

# THE HEARTHSTONE.

Frank told her, and she was visibly startled, her face flushing, and mouth trembling with some deep feeling; but she was leaving him on some slight pretext, without offering any explanation, when he drew her back to her seat.

"No, Rosamond; I will not let you go till I know what has moved you so. Can it be that you are able to conjecture the cause of Kathleen's unkindness?"

"No—indeed, I cannot!" she hurriedly answered.

"Then what was it that stirred you so visibly? Do candidly with me; I am perplexed enough, without having to fear that you keep something from me that I ought to know."

"Nay, dear Frank; the circumstances of which for the moment I had an unpleasant reminiscence, were almost too trifling to repeat; and I think no more of them," she pleaded. But as he persisted in his demand, she reluctantly went on to say, "It flashed into my mind, when you were speaking of Kathleen's altered demeanour, that you dated it from the day I saw her grow confused, turn very pale on the receipt of a note a servant handed to her, and—"

But here Rosamond paused a moment ere she added, "And glanced at Lord Glanore, as if he were in some way connected with her unkindness."

Frank walked to a window, and stood there for some moments, without replying. There was a contest warring within him, between his trust in Kathleen's sincerity, and a dread that Lord Glanore—so long known as an intriguing reckless man—was in some way supplying the young girl's truth. At last he went back to his sister, who was anxiously watching him, and put his arm around her.

"My dear Rosie, for your sake as well as mine, I shall do my utmost to fathom the little mystery which is now puzzling us. In the meantime let me entreat you not to enter into any engagement with the Viscount."

Rosamond's colour rose, and with some warmth she answered, "It is scarcely fair to suspect Lord Glanore, and yet believe Kathleen false."

"My dear sister, I am trying hard not to doubt either of them. Only yesterday, in the handsomest manner, Glanore begged me to introduce you to him in his behalf, and wished to be permitted to visit here as your acknowledged suitor; but I cannot give him my bonny Rosie till I am sure that he does you wrong."

Rosamond leaned her head against her brother's arm, and burst into tears. "Dear with me," she sobbed; "I am miserable! I love him, and yet—yet—oh, Frank! it may be that Kathleen is false in his eyes that I am; or he may have loved her once already, and be returning to his allegiance."

"I'll not credit either supposition to do so, would be to convict both my friend and my betrothed of the grossest deception! Take courage, dearest Rosie; I will extort from Kathleen the cause of her hidden troubles, and then we shall all be happy."

He did not fulfil his intention till his cheerful persuasions had tranquillized her, and then he went away, determined to seek Kathleen, and not leave her till she had fully satisfied him that the suspicions he could not help entertaining were wholly without foundation.

When he reached Mrs. Carroll's, the widow and Norah were examining some boxes of artificial flowers, and Kathleen, they said, had complained of headache, and gone to her room to lie down.

"I'll go and whisper that you are here," cried her cousin; "for we really cannot decide upon these wreaths without her. Here are some lovely shamrocks, which will be just to her taste."

She left the room, but returned directly, saying Kathleen must be sleeping for her eyes at the door had remained unshut. Frank waited for some time in the hope that she would appear, but was obliged to go at last, and content himself with Mrs. Carroll's permission to join her party at a concert that evening.

He was wending his way homeward, with his hat pulled over his brows, and a moody look on his handsome face, when he was brought to a standstill at the corner of a by-street by a string of vehicles. As he stood, waiting for them to pass, he chanced to glance down this narrow turning, and beheld Kathleen herself.

It was but a glimpse, for the street was a busy one, and the passers to and fro so many, that she was no sooner seen than lost to view. Besides she was walking from, instead of towards, him; but he could scarcely be mistaken in the little airy figure, nor the parasol she carried; for when the cousins were choosing some a few days previously, Kathleen had refused a plain white silk, like Rosamond's, or the buff that harmonized with Norah's glowing face, and had, laughing, preferred one on which the pure ground was striped with the national colour, green.

Frank gave instant chase, and soon convinced himself that she was not alone. Her hand was resting on the arm of a tall, gentlemanly man. Oh, for a glance at his features! But was it necessary? Was it possible to doubt that it was Lord Glanore? The peculiar turn of the head, the somewhat haughty bearing, the height, the colour of the hair, these were sufficiently convincing, and his jealous heart swelled to bursting.

Regardless of the angry observations levelled at him, he strode on. The couple he pursued crossed the street, and for a moment, a slowly-moving van concealed them. Then he dashed onwards again, but now they had disappeared.

They must have entered some house together. He gashed his teeth as he surveyed the unpromising locality, and thought of his fair Kathleen making assignments with a roof, and meeting him here! He paced to and fro, examining the windows, and striving to discover what had become of her, till he was obliged to conclude that she had altogether evaded him.

When he reached home, Rosamond flew to meet him, and heard what tidings he brought; but he put her aside, curtly saying that he had not been able to get an interview with Kathleen, and went to his own room, to dress with feverish haste for the concert.

He arrived at the widow's nearly an hour earlier than the stipulated time, and paced up and down the room into which he was shown, with his watch in his hand, and his eyes fixed upon the door. Did she know he was there? Yes, one of Mrs. Carroll's good-looking hand-maids had tripped away with a smile to warn Miss Kathleen that she was waited for. Would she never come?

At last, a footstep approached, and he hurried to meet her, but only to endure fresh disappointments. It was the Viscount, whose countenance grew as dark as Frank's, when he learned that Rosamond had not accompanied her brother.

Frank would not imply a doubt of Kathleen by questioning his lordship, whose manner, like his own, was constrained. He could even have fancied that the Viscount furtively watched him, as though he comprehended that an indubitable something had risen up between them.

Scarcely a word was spoken, till Mrs. Carroll, crimson with heat and the exertion of dressing, came into the room.

"And where is our Rose of Roses?" she asked. "A afraid to brave the fatigue? I cannot blame her. This weather is terribly exhausting. If I were really very stout, it would kill me quite! And how does your lordship manage to endure it?"

"I have been too idle to be inconvenienced by the heat," was the careless reply. "With the exception of transacting a little business in Verrall Street, I have done nothing all day but smoke and read."

Frank found it hard to repress his wrath when he heard this cool allusion to a meeting which blasted his own hopes; unless, indeed, Kathleen could give a very satisfactory reason for meeting this unworthy man.

But now the cousins came in; Norah quietly in black lace, looped up with crimson passion-flowers, with their long trails of green leaves and tendrils; Kathleen in a shimmering robe of blue, and forget-me-nots in her brown hair. There was a look about her eyes as if she had been weeping, and her cheek was pale, but her face lighted up when she saw Frank, and she glided to his side with an *embracement* with which at any other time he would have been delighted.

It was not till the bustle of finding seats at the concert-room was over, and Frank had contrived to secure one between Kathleen and her *chaperone*, that he was able to put the question, "Whither went you this morning?"

Her cheek flushed, and her eyelids drooped.

"Did not Norah tell you that I kept my room with a headache?" she whispered evasively.

"Yes, your cousin repeated what she was obliged to say; but I must know more than this, Kathleen. I demand the truth!"

"Demand!" she repeated, with an offended gesture. "Mr. Dalton, you are speaking very strangely."

"I cannot stop to consider my words at such a moment; and I repeat that I demand, by our mutual love, that you tell me the whole truth. Kathleen, I know that you were not in this house this morning when I called."

"Who has been playing the spy upon me?" she asked, a little terror audible in her accents.

"No one. By a strange chance, I saw you myself in Verrall Street."

Kathleen's trembling fingers played with her fan; and she darted a furtive, troubled glance at the young man, which pained him excessively, for there was none of the fearless confidence in it with which he had been hoping against hope that she would have heard and answered him.

"I had an errand in the street you name," she said, presently. "Was it honourable to watch me?"

"Yes, when I saw you in danger!" he retorted.

"Kathleen, you must have been mad when you consented to meet that worthless man—and he darted in furious glance at Lord Glanore—upon any pretext."

Kathleen's head had sunk lower and lower while he was speaking, but now she looked up and said, "Hush, Mr. Dalton; your loud tones will attract attention. Besides, you are mistaken. I did not go to Verrall Street to meet Lord Glanore."

"Thank heaven, you are able to say so!" the relieved Frank exclaimed. "Then the rencontre was an accidental one?"

Almost unintelligibly, she murmured that she had not seen his lordship at all; and her lover was too much shocked by the deliberate falsehood to make any immediate reply.

"Had I been inclined to doubt my own sight, and believe your assertion," he calmly observed.

"Lord Glanore's confession that he visited Verrall Street this afternoon would put it out of my power."

"Lord Glanore visited Verrall Street?" she repeated, with an expression of countenance difficult to analyze. "But he did not say he had seen—that is, spoken with me? He could not! On my honour, Mr. Dalton, I held no communication with his lordship, nor was I conscious of his presence there."

"And yet I saw you walking side by side, your hand on his arm."

"Indeed, you are wrong. It may have been the same pavement with me—that I cannot contradict, for I was too much afraid of the crowd to look either to the right or the left; but see Lord Glanore, or speak with him, I did not."

Frank sat silent. How was he to reconcile these earnest assurances with what he had seen?

"Your hand rested on his arm, Kathleen?" he reminded her.

"On Lord Glanore's? Never—never!" But now she spoke with a confusion that marred the impression her words might have made.

"Will you tell me what errand it was that led you to visit Verrall Street secretly?"

After some hesitation came the response, "I went to relieve a person who is in distressed circumstances;" and Frank was only too glad to believe her.

"For the future, you must delegate your charitable intentions to me, my dearest, and I will carry them out. Visiting the cottagers round about the farm was a very different thing to relieving the poor in a great city like this. You must not attempt it—at least, not alone. Promise me this."

But she would not give him the pledge he demanded.

"You have no right to attempt to rule my actions, Mr. Dalton," she said, agitatedly. "You will always forget that I have never given my consent to the betrothal you persist in regarding as a decided affair."

He was now really angry.

"Kathleen, this is unworthy of you. If your lips have never uttered a positive consent to my wishes, you have tacitly permitted me to believe that you will be mine at the time Mrs. Carroll has fixed for our union. Can it be that you have ceased to love me—that another holds the place in your heart that I fondly hoped was mine?"

The little hands lying in her lap were restlessly clasped and unclasped, and her eyes were heavy with unshed tears.

"Mr. Dalton, do me the justice to remember that I have always keenly felt the difference in our position, and have begged you to be contented with my friendship."

"Why should I, if the richer prize of your love is to be won? Kathleen, dearest Kathleen, how can you coquette with me now?"

"I am no coquette," she faltered. "I thoroughly comprehend how much you offer me. Is it nothing, think you, to a desolate, ill-treated girl, to find herself suddenly exalted to a place in the affections of one of the best of men? But I have never been in my power to act for myself. I fear it never will. I dare not grasp happiness, even when it is within my reach."

"My dear love," he whispered, "you are tantalizingly mysterious. Miss Delany must be exercising some secret and evil influence over you. Is it not so?"

Kathleen shook her head and sighed.

"Aunt Ursula prefers to forget my existence. I wish I could teach you to do the same."

"And I," he promptly answered, "I wish I could teach you to let no silly fancies come between us, but shorten the term of my probation, and give me an immediate right to protect you from every one."

"It is impossible—impossible! I am not worthy to be your wife!" was the murmured reply, and Frank's heart sank. Her concluding words had been spoken with a sorrowful earnestness which compelled him to dread that some obstacle to their union lay in that past of which he knew so little.

While the young man was thus whispering in Kathleen's ear and Mrs. Carroll good-naturedly striving to reconcile Lord Glanore to Rosamond's absence, Norah's bright eyes had lured Major Colby to her side.

"Are we friends or enemies?" he demanded, lazily fanning himself with her fan.

"Neither the one nor the other," she readily answered. "I call those persons with whom I have merely exchanged a few civilities, *casual acquaintances*. Don't you?"

"Bah! I detest neutrality. Open war for me, or else a strong and lasting peace!"

"You are a soldier," said Norah, "and think it incumbent upon you to be technical; but I have always understood that skirmishing is harassing to the bravest."

"Not when ones adversary is an honourable one." And he bowed significantly to the lady.

"In that case, I don't mind owning myself worsted occasionally."

"But I do!" cried Norah, defiantly; "so take care, Major. If war should be declared between us, you will find me a dangerous antagonist."

"It is consoling to learn that you think me of so much consequence," said the Major, sentimentally. "If I cannot be loved, I prefer to be hated."

With a curious smile flickering about her lips, she replied, "You shall be gratified; but be warned! It is not a safe game to play!"

"For you, or for me?" he asked, insolently.

"Let Time answer that question; but I should be but a bad general if I did not arrange the plan of my campaign before engaging upon it."

She smiled, with a gay carelessness that baffled him. Again he put the question to Lord Glanore, "Who is this strange girl?"

But when he had learned all there was to tell about her, he found himself none the wiser.

And still the days sped on; and, in another week, Norah would quit Dublin. Her zest for gaiety continued unflagging, even though she came home from the theatre or a *soiree* overwrought and under the powerful spell of some emotion, the source of which she carefully concealed. Rosamond and Kathleen were but hollow friends now-a-days; the former was suspicious, the latter reserved, and eager to avoid being left alone either with Frank or his sister.

Perhaps they were all looking forward to Norah's departure as a relief; after that, affairs might, say, and be brought to a climax.

This came sooner than was anticipated. Mrs. Carroll had promised to patronise a ball given on behalf of some charity; and, at her request, the Daltons were other party. Kathleen linked her arm through Rosamond's as they were entering the noble apartment appropriated to the dancers, and many an eye followed admiringly these fairest types of English and Irishian loveliness.

They were detained by the crush at the door of the ball-room, and Frank, who was following his sister, stooped, to pick up a tiny note which had fluttered to his feet. Unperceived by Kathleen, who was exchanging courtesies with an acquaintance, he touched Rosamond's shoulder with it.

"You have dropped something, Rosie; thank me for reclaiming it."

"Let me first be sure that it is mine," she smilingly replied.

"It fell from the folds of your dress," he persisted; for Frank believed that it had done so.

"Perhaps it is an excuse from Madame for the mistake in the trimmings of my cloak. Open it, and see."

Unthinkingly, he obeyed, and read as follows:—

"My Lord,—

"I entreat you to see me at the old place at Verrall Street. If you retain any affection for one who ought still to be very dear to you, do not refuse the prayer of—

"KATHLEEN SIDNEY."

(To be continued.)

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## TO THE BITTER END.

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### CHAPTER VIII.

"RECALL HER TEARS, TO THOSE AT PARTING GIVEN."

It was some time, however before Mr. Walgrave forgot what he had heard in the wood about Grace's mother—that dark hint of heart-disease. He took occasion to question Mrs. James next day upon the subject, and made himself fully acquainted with the details of Mrs. Richard Redmayne's death, and what the doctor had said about Grace. He had made no examination, it appeared; no stethoscope had ever sounded the innocent young heart; but he had remarked to Mrs. James one confidentially, that there was something about her niece's appearance he hardly liked, and that it would not surprise him if her constitution should develop the same tendency that had been fatal to her mother. This had been said while Richard Redmayne was in England; and his sister-in-law had not cared to alarm either him or her niece by any hint of what the doctor had said.

"If it was heart-disease, you see," said Mrs. James, "there'd be no cure for it; and if it wasn't, it would have been cruel to upset poor Rick in the midst of his troubles, which was coming pretty fast upon him just then; so I thought the wisest thing I could do was to hold my tongue."

"Quite right, Mrs. Redmayne. No doubt the doctor wanted a job. Your medical men can have very little to do in this pure atmosphere. A chronic case, rich farmer's only child, and so on. Heart-disease! No; I don't for a moment believe that your niece Grace has anything amiss with her heart. At her age the very idea seems preposterous."

"Well, it do, Mr. Walgrave—don't it? But her mother was only seven-and-twenty when she died. They're not a long-lived family, any of the Norbitts; and Grace's mother was a Norbitt."

Mr. Walgrave persisted in making light of the matter. He would not permit himself to think that anything so bright and sweet as Redmayne was doomed to vanish suddenly and untimely from this earth. He pooh-poohed the country surgeon's opinion, and very speedily

contrived to get rid of any uneasiness which the subject might have caused him.

An event occurred to divert his attention in some manner a few days after the picnic. He had more than half made up his mind to leave Brierwood, and go abroad somewhere for the rest of the long vacation. He could not quite shut his eyes to the peril of remaining where he was. He had recovered his strength—was almost as well as ever he had been, in fact. In every way it would be best and wisest for him to go.

He began to pack his portmanteau one night, took out his *Bradshaw*, and made a profound study of the continental routes. Why should he not spend his autumn abroad? There was Spain, for instance. He had an intense desire to see Spain, from the Escorial to the Alhambra. Yet to-night, somehow, the vision of dark-eyed damsels and bull-fights had scarcely any charm for his imagination. He flung the railway-guide into a distant corner with an impatient sigh.

"Why should I run away from her when I love her so dearly?" he said to himself. "Cannot a man live two lives—give his outward seeming and all the labour of his brain to the world, and keep his heart in some safe shelter, hidden away from the crowd? Other men have done it, why should not I? Is there a man upon earth who would throw such a treasure as that girl?"

And then Mr. Walgrave fell into a profound meditation, and went to bed at last in the gray morning to spend three mortal hours tossing and fro, tormented by the most perplexing thoughts that had ever wearied his brain. He was trying to reconcile things that were irreconcilable. His future life had been planned long ago—judiciously, he believed. He did not mean that anything should alter those plans. Whatever new element might arise must be made subservient to those. He was not a man to turn aside from the path which he had cut for himself—a high-road to fame and fortune—for any consideration whatever. He meant to renounce nothing.

But—but if he could hold fast by all he valued so highly, and yet win that other prize—that sweeter, nearer delight? Fame and fortune must come in the future—he would do nothing to forfeit the certainty of those. But why should he not snatch this other joy in the present, and let the future, so far as it concerned Grace Redmayne, take care of itself? If that croaking country surgeon's opinion were indeed correct, and the poor child were not destined to live long, so much the easier would it be to provide for the happiness and security of her future. There was no sacrifice, short of the entire sacrifice of his own prospects, which he would not make for her. And so his thoughts rambled on, shaping first one scheme and then another, only to abandon them. And when he got up in the morning, he said to himself resolutely:

"I will make it the business of my life to forget her. A man who takes such a step as that always wrecks himself. Sooner or later his folly comes home to him. I have gone through life without a single error of that kind. It would be madness to begin now."

He went downstairs, and sauntered out into the garden. It was still early. All the pleasant bustle of farmhouse life was at its height in dairy and outhouses and kitchen. Grace, with a basket on her arm and a pair of scissors in her hand, was clipping and trimming the roses near the house, fair as Tennyson's famous gardener's daughter when first her lover saw her in the porch.

The vivid blush, lighting up the fair pale face, the sudden look of pleased surprise—how sweet they were!

"And I am going to surrender all this," Mr. Walgrave thought with a sharp pang. He had quite made up his mind to go away, by this time; but he could not make up his mind to tell her his intention. Better to put off that until the very last moment, and then with one desperate wrench tear himself away.

They strolled round the garden, Grace clipping the roses as she went, not quite so neatly as she would have clipped them without that companionship. The hands fluttered a little among the leaves as they did their work. He was talking to her; those unfathomable gray eyes were watching her. He had never spoken of his love since the day at Clevedon; had said scarcely a word which her uncle and aunt might not have heard; but he had lost no opportunity of being with her; and she had been almost completely happy. She did not forget what he had told her. She was engaged to marry another woman. He would go away by and by, and her life would be desolate; but she only looked forward to this desolation with a vague terror. She could not be unhappy while he was near her.

They waited about an hour in the garden. Grace had breakfasted half an hour ago as it was. Mr. Walgrave's breakfast was waiting for him in the cool airy parlour. He went slowly back to the house at last, still with Grace by his side. Aunt Hannah was up to her eyes in dairy-work at this time of the day. There was no one to observe them. They were talking of the books Grace had been reading lately—books which opened a new world to her—and her brightness and intelligence delighted her lover.

"If all Miss Toulmin's pupils are anything like you, Grace I shall certainly make a point of sending my daughters to her some day," he said lightly.

She looked at him for a moment, and then grew very pale. His daughters! He was talking of a time when he should be married to that other woman—when she would have passed out of his life altogether. That careless speech of his had brought the fact sharply home to her. He was nothing, never could be anything, to her.

"You will have forgotten my existence by the time your daughters are old enough to go to school," she said.

"Forgotten you, Grace? Never! Fate rules our lives, but not our hearts. I shall never forget you, Grace. I behaved very badly the other day, when I told you the impression you had made upon me. It was an offence against you—and some one else. But I think that you, at least, have forgiven me."

He spoke as lightly as he could, like a man of the world, but was very far from feeling lightly. Grace was silent. That common-sense tone of apology cut her to the quick. She scarcely knew what she had hoped or dreamed within the last few days! But they had been so happy together, that the image of her unknown rival, the woman he was destined to marry had seemed very vague and unreal.

"I have nothing to forgive," she said coldly.

"It is for—the—the other person to be angry."

"The other person would be very angry, no doubt, if I were to make a full confession of my sins; but I don't mean to do so, believe me. The other person will go down to her grave in ignorance of the truth. But I want to be assured of your forgiveness, Grace. Just raise those sweet eyes of yours, and say, 'I forgive you for having loved me too well.'"

Grace smiled—a bitter smile.

"So well, that you—that you will go away and marry some one else," she said, the practical phlegm of the situation coming home to her with that first pang of jealousy.

"My dearest girl," cried Mr. Walgrave, who had by no means desired the conversation to take this turn, "there are very few men in this world who can choose their own road in life. Mine was chosen for me long ago. I am not my own master; if I were—"

"If you were," repeated Grace, with a sudden desperate courage, that was as much a surprise to herself as it was to him—"if you were, would you marry a bankrupt farmer's daughter?"

"If I wore the master of Clevedon, Grace—if I had five thousand a year—yes. But I have my own way to make in the world, and I am weak enough to value success. I am engaged to marry a woman whose fortune will help me to win a position, and to maintain it. That is as much as to say, I am going to sell myself, isn't it?"

"It sounds rather like that."

"Mendo it every day, Grace—quite as often as I can—and the thing answers fairly enough in ten cases out of twenty. I daresay I shall make a very tolerable average kind of husband. I shall not spend all my wife's money, and I shall go to dinner-parties with her. I think I can give her almost as much heart as she will give me; and yet, Grace, I never loved but one woman upon this earth, and her name is Grace Redmayne."

"The girl was silent. He was cruel, he was base; and yet it was still sweet to her to be told that he loved her. With all her heart and soul she believed him.

"I never meant that our talk should take this turn," Hubert Walgrave went on, after a rather lengthened pause. "I meant only to bid you good-bye, and to go away without one dangerous word."

She looked up at him with sudden terror in her face.

"You are going away!" she exclaimed.

"Very soon; to-day, in fact, if possible. What should I do here? The wretch must come, Grace. The sooner the better."

She tried to answer him, but her lips only trembled, and then began to cry. All the eloquence that ever poured from the lips of woman exalted by passion would not have touched him so keenly as that mute look—those childish tears. It was little more than a child's unreasoning love that she gave him perhaps, but it was so pure and perfect of its kind!

They had turned away from the house, instinctively avoiding it as their conversation grew more tender, and were walking slowly towards the orchard, quite out of human ken. Mr. Walgrave drew his arm round the girl's waist, comforting her—drew her close to him, until the graceful head sank on his shoulder. Never had so fair a head rested there before. He bent down and kissed the pure young brow.

This was the manner in which he began to forget her.

"My dearest, my sweetest!" he said pleadingly, "your tears go to my heart of hearts. I am so anxious to do what is wise, what is right. Upon my soul, Grace, I believe that I could bring myself to forego all question of worldly advantage—he did fancy for the moment that this was so—if—my honour were not involved in this marriage which I speak of. But it is, darling, it is quite too late for me to recede from my engagement. I should be the vilest of defectors if I did. Let us be reasonable, then, my sweet one. I wish to do what is best for you, for both of us. Don't you think that it would be wisest for me to go away?"

"I don't know whether it would be wise or foolish," she sobbed, with her head still upon his shoulder; "but I think my heart will break if you go."

He drew her a little closer to him. Great heavens, why had he not five thousand a year, and the right to marry this village maiden? It seemed to him a very hard thing that he was not able to win this wayside flower, and yet keep all the other advantages he valued so highly.

"But remember, dearest," he said, trying his utmost to be worldly and practical, "it is at best only a question of a week or so, more or less. It is very sweet to me to be with you. I doubt if I ever felt what real happiness was before I knew you; but I cannot linger in this happy valley for ever. The time of parting must come at last, and will seem the harder for every hour we spend together. Would it not be wiser to part at once? Say yes, Grace, for both our sakes."

"I can't. I can't be glad for you to go away. If you are really happy here, why should you be so anxious to