

preaching in the presence of her majesty downstairs. If you say another word, Petite Reine, I will drop Monsieur Frank and take up Monsieur Larry!"

"Do," says Reine; "I wish you would. I promise not to interfere there. He cannot hurt you, and I am quite sure you cannot hurt him. The man is as hard as stone."

It was quite evident Mr. Longworth was still not absolutely a foe-forgiven. Mrs. Windsor, with a more gracious face and bearing than usual, awaited them in the dining room. It was the first time they had met that day. Madame had breakfasted in her room, and so had Miss Landelle. Had they recovered from the fatigue of the picnic? Marie, she was glad to see, had escaped the sun scatheless, but Reine was sunburned. It was something quite out of the common for her to notice her younger granddaughter at all, except in the most casual manner.

Dinner passed. Marie always exerted herself and made talk in her grandmother's presence, and no one can do it more fluently or more gracefully when she chooses to try. Reine never chooses. She knows Mrs. Windsor dislikes her, and if the truth must be told, cordially returns that dislike.

Dinner ends. Reine walks to the open window, and looks out. The clear sunshine that has lasted so long is gone. The day is gray, windless, threatening rain. One or two large drops patter and fall on the flags as she looks. As she stands dreamily gazing at the glimpse of lead-coloured sky seen between the trees, Mrs. Windsor, in her slow, modulated voice, speaks.

"There is a matter of some moment upon which I wish to speak to you, young ladies," she begins; "it concerns the disposal of my fortune. Mademoiselle Reine, may I claim the honour of your attention?"

Marie, reclining gracefully indolent in a chair, turning over the leaves of an illustrated book, pauses and turns to her grandmother. Reine comes forward a step or two, and stands leaning lightly against the low marble chimney.

"I told you on the evening of your arrival," says Mrs. Windsor, "that I had made my will and disposed of all I possess to my friend, Mr. Longworth.

That he declined the gift did not alter my resolution; but last night, coming home on the steamer, he and I talked it over, and a new idea, in which conflicting interests need no more clash, has dawned upon us both. He desired me to inform you of it. It is that one of you two become the wife of Mr. Longworth."

CHAPTER XVII.

A BITTER STRUGGLE.

DEAD silence—dead, blank, unbroken silence. Reine looks stunned, absolutely stunned. Then anger, amaze, defiance flame up, and flash from her dark eyes. She looks at Marie, but except that Marie has grown a shade paler, that her delicate lips tighten and compress, her face does not change.

"I need hardly say Mr. Longworth has not fallen in love with either of you," pursues Mrs. Windsor, and as she says it she turns, and almost pointedly addresses the elder sister; "that is an affair of the future, if necessary at all. Of course such a marriage reconciles any claim of blood you have upon me with my own inclinations. When he has chosen, and is prepared, he will speak. It is necessary for me to say what I desire your answer to be?"

Again Reine looks at Marie, fiery scorn and wrath in her face, passionate rebellion and defiance in her eyes.

"Speak! Fling back her insulting offer in her face," says that flaming glance.

But Marie's eyes are fixed on the white hands folded in her lap, her face tells absolutely nothing what she may feel.

"To young ladies brought up on French principles, as I presume you both have been," continues grandmother, in her most marked grand-duchess manner, "to accept the husband chosen for you must present itself as the most proper and correct thing possible. Mr. Longworth, I need not say, possesses in himself all that is likely to attract the fancy of the most romantic girl. He is handsome, he is gifted, his manners are perfect—he will be a husband whom any lady may be proud of. He is well disposed to make one of you his wife if you throw no obstacle in his way. And