

"Yes, to Mr. Abbott. They, at least, seem to be perfectly content. When do you mean to follow suit, Joan?"

Joan was gathering and eating blackberries. She hooked down a high branch with her umbrella, and gathered all of the ripe fruit from it before she answered quietly—

"Not at all."

Lottie looked at her eagerly.

"Why not? Joan, you might tell me whether you have any reason for saying so—whether there is not some person you care for? You know it would go no farther."

"No farther than Mr. Lenthall, you mean," said Joan, quietly. "No, Lottie, dear, I have no little romance to tell. I did have one, once, but it's over now—dead and buried. There, now, you know all there is to know."

She walked on, so abstracted that it was some time before she became aware that Lottie was crying quietly. Her large eyes became almost round with surprise.

"What is wrong?" and she put her arm around the weeping girl, and drew her to where the ferny bank offered an inviting seat.

"My last hope!" sobbed Lottie. "Don't Joan, I thought better of you."

"What do you mean? I don't understand you," said Joan.

Lottie dashed away her tears and drew away from the encircling arm.

"I would not believe it before. He said you avoided him, coming from church, Sunday, but I was sure he was mistaken—I knew you used to care for him. Why, if Fred were hideous, I should not care. He'd be the same to me. Here, let's go back."

"Go back!" Joan repeated in surprise. "I thought you wanted me to go to the village with you."

"Not now—not that way!" and Lottie, looking very nervous and excited, caught Joan by the arm, and tried to drag her back the same way they had come.

"Are there some cows coming," asked Joan, superfluously, for the road here turned a sharp corner, and it would have been utterly impossible to see anything till it was close on them. "How absurd you are, Lottie! I will not stir a step till you tell me why."

"Because—because—oh, here they are!" stammered Lottie, confusedly, her cheeks becoming red as her eyelids.

As she spoke, Lenthall and Emerson turned the corner, arm-in-arm.

"This was a plan, then! Lottie, I'll never forgive you," she whispered.

She shook hands in a cold and distant way with each of the young men. Lenthall was quite unconscious of any stiffness, for he had seen the wetness of certain eyes, and he was all anxiety to learn the cause.

Emerson, however, instantly shrank into himself, for he had become painfully sensitive, attributing any fan-

cieled slight to his changed appearance. He was scarred, certainly, but his dark eyes had not altered, except in expression.

"Shall we turn back with them, Kane?" Lenthall asked, and the other assented.

There was no help for it. Lottie and Fred must be allowed to linger just out of hearing, and to converse in tender undertones. Joan felt that she had been trapped, and suspected Emerson of being in the plot, though in fact he was under the impression that the meeting was accidental.

"I am glad to see you are able to go out again," said Joan, formally.

"This is not the first time; I was in church, Sunday," he answered.

"I saw you," and Joan tried to seem unconscious of his quick glance.

"I thought so—although you would not speak to me."

The reproach made Joan feel a little choky in the throat. How could she tell him why she had shrunk from the meeting—not trusting her power to greet him calmly?

"This is the first time we have met," Kane went on, as she was silent, "since I offended you so bitterly. I hardly thought you would nurse that offense so long—after I had apologized."

"I did not," said Joan, finding a voice, but rather a harsh one, through her effort to command it. "I was annoyed at the time, but that was all."

Then her coldness and distance were all due to his marred face, Kane thought, and longed for the interview to end.

"I shall not annoy you in that way again," he began, for the sake of saying something. "I think when I fell on my head I must have smashed my organ of humor, for I have felt sober enough ever since."

Joan's throat was a little troublesome again.

"It is being out of health. That is all, I hope," she said, after a pause.

"What, don't you think it an improvement? I remember how you used to complain that I was never serious."

"And now I wish you were less so," said Joan, looking away from him. "Shall we wait for the others?"

"If you like," he answered, and he looked back to where the lovers were following slowly far behind.

"I never gave you credit for so much vanity, Mr. Emerson," said Joan, breaking the uncomfortable silence.

"Vanity!"

"What is it but vanity that makes a scar or two trouble you so much?"

"It is not the scars that trouble me, but the difference that I find in my friends," Emerson answered, moodily.

"Mr. Emerson, you surely do not think such a thing as that could make any difference to your friends."