

echoes make all other sounds distasteful? What has come to you, Elsie Challoner? Why does your heart bound or sink now at a sound or a step? Why are you so gay if all the company, save one, are present, and on the entrance of that one why do you become grave and demure? Why, if he approach you when you are playing chess or singing, does your hand tremble and your voice shake? Foolish Elsie! you little thought when your father wrote his invitation to your cousin John, and you joked about your soldier cousin and his plebeian name, that he held the key of that hitherto insensible heart.

It was a very speedy process by which Elsie and her cousin fell in love. It was, as we know, her first fancy; and though, of course, John Lawrence had not reached his twenty-fifth year quite unscathed, he had never yet seen the "one woman in the world for him." Elsie made an impression on him at once, which deepened and strengthened day by day. Little was said, and, strange to say, no one noticed the growing liking on either side. John had not yet spoken the decisive words, and Elsie, though she perfectly understood what he implied, would not appear to do so till he uttered them.

It was New Year's Eve. The guests were preparing for dinner, and the drawing-room was deserted except by Elsie, who ready dressed, was seated on a low stool before the fire. Her eyes were fixed on the pictures in the coats, and her thoughts were evidently deep and earnest, if you might judge by their steady gaze and the line upon her brow.

A step in the hall makes her start and causes the rich color to mantle over cheek and neck; but she is quiet again before the door opens and admits her cousins John and Percie, mud-splashed, and in shooting dress.

"Here alone, Elsie!" said the former. "But I need not feign surprise. I knew we should find you here at this hour."

"And, therefore, came to inflict the sight of those muddy gaiters upon me!" she said with a merry laugh. "I am afraid you make too sure of a welcome."

Truly his face said that he was sure of it. He was a gallant young fellow, stalwart

and bronzed. None of his brother's delicacy, no trace of the family to which he was supposed to belong—his plebeian blood asserted itself in strong health and vigorous life. He was not of his mother's fair complexion, though he strongly resembled her; but he had her brown eyes and dark waving hair. The eyes told of truth, sense, and feeling; the soft yet firm lines of the mouth were at once resolute and sweet. You may give your heart to him without fear, Elsie Challoner. He will value it and guard it well.

"What sport have you had to-day?" asked Elsie.

"Not much; but we did not spend much of our time on it. John and I were practising at a mark in the long walk."

"And which is the better marksman?"

"Oh, John beats me out and out. My hand has lost its cunning altogether at Oxford."

"Percie underrates his own skill," said John. "I have hard work to beat him. I should be very sorry to stand up as his target."

"I mean to be even with you yet," said Percie; "but in the meantime we had better get out of this mud and dress for dinner. If you're as hungry as I am you won't want to keep it waiting."

He left the room, but John remained, leaning on the mantel-piece and looking at Elsie, who still kept her low seat.

"What do you call the color of your dress, Elsie? It is very pretty."

"Don't you know mauve? With these black ribbons it is half-mourning, and you know papa does not wish me quite to leave it off just yet."

"It is very becoming—at least you look well in it; not but what you always look well in my eyes." The tone of the last words brought the color to her face again.

"Elsie, I never thought how pleasant it would be to have a sister till I knew you."

"Do you wish I were your sister?" she said innocently, and then blushed deeply at the sudden thought which entered her mind.

"No, Elsie," he said, coming nearer and leaning over her; "I would not have you for my sister for the whole world."

She could not speak now. Her eyes