

## THE PRIZE DESIGN.

## CHAPTER III.

"Oh, how fair the garden looks after rain!  
The roses and the gilliflowers uprear,  
And with a confidence from Heaven appear  
To tell once more that joy comes after  
pain!"



HAVE you ever on a dark winter's day noticed the effect of a ray of sunshine darting its glory for a

time between the clouds? All that was dull and cheerless a moment earlier is transfigured. The snow is like a sheet of silver, the drops of moisture on the trees are crystals, the sleeping birds awake and raise their heads to Heaven, chirping praise, the pale-faced snow-drop breathes again. As the sunshine, so was my life now—my new life spent under the chestnut trees of Abbotsford.

"Surely," I would say to myself, as I looked around my room, with its white curtains and the roses at the window—"surely some witchery is on me, and I am dreaming, fooled by this magic spell which soon will break and leave me desolate!"

And now let me tell you how I spent my day. I have troubled you so long with my bitterness and sorrows that I like to linger just a few short moments on my altered circumstances and blessed time of happiness and peace.

I would arise at seven o'clock and meet Miss Hamilton in the dining-room, where we would converse for some time together over a dainty meal of coffee, rolls, and fruit. Then we would walk under the pine trees and gather wild flowers or turn into the orchard, plucking a luscious apricot or pear. At ten o'clock we would part company, she to return home, and I to thread my way towards the pleasureance, where I would work at my painting until the gong sounded for dinner.

Dinner was served in the oak *salon*. All the furniture here was of ancient design and in the best taste. Heavy chandeliers were suspended from the ceiling, and fine old pictures adorned the walls; the appointments were of silver. Most beautiful views were to be obtained from the deeply-recessed windows.

Our dinner passed gaily and pleasantly, Miss Hamilton talking continually about her nephew, who was now travelling on the Continent, and who seemed to be in the dear old lady's eyes at once the best and most heroic of men.

I would listen at such times with reverence and attention, and in return for what she called my patience she would kindly ask me to confide in her, so that she very soon knew my entire history.

After dinner we drove to the neighbouring villages, where we visited the poor, taking them fruit, eggs, and fresh butter, and on our return tea was awaiting us, spread out on the lawn under the chestnut trees. From thence until supper I again returned to my painting,

Miss Hamilton sitting by my side and beguiling the happy moments by her sweet thoughtfulness and charm.

Our evenings we always spent in song, and before retiring we knelt down together, thanking God for his goodness to us.

One day, whilst we were at dinner and I was laughing merrily at some story she was telling, she stopped short suddenly and said—

"Marie"—she had insisted upon calling me Marie from the very first—"Marie, you interest me, child. Your life has been an unusual one, and your face—"

The happiness died from my eyes. Would she also, the angel who had treated me so kindly—would she also blame me for my ugliness? She noticed my look and smiled.

"Your face, dear," she continued, "has more expression in it than I have ever seen in a human face before."

"My face has always repelled people," I said, with downcast eyes.

"Because up to this time your face was so thin and haggard, your eyes were dulled with sorrow, and every feature cried out to the passer-by, 'I suffer!' Now all is changed. Only one short week here has given you new life. Your cheeks have colour in them, your eyes have lost their blank look of despair, your soul has been awakened."

I smiled, but not vainly. I knew too well that, whatever she might say as to my altered expression, my features would ever be unshapely and unbeautiful.

"You are so good, madame," I said wistfully. "If my appearance has indeed changed, as you say, you have forgotten to name a beautifier more potent far than country air or sunshine."

"And what may that be, Marie?"

"Your kindness, madame, and the friendship you have been pleased to bestow upon me!"

My answer seemed to touch her, and I noticed that there were tears in her eyes. She was such a pretty, sweet old lady, with silvery hair, and eyes still bright, and cheeks still pink as rosebuds.

"My picture wants a frame," she said presently, speaking aloud some thought. Then, turning to me, she said—

"Marie, I have a strange whim this morning, and I wish you to gratify it. Will you promise?"

"Certainly, madame," I responded warmly.

"Then do me this favour. I have upstairs a gown, a very simple one certainly, but it pleases me. It is of a soft material, that hangs in heavy folds. The colour of the material is beautiful, its only trimming is a deep collar of lace. I want you to put this dress on and give me in exchange that cold grey gimp you wear."

"The exchange shall be made at once," I said, with a puzzled air. "Is that your only desire, madame?"

"No. I have another favour to ask. I want you to dress your hair more loosely, to coil it in the neck, instead of braiding it so stiffly, and let a curl or two stroll on your forehead."

I don't know why, but this proposal of hers to beautify my appearance filled me with secret sorrow and alarm, perhaps because I was sufficiently philosophic to know that, easy as it is to change gimp for silk, it is quite another thing to put away the bright new stuff and return to the simpler fabric.

That afternoon I appeared transfigured, and the good old lady, delighted at the change, led me to a cheval glass to gaze upon my image.

I was more interested in her bright and

beautiful face peeping over my shoulder than in my own plain features, which, however dressed, could never be otherwise than fairly. However, I thanked her for the interest she had taken in me, whereupon she kissed me and made my heart yearn ever so fondly after the mother I had lost so long ago.

All this time I was making progress with the picture of the pleasureance. The glowing colour of the myriad roses, the shadow of the fountain on the pathways, the lizards creeping underneath the eaves, the fauns and goddesses that kept their guard—all this I had reproduced as faithfully as I could.

The picture was nearing its completion. A few days, only perhaps two or three, and it would be finished. I don't think my work was absolutely wanting in merit, and yet, as I put the finishing touches, my eyes were heavy and my hands were trembling.

"In a few short hours," I mused sorrowfully, "all will be at an end—all the beautiful hours of sympathy and peace. Never again shall I be able to drink in the beauty of the morning, nor linger at eventide under the starlit canopy of heaven; never again to smell the perfumed flower and listen to the rustling of the trees and hear the sweet voice of a friend in my ear. Never again," I murmured to myself—"never again!"

Yet, even as the tears welled to my eyes, I went down to my knees and thanked God for His goodness to me, for are there not many who never have even a gleam of sunshine in their lives?

## CHAPTER IV.

"Glances and tones that bring the breath of poetry with them."

The afternoon in which I had decked myself out in my new gown seemed to be one of importance. I left madame in quite a flutter of excitement, and so many whisperings and preparations were going on in the abbey that I was amazed, and said to myself, "Surely some great event is to take place."

The mystery was soon solved, for about an hour later, just as I was putting the finishing touch to a clump of roses in my picture, Mr. Hamilton suddenly appeared before me.

He looked in my direction two full minutes before he approached. He seemed puzzled and bewildered.

"It is on account of my borrowed plumes," I said to myself, and felt horribly mortified. However, he did not seem displeased, and a moment later he was cordially shaking hands with me. Then he gazed at my picture.

He neither praised nor blamed it, but I took his silence rather for approbation than the reverse.

Presently, after he had examined it for a long while, he sat down by my side.

"My aunt has kept me quite a time talking," he began. "She insisted on having her say before allowing me to see my picture and—the painter."

I bowed as gracefully as I could, and marvelled at the tone of his voice and his general concension.

Was it possible that my picture—that little atom of unfinished art—could have broken down the mighty barrier which separated us from each other—the barrier between wealth and poverty?

"Truly," he continued, "I was so anxious to see how it had advanced, that I curtailed my visit on account of it."

"I trust," I said, colouring, "that you are not wholly displeased with my effort."