

her first of all. Will it not suffice that I have asked her to marry me, and she has answered yes?"

"I feel bewildered," Mrs. Windsor says, and she looks it. "Reine, when you might have had Mario. A small, plain, rather sullen-tempered girl, without attractiveness of any sort except good taste in dress and a fine voice, when you might have had rare beauty, grace, and sweetness. This explains why you permitted Frank Dexter to run about with her everywhere. And you really prefer Reine?"

"I really do, he says, almost laughing, "amazing as it appears to be."

"Amazing indeed to me. Of course you must prefer her or you would not ask her. But, Laurence, the girl does not even like you."

"That is my great misfortune. It shall be the labour of my life to try and induce her to change her mind. I do not despair of success in time."

"Well, talk of the perversity of women after this! And when is it to be?"

"What?"

"The wedding, of course."

"Somewhere in the dim and shadowy future. When Mademoiselle Reine does me the honour to overcome her aversion and—well, let us say begins to tolerate me. Not an hour before—this is the express stipulation. I have your consent and approval, madame, I presume?"

"Undoubtedly; but I wish it had been Mario. Reine, I cannot realize it. I never thought of her as your wife. I am confounded."

"No doubt. One's choice invariably confounds one's friends. But I have chosen, and am not likely to change my mind. If I can win Mademoiselle Reine's good opinion after a little, believe me I shall consider myself a most fortunate man."

"I think you must be in love with her," says Mrs. Windsor, thoughtfully, and a conscious smile comes into Longworth's face. "What shall I say to her when she returns, for I am sure I do not know?"

"What you would say to Mario in her place. And, madame," he says, hurriedly, "I wish you would try to like her. Believe me it is a heart of gold, the gold all the purer for the crust

of inferior ore that overlies it. A little kindness from you would go a great way, and she needs kindness, poor child."

"Have I been unkind to her?" Mrs. Windsor says, in proud surprise; "has she been complaining?"

"You know that she had not. And while we are on this subject, pardon my asking if you have destroyed that will of which you spoke to me before they came."

"I have not," she returns, in the same cold voice.

"Then I beg you—may I ask of you to do so. Make another, and give Mario her fair share. Or make none, and let the law divide. It is presumptuous in me to speak to you of this, but I think you will not misunderstand my motive."

"I am not likely to. You have proven yourself abundantly disinterested. I will think of what you say; no doubt the world will hold it only justice. Are you going, Laurence?"

"I must present myself at the concert for an hour at least. Thank you, Mrs. Windsor." He takes her hand as she rises. "How often I seem to have to thank you, but never I think, with quite the same depth of gratitude as to-night."

"You owe me nothing here," she returns, with far less cordiality than usual. "I never thought of this. But you have chosen for yourself. I can only hope you will never repent it."

"That I am sure I shall not, let it end as it may. Good night."

"How sweet are the congratulations of friends!" thinks Longworth, with a shrug, as he shuts the door. "And this is but the beginning of the end. If I had fallen in love with Mario's doll face and doll's soul all would have been proper and well; but I choose a 'queen of noble nature's crowning,' and because her complexion is dark, and that piquant little face irregular, and she is only five feet four in her very highest-heeled shoes, every one will fall into a trance of wonder. As if goodness and greatness were measured by the yard, or diamonds sold by the hundredweight."

Mr. Longworth puts in an appearance at the concert, and does escort duty after for Miss Harriott and Mdlle.