

And as she stands—as she looks, some one comes up the path from the street, and it is Sir George Valentine, and alone!

The little limpid baby waves slip up and down over the white pebbles at her feet, the slanting afternoon sunlight gilds her pale face and golden hair as she stands—a very, very pale face now. The pang is so sharp, so cruel, so utterly unbearable for a moment! He has not come. She sinks down on the low garden wall, and covers her face with her hands. He has not come! At last she is alone with her pain. But, oh! she has so hoped, so longed for his coming, so hungered for the sight of his face, the sound of his voice. All her life she has loved him and known it not—it seems to her she has never known how she has loved him until this bitter hour. 'Rene—my love—Rene!' she says, and stretches out her arms passionately; 'why have you not come?'

Have her words evoked him? A hurried step, a voice, a call, 'Snowball!' a voice that would call her back from the dead almost it seems to her, in the wild, incredulous joy of that moment. 'Dolores—my darling!' the voice says. And it is Rene who stands before her, who clasps her impetuously in his arms, Rene, who is looking down upon her with all his loyal, loving heart in his dark, radiant eyes. 'Dolores! my own, my dearest! Carissima mia! we meet all last!' he cries.

She slips for him, and sits down again on the garden wall, dizzily. Joy, rapture, amaze fill her. What she says is in a weak voice.

'I thought you were not going to come.'

He laughs, and seats himself beside her, possessing himself of the two small, fluttering hands in a strong, close clasp.

'Because Valentine came in first alone? I met old Tim at the gate, and of course had to stop a minute and shake hands with the dear old fellow. I just glanced in the parlour, kissed the bride, congratulated the bridegroom, inquired for you, and was directed here. I came—I saw—I have I conquered? Snowball, my little love, my life's darling, how good it seems to sit here beside you, to look at you, to listen to you once more!'

'I really thought you were not coming! In this supreme hour it is all Dolores, ever fluent and ready, can find to say, and even in saying that she cannot look him in the face. But, oh! the rapture, the unspeakable gladness that fills her heart as she sits.

'Thought I was not coming,' laughs Rene again, 'anima mia, it has been all I could do to keep from coming any time the past year. I held myself by force—sheer force of

will—away. It was too soon, out of consideration for you, but you do not know, you never can know, what the effort cost me. And those letters, few and far between, formal and friendly, I used to tear up a dozen drafts of each, in which my heart would creep out at the point of my pen. Thought I was not coming! Oh! you might have known me better than that. And now I have come, and for you, my long-lost love—never to leave you again—to take you with me, my own forever, when I go.'

What is Dolores, is any one, to say to such impetuous wooing as his? It sweeps away all before it.

Rene, silent habitually, can talk it seem when he likes.

'I have the programme all arranged. You are to listen, if you please. Madam Rene Macdonald, and to offer neither remonstrance nor objection. Our wedding takes place—well you shall name the day of course, but in June sometime, and there is to be no talk of elaborate trousseau or delay, because I have neither the time nor the inclination to listen. We will be married in the little church over there, and Pere Louis shall perform the ceremony. Then we go to Valentine for July and August, to Paris for September and the Autumn, and back to Rome, our home, Carina, in the early winter. I have all arranged, you understand, and if you know any just or lawful reason why it may not be carried out, you will be kind enough to state it now, or forever after hold your peace.'

'Some one is singing. Listen——' is Dolores still inconsequent reply; 'it is Iuno—has she not a charming voice?'

Through the open windows the tender refrain of the much sung love song, 'My Queen,' comes to the happy lovers sitting here.

When and how shall I earliest meet her?

What are the words that she first will say?

By what name shall I learn to greet her?

I know not now; it will come some day.

With this self-same sunlight shining upon her, shining down on her ringlets sheen.

She is standing somewhere—she I will honour. She that I wait for—my queen, my queen!

'She must be courteous, she must be holy.

Pure, sweet, and tender, the girl I love;

Whether her birth be humble or lowly,

I am no more than the angels above.

And I'll give my heart to my lady's keeping.

And ever her strength on mine shall lean,

And the stars shall ail and the saints be weeping.

Ere I cease to love her—my queen, my queen!

'And all this time,' says Rene, 'I have not asked you once, if you love me, my queen?'