

"Law, yes, I forgot. Still, one may fancy one's—ah—sort of relation even, can't one? Well, I must change my gown. Shall I wear the yellow brocade or the pale green that came from Paris?"

"Wear the yellow, you look so sweet in it. Now, I must run away and change mine also. Shall we go down to the drawing-room together?"

"Um—yes—and Sheelah, try to be your own natural sweet little self to-night; Sir Charles O'Hara is staying here for the holiday."

Sheelah laughed nervously and started towards the door. Constance had told her the very thing to make her self-conscious. Although a relation, she had only met Sir Charles recently and had not spoken to him more than three or four times, but already she had lost her heart to the strong handsome man with the dancing blue eyes that looked at her so merrily.

Sheelah and Constance had come the day before Easter Eve by the stage-coach from Bath and had arrived, tired out, at Mairlea, where Lord and Lady Mairland were keeping open house for the Easter season. In the year 1760 the roads from Bath to Mairlea House, some five leagues distance, were in a terrible condition, so Sheelah, worn out, retired to her room and was seen no more that evening. It was the next day, Easter Eve, when the conversation between the two girls was held. After Sheelah left the room Constance leaned thoughtfully back in her chair. Suddenly she bolted up and, skipping around the toilet-table, seized a long cloak and hood.

"I have it, I have it," she cried. "If I can't be happy, why shouldn't she? He told me perfectly plainly that he cared nothing for me except to flirt with and that he'd never marry a coquette, heigho!"

She looked long and earnestly at her reflection in the mirror and sighed as she slipped on her cloak; then she laughed suddenly and sharply.

"Yes, I'll do it, and more, if it be necessary; there's no limit to the deeds I'd do."

On her way out she picked up a sharp little knife from her writing-desk and hid it in her bodice, then strolled casually down the wide oak staircase, across the hall and out a side door to the lawn. The early spring evening was closing in, and as she crossed a rustic bridge her hurry became evident. She sped through the woods to a forked tree laden with lilac blossoms. There she stopped and, throwing aside her cloak, commenced to carve on the trunk. After about fifteen minutes' labour, she stepped back to view her work. It was two twined hearts with the initials S. S. and C. O'H. in them. Constance put her head on one side and laughed.

"This is splendid! I protest, 'tis as goodly a carving as any man could make. Now then for the other."

She looked swiftly around and glided through the trees until she came to a rippling brook. At the side of this stream was a fallen tree, which the young people used as a seat. Constance dropped to her knees beside it and at the end nearest the roots she carved, in a more careless fashion, the facsimile of the hearts and initials, then she carefully coaxed a branch to droop across it, jumped to her feet and hurried back to the house.

This time she entered by the front door, and as she was crossing the hall she heard her name called softly.

"What rosy cheeks, Mistress Constance Wynn! I vow I'll go into the air and see if I can coax the same tint into my own face; but, alas, I fear me 'tis hopeless. We of the stronger and bolder sex must in this at least consent to be outrivalled by the charming ladies."

The gentleman bowed low, and Constance looked at him in delight. Here was the very man she wanted to see.

"Ah, Sir Charles," she said light-