

"You are at liberty to publish the story to the whole world if you choose; it will be your own name you will drag in the dirt. Mrs. Bullion and Mrs. Thorpe will then stand on equal ground. Remove your hand from my arm if you please."

Now, Mr. Thorpe was not prepared for this, and though he was foiled in his effort to force her into submission, he was conscious, even in his anger, of a feeling of admiration for the pride and hardness which forbade her cringing to him.

"Do you mean by that that you refuse to obey me?" he asked, fiercely.

"I do mean that. In a marriage like ours, obedience is no part of the contract. I married you to suit my own purpose, or in other words because I desired the freedom and the established position in society which only marriage confers upon a woman. You married me for my money. If you would prefer it, I can go my way and you can return to the poverty and obscurity from which my money raised you. Under any circumstances, I would have you recognize the fact that I am absolutely my own mistress."

"Then you do not deny that you intercepted Mr. Standfield's letter and replied to it in Miss Brown's name?"

"I do not."

"It is true?"

"It is."

"Your motive was love for the banker, I suppose?"

"It was."

"You expected to win him when Miss Brown was disposed of?" asked Clarence, sneeringly.

"No; it was my revenge."

"I suppose you understand my intentions with regard to this matter?"

"Certainly; as your knowledge of the facts has failed as a weapon wherewith to cow me into wifely submission you intend to use it as an instrument of revenge, by informing Mr. Standfield and Miss Brown of the part I played in their destiny. Have I stated your intentions correctly?"

"You have, madam."

"Then I think there is nothing further to be said. Shall I expect you in to dinner?"

"No," he growled.

Then this ill-assorted couple separated; she entering her private room, while he left the house and went with rapid strides toward the post-office where he deposited the letter he had written to Judith.

"The truth will have to be told now," he muttered as he dropped it into the box, and turned away in anything but a comfortable frame of mind.

"Hang it! I'll go to Eastville to-morrow instead of Friday and get it over," was his next thought. And as the reader has seen, he did go on Thursday. His object in telling the story to Judy instead of to Mr. Standfield or Dorothy herself, was to win her gratitude and good will. But he knew her well enough to understand that he must conceal his triumph and his real motive for the disclosure he was about to make. He must feign sorrow for his wife's deceit, and regret for the pain it had caused to Dorothy. Moreover, he must let Judith know that it was with Augusta's knowledge that he had made the journey to Eastville for the purpose of making known the facts. Well he knew the aversion with which the gentle, high-minded Judith would regard him, did she guess his malice toward his wife, the hideous triumph with which he exulted over the discovery of her treachery toward her cousin, and he still cared enough for Judy to wish to stand well in her regard, though to say that he loved her or anyone else would be a parody on the word, and his brief, mad passion for her had cooled long since.

CHAPTER XII.

THE OLD LOVE AND THE NEW.

THE sun was shining brightly, warmly, and it shone on two figures standing at the further end of the orchard—those of a man and a girl. The former stood with his head bent on his breast; his hands were tightly clinched and his face was white, like that of a man who is suffering mental torture.

Judith—for it was she—was also very pale, but she spoke calmly, even coldly, in answer to the question he had asked her a moment before.

"Yes, it is true, I did care for you at that time, Mr.

Standfield, and had it not been for what Augusta told me I—matters might have been different. But—no, listen, let me finish—I am glad now that things have turned out as they have with regard to myself. For how could I have been happy had I found out afterwards that I had married the man who, but for Augusta's falseness, would have been my sister's husband, the man whom Dorothy has loved all these years?"

"No, for God's sake do not say that! Heaven forbid that Dorothy should love me still!"

"Have you no love left for Dorothy, at all?" she asked, sadly.

"None, as Heaven hears me—none! Never once in the past did I love your sister as I love you now, child."

"Oh hush! you must not speak so. And I am not half as good as Dorothy. She is so beautiful and sweet; oh! if ever you loved her at all you will love her again when you see her!"

"It might have been so had I never seen you; but now it is too late!"

"Oh!" she cried piteously, "do not say that I have come between you and her—my poor Dorothy!"

"It is not your fault, little Judith!"

"But do not say it, do not think that it is so. I cannot bear it. It must be all a fancy, your—your love for me. When you meet Dorothy again you will wonder how you could ever have imagined that you cared for me; why, I fancied that I loved you a short time ago, and now—"

"And now you find that it was all a fancy; but men, at my age, do not take fancies like that," he said, smiling sadly.

"Are you sure, Judith," he continued, "that your sister still cares for me?"

"I know that she has refused many offers; and—and she is one of those women who will not love a second time," hesitated Judith, desiring above all things her sister's happiness, and yet fearful of making her appear cheap in his eyes.

"You will, at least, see her and explain it all to her. Remember what unjust thoughts of her you have harbored in your heart all these years. She has suffered through no fault of her own."

"True, but she must have had hard thoughts of me, also, thanks to Mrs. Thorpe!" he added, bitterly.

"I do not think so; but if she did think badly of you, must that not have added to her unhappiness?"

"Judith, I believe you are right; it is my duty to atone to Dorothy, for the past. If she still cares for me I will do my best to make her happy. But oh God! what misery that woman has wrought! What matters it to what purpose I devote my life when you are lost to me? I could almost find it in my heart to forgive her if it were not for you."

"Oh hush, please!" remember Dorothy, remember Jack."

"Jack!" he groaned, and turning, walked a few paces from her.

"Do you love him then, Judy? Has he stolen your heart from me already?" he asked, returning to her side.

"Yes, I love him," she murmured, and turned away her eyes that she might not see the misery in his.

"And are you happy?"

"Yes."

"May Heaven keep you so always!" he raised her hand and pressed his lips upon it, restraining the mad impulse that came upon him to take her in his arms and kiss the perfect lips that he never had kissed, and never would, though he loved her so well.

Just then Judith uttered a little cry of surprise, and glancing round to discover the cause of it, he saw a woman, with a lovely Madonna-like face, advancing toward them. It needed not Judith's joyful cry of "Dolly, oh Dolly!" to tell him who it was. The old love and the new! He watched them together, and told himself that if he had never met and loved Judith, he might have been happy, even now, with sweet Dorothy. But it was too late; he loved Judy, and the old love was dead forever.

They greeted each other quietly, and Judy, with a few words of excuse, left them together and sped with a beating heart to her own room.

Oh if only it would all come right between them, how happy they both might be; for what man, having once loved