

I shall never forget the noddish glances with which Grace Merton regarded me. "Jealous, eh?" she sneered.

"Jealous! no, thank Heaven," I answered. "I am a little above being jealous of a girl like you; I have not fallen quite so low in my self-esteem. No! if I stood between you and him, it would not be out of anything so mean as jealousy; it would be from the mere Christian desire to save a man I loved and revered from a pitfall and degradation. If Bernard loved another woman, and I thought he would be happy with her, that she would make him a good wife, I would resign my position, even if it broke my heart, for his sake and for his happiness; but I would save him from the clutches of a treacherous creature, who lured him from the woman he was engaged to. I would save him from a life of misery and disgrace, such as an unprincipled woman like yourself could bring on an honest name."

"Your flowery sentiments are doubtless very romantic and fine," my companion said jeeringly; "but they won't hold water, for he loves me. Yes, me," she added, triumphantly, "and he despises you; it is only your money which has hitherto attracted him, but now he has seen me he will relinquish that; he loves me for myself, for I am penniless."

I staggered against the sideboard for support. Was I dreaming!—dreaming! Was this my bosom friend, whom I had almost pictured as a saint!—this the woman whose fair, placid brow I had never seen ruffled before.

Heavens! shall I ever believe in my own sex again! But this libel against Bernard. I would hasten to him at once; I would hear from his own lips the truth, and nothing but the truth.

"Remain where you are, woman," I cried; "I will be with you again in a short space." I entered the drawing-room.

My manner was that of one who wanders in a dream—cold, icy, almost lifeless. Colonel McGregor evidently perceived a marked change in manner and appearance. He rose half-confusedly.

"Gertrude," he said, humbled and abashed, "how shall I ever dare hope to obtain your pardon?"

My proud spirit was fully roused.

I did not relent.

"Sir," I cried, "I have come to release you from your engagement with me. You have this morning offered marriage to another woman."

"Oh, Gertrude!" he cried, looking white as death, "forgive me—I implore it of you; I was a mad fool, and hardly accountable for what I said; it was a trying hour for me, and all men are fallible."

I sneered contemptuously. "If a man is so weak that he cannot resist a pretty face, Heaven knows what will become of him! You asked Grace Merton to be yours, sir, and

she desires to hold you to your word."

"Oh, Gertrude! Gertrude!" he cried, wringing his hands despairingly, "I tell you, upon my honor, I was speaking under the influence of mere passion. Gertrude, must I appeal to you in vain?" he continued, falling on his knees at my feet. "Confound that woman! I despise her far more than you do! I should have awoke to a sense of shame at my folly before it ever went any further. If you leave me, Gertrude, you don't leave me to marry another. I never loved as I love you, Gertrude. For Heaven's sake hear me—forgive me—without you my life would indeed be a blank!"

His appeal was most earnest; doubtless he bitterly repented of his folly. We had been very happy together for years. Why should we allow a worthless woman to separate us?

"Are you willing to speak face to face with Grace?" I asked.

"Willing?—Yes!" he cried, impulsively, and throwing open the door, "Now, madam," he cried, addressing himself to the occupant of the next room, "kindly step this way."

I shall never forget the dejected appearance my friend presented as she came forward and faced us.

"Miss Merton," I said, looking at her with undisguised contempt, "you have been our enemy and mischief maker; hear what Colonel McGregor has to say to you."

"Miss Merton," he said, bowing, "I am sorry to have to speak such words to you. I speak them on my own account and in my own defense. I ask you to forget the words I uttered to you a short time back. They were not meant seriously. There is but one woman in the world whom I love and respect, and that one is your friend, Gertrude. I was weak enough, mad enough, to listen to your avowal, but I have since repented of my folly. Had you proved yourself a sincere friend of Gertrude's, I should have at least cherished a kind feeling towards you; as it is, I thoroughly despise you. You are a false friend, and a dangerous rival; but I tell you that, with all your beauty, I would rather remain a single man all my days than wed you."

She laughed a bitter laugh.

"Grapes are sour!" she cried. "You are a coward and a sneak; you cling to your golden treasure because you can't live without it. I soar above you both. Gertrude is a blind fool, and you are a mercenary knave!—Adieu!"

She was about to flounce out of the room, when my aunt appeared at the doorway, a rigid smile upon her lips. She fixed upon Grace Merton a look I had never seen from under those green glasses before.

It was not a look exactly of anger, but a penetrating, scrutinising gaze full of contempt and disdain.

She had heard the latter portion of my