

—we all do. I can tell you nothing more;” but she still retained her hand, and stood looking down into those magnetic eyes as if spell-bound.

John came forward, saying,

“I wonder if you cannot tell me something better than that.”

She looked in his hand, and, without a word, placed Franc’s hand within it, and turned away.

He drew it through his arm, and so they walked in perfect silence, back to their party. Only once, just before they joined their companions, he turned, and their eyes met. Franc never forgot that look. After that she would not have dared to say what she had said to Kate the week before.

A rising cloud gave promise of a shower, and in haste they prepared to return home; but they had scarcely gone a mile when the rain came down thick and fast. They took refuge in one of those little hotels with which our country is cursed, and some of them being quite wet, Dr. McAlpine prescribed “something warm.” Accordingly, he brought a glass to Kate. She held it up, looked through it a moment, just touched it to her lips, and then, with a quick shudder, let it fall to the floor.

“Allan, that’s my last glass of wine,” she said.

“Pshaw! Kate, don’t go making a fool of yourself,” said he. For an answer, she pointed to Hugh just lifting the second glass of brandy to his lips. Allan quietly laid his hand on his arm, saying,

“Hugh, my boy, you have taken quite enough.”

Hugh turned towards him, his eyes flashing, and his lip curled as he said, “It’s only for my health, you know. My physician ordered it. I’m not strong enough yet to do without it,” and he drained the glass to the very bottom. All the glasses were instantly put down, and there was no more drinking there that night; but on a sofa in his brother’s office, the handsome Hugh slept the sleep of a drunkard.

During the drive home, John Earle suddenly reined in his horse, and, bending down so as to catch a glimpse of the face at his side, said,

“Franc, it needs no words of mine to tell you that I love you. That old gipsy

gave you to me. Will you sign the contract?”

“Don’t ask it, John.”

“I have a right to ask it, Franc. You dare not tell me you cannot return my love. That one look down into your soul told me that.” He bent nearer to her, but there was no answer, even by a look. He grew pale as he said,—

“Franc, does any one stand between us?”

“No, no one, but—”

“But what, Franc. I must know all.”

“Well, John, I couldn’t quite trust even you, so long as you keep up that habit of drinking.” The words were simply spoken, but they went like a dagger to John Earle’s heart.

“That shall not separate us, Franc. Would three months of total abstinence satisfy you, and dispel your doubts of me?”

“Yes, if at the end of that time you are willing to take a pledge for life. But, John, I do not ask you to do this. I only ask to be left to go my own way alone.”

“I shall never leave you to go your way alone,” said John, resolutely, “unless you first tell me you do not love me.”

“I cannot tell you that,” she said, quietly. “What I have given you I can never take back. I could not love twice.”

“With that knowledge to keep my heart warm, I could overcome any obstacle.” How vain is man’s trust in his own strength!

When Franc reached home she found a letter for her from her uncle—the first she had received from him since she left the city. It was very short, and evidently written with a trembling hand. It told her that he was sick and alone, and wanted her to come to him. There was no allusion to the past; he merely said:—“Franc, my child, you are my nearest of kin, and I want you. Do not refuse me.”

She went straight to her own room, to decide whether or not to go; but the struggle was more than she had thought. This was in all respects a home to her, and a very dear one; and she dreaded the dull, stately home of her uncle. Then, she thought, “He turned me away from it; what right has he to expect me to return?—and without any apology for the past.” On the