

"I know it, Nellie," the young man replied, drawing the little hand thro' his arm, and walking slowly forward, "I could not help it dear, I was just leaving the office when a telegram was handed me from Southampton. The 'Margurette' got into port this morning, and Uncle George wishes me to be at the terminus to-night, as he comes by the seven o'clock train to London."

"Why how will you know him? I dare say he's as yellow as a guinea—a regular old Indian nabob: I should be afraid to go near him," she laughed. "Forgive me, Arthur, but it *does* seem strange to go in search of a person you have never seen, and at such a place as a London railway station."

"O that's all settled," he replied. "Studly, who was with him four years in India, goes with me; so there will be little fear of us missing each other. Are you cold, Nellie?" He drew the furs closer around her, and both walked on for a short time without speaking. At length Arthur broke the silence by repeating the one word "Nellie." His voice was low, musical, tender; and for a moment the girl trembled as she caught the pleading look in his dark eyes.

"Arthur," she said at length, "it's of no use—we must wait: he is inexorable."

"And is my happiness nothing?" asked the young man passionately. "Must I, too, yield to the unjust decision of a guardian who is as yet a stranger to you? You try my love sorely, Nellie."

There was a tinge of impatience in the tone, and for an instant a look of intense grief flitted over Nellie Ashleigh's face; but when she answered, it had entirely passed.

"You *know* I love you," she replied, looking up to him, "and that I have promised, some day, to be your wife; but dearly as I love you, Arthur, and sweet as is the hope of sharing my future with you, the promise I gave Father on his death-bed—to be guided in all things by the advice of Mr. Burton—must be to me sacred. If Father had lived it might all have been different, and—and—" She was crying now, but so softly that at first Arthur Knightbridge did not notice it, and waited patiently for her to continue.

"Don't, Nellie," he pleaded, becoming aware that the hand on his arm was trembling strangely. "Forgive me, darling; I was selfish, unkind, and am not worthy of your affection to try it in this way. Only I *do* love you from my very soul, Nellie; and it grieves me deeply that on this Christmas eve I cannot take you to my heart, and there shelter you from all the whims of this tyrannical old —. Well, well, pet, I'll say no more, but will wait for you as patiently as Jacob of old did for Rachel, if you will promise that when you are of age the waiting shall cease."

"If we are both alive two years hence, the day that I am twenty-one, I will be your wife, Arthur."

The voice was gentle, decisive, kind; and Arthur could do no more than press a kiss on the sweet lips and promise to be content. Retracing their steps, they were soon standing by the beautiful bronze statue of Achilles,* that occupies a site near the south-east entrance of the Park from Piccadilly. Hailing a couple of cabs, Arthur placed Miss Ashleigh in one, giving the direction—105 Westbourne Terrace; and jumping into his own, called out to the driver, "Knightbridge & Studly, Fleet street," and was taken to his destination accordingly.

* "Erected to the Duke of Wellington and his companions in arms," and cast from the cannon taken at the battles of Salamanca and Waterloo.—(See Chamber's "Guide to London.")