

all her's; entailed, ye know, by her grandfather that was my mother's uncle. Thars just only us two left o' the old stock, and in the course o' nature the property'd come ter me. When the war begun, with the niggers an' money an' all, it was worth a million dollars—all Darragh's—then just ten years old. Major Lanier was her guardian—had a pile o' money of his own, too. He was the first man in the country to enlist as a soldier—soon as there was a company he armed and equipped 'em at his own expense. On top o' that he put all the an' Darragh's money in the Cotton Loan. Oh, he ain't one that ever did things by halves, I tell, ye."

"Evidently not," Fanning said, setting his teeth hard. The other went on: "An' as if that warn't enough, after the Yankees come in these parts, through a lawyer here, he mortgaged Darraghs-mount—every acre—and sent the money to England to buy quinine and gunpowder for his men, sick and well. He's a fighter from way back, let me tell ye. Enlisted 'for the war,' and stayed always where the fight was hottest. Notthin' ever tetched him till the last month of shindy. In some o' them fights before Petersburg he got so shot and cut to peices that nobody thought he'd live a week. But somehow he did pull through—more's the pity, I can't help saying. Darragh and old Isaac managed somehow to get him home. Of all his fortune nothing was left but the plate and furniture, and books—he had fine ones if he didn't read—carpets and blankets and linen had mostly gone to the soldiers and the hospitals. Here he has been ever since, blind helpless as you see him, but saved from every care. You don't need to be told that whatever is, is for him—the other two do without. Now for twenty odd years a woman who by rights ought to roll in gold has had never a decent frock and barely enough to eat, has pieced and patched, and turned and contrived, sold all that was saleable outside her father's room—plate, furniture, books, curios—and spent whatever they fetched in, keeping fair weather for him.

Of course the mortgage wasn't worth the paper it was written on unless she'd sign it after coming of age. Bu', bless you, nobody could make her see that she wasn't bound by her father's doing. In her eyes he could never do wrong. She went straight to the bank that held it, and said: "You shall have the land; only let me live on it till my father dies." They were mighty willin' to that—the major, they thought, couldn't live a year—but for all that, they made Darragh promise not to work or develop the land, except what old Isaac could tend. He's just about made bread and caicken-feed every year, with corn enough over to winter old Sultan, the majors

name, but he was a soldier—one that helped do something for the major when he was so bad off—I can just remember him—he came to see her off and on for three—fo'—years, when I was a brat. We always said Darragh loved him a heap. I reckon 'twas the major—the keer of him, you know, that kep' 'em apart. Anyway, he went off somewere—New York, I b'levee—so' she's here, wearin' her life away."

"Why do you tell me all this?"

"Well? you see, ma wrote about you two strangers bein' here; first off Darragh was afraid the bank had sent you to buy and take possession. When she found out better—ma's over here every little spell—why, we concluded one of you must be after her. Oh! I can tell you that speculation's been tried before. I'd a-been back to see about it six weeks ago, only I was out drummin' for our house—Wheelock and Co.—an' didn't get word of things till just yesterday. Now I'm a square man; I've showed you all my hand. If you mean anything, say so, and do your best to win. Ef you don't—why, it's no more'n fair, I should ask you to get out. I ain't vain—you're a heap better to look at, and I don't want Darragh to have too much chance to compare us."

"So! you have so thought of giving up your—suit?"

"Not till death or matrimony. But say! is it go or stay with you?"

Fanning yawned, though his eyes were blazing. "Really, Mr Reid! you must excuse me until to-morrow," he said, turning upon his heel and vanishing through an open window.

Night fell ere he came back, and all day through there raged in him the battle of love and pride. Love! At last he aimed it squarely Hamilton Fanning—rich, fastidious, distinguished, master of art, and hearts—found himself captive to this dull, quiet woman whose life had been one long sacrifice, who had no claim of youth, of wit, of wealth, to excuse his enthrallment. How he would have laughed to even have thought—nay, how had he repelled Betram's insinuation of such a possibility the day he first set eyes on her. Now, he told himself over and over, he had come to the parting of the ways. On one hand lay the great world—his world of fame and riches, and freedom, and the highest place among his fellows. Art, he held a jealous mistress, brooking no rivalry of wife or child. She could give him much—so much—all that hitherto had seemed to him worth wishing; now it looked poor and tawdry, lacking the illumination of

A N D R E W L E E S.

Importer, 48 George Street, Dunedin.

GLASS, PAPERHANGINGS, PAINTS, PICTURE-FRAME MOULDINGS, BEVELLED MIRRORS, &c.

The Largest Stock of British Plate and English Sheet Glass in New Zealand. A large variety of the latest and original designs in Paperhangings from the leading British Manufacturers. Established 1859.]

ANDREW LEES, 48 George Street.

war horse, who lives on as astonishingly as his master. You've seen him, no doubt, in the yard all summer; he brought the major out through the hottest sort of fire, when he was so hurt they thought him dead there in the saddle—so Darragh would go hungry herself sooner than stint his corn. She has taken good pains the major shall not know what she has given up. He was awfully cut up, thinking he had beggared her; so she makes him believe the land is her's, free and clear, and that she simply won't sell her coal and iron rights because she has already more money than she knows what to do with. Believing that, he wants her always to wear silk, dress for dinner, and all that. I reckon, though, you know all about that—poor old man! so he has the feel of silk about her, he believes her fine as a fiddle. It's the same way about old Isaac—he is supposed to be valet and butler, with a dozen servants under him, when really what time he can spare from waiting on old Eppy, his wife who is cook, he is out in the field, working for dear life.

Now just look at things! The place is worth two fortunes still; coal in one hill, iron in another, wood, water, limestone, all about—five thousand acres in it, too! Ain't it more than a shame that the rightful owner and heir should be chuseled out o' it in this fashion? All for a whim, too. Ever since I came of age I've been at Darragh to let me open the case and fight those bank sharks. She jest won't hear of it; says she gave her word of honour for her father's debt—and that's worth more than a hundred million, let alone one or two."

Fanning half turned away to say: "H-m-m! I suppose, then, there is no record of her promise?"

"Not a scratch? That's one reason she's so set; says them people trusted her, and she ain't goin' back on 'em. Ef once I could get her to marry me, they'd dance to a different tune!"

"Ah! you are—fond of her?"

"Oh, yes!—in a way. She's a right good sort—but, man alive just look at it. I'm heir to this property, if she dont fool it away, or—marry you?"

"Has she had no other chance?"

"More'n you could shake a stick at. We ain't the only ones—not by a jugful. Fact is, she could have took her pick of the country long ago, if she'd ever left the major long enough to talk to a man. One time she did have a right smart notion of a feller—I forget his

Darragh Lanier's eyes, of her thinking smile, her tender, patient face. If only life could go on to the end at the pace of these last weeks he would know well which to choose. In the wide, bare house, amid the silence of leaves and sky, she could never lose her charm. How would it be, though, if she were borne away—transplanted to the flaunting garden of his world—set over against the brilliant beauties, trained from birth to all the fine arts of fascination, and masking in wreathed smiles whatever of dark or bitter fate might set in their hearts?

He could never dare such a contrast. Choosing her, he must choose also the way of life she led. And could he endure that, year in and year out? Now it seemed easy, the one thing worth living for. Yet he had an inner sense that, after use had dimmed the glammers of her presence, he might find him bitterly discontent with his choice.

As he set foot on the piazza, her voice came out of its gloom. Evidently she was awaiting him, a proceeding altogether strange. As he went toward her she stood up, saying with a little undertone of tremor, "Please forgive me, Mr Fanning, for—for—what you were forced to endure to-day."

"What do you know about it?" Fanning asked, letting his hand steal through the dark to the two clasped so meekly in front of her.

For a minute she made no answer beyond the nervous tremor of her fingers. Then she drew them gently away and said, half under her breath. "Nothing—that is, only that Joe—came—with the purpose to be—disagreeable. I—ought not to have left you—at the mercy of his tongue."

"Do you know what he asked me?"

"No; I am afraid—"

"Have no fear; it was only what I have been asking myself inarticulately these ten days past; that is, dare I ask you to trust yourself in my keeping?"

Through the sweet, still dark, he heard a low half-sobbing sigh, felt her sway and shrink away from him into the doorway's deeper murk. Again he put out his hand, seized, held her's hard and fast, saying thickly: "I do dare. The rest is as you will."

She drew him impetuously within, down the long hall on to the door-way through which she had first dawned upon his vision. The

JAMES ALLAN,

House Painter and Decorator,
Please Note Address—148

Importer of Paperhangings, Panels, and Glass.

Armstrong Street, Christchurch (a few doors from Manchester Street)