

"You do not like this climate, I imagine," I continued.

"Not much," was the laconic answer wrung from him.

"But you did at one time like to live in your native land," I said; "why did you go in the first place to the East Indies, uncle?"

"To trade," said he; "to buy and sell and get gain. That is what the world lives for. Gold is the lever that moves the world."

"True," I said; "but you have won gold; you are what the world calls rich; are you happy?"

His brow contracted. "Happier than I should have been without wealth, I presume," said he. "But perfect happiness is not the lot of man."

"You never had a family, uncle," I continued; "you have lived alone all your life. Why did you never marry? Did you never love?"

A deeper shadow stole to his cheek; I saw that I had touched upon a tender point. He did not reply immediately, but sat, I imagined, half moodily before the fire, as still as a statue.

At length he turned abruptly towards me. "Yes, I have loved," he said, "but it was long years ago. The romance of life is over with me now. The flame has gone out that passion kindled; there can scarcely be found one smouldering ember that has survived the wrecks of time and its accompanying sorrows."

"Tell me all about it, uncle," I said anxiously; "when was it that you found your *beau idéal*,—where did you meet with her? In America, or in the East Indies?"

"It was long years ago," he said, "long before I went to the East Indies, that I first met Adelaide Sullivan."

"Was she very beautiful, uncle?" I queried. "Had she blue eyes, a Grecian nose, and delicate features? Was she very lovely?"

"To me," he replied, "she was as beautiful as an angel, although you perhaps might not at first sight have termed her very fair. She had eyes as blue as the violets which opened in the spring woods, lips and cheeks that might have stolen color from the rosebud, and a forehead white as snow. But beautiful as she was in person, she was more attractive in mind. She had wit, sprightliness, intelligence. She was gentle and refined. To me she appeared, in those days, of all her sex the paragon."

"And still you did not marry her," I said; "why was this?"

"Mercenary parents stood in the way,—parents who said that something more than love was wanted to commence our housekeeping upon,—parents who frowned upon my schemes, until, in a fit of passion, I vowed to amass gold until their cupidity was satisfied; and with this vow upon my lips, I bade adieu to Adelaide, and sailed for the Indies. For long years I toiled unsuccessfully. My head grew gray with time and thought and care. At length the news reached me of Adelaide's marriage. From that hour I relinquished all ideas of ever possessing a home of my own,—of forming the centre of a domestic circle. I amassed gold, for acquisition had grown into a passion,—a habit with me, and it is a passion with me still. Just now I was planning the sale of some ten-acre lots on my plantation. There was not much romance about that operation, you will admit."

"No," I said, thoughtfully. "But what of Adelaide? do you know anything of her now? Have you ever found her since your return to your native land?"

"No, not I. Why should I? She is the wife of another, and has forgotten me. At any rate, she has no business remembering me; a pretty chap I should consider myself, looking up married women, and reviving old flames. No, no!" and my uncle shook his head decidedly.

Just then a rougher blast shook the casements; the day was in truth a most inclement one. The wind not only shook the casements, but forced open the door. My uncle jumped to his feet, and sprang to close it immediately; but he did not accomplish his design. A weak voice arrested his hand. The figure of a pale and half-frozen child stood upon the door-steps, as if hesitating whether a welcome waited for him inside or not.

"Come in, boy, come in!" said my uncle, hastily; "a dog should not be abroad in such weather, much less a delicate child. Come in, and thaw out your stiffened fingers, dear."

The boy mounted the threshold, and tottered towards the fire. He was very weak; it might be through hunger, it might be through cold, perhaps from both combined.

I rose and offered him a low chair by the grate. He sank into it; and as he felt the genial heat of the room stealing into his benumbed frame, a few tear-drops rolled down his wan cheeks.

My uncle was a benevolent hearted man. He regarded the lad for a few moments with an expression which showed that much contact with a rough world had not entirely dried up the fountains of sympathy in his heart.