

overseeing repairs and improvements. The girls sometimes accompanied me, and we rode or walked according to the distance. The heiress was very pleasant and cordial, and seemed not unwilling to fall into her aunt's plan of a marriage; though I must say she was never forward, and perhaps if I had not known she was the heiress, and had not had the other girl so constantly before my eyes, I should have come to consent to the arrangement myself. But the other girl was my ideal. I need not describe how or why she charmed me; I fell in love at first sight, and that was reason enough. Time only made me more determined to have nothing to do with the heiress, and to win, if possible, her penniless cousin.

Yet my decision worried me, for Miss Mickleston sometimes eyed me sharply, and I knew I was going directly against her wishes. So I sought solitude in strict attention to business. The affairs of the place were so entangled that they took up most of my time, but I made them a pretext for more retirement than they actually required, and I began to reflect on the consequences of my love-making. If I married according to my heart, I must wait a long time for my bride, for I was miserably poor. And what indulgence could I expect from Miss Mickleston? Would she ever take me into her good graces again, after I should have confessed my love for the wrong girl, and thereby frustrated long-laid plans?

I went away abruptly one morning in May on the plea of business concerning the estate which might require me to stay in London some time. I remained away much longer than was really necessary,

and I shrank from coming back. A few days after my return, the thought suddenly struck me to give up my managership of the estate, and thus put an end to my false position. I had put everything in good shape, the books were clear, correct, and up to date, and there was really no reason to detain me longer. A favorable opportunity presented itself one evening soon after, as we were all gathered together in the old-fashioned drawing-room, and, in a kind of half-despair, I declared my intention of returning to my home at the end of the month. A storm of opposition met my remark. My godmother insisted that I had saved the estate and that I was still necessary for its proper management. The two girls chimed in with her and declared that, indeed, the place could never get along without me. Altogether it was a touching domestic scene, and I melted under its influence and proceeded, as I believed, to make a fool of myself. I asked my godmother for a few moments of private conversation, and there avowed my love for her poor niece. She appeared to be very angry and indignant, and I admitted she had some right to be so, considering that I had gone against her wishes under her very eyes. Nevertheless I could not consent to sacrifice the happiness of my life. Then she burst out laughing, and told me, to my confusion, that I had fallen into a snare, and that she had outwitted me after all; for Ellen, whom I had taken for her poor companion, was the very girl she had destined for me, while Mary was in reality the poor girl. She had wanted to try me, and had with difficulty persuaded her nieces to change places. I was bewildered, and rather angry