

"Nothing new to see Judith making a fool of herself? No, you are right there; she has been exposing her folly for the last two weeks or more."

"There are two fools I'm thinking," replied he dryly.

"Pshaw," answered she, not perceiving that his remark might have a different application,—

"You know what Donald Standfield is. He means nothing by his manner to women; besides he is old enough to be her father; and that is where her folly comes in."

"We'll let her pay for her folly then; most people have to," said the young man with a savage laugh. He had been assiduous in a sort of underhand attention to Judith during the past month, but his advances had been met with scornful coldness on her part; and now he was torn between love and hatred of her. One strong influence of his love for her was a passionate desire to seem better in her eyes than he really was; and yet with strange perversity he pursued the very course which effectually destroyed the last remnant of respect she might have had for him. Judith had risen as soon as Augusta and Thorpe approached, forgetting her injured ankle. She uttered a little cry of pain when she put her foot to the ground.

"My poor child you have hurt yourself; let me help you; lean on my arm." The girl hesitated a moment, fearing Augusta's ridicule; but Standfield coolly placed her hand within his arm.

"You should not have come out at all this afternoon, you should be more careful."

"Oh! indeed you make too much of it, and I did not walk to the orchard alone, Susannah insisted on helping me."

As they thus approached Augusta eyed them in wonder.

"What is the matter with you Judith, that you cannot walk without assistance?" she asked coldly. Clarence, who had an appointment to keep, had gone.

"I have sprained my ankle, Augusta."

"Oh! When did it happen?"

"A little while after you went out; I was running down stairs and slipped. It is only a slight sprain; it will be well to-morrow."

"I think if you had remained in the house and let Susannah bandage your ankle, it would have been wiser than walking to the orchard."

Judith blushed crimson, as she remembered why she had been so anxious to go to the orchard. Standfield would undoubtedly have called at the house, but there was only one sitting-room and that was always occupied by Mrs. Laurie, and the old lady, garrulous enough in her lord's absence, would have been a tiresome interruption to the delightful *tele-a-tele* she had been looking forward to.

"I was advising Miss Judith to take proper care of her foot," said Standfield as they continued toward the house.

"She will doubtless pay attention to, your advice," said Augusta with a cold smile.

When he had seen Judith safely seated in an arm chair and had himself placed a footstool for the injured foot to rest upon, Standfield took his leave, notwithstanding Miss Laurie's pressing invitation to tea.

He had left his cane in the orchard and went thither for it; reaching the spot where they had spent the afternoon, he espied, lying on the grass, the letter which he had rescued from Trap a short time before.

He picked it up and held it tenderly—it was Dorothy's letter. He raised it for an instant to his lips and then strode toward the house again to return it to Judith.

The sitting-room window was open and as he approached, the sound of Augusta's voice came plainly to his ears. She was speaking words which caused him suddenly to stand still, scarcely conscious that he was playing the eavesdropper.

"Only I warn you do not fall in love with Donald Standfield, though I daresay it is too late to warn you now, your weakness has been so obvious to everyone for the last few weeks. He means nothing by his attentions to you, he is the same to every woman who takes his fancy, until he tires of her."

"How dare you, Augusta?" cried the young girl in a choking voice, rising to her feet in her anger; but with a moan she fell back in her seat again.

"You had better let Susannah attend to your foot; Mr. Standfield was so tenderly solicitous about it this afternoon; he will probably be here to-morrow to inquire for you. It was odd how you managed to slip on the stairs; I should not wonder if the accident had been planned for the occasion."

But these last words were lost on Judith for she had fainted away from mingled pain and excitement; and the listener outside the window stole quietly away without being seen by Augusta from the house.

His mind was in a whirl; but he was conscious chiefly of a burning anger against Augusta. It was not until he had shut himself up in his own room, at the bank, and sat down to think over what he had heard that the probability of Judith's loving him occurred to him.

She had always seemed a mere child to him; and he had felt so elderly, so fatherly in her presence, that the idea of her regarding him as a lover was simply overwhelming.

"It is impossible! absurd!" he told himself impatiently. And yet as he thought over the past month, many little incidents occurred to his mind which seemed to offer some foundation for Augusta's accusation.

For a long time he sat brooding over this perplexing question. At last he arose and stood by the open window. Gradually the frown disappeared from his brow, the stern, dark eyes melted into a grave tenderness.

"If it should be so, if Judith loves me," he said, and his heart leaped strangely at the thought, "she shall not be wounded by having her love thrown back upon her; I will take it and cherish it as a precious gift; she shall be my wife if she will. Ayl in spite of the past."

He drew Dorothy's letter from his pocket. What should he do with it? Judith might wonder why he had not returned it to her immediately on his finding it; and he must be very careful not to allow her to suspect his discovery of her secret, if, indeed, what Augusta had said should prove to be true. No, he would burn the letter and say nothing of it. He carried it to the empty fireplace and kneeling down held a lighted match to the fateful missive which had caused such a revolution in his life. This time he did not kiss it, he felt no desire to do so. But he said, "Poor Dorothy!" That was his farewell to the love of nine long years.

For several days he kept away from Bonny Dale. Not from any disinclination to go there; but because he wished to accustom his mind to the idea of presenting himself as a suitor for Judith's hand. It was such a new, bewildering idea, this of making Judy his wife. His wife! He repeated the name over and over to himself, until the sound of it became dear to him. Gradually it seemed that Dorothy's face grew fainter and fainter, while Judith's was ever before him, fair, and sweet and bright.