

this, I think, educated as you have been situated as you are, neither of you will be insane enough to do."

"Oh! this is shameful! shameful!" Reine gasped under her breath, her hands clenching, her heart throbbing. "Why will not Marie speak? Why does she not rise up, and say we will go out and beg, or starve, or die, sooner than listen to such degradation as that! And he—oh, I said well when I said I hated him! To make such a compact as this, to be ready to force one of us into marrying him because he is ashamed to take her fortune in any other way. He is almost too despicable for hatred and contempt."

"You do not speak," Mrs. Windsor resumes, in slow surprise. "How am I to interpret this silence? Am I to think the proposition does not strike you favourably?"

"Marie," Reine cries out, in a tone of concentrated anger and scorn, "why is it you do not answer? It is for you to reply that what madame wishes is utterly and absolutely impossible."

"Impossible," Mrs. Windsor repeats, in the tone a sultana might use to an insolent slave; "impossible! What do you mean? Why impossible? It cannot—no, it cannot be that either of you has had the audacity to come to me already engaged."

Marie looks across at her sister—one straight, level, warning look. Then she sits erect, and turns to the speaker.

"We are neither of us engaged, madame," she says, and as she says it, Reine turns and lays her face on the arm resting on the mantel; "it is the suddenness of this unexpected proposal that leaves us dumb. I have not been brought up on French principles," she says, a touch of scorn in her voice. "My mother's daughter was hardly likely to be, and with my father's example before me, his teachings on that point could hardly produce any very great effect. My sister has certainly been, and I see no reason"—again Marie glances steadily at her—"why she should object."

"I do not know that it is necessary for your sister to consider the matter at all," retorts madame, in her iciest voice. "I doubt if there is the slightest likelihood of her being put to the test. Do,

I understand you, then, Miss Landelle, to say on your part that if Mr. Longworth does you the honour to propose for you, you will accept at once?"

Reine starts up. A flush, a faint, transient flush, passes for a second over the pearly pale face of Marie.

"Madame, this is very sudden. Will you not give me a little time——"

"You have known Mr. Longworth a fortnight. That is amply sufficient. I am not in the habit of pressing my favours on any one. A simple yes or no will suffice. Which is it?"

"It must be yes, madame, if you command it."

"Oh," Reine says, as if some one had struck her, and she turns, with clasped hands and crushed look, and goes back to the window.

"Understand me," pursues Mrs. Windsor, in frigid displeasure. "I know very little of your antecedents. You may both have had lovers by the score before you came here; but if I thought either of you were bound by tie or engagement of any sort, that one should instantly leave this house and return to the man to whom she belongs. I have received your father's daughters because it seemed inevitable—if I fancied either of you were bound to men like him, you would not remain another hour with me."

"Oh," Reine says again, under her breath, in the hard tense tone of one in unendurable pain.

"One other thing," continues the lady of the Stone House, rising, "one last and final word on this subject. Which ever Mr. Longworth may choose, should she see fit to refuse, she will also see (if she retains the slightest good taste) the indispensability of providing herself at once with another home. Should he be accepted, however, there must be no reluctance, no playing fast and loose, no young-ladylike humours or caprice. She must look upon the contract as indissoluble, and conduct herself as the affianced of an honourable gentleman, and as becomes my granddaughter."

And then—very erect, very majestic—Mrs. Windsor sails out of the dining room and into her own.

There is silence for a time between the sisters. Reine still stands by the