

Mrs. Rollan passed over the ensuing years in silence; but Kate understood. The two women always refrained from speaking of the faults of Edward Rollan, the one from wifely, the other from filial, loyalty.

'After old Mrs. Terriss died,' the older lady continued, 'I found the locket among her belongings. I kept it, but did not trust myself to look at the miniature. One trinket I did not find—another locket containing my portrait, painted when I was a very young girl, which my mother had given her.'

'As a faithful wife, I banished the image of Arthur from my mind, and even when death broke the bond that bound me I would not suffer my thoughts to dwell upon the first love of my youth. But since I have been here in this southern country, since I looked at the miniature and have seen you wearing the locket, I have been haunted by 'recollections of the days when I was a girl. And yet for years I have believed Arthur Terriss dead.'

'No, no, mother, he is alive!' Kate broke out eagerly, unable longer to keep back her story. 'You have thought of him so much, perhaps, because he has been nearer to you than for years before. Mother, he is in Mexico. David knows him.'

Mrs. Rollan started to her feet.

'Arthur is living?' she repeated in a dazed way.

'Yes, I have written to him and have received a reply. He is coming to visit us. Dearest! what have I done?'

Springing forward, the girl stretched forth her arms just in time to prevent her mother from falling. Mrs. Rollan had fainted.

'Of course mother and Arthur Terriss are past the age of romance now,' Kate said to herself with the positiveness of her twenty years.

Nevertheless, anxious that he should see that her mother had not altogether lost her comeliness, she persuaded the gentle lady to smarten up her frocks and to turn her wavy hair back from her face in a soft roll, as she had worn it long ago. The result was that she did not look a day over forty.

At last the expected guest arrived, and with him came David Cranston. On the surface everything was absolutely commonplace. From behind the vines of the verandah Kate saw them nonchalantly walking from the station. As they approached the house, however, and the senior caught sight of the ladies on the porch, he quickened his pace and sprang up the steps as agilely as David.

Mrs. Rollan, hospitable, gracious, but self-possessed, hastened forward to greet him.

'Margaret,' he cried, and his voice had the softness of the Mexican accent as, taking both her hands in his, he raised them to his lips. Was the impulse but a Spanish courtesy, or something more?

With a stately formality he led her back to her chair, and then turned to Kate, who was ready to forgive his tardy notice of her, since she in turn had been engrossed in welcoming David.

The Senor Teressano did not appear nearly so elderly as she had supposed him to be. He was tall and of fine physique, with blue eyes, and although his hair was grey, his clean-shaven face and slightly sun-browned complexion showed him to be a well-preserved man; 'good for twenty years yet,' as he laughingly said of himself. His clothes were of fine cloth, if not perhaps quite up-to-date, and he had not only an air of distinction, but of the perfect neatness that bespeaks refinement. The girl decided that he was one who, under all circumstances, would prove a gentleman.

The hotel of the town was the headquarters of the visitors, but every evening saw them at the little house of the Rollans; and often during the day the senior was there too, for he loved to chat with Kate's mother while she worked at her embroidery.

A month had passed, when one evening Kate, who was waiting for David in the drawing-room, caught a few words that were wafted in from the corner of the verandah by the September breeze.

'But, Arthur, why did you go away?' queried the sweet voice of Mrs. Rollan.

The tender earnestness of the senior's answer surprised the girl, and made her forget that she was playing the part of eavesdropper.

'Senora mia,' he said, 'it was because I loved you, yet Edward had wooed you first. I thought you were indifferent to me. Had my rival been anyone but my stepbrother, I would have remained and striven manfully to win you; but I could not try to wrest from him the treasure I believed he was on the point of gaining. Sometimes, however, I have wondered if my going was a mistake.'

He paused, but Mrs. Rollan did not answer.

Yet Kate, as she held her breath, felt intuitively that her mother would fain have cried out with pas-

sionate directness, that he might well doubt. Had he done right or wrong to go? Was his idea of honor the true one? He had sacrificed his own happiness in the name of friendship; but had he been just to the woman he loved?

And yet Margaret had acknowledged to her daughter that it was of her own free will she had married Edward Rollan. Why did she marry at all? At the cross-roads of life, when she found herself separated from Arthur, she had voluntarily chosen her path; how, then, could she blame him for the sorrows of her way?

'If I had stayed, would you have loved me?' he urged.

Still she did not speak. Even though she had been long a widow, the memory of the years when she was a wife prevented her from admitting that her young heart had at first been given to Arthur. The past, from the first day she had seriously listened to Edward's wooing until his death, belonged to the man who had been her husband. Since then life had been the succession of grey days that sometimes follow a storm.

The senior sighed with disappointment, but persisted.

It is needless to tell you of my varying fortunes, except that I came northward from Peru. Your portrait, painted from the miniature I took away with me, has been the only woman's face I cared to see in my home. Well, we will not speak of the past, but of the present and the future; your future and mine at least are in your hands. I love you still, I can keep you from want. Margaret, will you love me now and henceforth; will you be my wife?

Kate heard the woman who had been the love of his life tremulously answer 'Yes.'

Then she stole out of the house and walked down the road to meet David.

The announcement of the approaching marriage of the Senor Teressano and Mrs. Rollan was received with pleasure by all save one of the friends whom Kate and her mother had made in D—. To their astonishment, David Cranston was unmistakably gloomy over the news. He avoided the Rollans for days, and when he finally called to offer his congratulations, the elder lady good-naturedly gave him a chance to 'make up' what she supposed to be a lover's quarrel.

The few minutes alone with Kate which he usually so prized now threatened, however, to be an awkward quarter of an hour for both. The girl chatted gaily of the coming wedding.

'The senior will take his bride beyond the Rio Grande, and they have made me promise to go with them,' she volunteered. 'Of course my mother's marriage will make quite a difference to me.'

She was half ashamed at venturing to hint to him thus that now, with her mother provided for, she herself was free.

But to David her words were as a match to a fuse, and an explosion succeeded.

'That is just it,' he cried, jumping up and pacing the floor in excitement. 'In bringing about the reunion of my friend and your mother, I have defeated my own hopes. I love you, I want you for my wife, but they will take you away.'

'And will it be too far for you to follow?' inquired Kate, with a touch of scorn.

'Miss Rollan, is it possible that you do not understand?' he exclaimed, facing her. 'The Senor Teressano is one of the wealthiest mine-owners in the southern republic. Can it be that your mother is not yet aware of this?'

'Mother thinks he has only a little property,' she exclaimed aghast. 'Why, you yourself told—or at least let me suppose—that he was poor.'

'I only wanted to test you,' he admitted.

'Well, at any rate, David, what has his position to do with us?'

'Don't you see, dear,' he said, melting as she uttered the little word that seemed to link them together, 'the senior will be able to make a brilliant marriage for you? Your mother will naturally want to see you well settled; you yourself—why, every woman likes luxury, and I am only a mining engineer, with good prospects, it is true, but a small income.'

'Yet you love me?' Kate repeated in a voice that thrilled him. 'You still wish to marry me?'

'I love you, and will marry you to-morrow if you are willing,' he answered, forgetting everything else.

'Then, David,' said the little school-teacher bravely, 'your love is more to me than all the wealth of Mexico, because I have prayed, not for riches, but for happiness.'