

than that," she answered with assumed indifference. "These who love you, and who are worthy of your love, are in dear old England, not in this wretched country."

"You are not happy here then; you are disappointed?" he cried with genuine surprise.

"How can I be happy so far away from everybody, with only strangers about me, that is, and my brother, my poor brother, dying, I may say?" She bit her lips and turned away, trying to restrain or conceal her tears.

"Your brother Reggie dying! What do you mean?" And in his generous interest the young fellow forgot all about himself and the suit he had come to urge.

"Perhaps I am exaggerating; but Reggie frightened me, he looked so bad. He told me he had been ill and out of work, and that made me anxious to see him. But for a long time I couldn't go; the people I am with wouldn't hear of it. At last I struck, and went right away. The poor boy was better when I got to New Westminster, and Providence had sent him a kind friend. That is the man he is gone to Kamloops with, Mr. Parkinson. Oh, he is such a splendid fellow, quite a gentleman, and yet able to turn his hand to anything—a great, strong, handsome man, and yet as soft and gentle as a girl; softer and gentler than some girls I know."

"I shall be jealous," said Tom Playfair.

Sybil looked at him dubiously for a moment, and then said somewhat bitterly—"You needn't be. He took my measure at once, I can tell you."

"He wasn't rude to you—surely not that?"

"Oh dear no; Mr. Parkinson couldn't be rude to any one. But he evidently saw the poor sort of stuff Reggie and I were made of. He weighed us in the balance, and found us wanting—very much. But then, being a strong, kind man, he was sorry for the sick boy; for me he had nothing but contempt."

"I don't believe a word of it, miss; and if you were any one else I should say you were fishing for compliments," protested Tom stoutly. "But anyhow, this strong, kind man has relieved you of your anxiety about your brother."

Sybil replied sharply—

"He has done what very few would do. He has treated a poor lad about whom he knew nothing like a brother; he has taken Reggie away to his own

place under pretence of giving him work, but really to nurse him, and to save his life, if possible."

"There, there! don't be angry with me," he pleaded. "I was only amused at the idea of any man having a contempt for you. But tell me about yourself. Are you going back to your place—to the people who were so unkind to you?"

"If they will have me back, yes. I have no choice."

"Oh yes, you have a choice; you know you have, Sybil. That is what I have come to speak to you about. Will you not listen to me?" And he took her hand tenderly in his.

"It is no use!" she cried, starting back from him. "I'm not worthy of you, Tom. That much at least I've learnt since I've been out here. You are a good man, and deserve a good wife; and that is what I could never be."

"Come, Sybil, don't you talk like that," remonstrated Tom. "Not worthy! Why, it is I am not fit to hold a candle, as the saying is, to a real lady like you. But I am able to keep you in comfort, and I can't bear to think of you going back to slave at work you don't like. You know I have loved you this many a day."

"That is just it," she sobbed, for her pride was so far broken down. "I made light of your love when I ought to have been proud of being honoured with it. I was a vain, self-willed, silly girl, and now I must take the consequences. I insisted on coming here, thinking I knew what was best; I wouldn't be advised. Well, you may be sure I won't give in now. I chose to stand alone, and alone I must earn my own independence. It may be my punishment, but I've got to bear it." And she tossed her head proudly, choking back her tears.

Tom Playfair looked at her with admiration, for there was something in her face that made him love her more than ever he had done before.

"Look here," he said deliberately, possessing himself now of both her hands, "I want you to listen to me and I want you to listen to your own heart. You know that, whatever your faults may be, I love you honestly and well."

"I know that, Tom," she assented with drooping eyes.

"Well, I don't believe it's in human nature—not in a sound-hearted girl's nature, anyhow—to resist such love as that. You don't care for this Parkinson fellow, do you, lass?"