

ber, very dark, very cold, and very foggy. He brought me home from church, and he kept me there at the gate pierced through and through by the frost, and half-choked by the stifling river mist, holding my hand in his own and refusing to leave me until I promised to marry him.

Home was very lonely since mother died. The farm had gone quite wrong since we lost father. My near friends advised me to wed with Kenneth Moore, and all the village people looked upon it as a settled thing. It was horribly cold, too, out there at the gate—and—that was how it came about that I consented.

I went into the house as miserable as Kenneth had gone away happy. I hated myself for having been so weak, and I hated Kenneth because I could not love him. The door was on the latch; I went in and flung it to behind me, with a petulant violence that made old Hagar, who was rheumatic and had stayed at home that evening on account of the fog, come out of the kitchen to see what was the matter.

"It's settled at last," I cried, tearing of my bonnet and shawl; "I'm to be Mrs. Kenneth Moore. Now are you satisfied?"

"It's best so—I'm sure it's much best so," exclaimed the old woman; "but, deary-dear!" she added as I burst into a fit of sobbing, "how can I be satisfied if you don't be?"

I wouldn't talk to her about it. What was the good? She'd forgotten long ago how the heart of a girl like me hungers for its true mate, and how frightful is the thought of giving oneself to a man one does not love!

Hagar offered condolence and supper, but I would partake of neither; and I went up to bed at once, prepared to cry myself to sleep, as other girls would have done in such a plight as mine.

As I entered my room with a lighted candle in my hand, there came an awful crash at the window—the glass and framework were shivered to atoms, and in the current of air that rushed through the room, my light went out. Then there came a crackling, breaking sound from the branches of the old apple tree beneath my window; then a scraping on the bricks and window-ledge; then more splintering of glass and window-frame: the blind broke away at the top, and my toilet table was overturned—the looking-glass smashing to pieces on the floor, and I was conscious that someone had stepped into the room.

At the same moment the door behind

me was pushed open, and Hagar, frightened out of her wits, peered in with a lamp in her hand.

By its light I first saw Philip Rutley.

A well-built, manly, handsome young fellow, with bright eyes and light close cropped curly hair, he seemed like a merry boy who had just popped over a wall in search of a cricket ball rather than an intruder who had broke into the house of two lone women in so alarming a manner.

My fear yielded to indignation when I realized that it was a strange man who had made his way into my room with so little ceremony, but his first words—or rather the way in which he spoke them—disarmed me.

"I beg ten thousand pardons. Pay for all the damage. It's only my balloon!"

"Good gracious!" ejaculated Hagar. My curiosity was aroused. I went forward to the shattered window.

"You: balloon! Did you come down in a balloon? Where is it?"

"All safe outside," replied the aeronaut consolingly. "Not a bad decent, considering this confounded—I beg pardon—this confounding fog. Thought I was half a mile up in the air. Opened the valve a little to drop through the cloud and discover my location. Ran against your house and anchored in your apple tree. Have you any men about the place to help me get the gas out?"

We fetched one of our farm labourers, and managed things so well, in spite of the darkness, that about midnight we had the great clumsy thing lying upon the lawn in a state of collapse. Instead of leaving it there with the car safely wedged into the apple-tree, until the morning light would let him work more easily, Rutley must needs "finish the job right off," as he said, and the result of this was that while he was standing in the car a bough suddenly broke and he was thrown to the ground, sustaining such injuries that we found him senseless when we ran to help him.

We carried him into the drawing-room, by the window of which he had fallen and, when we got the doctor to him, it was considered best that he should remain with us that night. How could we refuse him a shelter? The nearest inn was a long way off; how could he be moved there among people who would not care for him, when the doctor said it was probable that the poor fellow was seriously hurt internally?

We kept him with us that night; yes,

and for weeks after. By Heaven's mercy he will be with me all the rest of my life.

It was this unexpected visit of Philip's, and the feeling that grew between us as I nursed him: well and strong again, that brought it about that I told Kenneth Moore, who had become so repugnant to me that I could not bear to see him or hear him speak, that I wanted to be released from the promise he had wrung from me that night at the garden gate.

His rage was terrible to witness. He saw at once that my heart was given to someone else, and guessed who it must be; for, of course, everybody knew about our visitor from the clouds. He refused to release me from my pledge to him, and uttered such wild threats against poor Philip, whom he had not seen, and who, indeed, had not spoken of love to me at that time, that it precipitated my union with his rival. One insult that he was base enough to level at Philip and me stung me so deeply, that I went at once to Mr. Rutley and told him how it was possible for evil minds to misconstrue his continuing to reside at the farm.

When I next met Kenneth Moore I was leaving the registrar's office upon the arm of my husband. Kenneth did not know what had happened, but when he saw us walking openly together, his face assumed an expression of such intense malignity, that a great fear for Philip came like a chill upon my heart, and "when we were alone together under the roof that might henceforth harmlessly cover us both, I had but one thought, one intense desire—to quit it forever in secret with the man I loved, and leave no foot-print behind for our enemy to track us by.

It was now that Philip told me that he possessed an independent fortune, by virtue of which the world lay spread out before us for our choice of a home.

"Sweet as have been the hours that I have passed here—precious and hallowed as this little spot on the wide earth's surface must ever be to me," said my husband, "I want to take you away from it and show you many goodly things you have as yet hardly dreamed of. We will not abandon your dear old home, but we will find someone to take care of it for us and see what other paradise we can discover in which to spend our life-long honeymoon."

I had never mentioned to Philip the name of Kenneth Moore, and so he thought it a mere playful caprice that made me say:—

"Let us go, Philip, no one knows where—not even ourselves. Let Heaven