







Select Literature.

THE CRUMPLED ROSE-LEAF.

CHAPTER I.

Pleasure to yourself the most charming of morning-rooms, in the most picturesque and comfortable of country mansions, the brightest and most inviting of spring mornings, the sweetest of sylvan views from the long, wide-open windows, and you will have the surroundings of the two ladies I am about to introduce to you.

One—the elder of the two—lay back in a lounge-chair, where the morning sun streamed in most warmly, lazily pulling and fondling the delicate ears of a greyhound who rested his slender muzzle in her lap, in sleepy enjoyment of the soothing process. The other stood beside one of the open windows, her hands behind her, looking out. Beyond this, she was doing nothing, not even thinking.

"Rosamond, my dear," said the seated lady, presently, "do you know I have just been thinking you are the luckiest creature in all the world? I don't suppose you ever had a wish that somebody did not rush to gratify. As to a real want, that you never could have had, nature and fortune took such loving care of you. Yes, my dear, depend upon it, all the fancies that you, dear, have ever had, that ugly old thing that worked so much upon the poor beauty in the fairy tale, was not forgotten, but came charged, I'll be bound, with some rare gift."

"That of enabling me to see a flaw in what looks perfect to all other eyes, perhaps," answered the lady by the window, in rather a doleful tone. The other gave her a sudden glance, which enabled her to see the face of her companion—it was a face fair to look upon, of that order of beauty seen often in the pictures of one of the greatest of living English painters, with large tender eyes, and rosy, child-like lips. Both eyes and lips were the expression of a griefed infant's.

"A flaw in your lot, my dear?" the elderly lady went on compassionately. "No; that would indeed require the most powerful of mental microscopes to detect. With youth (beauty, of course) more money than you can spend, this delightful old house to live in, the most charming of gardeners to put you, and a sober, sensible friend like myself to give you good advice. But perhaps I'm the daw. Never hesitate to confide in me."

Miss Beauchamp looked on in some dismay, a sweet, long-drawn-out whistle came stealing through the open window.

"There's Jack," said Miss Beauchamp, going towards the window whence the sound came nearest. Rosamond stopped and looked irresolutely, but she came no nearer to the window.—Miss Beauchamp looked out.

"Well, sir, good morning?" "Ah, Harry, the top of the morning to my dear. Where's Rosamond?" "Here. Do you want her?" "Of course. What a question to ask an adoring lover? Tell her to show her face at the window, and I'll not miss the sun when he goes behind that cloud that's sailing up with the wind. There, Harriet; can I trust you to repeat that pretty speech? I'll be bound Horace never says anything half so nice to you."

"Rosamond," he wants you, Miss Beauchamp said, looking back into the room. Miss Barrington walked slowly to the window, and looking on the gentleman who waited on the lawn below. He was not otherwise than a pleasing sight to look upon, as she stood carelessly waiting, with the sunshine glinting off the bright curls of his handsome head, and shimmering in his flowing tawny whiskers. He looked up when she came to the window, but she was in the shadow of the curtain, and he did not notice the sober gravity of her face.

"Rosamond, I have come to tell you, it's the sweetest morning of all the year. Will my gracious lady permit her slave to order the horses, and go with him for a delicious canter over Baraunton Downs?" "I don't care about riding to-day," says Rosamond slowly. "Not care about riding to-day? Why, my child, it's a day of days for a gallop. There's the sweetest breeze over the downs, and the larks are singing like—like mad; and—He broke off with a laugh. "I'm not at all at the disposition, but I give you my word it's the most glorious day."

"Yes, but I can't ride to-day, thank you." "Won't you, really? Well, then, I think I will take a run over and call at the Dacres'; you know I ought to have gone ever so long ago.—You really will not come, Rosa?" "Well, then, I'm off. Here, Contess! Sweet-lips! hi, Jase! Good-bye, ladies, till dinner-time, and whistling his dogs round him, the easy lever strode away over the dewy lawns towards the stables.

Miss Barrington looked at her friend. "Yes, that is how it is," she said bitterly. "He does not care whether I am with him or not. He'll go over to Harper's Court, and ride with Flora Dacres, and be just as content with her as he would be with me. Harriet, you would not be content to be loved in that fashion by Mr. Vaughan?" "Because that easy fashion of loving is not Horace Vaughan's, but it is Jack Walsingham's, my dear Rosamond, men don't love after any one pattern, but after their own natures."

"Yes—adversity, the thing! Miss Beauchamp went on. "Remember what the poet says, my dear Jack; 'Adversity, like the toad, ugly and venomous, wears yet a precious jewel in the head.'"

"Decidedly ugly, if it's to come in the shape of a railway smash," Mr. Walsingham replies, dubiously crossing his whiskers. "I say, Horace, can't it be something short of that?" "Miss Beauchamp looked up at her cousin's stately strength and comeliness. 'Horace, if you please, I can't have Jack disgraced; not permanently; but a wasting illness might be judiciously employed perhaps. I have heard of such things, and in books.'"

"Faith, I suppose you're very stupid; I can't say I comprehend." "My good fellow, you are stupid," Mr. Vaughan remarked. "From the bed of wasting sickness, you can indite a most touching farewell, and beseech a last interview, and who—"

"No! I'll be hanged if I can," interrupted Mr. Walsingham, most emphatically. "I could not play with any woman's feelings in that way; I could not owe my wife to a trick, Harriet." "Ah! I thought your impracticable honesty would come in the way presently," said Miss Beauchamp, trying hard not to laugh. "Well, Horace, what's to be done?" "We must wait in humble hope of the misfortune, since Jack won't allow us to expedite matters; or for that not very improbable event of a lady's changing her mind," answered Mr. Vaughan.

"But if I were in Jack's place, it would be long before I would ask Miss Barrington to change it," said Miss Beauchamp energetically. "What! my dear? asked Jack, looking at her rather wistfully, "and yet you are in love with Horace here, or do you think you are?" "At any rate, he loves the best," returned that gentleman. "But what has that to do with it?" "Nothing, perhaps; only I was thinking of some old words: 'Love suffereth long and is kind,' Mr. Walsingham said simply.

To be continued.

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