

wild and reckless youth, who will break her heart? But she will be rich, easy, comfortable. Well, if she could be happy, I should be glad, but Walter Clifton loves with the love of a boy—a love of impulse, give him his toy, and he will break it."

"What are you talking to yourself about so freely?" cried Alice, tripping from behind some bushes where she had been culling flowers for the evening. "But how pale and ill you look! Shall I get you anything?"

"No, Alice, I am very well in body, but the mind is ill at ease."

"Are you ill, John?—my friend—my brother—"

"Ah yes!" cried he, passionately; "there it is; I have been a fool; I have taught you to treat me as a brother, and the idea could never enter your head of thinking of me as aught else."

"Certainly not," said Alice anxiously.

"But it had mine, Alice!" cried John, forgetting all reserve and prudence; "ever since you were twelve years old, I looked on you as one who might be my future wife. Six years have passed away, six long happy and years—nearly seven—during which, each day I have loved you more and more. I waited and waited, putting off the day of declaration until you were quite a young woman; and it is now too late!"

Alice groaned, astonished, hurt, and pained to the last degree.

"Too late," said the usually calm young man, in tones of deep and wildly passionate feeling, "and all my dreams are fled. I hoped, if heaven blessed me with your affection, to be united to you on your nineteenth birthday: we could then have made my two rooms up stairs ours, and have left your mother yours. She would have found no change, save that in place of one child she would have had two."

"Ah John, John! why did you not speak before?—I never thought—I never supposed—I—"

"Alice, it was not to be. So, no more of it. I see mother, but by-and-by."

"My friend, my brother," exclaimed Alice, as she gazed on his pallid face, flashing eyes, and trembling lip.

"Say no more, dear girl. Be happy with the man of your choice. You have the prayers and good wishes of John Morrison."

And the young man turned away and went up to his room. An hour later he sat down to the tea-table of Mrs. Dempster, far calmer than poor Alice, who scarcely had courage to look up. The talk was varied, and generally trifling, Walter not being one of those who can think sufficiently seriously to converse in any other way. Presently he spoke of a grand subscription ball for the following Thursday, to which he invited Alice, in the name of his mother and sisters, who would call for her with their old fashioned carriage.

"But I cannot go," said Alice, quietly, while, despite herself, her eyes flashed with pleasure at the idea; "my mother cannot remain alone; besides, I dance very indifferently."

"My dear Alice," said John, in a kind tone, "I will take care of your mamma. We will sit up for you till any hour of the night. Go, it will do you good, you who never go out."

"Yes; go by all means," added Mrs. Dempster.

"Now you cannot refuse," continued Walter, shaking Morrison's hand heartily; "I, Mary, and Jane will be round at seven; so mind,—be ready."

After he was gone there were rare discussions that night. Alice had no dress to go in—that had never been thought of. Mrs. Dempster thought more of her daughter than she did of herself, it is true, but a ball dress is a serious affair with persons of small income. After supper the debate was resumed, but with no satisfactory result, so all went to bed. About eleven o'clock next day, while Alice was turning out all her finery in search of something suitable, a man entered with a parcel for Mrs. Dempster. It contained a

beautiful ball dress, sent by Morrison, who had risen early and gone into town to purchase it. Alice turned pale, and sat down; but, recovering herself, bent over the kind present to hide her tears. Mrs. Dempster—good and kind mother—was in ecstasies, both at the dress and the donor, and immediately sat down to a table to begin cutting out.

When John came home that night, his greeting was indeed hearty and warm. The mother declared that he was more than a son to her, while Alice said not a word. Her look, however, was eloquent indeed. It expressed gratitude, pity, sorrow,—a thousand mingled shades of feeling which words could not have expressed.—John was rather serious in his manner and tone, but by no look did he betray his peculiar state of feeling. He sat reading to them all that evening, while they worked on the dress, and even made pleasant and jocular remarks on Alice's love for finery and dancing, with such success as to remove from the young girl's mind all remains of uneasiness. She was the more easily consoled, that John seemed to her rather old to be her husband. Walter was three and twenty, John was twenty-eight; Walter was handsome, John was plain, the one was lively and gay, the other serious. Now all this, to a young girl of eighteen, with little experience, rendered comparison useless.

The evening of the ball soon came round. At seven Alice was ready dressed, and John Morrison looked at her with undigested admiration, while her mother was—naturally enough—in raptures, as mothers always are when they gaze upon their fair and charming offspring. About half past seven the carriage came. There was Walter and Edward and the two Misses Clifton. (The mother was indisposed,) who were all in ecstasies with Alice. They did not stop long, for all were young, and eager for the hour when music should invite them to join the dance—an amusement, when it leads not too often to late hours, both healthful and conducive to cheerfulness.

John Morrison remained with Mrs. Dempster, despite the efforts of the Cliftons to take him along with them. For some time nothing was spoken of but the beauty, grace and elegance of Alice; then the conversation turned upon her marriage with Walter, he having distinctly announced his intention to make a formal demand of her hand on the Saturday, if he obtained the young girl's consent that night. John bit his lip; and, to change the conversation, opened a book and read aloud. Mrs. Dempster listened awhile; and then the stillness and quiet, the silent night asserted its influence, and she fell asleep. John continued reading for about a half an hour; but then he laid down his book and fell into deep reverie. He was half asleep and half awake for hours. Suddenly he started up as the clock struck five, and found Mrs. Dempster preparing tea.

"Not home, yet?" said John, smiling; "the little dissipated girl."

"It is so seldom she goes out," replied Mrs. Dempster, "I do not expect her yet."

At this moment the sound of carriage wheels was heard. There were two, not one. They threw open the case. It was daylight, and within a hundred yards they discovered the carriage and a gig side by side. Alice was in the gig, driven by Walter, while some friends filled the vacant place in the other vehicle. They came up at a rapid pace, and pulled up at the door. Alice leaped out, then with a bow and a "good morning," the party sped away homeward. As she entered the room both noticed that all Alice's elasticity of step—all her spirits—all her liveliness was gone.

"You are tired, love," said her mother, kindly, "here is a nice cup of tea; you look serious. I suppose Master Walter has been proposing to you. I suppose, too, I shall have him here on Saturday, as he threatened, and shall lose my child next. You must not look so serious. It is quite natural, and I do not say it by way of reproach."

"Mamma," replied Alice gravely, "I have had two offers this week—one on Monday last, and one this morning. You look surprised, mamma, and you, my dear friend, look vexed. I should be sorry if the conclusion of my words should pain you. On Monday, I accidentally discovered that John Morrison here had loved me as his future wife, for six years—"

"John!" exclaimed the mother, looking at them with an air of astonishment.

"Yes, for six years; and I scorned his love. I thought him too old, too grave for me; and I owned my affection for Walter. This morning Mr. Clifton made me an offer of his hand and heart, and I rejected him."

"Rejected him," said both, in amazement.

"I rejected him," replied Alice, gravely, "and dear mamma, and dear John, if you both will consent, I wish from this day to be considered the wife of John Morrison."

"Alice, why is this?" exclaimed Mrs. Dempster, who was naturally at first in favor of the rich husband.

"My Alice," cried John, "this is too much happiness."

"Why is this?" replied Alice, earnestly; "because John is generous and good, and Walter is selfish; because John loves you, and Walter treats you as an incumbrance and a bore. I declare to you, mother, dear, that I now love John as much more than I did Walter, as I love you more than a stranger."

"But speak, Alice, dear," cried the enraptured young man; "explain all this."

"It is our mother who shall judge," replied Alice. "I will record two conversations now clearly fixed on my memory, word by word, but only one of which I shall recollect after this morning."

She then related, word for word, what had passed between her and John, and the scene between her and Walter in the gig.

"I have begged you to ride alone with me," said Clifton warmly, "that I may pour out my heart and soul; I wish you to share my fortune—to be my wife at once; immediately. My friends have already consented; your mother has hinted her gladness to acquiesce; we want your consent."

"Walter," replied Alice, with downcast eyes, "before you go any further, I have something to say to you that may change your sentiments. I have a mother who is alone in the world; she has nobody to love her or nurse her; as long as she lives I can never leave her. She has for many years been my devoted nurse; wherever I go there must she be."

"Oh, but this is all nonsense, Alice," cried Walter impatiently; "I have enough of old people at home. I mean to travel for a year or two in France and Italy, and to return only when I come into my property."

"Then, Walter Clifton," said Alice, raising her head and speaking firmly, "I can never be your wife; you must seek one differently situated from myself. No, Mr. Clifton, I would not leave my mother for one I have loved for many years, much less for one I have known but a month."

"But every one parts from their parents when they marry," said Walter, pettishly; "you must be mad; on the one hand a young, fond, and rich husband, all the pleasures of a continental life—of Paris, of Italy; on the other, a dull home, alongside an old, ailing woman, with the prospect of being the wife of a pert clerk, perhaps, like John Morrison."

"Enough, Mr. Clifton," replied Alice, firmly, and almost angrily; "if you now were to consent a thousand times to all I could ask, I would not be your wife."

"You never loved me!" said Walter, whose anger was roused.

"I never did; I was dazzled for a while because I knew you not. I saw you handsome and agreeable, and seemingly generous. I find you selfish and ungenerous. But pardon me, such observations come with very ill grace from me. We can still be friends." A