

"My dear madam, pray tell me what you think?" and he then told her the whole story. When he went away it was with the understanding that he would call again in the morning. Meanwhile the lady related the story to the girl, advising her to go with him. Vividly she portrayed the two paths in life now open before her. "I think," she concluded, "indeed, he as much as said it, that he will make you his wife at once if you will consent. Let me assure you it is love, not justice, that has made him spend months in seeking you out."

When Gaylord came next morning, this worldly-wise woman left the pair to themselves, and when Lute went away the girl blushing told her mistress that she had consented to marry the gentleman.

"I ain't the cousin he's talking about, but if he is willing to take a poor kitchen girl and give her a fine home, I am willing to go. It will be a great thing for me, having no home since mother died."

Ten days later Lute Gaylord and wife registered at the hotel just opposite the building in which Rodgers & Son had their offices. In the early evening, as Reece—the mere ghost of his former self—was riding down the street, he saw the young couple coming down the hotel steps, starting for a walk. As he caught a full view of the bride's face, he suddenly reined up his horse and ejaculated:

"Rose! Miss Wilton!"

Simultaneously the two gentlemen raised their hats, and Gaylord said, proudly: "My wife, Mrs. Gaylord, now;" and then he watched to see her recognize some old acquaintance; but she only stared blankly from one to the other.

At the introduction and entire want of recognition on the part of the lady, Reece grew suddenly dizzy and would have fallen out but for Lute, who caught the reins and steadied him.

"I am better, now," said Reece, faintly, holding out a shaking hand for the lines.

Mechanically the young husband watched him off, and turning to his wife, asked, almost sternly:

"Don't you know him?"

"No, I never saw him before."

"Oh, Rose!"

"I insist on your calling me Annie," she said, haughtily. "I have told you all the time that I am not your cousin Rose, and was never in Oakland before and know nobody here; but I am your wife, now, and you have to use me well."

Lute had another chill—he always had them when he got to wondering whether he had not made a sad mistake. Then there was another fear that was even worse. If this was Rose, the shock his mother had given her had affected her mind, and she was deranged on all matters relating to herself as Rose Wilton. When he spoke next he proposed that they walk toward the Villa. Surely the sight of the beautiful home would move her; and he determined to watch her closely. Very lovely she looked in her stylish suit of white flannel, but every few minutes there would be something in her manner or speech that made him uneasy. She seemed delighted with the Villa, but so far as he could detect there was not the faintest memory connected with it for her.

"And shall we live here?" she asked.

"Yes, but I shall pay rent until the estate is settled. Rose, don't you remember anything about the place?"

"Mr. Gaylord, don't ask me any of those hard questions again, please don't."

"Call me Lute, dear."

"Call me Annie, then."

After that they walked back in almost utter silence, and the past was avoided as much as possible. People knowing Rose Wilton called on the Gaylords at the Villa, but they never called a second time. Annie was an excellent cook and a neat seamstress, but there her accomplishments ended. The fine library, the grand piano and studio were useless to her. Thus a

year passed. If Lute Gaylord suffered for lack of culture and refinement in his wife, and with a secret dread lest her malady take a worse form, Reece Rodgers suffered ten times more. He had never met her face to face since that first evening, and hearing many of the strange stories in circulation a gloom settled down upon him.

"If she were dead I could bear it," he said to himself; "but it is like knowing that her ghost is haunting the old place."

One Friday night, when Lute came home, he told his wife that the Wilton estate was settled and that his mother, himself and sister were the heirs. Annie had been mistress of the Villa a year before she undertook a general house cleaning. She heartily enjoyed it, and somehow she felt that things would seem more like her own if they were moved about. But right in the midst of it all an awkward servant upset a quaintly carved cabinet that stood in one corner of the family sitting room. Over it went with a crash, and something giving way a row of little drawers was revealed. She looked through them curiously. There were papers and letters lying loose and bound in packages, but she piled them neatly away. One after another of the tiny drawers was opened until a curious bit of shining silver caught her gaze.

"Why!" she exclaimed, catching her breath, and picking it up. It was attached to a faded, blue ribbon. "Why!" she said again, her hands shaking as she examined it closely. Then she went to the small trunk in her own room, her only possession before her marriage, and from a tiny box in the till she took a charm precisely like the one found in the cabinet, only it was attached to a pink ribbon.

"I can't understand, I can't understand," she said, over and over. Then suddenly springing to her feet she let both the trinkets fall to the floor, while with hands outstretched in an imploring manner she cried out:

"Can it be? Can it be?"

Growing calmer after a while she put the charms in her box and went down stairs. Eagerly she opened each paper and letter, scanning the lines closely. In the very bottom of the same little drawer where the charm had lain was a



"A PAPER,
YELLOW AND WORN."



"EAGERLY REECE RODGERS CAUGHT AT THIS ONE."

paper, yellow and worn. She opened it, and the first line that met her eye was: "Last Will and Testament of Florence T. Wilton." It was an old document, signed in New York, and the date was more than sixteen years back. It bequeathed one-half her possessions to her "beloved daughter, Rose Wilton," and the other half was to be equally divided between Lucius and Ellice Gaylord.

House cleaning suddenly lost its charm for the mistress of the Villa, and, donning one of her prettiest suits, she took the two charms and the yellow document and started for the office of Rodgers & Son.

Reece was in his private office alone. He arose when he saw his visitor was a lady, and pushed forward a chair; but when she threw back her veil he started back as if she had struck him a blow.

"Rose—beg pardon—Mrs. Gaylord!"

The lady in question was not accustomed to doing legal business, and as a usual thing, she was extremely diffident; but to-day she was another being.

"Please sit down, Mr. Rodgers, I have something to say to you."

"After all this time, Rose?" His voice quivered with pent-up emotion.