

"I thought you would be glad to see me," she began, plaintively.

"I thought so, I hoped so," faltered Derry: "but I am afraid of myself—of what I might say."

"Say nothing, dear," advised Ella in her gentle way: "especially if it would be on that old sad topic."

And Derry obeyed her and said nothing, though anguished thoughts were surging to her lips, while Ella told her tale, with the old pathetic cadence in her chill, sweet voice. She spoke of the great loneliness of her life since she had lost Miles; of how, while in London, his brother Oliver had tried to take his place and to cheer her, and was so like her own lover, that she had gradually grown to feel almost that it was he. Of how Oliver was fond of her, and at last had won her promise to be his wife. Of how her aunt Crystal rejoiced, as she had always wished her to reign at the Tower, and how she was quite sure that Derry would rejoice too. When Ella ceased speaking there was an odd silence in the room. More than once Derry tried to break it, but the words would not come, and when Ella, not unnaturally resenting this curious behavior, rose to go, the elder sister rose too, and putting her hands behind her to lean against the arm of the couch from which she had risen, looked into her sister's face, with a look Ella did not even try to understand—so full the gaze was of love, of pity and of horror.

"Ella, is it a dream that you would marry Miles's brother? Oh, how you will fill my heart with thankfulness if you tell me that this is a dream!"

"Why should it be a dream? You have no right to say that sort of thing, Derry, about your—thankfulness."

A sudden fire blazed in Derry's eyes, as she forcibly put away one thought and seized another. Her whole attitude as well as expression seemed changed, though she had not moved. "You can not know Oliver Basset, Ella. He is—he admires every girl—many girls, I mean, and he can not really love—Oh! Ella, you will change. You will not do this?"

"Oliver cares for me. It is nothing against him if he has cared for other girls before. He will not again."

"He cares for your fortune," correct-

ed Derry, every word an effort to her. "Only that. He knows you are Mrs. Martin's heiress. He knows you will be rich. He courts your fortune."

"This is not like you, Derry," observed Ella, in genuine astonishment. "How can you even pretend to know these things?"

"I know Oliver Basset."

"I recollect now that you told me so," rejoined the younger sister, rather pointedly, "though I fancied you must have been mistaken when I found that he himself never mentioned having met you."

"Does not that prove what I say? Would not it have been more honorable to have told?" inquired Derry. Her strange, cold manner would have revealed to some that she was forcing these reasons, but it did not to her sister. "He did me the honor, Ella, to pretend he cared for my favor above that of any other woman in the world."

"Then that explains your odd idea. Jealousy is always unjust. But I can forgive it, Derry, it is so natural. But on which plea" (with a smile) "am I to dismiss Oliver? For his dishonor in not telling me he had flirted with my sister among others? For his general heartlessness in having flirted with a hundred others? Or for his mercenary motives in finally choosing me, not to flirt with, but to woo in earnest?"

"On any, on all," panted Derry, "so that you dismiss him. Oh, Ella, let me implore you to do this!"

"You are cruel," said Ella, tears of real alarm gathering in her eyes. "What right have you to say that Oliver wants only my fortune?"

"May I prove him? May I?" queried Derry, eagerly.

"You may try," with a laugh.

"If I can prove it—if I can show you that he admires another woman more, will you be convinced?" cried Derry, feverishly. "Will you reject him then?"

"I know the feeling girls have when a rich one is engaged," observed Ella, patiently. "They never think it possible that she is loved for herself. Now I must go."

Once more Derry, in piteous earnestness, and now with tender, loving words, entreated her to break off her engage-