

'Oh, she'll marry some rich old man. I hear she's booked for Samuel Ibbotson.'

Clarinda felt the blood run surging to her brain.

'Booked for Samuel Ibbotson,' she gasped. 'Why should such a thing be said? And drawing back from the crowd of dancers, she sank limp and trembling on a seat. 'Aunt would surely never force me to do that.'

'Ah! here you are, sweet child,' Mrs. Golding cried, coming towards her, her hand on Samuel Ibbotson's arm. 'But why—what is wrong?'

The girl smiled faintly and put her hand to her eyes.

'I'm tired. My head aches. May I—will you take me home?'

'Of course, if you are ill. Mr. Ibbotson, will you kindly ask for my carriage?'

'Certainly; and I hope this is only a passing indisposition, Miss Uttley.'

'Oh, quite passing, thank you.'

'And may I call to-morrow morning?' he said in a marked way. 'I have much to say to you.'

'You may call,' Clarinda replied, looking at him with cold eyes. 'My aunt will be glad to see you. But I am going to the country. Good-night, Mr. Ibbotson.'

Mr. Ibbotson bowed stiffly and withdrew. Mrs. Golding gazed at her niece with wrathful eyes, but did not speak till they were in the carriage driving home through the quiet streets.

'And pray,' she said fiercely, 'what is the meaning of this freak? Why did you refuse to see Mr. Ibbotson in the morning?'

'For the reason I gave, Aunt dear. I shall not be in town.'

Your departure will be a tacit refusal of Samuel Ibbotson's hand. He was coming to ask you to be his wife.'

'I could never be his wife.'

'And pray, why not?' in a low, suppressed voice. 'He is a good man; wealthy.'

'I know. But I do not love him.'

'That would come. If a sensible girl loves no one else, is heart-whole, as I understand you ...'

Clarinda gave a sob, and laid her hand upon her aunt's arm.

'I deceived myself. I deceived you,' she cried, 'and I only knew I had done so—to-night.'

'You mean you love someone—'

'Yes, I could never marry as you wish.'

'You have disappointed me bitterly.'

'I am sorry, you have been so kind, so good to me,' stammered Clarinda. 'But I cannot—help it.'

'You must go your own way,' icily, 'I cannot prevent you. But you need not expect help from me when you repent of your folly.' And without another word Mrs. Golding swept out of the carriage, up the hall-door steps, and away to her own room.

The afternoon was waning. In the orchard, behind the Langton's house, under the old apple trees it was cool and shady, and here in a long chair reclined Ernest Langton, white and weary, a shadow on his face, a look of pain across his eyes. He had been very ill, and although out of danger did not recover his strength as quickly as the doctors and his friends desired and hoped he would. That afternoon he was depressed, and when they left him alone under the trees his eyes had a sad and mournful look as he fixed them, with a heavy sigh, upon the bright, beautiful sky just visible through the waving branches of the trees.

'I cannot believe it,' he moaned. 'A girl of heart and feeling could never make such a marriage—and if she did—would surely be unhappy. When the first glamor—the novelty of wealth—passes, what will remain? To Clarinda, with her sweet and loving nature—nothing.'

He looked round and suddenly started up in his chair and, turning from white to red, put his hand to his forehead and uttered a little cry.

Through the trees, in her plain serge dress, her fair hair shining golden in the sunlight, her eyes bright

with excitement blooming and radiant, came Clarinda Uttley.

'Am I dreaming?' gasped Ernest. 'Or—why is she here? Clarinda! You?' He stiffened himself and held out a white and shaking hand. 'I—did—not expect to—'

The girl caught his hand and threw herself on her knees by his side.

'You have been ill,' she cried, with a sob. 'Oh! why did they not tell me sooner?'

'I have been ill. But—'

'Don't look like that, Ernest. Say you are glad to see me. I've just come back to—to you—and those I love.'

'I must congratulate you,' he said coldly. 'I hear you are about to marry—well, a wealthy man.'

'No, those rumors are false. I could not do it. I've—breathing very hard—as you once said, deceived myself. I want something nobler, better than a life of worldly dissipation and wealth. I must have—be with those I—Oh! Ernest, I now know that without love life is not worth living.'

'But—you—dread—dullness—poverty?' broke from his trembling lips.

'Not with the man,' a bright blush dyeing her sweet face crimson, 'I love.'

'Clarinda! Do I understand?' His pallid countenance was lit up with a great joy, his eyes shone with happiness. 'Dare I hope? Do you mean that you love me—that you are willing to give up wealth and ease and luxury, and be my wife?'

'I left all that behind me. I will never,' touching her homely dress with her fingers, 'wear better than this, till you can give it to me, as your wife. Now,' with a happy little laugh, 'I hope you are glad to see me?'

'Glad? Oh, my beloved,' throwing his arms around her and drawing her head upon his breast, 'more glad than words could say. My beautiful love—my sweet Clarinda—you have given me hope. Now, I have something to live for.'—CLARA MULHOLLAND.

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