

And laughing at his mother's, "Oly Bbd!" he made for the window again. And as he did so, a carriage came in sight, rolling along the drive a little distance from the house.

"There is the carriage coming for me, said Ida Valor. "Thank you for that song," she said, in a quiet voice that spoke more than a thousand gaspings.

"Are you really grateful?" he asked, repeating his question in a voice as low as her own.

She looked up without replying.

"Yes? Then, if you are not too tired, let me walk home with you."

"I am not too tired," she said, dropping her eyes beneath his gaze, "but you—"

"Could walk to Land's End and back," he said, finishing her question with a smile and a flash of his dark eyes that brought the roses for a second to the lovely face beside him.

CHAPTER V.

RODERICK GROWS BLOQUENT.

"This bud of love, by Summer's ripening breath,
May prove a beauteous flower when next we meet."

"Good night, good night, parting in such sweet sorrow,
That I shall say good-night till it be morrow."

Roderick could see the bronze of Ida's hair as it it were sunlight, so clearly and powerfully did the moon shine upon them as they started on their way to the Vale.

"Are you well wrapped up?" asked Roderick, drawing her thin shawl more closely round her.

"Well wrapped up!" she repeated with a sunny laugh; "and the night so hot that the trees wish themselves without leaves!"

"It is hot!" assented Roderick, lifting his hat and shaking his hair; "but I'm always anxious about woman at night, Ida. You've been sitting in the drawing-room in a low dress, and now you turn out in the open air with no extra covering but a loose shawl and a flimsy piece of muslin underneath, that I could blow to the end of the earth with a single puff."

The girl laughed.

"What do you know about ladies' dresses?" she said, looking up at him with a slight blush, and a trembling in her dark eyes.

"Nothing," said Roderick, with a smile, "and less of women themselves," he added, "Do you know, Ida, you puzzle me; I watch your face sometimes for half an hour together, and I can never tell whether you are joking or in earnest. Sometimes when you say something very seriously, I think— Ah, now she is in earnest, but the next moment your face breaks into a smile, and your eyes dance, and I give it up as a waste of time to try and make you out," and he laughed his short laugh, which was echoed by the silvery one of the girl's.

"You think me frivolous?" she said, looking at him with anything but a frivolous look.

Rod stopped short, and laying his hand upon her arm, looked down into her eyes.

They had halted in the midst of a clump of trees, through which the full moon shone in threads of silver, touching them and bathing itself in a clear stream that ran through the vale and laddled at their feet.

"Cousin Ida," he said, "I think you perfect!" She flushed and tried to smile—

"Ah, Rod, you do know little of women indeed!" she said, with a poor attempt at raillery.

"I know very little of anything," he said, gravely, "but I know enough to feel that."

She turned her face away from his dark, earnest eyes, and looked down at the stream.

For a few moments they remained silent, the youth's hand still clasping the girl's arm, the moon lighting up her beautiful face with a softened light that rendered it most tenderly lovely.

"Hark," she said, "it is striking ten—we must go, mamma will be anxious."

"Stay a few moments longer, Ida," said Rod, his hand tightening upon her arm. "Lady Valor would trust you with me although I am only a boy."

She looked up at him with a glance of reproach, and then felt her eyes riveted to his; they were dark and beautiful as hers, and shining with a light that made her heart throb fast with a feeling she did not understand.

"Besides," he added, "this is perhaps the last time you will walk through the woods with me."

She started a little, and her eyes opened with surprise, and certainly not pleasure; but she answered, with a shy little laugh—

"You mean that you are so tired of this one that you will take care the carriage is kept for the future?"

"No I don't," said Rod, with a slight frown. "You know I don't. I mean that I shall leave the Hall soon, perhaps to-morrow, at a moment's notice. Sir Harry has purchased me a commission."

The girl's face flushed, and then went pale, but she turned her face away, and looked at the stream.

"So—so soon?" she said, in a low voice.

"Yes," said Roderick, "and Sir Harry would say, 'The sooner the better.'"

She looked up at him for an instant with a glance of reproach.

"It is true," he said, "and my fault too," he added. "Sir Harry is tired of my racketting, and I am tired of his lecturing. I should be glad to leave the Hall, cousin Ida, but for my mother, for, excepting old Leo, she is the only one who cares for me, but—" and he stopped.

"But?" asked Ida's eyes.

He took her other hand and held her at arm's length, looking down into her eyes, eagerly.

"But for leaving you, Ida!—You don't care," he went on in a low voice, and hurriedly. "You will miss me for a day, until some other fellow as stupid as I am comes for you to laugh at—but I— Oh! Ida, I love you, and it makes me feel broken-hearted to go away for years—perhaps for ever—who knows!"

The girl's face kept its calmness for a moment bravely, then the perfect lips quivered, and broke into a sob, the deep eyes filled with tears, and the lovely head drooped like a broken lily.

Rod's hands trembled, and his eyes blazed as, his breath coming fast and hot, he caught her trembling frame to his breast.

"Why, Ida!" he said, "are you so sorry I am going?"

She said never a word, only the white fingers caught at the edge of his waistcoat and clung there.