

**ARTHUR**

**TIMOTHY SHAY**

THE HAND BUT NOT THE  
HEART; OR, THE  
LIFE-TRIALS OF JESSIE  
LORING

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The Life-Trials of Jessie Loring**

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**Arthur T.**

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# T. S. Arthur

## The Hand but Not the Heart; Or, The Life-Trials of Jessie Loring

### CHAPTER I

"PAUL!" The young man started, and a delicate flush mantled his handsome face, as he turned to the lady who had pronounced his name in a tone slightly indicative of surprise.

"Ah! Mrs. Denison," was his simple response.

"You seem unusually absent-minded this evening," remarked the lady.

"Do I?"

"Yes."

"You have been observing me?"

"I could not help it; for every time my eyes have wandered in this direction, they encountered you, standing in the same position, and looking quite as much like a statue as a living man."

"How long is it since I first attracted your attention?" inquired the person thus addressed, assuming an indifference of manner which it was plain he did not feel.

"If I were to say half an hour, it would not be far wide of the truth."

"Oh, no! It can't be five minutes since I came to this part of the room," said the young man, whose name was Paul Hendrickson. He seemed a little annoyed.

"Not a second less than twenty minutes," replied the lady. "Your thoughts must have been very busy thus to have removed nearly all ideas of time."

"They *were* busy," was the simple reply. But the low tones were full of meaning.

Mrs. Denison looked earnestly into her companion's face for several moments before venturing to speak farther. She then said, in a manner that showed her to be a privileged and warmly interested friend—

"Busy on what subject, Paul?"

The young man offered Mrs. Denison his arm, remarking as he did so—

"The other parlor is less crowded."

Threading their course amid the groups standing in gay conversation, or moving about the rooms, Paul Hendrickson and his almost maternal friend sought a more retired position near a heavily curtained window.

"You are hardly yourself to-night, Paul. How is it that your evenly balanced mind has suffered a disturbance. There must be something wrong within. You know my theory—that all disturbing causes are in the heart."

"I am not much interested in mental theories to-night—am in no philosophic mood. I feel too deeply for analysis."

"On what subject, Paul?"

A little while the young man sat with his eyes upon the floor; then lifting them to the face of Mrs. Denison, he replied.

"You are not ignorant of the fact that Jessie Loring has interested me more than any maiden I have yet seen?"

"I am not, for you have already confided to me your secret."

"The first time I met her, it seemed to me as if I had come into the presence of one whose spirit claimed some hidden affinities with my own. I have never felt so strangely in the presence of a woman as I have felt and always feel in the presence of Miss Loring."

"She has a spirit of finer mould than most women," said Mrs. Denison. "I do not know her very intimately; but I have seen enough to give me a clue to her character. Her tastes are pure, her mind evenly balanced, and her intellect well cultivated."

"But she is only a woman."

Mr. Hendrickson sighed as he spoke.

"*Only* a woman! I scarcely understand you," said Mrs. Denison, gravely. "I am a woman."

"Yes, and a true woman! Forgive my words. They have only a conventional meaning," replied the young man earnestly.

"You must explain that meaning, as referring to Jessie Loring."

"It is this, only. She can be deceived by appearances. Her eyes are not penetrating enough to look through the tinsel and glitter with which wealth conceals the worthlessness of the man."

"Ah! you are jealous. There is a rival."

"You, alone, can use those words, and not excite my anger," said Hendrickson.

"Forgive me if they have fallen upon your ears unpleasantly."

"A rival, Mrs. Denison!" the young man spoke proudly. "That is something *I* will never have. The woman's heart that can warm under the smile of another man, is nothing to me."

"You are somewhat romantic, Paul, in your notions about matrimony. You forget that women are 'only' women."

"But I do *not* forget, Mrs. Denison, that as you have so often said to me, there are true marriages in which the parties are drawn towards each other by sexual affinities peculiar to themselves; and that a union in such cases, is the true union by which they become, in the language of inspiration, 'one flesh.' I can enter into none other. When I first met Jessie Loring, a spirit whispered to me—was it a lying spirit?—a spirit whispered to me—'the beautiful complement of your life!' I believed on the instant. In that I may have been romantic."

"Perhaps not!" said Mrs. Denison.

Hendrickson looked into her face steadily for some moments, and then said—

"It was an illusion."

"Why do you say this, Paul? Why are you so disturbed? Speak your heart more freely."

"Leon Dexter is rich. I am—poor!"

"You are richer than Leon Dexter in the eyes of a true woman—richer a thousandfold, though he counted his wealth by millions." There were flashes of light in the eyes of Mrs. Denison.

Hendrickson bent his glance to the floor and did not reply.

"If Miss Loring prefers Dexter to you, let her move on in her way without a thought. She is not worthy to disturb, by even the shadow of her passing form, the placid current of your life. But I am by no means certain that he *is* preferred to you."

"He has been at her side all the evening," said the young man.

"That proves nothing. A forward, self-confident, agreeable young gentleman has it in his power thus to monopolize almost any lady. The really excellent, usually too modest, but superior young men, often permit themselves to be elbowed into the shade by these shallow, rippling, made up specimens of humanity, as you have probably done to-night."

"I don't know how that may be, Mrs. Denison; but this I know. I had gained a place by her side, early in the evening. She seemed pleased, I thought, at our meeting; but was reserved in conversation—too reserved it struck me. I tried to lead her out, but she answered my remarks briefly, and with what I thought an embarrassed manner. I could not hold her eyes—they fell beneath mine whenever I looked into her face. She was evidently ill at ease. Thus it was, when this self-confident Leon Dexter came sweeping up to us with his grand air, and carried her off to the piano. If I read her face and manner aright, she blessed her stars at getting rid of me so opportunely."

"I doubt if you read them aright," said Mrs. Denison, as her young friend paused. "You are too easily discouraged. If she is a prize, she is worth striving for. Don't forget the old adage—'Faint heart never won fair lady.'"

Paul shook his head.

"I am too proud to enter the lists in any such contest," he answered. "Do you think I could beg for a lady's favorable regard? No! I would hang myself first!"

"How is a lady to know that you have a preference for her, if you do not manifest it in some way?" asked Mrs. Denison. "This is being a little too proud, my friend. It is throwing rather too much upon the lady, who must be wooed if she would be won."

"A lady has eyes," said Paul.

"Granted."

"And a lady's eyes can speak as well as her lips. If she likes the man who approaches her, let her say so with her eyes. She will not be misunderstood."

"You are a man," replied Mrs. Denison, a little impatiently; "and, from the beginning, man has not been able to comprehend woman! If you wait for a woman worth having to tell you, even with her eyes, that she likes you, and this before you have given a sign, you will wait until the day of doom. A true woman holds herself at a higher price!"

There was silence between the parties for the space of nearly a minute. Then Paul Hendrickson said—

"Few women can resist the attraction of gold. Creatures of taste—lovers of the beautiful—fond of dress, equipage, elegance—I do not wonder that we who have little beyond ourselves to offer them, find simple manhood light in the balance."

And he sighed heavily.

"It is because true men are not true to themselves and the true women Heaven wills to cross their paths in spring-time, that so many of them fail to secure the best for life-companions!" answered Mrs. Denison. "Worth is too retiring or too proud. Either diffidence or self-esteem holds it back in shadow. I confess myself to be sorely puzzled at times with the phenomenon. Why should the real man shrink away, and let the meretricious fop and the man 'made of money' win the beautiful and the best? Women are not such fools as to prefer tinsel to gold—the outside making up to the inner manhood! Neither are they so dim-sighted that they cannot perceive who is the man and who the 'fellow.' My word for it, if Miss Loring's mind was known, you have a higher place therein than Dexter."

Just then the two persons of whom they were speaking passed near to them, Miss Loring on the arm of Dexter, her face radiant with smiles. He was saying something to which she was listening, evidently pleased with his remarks. The sight chafed the mind of Hendrickson, and he said, sarcastically—

"Like all the rest, Mrs. Denison! Gold is the magnet."

"You are in a strange humor to-night, Paul," answered his friend, "and your humor makes you unjust. It is not fair to judge Miss Loring in this superficial way. Because she is cheerful and social in a company like this, are you to draw narrow conclusions touching her heart-preferences?"

"Why was she not as cheerful and as social with me, as she is now with that fellow?" said the young man, a measure of indignation in the tones of his voice. "Answer me that, if you please."

"The true reason is, no doubt, wide of your conclusions," answered Mrs. Denison. "Genuine love, when it first springs to life in a maiden's heart, has in it a high degree of reverence. The object rises into something of superiority, and she draws near to it with repressed emotions, resting in its shadow, subdued, reserved, almost shy, but happy. She is not as we saw Miss Loring just now, but more like the maiden you describe as treating you not long ago with a strange reserve, which you imagined coldness."

"Woman is an enigma," exclaimed Hendrickson, his thoughts thrown into confusion.

"And you must study, if you would comprehend her," said Mrs. Denison. "Of one thing let me again assure you, my young friend, if you expect to get a wife worth having, you have got to show yourself in earnest. Other men, not half so worthy as you may be, have eyes quite as easily attracted by feminine loveliness, and they will press forward and rob you of the prize unless you put in a claim. A woman desires to be loved. Love is what her heart feeds upon, and the man who appears to love her best, even if in all things he is not her ideal of manhood, will be most apt to win her for his bride. You can win Miss Loring if you will."

"It may be so," replied the young man, almost gloomily. "But, for all you say, I must confess myself at fault. I look for a kind of spontaneity in love. It seems to me, that hearts, created to become one, should instinctively respond to each other. For this reason, the idea of wooing, and contending, and all that, is painfully repugnant."

"It may be," said Mrs. Dunham [Denison?], "that your pride is as much at fault in the case, as your manhood. You cannot bend to solicit love."

"I cannot—I will not!" The gesture that accompanied this was as passionate as the surroundings would admit.

"It was pride that banished Lucifer from Heaven," said Mrs. Denison, "and I am afraid it will keep you out of the heaven of a true marriage here. Beware, my young friend! you are treading on dangerous ground. And there is, moreover, a consideration beyond your own case. The woman who can be happy in marriage with you, cannot be happy with another man. Let us, just to make the thing clear, suppose that Jessie Loring is the woman whose inner life is most in harmony with yours. If your lives blend in a true marriage, then will she find true happiness; but, if, through your failure to woo and win, she be drawn aside into a marriage with one whose life is inharmonious, to what a sad, weary, hopeless existence may she not be doomed. Paul! Paul! There are two aspects in which this question is to be viewed. I pray to Heaven that you may see it right."

Further conversation was prevented by the near approach of others.

"Let me see you, and early, Paul," said Mrs. Denison. It was some hours later, and the company were separating. "I must talk with you again about Miss Loring."

Hendrickson promised to call in a day or two. As he turned from Mrs. Denison, his eyes encountered those of the young lady whose name had just been uttered. She was standing beside Mr. Dexter, who was officiously attentive to her up to the last moment. He was holding her shawl ready to throw it over her shoulders as she stepped from the door to the carriage that awaited her. For a moment or two the eyes of both were fixed, and neither had the power to move them. Then, each with a slight confusion of manner, turned from the other. Hendrickson retired into the nearly deserted parlors, while Miss Loring, attended by Dexter, entered the carriage, and was driven away.

## CHAPTER II

IT was past the hour of two, when Jessie Loring stepped from the carriage and entered her home. A domestic admitted her.

"Aunt is not waiting for me?" she said in a tone of inquiry.

"No; she has been in bed some hours."

"It is late for you to be sitting up, Mary, and I am sorry to have been the cause of it. But, you know, I couldn't leave earlier."

She spoke kindly, and the servant answered in a cheerful voice.

"I'll sit up for you, Miss Jessie, at any time. And why shouldn't I? Sure, no one in the house is kinder or more considerate of us than you; and it's quite as little as a body can do to wait up for you once in a while, and you enjoying yourself."

"Thank you, Mary. And now get to bed as quickly as possible, for you must be tired and very sleepy. Good-night."

"Good night, and God bless you!" responded the servant, warmly. "She was the queen there, I know?" she added, proudly, speaking to herself as she moved away.

It was a night in mid-October. A clear, cool, moon-lit radiant night. From her window, Jessie could look far away over the housetops to a dark mass of forest trees, just beyond the city, and to the gleaming river that lay sleeping at their feet. The sky was cloudless, save at the west, where a tall, craggy mountain of vapor towered up to the very zenith. After loosening and laying off some of her garments, Miss Loring, instead of retiring, sat down by the window, and leaning her head upon her hand looked out upon the entrancing scene. She did not remark upon its beauty, nor think of its weird attractions; nor did her eyes, after the first glance, convey any distinct image of external objects to her mind. Yet was she affected by them. The hour, and the aspect of nature wrought their own work upon her feelings.

She sat down and leaned her head upon her hand, while the scenes in which she had been for the past few hours an actor, passed before her in review with almost the vividness of reality. Were her thoughts pleasant ones? We fear not; for every now and then a faint sigh troubled her breast, and parted her too firmly closed lips. The evening's entertainment had not satisfied her in something. There was a pressure on her feelings that weighed them down heavily.

"There is more in one sentence of his than in a page of the other's wordy utterances." Her lips moved in the earnestness of her inward-spoken thoughts. "How annoyed I was to be dragged from his side by Mr. Dexter just as I had begun to feel a little at my ease, and just as my voice had gained something of its true expression. It is strange how his presence disturbs me; and how my eyes fall beneath his gaze! He seems very cold and very distant; and proud I should think. Proud! Ah! has he not cause for pride? I have not looked upon his peer to-night. How that man did persecute me with his attentions! He monopolized me wholly! Perhaps I should be flattered by his attentions—and, perhaps, I was. I know that I was envied. Ah, me! what a pressure there is on my heart! From the moment I first looked into the face of Paul Hendrickson, I have been an enigma to myself. Some great change is wrought in me—some new capacities opened—some deeper yearnings quickened into life. I am still Jessie Loring, though not the Jessie Loring of yesterday. Have I completed a cycle of being? Am I entering upon another and higher sphere of existence? How the questions bewilder me! Clouds and darkness seem gathering around me, and my heart springs upward, half in fear, and half in hope!"

An hour later, and Miss Loring still sat by the closed window, her eyes upon the gleaming river and sombre woods beyond, yet seeing them not. The tall mountain of vapor, which had arisen like a pyramid of white marble, no longer retained its clear, bold outline, but, yielding to aerial currents, had been rent from base to crown, and now its scattered fragments lay in wild confusion along the

whole sweep of the western horizon. Down into these shapeless ruins the moon had plunged, and her pure light was struggling to penetrate their rifts, and pour its blessing upon the slumbering earth.

A rush of wind startled the maiden from her deep abstraction, and, as it went moaning away among the eaves and angles of the surrounding tenements, she arose, and putting off her garments, went sighing to bed. Dreams visited her in sleep, and in every dream she was in the presence of Paul Hendrickson. Very pleasant were they, for in the sweet visions that came to her, Paul was by her side, his voice filling her ears and echoing in her heart like tones of delicious music. They walked through fragrant meadows, by the side of glittering streams, and amid groves with singing birds on all the blossomy branches. How tenderly he spoke to her!—how reverently he touched with his manly lips her soft white hand, sending such electric thrills of joy to her heart as waking maidens rarely know! But, suddenly, after a long season of blessed intercourse, a stern voice shocked her ears, and a heavy hand grasped roughly her arm. She turned in fear, and Leon Dexter stood before her, a dark frown upon his countenance. With a cry of terror she awoke.

Day had already come, but no bright sun shone down upon the earth, for leaden clouds were in the sky, and nature was bathed in tears. It was some time before the agitation that accompanied Miss Loring's sudden awakening, had sufficiently subsided to leave her mind composed enough to arise and join the family. When she did so, she found her aunt, Mrs. Loring and her cousins Amanda and Dora, two not over refined school girls, aged fourteen and sixteen, awaiting her appearance.

"You are late this morning, Jessie," said Mrs. Loring. Then, before her niece had time to reply, she spoke to her eldest daughter—"Amanda, ring the bell, and order breakfast at once."

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting, aunt Phoebe," replied Jessie. "I did not get to bed until very late, and slept too soundly for the morning bell."

"You must have been as deeply buried in the arms of Morpheus as one of the seven sleepers, not to have heard that bell! I thought Kitty would never stop the intolerable din. The girl seems to have a passion for bell-ringing. Her last place was, I fancy, a boarding-house."

Mrs. Loring spoke with a slight shade of annoyance in her tones. Her words and manner, it was plain from Jessie's countenance, were felt as a rebuke. In a few moments the breakfast bell was heard, and the family went down to the morning meal, which had been delayed full half an hour beyond the usual time.

"Had you a pleasant time last evening?" inquired Mrs. Loring, after they were seated at the table, and a taste of the fragrant coffee and warm cakes had somewhat refreshed her body, and restored the tranquillity of her feelings.

"Very," replied Jessie in an absent way.

"Who was there?"

"Oh! everybody. It was a very large company."

"Who in particular that I know?"

"Mrs. Compton and her daughter Agnes."

"Indeed! Was Agnes there?" said Mrs. Loring, in manifest surprise.

"Yes; and she looked beautiful."

"I didn't know that she had come out. Agnes must be very young—not over seventeen. I am surprised at her mother! How did she behave herself? Bold, forward and hoydenish enough, I suppose! I never liked her."

"I did not observe any impropriety of conduct," said Jessie. "She certainly was neither bold nor forward."

"Did she sing?"

"No."

"Probably no one asked her." Mrs. Loring was in a cynical mood.

"Yes; I heard her asked more than once to sing."

"And she refused?"

"Yes."

"Affectation! She wanted urging. She has had peculiar advantages, and is said to possess fine musical ability. I have heard that she is a splendid performer. No doubt she was dying to show off at the piano."

"I think not," said Jessie, "for I heard her say to Mrs. Compton, in an under tone, 'I can't, indeed, dear mother! The very thought of playing before these people, makes my heart tremble. I can play very well at home, when my mind is calm; but I should blunder in the first bar here.'"

"Children should be left at home," said Mrs. Loring. "That is my doctrine. This crowding of young girls into company, and crowding out grown up people, is a great mistake; but, who else was there? What gentlemen?"

"Mr. Florence."

Mrs. Loring curled her flexible lip.

"Mr. Dexter."

"Leon?"

"Yes."

The eyes of Jessie drooped as those of her aunt were directed in close scrutiny to her face.

"He's a catch. Set your cap for him, Jessie, and you may ride in your own carriage." There was a vulgar leer in Mrs. Loring's eye. The color rose to Jessie's face, but she did not answer.

"Did he show you any attentions?" inquired the aunt.

"Yes. He was quite as attentive as I could desire."

"Indeed! And what does 'as you could desire,' mean?"

Jessie turned her face partly away to hide its crimson.

"Ah, well; I see how it is, dear. You needn't blush so. I only hope you may get him. He was attentive, then, was he?"

"I have no reason to complain of his lack of attentions," said Jessie, her voice cold and firm. "They would have been flattering to most girls. But, I do not always give to compliments and 'company manners,' the serious meanings that some attach to them."

"Jessie," Mrs. Loring spoke with sudden seriousness; "take my advice, and encourage Leon Dexter. I am pleased to know that you were so much an object of his attentions as your remarks lead me to infer. I know that you will make him a good wife; one of whom he can never be ashamed; and I know that a union with him will give you a proud position."

"Will you waive the subject, at present, dear aunt?" said Jessie, with a pleading look, at the same time glancing covertly towards her cousins, who were drinking in every word with girlish eagerness.

"Oh, by all means," answered Mrs. Loring, "if it is in the least annoying. I was forgetting myself in the interest felt for your welfare."

"And so Mr. Dexter showed you marked attentions last evening?" said Jessie's aunt, joining her in the sitting-room, after Amanda and Dora had left for school.

"Did I say so, aunt?" inquired Jessie, looking into her relative's face.

"You said enough to make the inference clear, my child."

"Well, Aunt Phoebe, he was attentive—more so, by a great deal, than I desired!"

"Than you desired!" There was unfeigned surprise in the voice of Mrs. Loring. "What do you mean, Jessie?"

"The man's position is all well enough; but the man himself is not altogether to my liking."

"You must have grown remarkably fastidious all at once. Why, girl! there isn't a handsomer man to be found anywhere. He is a noble looking fellow! Where are your eyes?"

"The man that a wife has to deal with, is the man of the spirit, Aunt Phoebe—the real man. The handsome outside is nothing, if the inner man is not beautiful!" Jessie spoke with a sudden glow of feeling.

"Stuff and nonsense, child!" said Mrs. Loring, impatiently. "Stuff and nonsense!" she repeated, seeing that her niece looked steadily into her face. "What do you know of the man of the spirit, as you call it? And, moreover, what possesses you to infer that Mr. Dexter's inner man is not as beautiful as the outer?"

"The soul looks forth from the eyes, and manifests its quality in the tones of the voice," replied Jessie, a fine enthusiasm illuminating her beautiful face. "No man can hide from us his real character, unless we let self-love and self-interest draw an obscuring veil."

"You are a strange girl, Jessie—a very strange girl!" Mrs. Loring was fretted. "What can you mean? Here, a splendid fortune promises to be poured into your lap, and you draw your garments aside, hesitating and questioning as to whether the golden treasure is worth receiving! I am half amazed at your conduct!"

"Are you weary of my presence here, Aunt Phoebe?" said Jessie, a tremor in her low failing tones.

"Now give me patience with the foolish girl!" exclaimed Mrs. Loring, assuming an angry aspect. "What has come over you, Jessie? Did I say anything about being wearied with your presence? Because I manifest an unusual degree of interest in your future welfare, am I to be charged with a mean, selfish motive? I did not expect this of you."

"Dear aunt! forgive me!" said Jessie, giving way to tears. "My feelings are unusually disturbed this morning. Late hours and the excitement of company have made me nervous. As for Mr. Dexter, let us pass him by for the present. He has not impressed me as favorably as you seem to desire."

"But Jessie."

"Spare me, dear aunt! If you press the subject on me now, you will only excite disgust where you hope to create a favorable impression. I have had many opportunities of close observation, and failed not to improve them. The result is—"

Jessie paused.

"What?" queried her aunt.

"That the more narrowly I scan him the less I like him. He is superficial, vain and selfish."

"How do you know?"

"I cannot make manifest to your eyes the signs that were clear to mine. But so I have read him."

"And read him with the page upside down, my, word for it, Miss Jessie Loring!"

Jessie answered only with a sigh, and when her aunt still pressed her on the subject, she begged to be spared, as she felt nervous and excited. So, leaving the sitting room, she retired to her own apartment, to gather up, and unravel, if possible, the tangled thread of thought and feeling.

## CHAPTER III

"THERE is a gentleman in the parlor, Miss Jessie," said Mary, the chambermaid, opening the door and presenting her plain, but pleasant face. It was an hour after Miss Loring had left her aunt in the sitting room.

"Who is it, Mary?"

The girl handed her a card.

On it was engraved, PAUL HENDRICKSON. The heart of Jessie Loring gave a sudden leap, and the blood sprung reddening to her very temples.

"Say that I will be with him in a few minutes."

The servant retired, and Jessie, who had arisen as she received the card, sat down, so overcome by her feelings, that she felt all bodily strength depart.

"Paul Hendrickson!" she said, whispering the name. "How little did I expect a visit from him! After our first interview last evening, he seemed studiously to avoid me."

Then she arose hastily, but in a tremor, and made some hurried changes in her dress. She was about leaving her room, when Mary again presented herself.

"Another gentleman has called," and she handed another card. Jessie took it and read LEON DEXTER!

Could anything have been more inopportune! Jessie felt a double embarrassment.

"The fates are against me I believe!" she murmured, as, after a few moments of vigorous expression of feeling, she left her room, and descended to the parlor, entering with a light but firm tread. Dexter stepped quickly forward, giving his hand in the most assured style, and putting both her and himself entirely at ease. She smiled upon him blandly, because she felt the contagion of his manner. Hendrickson was more formal and distant, and showed some embarrassment. He was not at ease himself, and failed to put Jessie at ease.

After all were seated, Dexter talked freely, while Hendrickson sat, for the most part silent, but, as Jessie felt, closely observant. Light and playful were the subjects introduced by Mr. Dexter, and his remarks caused a perpetual ripple of smiles to sparkle over the countenance of Miss Loring. But whenever Mr. Hendrickson spoke to her, the smiles faded, and she turned upon him a face so changed in expression that he felt a chill pervade his feelings. She did not mean to look grave; she did not repress the smiles purposely; there was neither coldness nor repulsion in her heart. But her sentiments touching Mr. Hendrickson were so different from those entertained for Mr. Dexter; and her estimation of his character so widely variant that she could not possibly treat him with the smiling familiarity shown towards the other. Yet all the while she was painfully conscious of being misunderstood. If she had met Mr. Hendrickson alone, she felt that it must have been different. A degree of embarrassment might have existed, but she would not have been forced to put on two opposite exteriors, as now, neither of which, correctly interpreted her state of mind, or did justice to her character.

"I did not see much of you last evening, Mr. Hendrickson. What were you doing with yourself?" she remarked, trying to be more familiar, and giving him a look that set his pulses to a quicker measure. Before he could answer, Dexter said, gaily, yet with covert sarcasm.

"Oh, Mr. Hendrickson prefers the society of elderly ladies. He spent the evening in sober confabulation with Mrs. Denison. I have no doubt she was edified. I prefer maid to matron, at any time. Old women are my horror."

Too light and gay were the tones of Dexter to leave room for offence. Hendrickson tried to rally himself, and retort with pleasant speech. But his heart was too deeply interested,—and his mood too serious for sport. His smile did not improve the aspect of his countenance; and if he meant his words for witticisms, they were perceived as sarcasms. Jessie was rather repelled than attracted—all of which he saw.

Conscious that he was wholly misrepresenting himself in the young lady's eyes, and feeling, moreover, that he was only spoiling pleasant company, Hendrickson, after a brief call, left the field clear to his rival. Jessie accompanied him to the door.

"I shall be pleased to see you again, Mr. Hendrickson," she said, in a tone of voice that betrayed something of her interest in him.

He turned to look into her eyes. They sustained his penetrating gaze only for a moment and then her long lashes lay upon her crimsoning cheeks.

"Not if I show myself as stupid as I have been this morning," said the young man.

"I have never thought you stupid, Mr. Hendrickson."

"I am dull at times," he said, hesitating, and slightly confused. "Good morning!" he added, abruptly, and turned off without another look into the eyes that were upon him; and in which he would have read more than his heart had dared to hope for.

"What a boor!" exclaimed Dexter as Miss Loring returned to the parlor.

"Oh, no, not a boor, sir. Far, very far from that," answered the young lady promptly.

"Well, you don't call him a gentleman, do you?"

"I have seen nothing that would rob him of the title," said Miss Loring.

"A true gentleman will put on a gentlemanly exterior; for he is courteous by instinct—and especially when ladies are present. A true gentleman, moreover, is always at his ease. Self-possession is one of the signs of a well bred man. Hendrickson is not well bred. Any one who has been at all in society, can perceive this at a glance. Did you notice how he played with his watch chain; crossed his legs in sitting; took out his pencil case, and moved the slide noisily backwards and forwards; ran his fingers through his hair; exhibited his pocket-handkerchief half-a-dozen times in as many minutes, and went through sundry other performances of which no well bred man is guilty? I marvel, that a young lady of your refinement can offer a word of apology for such things. I see in it only kindness of heart; and this shall be your excuse."

So gaily were the closing sentences uttered; yet with so manifest a regard softening the final words, that Miss Loring's rising anger against the young man, went down and was extinguished in a pleasing consciousness of being an object of marked favor by one whose external attractions, at least, were of the highest order.

"But the subject is not agreeable to either of us, Miss Loring," said Dexter in a voice pitched to a lower tone, and with a softer modulation. "I did not expect to find a visitor here at so early an hour; and I fear that I have permitted myself to experience just a shade of annoyance. If I have seemed ill-natured, pardon me. It is not my nature to find fault, or to criticise. I rather prefer looking upon the bright side. Like Sir Joshua Reynolds, 'I am a wide liker.' There are times, you know, in which we are all tempted to act in a way that gives to others a false impression of our real characters."

"No one is more conscious of that than I am," replied Miss Loring. "Indeed, it seems often, as if I were made the sport of adverse influences, and constrained to act and to appear wholly different from what I desire to seem. There are some of life's phenomena, Mr. Dexter, that puzzle at times my poor brain sorely."

"Don't puzzle over such things, Miss Loring," said Mr. Dexter; "I never do. Leave mysteries to philosophers; there is quite enough of enjoyment upon the surface of things without diving below, into the dark caverns of doubt and vague speculation. I never liked the word phenomenon."

"To me it has ever been an attraction. I always seem standing at some closed door, hearkening to vague sounds within and longing to enter. The outer life presents itself to me as moving figures in a show, and I am all impatient, at times, to discover the hidden machinery that gives such wonderful motion.

"Morbid; all morbid!" answered Dexter, in a lively manner. "Dreams in the place of realities, Miss Loring. Don't philosophize; don't speculate; don't think—at least not seriously. Your thinkers

are always miserable. Take life as it is—full of beauty, full of pleasure. The sources of enjoyment are all around us. Let us drink at them and be thankful."

"You are a philosopher, I perceive," said Miss Loring, with a smile, "and must have been a thinker, in some degree, to have formed a theory."

"I am a cheerful philosopher."

"Are you always cheerful, Mr. Dexter?" inquired Miss Loring.

"Always."

"Never feel the pressure of gloomy states? Have no transitions of feeling—sudden, unaccountable; as if the shadow of a cloud had fallen over your spirit?"

"Never."

"You are singularly fortunate."

"Am I, Miss Loring?" and the young man's voice grew tender as he leaned nearer to the maiden.

"I am blessed with a cheerful temper," he added, "and I cultivate the inheritance. It is a good gift—blessing both the inheritor and his companions. Neither men nor women are long gloomy in my presence."

"I have often noticed your smiling face and pleasant words," said Jessie, "and wondered if you moved always in a sunny atmosphere."

"You are answered now," he replied.

A little while there was silence. Jessie did not feel the repulsion which had at first made Dexter's presence annoying; and as he drew his chair closer, and leaned still nearer, there was on her part no instinctive receding.

"Yes," she murmured softly, almost dreamily, "I am answered."

"Jessie." The young man's breath was on her cheek—his hand touching her hand. She remained sitting very still—still as an effigy.

"Jessie." How very low, and loving, and musical was the voice that thrilled along the chords of feeling! "Jessie; forgive me if I have mistaken the signs." His hand tightened upon hers. She felt spell-bound. She wished to start up and flee. But she could not. There was a strange, overshadowing, half paralyzing power in the man's presence. Without a purpose to do so, she returned the pressure of his hand. It was enough.

"Thanks, dear one!" he murmured. "I was sure I had not mistaken the signs. The heart has language all its own."

Still the maiden's form was motionless; and her hand lay passive in the hand that now held it with a strong clasp. Yet, how wildly did her heart beat! How tumultuous were all her feelings! How delicious the thrill that pervaded her being!

"I love you, Jessie! Dear one! Angel! And by this token you are mine!" said Dexter, his voice full of passion's fine enthusiasm. And he raised her hand to his lips, kissing it half-wildly as he did so.

"The gods have made this hour propitious!" he added, as he drew her head down against his bosom, and laid his ardent lips to hers. "Bless you, darling! Bless you!" he went on. "My life is crowned this hour with its chiefest delight! Mine! mine!"

Yet, not a word had parted the maiden's lips, thus spirited away, as it were, out of herself, and strangely betrayed into consenting silence. She had neither given her yea nor her nay—and dared as little to speak the one as the other.

Almost bereft of physical power, she sat with her face hidden on the bosom of this impulsive lover, for many minutes. At last, thought cleared itself a little, and, with a more distinct self-consciousness, were restored individuality and strength. She raised herself, moved back a little, and looked up into the face of Mr. Dexter. The aspect of her own was not just what the young man had expected to see. He did not look upon a countenance blushing in sweet confusion; nor into eyes radiant with loving glances; but upon a pale face, and eyes whose meanings were a mystery. Slowly,

yet persistently, did she withdraw her hand from his clasp, while slowly her form arose, until it gained an erect position.

"You have taken me off my guard, Mr. Dexter," she said, a tremor running through her voice.

"Say not a word, Jessie! say not a word! I am only too happy to have taken your heart captive. You are none the less my own, whether the means were force or stratagem."

"Speak not too confidently, sir. Have I"—

Mr. Dexter raised his hand quickly, and uttered a word of warning. But were silent again. Then the young man said, his manner growing deferential, and his voice falling to a low and subdued tone—

"Miss Loring, I here offer you heart and hand; and in making this offer, do most solemnly affirm that you are precious to me as life.—The highest boon I can crave from heaven is the gift of your dear self."

As he spoke, he extended his hand towards her. But her own did not stir from her lap, where it lay as still as if paralyzed.

"This is no light matter, Mr. Dexter," she said; still with the huskiness and tremor which had before veiled her voice. "I cannot decide on a thing of such infinite moment, in hot blood and on the spur of a sudden occasion. You must give me time for reflection."

"The heart knows no time. It neither reasons nor deliberates; but speaks out upon the instant, as yours has already done, Miss Loring," replied Dexter, with reviving ardor.

"Time, Mr. Dexter, time! I must have time!" said Jessie, almost imploringly.

But Dexter, who saw that time might turn the scale against him, resolved to press his suit then to the final issue.

"I cannot accept delay," he answered, throwing the most winning tenderness into his voice. "And why should you hesitate a moment?"

"My aunt"—murmured Jessie.

"Consult her with all maidenly formality. That is right—that is prudent," he said, leaning again very near to her. "But, ere we separate this morning, let me ask one question—I am not disagreeable to you?"

"Oh, no, no, Mr. Dexter!" was the quick, earnest reply.

"Nor is your heart given to another?"

"No lips but yours have ever uttered such words as have sounded in my ears this day."

"And no lips, speaking in your ears, can ever utter such words with half the heart-warmth that were in mine, dear Jessie! True love is ever ardent, and cannot wait. I must have a sign from you before I leave. You need not speak; but lay your hand in mine," and he reached his hand towards her.

It was a moment of strong trial. Again her thoughts fell into confusion. Again a wild delicious thrill swept like a strain of music through all her being. She was within the sphere of an irresistible attraction. Her hand fluttered with a sudden impulse, and then, moving towards the hand of Dexter, was seized and covered with kisses.

"Thanks, dearest!" he murmured. "Thanks! By this token I know that I am loved—by this token you are mine—mine forever! Happy, happy day! It shall be the golden one in all the calendar of my life."

With the ardor of passion he drew her to his side again, and clasping his arm around her, kissed her with all the fervor of an entranced lover—kissed her over and over again, wildly.

All this was not mere acting on the part of Mr. Dexter. He did love the sweet young girl as truly as men of his peculiar character are capable of loving. He was deeply in earnest. There was a charm about Jessie Loring which had captivated him in the beginning. She was endowed with rich mental gifts, as well as personal beauty; and with both, Dexter was charmed even to fascination. Superficial, vain of his person, and self-satisfied from his position, he had not been much troubled by doubts touching his ability to secure the hand of Miss Loring, and by his very boldness and ardor, won his suit ere she had sufficient warning of his purpose to throw a mail-clad garment around her.

Dexter remained for only a short period after this ardent declaration. He had penetration enough to see that Miss Loring was profoundly disturbed, and that she desired to be alone. He saw with concern that her countenance was losing its fine warmth, and that the lustre of her eyes was failing. Her look was becoming more inverted each moment. She was trying to read her heart, and understand the writing inscribed thereon.

"I will see you this evening, Jessie," said Mr. Dexter, on rising to depart. Their intercourse had already been touched with a shade of embarrassment.

Miss Loring forced a smile and simply inclined her head. He bent forward and kissed her. Passively—almost coldly was the salute received. Then they parted. A film of ice had already formed itself between them.

## CHAPTER IV

ON leaving Mr. Dexter, Jessie Loring almost flew to her room, like one escaping from peril. Closing and locking the door, she crossed the apartment, and falling forward against the bed, sunk down upon her knees and buried her face in a pillow. She did not pray. There was no power in her to lift a petition upwards. But weak, in bewilderment of spirit and abandonment of will she bent in deep prostration of soul and body.

It was nearly an hour before she arose. Very calm had her mind become in this long interval—very calm and very clear. With the plummet line of intense thought, quickened by keen perception, she had sounded the depths of her heart. She found places there—capacities for loving—intense yearnings—which had remained hidden until now. The current of her life had hitherto run smoothly in the sunshine, its surface gleaming and in breezy ripples. But the stream had glided from the open meadows and the sunshine, and the shadow of a great rock had fallen upon it. The surface was still as glass; and now looking downward, she almost shuddered as sight descended away, away into bewildering depths. She held her breath as she gazed like one suspended in mid-air.

"Too late! too late!" she murmured, as she lifted herself up. "Too late!"

Her countenance was pale, even haggard. There was no color in her lips—her eyes were leaden—her aspect like one who had been shocked with the news of a great calamity.

Mrs. Loring, Jessie's aunt, had been informed by the servant of whom she made inquiry, as to the identity of the gentleman who had called that morning to see her niece—or at least as to the identity of one of them. She did not make out by the servant's description the personality of Mr. Hendrickson, but that of Mr. Dexter was clear enough. She was also informed that the one whose name she could not guess, made only a brief visit, and that Mr. Dexter remained long, and was for most of the time in earnest conversation with Jessie. Her hopes gave her conclusions a wide latitude. She doubted not that the elegant, wealthy suitor was pressing a claim for the hand of her niece.

"Will she be such a little fool as to throw this splendid chance away?" she questioned with herself. "No—no;" was the answer. "Jessie will not dare to do it! She is a strange girl in some things, and wonderfully like her mother; but she will never refuse Leon Dexter, if so lucky as to get an offer."

Mrs. Loring heard Mr. Dexter leave the house, and with expectation on tip-toe, waited for Jessie to join her in the sitting-room. But while she yet listened for the sound of footsteps on the stairs below, her ears caught the light rustle of Jessie's garment as she glided along the passages and away to her own chamber.

"Something has taken place!" said Mrs. Loring to herself. "There's been a proposal, I'll bet my life on't! Why didn't the girl come and tell me at once? Ain't I her nearest relative—and haven't I always been like an own mother to her? But she's so peculiar—just as Alice used to be. I don't believe I shall ever understand her."

And Mrs. Loring fretted a little in her moderate way, not being capable of any very profound emotion. Ten, fifteen, twenty minutes—half an hour she waited for Jessie to appear. But there was no movement in the neighborhood of her chamber.

"Didn't Jessie go to her room, after the gentleman went away?" asked Mrs. Loring, speaking to a servant, who was passing down the stairs.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Is she there now?"

"I believe so ma'am. I haven't seen her anywhere about the house."

The servant passed on, and Mrs. Loring waited for full half an hour longer. Then, unable to repress impatient curiosity, she went to Jessie's room and knocked at the door. Twice she knocked before there was a sound of life within. Then she heard footsteps—a bolt was withdrawn, and the door opened.

"Jessie!" exclaimed Mrs. Loring, "how white you are! What has happened?"

"Come in dear aunt!" said Jessie, "I have been wanting to see you; but had not yet made up my mind to seek you in the sitting-room. I am glad you are here."

Mrs. Loring passed in and Jessie closed the door.

"Take this seat aunt," and she pointed to an easy-chair: "I will sit here," drawing a lower one close to that which Mrs. Loring had taken.

"Now, dear, what has happened?" Mrs. Loring's curiosity had been so long upon the stretch, that she could ill endure delay.

"Will you listen to me patiently, Aunt Phoebe?"

There was a calmness of manner about Jessie that seemed to Mrs. Loring unnatural.

"Speak, dear—you will find me all attention."

"I am in a—strait. I must act; but cannot of my own reason, determine what action is right," said Jessie, "you must think for me, and help me to a just decision."

"Go on dear," urged Mrs. Loring.

Then as briefly and as clearly as possible, Jessie related all that had passed in her excited interview with Mr. Dexter. On concluding, she said with much earnestness of manner:

"And now, Aunt Phoebe, what I wish to know is this—will Mr. Dexter be warranted in regarding either my words or my actions, as an acceptance of his offer?"

"Certainly," was the unhesitating reply of Mrs. Loring.

"Aunt Phoebe!"

There was a tone of anguish in the voice of Jessie; and her pale lips grew paler.

"Why, what can ail you, child?" said Mrs. Loring.

"I had hoped for a different decision. Mr. Dexter took me at unawares. In a certain sense, I was mesmerized by the stronger action of his mind, quickened by an ardent temperament. Self-consciousness was for a time lost, and I moved and acted by the power of his will. There was no consentation in the right meaning of the word, Aunt Phoebe, and I cannot think I am bound."

"Bound, fully, in word and act Jessie," was Mrs. Loring's firmly spoken answer. "And so every one will regard you. Mr. Dexter, I am sure, will not admit your interpretation for an instant. He, it is plain, looks upon you as affianced. So do I!"

"Oh, aunt! aunt!" cried Jessie, clasping her hands, "say not so! say not so! Knowing, as you do, all that occurred, even to the utmost particulars of my strange position in the interview, how can you take part against me?"

"Take part against you, child! How strangely you talk! One who did not know Mr. Dexter, might suppose him to be an Ogre, or second Blue Beard. I think the events of this morning the most fortunate of your life."

"While I fear they will prove most disastrous," said Jessie.

"Nonsense, child! you are excited and nervous. There is always something novel and romantic to a young girl in an offer of marriage. It is the great event of her life. I do not wonder that you are disturbed—though I am surprised at the nature of this disturbance. Time will subdue all this. You have a beautiful life before you, darling! The cherished bride of Leon Dexter must tread a path of roses."

A long sigh parted the lips of Miss Loring, and her face, to which not even the faintest tinge of color had yet returned, bent itself downward. She was silent.

"You leaned your face against him?" said Mrs. Loring.

"He drew my head down. I had no power of resistance, aunt. There was a spell upon my senses."

"You did not reject his ardent kisses?"

"I could not."

"And when he extended his hand, and asked you to lay your own within it, as a sign and a token of love, you gave him the sign and the token. Your hands clasped in a covenant of the heart!"

So he regarded the act. So do I; and so will all the world regard it. Jessie, the die is cast. You cannot retreat without dishonor."

"Will you leave me, aunt?" said Jessie, after a long silence. Her tones were sad. "I am very much excited. All this has unnerved me. I would like to be alone again."

"Better come down into the sitting-room," replied Mrs. Loring.

"No, aunt. You must let me have my way."

"Willful, and like your mother," said Mrs. Loring, as she arose.

"Was my mother willful?" inquired Jessie, looking at her aunt.

"Sometimes."

"Was she happy?"

"No. I do not think she ever understood or rightly appreciated your father. But, I should not have said this. She was a beautiful, fascinating young creature, as I remember her, and your father was crazy to get her. But I don't think they were very happy together. Where the blame lay I never knew for certain, and I will make no suggestions now."

"They were uncongenial in their tastes, perhaps," said Jessie.

"Dear knows what the reason was! But she died young, poor thing! and your father was in a sad way about it. I thought, of course, he would marry again. But he did not—living a widower until his death."

"Is my mother's picture very much like her, Aunt Phoebe?"

"Very like her; but not so handsome."

"She was beautiful?"

"Oh, yes; and the reigning belle before her marriage."

Jessie questioned no farther. Her aunt's recollections of her mother were all too external to satisfy the yearnings of her heart towards that mother. Often had she sat gazing upon the picture which represented to her eyes the form and face of a parent she had never seen; and sought to comprehend some of the meanings in the blue orbs that looked down upon her so calmly. But ever had she turned away with vague, unquiet, restless feelings.

"If my mother had lived!" she would sometimes say to herself, "she could comprehend me. Into her ears I could speak words that now sleep on my lips in perpetual silence.

"Oh, if my mother were alive!" sobbed the unhappy girl, as the door closed on the retiring form of worldly-minded Aunt Phoebe. "If my mother were only alive!

"Affianced!" she said a little while after, as thought went back to the interview between herself and Mrs. Loring which had just closed. "Affianced! Yes, that was the word. 'He regards you as affianced, and so do I!' How completely has this web invested me! Is there no way of escape?" A slight shudder went through her frame. "Ah, well, well!"—low and mournfully—"It may be that my woman's ideal has been too exalted, and above the standard of real men. Mr. Dexter is handsome; kind-hearted enough, no doubt; moderately well cultivated; rich, elegant in manner, though a little too demonstrative; and, most to be considered, loves me—or, at least, declares himself my lover. That he is sincere I cannot doubt. His was not the role of a skillful actor, but living expression. I ought to be flattered if not won by the homage he pays me."

Then she sat down, and began looking into her heart again, her keen vision penetrating to its farthest recesses. A long fluttering sigh breathed at length through her lips, and starting up she said,

"I am weak and foolish! Life is a reality; not a cycle of dreamy romance. All poetry lies in the dim distance—a thing of memory or anticipation—the present is invariably prose. How these vague ideals do haunt the mind! Love! Love! I had imagined something deeper, purer, holier than anything stirring in my heart for Leon Dexter! Was I deceived? Is the poet's song but jingling rhyme?—a play of words in trancing measure? Let me bind back into quietude these wildly leaping impulses, and clip the wings of these girlish fancies. They lead not the soul to happiness in a world like ours."

Again her form drooped, and again she sat for a long period so lost in the mazes of her own thoughts, that time and place receded alike from her consciousness. Not until dinner-time did she join her aunt. Her cousins had returned from school, and she met them as usual at the table. Her exterior was carefully controlled, so that the only change visible was a slight pallor and a graver aspect. Mrs. Loring scrutinized her countenance closely. This she bore without a sign of embarrassment. She partook but lightly of food. After the meal closed she retired to her own room, once more to torture her brain in a fruitless effort to solve this great problem of her life.

## CHAPTER V

WHEN Paul Hendrickson left the house of Mrs. Loring, his mind was in a state of painful excitement. The inopportune appearance of Dexter had so annoyed him, that he had found it impossible to assume the easy, cheerful air of a visitor. He was conscious, therefore, of having shown himself in the eyes of Miss Loring to very poor advantage. Her manner at parting had, however, reassured him. As they stood for a moment in the vestibule he saw her in a new light. The aspect of her countenance was changed, the eyes, that fell beneath his earnest gaze, burned with a softened light, and he read there a volume of tender interest at a single glance.

"I shall be pleased to see you again, Mr. Hendrickson." There was more than a parting compliment in her tones as she said these words. "I have never thought you stupid." What pleasure he derived from repeating these sentences over and over again! Early in the evening he called upon his friend Mrs. Denison.

"I have come to talk with you again about Miss Loring," said he. "I can't get her out of my thoughts. Her presence haunts me like a destiny."

Mrs. Denison smiled as she answered a little playfully:

"A genuine case of love; the infection taken at first sight. Isn't it so, Paul?"

"That I love this girl, in spite of myself, is, I fear, a solemn fact," said the young man, with an expression of face that did not indicate a very agreeable self-consciousness.

"Fear? In spite of yourself? A solemn fact? What a contradiction you are, Paul!" said Mrs. Denison.

"A man in love is an enigma. I have often heard it remarked, and I now perceive the saying to be true. I am an enigma. Yes, I love this girl in spite of myself; and the fact is a solemn one. Why? Because I have too good reason for believing that she does not love me in return. And yet, even while I say this, tones and words of hers, heard only to-day, come sighing to my ears, giving to every heart-beat a quicker impulse."

"Ah! Then you have seen Miss Loring to-day?"

"Yes," answered Hendrickson, in a quick, and suddenly excited manner. "I called upon her this morning, and while I sat in the parlor awaiting her appearance, who should intrude himself but that fellow Dexter. I felt like annihilating him. The look I gave him he will remember."

"That was bad taste, Paul," said Mrs. Denison.

"I know it. But his appearance was so untimely; and then, I had not forgotten last evening. The fellow has a world of assurance; and he carries it off with such an air—such a self-possession and easy grace! You cannot disturb the dead level of his self-esteem. To have him intruding at such a time, was more than I could bear. It completely unsettled me. Of course, when Miss Loring appeared, I was constrained, cold, embarrassed, distant—everything that was repulsive; while Dexter was as bland as a June morning—full of graceful compliments—attractive—winning. When I attempted some frozen speech, I could see a change in Miss Loring's manner, as if she had suddenly approached an iceberg; but, as often, Dexter would melt the ice away by one of his sunny smiles, and her face would grow radiant again."

"You exaggerate," said Mrs. Denison.

"The case admits of no exaggeration. I was too keenly alive to my own position; and saw only what was."

"The medium was distorted. Excited feelings are the eyes' magnifying glasses."

"It may be so." There was a modification in Hendrickson's manner. "I was excited. How could I help being so?"

"There existed no cause for it, Paul. Mr. Dexter had an equal right with yourself to visit Miss Loring."

"True."

"And an equal right to choose his own time."

"I will not deny it."

"Therefore, there was no reason in the abstract, why his complimentary call upon the lady should create in your mind unpleasant feelings towards the man. You had no more right to complain of his presence there, than he had to complain of yours."

"I confess it."

"There is one thing," pursued Mrs. Denison, "in which you disappoint me, Paul. You seem to lack a manly confidence in yourself. You are as good as Leon Dexter—aye, a better, truer man in every sense of the word—a man to please a woman at all worth pleasing, far better than he. And yet you permit him to elbow you aside, as it were, and to thrust you into a false position, if not into obscurity. If Miss Loring is the woman God has created for you, in the name of all that is holy, do not let another man usurp your rights. Do not let one like Dexter bear her off to gild a heartless home. Remember that Jessie is young, inexperienced, and unskilled in the ways of the world. She is not schooled in the lore of love; cannot understand all its signs; and, above all, can no more look into your heart, than you can look into hers. How is she to know that you love her, if you stand coldly—I might say cynically—observant at a far distance. Paul! Paul! Women are not won in this way, as many a man has found to his sorrow, and as you will find in the present case, unless you act with more self-confidence and decision. Go to Miss Loring then, and show her, by signs not to be mistaken, that she has found favor in your eyes. Give her a chance to show you what her real feelings are; and my word for it, you will not find her as indifferent as you fear. If you gain any encouragement, make farther advances; and let her comprehend fully that you are an admirer. She will not play you false. Don't fear for a moment. She is above guile."

Mrs. Denison ceased. Her words had inspired Hendrickson with new feelings.

"As I parted from her to-day," he remarked, "she said, 'I shall be pleased to see you again.' I felt that there was meaning in the words beyond a graceful speech. 'Not if I show myself as stupid as I have been this morning,' was my answer. Very quickly, and with some earnestness, she returned: 'I have never thought you stupid, Mr. Hendrickson.'"

"Well? And what then? Did you compliment her in return; or say something to fill her ears with music and make her heart tremble? You could have asked no better opportunity for giving the parting word that lingers longest and is oftenest conned over. What did you say to that, Paul?"

"I blundered out some meaningless things, and left her abruptly," said Hendrickson, with an impatient sweep of his hand. "I felt that her eyes were upon me, but had not the courage to lift my own and read their revelation."

"Too bad! Too bad! The old adage is true always—'Faint heart never won fair lady'—and if you are not a little braver at heart, my young friend, you will lose this fair lady, whose hand may be had for the asking. So, I pray you, be warned in time. Go to her this very evening. You will probably find her alone. Dexter will hardly call twice in the same day; so you will be free from his intrusion. Let her see by tone, look, manner, word, that she has charmed your fancy. Show yourself an admirer. Then act as the signs indicate."

"I will," replied Hendrickson, speaking with enthusiasm.

"Go and heaven speed you! I have no fear as to the issue. But, Paul, let me warn you to repress your too sensitive feelings. Your conduct, heretofore, has not been such as to give Miss Loring any opportunity to judge of your real sentiments towards her. Your manner has been distant or constrained. She does not, therefore, understand you; and if her heart is really interested, she will be under constraint when she meets you to-night. Don't mind this. Be open, frank, at ease yourself. Keep your thoughts clear, and let not a pulse beat quicker than now."

"That last injunction goes too far, my good friend; for my heart gives a bound the moment my eyes rest upon her. So you see that mine is a desperate case."

"The more need of skill and coolness. A blunder may prove fatal."

Mr. Hendrickson rose, saying,

"Time passes. A good work were well done quickly. I will not linger when minutes are so precious."

"God speed you!" whispered Mrs. Denison, as they parted, a few minutes later at the door.

## CHAPTER VI

IT was an hour from the time Mr. Hendrickson left the house of Mrs. Denison before he found himself in one of Mrs. Loring's parlors. He had been home, where a caller detained him.

Full ten minutes elapsed after his entrance, ere Jessie's light tread was heard on the stairs. She came down slowly, and as she entered the room, Hendrickson was struck with the singular expression of her face. At the first glance he scarcely recognized her.

"Are you not well, Miss Loring?" he asked, stepping forward to meet her.

His manner was warm, and his tones full of sympathy.

She smiled faintly as she answered—

"Not very well. I have a blinding headache."

Still holding the hand she had extended to him in meeting, Mr. Hendrickson led her to a sofa, and sat down by her side. He would have retained the hand, but she gently withdrew it, though not in a way that involved repulsion.

"I am sorry for your indisposition," he said, in a tone of interest so unusual for him, that Miss Loring lifted her eyes, which had fallen to the carpet, and looked at him half shyly—half interrogatingly.

"If you had sent me word that you were not well, Miss Loring"—

He paused, gazing very earnestly upon her face, into which crimsoning blushes began to come.

"I am pleased to meet you, Mr. Hendrickson. I did not wish to be excused," she answered, and then, as if she had been led to utter more than maidenly modesty approved, averted her face suddenly, and seemed confused. There followed a moment or two of silence; when her visitor said, leaning close to her, and speaking in a low, penetrating, steady voice—

"Your reply, Miss Loring, is an admission of more than I had expected—not more than I had hoped."

He saw her start, as if she had touched an electric wire. But her face remained averted.

"Miss Loring"—

Warmer words were on his lips, but he hesitated to give them utterance. There was a pause. Motionless sat the young maiden, her face still partly turned away. Suddenly, and with an almost wild impulse, Hendrickson caught her hand, and raising it to his lips, said—

"I cannot hold back the words a moment longer, dear Miss Loring! From the hour I first looked into your face, I felt that we were made for each other; and now"—

But ere he could finish the sentence, Jessie had flung his hand away and started to her feet.

"Miss Loring!"

He was on his feet also. For some moments they stood gazing at each other. The countenance of Miss Loring was of an ashen hue; her lips, almost as pallid as her cheeks, stood arching apart, and her eyes had the stare of one frightened by some fearful apparition.

"Miss Loring! pardon my folly! Your language made me bold to utter what had else slept in my heart eternally silent. Forget this hour!"

"Never! Never!" and she struck her hands together wildly. Her voice had in it a wail of suffering that sent a thrill to the heart of Paul Hendrickson.

Then recollecting herself, she struggled for the mastery over her feelings. He saw the struggle, and awaited the result. A brief interval sufficed to restore a degree of self-possession.

"I have nothing then to hope?" said the young man. His tones were evenly balanced.

"Too late! Too late!" she answered, in a hoarse voice. "The cup is dashed to pieces at my feet, and the precious wine spilled!"

"Oh, speak not thus! Recall the words!" exclaimed Hendrickson, reaching out his hands towards her.

But she moved back a pace or two repeating the sentence—

"Too late! Too late!"

"It is never too late!" urged the now almost desperate lover, advancing towards the maiden.

But retreating from him she answered in a warning voice—

"Touch me not! I am already pledged to another!"

"Impossible! Oh, light of my life!"

"Sir! tempt me not!" she said interrupting him, "I have said it was too late! And now leave me. Go seek another to walk beside you in life's pleasant ways. Our paths diverge here."

"I will not believe it, Miss Loring! This is only a terrible dream!" exclaimed Hendrickson.

"A dream?" Jessie seemed clutching at the garments of some departing hope. "A dream!" She glanced around in a bewildered manner. "No—no—no." Almost despairingly the words came from her lips. "It is no dream, Paul Hendrickson! but a stern reality. And now," speaking quickly and with energy, "in Heaven's name leave me!"

"Not yet—not yet," said the young man, reaching for his hands and trying to take one of hers; but she put both of her hands behind her and stepped back several paces.

"Spare me the pain of a harsh word, Mr. Hendrickson. I have said—leave me!"

Her voice had acquired firmness.

"Oh, no! Smite me not with an unkind word," said Hendrickson. "I would not have that added to the heavy burden I seem doomed to bear. But ere I go, I would fain have more light, even if it should make the surrounding darkness black as pall."

His impassioned manner was gone.

"I am calm," he added, "calm as you are now, Miss Loring. The billows have fallen to the level plain under the pressure of this sudden storm. You have told me it was *too late*. You have said, 'leave me!' I believe you, and I will go. But, may I ask one question?"

"Speak, Mr. Hendrickson; but beware how you speak."

"Had I spoken as now this morning, would you have answered: 'Too late?'"

He was looking intently upon her face. She did not reply immediately, but seemed pondering. Hendrickson repeated the question.

"I have said that it was *now* too late." Miss Loring raised her eyes and looked steadily upon him. "Go sir, and let this hour and this interview pass from your memory. If you are wise, you will forget it. Be just to me, sir. If I have betrayed the existence of any feeling towards you warmer than respect, it has been under sudden and strong temptation. As a man of honor, you must keep the secret inviolate."

There was not a sign of girlish weakness about the calm speaker. Her small head was erect; her slight body drawn to its full height; her measured tones betrayed not a ripple of feeling.

"I am affianced, and know my duty," she added. "Know it, and will perform it to the letter. And now, sir, spare me from this moment. And when we meet again, as meet no doubt we shall, let it be as friends—no more."

The pressure of despair was on the heart of Paul Hendrickson. He was not able to rally himself. He could not retain the calm exterior a little while before assumed.

"We part, then," he said, speaking in a broken voice—"part—and, ever after, a great gulf must lie between us! I go at your bidding," and he moved towards the door. "Farewell, Miss Loring." He extended his hand; she took it, and they stood looking into each other's eyes.

"God bless you, and keep you spotless as the angels!" he added, suddenly raising her hand to his lips, and kissing it with wild fervor. In the next moment the bewildered girl was alone.

## CHAPTER VII

THE visit of Hendrickson was an hour too late, Dexter had already been there, and pressed his suit to a formal issue. The bold suitor had carried off the prize, while the timid one yet hesitated. Jessie went back to her room, after her interview with Paul Hendrickson, in spiritual stature no longer a half developed girl, but a full woman grown. The girl's strength would no longer have sustained her. Only the woman's soul, strong in principle and strong to endure, could bear up now. And the woman's soul shuddered in the conflict of passions that came like furies to destroy her—shuddered and bent, and writhed like some strong forest-tree in the maddening whirl of a tempest. But there was no faltering of purpose. She had passed her word—had made a solemn life-compact, and, she resolved to die, but not to waver.

The question as to whether she were right or wrong, it is not for us here to decide. We but record the fact. Few women after such a discovery would have ventured to move on a step farther. But Jessie was not an ordinary woman. She possessed a high sense of personal honor; and looked upon any pledge as a sacred obligation. Having consented to become the wife of Leon Dexter, she saw but one right course, and that was to perform, as best she could, her part of the contract.

How envied she was! Many wondered that Dexter should have turned aside for a portionless girl, when he might have led a jewelled bride to the altar. But though superficial, he had taste and discrimination enough to see that Jessie Loring was superior to all the maidens whom it had been his fortune to meet. And so, without pausing to look deeply into her heart, or take note of its peculiar aspirations and impulses, he boldly pressed forward resolved to win. And he did win; and in winning, thought, like many another foolish man, that to win the loveliest, was to secure the highest happiness. Fatal error! Doubly fatal!

It is impossible for any woman to pass through an ordeal like the one that was testing the quality of Jessie Loring, and not show signs of the inward strife. It is in no way surprising, therefore, that, in her exterior, a marked change soon became visible. There was a certain dignity and reserve, verging, at times, on coldness, not seen prior to her engagement—and a quiet suppression of familiarity, even with her most intimate friends. The same marked change was visible in her intercourse with Mr. Dexter. She did not meet him with that kind of repulsion which is equivalent to pushing back with the hand. She accepted his loving ardor of speech and act; but passively. There was no responsive warmth.

At first Mr. Dexter was puzzled, and his ardent feelings chilled. He loved, admired, almost worshipped the beautiful girl from whom consent had been extorted, and her quiet, cold manner, troubled him sorely. Glimpses of the real truth dawned into his mind. He let his thoughts go back, and went over again, in retrospection, every particular of their intercourse—dwelling minutely upon her words, looks, manner and emotions at the time he first pressed his suit upon her. The result was far from satisfactory. She had not met his advances as he had hoped; but rather fled from him—and he had gained her only by pursuit. Her ascent had not come warmly from her heart, but burdened with a sigh. Mr. Dexter felt that though she was his, she had not been fairly won. The conviction troubled him.

"I will release her," he said, in a sudden glow of generous enthusiasm. But Mr. Dexter had not the nobility for such a step. He was too selfish a man to relinquish the prize.

"I will woo and win her still." This was to him a more satisfactory conclusion. But he had won all of her in his power to gain. Her heart was to him a sealed book. He could not unclasp the volume, nor read a single page.

Earnestly at times did Jessie strive to appear attractive in the eyes of her betrothed—to meet his ardor with returning warmth. But the effort was accompanied with so much pain, that suffering was unable to withdraw wholly beneath a veil of smiles.

The wordy, restless pleasure evinced by Mrs. Loring, was particularly annoying to Jessie; so much so that any allusion by her aunt to the approaching marriage, was almost certain to cloud her brow. And yet so gratified was this worldly-minded woman, at the good fortune of her niece in securing so brilliant an alliance, that it seemed as if, for a time, she could talk of nothing else.

Mr. Dexter urged an early marriage, while Jessie named a period nearly a year in advance; but, as she could give no valid reason for delaying their happiness so long, the time was shortened to four months. As the day approached, the pressure on the heart of Miss Loring grew heavier.

"Oh, if I could die!" How many times in the silence of night and in the loneliness of her chamber did her lips give forth this utterance.

But the striving spirit could not lay down its burden thus.

Not once, since the exciting interview we have described, had Paul and Jessie met. At places of fashionable amusement she was a constant attendant in company with Dexter, who was proud of her beauty. But though her eyes searched everywhere in the crowded audiences, in no instance did she recognize the face of Hendrickson. In festive companies, where he had been a constant attendant, she missed his presence. Often she heard him inquired after, yet only once did the answer convey any intelligence. It was at an evening party. "Where is Mr. Hendrickson? It is a long time since I have seen him," she heard a lady say. Partly turning she recognized Mrs. Denison as the person addressed. The answer was in so low a tone that her ear did not make it out, though she listened with suspended breath.

"Ah! I'm sorry," responded the other. "What is the cause?"

"A matter of the heart, I believe," said Mrs. Denison.

"Indeed is he very much depressed?"

"He is changed," was the simple reply.

"Who was the lady?"

Jessie did not hear the answer.

"You don't tell me so!" In a tone of surprise, and the lady glanced around the room.

"And he took it very much to heart?" she went on.

"Yes. I think it will change the complexion of his whole life," said Mrs. Denison. "He is a man of deep feeling—somewhat peculiar; over diffident; and not given to showing himself off to the best advantage. But he is every inch a man—all gold and no tinsel! I have known him from boyhood, and speak of his quality from certain knowledge."

"He will get over it," remarked the lady. "Men are not apt to go crazy after pretty girls. The market is full of such attractions."

"It takes more than a painted butterfly to dazzle him, my friend," said Mrs. Denison. "His eyes are too keen, and go below the surface at a glance. The woman he loves may regard the fact as a high testimonial."

"But you don't suppose he is going to break his heart over this matter."

"No—oh, no! That is an extreme disaster."

"He will forget her in time; and there are good fish in the sea yet."

"Time is the great restorer," said Mrs. Denison; "and time will show, I trust, that good will come from this severe trial which my young friend is now enduring. These better natures are oftenest exposed to furnace heat, for only they have gold enough to stand the ordeal of fire."

"He is wrong to shut himself out from society."

"So I tell him. But he says 'wait—wait, I am not strong enough yet.'"

"He must, indeed, take the matter deeply to heart."

"He does."

Here the voice fell to such a low measure, that Jessie lost all distinction of words. But the few sentences which had reached her ears disturbed her spirit profoundly—too profoundly to make even a ripple on the surface. No one saw a change on her countenance, and her voice, answering a moment after to the voice of a friend, betrayed no unusual sign of feeling.

And this was all she had heard of him for months.

Once, a little while before her marriage, she met him. It was a few weeks after these brief unsatisfactory sentences had troubled the waters of her spirit. She had been out with her aunt for the purpose of selecting her wedding attire; and after a visit to the dressmaker's, was returning alone, her aunt wishing to make a few calls at places where Jessie did not care to go. She was crossing one of the public squares when the thought of Hendrickson came suddenly into her mind. Her eyes were cast down at the moment. Looking up, involuntarily, she paused, for within a few paces was the young man himself, approaching from the opposite direction. He paused also, and they stood with eyes riveted upon each other's faces—both, for a time, too much embarrassed to speak. Their hands had mutually clasped, and Hendrickson was holding that of Jessie tightly compressed within his own.

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