

Allan Kirke checked him with a motion of his hand.

"Spare me, Arthur Desmond, if you please, any recapitulation of the disgraceful story of your past. Nothing that you, or any human being, can say, can alter the fact that you basely deserted your young wife, when she lay, as you thought and hoped, on her death bed. As if that were not enough to brand you for perdition, you most grossly maligned her when you thought death's seal upon her lips would prevent her ever refuting your lie. All this you did for what?—for money! Faugh! hell is teeming with lost souls that are white in comparison with yours."

Arthur Desmond's face grew livid, and for an instant his eyes scintillated with a deadly gleam. But the steady gaze of the man before him seemed to pierce him through and through like cold steel, and, coward that he was, he was afraid to utter the angry words that trembled on his lips. At length he spoke.

"You are hard upon me, Dr. Kirke; but if you come to me as Leonie's friend, I give you leave to say what you please. Can you tell me where she is?"

"If I could not I should scarcely be here. But whether I will do so depends upon the nature of your errand. Look me in the face, Arthur Desmond, and if the truth be in you, tell me what is the feeling or motive that actuates you in coming back, thus, almost from the antipodes, after six long years, to disturb the peace of the woman whose life you have completely wrecked?"

"Dr. Kirke," said Desmond, taking a step forward and speaking with a strange, impressive earnestness, "if I answer you truthfully, you will laugh in my face; nevertheless, I will so answer. I came back because I love Leonie, the sweet wife I in a moment of madness deserted—because I have never been able to forget her for a single hour—because, with every day that has dawned in all these six long years, I have cursed myself for my baseness—cursed the hour of my temptation, and the stern, selfish old man from whom it emanated. Lastly, I have come because I can not longer live without her. I have come to win her back, and I will try to clasp her to my hungry heart, or I will put an eternal end to the torment I am suffering. If, as you charge, I deserted her solely for money, I have, also, relinquished money—a cool million and a half—for her sake. My uncle, on his deathbed, cut me off with half a million, because I revealed to him the fact of my marriage, and thus frustrated his design of marrying me to his niece. I have come for my wife, Dr. Kirke, but if she receives me as you have, God help me."

There was no mistaking the heartfelt earnestness and magnetic power of the man, and Allan Kirke, as he listened, bravely laid out the corpse of any hope

he had ever had of winning Leonie Desmond to forget the love of her girlhood. At length he said—

"Well, Desmond, if you have really come to your senses, and mean to do right by her, I can only wish you God speed. But oh, man, I hope you realize what you have made her suffer. I hope you know that half a century of love and truth and tenderness can not obliterate the scars you have cut upon her little heart."

"I do realize it all, Dr. Kirke, and so help me God, the aim of my life henceforth shall be to make atonement to her."

"Amen," was the solemn response.

And then, with the assurance that he would communicate to him, in the morning, his wife's wishes in regard to an interview, Allan Kirke withdrew, and went slowly homeward; and with each reluctant step he was picturing to himself what his home, his life, would be henceforth, without that dear presence.

As he crossed the lawn and neared the house, he could see her through the meshes of the lace window draperies, still sitting by the hearth where he had left her, gazing dreamily into the dying embers.

He stood still and asked himself: "Can I go in there and tell her now? Must I stand by and see the love light leap into her eyes at the glad tidings that he is near? Surely I may spare myself that."

And instead of going to her, he went to his study and scrawled a hasty note—

The enclosed letter is the one I received to-night. I have been to the hotel, have seen him and talked with him. Can only say that he seems truly penitent, and asserts that he has never ceased to love you, and to regret his desertion of you. It is a matter in which I can not venture to advise you, Leonie; you must obey the dictates of your own heart and judgment. I have promised to let him know early to-morrow if you are willing to see him. God help you to decide aright.

ALLAN KIRKE.

Calling his sister, he sent her with the note and letter, to Leonie; then passed the greater part of the night pacing the floor of his study.

"She wasn't half so surprised and startled as I expected she would be," said Hannah, meeting him as he came down stairs next morning. "When she had read his letter she just looked at me, with her sweet eyes all aglow, and said she: 'Aunt Hannah, I've waited six long years for this moment.' Then she kissed me and ran out of the room, and that was all of it. Goodness knows I hope he will not take her far away from us, for she's just growing into my heart strings;" and Hannah buried her face in an ample cambric handkerchief, and gave way to tears.

Her brother, to whom the relief of tears refused to come, turned quietly away and went to summon the man who was going to desolate his life.