

bed, and when I tried to tell the secret I dreamed that the words choked me, and with me the secret died. Oh! it was a dreadful wrong!"

Strange and to her inexplicable as was the narrative, Rose somehow felt it enkindling deep interest in her own heart. The strong emotion of the old man, his swelling veins and the wild glare of his eyes, assured her there was in his words something more than the description of an empty dream—something that mayhap gave the key of his mysterious life—something, she felt, which concerned herself: the sunlight, it might be, to melt away those clouds in which her history was buried.

She turned to ask him one question—why did the dream afflict him so?

For a moment it seemed as if he were going to give the answer voluntarily. His gloomy abstraction threatened every moment to burst into a disclosure. But if he had anything to disclose, he appeared to have conquered an impulse to disclose it, for suddenly raising his head and looking straight at Rose, with a look that frightened her, he said, laughing strangely:

"It was only a dream, after all—only a dream—nothing more than your ghosts, Rose."

He was silent again; and thinking.

"Why should the words choke me? That was a queer idea. Choke me and let the secret die! Ha, they may choke me, but they won't choke the secret. Ha, ha, that's secure—that's very secure."

Old Richard attempted to rise from his chair but sank back with a groan.

"Oh! those dreadful spasms!" he cried, painfully. "How they rack me! Rose, wheel me over my writing-table."

Rose transferred it from the window, where it was her father's habit day after day to sit writing something that, it seemed, never would end.

Richard opened the writing desk, a moth-eaten relic of once costly rosewood, inlaid with mother-of-pearl. The interior was a complicated system of spring and secret drawers.

"Come here, Rose," he said, firmly. "I am old, and my diseases multiply. I may not have long to live."

"Father, do not speak so despondingly," said Rose, in tears. "It makes me very sad."

"No, child, it is better you should face it now. Perhaps—may certainly—you will be happier when I am gone."

Rose looked at him in amazement.

"I mean," he said, hurriedly and in some confusion, "you will go into the world, and

your beauty will be admired, and you will be worshipped for your goodness. How much a brighter prospect for you my poor child, than nursing a tedious sick old man!"

"Oh! father, how can you say that?" cried Rose, embracing the old man tearfully. "The world is a desert to me. I have no one to love there but you."

An expression of wonderful love came on his worn face as he gazed into the deep true eyes, like blossoms on a leafless tree in winter.

"Heaven, forgive me for so abusing your love," he cried. "But what could I do without you?"

"Father, have I ever given you reason to speak so?"

"No, no, child, but I feel it all the same. But enough of that. I want to tell you, if—anything should happen me—anything sudden, you know—don't tremble, Rose—it may be only a fancy—but if anything should happen, you will find in this little drawer that which will make a great provision for you, child—that which will make you a little princess as proud as Sir Albin Artslade's heiress."

As he spoke, he pointed out behind a slide in the bottom of the desk a little drawer securely locked, and at the same time gave her a little brass key of peculiar construction which unlocked it.

Rose took the key mechanically. Her poor brain was in a whirl of doubt and amazement. How she longed to burst open the little drawer at once, and steal away its secret! Her father's confidences were so strange, so much at variance with his habitual reticence, she knew not what to think, unless that in that drawer lay the talisman of her life.

But, after all, the great provision he spoke of might be only gold—perhaps the hoard that cost him all his lonely years of misanthropy. The thought chilled her anxiety at once. Even to be a "princess as proud as Sir Albin Artslade's heiress" charmed her little, if it filled not the void in her heart, nor satisfied her longing for human sympathy. What avail golden toys to a child that is hungry?

She sighed deeply, and looking on into the future, when the grass grew over Richard Marton's grave, saw in a old convent cloister one who might have loved, fading painfully into a world where love will be eternal. She did not sigh again. Resignation shone in her face like a glory from the empyrean.

Her meditations were cut short by an abrupt question from her father.