

As Thorpe was rushing with frantic haste up the avenue, Leon seized him by the arm.

'Are you crazed?' said. 'Vashti is very feeble, a sudden shock like this might kill her. Besides you need to prepare yourself for the great change you will find in her appearance—'

'Good Heaven! Brownlee, what if she should still refuse to let me see her.'

He reeled against a tree as he spoke, dizzy with emotion.

'Keep up, man—keep up; there is no danger of that, but you must be calm. Sit here and compose yourself while I go into the house. I will come back for you very soon.'

Nora and Vashti were both in a little parlour opening from the great hall. Both still wore their black dresses, relieved, however, with delicate lace ruffles at the neck and wrists. In the faces of both, there was something that glowed purely and brightly, as though a lamp of peace burned within. Nora bent over some fragile bit of work, talking in her soft, yet strong tones. There was softness and dignity, too, in her air; and Vashti paced the floor, something after the old fashion, for the subject under discussion was a moving one, but with the slender white hand upon the wall as she stepped. Vashti was tall, straight, and elegant, somewhat too colourless as to her shape, somewhat too colourless as to her pale, oval face, to set the minds of her friends quite at rest about her health. Nora's brown eyes, which were now and then lifted to her sister's face, were suddenly intercepted by the sight of Leon standing silently in the doorway.

All over her face went a flush of emotion; she had self-possession to be silent with her questioning eyes on his face.

He smiled and bowed, pointing through the window at which she sat.

With a hurried movement she saw Thorpe a little way off, pretending to dodge behind the trees, but unable to keep his hungry eyes back from their quest.

She put her finger on her tremulous lip with an emphatic warning gesture, and, dropping her work, went and put both arms round her sister's neck.

'I believe God is going to give you a great joy, sister,' she said, gently.

Vashti returned her caress.

'God is good, dear,' she answered, as gently.

'Could you bear to hear a very great, grand piece of news?' kissing her.

'News, Nora—what news could affect me? Let me see—I expect no news that I can

think of. What can it be?' playfully, and with brightly-interested expression.

'Something you don't expect, Vashti—think. What would you ask God to do for you this minute, if you were going to crave the removal of one of the afflictions he has laid on you?'

Bravely Nora kept her agitation out of her voice.

Vashti struggled a moment with some rising emotion.

'Nora, Nora! why do you ask me that? Mamma cannot come back to me.'

'No; but somebody else might,' restraining herself with difficulty from tears, and with her tones broken in spite of her.

'What is it you mean?' Vashti exclaimed, seizing her passionately, and the next instant losing her hold. 'I should indeed be presumptuous to hope that—'

She paused, and seemed lost in thought. Nora scarcely breathed as she watched her sister.

Vashti put her hand on Nora's face.

'There are tears on your cheek, and your voice did tremble with joy. Nora—Nora—can the sea give up its dead? Speak to me, Nora, or I shall die!'

'Sister, I have heard that he still lives—that—'

There was a noise at the window. Vashti turned her whitening face toward it, with her arms extended, and her sightless eyes wide open.

'My God, if I could only see!' Nora—'

'My darling! my darling! I have come back to you!'

He had sprung through the open window into the room—he had her in his arms, and she clung to him as though she would never let him go.

Nora looked anxiously at her sister. Leon drew her away, saying, tenderly:

'She is in safe hands; he will not let her die.'

They went out quietly into the hall, closing the door after them—a fair, beautiful pair—love, purity and truth in their hearts and on their brows. Her hand was in his, and his arm round her, as they went down the steps and out into the misty twilight that was gathering. Nora cast, now and then, apprehensive glances back toward the parlour, but all still seemed tranquil there.

'We will be married one week from to-day, Nora,' Leon said, caressing the little hand he held. 'Can you be ready?'

There were still tears in her eyes, but she flashed a shy glance at him, as she said 'Yes, sir,' in her usual prompt style.

He answered her with a warmer caress, and said: