

weak—mad; I could not! Oh, Florence!" he cried, abruptly, "How will you bear it?"

"I can bear anything, papa, but seeing you suffer, while I am ignorant of the cause," she rejoined, firmly.

He strove to speak, but failed.

"I cannot!" he exclaimed. "When I look on your bright beauty, and think of the future, the sentence chokes me."

"Papa," Florence entreated, prayerfully, "I implore you speak! You terrify me! Surely the truth would be less painful."

"The truth! My child, never, never could you guess it!" he moaned. "We are ruined!"

"Ruined!" she gasped, in consternation. Oh, papa!"

"Penniless—nay, worse, Florence, in debt! Heaven preserve you beneath this sad reverse!" he cried, as his head fell upon his bosom.

The grief died out of her face. A moment before, a girl, Florence, at the sight of her parent's trouble, became a firm, brave woman. As she looked on her father's agitated features, she felt that there was something worse than beggary—the illness of those we love. In the midst of all came the recollection of their guests, and a consciousness that their reverse of fortune must not reach them that night. Soothing her father to some appearance of calmness, she told him this, and, as she must return to the ball-room, entreated him to wait there until her return, but not tell her more till afterward, lest her strength should fail.

"Florence!" cried Mr. Edwards, regarding her with proud surprise, "you shame me—a man! Although my trouble is for you, yet I am broken down and you so calm—so brave! If you can thus bear it, so will I!"

Forcing a smile to her lips, she embraced him.

"Yes, papa," she said, cheerfully, "it will not be so very difficult, since we bear it together." And gliding away, Florence returned with a heavy heart and artificial smiles to the ball-room, ringing with laughter and music, and played the hostess to the guests, excusing her father's absence through sudden

indisposition, and gave Mr. Harcourt the waltz she had promised.

Who can fathom a woman's noble endurance and fortitude under suffering. Those who can may comprehend the exquisite pleasure with which Florence heard the last carriage roll down the avenue, then, giving the servants orders to retire to rest, she crept to her father's side, and clasping his hand in hers, said quietly,—

"Now, papa, we are alone, please tell me everything."

He complied, and a few words sufficed. After all those years a nearer relative had appeared, and not only what they had, but that that they should return every dollar expended since his possession. Florence listened silently; she never spoke till the recital was concluded. Her father looked towards her interrogatively; then her composed tones startled him. She said,—

"We must learn to bear it, papa. Have you heard the heir's name?"

"Yes," he answered, looking uneasily at her.

"Of course he is a stranger?"

"No."

"No?"

"No," he reiterated, averting his eyes.

She gazed at him wonderingly, then abruptly asked,—

"Papa, do I know him?"

He hesitated, then answered in a low tone,—

"My darling, yes."

"It is——" she exclaimed, with sudden fear,

"Hamilton Miller," he rejoined.

"What!" she cried. "The man whose love I rejected?"

"The same, dearest. Maddened by disappointment, and eager for revenge, it appears he held our name up to jest and ridicule wherever he went. In company once with a lawyer who knew our antecedents, he told Miller of them, and the advertisement for next of kin. 'If this be so,' said the listener, rising suddenly, 'If he who died was George Harris, a Philadelphia merchant, then I am one step nearer kin than Walter Edwards, and his wealth is mine!' Eagerly he and the lawyer consulted. He produced the proofs of identity, and I have seen them to-night—they are true. Ha—