

learned that she was beloved; but for her they were full of sweet significance.

Captain Barringer's stay at Belair was brought to a premature close by an imperative summons to join his regiment in India. Any but a very observant spectator of the parting between him and Frederica would have characterised that ceremony as a piece of polite frigidity; but it had occult signs of its own, unnoted by the world, in that tender lingering pressure of the hand; in that one flashing glance of love from the soldier's dark luminous eyes, artfully veiled next moment under their long lashes; in those two little words, "Dinna forget," whispered under the breath, and instinct with a precious meaning of their own. And then he was gone.

"Dinna forget!" Would she ever forget him? whispered Frederica to herself. No; never—never!

Two uneventful years had come and gone since Captain Barringer left Belair; but neither the distractions of half a season in London (town did not agree with Lady Spencelaugh's health), nor the quieter pleasures of country-life, had dulled the edge of Frederica's memory. Day after day she lived over again, in thought, the words, the looks, the tones of the gay young soldier; and without being in the least melancholy or loveless, she clung with all woman's devotion to the fetish she had set up in her own heart, saying to herself, times without number, that it must be good and true because it was so beautiful. She heard of her idol frequently, but not from him; certain law proceedings, which the baronet had kindly consented to watch in the interest of his young friend, necessitating frequent communications between the captain and Sir Philip; and the letters of the former never concluded without some message to Miss Spencelaugh, which the baronet always delivered with perfect good faith in their humorous unveracity; but wherefrom Frederica contrived to elicit a deeper meaning than the mere words themselves seemed to convey. In one of his earlier epistles, Captain Barringer had declared his intention of selling out at the end of three years, and coming home to settle; an intimation which, to Frederica's ears, could have but one interpretation—then would his love, hitherto unspoken, reveal itself in words, then would he claim her as his own for ever.

But it was all over now—the bright dream which she had cherished with such tender faithfulness. Love's little comedy was played out; the lamps were extinguished; the curtain had come down with a run; and the chill gray daylight of reality was poured over the scene of so many vanished illusions. In the first sharp pain of her loss, she thought herself more deeply stricken than she was in reality; she knew little of the gentle power of Time to heal far worse wounds than hers; but deemed that all her life must henceforth be as blank and dreary as she felt the present to be. Her woman's pride was deeply wounded to find how easily she had allowed herself to be fooled by one whose only object had been to while away a few idle hours; but she held her crushed heart bravely, and uttered no plaint; and never had her eyes shone more brightly, nor her dark beauty flushed to a rarer loveliness, than on that sunny afternoon when she rode seaward from Belair, with the dearest hopes of her young life quenched within her for ever.

A strong tide was rolling magnificently in when Frederica reined up her mare on the summit of the great rock known as Martell's Leap. She took off her hat, and let the breeze play among her hair, and listened to the roar of the waves as they shivered on the beach three hundred feet below; with eyes that followed dreamily in the wake of some outward-bound ship, whose white sails gleamed ghost-like through the haze that veiled the horizon a mile or two away. She watched till the ship could be seen no longer, and then turned Zuleika's head inland, and rode gently homeward by way of St. David's Valley, and through the fruitful champaign country that stretched southward from Belair. Coming up with Sir Philip in the park, leading his cob by the bridle, which had fallen lame, she dismounted, and took her uncle's

arm, while Mr. Bevis turned off in the direction of the stables with Zuleika and the cob.

"Your roses are quite brilliant this afternoon," said the old man gallantly.—"Oh, been as far as Martell's Leap, have you? Far better than dawdling in the house, my dear; only be careful you don't let Zuleika take you too near the edge, or the catastrophe that gave its name to the place might unfortunately be repeated. Let us rest here for a minute or two; I have something particular to say to you, and I could hardly have a quieter spot than this to say it in."

Frederica's heart sank within her; she foreboded but too surely what it was that her uncle wished to say to her. They had left the main avenue of the park, and had taken a by-path through the shrubbery which would bring them more quickly to the house, and had now reached a little secluded nook among the greenery—a semicircle of softest turf, planted round with evergreens, with here and there a rustic seat and in the midst a tall terminal figure of Hymen in white marble, placed there by some previous owner of Belair, to make sacred the grove where he had wooed and won the lady whom he afterwards made his wife.

The baronet and his niece sat down on a curiously carved bench, shaded by an immense laurel from the rays of the westering sun. Sir Philip sat without speaking for a minute or two, tapping his boot absently with his riding-whip—a tall, white-haired handsome old man, but very frail and delicate-looking; with manners that were marked by a certain kindly, old-world courtliness of tone not often met with now a days.

"You remember, Freddy," he began at last, "my speaking to you, some time ago, respecting the union which I wished to bring about between my friend Duplessis and yourself? You have not forgotten what passed at that time?"

"I have not forgotten, uncle."

"That is well. I forbore to press the subject because I saw that it was distasteful to you, but none the less has it dwelt in my mind ever since, and I cannot rest till I have brought it once more before your attention, and—and, in short, done all that lies in my power to induce you to view it in a more favourable light. I am an old man, and my time in this world is short—nay, my dear, it is as I tell you; I say it calmly and seriously. When spring next comes round, I shall hardly be among you; and my medical man, if he chose could tell you the same thing. You have been as dear to me, Freddy, as any daughter could have been, and I am naturally anxious to see you comfortably settled, and with a home of your own, while I am still here to look after your interests. Lady Spencelaugh and you have never agreed overwell together; and when I shall be gone, Gaston will be master of Belair, and the old house will hardly seem like a home to you. We have no near relatives; and the secluded life which the state of my health has compelled me to lead, has precluded the formation of many intimate friendships. Under these circumstances, the consideration of your future has naturally been a source of some anxiety to me; and to see you happily married, dear, would lift a great weight from my mind. When your father lay dying, he took me by the hand, and said: "When I am gone, Phil, you must look after my little girl. I leave her in your hands. Bring her up religiously, and when she is old enough, find her a good man for a husband; and may heaven deal by you as you deal by her!" I loved you at first because you were a wee little orphan and my brother's child, but soon you grew as dear to me as though you were my own; and I have striven to carry out poor Arthur's wishes to the best of my ability."

"Dear uncle!" said Frederica, with tearful eyes, "Papa himself could not have done more for me than you have done."

"For the last half-dozen years," resumed Sir Philip, "I have been hoping that of your own accord, and without a word from me, you would pick out some worthy gentleman on whom to bestow your hand and heart—and of such suitors you have had more than one or two to whom I could have given you with every confidence.

But time goes on, and still Endymion comes not, and to all others Diana is cold as an icicle."

He took her hand fondly, and stroked it gently between his. "Four months ago," he went on, "my friend, Henri Duplessis, came to me, and asked my permission to address you on a subject very near to his heart. The permission he asked for I gave him readily, knowing no man to whom I would sooner intrust the happiness of my darling than to him. He spoke to you, and his suit was rejected, and in that respect he only met the fate of others who had ventured before him. For his sake, I departed from the course I laid down for myself long ago—not to interfere by word or look in such matters. I hinted to you how happy it lay in your power to make both him and me, could you see your way clearly to do so. My words distressed you, and I told you to consider them as unsaid. But again, to-day, I venture to plead once more the cause of my friend. Do not mistake me, however; I am not here at his request—he knows nothing of this. He bowed unobtrusively to your decision, and from that day to this the subject has never been mentioned between us; but, unless I misjudge him greatly, he is not a man whose feelings readily change. Ah, Freddy, if you could but learn to look favourably on him! He is a gentleman by birth and education—generous, handsome, and accomplished; and although he is not a rich man, that fact would not, I am sure, influence your inclinations in the slightest degree. That he is brave, both you and I have had ample proof, else he would not have risked his life to save mine as recklessly as he did that day in the Pyrenees. When a man reaches my age he seldom makes new friendships; but my heart seemed to warm to Henri Duplessis, from the moment my eyes opened on his pleasant face, bent anxiously over me, in that little *auberge* among the hills; had it not been for his bold spirit and strong arm, they would never have opened again on earth. Ah, Freddy, Freddy, if you could but learn to like him!"

He was still stroking her hand tenderly between his withered palms. There was a far-away look in Frederica's eyes as she sat, almost as immovable as a statue, gazing out into the violet sky; but there was a bitter warfare going on in her heart.

"Would it make you so very happy, uncle, if I were to try to 'like' Mr. Duplessis a little?"

A bright eager light came into the old man's eyes, and his hands began all at once to tremble as he spoke. "Would it make me happy?" he said. "It would take away altogether my greatest earthly anxiety; it would cheer and gladden, far more than I can tell you, the few remaining days that are left me in this world, and crown my life with a happiness which I feel would be far greater than my deserts. Ah, darling, tell me that you will do this, and an old man's blessing will follow you through life!"

"I will strive to do as you wish, uncle," said Frederica.

He drew her face close to his, and kissed her fondly, and then turned away his head, for his eyes were dim, and he wanted time to recover himself.

"We will go home now, uncle, if you please," said Frederica. There was something in the tone of her voice which grated on his ears, and he peered anxiously into her face as he offered her his arm; and his heart sank a little, she looked so passionless and cold, with that stony far-away look in her eyes, as though she had caught a glimpse of the Gorgon's head in passing, and already the blight were falling upon her.

"Were I not as certain as a poor human being can be of anything," urged he, hastily, "that this step will ultimately conduce to your happiness, I would not persuade you to take it. Some day, dear, in the years to come, you will look and say: 'My old uncle did what he thought best for my happiness, and his judgment was not such a bad one after all.'—Henri will make you a true and loving husband—of that I am sure."

"Pardon me, uncle," said Frederica, "but you are putting a far more absolute construction on my words than I intended them to convey."

He laughed a pleased little laugh. "Well,