbled over her lids or hung on her lashes. She dashed them away, went softly to her brother's side, took one of his hands, and, unclenching the fingers, slipped her own into their clasp. A world of sympathy was expressed in that contact.

"Oh, Carr."

The words were accompanied by a sigh. The young man echoed it with a deep one, that was almost a groan, as he rose. Still holding her hand with his right, he drew a chair forward with his left, and pulled her on to his knee.

Neither spoke for a little while. Janet was the first to find her voice. The warm clasp of her brother's arm round her waist was comforting and encouraging. She began to feel better.

"If you give way, dear," she said, "I don't know what will become of us."

"I won't, Janet—I won't; but I was rather knocked over at first. I could face the poverty—the work, Janet; but that is not the worst. I must give her up."

"Oh, Carr. Now that the day is fixed and all? She will not let you; she will wait, I know. It is but putting it off."

"For how long?" he asked, gloomily. "Until we are both gray? No, Janet, I don't flatter myself that she will wait long for me."

Janet knew better than to believe him. She sighed again, for she knew a side of Minna King's nature that was never presented to her brother—the selfish side, of the existence of which he was totally incredulous. She read the young man correctly. Say what he might, he had in his heart no shadow of doubt that Minna would cleave to him in his poverty as faithfully as if she were already his wife.

"I must go," he said suddenly. "They expect me to-night, and I would rather they heard this from me than in any other way. When I come back we must make some plans—see what is to be done. At present I am all abroad—can't see my way in the least."

"Carr," the girl began, half timidly, "you won't be too hard on poor papa—he seems so broken down: and he

thought he was acting for the best. Oh, Carr, pray, pray don't be so angry with him! I can't bear to hear you speak to him as you did at dinner!"

He was silent.

"It was a mistake: and he suffers so deeply, Carr, without you visiting it on him like that."

"There, that will do," he answered abruptly. "You can't understand; at any rate, I must go now."

He detached himself from her detaining hands, and went out hurriedly. Outside the front door he stood a minute to collect his thoughts, wondering, with a slight feeling of compunction, whether poor little Janet was crying over his repulse, and half inclined to go in again and see.

A minute only of hesitation, then he started off down the glistening, muggy street. His first impulse was to hail a hansom, but he checked it with a muttered "Can't afford it!"—words so familiar to the tongues of many men he knew, but hitherto strangers to his own.

He had nearly three miles to go—a distance no one ever thinks of walking in London—yet Carr walked it to-night, scarcely noticing the drizzling rain, or the smoke-laden, penetrating mist. His thoughts were busy planning how he would break this news to his darling; conjuring up her pale, pretty face, her tender, sympathizing voice, her vows to be true to him until he was again in a position to claim her.

Poor Carr! The reality was not very like the picture created by his imagination. Minna had already heard of his father's failure, for all news had not in this case belied its proverbial character for speed. She received him with a stiff and constrained manner that chilled him somehow. And when he told her that he was to release her from her promise, there were no protestations, no refusal to accept her freedom. Minna had expected it, and took it as a matter of course.

Disappointed, in spite of his loyalty to her, Carr held the little white hands that lay passively in his, neither returning nor avoiding his pressure. He looked sadly at the golden braid that encircled her head, for she had bent her face down out of sight. That drooping face was a very pretty one, almost classic in outline, with a simple, innocent, childish expression, and eyes so blue that it was no wonder her lover had fancied he saw a glimpse of heaven therein.

"Have you nothing to say to me, Minna?" he asked, after waiting a little while in vain for her to speak.

"What can I say? It is a great pity. Mr. English must have been very foolish to risk his money in a thing that wasn't safe. What ever will you do?"

"Work," said the young man, harshly. "And poor Janet, what will become of her?"

"Janet! Why, there is Leonard." "But, Carr, you don't think—they were not regularly engaged. And Leo-

nard's income by itself is not sufficient to marry on."

"Not sufficient?" Carr repeated. "Why, he has four hundred a year, and his practice is increasing!"

"That is not enough to live in the style Janet is used to. Oh, no, Carr, I am sure he will never ask her now. I am sorry. Janet is such a dear little thing, and Elinor is so fond of her; but—"

"You probably know your brother better than I do," said Carr, growing paler. "I had never contemplated such a possibility as you suggest. Be it so. If Leonard is such a mean cur as that, it is far better for Janet that she

should come and show him as he is before it is too late."

Another constrained silence. Minna glanced up at his white, harassed face, but offered no word of pity. However much "pain" might wring her lover's brow, Minna King would prove no "ministering angel." In the presence of trouble or sickness she felt awkward and out of place; in the present instance she longed for the interview to be over, and sighed so heavily that Carr's displeasure took flight. He caught her to his breast, and kissed her again and again.

Her cheeks burned when he released her, and she drew back a little way with a wary eye, meaning to avoid if she could such another demonstration.

However, Carr had no thought of repeating the embrace. He still held one hand, and looked at her as if to stamp that pretty figure on his brain.

"Good-bye, Minna darling. Think of me sometimes. Give me some kind word to remember."

Some kind word? What? Minna thought for a minute, but could find nothing suitable to say. If only he would go!

"Not a word, Minna? Good-bye then, once more. Heaven bless you, my darling!"

He pressed her hand, turned hastily away, and quitted the room. He had descended into the hall when a door close at hand was opened, and a girl ran out and laid her hand on his arm.

"Oh, Carr, is it really true?"

He inclined his head.

"I am sorry! How dreadful for you all! But surely it's not so bad as they say? You have lost, but not everything?"

"Everything, Elinor. We are ruined."

"But why are you going like this? What is—oh! you haven't—surely you haven't broken off your engagement?"

"Yes. But don't talk to me—don't question me, Nell. I can't bear it. Good-bye."

Elinor stepped back from him and burst into tears.

"My dear child, don't do that," said Carr, instantly recovering to a great extent his own composure, and laying his hand kindly on her shoulder.

"It is very stupid," said Elinor brokenly. "But I am so sorry for you all! If I could only help you in any way! But Carr don't look like you did just now. Things are not often so bad as they seem at first. Something will turn up; you will get some good post, and will be able to marry before long."

He smiled sadly.

"Perhaps so. You are a kind little sister, Nellie. I shall always think of you as a sister even if I never—but there, good-bye child, and don't cry."

"Good-bye, Carr, and don't be discouraged and despondent. And please tell Janet how grieved I am."

She opened the door and let him out, frankly returning the pressure of his hand at parting; but quite unconscious of all she had done in this little interview. He had thought Minna cold and unfeeling, though unwilling to admit it; but her sister's genuine sorrow had shown him by contrast that he had not been mistaken. Elinor's tears had shaken his faith in Minna to its foundation.

"For richer, for poorer—for better, for worse," he muttered as he walked home-wards. "For richer only it seems that Minna meant to cleave to me. She was meant for the sunshine only, and my life lies henceforth in the shadow."