

love to ours; but they can never be quite the same as those dear ones who have gone. God forbid that they should. The flowers that bloom this summer are not the same that bloomed the summer before; for they withered and died when the Autumn came. It was a very silent meal, the dinner, that evening, for Sybil was far too grieved and heart sick to even make a pretence of eating, or talking either; and Arthur felt that it would not be good policy to appear in anything like good spirits. As they arose from the table, Sybil announced her intention of going over to see Mollie that evening.

"Good heavens Sybil! can't you let the matter rest for to-night?" he cried irritably.

"There is no necessity for Miss Stuart knowing the news immediately."

"But then she might hear it suddenly from some stranger, who would not be like to spare her feelings, and it would be terrible for her, poor child!"

"She's not likely to hear of it between this and to-morrow."

"Did you tell anyone else about it before you came home this evening?" she asked in a low tone.

"Oh—yes, one or two fellows know it."

"Then it will be all over town by to-morrow, you know how well known and liked he was here, poor—poor Neal!"—she fluttered a little and then went on—"Mollie would be sure to hear it from some one and it would be cruel to let her learn it in such a way, though God knows it will be hard for me to tell her."

She sighed deeply as she spoke, and then advancing nearer to him, said hesitatingly:

"Arthur—what is the reason you dislike poor Mollie so much? she has never harmed you, has she?"

"No," he answered, coloring redly and frowning as he spoke—"she has never harmed me. I think I have told you several times that I never have particularly liked Miss Stuart; one cannot always account for ones likes and dislikes, and as she evidently reciprocates the dislike I don't at all see why you should trouble yourself about it," he added with a short laugh. "Well at least you will send her a few kind words of sympathy to-night; won't you Arthur dear? You do feel sorry for her, do you not? and you were his friend. May I tell her that you are sorry for her, and that the news of poor Neal's death has grieved you?"

"You may tell her so if you choose. I don't suppose she will care whether I send her a message of condolence or not; I guess she'll take it for what it is worth." Sybil did not answer but she sighed as she crossed the room and rang the bell. When the servant appeared she ordered the sleigh to be brought round at once, and then, with a few words to her husband left the room to prepare for her drive.

It was no easy task she had imposed on herself and her heart almost failed her as she stepped into the sleigh Arthur came out to see her off. Suddenly a thought struck her.

"Arthur," she said, "will you let me have that letter Mollie may wish to see what Mr. Stanley says about Neal."

He took it from his pocket and handed it to her, at the same time begging her to return as soon as possible.

"You know Graham is coming up this evening, and he promised to bring his friend Greaton with him; I particularly wished you to know Greaton: he is a splendid fellow."

"Very well dear; I shall endeavour to be home in time to meet Mr. Greaton. Will you tell Peter to drive on now."

When the sleigh drew up at the modest gate of the cottage, Sybil got out and walked up the path leading to the door. She rang the bell gently; her heart was beating painfully and she was trembling with nervousness.

Christie opened the door and curtsied with a broad smile as she saw who it was stood without.

"Oh! Mrs. Macdonald ma'am it's you: please to walk in ma'am, Miss Mollie is up-stairs, I'll tell her you are here." She ushered her into the little parlor and went away to inform her mistress of her visitor's presence in the house.

In the few minutes that she was left alone, Sybil nerved herself for her task, and had succeeded in controlling her nervousness in some degree by the time Mollie appeared.

"Sybil! I am very glad to see you," cried the latter as she came into the room, with outstretched hands to meet her visitor.

"I was wondering when you would be around to see me

again; it seems a long time since you were here last, and I—well you know how busy I always am."

"Indeed you must have very little time for calling, dear Mollie," answered Sybil. "I only wish there was not the necessity for your working as you do and that we could be more frequently together."

"Ah well! that cannot be helped," sighed Mollie sadly.

"But now tell me what has brought you here to-night? anything important, or is it just a friendly call? the latter I hope, so that we can have a good long, cozy talk, before the fire here."

Mrs. Macdonald gasped and turned pale; this was too good an opportunity of breaking the news to Mollie, to allow it to pass; but she absolutely could not speak; a great lump had risen up in her throat preventing her utterance; she could only clasp her hands and gaze at Mollie with fearful eyes.

"Sybil!" cried Mollie with a ring of anxiety in her tones.

"What is the matter? Why do you sit and look me so. For heaven's sake tell me what is the matter."

She was about to rise from her chair when Sybil sprang to her side and kneeling down laid her two clasped hands in the girl's lap and looked up at her with deep pity shining from her violet eyes. Then she said brokenly:

"Oh! Mollie, my darling! cannot you guess what I have come to tell you?"

The other started and said:—

"You have heard something of Neal?"—in a hard, steady voice, and looked down upon the kneeling woman at her side, with dark eyes that were full of a stony horror.

"Mollie, he is dead!"

There was a deep, deep silence after these words were spoken; both women remained in the same positions, gazing into each other's faces with a fearful fixedness; scarcely conscious for the time being of their own existence in the horror which had seized upon them. Mollie turned into stone by what she had heard, Sybil mute with terror at the effect of the news upon her friend.

Does it seem strange that the woman for whose sake alone, Neal Despard had gone into exile and met his death in a foreign land, should be the one from whose lips his betrothed wife learned the tidings of his death? But do not think things as strange and as seemingly incongruous happen daily in the midst of our lives?

At last the dreadful silence between them was broken. With a low cry, almost of horror, Mollie flung Sybil's clinging hands from her and sprang up, standing a little apart with her hands pressed close to her bosom and her eyes fixed stonily on the startled face of the elder woman.

"Mollie"—cried the latter, rising and approaching her—"Oh my dear! do not look like that, you frighten me; for God's sake cry or speak." She laid her hand gently on her shoulder, but the girl shrank away, trembling and crying—

"Oh! no, no, no do not touch me!"

Sybil immediately drew back looking hurt at this unexpected repulse. She thought that Mollie shrank from her because she had been the one to tell her the fatal news. Instantly her noble heart forgave the repulse and found ready excuses for the much tried girl. Ah! how appalled she would have been could she but have read the thought that was in Mollie's mind.

"She killed him! It was for this woman's sake Neal died!" It was that thought which had caused Mollie to shrink from the very touch of Sybil's hand. And who shall blame her? She was but human this heroine of mine; and what woman would have acted differently?

Sybil hesitated a moment and then tried to say something comforting to her, if indeed there could be anything comforting to say at such a time; but Mollie only turned away with a strange new dread of the woman who spoke to her, without answering or permitting her to approach near enough to touch her.

Suddenly Sybil bethought herself of the letter and drew it from her pocket.

"Mollie, you have not asked me how I came to know of this sad news; it was from this letter, written to my husband by a friend of his now in India; would you like to read it yourself my dear?"

Mollie held out her hand mutely for the letter and then went slowly over to the table where the lamp stood, to read