

circumstances would he ever receive me under his roof again? And had I not merited this disgrace?

But what was the reason of my father's original interdiction?

All these questions were answered sooner than I expected.

VII.

"Is your father's Christian name Eustace?" asked Mr. Vinesly, a week after I had answered the advertisement and when his health was completely restored.

"Why do you ask?" I replied, with a prescience that I was about to hear something that concerned his and the past history of my father, and that the mystery that affected both of them would be unravelled at last.

"I can see by your question, Medora, that his name is Eustace, and now that you belong to *my* family I must tell you something to interest you since it concerns *your* family."

With this preface Mr. Vinesly began his narration.

"Many years ago, when I was a young man, and, I may add, a poor one as well, I had a dear friend of my own age. He was well off in a worldly sense and possessed all the qualities to attract men and fascinate women. Although he lived at his ease and I had to toil for my daily bread, we were still constant companions, following the same out-of-door pursuits, choosing the same intellectual pleasures, and addicted to the same youthful follies. But our friendship, steadfast and unswerving during many years, was suddenly overshadowed.

"Of course you can guess the reason of it. We both fell in love with the same woman and so the *cordiale entente* between us received a shock.

"Although we made a confidant of one another on every other subject, we were discreetly silent on this one, and it just happened that Florence Adescombe favoured me, and one day I summoned courage to declare my suit and was accepted.

"As we were both of us poor, and as Florence supported her parents by her industry, we resolved to keep our engagement a secret until my worldly circumstances improved, nor did I even impart the news of my happiness to my friend. One day, however, to my utter astonishment, I heard that Florence was engaged to be married to no less a person than to

Eustace. I did not at first believe it; but the news was soon confirmed. What do you think I did under these cruel circumstances? I did not upbraid the false Florence, curse womankind for her perfidy, or vent any bitter reproaches on my friend. I just said and did nothing, and let matters take their course. If Florence chose to throw over the poor man for the sake of the rich man, that was *my* misfortune. I had not gauged correctly her feelings for me, that was all. And if Eustace had supplanted me by reason of his superior worldly position that was *his* good fortune. I merely fortified myself with those wonderful verses of the sixteenth century:

"Shall I wasting in despair,
Die because a woman's fair?

* * *

If she slight me when I woo,
I can scorn and let her go,
For if she be not for me
What care I for whom she be."

"Well, Med, I need not weary you with any unnecessary details; the day fixed for my friend's marriage drew nigh. I sent them a present and wished them the usual felicitations; but I did not intend to be present at the marriage ceremony.

Now prepare yourself for a startling surprise. On the day appointed for the marriage, when I was brooding at home and fortifying myself to the utmost with the verses referred to, for I need not tell you I still required the *panacea* of a good deal of philosophy to reconcile myself to the loss of the woman I loved, a loud ringing of the doorbell startled me, and before I could recover my surprise Florence, dressed in her wedding attire, pale and flurried with agitation, stood before me.

Was it an apparition or a creature of flesh and blood? In my bewilderment I hardly knew what to imagine. But the tremulous human voice soon awoke me to the strange reality of the situation.

"I dared not enter the church. I could not utter false vows. I could not hate myself for ever by pretending to love him; my mother's poverty tempted me to share his riches; I yielded only to regret; I have wronged *you*--forgive me."

She almost gasped these words, and then, evidently overcome with the strain of her wild excitement, fell fainting in my arms.

My love, that had never waned, at that moment grew intensified. I soothed her, forgave her, and tried to comfort her, and later on we were married.

But I have not finished yet.