

'Society!' exclaimed Eveline. 'Poor Zoe will never be able to do anything, but give lessons—when she is old enough. Her father intends her to be a governess.'

'She has no taste in dress either,' continued Mirza. 'She will be a real dowdy one of these days.'

'I can't think that exactly,' rejoined Eveline. 'She has good taste in colors, and is always exquisitely neat. But she has no style.'

'Style!' ejaculated Mirza with a laugh. 'She will never need it—unless, indeed, she should have to make her living in one of the large dressmaking establishments where the young ladies try on garments for customers.'

'That Zoe would never do,' replied Eveline. 'Her father would not permit it.'

'What is he but a clerk?'

'That is true, but he went to school and played with your papa and mine, just as we three do now.'

'Yes,' said Mirza, 'but he is not a success. I heard papa say so.'

'And my papa also,' replied Eveline. 'I heard that conversation.'

But neither of the girls added what had also occurred: that the two friends of M. Bertrand had said it was because of having paid his father's debts, thus having deprived himself of his patrimony; and that they had also said he was too honest to succeed in life.

'Zoe is of the same disposition,' said Mirza. 'She is simply a nonentity, and will always be.'

'She is very sweet, though, Mirza,' remarked Eveline, still loyal to her friend.

'I don't deny it,' replied Mirza. 'But doesn't she dress plainly? I am almost ashamed to go out with her.'

Zoe could not endure any more. Putting her fingers in her ears, she did not hear the rest of the conversation. She feared almost to move. But after a while she got up and stole silently away. Once in her own little room, she threw herself upon the bed and shed many silent tears; for Zoe was not one to make a display either of grief or joy. But, in spite of her quiet demeanor, she had a great deal of firmness. Seated by the window, she reviewed the happy years spent with her young companions, which she now felt were gone forever. She could not conceive of a friendship which could vanish as that of Mirza had done. Eveline had been less heartless; but Zoe felt that she, too, had changed toward her, and that the time had come to sever their relations.

She must, however, do this without exciting the suspicions of her father or his friends. There was no need to grieve his devoted heart. Still, Zoe was scarcely more than a child; she felt the need of a confidant in whose bosom she could pour her sorrow; and when Madeleine came to tell her that luncheon was waiting, and noticed her red eyes, Zoe had soon told her the whole pitiful story.

'It is not what I heard to-day that has decided me,' concluded Zoe. 'This has been going on ever since Mirza's return. I have felt that they were both changed; that I did not, and could not, share their plans and pleasures as I had always done before. And perhaps it is best, Madeleine, that it has happened; for you know very well that both will soon be young ladies, that they will move in a different sphere from mine, and that it would be impossible for me to attempt to join in their amusements. I will soon get over it, Madeleine; for now I must begin to work—or to prepare for work.'

'What do you mean?' asked the indignant old servant. 'You do not need to work. For what do your papa and I practise all our economies but that you may have something when he is gone? For what do I hoard and treasure every cent. that I can spare from my wages but for the same purpose—to add to the store he is laying aside for our darling Zoe? Ah, those mean, ungrateful creatures!' she wound up bitterly. 'But for the fear that it would cause trouble among the gentlemen, I should denounce them before their deceitful faces.'

'My good old Madeleine!' cried Zoe, throwing her arms around the old woman's neck. 'How can I ever thank you! But you and papa shall practise your "little economies," as you call them, no longer. Do not say a word of all this to papa, I implore you. Only uphold me in all I shall ask of him, and confirm all the statements I shall make. Will you promise me?'

'Yes, I will do anything you ask,' replied Madeleine. 'I have never known you to say or do anything that was not right. I will say "Yes" to everything you propose.'

Zoe dried her tears, and went to luncheon. She did not go downstairs again during the day, and no one came to seek her. With a pang she reflected that

until lately, no day could have passed in which her friends would not have sought her, had she failed to make her appearance. But her mind was so busy with plans for the future that it took away much of the poignancy of her regret.

Toward evening, seated at her high window, she saw Mirza and Eveline, accompanied by one of the Beauvallon maids, pass along the sidewalk. This gave her a desired opportunity. She ran down to the pavilion in the garden where they had been accustomed to study, took her books from the corner of the bench where she always placed them, and hastened upstairs, her eyes overflowing with tears. Her childhood was over; her friends had grown indifferent; she had bidden adieu to the past. And then as she paused in front of a picture of her parents, taken in the early days of their marriage, her affectionate heart went out to both—the dear dead mother whom she had never known; the loving father whose whole life was spent in her service, with no thought but for her future.

II.

That night, after the table had been cleared, and M. Bertrand sat down as usual for a quiet talk with Zoe before going to spend an hour smoking with his two friends in M. Beauvallon's den, he observed reflectively:

'Zoe, my dear, I have often thought that, in spite of our circumstances, you and I have been singularly favored. Here we are—and have been all your life, at least—with every advantage, almost, that our richer neighbors possess. We are all like one family. Nothing has ever occurred to disturb our pleasant relations. And you, my child, have participated in the studies of Eveline just as though you were her sister. I could never have been able to pay for the lessons you have shared with your friend. Think what it would have meant if I had been obliged to send you away from me to a convent school. How lonely I should have been! I often think of it, and thank God for His goodness.'

Zoe looked at her father. For a moment she wondered if he had heard or suspected anything. He had never spoken so before. But his calm and happy countenance, his gentle eyes filled with gratitude, assured her that he meant every word he said; and she felt grateful for the opportunity offered her to unfold her plans.

'Papa,' she observed slowly, 'you are right in all you say; and I have, I think, been very grateful for the advantages I have enjoyed. Your words have given me courage to say something that has been occupying my mind for some time. You know that my future must be very different from that of Mirza and Eveline. Their fathers are wealthy; they will never have to work for their living. But we are poor; you are not as young as you once were; and I have resolved—with your permission, of course—to discontinue my studies with the girls, and choose some means of making a living.'

M. Bertrand looked aghast at his quiet, timid little Zoe.

'What do you say, my child?' he exclaimed. 'Make a living! I had never thought of such a thing. I trust it will not be necessary. I have plenty of work in me yet, I hope; and my savings are not so small.'

'But your pleasures and luxuries are, papa,' answered Zoe. 'Do not think that I have not observed your economy and self-sacrifice. It has always been in my mind to help when I was old enough, and now I think the time has come.'

'But, my dear—'

'No, papa, unless you positively forbid it—which would make me very unhappy—no objection you can make will have any effect on me. There is nothing for me to do in the house, Madeleine is so efficient. Let me prepare myself for some occupation by which I can help you.'

'But what could you do?'

'I had thought of going to the Polytechnic, where I could improve my drawing. Mlle. Boulin told me several times that I had some talent for designing; and she said also that young girls sometimes make a good deal of money that way. (Mlle. Boulin was the lady who had given drawing lessons to the three girls.) And, besides, papa,' she continued, 'among the pupils at Mme. Rigaud's pension, there are often American ladies who wish to take French lessons, and they pay well.'

'My dear Zoe,' said M. Bertrand, 'I confess that I am surprised; but at the same time I admit you are very sensible. For the first time I realise that you are no longer a child. I shall not refuse you. Let us consider the matter a little, in order to see what will be best. What do you think, Madeleine?' he inquired of the old woman, who was busy putting away the dishes in the china closet.