

"Warning! for my good!" exclaimed Judith in astonishment; "What do you mean, Augusta?"

"It is rather a difficult subject to approach," returned Augusta, in her cold, measured tones, "but it is best to go straight to the point. It is of Mr. Standfield I wish to speak; to warn you against him that I—"

"Augusta!"

"Hush! do not interrupt me; reserve your wrath till I have finished. I have seen your foolish fancy for him, and have done my best to warn you against placing any trust in a heartless flirt—a man who has played with so many women's hearts, that yours added to the list was as nothing in his estimation; you have helped him to pass the time here rather more pleasantly than he would otherwise have done. And you, poor little fool, have actually given your heart to him! However, a girl's first love is fortunately a light matter, and your only regret will be that you have made yourself slightly ridiculous in his eyes. But probably he will make excuses for you on the score of your youth and total inexperience. You doubtless think me hard and unkind to speak in this way, but I am doing only what I conceive to be my duty to you."

"What I think of you," said Judith, scornfully, keeping her pale, proud face steadily turned to her cousin, "what I think of you is that you have spoken utterly falsely; what your object may be I do not know. That you have my welfare in view, I do not for one moment believe; and as for your taunts about my folly, as you are pleased to term it, I treat them with the scorn they merit."

"Your answer is precisely such as I anticipated it would be. A trifle more stagey, perhaps, but that is not surprising in a romantic young girl," answered Augusta, sneeringly.

"You do not believe what I have said of Mr. Standfield's character. Very well; here is, at least, one proof of his faithlessness. You perhaps are aware that your sister Dorothy had a love disappointment in her girlhood? So, well then, it was Donald Standfield—your immaculate hero, whom she loved; and he jilted her, after dangling after her for one entire summer. It happened here at Bonny Dale,—and—well, history repeats itself, and Mr. Standfield is amusing himself with you as he amused himself with Dorothy nine years ago."

"I do not believe it," cried Judith, passionately, but even as she spoke, she felt the cold chill of doubt creeping into her heart.

"Very well," said Augusta, coldly, as she turned to leave the room. "If you persist in making yourself an object of ridicule, it is no business of mine, I have done what I could to save you, and received only insults for my pains; if you doubt the truth of what I have told you about your sister and Mr. Standfield, suppose you write and ask Dorothy about it. Good night."

#### CHAPTER VIII.

"THOU ART THE MAN!"

FOR a few moments after Augusta left her, Judith stood, motionless, conscious only of the dull, sickening pain that filled her heart, where a few minutes ago joy had reigned supreme.

Could it be that her hero—Donald Standfield, was the heartless, treacherous being Miss Laurie had painted him? What! Dorothy's lover, that faithless lover whom she [Judith] had vowed to hate and scorn if ever she met him. Oh no, no, it could not be, it was not true! And yet, why—

why had Dorothy never said that she and Mr. Standfield had met at Bonny Dale? In her letters to Dorothy she had so often spoken of him, and expressed her liking for him and her gratitude for his many acts of kindness toward her; and in her replies Dorothy had passed over these passages in her sister's letters, making no mention whatever of Mr. Standfield. That seemed strange, now she came to think of it; for in everything else that concerned Judith, Dorothy took always a hearty interest.

And was not Mr. Standfield always curiously averse to any conversation about Dorothy? What did it all mean? With a shiver Judith sank into a chair and pressed her hand over her eyes; she was very unhappy. As the past two or three months, with their full measure of joy and their bright hopes, passed before her mental vision, she sobbed piteously, throwing herself on the bed and burying her face in the pillows to smother the sound. You see, she was young enough to weep over her troubles, a privilege which is denied to most people as they grow older. I often think how intense must be the suffering of those who cannot find vent for their grief in this way, particularly men—strong men, who seldom, if ever, shed a tear, even in very great sorrows and disappointments.

As Judith grew calmer and lay thinking over this trouble of hers, it seemed to her highly improbable, nay, even presumptuous, to doubt the honor and goodness of Donald Standfield. Like most girls who love for the first time she had made a hero of her lover, and exalted him into a god whom she worshipped, and in her eyes he could do no wrong.

So now, was she, at the bidding of another, going to doubt her hero and cast down her god from his pedestal? No! She did not believe a word Augusta had spoken; she had detected Augusta in a falsehood once before, and she believed that this precious story of hers was but a tissue of falsehoods told for some purpose of her own. How had she dared to make use of Dorothy's name in that way? But probably she had felt pretty safe from detection; as she [Judith] would never—no never—be so heartless as to write and ask Dorothy any questions about that sad little story of her girlhood, which poor Dolly had guarded so carefully from all the world—even her brother and sister. No, Augusta doubtless knew very well that she would never write to Dorothy about it. Besides, would not that be a tacit acknowledgment of her belief in Miss Laurie's accusation against him? And she did not doubt him; oh no!

Poor little Judy! Though she told herself that Augusta's statements were false, yet there was a lingering doubt in her mind, and the loving heart ached sadly as she lay awake far into the night. And when at last she fell asleep, there were tears on the long dark lashes resting on the colorless cheeks.

Does it seem strange that Miss Brown had never mentioned to her sister the fact of her having previously met and known Donald Standfield?

But it must be remembered that Judith was a child at the time of Dorothy's visit to Bonny Dale, where the one love story of her life was enacted. And when she had buried the past, what need was there to rake up the ashes of her bitter disappointment? Both Reggie and his younger sister were vaguely aware that when Dorothy was a young girl in her teens she had had a love affair which ended unhappily for her; they had never been told directly of it, but somehow or other the knowledge had come to them. Of the unknown lover they knew nothing, not even his name, but in their