

Jeannie Sinclair,

OR THE LILY OF THE STRATH.

"Oh, Mary, Mary!" burst out Jeannie, "How can you think—how can you say so?"

"Because I believe it to be true. You have not realized it yet, you have not become conscious of it, just because you have not been made to analyse or understand your feelings."

"I never knew the truth till now," murmured Jeannie. "I have felt very deeply since Mr. Denman came amongst us, but till this moment I did not discover the nature of my feelings. I never thought of love, never dreamed of it either on his side or mine. Oh, Mary, believe me when I say so."

"I do believe you, my darling. Nay, it needed not your assurance to convince me of it, for well do I know the purity, the innocence, the honour of your nature. I feel that the blame that is lies with me, for I saw the danger that no one else saw and had not the courage to point it out till now, woe alas, it is too late to prevent much bitter evil. Heaven forgive me, Jeannie, and Heaven help you and William Denman to bear the pain in store for you."

"My secret is safe with you, Mary. I know you will not betray me," murmured the maiden, lifting her agonized face to the fearful face of her friend.

"Yes, you know it, darling," whispered Miss Wilson in reply. "It needs not that I should give you an assurance of it. But now you see how much better it would be for Mr. Denman to leave the home and go to lodge with Mrs. Carrick."

"Oh, Mary, I am wretched, wretched, wretched! Jeannie, who had not the state of her truly revealed to her and knew how truly and deeply she loved William Denman. Till now, no shadow had clouded her life, no trouble had disturbed her peace. Her existence hitherto had been one bright, calm experience. Through circumstances, she had but skimmed the surface of her being, depths either of joy or sorrow had never been stirred; but now the fountain was to be broken up, and Jeannie Sinclair was to know sore and trying sorrow."

"It had all come in a moment. Since her intercourse with William Denman began, she had experienced a strange, sweet delight, a thrill of delicious pleasure, the nature of which she never once thought of trying to discover. Had she thought presented itself that she was falling into the arms of love, she would have started back in shock and gained the brink, and turned away from the enchanted gift with a sigh of regret produced by the discovery that her late excitement had been plunging into its delicious depths. She was already betrothed—a wife in promise—and could therefore not in honour indulge thoughts of love towards William Denman. But with unsuspecting simplicity she had slid into the deep, and only awoke to a knowledge of the truth when her heart was no longer her own."

"In one hour she had passed from pleasure to deepest pain, from serenity to wretchedness, from her girlish ignorance of grief through the portals and into the dark house of human anguish. And all this from the discovery that she loved William Denman with a love that was forbidden, for she was betrothed to Sir Fergus Sinclair?"

"In view of all this, remaining all this, you can wonder at the wall being repeated by her aching heart."

"Oh, Mary, I am wretched, wretched! My poor girl, I know you are returned Miss Wilson, in a broken voice. This is your first trial, and it is a sore one. Heaven give you strength to bear and fully overcome it."

"What is to be done?" asked Jeannie with a helpless look.

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Feb. 4, 1869.

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Guelph, 14th October.

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