

"You are right; such self-sacrifice is almost inconceivable!" says Horace gravely.

"You need not despise it," she says quickly, stung by his tone. "It is not every man who would wish for a *fiance* with no *dot*, nothing that any one will envy him. You may hear what they say in Pont-Avize. They will not think of it as you do. I shall not bring him anything that he cares for, and he will give me a share in all that he has."

"Yes, in his refined pleasures and his gilded drawing-room, in his absurd fountain and his Chinese pagoda, in the Venetian mirror of which he talks so much, and his fat poodle. Your fate will be indeed a happy one," cries Horace scornfully.

She turns away and makes no answer, for her strength has deserted her, and miserable scalding tears fall fast upon the white linen. But Horace is not appeased though he knows that she is crying.

"So this is to be the end," he says again, bitterly. "Why did I not know it before?"

"Because I did not know it myself," she says, hastily brushing away her tears and turning once more toward him. "It was only yesterday that they told me. It will be a long time before he asks me himself. Papa has said that he will wait. He will give me time."

"And what will time do for you?" asks Horace coolly, seating himself on the stool and fixing his eyes upon her.

"Why—why do you try to make it harder for me?" she cries, while the tears drop unheeded upon his coat sleeve and her own hands.

"Why? Must I tell you why?" She stops crying at the question and looks at him like a frightened child, for she can not withdraw her hands from his, nor hide her face from his eyes.

"Do you know now?" he asks again slowly, whilst at the rush of color which his look has brought into her face a great gladness takes possession of his heart and holds high revel there. "Do you not understand that it is because I would make it impossible? Will you not love me, do you not already love me a little? Tell me—answer me."

But she makes no answer. She only droops her head lower and pulls her hands away from him.

He lets them go and steps back. "Then you can not," he says quietly. "If it was not so you could not send me away without one word. At least you would speak to me. You need not be afraid; I am not going to force an answer now;" and he makes a movement as if to leave her. It is fortunate that her confusion is too great for her to observe that his voice is not so desponding as his words.

"Wait," she says, stretching out one imploring hand; "I did not mean to be unkind."

"Then look up. Only look up, and I will not ask you to speak even one word."

She has been trained under a strict rule, and with her obedience is almost an instinct. She does not dream of resisting the tone of authority, gentle as it is.

Her heart is beating in frightened throbs; she does not even know what she would say; her long lashes are still wet with tears; her cheeks are burning; yet difficult though it is, she does not hesitate to lift her shy eyes to his. And she has no need to speak, for they have told him all that he would know.

"My sweet little love," he cries joyously, and takes her in his arms; and she does not struggle or try to speak, but hides her face upon his shoulder.

## v.

Three days have passed since that stolen interview in the storeroom—three days since love came and claimed his prey. He has reigned with undivided sovereignty for three joyful rosy dawns—three happy wakeful nights, in Aimée's glad young heart. Horace is still at Pont-Avize; they are not as yet betrothed, for M. Laval is cautious. He has two strings to his bow, and he will not, as yet, discard either.

If young Dallas can obtain the consent of his friends and the approval of his family, he will be a better *parti*, for Horace will be an English baronet some day, and that is the next thing to a lord. But he fears lest the young man should not be able to carry out his intentions; even in England parents have some authority, and Sir George Dallas may withhold his consent. As to the young people marrying without it, such a thing is not to be thought of for a moment.

Horace has written to his father, and M. Laval is clever enough to see that he is uneasy about the result.

Horace for his part is very far from being at his ease. He breathes not a word of his doubts or his fears to Aimée, but he thinks of the old home and the tribe of younger brothers and sisters. He remembers his father's anxieties and care for the future, above all he remembers a fair-haired English girl, whose fortune would have made his path in life so easy, a girl of whom his mother had said, "She is so good and true, Horace; if you win her you will be a happy man;" and in his heart he knows that a week ago he was ready to believe that she was right. Yet at least he was not pledged, and though he has sealed his love to Aimée by but one kiss, it is a pledge which shall never be broken.

When the letter comes at last he opens it with nervous haste, and as he turns the first page his brows contract and an angry light comes into his eyes. He for once seeks M. Laval of his own accord, but it would not seem that the hour which he spends with him in his study has tended to soothe his perturbed feelings. As he leaves him he thrusts the letter into his pocket, crushing it in his hand, and goes out gloomily into the street.

"Go, then, if you will; obtain your parents' permission and then come to ask mine," M. Laval has said. "It is well our good Blanchard knows not of this little episode," he thinks to himself as the young man leaves him. "Bah, it is the overture before the opera, the grace before the meat."

"He is insufferable," Horace says to himself. "Aimée shall never see him again when once we are married. It