

weeks later, Mrs. Westlake and Esther stepped upon British soil, no better welcome could have awaited a Princess of royal blood than was awarded to the dainty girl so soon to reign supreme in the mansion to which she was taken.

Again there is a lapse of years, and in another English home—not the same—a man lies dying. Not exactly on his death-bed, mind you; but for all that his life is slowly ebbing away, and he knows it. A doctor stands by his side, not one who receives pay for his daily visits—oh no, this one is the man's own son, who has left a good London practice on purpose to watch over the only parent he has ever known. It is anguish to both to be together—these two possess a bond of love between them, and the coming separation but draws this bond the tighter, causing pangs of heartfelt agony to which the world as it goes on, with Father Time leading the way and counting out the heart-beats which the son knows to be so very few, is wholly indifferent. This son was not young, but then no other love had come between his father and him, and he was casting over in his mind as he sat there, watching the feeble countenance before him, how life would be when this his one friend was gone.

"Harry!" The younger man started. "Harry, I feel that my strength goes now fast—you see it too, my boy—and I have something to tell—to ask you, I mean. Harry, I think I should like to see her—your mother—once more before the end."

His mother! It was then that Harry Mortimer arose to his feet, and held out his hand to feel if the invalid's pulse were not more than usually unsteady.

"No, no! I'm all right, my boy!" There was a peculiar ring of affection in the two words, "my boy." "I'm all right, Harry, only I have never told you of Es—, of your mother: perhaps I ought, and Harry, if you don't mind, I think I'll do it now."

Plainly the task would be no easy one, but Harry Mortimer knew that there ought to be no delay; and besides, he had long thought that some trouble lay heavy at that father's heart. Now, perhaps, the telling would remove it, or at any rate he, the son, would share it with him; which would, at all events, be better than nothing. But this mother! He had always believed her to be dead and lying in her grave: his father had told him once that it was so—what, oh what, did it all mean?

"You are mystified, Harry, and well you may be; but have patience yet a little, for I must begin at the beginning, and then you will know all. I met your mother as I was idling away my youthful leisure on the banks of the Rhine. She—we were both young, and as is the case sometimes, we fancied ourselves in love—fancied! Oh, Harry, before God, I say that mine was not fancy; it was true at least, whatever hers might have been—but there, naught can undo it all now!" He sighed wearily, and a strange look of mingled tenderness and pain swept over his pale face. The younger man was all attention, but he spoke not, and the fierce August sun which shone in upon them mocked, as it were, the faded eyes of the dying man, and the solemn stillness which reigned around.

"I need not tell you what she was, you have seen the picture of her as I knew her then." (Yes, and Harry wondered at the man, who with his wife yet living but as dead to him as though the grave held her, could bear to gaze upon her face in the early morning and late at night; for her portrait hung even now in his chamber, just opposite his bed, where his eyes could not fail but see it as soon as they opened or daylight appeared. Yes, he wondered very much at the heart which could be so constantly riven, and with so keen a pain.)

"She came to England to be married, for so my father and mother willed it; and not till they stood beneath the old roof in Dorset did my father at all recognise who they were. Then it came out that the mother had jilted him in early youth, and married someone with more money: but strange to say, my father came soon after, all unexpectedly, into a wealthy heirship, while this woman, whom he had once loved so dearly, lost her husband and the greater part of the wealth she had so dearly bought at one and the same time. All this I learnt, but then Esther was true, she loved me for myself alone, and yet my heart misgave me sorely when I saw how gladly she turned away from my love for the vanities of the world. But she was so fair, so peerless in my eyes, and—God help me, Harry, my boy! it makes me well-nigh faint even now to recall the time—I loved her madly, madly, else I had not turned her away in my fierce anger."

"It came—the quarrel, I mean—on the next Midsummer Day but one after our marriage. She—your mother—was fond of life and gaiety. She had spent the previous season in town, and now she came to me, saying that some ladies whom she had grown to imitate during that time, were going to Paris; and thence, later on, to Rome for the winter months—could not she and I go as well? I told her, No! plainly and at once; for I had had enough of roving, and I was as dear to my father, Harry, as you are to me. I was their all, and they were trying to make our home and lives happy, and besides that, there was you to be cared for; and I thought that home, with us to love and cherish her, ought to have kept her too from wishing to roam. Then she grew angry—I had never seen her so before, saying that she might just as well have married a poor man as myself for all the pleasure which my wealth brought her. One word rose another, and I, stung to madness, asked her if she too had then wedded for gold, even as her mother before her. Then she quite forgot herself—yes, I believe they were the words of passion—and declared that she had made a worse mistake than that, but she would undo it, so far as lay in her power, by leaving me and going back once more to the mother I despised. My father here came upon the scene—he was aggrieved for me, and his words, I need scarcely say, added yet fuel to the fire I had kindled—and so we parted. Of course her mother is long since dead—dead, yes; and she, Esther, is old; but I have never seen her since. I would have taken her back and forgiven her, had she made the least advance; she began the quarrel, therefore I felt it was her place to be the first to make it up. Now as I lie here, and as I look upon her fair face in the early morning, I grow to blame myself. Her love may have been a mistake as she said, but at least she could not help her mother's sin; and, my son, I had no right to deny to you a mother's love, a mother's holy care. She would—nay, she must—have loved you; and Harry, my boy, I should like to see her once more, once more on this side the grave."

Harry Mortimer's face was very grave and firm, and as he listened to all his father said, various emotions stirred his inmost soul. He loved his father with a love surpassing that of woman, and yet there was his mother, his unknown mother, and he pictured to himself her mute eyes pleading for the husband and child she had left so long ago. He struggled hard to think aright upon the matter, for although his heart yearned, had yearned all through his life, as a man's heart seldom does, for a mother's love, he yet thought severely, as was natural, of her who could prefer gaiety and amusement to the love of her husband and the nurturing of her child. He understood now at the last too why the old ancestral home in Dorset had been shut up since his grandparents' death, and this house, which was smaller and meaner in its every appointment, should have been chosen in its stead.

"Father, what would you have me do—go and seek her, or shall I merely write to her in your name?"

"Go, my son. Nay, don't think of me"; for he had seen his son start at the words he spoke. "She is old, or at least growing so, and her memory may not carry her back strongly enough to the days I dwell upon to induce her to come if you only write. Go to her—her heart must have cried out for her child. She will come with you, my son, and perhaps—perhaps she may be sorry, and I can then bless you both, you and her, before I die."

He thought otherwise, that loving, far-seeing son; and yet, because it was the wish of a dying soul, and because he himself longed to behold the mother whose face had been so fair in her girlhood, he tore himself hence, feeling quite sure that upon his return—his and hers—that death would have stilled for ever the craving soul he was now trying to satisfy. He would bring her home; so he promised the dying man, and they parted, never more on earth to meet again.

It was September, and the harvest moon rode high in the heavens; it poured its clear broad rays in through the yet uncurtained windows of the sick room. Henry Mortimer was sinking, sinking fast now, and to-night he was waiting, and would not have the lamp lit or the curtains drawn, because he would persuade himself that it was not yet so late, and because he felt somehow sure that those he expected would yet come.

A little distance down the lane a carriage stopped, and then a slight, shrunken figure moved slowly, hesitatingly up to the house wherein the dying man waited. The door was wide open, so like a poor criminal she crept in. A servant stood in her way, and of him she inquired of the whereabouts of his