

Agatha next rushed to the door, and called excitedly to her husband, child, parents, and brother.

All obeyed the summons, in the greatest alarm; but the fright was turned into joy when they saw the Colonel standing in the centre of the room.

Howard advanced, and they both, clasping hands, gazed affectionately at each other. Their hearts were opened without a word of explanation from either.

And now Gwendoline came jumping in with a look of astonishment, and a smile passed over her bright little face.

"You!—where have you come from?" asked she, clasping her hands merrily.

"Am I still a nice man, my pretty one?" asked the Colonel, lifting his pet high in the air. "Have you really not forgotten me yet?"

"No—really not!" answered the child; "and I'll give you a kiss for coming to see me again."

After a while the storm began to lay itself. The family became quieter, and the Colonel asked Howard if he had heard from Vincent lately, and if the ship the latter was coming in had arrived in England. He at once declared his intention of going to meet his son.

Agatha and her husband exchanged looks.

"Have you had any news of Miss Landville?" asked the Colonel, noticing the glance between husband and wife.

They replied in the affirmative.

"We have a letter, to deliver into Vincent's hands on his arrival, from Isabel."

"Give it to me. I will be love's postman for once?" laughed the old gentleman.

Howard went to fetch the letter. The Colonel took it, looked at it on every side, and tore the envelope open.

His son jumped up in alarm, ready to prevent its perusal.

"Leave me alone," cried the Colonel, good-temperedly; "I will take all the responsibility upon myself."

He stepped to the window, and commenced reading.

It was some time before he had mastered its contents—much longer than necessary, considering the length of the letter, as Isabel had not used many words to express utter hopelessness. But the contents were only intended to be read by the man to whom they were addressed, and whom the girl loved better than the whole world put together.

The noble submission with which she took her humiliation from the Colonel's hands was stated uncomplainingly, while she told him that she could not consent to see him again till his father was willing to allow her to enter his family, though she was afraid that happy time would never arrive.

There must have been something in Isabel's unshaken self-government that had the power of touching the Colonel more than anything else. Be that as it may, Agatha declared that he changed color several times during his perusal of the lines.

When he had read the letter, he asked for a new envelope, pen, ink, and sealing wax.

Howard obeyed his request, though he hardly liked his task, for he was afraid of any rash words the Colonel might be guilty of. He had suffered much at his father's hands, and, knowing Isabel well, and, being fully acquainted with her irresistible fascinations, he was glad to hear of the plan she was going to adopt towards the Colonel, and was almost sure of its ultimate success: for who could resist such a girl long? Therefore, he was doubly anxious now, knowing how much happiness and misery depended upon the stroke of a pen, or even a misinterpretation of words.

The Colonel acted as if he were the only man in the world, and as if no one could be in the least interested in anything he was about to do. He dipped his pen in the ink; then, laying Isabel's letter in front of him, glanced very uneasily upon the neat handwriting, and wrote in large characters, upon the top of the paper, "Your resignation will not be accepted."

Agatha had been watching Colonel Steward's hand with anxiety, and when she discovered what he wrote, rushed into her husband's arms, whispered the joyful intelligence to him.

The Colonel heard her. He turned round, and said, with a mocking smile, "I suppose you thought I had the nature of a bear in me, Agatha? I tell you what, Howard, you had better give your wife some lessons in natural history. There! now for my fate."

He sent the letter off, so that Miss Landville received it before the return of Vincent.

All was right again between them. It is not possible to describe the happy re-union of a family that has been at strife with each other for a long time. Gwendoline received most of the Colonel's kisses; but one could tell, by the way he watched her, what an impression Agatha had made upon the obstinate heart.

Of the meeting between Vincent and the Colonel, we can only say that the sight of his stately old father was sufficient to fill him with hope.

Father and son agreed at once to see the Landvilles.

"You must go to the father; I to the daughter," said the Colonel, with mock seriousness.

"Don't you think exactly the contrary will do as well?" asked Vincent, laughing. "I am longing to meet darling Isabel."

"She won't see you till I've spoken to her," replied the Colonel, calmly. "Something has happened between us that—"

Vincent gazed at his father in alarm.

"Isabel is proud," whispered he, with some agitation. "I do hope nothing will come to prevent our happiness."

The Colonel shrugged his shoulders, but did nothing to calm his son's doubts.

"The uncertainty of the next four-and-twenty hours shall be your punishment for going off to America without my consent, and without taking leave of me."

Vincent knew of old, that all questions on his part would be of no avail; so he was silent, and counted every station in secret that divided him from the girl he loved.

At length, the last was reached, and a carriage took both gentlemen—the old one laden with good resolutions; the young one provided with proofs of his efficiency, in securing a fortune which had well-nigh been lost to the family for ever—in front of the Landvilles' house.

Isabel's father, who had already been made acquainted with Vincent's arrival in England, received him with exclamation of joy and gratitude; while she hid herself behind the door, and waited anxiously for the key to the riddle which had been sent her in the shape of her returned letter, signed by the Colonel's hand.

The latter advanced to her, and led the trembling girl to the window. Then, laying both his hands upon her shoulders, he gazed intently into her lovely face. There must have been something in his expression that appealed to her heart; for, bending her proud head low, she pressed herself affectionately to his breast. He embraced her silently and tenderly, and whispered, in a voice of emotion, into her ear alone.

"Can you really dispense with my love, as you told me you could when we last met?"

"The words, father, were hastily spoken," she replied.

Further explanation was unnecessary.

Vincent won his happiness through his own efforts on the other side of the ocean, and all obstacles to his love vanished.

If the reader wishes to know which daughter-in-law the Colonel likes best, he must look farther than his conduct to both of them before he can judge rightly. Agatha is the object upon which he vents his sarcasms, while on Isabel he bestows warm adoration.

Gwendoline, the sweetest of grandchildren, has won a throne in her grandfather's heart which nobody else can dispute—not even if he should be blessed with a dozen more grandchildren.

One day, the Colonel penned the following lines to his sister-in-law, Widow Rowland:—

"The fear that you might be seeking me in the moon, after my sudden disappearance from Westbury, induces me to write an acquaint you with the fact that I am at present residing with my son Vincent's intended wife's family. You may laugh away, my dear—it cannot hurt me. I, too, often have a good laugh at the expense of an old fellow named Steward, who has given up the part of a 'bear,' to play that of a—Well, sister, there's no writing so difficult on earth to a person as penning an admission of his own faults, so I out with the truth—to play the part of thoroughly happy father and grandfather."

"Come and judge for yourself, and see your worthy brother-in-law fondled affectionately by Agatha, the blacksmith's daughter, dancing a galop with that romp Gwendoline, and making love to the proud daughter Isabel."

"In four weeks Vincent is going to be married; and he expects his aunt Rowland to attend his wedding in the stiffest of silks and the smartest of bonnets. I conclude by assuring you that I am still old Colonel Steward, but I have found my hermitage in my son's house, where I intend to remain till the end of my days, doing penance for my sins."

Of course, the widow did not wait for a second invitation, but hurried at once to Eden to see her fondest hopes realized. We may also be sure that she was greeted with some of the Colonel's cutting speeches; but as she was a lady well able to take care of herself, she probably answered him in a proper spirit.

## ETHEL'S STORY.

She was a very beautiful, attractive woman, black-eyed and crimson-cheeked, with a splendid bust, and arms which she did not mind showing.

I was a little, pale creature, neither ugly nor pretty; but I did not envy her.

Let all the men on earth admire her; one loved me.

If I was fair in his eyes, I cared nothing for the rest.

The other girls were jealous at times.

Madge Burt and Barbara Brown declared that there was no such thing as getting any attention from any one where she was.

Certainly she tried her best to fascinate every man, single and married, who came near her.

Milliecent Bray was her name, and I understood that, young as she was, she was a divorced woman.

It may have been that she was very much ill-used by her husband, and had then the injured party altogether.

I presume it is often so—but pure women will bear a great deal rather than sever the holy tie that binds them to a husband's side; and there is always a doubt about a divorce.

Some of the ladies at Mrs. Norton's shrugged their shoulders, and wondered what the old lady had been thinking of to take Mrs. Bray in.

The gentlemen, however, fought in her defence.

Beautiful, musical, fond of flirtation, and apt at flattery, she won her way into their liking.

For my part, I did not respect her one whit. I did not see anything to love in her, but I admired her.

Unlike most women, I always found myself able to see the charms that men see in a personally attractive woman.

But were I a man, I could not do as men do: flatter these flirts at the expense of true-hearted women, who love them with all their souls.

When good Mrs. Carman went to her room with tears in her eyes, leaving Mr. Carman whispering soft nothings in Mrs. Bray's ear; and when little Effie Fay crimsoned and trembled with anger, because her lover forgot her while he turned the beauty's music and looked down into her eyes, I often thought to myself that those were poor triumphs after all, that those men who gave them to her were but silly creatures.

She liked none of them.

She mocked them, and had little nick-names for each.

She was as cold in heart as she was warm in manner.

Her impassioned glances were those of an actress, nothing more.

She gave those glances to my Harry as well as to others, but I had no fear of their effect.

Of course, he knew she was handsome, and that she sang well, so did I.

We had met at Mrs. Harlan's.

I was an orphan, and taught music for my bread; he was a young clerk in a large wholesale house.

At our first meeting we had liked each other, and he was the only lover I had ever had.

When I gave him my betrothal kiss, it was with lips that had never met those of any man before, and I was glad to think of it.

We had been engaged three months, and were to be married in the spring.

We were wrapped up in each other, and I believe concerned ourselves very little about Mrs. Bray.

I did not.

It pleased me better to think of better women.

There were others whose minds were continually running on her, however.

Jealous Effie Fay could not quite forget her.

Over and over again she sat in my room, with tears pouring down her cheeks, and talked of her.

"She's a wretch," she declared, "a bold, forward, cruel creature. She knows Charlie is engaged to me. She knows it. I see it in her eyes; and she works so hard to get him to herself. Charlie doesn't know what he is doing for himself. I shall break with him yet, and I do love him so. No one will ever love him so much."

Then she would cry again, and begin the old story of Mrs. Bray's conduct, of her looks, her contrivances, her tricks and wretched smiles.

I felt sorry for the child, she was but sixteen; and sorry too for Charlie, who was acting as most foolish boys do under such circumstances.

But one morning she began another strain.

"Mrs. Bray is at work with your Harry now," she said, "and she'll twist him round her finger soon, as she does my Charlie. It's witchcraft those women have—an unholy power of some kind. You'll see, Ethel, you'll suffer as I do soon."

And then she spoke of words, and looks, and actions that had quite escaped me, but which, spoken of, made me strangely uncomfortable.

I had utter faith in Harry, but I did not like to hear such things.

At first it was only that, but after awhile it was more.

As the days went on, I noticed one or two things that were suspicious.

I saw that she contrived to meet my lover in the hall, and on the stairs, to sit near him at dinner time, to go out upon the balcony when he did.

Charlie Beach was allowed to slip back into his old place in Effie's heart, and my Harry was Mrs. Bray's object.

Effie had been sharper than I; but Harry was too strong in his love for me to yield, I felt sure.

It was about the time that Harry's business compelled him to choose a lodging farther away. He left Mrs. Norton's, and only called to see me in the evenings, and we began to write to each other.

I have the little notes he wrote me carefully hidden away even now.

They are very precious to me.

As I read them over, they bring those hours back again, and I am a young and loving girl once more.

I never loved Harry more tenderly than when I sat down one morning to tell him of a little festivity which I had been invited to attend, and to ask his escort.

I shall never forget that day.

After I had posted the letter, I sat in my room, and sewed upon the pretty dress I intended to wear, thinking all the while that it was Harry's favourite color, and that he would be sure to like it.

Effie, happy in her recovered lover, sat with me and read aloud from a little book of verses Charlie had given her.

They were not fine verses, nor was she an elegant reader, but there was love in them and in her heart, and that sufficed.

We are so unaccountably happy sometimes, just as we are unaccountably sad at others.

It is as though unseen spirits, good, or bad, hovered about us and whispered to us.

I was gloriously content that day. Outside the sun was bright and the air soft. The geranium that stood in my window was full of crimson blossoms.

My canary bird sang shrilly. Effie, with pretty smiles on her face, basked in the bright firelight, and between her verses talked of dear Charlie.

I had finished the dress, and sat looking down into the street, when I saw a boy hurrying along.

It was the errand boy at Harry's place, and Effie, who had seen him also, ran downstairs to bring my note to me, for we both knew that it was my answer that shimmered in its little white envelope in my hand.

She ran down gaily, humming a tune.

She returned with a very serious face.

A note was in her hand with my name upon it in Harry's writing.

But her expression frightened me so that I caught my breath.

"What is it, Effie?" I asked.

"Ethel," she said, very sadly, "I must tell you, though you'll hate me. The boy who brought that note brought one for Mrs. Bray."

I was so relieved that I burst into a fit of laughter.

"Why should that trouble me?" I asked.

"Don't you see your Harry must have written both?" she asked.

"No," said I, "I do not. I am not jealous of Harry."

Then I broke the seal, and these were the words I read—

"MADAM,—

"I have another engagement and am obliged to decline yours.

"H. HEATHCOTE."

I put the cold billet down with a strange chill at my heart.

What had I done to deserve this?

What did it mean?

What should I do?

A note like this from a betrothed lover, from whom I had parted with the tenderest caresses. Effie saw that I was in trouble and forbore to question me, but she glided out of the room and did not return for an hour.

When she came back, her face was wet with tears.

"You cannot tell me what it is?" she asked.

I answered—

"I must have offended him unconsciously. I can't say anything more."

When the dinner-bell rang, I went downstairs as usual.

Passing the parlor door, I saw Mrs. Bray. She was reading a note aloud.

"I declare I never was so surprised," she said. "I thought he was in love with that little girl. Ah! there she comes."

She hurried away as she spoke, in assumed terror.

The next moment I saw Effie speak to her, and a white paper pass into her hand.

Whatever it was she knew, and she would tell me.

She did.

That evening she brought a letter into my room—a letter that Mrs. Bray had exhibited to all the house—a love-letter from Harry Heathcote, tenderer and more passionate than any he had ever written to me, and with his undoubted signature as its foot!

It was no forgery.

I even knew the paper, a rare and costly kind, with his own monogram upon it.

It began "Darling," and ended "Your own Charlie."

I did not scream, I did not swoon; I faced the terrible truth as best I might.

She had won him from me, but I was in no wise to blame.

I was true.

I was sinned against, not sinning, and the blow should not crush me.

I did not even allow myself to play the mourner.

Contempt of my lover had taken the place of love.

He should know I did not grieve for him; and I asked good old Mr. Harlan to be my escort, and went to the party next evening with a smile on my face, though my heart ached sorely, and life seemed a cold and cruel thing to me.

They told me I was gay that night.

I chatted, I ate and drank, I danced whenever I was asked to do so.

All the while the words of that letter Harry had written to Mrs. Bray were in my ears.

When old Mr. Harlan took me home, he told me I had "wornied myself out, and was beginning to feel it."

But I was strong yet.

To-morrow I had work to do that would demand all my strength.

To take the matter into my own hands, to write an adieu to Charlie, send him back the gifts and letters in my possession, and ask mine of him.

As I went upstairs old Mrs. Norton looked out of her room.

"Your beau was here to-night," she said. "I expect he was out up to find you out, but Mrs. Bray took care of him."

I tried to laugh.

All my life I felt I must laugh when I had rather cry.

I must hide my heart.

No one should ever call me a "disappointed" woman.

No one should speak of me as one who had been jilted.

I wrapped myself in my dressing gown and sat before my fire.