

secrets? For she looks a very child to him in her impetuous fits of wrath, although at other times the stately Little Queen they call her.

"Then I will tell her to-morrow," he answers.

And so suspense is over, and Reine Landelle is wooed and won.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### "THE VERY BEST THING IN ALL THE WORLD."

THE croquet players are all together, laughing and talking in the moonlight, when Longworth rejoins them. Reine has slipped in through an open window, and as he appears the first note of the lancers breaks on their ears.

"Really, Laurence," says Mrs. Sheldon, looking at him with searching eyes, "how very long it has taken you. Were you obliged to go to Miss Harriott's to find Mademoiselle Reine?"

"Not quite so far. Will you dance with me, Totty? I see they are forming the set."

All the rest of the evening Reine remains at the piano. Even when the lamps are lighted and they flock in, tired and breathless with the sheer hard work of dancing on the grass, she still retains the piano stool, and begins to sing unasked.

Even Mrs. Sheldon, who dislikes her, and is instinctively jealous of her—who thinks her small, and plain, and unattractive—is forced to own that even a plain woman with a divine voice may be a formidable rival. And Longworth, leaning against the chimney-piece, sipping his iced lemonade and talking to Marie, is listening to the sister who singing far more than to the sister who talks—that she can see.

Once only does he and Reine exchange a word again that evening. He knows she keeps her piano post to avoid him, and he does not approach her. The party breaks up early, and he is the last of all to draw near and wish her good night. There is a certain wistfulness in his eyes, but hers are fixed upon the keys, and she does not observe it. She is striking chords at random as he speaks.

"Good night, petite Reine," he says,

with a smile; "shall you be at home to-morrow evening when I call?"

"I do not know, Monsieur Longworth," she says, with sudden hurry. "There is just one thing I wish to say. It is this: When you speak to grandmamma, make her understand she must change her will—that all must go to you—that Mario must have half. It is her right, you know," she says, and looks for the first time up at him, a flash in her eyes.

"Oh! confound the money!" Longworth thinks, with inward savagery. "Before heaven, I wish Mrs. Windsor were a beggar. Even this child can think of nothing else."

"Grandmamma will listen to you," pursues mademoiselle. "I think you will find her disappointed in your choice monsieur. I am quite sure—and very naturally—she thinks you must ask Marie."

"Mademoiselle," he says, "I am curious about something. Down yonder in the garden you said this, 'Since it had to be one of us, I am glad it is I.' Now, everything considered, it strikes me that was rather a curious speech."

"A bold one, perhaps, monsieur thinks?"

"Well—no, since there is but one way of interpreting it. Your great love for your sister makes self-abnegation easy. You prefer to sacrifice yourself—since one of you it must be—than see her sacrificed."

"If that explanation satisfies monsieur, it will do as well as any other," responds mademoiselle, coolly; "but it is not precisely what I meant. Do not ask me now—one day I promise to tell you."

"I wonder when that day will come," he says, leaning against the piano, and looking down at her, wondering how any one can think that spirited *mignonne* face plain; "meantime, I am ready to wait—for everything. Only I should like to convince you that if Mrs. Windsor had not a penny, if she hated me, and would cast you off for accepting me, I would still have spoken—ay, and said far more than I have said to you to-night. I wonder if I could?"

Reine looked up at him, the old distrust and doubt, almost aversion, in her gaze.