

"A letter! How nice!" said Miss Letitia, looking towards the shelf. "John is as faithful in writing as if he were your lover."

"He is the best lover a woman can have," said Grace, as she busily sorted and arranged the flowers. "For my part, I ask nothing better than John."

"Let me arrange for you, while you read your letter," said Letitia, taking the flowers from her friend's hands.

Miss Grace took down the letter from the mantel-piece, opened and began to read it. Miss Letitia, meanwhile, watched her face, as we often carelessly watch the face of a person reading a letter.

Miss Grace was not technically handsome, but she had an interesting, kindly, sincere face; and her friend saw gradually a dark cloud rising over it, as one watches a shadow on a field.

When she had finished the letter, with a sudden movement she laid her head forward on the table among the flowers, and covered her face with her hands. She seemed not to remember that any one was present.

Letitia came up to her, and, laying her hand gently on her's, said, "What is it, dear?"

Miss Grace lifted her head, and said in a husky voice,—

"Nothing, only it is so sudden! John is engaged!"

"Engaged! to whom?"

"To Lillie Ellis."

"John engaged to Lillie Ellis?" said Miss Ferguson, in a tone of shocked astonishment.

"So he writes me. He is completely infatuated by her."

"How very sudden!" said Miss Letitia. "Who could have expected it? Lillie Ellis is so entirely out of the line of any of the women he has ever known."

"That's precisely what's the matter," said Miss Grace. "John knows nothing of any but good, noble women; and he thinks he sees all this in Lillie Ellis."

"There's nothing to her but her wonderful complexion," said Miss Ferguson, "and her pretty little coaxing ways; but she is the most utterly selfish, heartless little creature that ever breathed."

"Well, *she* is to be John's wife," said Miss Grace, sweeping the remainder of the flowers into her apron; "and so ends my life with John. I might have known it would come to this. I must make arrangements at once for another house and home. This house, so much, so dear to me, will be nothing to her; and yet she must be its mistress," she added, looking round on everything in the room, and then bursting into tears.

Now, Miss Grace was not one of the crying sort, and so this emotion went to her friend's heart. Miss Letitia went up and put her arms round her.

"Come, Gracie," she said, "you must not take it so seriously. John is a noble, manly fellow. He loves you, and he will always be master of his own house."