

rowing-boat, urged along by the motion of her own resolute arms.

"Dearest Ethel, tell me why you are unhappy."

"Because I have been a fool," answered Ethel, recklessly, as she drew her fingers through the rippling water, apparently engrossed in watching the diamond sparkles; "because I have played with the noblest heart that ever throbbed and cast it from me. Now, do you wonder that I am miserable?"

Cora was silent for a few moments, her sweet, ingenuous nature could scarce comprehend the full extent of her friend's trials.

"You mean Ruthven Gray?" she said at length.

"Yes, I mean Ruthven Gray."

"Ethel, surely you never could have trifled with him?"

"I could—and I did. I think I must have been mad or infatuated, Cora. I think there are times when we seem rather to be under the dominion of evil spirits than acting according to our natures."

"He asked you to marry him, and you refused?"

"Yes."

"And now it is too late you have discovered that you were mistaken in your own feelings?"

"I have discovered that my life's happiness is blighted by my own act. Take care, Cora, we are drifting too near that island."

And through all the delicious hours of the August morning, jewelled with sunshine and musical with the low din of chiming oars, the two girls floated on—now passing through odorous belts of shadow, now skirting fairy islands.

"What time is it, Ethel?"

"Four o'clock; and there is a thunderstorm rising among those mountains. Look yonder, towards the west, Cora. We must row faster."

"If you rowed with fourteen hands instead of four, it would do no good," said wise little Cora, as she eyed the lurid, heavy-piled masses of vapour that were steadily rolling up above the horizon. "I don't know what we were dreaming of not to have noticed it before. No, we cannot reach home; we had better put into shore somewhere. There ought to be an old ruined tower not far from here, with a blighted pine tree hanging over it—and there it is, now: I thought so! pull, Ethel; the clouds are getting blacker every instant. Do you know, I've always longed for a real adventure, and I think it's coming now."

Ethel smiled. The exercise was bringing a soft carmine glow into her cheeks which became her wonderfully well.

"Let us sit here for a few minutes," said she, when the boat was moored to the overhanging trunk of a silver-birch tree. "This is such a shady nook, and the water is so clear, and the coming storm makes the air so deliciously cool."

Cora nestled down on the velvet grass beside her

companion without a word, leaning back against an almost perpendicular rock which ran straight for about six feet, and then shelving backward, formed a flat surface, covered with tangled bushes.

"Ethel," said Cora, suddenly laying her cheek upon her companion's shoulder, "Do you love Ruthven Gray?"

"Yes."

"And do you think he still loves you?"

"I think his nature is one that, once having formed an attachment, would be slow to relinquish it," said Ethel, softly and dreamily.

"Then why on earth don't you write to him, Ethel?" exclaimed Cora.

"Write to him!"

"Yes; and tell him that you have been a goose, and that you're heartily ashamed of yourself, and don't mean ever to do it any more. Why don't you, Ethel?"

"Never!" The scarlet tides rose to Ethel's fair temples like a torrent—she hid her face in her slender hands. "Oh, Cora—never!"

"Love is a curious kind of an epidemic," said the blue-eyed little philosopher, thoughtfully tossing bits of grass down into the water. "And I, for one, can't understand its symptoms. When a word would set all right between you——"

"That word will never be spoken," said Ethel, rising with calm dignity. "Come, Cora, it will rain very soon."

But Cora's only answer was a wild cry of terror.

"The boat! the boat! It is floating off!"

Ethel stood transfixed with alarm. The little skiff had, indeed, played them false, and was slowly receding farther and farther from the shore, leaving them almost as desolate and helpless as Juan Fernandez on his desert island.

"Oh, what shall we do—what shall we do!" exclaimed Cora, clasping her hands wildly together.

But the words had scarcely left her lips when there was a slight rustle among the bushes overhead, a parting of the silver birches that grew almost beside them, and the next instant a tall figure plunged into the lake, and striking boldly out through the clear water, caught the rope, and drew the little boat safely ashore. What a welcome sound was the grating of the keel on the sand and pebbles to Cora's strained ear!

Ethel came forward to thank the tall apparition who stood dripping among the trees: but as his eyes met hers the words died away upon her tongue into a faint, voiceless murmur. Cora uttered a little hysterical cry.

"Ethel, it is Mr. Gray!"

It was Ruthven Gray; but there was a brightness on his brow, a strange, inscrutable light in his eye that neither of the girls had ever witnessed there before.