

handsome face. It gave Leah a sense of things gone wrong in the world. Dick Mason had always seemed like one of themselves. That Kitty could bring that pained look into his eyes was the last thing she would ever have dreamed.

He came and bent over her chair with an air of confident friendliness that to a looker-on might have seemed to have a tender meaning of its own.

"What does it mean? Does she care for that man?"

"I don't know. I'm all adrift. Take me home, Dick. No one will miss me."

But one man at least missed her, and found the zest quite gone from his evening. He got himself out of the house, and taking all his chances in the malarial damp of the summer night, came to a conclusion as the gray dawn crept up the east.

"He never shall have her. Good fellow as he is, he is no more worthy of her than—I am. But I can understand her, thank Heaven, and he never will."

And "he" was Dick Mason, and the "her" Leah Allen.

A month slid by. Mason haunted the house, and Holland's evenings away were the exception. Mason was sulky, Holland cool, watchful, non-committal, Leah silent, and Kitty as brilliant and uncertain as a glancing flame.

"If we were young ladies of leisure, it might be amusing. As it is, does the game pay for the candle?" Kitty said.

They were sewing at midnight, to make up for the afternoon and evening hours. Mason had stopped on his way home from the bank, and had staid to tea. With the twilight Holland had come in.

"It eball pay," answering her own question. "And George Holland is the stake," with a hard laugh and tightening of the lips.

Leah did not answer.

"Not that I care," looking her sister in the face. "If he asks you, Leah, I shall be glad. It doesn't matter much, only it seems to be me."

"Yes," Leah assented.

They were not girls to waste words. Matters went on as before. If Kitty drove with Holland one day, and came back to find Mason sitting gloomily beside Leah, why, it was Leah's turn next day, and Mason had the comfort of spending the time in trying to please an absent-minded, preoccupied young woman who seemed not to know either his mind or her own.

Kitty's black dress was in strings; the white bunting was no longer fresh.

"It ought to have lasted another year," Leah said, with regretful emphasis.

"Blessed old dud! It was that dress that procured us the honor of Mr. Holland's friendship, as he tells me once in three-days. He has likened you to every thing from a calla lily to the Sphinx. It ought to have been you, Leah, I think."

"Do you mean—" quickly.

"No, I don't. He is quite as inscrutable as he was the first day he came here. I wish for Dick's sake he would speak and have it over with."

"For Dick's sake! Kitty, do you care for Dick?"

Kitty's fingers trembled a little over the rent she was darning.

"Care for him? Of course I do. I hope I am good Christian enough to care for all human kind;" and then her voice broke. "What is the use? I know what you mean, Leah. Girls as poor as we are can't indulge in the luxury of 'caring' for a poor man. George Holland has money and is respectable—O, deadly respectable!—and if he asks me to marry him, I shall say yes."

"But, Kitty," hesitatingly, "if you love Dick—"

"That has nothing to do with it. And I don't at all know that Dick loves me. Besides, you said it yourself, you would never marry a poor man."

"But this is different."

"Don't talk about it any more," taking up her work and speaking with cold decision.

"Suppose I should marry Dick—I mean in the event of his asking me—what would become of mother and you?"

Leah said no more.

That afternoon George Holland's black horses stood again at the door. Leah was coming down the staircase as he ran up the steps to the open door.

"It is a lovely day."

"Lovely," with regretful eyes going beyond him into the afternoon brightness. He saw the wistful look.

"Come and see how pleasant it is on the lake road."

She hesitated a little. Play now meant work by night. But Kitty loved Dick Mason, and if it was true that there must be a sacrifice in the family; and perhaps Kitty might be wrong in her opinion of his preference. She doubted sometimes if Kitty understood him thoroughly. As for her, she loved no one; and then her heart beat hard again.

It took only a breath or two for that and the half-desperate resolve to save Kitty if any womanly art could do it. She raised her eyes to his face—those soft, dark eyes—with all her trouble showing in them. He could not read their meaning; he saw only the shadows.

"You look as if a little of the out of doors would not hurt you," he said.

"Thank you. I will go. You will go in to mother and Kitty?"

"No. Thanks. I will stop here. Pardon me—I forbid a toilet," as she turned to mount the stairs again. "We cannot afford the time, you know."

So Leah's shade-hat went on with the afternoon dress—a white one with inexpensive Hamburg trimmings. At the door a cluster of roses, the very last of the season, burned their fragrant red fire. She paused to gather them. The stem was tough; she stooped and bit the stalk with her sharp little teeth. She uttered a low exclamation, and drew her handkerchief across her lips. A thorn had brought the blood.

"Did you hurt yourself?"

"It is nothing," with a short laugh. "One has to take the thorns with the roses;" but the commonplace did not sound so commonplace as she said it.

Half the cluster she twisted into her belt. The other half was fastened at her throat. There was nothing shrinking nor repellent in her manner to-day. He felt it in a half-unconscious fashion. The snow maiden was suddenly alive, with life in her eyes and warm blood burning in her cheeks. Once before he had seen the transfiguration, but that was under the spell of music and—Dick Mason's presence. He looked at the red roses on her breast, and then into her face, with a sense of the harmony between the woman and her flowers.

To all seeming he was busy with his horses' head-gear. She did not know that he had looked at her, even. He seemed to her always cold, unimpulsive, self-absorbed.

Out through the summer afternoon among the shadows of the wood roads to the blue edge of the lake among the hills. Clearly it was his duty to offer some remark to the lady by his side, but for three miles not a word was said. Three miles of silence. Leah stirred a little restively.

"Your village is a pretty place," he said, absently.

"In summer—yes."

"And not in winter? You do not like the country in winter?"

"I know nothing of anything else. This place has always been my home."

"And you would not care for the city?" waking up to the situation, apparently.

Leah was in a high-strung mood that exaggerated every thing. She was resentfully conscious of his hesitation, his absent-mindedness, the effort with which he brought himself back to her presence.

"It was Kitty he wanted," she thought. "And Kitty doesn't love him, and she does love Dick Mason."

He was saying, "I can fancy, Miss Leah, that you would find your element there. Music and color and life—the intense, sympathetic life of a crowd. You would like it after a little."

"I should be lost, I am afraid," smiling faintly. "I belong among the half hues, the negatives, I think."

"Who told you that? I don't know of a woman in the world more emphatically capable of deep tones than yourself."

He was quite awake now.

"It is rather unfortunate," dryly. "I am not likely to come in contact with much that this place does not afford."

"When the fairy prince comes—you'll scorn the reputation, but you are dreaming now—you'll be 'o'er the hills and far away' into all kinds of wonders."