
Elfa

as pleased as I did, when his secret came tumbling out, with pauses and gaps and stops: for though he was right glad to have some one to tell it to, he was so awkward and man-like in the telling. Of course, I promised him all the help I could give; for I was so happy with my big husband that I thought I should like to try and make those two happy. And then I wanted to have you brought into the conspiracy: but he would not, and protested that, as men in love are shame-faced with men, he could not look you in the face if you knew. And I yielded, knowing it could be but for a few days. I did not like that part of it; yet seeing that the man was good and true and noble and that I loved the girl he loved; and perhaps because I rather liked to have the direction of such a matter, I gave way."

"You loved the girl yourself, Elfa? Why, who——?"

"Ah, that was the reason which weighed with me more than all. Do you remember I once told you of a cousin whom I had loved in my childhood as we grew up together, and how we were at length parted: my cousin, Esther Mähling. It is she whom Captain von Unger loves. They had had a lover's quarrel; and he, poor fellow, was so unhappy that when he asked me to help him, I could not refuse. I wished first to find out whether Esther loved him; and I thought if I were to see her gain—and I longed to see her and let her know what happiness had come to me—I could surprise the secret out of her. But you are looking very grave and thoughtful at all this, Ernst."