

'She seemed so interested in you, and in Riverside,' said Rosamond, 'and even proposed coming home with me—'

Mr. Browning started suddenly, and as suddenly a coal snapped out upon the carpet. This was an excuse for his movement, and Rosamond continued, 'She thought, though, you might not care to see her, being a stranger, but she sent you her love, and— You are cold, ain't you, Mr. Browning? You shiver like a leaf. Ben said you'd had the ague.'

Rosamond closed the door and commenced again. 'Where was I? Oh, I know. She said if you were not a confirmed bachelor she would try her powers on you. "She was irresistible in her diamonds," she bade me tell you. But have you an ague chill, really? or what makes your teeth chatter so? Shall I ring for more coal?'

'No, Rosamond, no. Fire does not warm me; I shall better soon.'

Rosamond pitied him, he looked so white and seemed to be suffering so much, and she remained silent for a time. Then remembering the note, she handed it to him, and turning toward the fire, stooped down to fix a bit of coal which was in danger of dropping from the grate. While in this attitude a cry between a howl of rage and a moan of anguish fell upon her ear—her shoulders were grasped by powerful hands, and looking up she saw Mr. Browning, his face distorted with passion and his flashing eyes riveted upon the ring glittering in that firelight. Seizing her hand, he wrenched it from her finger, and glanced at the name—then, swift as thought, placed it upon the marble hearth and crushed it with his heel.

'It's mine—you've broken it,' cried Rosamond, but he did not heed her, and gathering up the pieces, he hurled them into the grate—then, pale as ashes, sank panting into the nearest chair.

Rosamond was thunder-struck. She did not suppose he had had time to read the note and never dreaming there was any connection between that and his strange conduct, she believed him to be raving mad, and her first impulse was to fly. Her second thought however, was, 'I will not leave him. He has these fits often, now, I know, and that is why he sent for me. He knew I could quiet him, and I will.'

So Rosamond stayed, succeeding so far in soothing him that his eyes lost their savage gleam, and were suffused with a look of unnatural tenderness when they rested on her face. He did not ask her how she came by the ring for he knew it had been sent as an insult to him, and he felt a glow of satisfac-

tion in knowing that it was blackening on the grate. Ben's voice was now heard in the hall, as king if they intended staying there all night, and in a whisper Mr. Browning bade Rosamond go down and apologize for him. She accordingly descended to the parlour, telling Mrs. Van Vechten that her brother was too much indisposed to come down, and wished to be excused. Mrs. Van Vechten bowed coolly, and taking a book of prints, busied herself for awhile in examining them; then the book dropped from her hand—her head fell back—her mouth fell open, and Ben, who was anxiously watching her, knew by unmistakable sounds that she was fast asleep. It was now his time, and faithfully did he improve it, devoting himself so assiduously to Rosamond, that she was glad when a snore, louder and more prolonged than any which had preceded it started the lady herself, and produced symptoms of returning consciousness.

The next day, and the next, it was the same, and at the expiration of a week, Ben had determined either to marry Rosamond Leyton, or go to the Crimean War, this last being the bugbear with which he intended frightening his mother into a consent. He hardly dared disobey her openly for fear of disinheritor, and he would rather she should express her willingness to receive Miss Leyton as her daughter. He accordingly startled her one day by asking her to sanction his intended proposal to the young girl. Nothing could exceed Mrs. Van Vechten's amazement and contempt. She would never consent, and if Ben persisted in making so disgraceful an alliance, she would disinherit him at once. Ben knew she was in earnest, and so fell back upon the Crimean war as a last resort. 'He would go immediately—would start that very day for New York—he had money enough to carry him there,' and he painted so vividly 'death on a distant battle-field, with a ferocious Russian rifling his trousers' pocket,' that his mother began to cry, though she still refused to relent.

'Choose, mother, choose,' said he. 'It's almost car time—Rosamond or the war,' and he drew on his heavy boots.

'Oh, Benjamin, you will kill me dead.'

'I know it. I mean to. Rosamond or the war!' and he buttoned up his coat preparatory to a start.

'Do, Ben, listen to reason.'

'I won't—I won't;—Rosamond or the war! I shall rush into the thickest of the fight, and be killed the first fire, of course, and black is so unbecoming to you.'

'Stop, I entreat. You know you are