

"But you have so much to live for; you have everything your heart can desire."

Have I? I do not answer him, my eyes are on the great pearly bank of cloud whose fringes are slowly turning from silver to gold in the light of the setting sun.

"Rosalie, will you let me try to make you happy? Will you try to care for me a little? I love you—I have loved you since the first moment I saw your face. Don't you think I could make you happy, loving you so much as that?"

I do not think it for a moment. I do not seriously entertain the thought even for one second of time. A year ago it might have seemed to me a very desirable arrangement. It would rescue Woodhuy to the man who I always felt ought to have had it. But a year ago I did not care for anyone else. Now my heart lies buried in a grave that was dug for it down among the tangled ferns and leaves and grasses in my shadowy comb one day—a grave whose fresh sods I have never visited—a grave where with my dead love I have buried all hope, all pleasure, all desire of life.

"I am sorry, if you really care for me, Cousin Ronald. I don't know how you can"—smiling slightly—"knowing how cross I am!"

"May I ask you one question, Rosalie?"

I know what the question is before I look round into his face.

"Yes," I answer slowly; "I suppose you have a right to ask."

"I do not want to ask it by reason of any right, and you are not bound to answer me."

"No; I am not bound to answer you."

"Rosalie, have you ever fancied that you cared for any other man?"

The question is put so gravely, so composedly, that it does not startle me. I answer it just as gravely, just as composedly, looking straight before me at the smooth gray terrace-walk.

"Not fancied it, Cousin Ronald! I have cared for another man so much that, though you may be a hundred times better, a thousand times worthier, you can never be to me what he once was."

"I am not going to ask you his name. But this man, Rosalie, it cannot be but that he loved you in return?"

"Oh, yes, he loved me!"

"Then is he dead?"

"No," I answer, with a strange little smile, "he is married."

For one moment Ronald Scott stands beside me in dead silence. I do not look at him; but I can fancy the astonishment—the disgust, perhaps—in his grave stern face—his silence might mean either or both.

"Poor child," he says at last—and his tone is only pitiful, not disgusted at all—"poor child!"

I do not look at him, and I do not think he is looking at me. But two great tears well into my eyes and fall upon my ashy purple gown.

"I will not trouble you any more, dear," he says, gently. "I would never have asked that question if I had dreamed what your answer would be. But I could not think you cared for any one—it seemed so unlikely that—he would not care for you."

I hold out my left hand to him—the one next to him—without turning my head. The foolish tears drop down my cheeks and fall upon the gown whose dead violet shade Olive abhors.

"I shall be your friend always, Rosalie—remember that!"

"Yes," I say vaguely, not dreaming how soon I shall make trial of his friendship; "I shall remember."

He stoops and kisses my hand gravely, dispassionately, and walks out of the room just as Olive and Mr. Lockhart come into it.

* * * * *

"There is no news in the paper to-day," Olive says, picking up the "Times" from the floor where Ronald Scott had thrown it.

"Is there not?" I answer languidly, still standing in the deep bay window looking out.

"Nothing that I call news. Oh, what is this?"

She does not speak again for a minute or two. I suppose she is studying the paragraph which seemed to have attracted her attention. I am studying the sunset colors in the sky, the mystic glory of sunset hill, the deep ruddy green of my shadowy woods. Mr. Lockhart has just wished us good-bye and left the room; Digges has carried away the tea things; Olive has more than once suggested that it is time for my ante-prandial drive; but I was in no mood for exerting myself—even to the extent of putting on my hat.

"Such a horrible thing!" Olive exclaims. "Allie, did you know that unfortunate Gerard Baxter was married?"

"Yes," I answer calmly, without turning my head: "I know it some time ago."

"I declare I don't like to tell you above it—it is enough to shock you if you had never known the wretched boy."

"What is it?" I ask, confronting her. The girl is sitting on the corner of the sofa, looking up at me with a white startled face.

"Why he was arrested the day before yesterday on a charge of having murdered his wife!"

(To be Continued)

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