

Dorothy, could in very truth love another? So thought Judy as she waited anxiously for the result of that interview between the long-parted lovers.

It was growing dusk when Dorothy at last entered the room. But even in the half light Judith could see that her face was very white and bore traces of suppressed suffering. Perhaps she read the truth in her sister's eyes; perhaps some instinct told her that her dreams were not to be realized.

"Oh Dorothy!" she cried, passionately, "surely you have not refused him?"

And then a great pity and tenderness filled her soul. For Dorothy—calm, self-possessed Dorothy—had thrown herself on her knees by the bed, and, with head bowed on her outstretched arms, was weeping bitterly, as though her heart would break.

"Oh my love, my love! mine once but not now!"

Not aloud did she utter this cry; and Judith was spared the bitter reproach it conveyed. She did her best to soothe and comfort the elder woman and after a bit, the tempest of sobs calmed and died away. She arose and pushing back the damp, clinging hair from her brow, looked at her sister with wan, piteous eyes.

"Judith!" she cried, "how can one human being be so cruel, so merciless to another? I had never injured Augusta, that she should have done this heartless thing."

"She was jealous; it seems she loved him too."

"Loved! Does not love soften? Are not love and mercy allied? and if she had loved him would she not have desired his happiness above all? That is true love."

"A woman like Augusta could never love like that. I do think she is the most wicked woman I ever met," cried Judith, bitterly.

"Dolly," she said, timidly, "you did not send him away for good and all, did you?"

"Yes, we have parted; for good and all, as you say. It was better so. He does not care for me now, you know, though he asked me to be his wife. He did not tell me so; but I knew it as soon as I saw you two together in the orchard. I read it in his eyes as they rested on your face. So you see it is impossible that he and I should ever be anything to each other more than friends."

"Oh Dorothy! will you ever forgive me? I did not know for a long time after I met him here that he had ever even met you, and when he seemed to care for me I was pleased, for I loved him then. I was so lonely and homesick before he came; and he was so good and kind to me, that I thought there was no one like him. Then Augusta came to my room one night and told me that he was only amusing himself with me as he had amused himself with you years ago. I believed her, and blamed him for spoiling your life; because if it had not been for him you would have cared for someone else. I cannot tell you how miserably unhappy I was after that. If I had only known, I would not have encouraged him, and then he might never have cared for me at all! But it is too late now!" and she burst into tears.

Then the old, motherly tenderness re-awoke in Dorothy's heart for the little sister who had been her care from babyhood, and she put her arm around the weeping girl and soothed her with loving words.


"Why, my dear little sister, you do not think that I blame you for loving him? You did no wrong to me; and you know he was not bound to me in any way; he was, and is, free to love another—perfectly free. And, my dear, do not think that because I have missed this one great joy I am unhappy. So many women miss their destinies and yet are content; and now that I know the truth, and can think of him as one worthy of all the love I gave him, I am more than content with my lot—I am happy." She paused a moment and in her beautiful eyes shone a divine light. She was murmuring a silent thanksgiving to God that the man to whom she had given a life-long love was worthy of her devotion.

"I wept a few minutes ago," she continued, "because I was unnerved, and there came upon me for an instant an overwhelming regret for what might have been. But that is past now. He has gone out of both our lives; so let us not speak of him again, but in thinking of him let us remember that he also has suffered through us, and that he was worthy of the love we both gave to him." And as Dorothy spoke, bending over her sister, a tear fell on the girl's bright hair.

Only one of the millions of tears that women weep every day for men's sakes.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN BONNY WOODS.

 SEASON of present pleasure, a dream of anticipated joy came to Judith in the summer that followed. The only disturbing element was the thought of Dorothy's lonely fate and the remembrance of Donald Standfield's unfortunate lover. Her life at the farm, since Augusta's departure had been one of simple content, leaving nothing to be desired. Her daily duties were light and pleasant; for she soon had discovered that it was far from Mr. Laurie's intention that she should burden herself with the multifarious duties which Augusta had chosen to perform. Susannah had now two stout country maids under her; and instead of being considered a dependent, Judith was treated by both the farmer and his wife as a daughter, for she had endeared herself to them in a hundred ways. The old lady, indeed, often sorrowfully declared that she did not know what she would do when Judith married and went away, shaking her head over the strange infatuation which prompted silly maidens to trust themselves to the tender mercies of men.

"If I could live my life over again I would never marry. No, my dears, I never would. Men are deceitful, and selfish to the core. They are never the same after marriage as they were in courting days. Not even the best of them."

"But do you mean to say, Mrs. Laurie," exclaimed the incorrigible Lydia, one day—"that no one should marry? Just think of the awfulness of a world full of old maids! And then the population, my dear Mrs. Laurie!"

"Well, my dear," returned the old lady, imperturbably—"I suppose the world must be populated respectably, but let the men choose for their wives the homeless and friendless girls who toil for a bare living in office and store and school, and leave the happy and protected daughter to the assured comfort of her parents' home."

"I wouldn't be a fool if I were you!" growled her amiable spouse, who had entered unseen! And Mrs. Laurie collapsed; her philanthropic scheme for hardworking females, nipped in the bud.

As the prospect of Judith's departure drew nearer, the farmer turned over in his mind the advisability of inviting Dorothy to take up her abode at Bonny Dale, when her sister was married. After due consideration he wrote to her, asking her to come and make trial of it for a year at any rate. To this Dorothy consented, grateful to the gruff, eccentric farmer for his kindness to her sister, and herself. And I may as well state here, that when Mr. and Mrs. Littleworth sailed for England Dorothy was settled at Bonny Dale; and though the farmer was fond of her in his rough way, and had a certain respect for her, he missed Judy's bright young face; and often, as he sat reading his newspaper in the evenings, he caught himself listening for the sound of a blithe voice, and a light, quick footstep on the stair. And then suddenly remembering, the stern lips would twist themselves into a more forbidding aspect, and he muttered to himself that he was "an old fool." But nevertheless, Judy had wound herself around the crusty heart of the old farmer; and though Dorothy continued to make Bonny Dale her home, she never had the same influence over him that Judith had. He never unbent to her; he liked her and was invariably civil to her; but of her young sister he cherished to his dying day a tender memory.

But we have been anticipating somewhat, let us go back again. Jack wrote that he would be in Eastville on the twenty-ninth of September, and it was now the seventeenth, and Judy, with shy gladness, was counting the days till he should come.

Ah, how different would be his return from what she had dreamed it would be when she bade him good-bye a year ago! She had been so relieved when he went away; so glad of a year's freedom—a year's immunity from his unwelcome attentions. But what a change had these twelve months wrought in her feelings towards him! How entirely had that other love vanished away, only to be thought of with uneasy regret for her girlish folly. And now with miles and miles of land and sea between them, she had learned