

"Three years, Paul? That is a lifetime. Henrietta married and you away! What—what is to become of me?"

"We must arrange something for you, Dorothy," he said in an odd, absent manner. "I shall not go for a month or six weeks." He paused; Dorothy rose, and went to the window, as if to escape his eyes.

"Though you will not confide in me, Dorothy," he resumed in a low, earnest tone, "do you care to hear a confession of—well, I fear I must call it weakness—from me?"

"Of course I do," she said, while an awful thought dashed across her. "Is he going to say he is in love with Henrietta? She believed he was."

"To you I dare say it will seem folly in a man who has left youth behind him," continued Standish, grasping the top of a chair near him with a nervous grip, "but I have fallen, no, rather grown into love, deeper and more intense, perhaps, than many a younger fellow could feel, with a girl almost young enough to be my daughter. I don't know that everyone would think her a beauty; to me no other face or form was ever so—so fascinating. To sit and watch the endless changes of the one, the grace of the other, is happiness to me. She has her faults; she is a little hasty, a little self-willed; but so true, so generous, so unselfish, so kind to me, whom she has known all her life. I see her sweet, sad eyes brighten when I come near, but dare I hope it is anything beyond the almost filial affection which might be her natural feeling for me, that speaks in them? Shall I ask her to be my wife? Is it not possible that for kindness, gratitude, pity's sake, she might say Yes, when nature might dictate No? Can I trust her to be true to herself as well as to me?"

"Let me confess, too, before I answer," returned Dorothy, clasping and twisting her fingers nervously, while her heart beat so fast it stirred the folds of her black dress. "I, too, have been foolish, for I have let myself fall in love with a man older, wiser, better—oh, a thousand times better—than myself, and I have been very unhappy, because I am ashamed of loving one who could only think of me as a half-formed, incomplete creature, to whom, however good he might be, I could only be an object of charity in the way of affection or regard. To know he loved me——" Breath and utterance failed her.