

was with Anne five years ago. Not so I. I have vowed that you shall not so disgrace us, or that if you do, you shall suffer like the rest. Refuse what I demand, marry Alice Ford, now or at any other time, and I place that paper in my father's hands."

She unfolded and held it towards him. The young man looked it over, at first carelessly, then with breathless eagerness. As he came to the end he turned deathly white and sunk trembling on the nearest chair.

"That would make a difference, you think? He might forgive his son's marriage, though a low one; but he would hardly acknowledge yours."

She spoke bitterly, and Allan covered his face. "What does it mean, Charlotte?" he asked at last in a faint tone.

"Have you not read it! What can it mean, except what is there stated in plain words? That you are no Challoner, but the child of the nurse, substituted in infancy for my mother's child who died."

The young man sat silent, as if stunned by the suddenness of the blow. "How did you come to know this? Why have you concealed it till now?"

"I never intended to reveal it; never should have revealed it for a less all-important cause. I came to the knowledge four years ago. When the woman who had practised the shameful imposture was dying, she sent for me, and confessed to me the whole."

"Tell me all," said Allan hoarsely; "and remember you are speaking of my mother."

"To what purpose should I go over the shameful story? She was my nurse and your mother; she could not acknowledge her child and keep her place; but circumstances favored her. You have heard what our—my mother's health was after, not your birth, but that of the child you represent; you have heard how she and my father went abroad, leaving their children to a friend's care. Friends are careless; no watch was kept over the nurses; the infant sickened and died; you were substituted; and when months afterward my father and mother returned, who could disclose the imposture? No one; and the truth was

never known until a death-bed repentance brought it to light.

"And are you content now? Are you happy that you drive me, a homeless, nameless wanderer, from the inheritance I have believed my own!"

"Allan, all you have ever had is yours still."

"What do you mean? Have you not just told me I am nothing I have ever believed myself to be? that instead of being a Challoner, heir to a noble name, I am a servant's base-born child?"

Charlotte set her teeth and frowned. "Allan, have you forgotten that I have had that paper for four years? That at any moment I might have disclosed its contents? I have not done so. The woman is dead; the clergyman who heard and signed her confession is dead; no one knows the secret but us two; and no one living need ever know it, unless you choose that it shall be so."

"Charlotte, what do you mean?"

"We have been brought up together, and I love you, Allan; that is one reason; but a stronger one is this. I would die a thousand deaths sooner than have a slur upon our name. Think what a story like this would be to tell."

"Would you rather, then, that I, that a false heir should inherit name and lands?" He might well ask; but his own agitation was such that he did not notice her confusion. "Even if I could consent to play the hypocrite, to continue the deceit, would you be satisfied?"

"You do not mean that you will not consent?" she asked hastily.

"Consent to a life of deceit and meanness without parallel? Never. Better any poverty—any degradation."

Charlotte bit her lip. "Allan, think of all you would give up: wealth, name, home, friends, family—all these are yours now; can you conceive what it would be to go forth into the world without them?"

Allan hesitated; the weakness of his nature showed itself; the first burst of mind candor and enthusiasm over, his mind accustomed to the blow, Miss Challoner's words had force. He did not perceive the difference in her tone, that she had changed from threats almost to plead-