


BOTH IN THE WRONG.

CHAPTER II.

 O that is your 'gentle, docile little girl,' Arthur?" said Evelyn a little later, when Sophy's absence was first discovered. "She does not strike me as being specially docile. I do not mean to *me*; that would be too much to expect. But to *you*—"

"I do not understand, my love," her husband replied, helplessly, and a little wistfully. "Something seems to have come over the child which I cannot make out. But try and be patient with her, will you? She will soon—very soon—grow to love and honour you; as who could help doing? I suppose she fancies, foolish child, that she is not quite the same to me as when I had only her."

"She is jealous, and looks upon me as an interloper," the young wife said to herself. But she did not breathe the thought to her husband, who was evidently so anxious to see her and his daughter on truly affectionate terms with one another; and to please him she exerted herself next morning to be even more than usually kind and conciliatory to poor Sophy, who came down to the breakfast table cold, silent, and, it must be confessed, rather sulky.

But her well-meant advances met with no better return than they had done on the previous evening. There was the slightest suspicion of patronage in her manner which stirred up every ill feeling in the girl's heart, though Evelyn herself was entirely ignorant of offence. But to be patronized by a stranger! She, who had reigned supreme hitherto at the Towers; she, who had been her father's own darling until supplanted by an intruder, should she submit to be patronized by her? Never!

Besides, to admit this stranger, with her beauty and her winning ways—for beautiful and winning she was in spite of all—was treason to the dead mother; and was *she* to forget the loved and lost because her father did?

So the foolish child reasoned with herself, steeling her heart against the beautiful stranger, and even against her father, towards whom she felt a jealous, maddening bitterness, born of her absorbing love for him.

So all the young bride's advances met nothing but the most chilling of responses, monosyllabic answers, averted looks, and not the ghost of a smile. Evelyn merely shrugged her shoulders, and, smiling rather scornfully, told herself that the girl really was not worth any more thought or trouble.

"We are going for a ride, Sophy," her father said, as they rose from the breakfast table; "wouldn't you like to come with us? It seems a long time since you and I had a gallop together. I will ask Mrs. Gray to excuse you from your lessons this morning." He put his hand affectionately upon her shoulder as he spoke, but Sophy drew back coldly.

"I do not think I can go with you this morning, thank you, papa," she answered with flushed face and averted eyes; "I do not like to leave my lessons, besides—" she stopped short. "You and Mrs. Tremaine will not want me," was on her lips to say, but she did not give the words utterance.

Her father urged, and Evelyn, at his request, backed up his wishes, though, truth to tell, it was done reluctantly. But Sophy resolutely refused, and finding that urging her was in vain, they left her to herself, Evelyn with a sense of great relief.

The girl betook herself to the schoolroom and Mrs. Gray's company, and bent low over her French exercise

as she heard the horses' feet on the gravel drive, and the merry voices of the equestrians. Her eyes were full of bitter tears and her lips were quivering, but for the world she would not let Mrs. Gray remark her trouble.

She stumbled through her lessons somehow, and the elder lady, seeing that her heart was not in her work, and guessing the cause, kindly excused all shortcomings, and, more kindly still, neither asked questions nor made remark.

Released at last, Sophy's first thought was to get clear of the house, and she was soon mounted upon her chestnut pony and cantering over the downs, in the opposite direction to the one she knew her father had taken, feeling the exercise and rapid motion a relief from the bitter mingled feelings surging in her heart.

And so things continued, week after week, with very little if any change in the relations between Evelyn and her step-daughter. Sophy would not or could not meet the kindly-meant advances. She still cherished the idea that she was miserably ill-used; that her father had been faithless to the memory of her own dead mother; that she was the only one in all the house who cherished that dear memory; that all sunshine had for ever gone out of her life; that she was neglected, despised, and altogether miserable. And so she hugged her sorrow, feeling that she was very hardly used, when all the time she was very far from blameless herself.

And Evelyn, after the first few days, grew tired of trying to make friends with such an unapproachable subject, and gradually gave up the attempt. It seemed a waste, she told herself, to lavish kindness and attention on such an iceberg. It would be better to leave the girl to follow her own whims and fancies. If she chose to come to her senses and behave better in the future, well and good; if not, why—with her usual customary shrug of the shoulders—she—Evelyn—would not break her heart.

"She is a stupid, spoiled child," the young wife wrote to one of her especial friends, "who thinks she is dignified and unhappy, when in reality she is only sulky and jealous. That is the true state of the case; but I do not like to tell Arthur so, for he dotes on the child, and will not admit that he sees any fault in her, though I can see very well how sadly troubled he is with her conduct. However, I have made up my mind to leave the young lady alone. We each follow our own way of life, interfering as little as possible with each other, and so manage very well. I should be sorry for a chit like that to spoil my happiness; for I am very happy indeed, dearest Nellie, and have got the best and noblest husband in the world."

And here followed a little rhapsody about Arthur's many perfections.

And so time passed on, and the two who ought to have been loving friends and companions were drifting gradually farther and farther apart, while poor Tremaine himself watched them, sorely troubled and puzzled, knowing not how to set things right, and bitterly regretting the breach between the two who were dearest to him on earth.

From her father, too, poor Sophy had seemed to be separated of late by a gulf which seemed daily to grow wider, and which she sometimes felt could never be bridged over, wilfully losing sight of the fact that the coldness and estrangement were due solely to herself.

And so the months of winter passed, followed by spring and summer, and very little change came to the little party at the Towers. Evelyn was careless and patronising; Sophy cold, resentful, and unapproachable; while Tremaine himself bitterly lamented the breach, but knew not how to heal it.

It troubled him sorely—kind-hearted, easy-going man