

"Thank you," answered the bride-elect, with a very unaffected faltering in her voice, for she did love this man, curious as it may seem—in spite of her treachery toward him.

"I shall value your gift above all others, believe me."

And Standfield smiled somewhat grimly.

"G. od-bye, God bless you, my dear little friend!" was his whispered farewell to Judith, as he wrung her hand at parting, and from her dry, fevered lips came a faint, trembling—"Good-bye!"

That night, with her fair head bowed on the low sill of her bed room window, Judith Brown sobbed out her farewell to him whom her heart acknowledged as its king—farewell to all that made the beauty and joy of her life, telling herself that henceforth she must live for duty alone—never, never would perfect joy be hers again; and the bright stars in the heavens looked pityingly down upon the poor heart-broken child; but it seemed as though they twinkled mischievously at that idea of living for stern duty alone—preposterous!

## CHAPTER X.

"LET THIS BE A SIGN BETWEEN US."

IT is just three weeks since Miss Laurie's marriage and departure from Bonny Dale, where peace and quiet once more reign supreme, to the entire satisfaction of all its present inmates. Mr. Standfield has not returned to Eastville, and is not now expected to return, as Mr. Littleworth informs Judith one afternoon as they saunter idly through the woods on their way from a fishing expedition—though it may be mentioned here that Mr. Littleworth's basket is entirely empty, notwithstanding that they have spent the whole afternoon on the banks of Dale River, whither they had gone with the avowed object of catching some fish for breakfast next morning.

As they come near the falls they both stop and stand for a few minutes idly gazing at the falling, dashing water, and the cooing streamlet that runs along the bottom of the ravine.

"I love this spot," says the girl, out-spreading her little sun-burnt hands as she says it.

"So do I," responds Mr. Littleworth, promptly. "I love it for the sake of all the happy hours I've spent here with you, my darling; and because it was here you promised to be my wife," and he lays down his basket and rod and comes closer to her.

"That is simply romantic nonsense; and I am surprised at a man of common sense giving utterance to it," says Miss Brown, austere; but she shinks ever so slightly as she feels his arm steal around her waist.

"Are you?" laughs he, giving the little waist a gentle squeeze. "Why, to hear you talk one might take you for a prim old maid of forty or thereabouts, instead of the small child you are."

"I am almost eighteen, and *not* small," Miss Brown says with extreme dignity.

But he takes no notice of this assertion and smiles down at her, putting all his heart into his adoring eyes, while she looks coldly away.

"Judy darling," he says, tenderly, "do you know that you have never yet given me one kiss, and we have been engaged more than a month."

Silence.

"Will you give me one now, Judy?"

"I do not like kissing; I told you once before," answers she very coldly now.

"Why don't you?"

"Why! what a foolish question! how should I know why?"

"Have you ever cared to kiss anyone?"

"Well, we were never very demonstrative at home; but I did like to be kissed by papa, because I loved him so dearly."

"And do you not love me a little, Judy?" asks the young man, wistfully—so wistfully that she is touched in spite of herself, and turning slowly, lays her hands on his shoulders, and with grave, tender grace, kisses him on the lips; and though his heart thrills at the touch of her lips, he knows too well that she does not love him.

"Thank you," he says, softly; foolish fellow, he is so intensely grateful.

"Do you know, Judy, I used to be fiercely jealous of old Standfield; I thought you cared for him a little, and then he was first on the field, you know."

"How very absurd," says Judith, coolly, stooping down as she speaks to pluck a fern, which she immediately proceeds to tear into little pieces. "But Mr. Standfield is not old."

"Well, perhaps not *old*, exactly, but not youthful enough to be the lover of a baby like you, eh pet?"

"No one was ever so foolish as to imagine him my lover, except yourself"—laughingly—"and I wish, Mr. Littleworth, you would cease jesting about my being so young; if I am such a baby I wonder you want to marry me."

"My dearest Judith! I never dreamed that my doing so could possibly offend you; most women like being thought young, whether they are so or not."

"Do they?" returns Miss Brown, frigidly.

"Dear Judy, I am—" begins the young man, helplessly, but she interrupts him stormily—

"Oh! please do not *dear* me every word you speak!"

This is the last straw. Mr. Littleworth succumbs.

"I think we had better be going home," he says abruptly, picking up his rod and basket. And in silence they plod along side by side; he in no very amiable frame of mind, judging from the ominous frown that clouds his usually sunny brow; while the wilful girl glances at him now and again with contrite eyes, regretting her petulant words more bitterly every moment. They take a short cut across some fields, and as he helps her over a fence, she lays her hand on his arm and falteringly asks forgiveness for her ill-temper.

"It was simply horrid of me, I know Jack; and you are always so kind and patient with me, far more so than I deserve."

Jack does not speak, but he takes the little penitent in his arms and kisses her twice. So the little storm blows over and there is peace again; though it is doubtful how long it will continue, for poor Jack's wooing is rather stormy, and such scenes as that I have just described are of very frequent occurrence.

"By the way," says he, as they approach the house, "have you heard that Mr. Standfield has been appointed manager at headquarters? He will not be back here now; Mr. Graham will continue at the Eastville branch."

"I had not heard of it," Judith says, and wonders that Jack does not notice the strangeness of her voice. Her heart is woefully heavy and she has a wild longing to throw herself down on the ground and weep out the passionate sorrow that fills her soul and makes her almost hate the man at her side, whom, she knows she has wronged in promising to be his wife, while her whole heart is given to another man.

"Will you come in and have tea with us this evening?" she asks, mechanically, and is conscious of an intense relief when he refuses on the score of an engagement in the village. When he is gone Judith blindly grasps her way up-stairs to her own bed-room and locking herself in is seen no more that evening.

One morning a week later, Jack wended his way to Bonny Dale with a heavy heart and a gloomy face. It was nearly two months since he and Judith became engaged, and during that time nothing had been definitely arranged about the marriage, although it was understood that Jack was expected in England before winter. Of course, it was Judy's fault; she absolutely refused to hear of an early marriage; and her lover perceiving how it annoyed her had weakly abstained from the subject, hoping that by patient wooing he might yet win her heart, and lead her, a willing bride, to the altar. So he wrote from time to time, putting off his return home, where his parents were so anxiously awaiting their beloved son's return. Jack was even prepared to disappoint them and remain in Canada till the following spring, and then take his young wife home with him, his father and mother not having opposed his engagement to Judith, although they were bitterly disappointed at his not choosing the fair young English girl, whom they had long hoped to see at the Grange as Jack's wife.

But now there was no help for it. He must return to England at once; and that meant parting from Judith for an indefinite time. He had that morning received a cable message bidding him come home at once if he wished to