

## Called To Account.

A cheering summer's sun shone brightly on me, and mirrored its reflection in my heart. I had arrived at that hopeful age when all things wear their fairest aspect, when life itself flows like a smooth unruffled stream. I had just attained my one-and-twentieth birthday.

I was engaged to be married to a man I loved. My chief friend and companion was the Belle of Rothsey, the envy and admiration of the whole village; her name was Grace Merton, and she was the loveliest woman in the world, in my eyes. I was an artist, and it was my delight to sketch the perfect face of my girlish friend and school companion. I was not jealous. How could I be jealous of a bosom friend?

Besides, I had secured the heart and hand of one of the most envied heirs in Rothsey, and standing next in succession to a baronetcy. What greater stroke of fortune could I secure had I possessed the most beautiful face in Christendom?

I was not a beauty, but my friends all saw a something in me; what that something was I never had been able to discover. I was about the average height, of somewhat stout frame, with dark hair and eyes, and rather sallow complexion—the very opposite to my fair delicate friend, with her golden hair, blue eyes, and exquisitely modeled features. I had no relative in the world, except a maiden aunt whom I lived with; but I had money, and, of course, could command a wide circle of friends and acquaintances. I was proud, and, with the exception of Grace Merton, I never admitted any woman into my confidence.

I was too proud to be jealous, I had too much self-respect; I knew that if I had not beauty, I had many other higher gifts to make up for its absence, and I had one of the prettiest homes in Rothsey. I was happy—ah! too happy to last.

I was, at the commencement of my tale, sitting on a bench beside the clear brook, which rippled at my feet, at the end of our garden, and on which the cheering sunrays reflected two shadows—my own and aunt Betsy's who sat beside me knitting, seeming more grave and solemn than usual. She was a prim spinster on the shady side of fifty, an excellent and well-disposed creature, although perhaps given to look on the shady side of things; she had corkscrew ringlets fastened back by side combs, a florid complexion, and wore green glasses. One of the most unpleasant features in my aunt's face was her mouth; it was always set and grim; it never relaxed on any occasion; no frivolous smile dared to lurk around its sacred precincts. She had long, long bid her final adieu to this world's glare and tinsel.

"Gertrude," she said, after a long pause,

"I have been thinking over your wish, and I advise you not to invite Grace Merton to stay with you until after you are married."

I opened my eyes to their fullest extent.

"Why after?" I asked in astonishment.

"My dear Gertrude, you don't face the two sides of the question; she may be all very well as a companion; but have you considered that your intended husband will be visiting you at the same time?"

Still in perfect darkness as to the drift of her argument, I replied:

"Of course, I have considered it, aunt; surely the house is large enough to hold both."

There was another awkward pause, a shifting of the green glasses, and again a firm hand on my arm.

"My dear, you won't understand me; there are some women whom no houses are large enough to contain. Suppose she should become a—a—a rival?" finally burst out my aunt, turning round suddenly, and facing me.

The latter word, instead of having its usual effect, touched me quite in a contrary direction. I burst out with a hearty laugh, my aunt looking on with rigid seriousness all the while.

"Child!—why do you laugh?" she said, after regarding me for a long interval. "Is it so very impossible for one woman to rival another; and one who has such winning prettiness, and—and—" She hesitated here, and breaking off into another strain, reminded me that none of our family had ever been beauties (which fact she herself certainly bore out); reminded me also that my dark heavy features would not retain youth in them long, and that men were always led away nowadays by prettiness.

Still bearing my aunt's unflattering comparison good-humoredly, I replied:

"Some men, but not such men as Bernard McGregor; besides, Grace Merton is my friend." I laid emphasis on the last word "friend," my ideas on the subject being rather elevated. To me the word "friend" comprised all a woman should be to another—genuine, true, steadfast, ready to sacrifice anything and everything. Alas, I placed too high a stake on frail woman's friendship. I judged others by myself.

My aunt saw that I entirely ridiculed her caution; she knew that my will was as firm and stubborn as my friendship.

"Have your own way, Gertrude," she said, rising and wending her footsteps towards the house; "you can never know anybody until you live with them! But, come." And my aunt was a sealed book to me for the rest of that day.

The following day Grace Merton arrived, and was warmly greeted by myself, although received somewhat coldly by my aunt. Old maids are often curious in their prejudices,