

"My life will be a failure, then, for I do not intend to adopt any such creed!"

And throwing the roses she had been arranging on the table, she left the room.

Once in her own room, she threw herself down beside the bed, passion-sobs breaking from her lips.

"How can she be so cruel?" sobbed the poor girl.

And a feeling of bitter shame swept over her as she recalled all her sister's manoeuvres to entrap the handsome young stranger.

Mrs. Vane was a thorough woman of the world. She had married her husband for his position and wealth, and she determined that her young sister, who lived with her, should follow in her footsteps.

But, alas! for her ambitious schemes. There was no one among all their acquaintance who suited her fastidious taste.

But one day Ralph Chesney returned from his travels. Then Mrs. Vane's organ, that stood for a heart, thrilled with satisfaction.

He was found at last!

A brilliant position and an immense fortune, a handsome person, polished manners, and a mind enriched by education and years of travel. The gods had been kind indeed! Mrs. Vane really envied her sister her good fortune.

Rita understood her sister's plans, and from the first she was unusually cold to Ralph.

She knew that nearly always a man simple and earnest is at the mercy of a clever designing woman; so all the attention Ralph bestowed on her she considered the result of her sister's scheming.

She declined all his invitations to drive or walk. If he asked for a dance, either her card was full or she was too weary to dance. In fact, she was coldly indifferent, and she nearly drove Mrs. Vane wild.

"What a fool that girl is!" she cried in a paroxysm of rage. "She must be blind not to see the man adores her."

However, she dared not interfere. Rita's manner prevented her touching the dangerous subject. She remembered their last interview.

Sometimes she wondered if Rita's indifference was not a bait to lure Ralph on, but she put the thought away from her with an impatient frown.

She knew her sister's sweet frank nature too well to believe she could be so deceptive.

And yet Rita felt that her life was one mass of concealment; for this man that she had vowed should be nothing to her had won her heart.

It was useless to deny it.

She tried to crush her love, but it would not be controlled at her bidding.

Then she longed to throw aside her haughty manner, and let him see her own winsome charming self.

Other men had loved her madly, why should not he?

Then pride would whisper:

"Remember how openly your sister courts him. Do not let him think it is with your consent."

This wavering frightened her, so she determined to crush her tormenting love with an iron hand; and her first step would be to go where she would not meet him.

When Mrs. Vane learned of Rita's intention to visit some friends in a distant city, she flew into a perfect passion.

"What is the use of all my planning?" she cried. "Are you mad, that you throw away this golden opportunity of winning the richest and the handsomest man in the city? There is the ball next week, too. What am I to say to Mrs. Wainwright? Really I do think——"

And Mrs. Vane, overcome with disappointment and vexation, did the best thing possible to win her own way—she burst into tears.

It was so unexpected, that poor Rita knew not what to do. To see her imperious and self-possessed sister in tears filled her with dismay.

"Oh, Clara!" she cried tremblingly, "if you wish it so much, I will not leave until after the ball."

"A few days will make little difference," she said wearily, as she went to her room after making her peace with her sister.

She passed the days in feverish excitement, playing the part she had set herself so well, that not even her sister dreamed of her love for Ralph.

The night of the ball came at last. When Rita entered the drawing-room, Mrs. Wainwright exclaimed, "Perfect!" and she could scarcely keep her eyes off her lovely guest; but there was a slight feeling of uneasiness in her heart as she noticed the dazzling brilliancy of the dark eyes and the bright-