

"How could ... going to stay with her for a time make any of us sorry papa? I am sure it would do me a very great deal of good. You could do without me, too. You said the other morning I was getting quite a torment. Do let me go."

I had crept close to his side, the better to coax him, turning from Aunt Janet quite. I felt instinctively she was not in favor of the plan; her words proved that I was right.

She had sat down to pour out tea without a word, but when I ceased speaking she looked up gravely. "John," said she, "it will be a risk."

"I think not, Janet; I hope not; for something in this letter—a nameless something—seems to urge me to let her go. Ruth seems strangely lonely for a wife. It might do them both good."

"I think not, John," said Aunt Janet. "It is my belief the girl would never settle hereafter."

"Aunt Janet, that is unkind; it is cruel of you," I said.

She looked at me, but she did not answer my passionate interruption.

"Their life is different from our life, John—brighter, fuller, emptier, too," she added, a little bitterly, I thought. "What if it should spoil our girl?"

My father put his hand on my head, and, with one of his rare tender smiles, looked down kindly into my tear-dimmed eyes.

"Our Letty is not so easily spoiled," said he. "I could trust to her coming back my own little girl, after all. You may trust her, too, Janet."

"Indeed she may, father," I said. "I never could forget my own home, wherever I went, or whatever I saw."

"And you would greatly desire to go on this visit, Letty?"

He read my answer in my face ere I could speak it, and smiled, a little sadly at my eager longing to roam.

"Then go you shall," he said; and so it was settled. If it had not been so, then this story had never been written.

Now I must tell you a little about cousin Ruth, and how it was that I was eager to go to her, apart from my wish to see London, apart from everything except my longing, intense and deep, to see her fair face again.

Ruth was the only living child of my mother's only sister; and ever since I could remember, her name been the emblem of all that was beautiful, and good, and gentle in our quiet home. She had lived with us for a little while; then she had married and gone away to her grand new home, leaving a void in my heart which nothing had been able to fill. She married a rich man, a Mr. Rupert Ray, a tall, handsome, grave-faced man, with a deep voice, and eyes keen, gray, and piercing that seemed to look into your inmost thoughts. He was one of the merchant princes of the great Cottonopolis—a man who, though young, was looked up to in the city, and well spoken of, more trusted in by men older, wealthier, more experienced than himself.

From the day I had seen Ruth looking so shy and delicate in her pretty travelling dress, I thought of her as one of the happiest and most fortunate women I had ever known. How could I doubt it? Young, beautiful, rich, it was not possible she could be anything but happy. Of her husband I rarely thought; whenever I did, it was with wonder that Ruth should love him, and marry him. He seemed grim and harsh in my eyes—not fitted to win a woman's heart—and such a wo-