

'The Hon. Mrs. Conrad Dalrymple'—reading from the paper before her—'has returned from the Continent to 106, Grosvenor square for the winter.'

Veronica flushed to her eyes, then grew suddenly pale again; her hands trembled and her eyes filled with tears.

'I couldn't do it. It would be too horrible—too—And yet—for mother's sake I might venture—overcome my pride and go to Mrs. Dalrymple. If she is kind she will see at once what I want and will—but oh! I cannot bear to beg for that—call it as I will, asking for help—that is what it will be in plain English. I could not—would not do such a thing for myself, but I must make an effort to save my darling. Posts are few; salaries low. So I'll go to Diana Dalrymple. I'll tell her all, and if her heart is not—smiling sadly—as stony as her name, she'll do something to help us. To-morrow is Saturday—a half-day in the city. So I'll be bold and brave, and venture to present myself to my magnificent cousin. It's really a good idea, and will be quite easy to carry out.'

But the following afternoon, as Veronica fastened on her hat and veil, the visit to her cousin seemed a useless and trying ordeal.

'She'll scorn me,' she moaned, 'and I'll be wild with humiliation. I can't! But I've promised mother, so I must face it, cost me what it may.' And, seizing her gloves, she ran downstairs.

Looking neither to the right nor to the left, the girl walked quickly through the streets, and soon found herself in Grosvenor square. Her heart throbbing, her color coming and going, she went up the steps of her cousin's fine mansion and rang the bell.

'I wish to see Mrs Dalrymple—on business,' she said, nervously.

'Impossible!' replied the footman. 'These are not business hours.'

'No; but I feel sure Mrs. Dalrymple would see me for a moment.'

'Have you an appointment?'

'No. But I think she will see me for a second.'

'I'm not so sure. In fact— But wait a bit,' softening as he met the girl's beautiful, imploring eyes; 'I'll just see. She's expecting somebody, I know. Maybe it's you. I can tell her it was a mistake, if she's angry. Follow me.' And he led the way up a broad, handsomely carpeted staircase to the drawing-room door. Here he paused, and, turning, said: 'What name shall I say, Miss?'

'Loraine—Miss Veronica Loraine,' stammered the girl, trembling in every limb. 'But you had better ask Mrs. Dalrymple if she will see me.'

'No, miss. I'll announce you straight away.'

He threw open the door and, standing aside to let the girl pass in, said in a loud, clear voice:

'Miss Veronica Loraine, madam.' Then he quickly withdrew.

A tall, stately woman, with bright auburn hair, elaborately and fashionably dressed, stepped forward, her green velvet tea-gown sweeping softly behind her, diamonds flashing on her white fingers and amongst the lace at her throat.

'I have not the honor of Miss Loraine's acquaintance,' she said in a cold, slow voice. 'And I cannot talk to her now.'

Veronica gazed at her cousin in speechless terror. The Hon. Mrs. Dalrymple was handsome despite her fifty years. But her manner was repellent, her expression haughty and forbidding.

'I must ask you to go—at once'—she pointed towards the door—'I am expecting a friend, and cannot be interrupted by a stranger.'

'Oh! wait—one moment, please!' Veronica stammered. 'My father was your cousin—you must remember him—Ferdinand Loraine. He was good, hard-working, but unfortunate, and he died poor. My mother—in a choking, tearful voice—'it is for her I ask your kindness—is in bad health, unable to work, and—'

'Your impertinence is extraordinary, and,' frowning and annoyed, 'not to be endured.'

She turned angrily and rang the bell.

'James,' as the footman, stolid and rigid, appeared upon the threshold, 'show Miss Loraine out. I am not "at home" to-day to anyone but Sir Leonard Dalrymple. If you disobey my orders again, you must go.'

She swept away up the long drawing-room, and Veronica, her head high, a red spot on each cheek, cast one indignant and reproachful glance at her proud, cold-hearted relative, and followed the footman down the stairs.

'My little venture has failed,' she thought. 'Well, I had no right to expect it to succeed. Only for mother—poor, dear mother—I—I would neither fret nor grieve. But on her account I am deeply disappointed.'

As Veronica passed out, a tall, soldierly-looking man of three or four and thirty, with dark eyes, and a fine, intelligent face, went up the steps of Mrs. Dalrymple's house. He glanced admiringly and inquiringly at the girl, then slowly entered the spacious hall.

'Who is that lady, James?' he asked the footman. 'She seemed distressed.'

'Yes, Sir Leonard. She's a Miss Loraine. She was very anxious to see Mrs. Dalrymple.'

'And she saw her, I suppose?'

'Saw her, yes. But Mrs. Dalrymple wouldn't speak to her. The poor thing was upset and disappointed, though she struggled hard not to show it.'

'She looked brave. Is Mrs. Dalrymple "at home," James?'

'Yes, Sir Leonard. She's expecting you, so this young lady came at the wrong moment.'

'Ah! she'll have better luck next time, I trust.' Then, laying his hat and stick upon the table, he followed James upstairs. 'Loraine!' he thought. 'To be sure: Aunt Diana was a Loraine. I wonder if that can be a daughter of the unfortunate actor-cousin, who was cut off so ruthlessly by his uncle. By Jove! She is lovely, and looks sweet and good—but, alas! desperately poor. Something must be done. She must be helped. Aunt Diana has always been a spoilt child of fortune; she knows nothing about poverty, its struggles and its misery. I have been through the mill. That girl's face has touched me to the heart.'

Mrs. Dalrymple greeted him with radiant smiles and held out both her hands.

'Now this is delightful!' she cried; 'I thought you had forgotten me till I got your note this morning.' He pressed her hands and laughed.

'Now, is that likely, Aunt Di?'

'Don't call me by that absurd name; it makes me feel old.'

'And you look—far from that, Diana.'

'A rather chilling remark, Leonard. However, I forgive you. And now, what's your news? Going to be married?'

'No,' shortly. 'I'm not a marrying man.'

'My dear Leonard! But they all—laughing—'say that—till the right person turns up. But you said you had something to tell me.'

'So I have. I've bought Sunnyside, the Gosspots' place in Hampshire, and am going to live there.'

She clapped her hands. 'Good news! Then we'll have house parties and bridge and—'

'Occasionally, perhaps. Not often. I'm going to cut the old pleasure-seeking, idle set, Diana, and turn over a new leaf.'

'Going to turn monk? My dear Leonard, I'm horrified.'

He smiled and took a seat beside her.

'Don't be alarmed or horrified; a monk's life would not suit me. But I want to mend my ways a bit and do some good to my fellow-men.'

'Leonard!' she stared at him. 'What's wrong?'

'Nothing, Diana. I am quite sane. But—well, I have been treated better than I deserve. My father, unlike any Dalrymple ever heard of before, made his own money in trade, and was honored with a baronetcy. I spent and squandered and lived a life he did not approve of, yet in spite of the disappointment the dear man felt in me, he left me everything. His goodness and generosity have touched me and filled me with remorse, and my earnest wish now is to do what I think he would approve of—help those less fortunate,