

Her face flushed, and her heart beat, but she made no answer. "I have borne my impatience well for the last three days," he said; "now I must speak to you, for I can bear it no longer, Pauline. Oh, do not turn away from me! I love you, and I want you to be my wife—my wife, darling; and I will love you—I will cherish you—I will spend my whole life in working for you. I have no hope so great, so sweet, so dear, as the hope of winning you."

She made him no answer. Yet her silence was more eloquent than words.

It seems a strange thing to say, but, Pauline, I loved you the first moment I saw you. Do you remember, love? You were sitting with one of my books in your hand, and the instant my eyes fell upon your beautiful face a great calm came over me. I could not describe it; I felt in that minute my life was completed. My whole heart went out to you, and I knew, whether you ever learned to care for me or not, that you were the only woman in all the world for me."

She listened with a happy smile playing round her beautiful lips, her dark eyes drooping, her flower-like face flushed and turned from his.

"You are my fate—my destiny! Ah! if you love me, Pauline—if you will only love me, I shall not have lived in vain! Your love would incite me to win name and fame—not for myself, but for you. Your love would crown a king—what would it not do for me! Turn your face to me, Pauline? You are not angry? Surely great love wins great love—and there could be no greater love than mine."

Still the beautiful face was averted. There was the sunlight on the sea; the western wind sighed around them. A great fear came over him. Surely, on this most fair and sunny day, his love was not to meet a cruel death. His voice was so full of this fear when he spoke again that she, in surprise, turned and looked at him.

"Pauline," he cried, "you cannot mean to be cruel to me. I am no coward, but I would rather face death than your rejection."

Then it was that their eyes met; and that which he saw in hers was a revelation to him. The next moment he had clasped her to his heart, and was pouring out a torrent of passionate words—such words, so tender, so loving, so full of passion and hope, that her face grew pale as she listened, and the beautiful figure trembled.

"I have frightened you, my darling," he said, suddenly. "Ah! do forgive me. I was half mad with joy. You do not know how I have longed to tell you this, yet feared—I know not what—you seemed so far above me, sweet. See, you are trembling now! I am as cruel as a man who catches in his hands a white dove that he has tamed, and hurts it by his grasp. Sit down here and rest, while I tell you over and over again, in every fashion, in every way, how I love you."

The sun never shone upon happier lovers than those. The golden doors of Love's paradise were open to them.

"I never knew until now," said Vane, "how beautiful life is. Why, Pauline, love is the very center of it; it is not money or rank—it is love that makes life. Only to think, my darling, that you and I may spend every hour of it together."

She raised her eyes to the fair, calm heavens, and infinite happiness filled her soul to overflowing; a deep, silent prayer ascended unspoken from her heart.

Suddenly, she sprang from his side with a startled cry.

"Oh, Vane!" she said, with outstretched hands, "I had forgotten that I am unworthy. I can never marry you!"

He saw such wild despair in her face, such sudden, keen anguish, that he was half startled; and, kneeling by her side, he asked:

"Why, my darling? Tell me why. You, Pauline," he cried—"you not worthy of me! My darling, what fancy is it—what foolish idea—what freak of the imagination? You are the noblest, truest, the dearest woman in the whole wide world! Pauline, why are you weeping so? My darling, trust me—tell me."

She had shrunk shuddering from him, and had buried her face in her hands; deep, bitter sobs came from her lips; there was the very eloquence of despair in her attitude.

"Pauline," said her lover, "you cannot shake my faith in you; you cannot make me think you have done wrong; but will you try, sweet, to tell me what it is?"

He never forgot the despairing face raised to his, the shadow of such unutterable sorrow in the dark eyes, the quivering of the pale lips, the tears that rained down her face—it was such a change from the radiant, happy girl of but a few minutes ago that he could hardly believe it was the same Pauline.

He bent over her as though he would fain kiss away the fast falling tears; but she shrank from him.

"Do not touch me, Vane!" she cried; "I am not worthy. I had forgotten; in the happiness of loving you, and knowing that I was beloved, I had forgotten it—my own deed has dishonored me! We must part, for I am not worthy of you."

He took both her hands in his own, and his influence over her was so great that even in that hour she obeyed him implicitly, as though she had been a child.

"You must let me judge, Pauline," he said, gently. "You are mine by right of the promise you gave me a few minutes since—the promise to be my wife; that makes you mine—no one can release you from it. By virtue of that promise you must trust me, and tell me what you have done."

While Sir Vane was studying her as the most difficult problem he had ever met with, he heard from Miss Hastings the story of her life.

(To be continued.)

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