

"George, tell me, I won't tell."

"I have *nothing* to tell you."

There was a long pause, Mr. Winter looked into the fire. Presently the stillness was broken by a sob. He threw his arms around her, and said: "Why, Mary, you are not crying? How foolish!"

"I am not foolish, you won't do anything I want you to, and you are a Mason, and I hate it."

"But it is a noble Order, my dear, and it does a world of good. It may save my life sometime; it has done such things scores of times. Just think, away back in the Indian warfare of our country, during a battle in which was the celebrated chief Brant, an officer in distress threw up his arm, and accidentally made the Masonic sign of danger. He was not a Mason, but Brant took him for one, and spared him, though an enemy. So, you see, that is one instance."

"Oh, yes, I know, you have told me all that before, but you will never need their help,—and besides, that man was not saved by being a Mason," she said triumphantly.

"He became one afterwards, though."

"I do not care whether he did or not. I want to know the secret. George, you ought to tell me; you know I would keep it."

"Mary, there is no reasoning with you." He withdrew his arm from around her and leaned back impatiently.

She arose, stood by the fire, and petulantly said: "You refuse me then?"

"I told you before I had nothing to tell; now, for goodness sake, let the subject drop."

"Very well," was all she said, but her eyes were unusually bright, and two red spots burned on her cheeks. She was thinking, as she stood there, "I have made his home bright and pleasant. I have lived only for him; and he cares nothing at all for my wishes. For the future, it shall be the world. I shall give myself up to society; *there* at least, I can be appreciated."

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"It is the little rift within the lute,
That by and by will make the music mute,"

sang Clarice Grantly. Mr. Winter, turning over her music, gave a slight sigh. Miss Grantly would have been pleased to attribute it to her own fascinations, but, casting her dark eyes up at him, at the words,—

"Trust me all in all, or not at all,"

he saw an absent, wistful look on his face. Clarice Grantly was an unconscionable flirt, and Mr. Winter was fair game, especially when his wife was by to follow them with her eyes. But the young lady had sense enough to perceive that the zest was all on her side. Mr. Winter was but a passive participant in this flirtation. Her song finished, she let her fingers wander carelessly over the keys of the instrument, striking light chords and bringing out touches of harmony. It was an excuse to watch him furtively. His thoughts were far enough from her. They had gone back over the months in which "the little rift within the lute" of his domestic life had been slowly widening. He could trace it clearly to the night of their conversation about Masonry. Since then, neither had ever alluded to the subject. He had trusted, at first, that the iciness of his wife's demeanor would wear off; but, as the weeks went on, and it seemed to become a part of her nature, he gradually resigned himself to it. He never told her how he missed her little caressing ways, or how her scrupulous politeness wounded him, he simply accepted the situation as fate. He failed to understand her unconquerable thirst for society, but always accompanied her. This summer he inwardly pronounced Newport a bore, although in his outward demeanor he was as great an idler as any there.

"Mr. Winter," said Miss Grantly, and her voice aroused him; "You are in a brown study."

"Not at all Miss Grantly, your music set me thinking."

"Then I'll not sing to you any more; you completely forgot me."

"Do let me retrieve my error."

"Yes, take me out on the balcony," she said, rising, "it is so warm in here."

There was a half-veiled triumph in her magnificent eyes, as she placed her hand on his arm, and allowed him to lead her from the room.

Mrs. Winter barely glanced at them as they passed, but her companion lowered his brows. Clifton Stanley was too high-toned a man to tolerate such a flirtation. He had come to Newport because Clarice Grantly came, and he had watched her actions with surprised pain. He felt a sincere sympathy with Mrs. Winter, and, although to-night they were not very good company for each other, they were perhaps better than they would have been for any one else.