

I say you know better. We came unasked—we forced ourselves upon her. Do you know what she meant to do? She meant to meet us at New York and send us back—back in shame and ignominy. She made her will, and gave our birthright to this stranger. Without consulting him, this wise man, this infallible judge, she will not even thrust her granddaughters from her door. And he—oh, he is good, and upright, and great, as you say, my friend. He says—

“No, no, you must not; it would not be right. You must let these poor girls come, you must give them a home, and I will not take your home—it is theirs, not mine.”

“Oh, he is indeed generous and noble with that which is none of his. So we come. We owe it to your friend that we are here—that we have a roof to cover us, food to eat, clothes to wear. And I burn with shame, and rage, and humiliation whenever I see him, and feel his kingly, compassionate look upon me, the pauper he has saved from beggary and—it is wicked, I know, and unjust, if you like, but I will hate him for it my whole life long.”

“Good heavens above!” says Miss Harriott. She stands, basket in one hand, shears in the other, a petrified listener.

The girl has not risen, but she sits upright as a dart, her small hands clenched, her eyes aflame with passionate anger and scorn. All this has been burning within her since the night of her arrival, and must come out. Perhaps Marie is right, and Aunt Denise has not judiciously trained the girl. A violent and undisciplined temper appears, certainly, to be one of her prominent gifts.

Longworth stands listening to every word. If they turn their heads ever so slightly they must infallibly see him; but both are too observed. For him, the picture he sees he never forgets. The small, slight figure sitting in the garden chair, in its grey dress, a knot of crimson ribbon at the throat, another in the hair—for even these details he takes in—and the impassioned, ringing voice that speaks. The words he hears remain with him for ever—his portrait as Mademoiselle Reine sees him.

There is a pause after her last words. Miss Harriott, her face very grave, breaks it.

“Mademoiselle, you are cruelly unjust!”

“Ah, he is your friend!” breaks in mademoiselle, with scorn.

“If he were not, if he were the most utter stranger, I would still maintain it—you are cruelly unjust to Mr. Longworth. Yes, he is my friend—my friend, tried and true, of many years—and I know him to be incapable of one sordid thought or action—a thoroughly generous and honorable man. He spoke to your grandmother as I would have done in his place, only I could never have spoken one-half so well; and in renouncing your fortune, let me tell you, mademoiselle, he has done what not ten men out of a thousand would have done.”

“Do I deny it? Do I not say he acted generously and well? You talk like Marie, as if I doubted it. Good heavens, I say from first to last he is the grandest of men, and I detest him!”

“That I regret. You will one day see its injustice, however. I am glad your sister is disposed to be more fair. I thought something had prejudiced you against him, but I did not dream it was as bad as this. I am more than sorry—I had hoped you would be friends.”

“My good or bad opinion can matter nothing to a gentleman who has such hosts of warm advocates,” says Mlle. Reine, stooping to pick up her hat. “I ought not to come and say such things to you, and show you my horrid temper; but I know nobody, and I am only a girl and cannot help it. We are all alone in the world; she is our only parent or relative, and it seems hard—oh, how hard to be indebted to a stranger for the cold charity she gives, scorning us all the while. You see what a senseless creature I am, madame, for you are my only friend, and I risk the loss of your friendship by speaking in this way of the man you like. But do not withdraw that friendship or I shall be poor indeed, and in spite of all this I want you to like me a little.”

She is smiling, but there are tears in her eyes. Miss Harriott takes the hand she extends in both her own, and stoops and kisses the low, broad forehead.

“Little Queen,” she says, “did I not tell you before I fell in love with you at sight on board the *Hesperia*. I am more in love with you to-day than ever,