

Miss Stewart read the disquieting words again in the absence of her maid, and when Palmer appeared she looked eagerly round.

"Well?" she asked.

"Alfred says, miss, that a lady rang at the hall door, and desired him to give it to you at once."

"A lady? What sort of lady? Ask Alfred what the lady was like."

In a short time Palmer once more returned.

"He says, miss, she was quite the lady—a youngish lady."

"And—did he know her by sight? Was she one of the people about here?"

"No, miss, he says not; she spoke like a South-Country lady."

Leonora Stewart asked no more questions.

"Help me to dress," she said; "I am afraid I am late."

But before she descended to the drawing-room to receive her guests, she carefully locked away the mysterious letter, taking care that her maid did not see where she placed it.

Then (also after Palmer left the room) she went to the looking-glass, and stood for a few moments examining her own face. A handsome woman, with her white skin and dark hair and eyes, in which there was a certain nobleness of expression that betokened a lofty soul. There was, indeed, nothing small nor mean about this young English-woman, who had but recently inherited the Scottish home in which we find her. She was the daughter and only child of the late Anthony Cust, a well-known London lawyer, and his Scotch wife, Janet Stewart; and it was from her mother's relations that Leonora Stewart had come into possession of the small estate and large house of Rossmore, which stands on the very verge of one of the most beautiful lochs in the Western Highlands.

But there was a condition attached to this bequest, which came from her late mother's brother—the last owner of Rossmore—Leonora was to become a Stewart also if she inherited the old laird's scanty acres, and the girl was quite ready to do this. She knew well the beautiful and romantic home that was to become hers; for each year, when the yellow corn was ripening on the braes, Mrs. Cust had taken her only child to visit the old house, where she herself had been born. And these visits had filled Leonora's young heart with an almost passionate