

"O Mr. Keir! you are too young to say that."

"I am too old to think otherwise," he rejoins, moodily; "your trouble was not of your own seeking, Miss St. John—mine is; that makes all the difference."

"It makes it harder to forget, perhaps," she answers, "but not impossible. And you have so much to make life pleasant to you—so many friends—"

"Friends! what do I care for them, excepting one? O Miss St. John! if you will not think me too bold in saying so, it is only since I met you that I have felt as if I really had a friend. The few months we have known each other seem like years in retrospection, though they have flown like days in making your acquaintance."

"We have seen so much of one another in the time," she murmurs, softly.

"Yes! and learned more. Sometimes I can scarcely believe but that I have known you all my life. To feel you really were my friend would be to experience the greatest pleasure that this world still holds for me."

"Why should you not feel so?"

The sweet strains of the "Blue Danube" are being repeated again and again, but above the loudest of them she hears the fluttering of her own heart as she puts the question.

"May I?" laying his hand upon the one which lies upon her lap: "is it possible that you can take sufficient interest in such an insignificant person as myself as to promise to befriend him? Do you know all that is implicated in that promise—the long account of follies and shortcomings you will have to listen to, the many occasions on which you will be asked for counsel or advice, the numerous times that you will feel utterly tired of or impatient with me?"

"I am not afraid of that, Mr. Keir."

"Why do you call me Mr. Keir? Can we be real friends while we address each other so formally? Surely you are above all such prudery, or I am much mistaken in your character."

"I am not a prude, or I think so; yet the name by which I call you can make no difference in my friendship."

"But cannot you guess that I am longing to have the right to speak to you familiarly? Irene—it fits you perfectly. I never knew an Irene in my life before, yet I could not fancy you by any other name, for I learned to love its sound long before I had the hardihood to hope that its possessor would admit me to her intimacy. I shall be very jealous of our friendship, Irene."

"But why should you be jealous?" she de-

mands, in a low voice. Her speaking eyes are cast upon the ground. He can only see the long, dark lashes that lie upon her cheeks, and the golden glory of her head, while the sweet, soft notes of the music still steal in to fill up the broken pauses of the conversation.

"Because it is a sacred bond between us which no third person must intrude upon; and if it is a secret, so much the better; it will be so sweet to feel that we have any thing in common. But if you admit another to your friendship, Irene—if I hear any man *daring* to call you by your Christian name, if I see that you have other confidants whom you trust as much or more than myself, I—I"—waxing fierce over the supposition—"I don't know what I *should* do!"

His violence amuses her.

"You need not be afraid—indeed, you need not; no one of my acquaintance would presume to act in the manner you describe."

"Then I am the first, Irene?"

"Quite the first."

"So much the happier for me! But I wonder—I wonder—"

"What?"

"Whether you can be content with such a friendship as I offer you; whether it will be sufficient for your happiness."

"How *exigante* you must consider me!"

"Not so; it is I that deserve the name. Yet if—if, when we have grown necessary to each other—or, rather, when you have grown necessary to me—you should see some one whom you prefer—some one more attractive—more desirable than myself, and desert me in consequence, marry him, in fact, what shall I do?"

She is about indignantly to disclaim the possibility of such a thing, when she is interrupted by the entrance of her mother.

"Irene! what are you thinking of? Captain Clevedon has been looking for you the last half-hour. You know you were engaged to him for this waltz."

The voice of Mrs. St. John, usually so sweet and low, especially when she is speaking to her daughter, has become too highly pitched in her anxiety, and sounds discordant. As she hears it, Irene, blushing all over, rises quickly from her seat.

"Have I been here long, mother? I have been talking, and did not think of it."

"Then you should think of it," retorts Mrs. St. John; "or Mr. Keir"—with a dart of indignation in his direction—"should think of it for you. It is not customary with you to offend your partners, Irene."