

Libbey Laura Jean

**Jolly Sally Pendleton: or, the
Wife Who Was Not a
Wife**



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Laura Jean Libbey

Jolly Sally Pendleton Or the Wife Who Was Not a Wife

CHAPTER I

**BOTH GIRLS WERE SO STUNNINGLY PRETTY, AND WORE SUCH
ODD, BEWITCHING COSTUMES ON THEIR TANDEM, THAT THE
PEOPLE WHO STOPPED TO WATCH THE BEAUTIES AS THEY
WHIRLED BY NICKNAMED THEM "THE HEAVENLY TWINS."**

As Jay Gardiner drove down the village street behind his handsome pair of prancing bays, holding the ribbons skillfully over them, all the village maidens promenading up the village street or sitting in groups on the porches turned to look at him.

He was certainly a handsome fellow; there was no denying that. He was tall, broad-shouldered, with a fair, handsome face, laughing blue eyes, a crisp, brown, curling mustache, and, what was better still, he was heir to two millions of money.

He was passing the summer at the fashionable little village of Lee, among the Berkshire Hills of Massachusetts.

That did more to advertise the place than all the glowing newspaper items the proprietor of the Summerset House could have paid for.

Every mother of a marriageable daughter who had heard of the millionaire managed to rake and scrape together enough money to pass the season at Lee.

It was laughable to see how adroitly these mothers managed to secure an introduction, upon one pretext or another, to the handsome millionaire. Then the daughters were duly brought forward and presented.

Every one knew the story of Jay Gardiner. His lady-mother and elder sister lived in what was called the Castle, the grandest and most famous homestead by far in Great Barrington.

With all the millions at her command, haughty Mrs. Gardiner had but one great sorrow, and that was that her handsome son could not be induced to remain at home and lead the life of a fashionable young gentleman of leisure.

At college he had declared his intention of studying medicine. He had graduated with high honors, and, much to his mother's annoyance, had established himself as a full-fledged M. D.

If he had been poor, perhaps patients might not have come to him so readily; but as it was, he found himself launched at once into a lucrative practice.

This particular summer upon which our story opens, his grand lady-mother was unusually incensed against handsome Jay. He had refused to spend his vacation at the Castle, because, as he explained, there was a bevy of fashionable girls invited there for him to fall in love with, and whom he was expected to entertain.

"The long and the short of it is, mother, I shall not do it," he decisively declared. "I shall simply run over to Lee and take up my quarters in some unpretentious boarding-house, where I can come down to my meals and lounge about in a *négligé* shirt, and read my papers and smoke my cigars swinging in a hammock, without being disturbed by girls."

In high dudgeon his lady-mother and sister had sailed off to Europe, and they lived all their after-lives to rue it, and to bemoan the fact that they had not stayed at home to watch over the young man, and to guard the golden prize from the band of women who were on the lookout for just such an opportunity.

Jay Gardiner found just such an ideal boarding-house as he was looking for. Every woman who came to the village with a marriageable daughter tried to secure board at that boarding-house, but signally failed.

They never dreamed that the handsome, debonair young millionaire paid the good landlady an exorbitant price to keep women out.

Good Widow Smith did her duty faithfully.

When Mrs. Pendleton, of New York, heard of the great attraction at Lee, Massachusetts, she decided that that was the place where she and her two daughters, Lou and Sally, should spend the summer.

"If either of you girls come home engaged to this millionaire," Mrs. Pendleton had declared, "I shall consider it the greatest achievement of my life. True, we live in a fine mansion on Fifth Avenue, and we are supposed to be very wealthy; but not one of our dear five hundred friends has discovered that the house we live in is merely rented, nor that your father's business is mortgaged to the full extent. We will have a hard time to pull through, and keep up appearances, until you two are married off."

Mrs. Pendleton established herself at the Summerset House, with her two daughters. Every Saturday afternoon the pompous old broker went out to Lee, to make a show for the girls.

"The next question is," said Mrs. Pendleton, after the trunks were unpacked, and the pretty clothes hung up in the various closets, "which one of you two will Mr. Gardiner prefer?"

"Me!" said jolly Sally, with a mischievous laugh, complacently gazing at the lovely face reflected in the mirror.

"It might be as well to wait until after he is introduced to us before you answer that question," said Lou. "But how are we to meet him?"

"Your father will attend to that part of the business," said Mrs. Pendleton. "He understands what he has to do, and will find a way to accomplish it. Having marriageable daughters always sharpens a man's wits. Your father will find some way to get in with young Mr. Gardiner, depend upon that."

It required three weeks for Mr. Pendleton to secure an introduction to the young man. On the following day the two sisters, dressed in their best, and hanging on their father's arms, paraded up and down the village streets until they espied the object of their search. Introductions naturally followed; but, much to the chagrin of the girls, their father, after chatting for a moment with handsome Mr. Gardiner, dragged them along.

"I did not have a chance to say one word to him," said Lou, disappointedly.

"Nor I," said Sally, poutingly.

"Don't make a dead set for a man the first time you see him," recommended Mr. Pendleton, grimly. "Take matters easy."

The proudest moment of their lives was when Jay Gardiner called upon them at their hotel one afternoon. The girls were squabbling up in their room when his card was handed them.

"Did he say which one of us he wishes to see?" cried Lou, breathlessly.

"The Misses Pendleton," replied the bell-boy.

There was a rush for their best clothes, and an exciting time for the mother in getting the girls into them.

A moment later, two girls, both pretty as pictures, with their arms lovingly twined about each other, glided into the parlor. Handsome Jay turned from the window, thinking to himself that he had never beheld a fairer picture.

There was half an hour's chat, and then he took his departure. He never knew why he did it, but he invited them both to drive with him the next day. Sally was about to answer "yes," delightedly, on the spot; but her sister, remembering her father's warning, was more diplomatic.

"We will have to ask mamma if we can go," she said.

Mrs. Pendleton, who was passing through the corridor at that moment, was called in. She and her elder daughter exchanged glances.

"I am sorry," she said, apologetically, "but Sally and I have an engagement for that afternoon."

The young millionaire fell into the trap at once.

"Then could not Miss Louise accompany me?" he inquired.

"If she cares to go, I really have no objection," said Mrs. Pendleton, hiding her delight with an arch smile.

When he left, and the two girls had returned to their room, the stormiest kind of a scene followed.

"Take care! take care!" cautioned Mrs. Pendleton, to Sally. "Your sister Lou is twenty; you are but eighteen. You should not stand in her way."

CHAPTER II

IT IS ONE THING TO ADMIRE A PRETTY GIRL, QUITE ANOTHER THING TO FALL IN LOVE WITH HER

The next afternoon Sally Pendleton watched behind closed blinds as her sister drove off, proud and happy as a queen, in Jay Gardiner's handsome carriage. Louise Pendleton kissed her finger-tips gracefully to the blinds, behind which she knew her rebellious sister was watching.

The drive through the country roads was delightful, it was such a fine day, so bright, so sunshiny. Jay Gardiner seemed to feel the influence of it, and almost unconsciously cast aside the mantle of haughtiness and pride, in which he usually wrapped himself, in order to make it pleasant for the beautiful, graceful girl whom fortune and fate had flung in his way.

Louise realized what a golden chance she was having, and made the best of it.

That was the beginning of the strangest romance that ever was written.

When Jay Gardiner helped his fair companion from the buggy, Louise Pendleton looked shyly into her companion's face, murmuring that she had had the most delightful drive of her life.

"I am glad you are so well pleased," answered Jay, raising his straw hat with a low bow; adding, gallantly: "I must take your sister out and show her what beautiful roads we have here."

Louise was thoroughly diplomatic. A hot flush rose to her face, but she crushed back the words that sprung to her lips, saying sweetly:

"You are indeed thoughtful, Mr. Gardiner. I am sure Sally will appreciate it."

"We will arrange it for to-morrow," he said. "I would be delighted to have you accompany us. I will drop in at the hop this evening, and you can let me know."

Louise and her mother had a long talk that afternoon.

"I think she may as well go with you," said the mother. "I am positive that he will prefer you to your sister. Fair men usually like their opposites in complexion."

The following afternoon the two sisters went driving with handsome Jay in his splendid T-cart, and were the envy of every girl in the village.

He did his best to entertain them. He drove them over to Great Barrington, and through the spacious grounds that surrounded the Castle.

The eyes of both sisters glowed as they caught sight of the magnificent, palatial house, and each resolved, in the depths of her heart, that this should be her home, and that she should reign mistress there.

Jay Gardiner divided his attentions so equally between the two sisters that neither could feel the least bit slighted.

The fortnight that followed flew by on golden wings.

There was not a day that Jay Gardiner did not take the two sisters on some sight-seeing expedition.

Every one began to wonder which of the sisters was the favorite.

Mrs. Pendleton watched affairs with the keenest interest.

"If he has a preference for either, it is certainly Louise," she told herself. "Sally seems content that it should be so."

All night long, after these afternoon excursions, both girls would seek their pillows, and dream the whole night through of handsome Jay Gardiner.

Louise would talk of him all the following morning, but Sally uttered no word; her secret was buried down in the depths of her heart.

Other young men of the village sought a pleasant word or a smile from gay, capricious Sally Pendleton. But she would have none of them.

"I will have a millionaire or nothing," she said, with a little laugh.

On two or three occasions, much to Sally's chagrin, Mr. Gardiner invited Louise to drive without her.

"That shows which way the wind is beginning to blow," she thought; and she looked at her sister critically.

Louise and her mother often had long conferences when she came in from her rambles with him.

"Has he spoken?" Mrs. Pendleton would ask; and she always received the same answer in a disappointed tone – "No!"

"Any other girl would have had a declaration from the young man before this time."

"If I could make the man propose, I would be his betrothed without a day's delay," Louise would reply, quite discontentedly.

Sally would turn away quickly before they had time to notice the expression on her face.

One day, in discussing the matter, Mr. Pendleton observed his younger daughter gazing fixedly at her mother and Louise.

"Love affairs do not interest you, Sally," he said, with a laugh. "My dear," he said, suddenly, "you are not at all like your mother in disposition. Could you ever love any one very much?"

"I do not know, papa," she answered. "I do not love many people. I only care for a few. In the way you mean, love would be a fire with me, not a sentiment."

How vividly the words came back to him afterward when her love proved a devastating fire!

She had turned suddenly to the window, and seemed to forget his question.

No one knew what a depth of passion there was in the heart of this girl. If any one should have asked her what she craved most on earth, she would have replied, on the spur of the moment – "Love!"

CHAPTER III

THE TERRIBLE WAGER AT THE GREAT RACE

A month had gone by since the two sisters had met the one man who was to change the whole course of their lives.

Louise Pendleton made no secret of her interest in handsome Jay Gardiner. She built no end of air-castles, all dating from the time when the young man should propose to her.

She set out deliberately to win him. Sally watched with bated breath.

There could be no love where there was such laughing, genial friendship as existed between Louise and handsome Jay. No, no! If she set about it in the right way, *she* could win him.

As for Jay himself, he preferred dark-eyed Louise to her dashing, golden-haired sister Sally.

The climax came when he asked the girls, and also their father and mother, to join a party on his tally-ho and go to the races.

Both dressed in their prettiest, and both looked like pictures.

The races at Lee were always delightful affairs. Some of the finest horses in the country were brought there to participate in these affairs.

As a usual thing, Jay Gardiner entered a number of his best horses; but on this occasion he had not done so. Louise declared that it would have made the races all the more worth seeing had some of his horses been entered.

"Don't you think so, Sally?" she said, turning to her sister, with a gay little laugh; but Sally had not even heard, she was thinking so deeply.

"She is anticipating the excitement," said Mrs. Pendleton, nodding toward Sally; and they all looked in wonder at the unnatural flush on the girl's cheeks and the strange, dazzling brightness in her blue eyes.

They would have been startled if they could have read the thoughts that had brought them there.

There was the usual crush of vehicles, for the races at Lee always drew out a large crowd.

Jay Gardiner's box was directly opposite the judge's stand, and the group of ladies and gentlemen assembled in it was a very merry one, indeed.

Every seat in the grand stand was occupied. Both Louise and Sally were in exuberant spirits.

It was the first race which they had ever attended, and, girl-like, they were dying with curiosity to see what it would be like.

"Which horse have *you* picked for the winner?" asked Mr. Pendleton, leaning over and addressing Jay.

"Either General or Robin Adair. Both seem to stand an equal chance. Well, I declare!" exclaimed Gardiner, in the same breath, "if there isn't Queen Bess! It's laughable to see *her* entered for the race. She's very speedy, but she isn't game. I have seen her swerve when almost crowned with victory."

Sally Pendleton listened to the conversation with unusual interest.

In a few moments all the riders, booted and spurred, came hurrying out from their quarters in response to the sharp clang of a bell, and in a trice had mounted their horses, and were waiting the signal to start.

The interest of the great crowd was at its height. They were discussing their favorites freely.

The buzz of voices was deafening for a moment.

No one noticed Sally, not even Louise or her mother, as she leaned over breathlessly, and said:

"Which horse do *you* think is going to win, Mr. Gardiner?"

"I have no hesitancy in saying Robin Adair," he declared. "He has everything in his favor."

"I have an idea that the little brown horse with the white stockings will win."

He laughed, and a look indicative of superior judgment broke over his face.

"I feel very sure that your favorite, Queen Bess, will lose, Miss Sally," he said.

"I feel very confident that she will win," she said.

He shook his head.

"I should like to make a wager with you on that," she cried.

"A box of candy – anything you like," he replied, airily; "but I must warn you that it is not quite the correct thing to wager with a lady, especially when you are sure that she will lose."

"I'll take my chances," she replied, a strange look flashing into her excited blue eyes.

"You have not told me what the wager is to be."

For a moment the girl caught her breath and gave a lightning-like glance about her. No one was listening, no one would hear.

"You have not told me," said Jay Gardiner, gallantly, as he bent forward.

She turned and faced him, and her answer came in an almost inaudible whisper. But he heard it, though he believed he had not heard aright.

"Do I understand you to say that your hand is the wager?" he asked, surprisedly.

"Yes!" she answered.

For a moment he looked at her in the utmost astonishment. Then a laugh suffused his fair face. Surely this was the strangest wager that he had ever heard of. He was used to the jolly larks of girls; but surely this was the strangest of them all. He knew that there was little hope of Queen Bess winning the race. But he answered, with the utmost gravity:

"Very well; I accept your wager. Your hand shall be the prize, if the little mare wins."

"She is so very young – only eighteen," he said to himself, "that she never realized what she was saying. It was only a jolly, girlish prank."

If there had been in his mind the very slightest notion that Queen Bess would win, he should have refused to accept the wager. But she surely would not win; he was certain of that.

So, with an amused smile, he acquiesced in the strange compact. In the midst of the talking and laughing, the horses came cantering on to the course.

It was a beautiful sight, the thorough-bred horses with their coats shining like satin, except where the white foam had specked them, as they tossed their proud heads with eager impatience, the gay colors of their riders all flashing in the sunlight.

A cheer goes up from the grand stand, then the starter takes his place, and the half-dozen horses, after some little trouble, fall into something like a line. There is an instant of expectancy, then the flag drops, and away the horses fly around the circular race-track.

For a moment it is one great pell-mell rush. On, on, they fly, like giant grey-hounds from the leash, down the stretch of track, until they are but specks in the distance; then on they come, thundering past the grand stand at a maddening pace, with Robin Adair in the lead, General, Yellow Pete, and Black Daffy going like the wind at his heels, and Queen Bess – poor Queen Bess! – fully a score of yards behind.

A mad shout goes up for Robin Adair. He looks every inch the winner, with his eyes flashing, his nostrils dilated. Every man leans forward in breathless excitement. Even the ladies seem scarcely to breathe. Suddenly a horse stumbles, and the rider is thrown headlong. There is a moment's hush; but the horse is only an outsider, and the crowd cheer the rest encouragingly.

For a time they seem to run almost level, then most of the horses seem to show signs of the terrible strain. Robin Adair keeps steadily to the fore, with General closely at his heels. The rest begin to fall off.

Again a mad shout goes up for Robin Adair.

"No, no – General!" comes the hoarse cry from a hundred throats.

But through it all, the wiser ones notice the gallant little mare, Queen Bess, coming slowly to the front.

Some daring voice shouts:

"Queen Bess! Queen Bess!"

"She is fresh as a daisy!" mutters some one in the box adjoining Jay Gardiner's.

White to the lips, Sally Pendleton sits and watches, her hands clasped tightly in her lap.

The babble of voices is so deafening that she can not hear.

Again the gallant steeds are specks in the distance. Now they pass the curve, and are on the home-stretch, dashing swiftly to the finish.

Nearer and nearer sounds the thunder of their oncoming hoofs. Ten thousand people grow mad with excitement as they dash on.

To the great surprise of the spectators, Queen Bess is gaining steadily inch by inch, until she passes those before her, even the General, and there is but a ribbon of daylight between herself and the great Robin Adair.

The crowd goes wild with intense excitement. Nerves are thrilling as down the stretch dashes the racers almost with the rapidity of lightning.

The grand stand seems to rock with the excited shouts. One great cry rises from ten thousand throats. Queen Bess has reached the great Robin Adair's flanks, and inch by inch she is gaining on him. And the excited spectators fairly hold their breath to see which horse wins.

CHAPTER IV

WHICH WON?

Never in the history of the Lee races had there been such an exciting scene as this. Jay Gardiner's face is as white as death, as, with bated breath, he watches the two thorough-breds. Every one rises to his feet in the hope of catching a full view of the flyers.

Which will win the race – the great Robin Adair or the gallant little Queen Bess?

The mad shouts are deafening.

Suddenly they notice that Robin Adair, who has been victor in a dozen such races, begins to show signs of distress. The foam covers his dark chest, and his eyes flash uneasily. It is all that his rider can do to urge him on with whip and spur.

There is only one more furlong to cover. Robin Adair and little Queen Bess are side by side, neck to neck, both increasing their speed with every stride.

Suddenly Robin, the great Robin Adair, falters ever so slightly. The seething mass of men and women hold their breath. Then, quick as a flash, as if shot from a bow, gallant little Queen Bess passes him. A great cry breaks from the vast multitude of spectators. One instant later, and the cry has deepened into a mighty yell. Little Queen Bess, with every muscle strained, passes under the wire – a winner!

The next instant she is hidden from sight by the eager thousands who are crowding and pushing one another to catch a glimpse of the winner. Jay Gardiner stands for a moment as if dumbfounded. He is hardly able to credit the evidence of his own senses.

"Queen Bess had won!" cried the golden-haired girl by his side, and he answers a hoarse – "Yes."

The girl laughs, and the sound of that laugh lingers in his memory all the long years of his after-life.

"And I have won!" she adds, shrilly.

Again he answers, in that same hoarse monotone – "Yes!"

Before he has time even to think, Sally Pendleton turns around to her father and mother, crying triumphantly:

"Mamma – papa, Mr. Gardiner wants me to marry him. My hand is pledged to him; that is, if you are willing!"

The young man's face turned as white as it would ever be in death.

The effect of her words can better be imagined than described. Mr. Pendleton stared at his daughter as though he had not heard aright.

Mrs. Pendleton was dumbfounded. And Louise – poor Louise! – to her it seemed as if life had ended for her.

Mr. Pendleton recovered himself in an instant. He had been quite sure that Mr. Gardiner preferred his elder daughter Louise to his younger daughter, merry, rollicking Sally.

"I am sure, I am very well pleased," he said, heartily extending his hand to Mr. Gardiner. "Certainly I give my consent, in which my wife joins me."

Jay Gardiner's face flushed. He could not make a scene by refusing to accept the situation. He took the proffered hand. Mrs. Pendleton rose to the occasion.

"If he prefers Sally, that is the end of it as far as Louise is concerned. Sally had better have him than for the family to lose him and all his millions," she thought, philosophically.

Jay Gardiner's friends congratulated the supposedly happy lovers. Louise spoke no word; it seemed to her as though the whole world had suddenly changed; her golden day-dreams had suddenly and without warning been dispelled.

During that homeward ride, Jay Gardiner was unusually quiet. His brain seemed in a whirl – the strange event of the afternoon seemed like a troubled dream whose spell he could not shake off, do what he would.

He looked keenly at the girl by his side. Surely she did not realize the extent of the mischief she had done by announcing their betrothal.

It was not until he had seen his party home and found himself alone at last in his boarding-house that he gave full rein to his agitated thoughts.

It was the first time in the life of this debonair young millionaire that he had come face to face with a disagreeable problem.

Gay, jolly Sally Pendleton, with her flashing get-up – a combination of strangely unnatural canary-yellow hair, pink cheeks and lips, and floating, rainbow-hued ribbons – jarred upon his artistic tastes.

He did not admire a girl who went into convulsions of laughter, as Sally did, at everything that was said and done. In fact, he liked her less each time he saw her. But she was young – only eighteen – and she might, in time, have a little more sense, he reflected.

What should he do? He looked at the matter in every light; but, whichever way he turned, he found no comfort, no way out of the dilemma.

If he were to explain to the world that the engagement was only the outcome of a thoughtless wager, his friends would surely censure him for trying to back out; they would accuse him of acting the part of a coward. He could not endure the thought of their taking that view of it. All his friends knew his ideas concerning honor, particularly where a lady was concerned.

And now he was in honor bound to fulfill his part of the wager – marry Sally Pendleton, whom he was beginning to hate with a hatred that startled even himself.

Such a marriage would spoil his future, shipwreck his whole life, blast his every hope. But he himself was to blame. When that hoidenish, hair-brained girl had made such a daring wager, he should have declined to accept it; then this harvest of woe would not have to be reaped.

Suddenly a thought, an inspiration, came to him. He would go to Sally, point out to her the terrible mistake of this hasty betrothal, and she might release him from it.

CHAPTER V

"SHALL WE BREAK THIS BETROTHAL, THAT WAS MADE ONLY IN FUN?"

The thought was like an inspiration to Jay Gardiner. He would go to Sally and ask her to break this hateful engagement; and surely she would be too proud to hold him to a betrothal from which he so ardently desired to be set free.

The following day he put his plan into execution. It was early in the afternoon when he entered the hotel, and going at once to the reception-room, he sent up his card. He had not long to wait for Miss Sally. He had scarcely taken two or three turns across the floor ere she floated into the room with both hands outstretched, an eager smile on her red lips.

He took one of the outstretched hands, bowed ever it coldly, and hastily dropped it.

"I was expecting you this afternoon," said Sally, archly, pretending not to notice his constraint, "and here you are at last."

"Miss Pendleton," he began, stiffly, "would you mind getting your hat and taking a little stroll with me? I have something to talk over with you, and I do not wish all those people on the porch, who are listening to us even now, to hear."

"I would be delighted," answered Sally. "Come on. My hat is right out there on a chair on the veranda."

He followed her in silence. It was not until they were some little distance from the hotel that he found voice to speak.

"You say you want to talk to your betrothed," laughed the girl, with a toss of her yellow curls; "but you have maintained an unbroken silence for quite a time."

"I have been wondering how to begin speaking of the subject which weighs so heavily on my mind, and I think the best way is to break right into it."

"Yes," assented Sally; "so do I."

"It is about our betrothal," he began, brusquely. "I want to ask you a plain, frank question, Miss Pendleton, and I hope you will be equally as frank with me; and that is, do you consider what you are pleased to call your betrothal to me, and which I considered at the time only a girlish prank, actually binding?"

He stopped short in the wooded path they were treading, and looked her gravely in the face – a look that forced an answer. She was equal to the occasion.

"Of course I do, Mr. Gardiner," she cried, with a jolly little laugh that sounded horrible in his ears. "And wasn't it romantic? Just like one of those stories one reads in those splendid French novels, I laughed –"

"Pray be serious, Miss Pendleton," cut in Gardiner, biting his lip fiercely to keep back an angry retort. "This is not a subject for merriment, I assure you, and I had hoped to have a sensible conversation with you concerning it – to show each of us a way out of it, if that is possible."

"I do not wish to be set free, as you phrase it, Mr. Gardiner," she answered, defiantly. "I am perfectly well pleased to have matters just as they are, I assure you."

His face paled; the one hope which had buoyed him up died suddenly in his heart.

Sally Pendleton's face flushed hotly; her eyes fell.

"I will try to win your liking," she replied.

"It is a man's place to win," he said, proudly; "women should be won," he added, with much emphasis. "When two people marry without love, they must run all the risk such a union usually incurs."

"Pardon me, but I may as well speak the truth; you are the last girl on earth whom I could love. It grieves me to wound you, but it is only just that you should know the truth. *Now* will you insist upon carrying out the contract?"

"As I have told you from the start, my answer will always be the same."

"We will walk back to the hotel," he said, stiffly.

She rose from the mossy log and accompanied him without another word. At last he broke the silence.

"I am a gentleman," he said, "and am in honor bound to carry out this contract, if you can not be induced to release me."

"That is the only sensible view for you to take," she said.

He crushed back the angry words that rose to his lips. He had never disliked a woman before, but he could not help but own to himself that he hated the girl by his side – the girl whom fate had destined that he should marry.

CHAPTER VI

THE WAY OF WOMEN THE WHOLE WORLD OVER

As Jay Gardiner and Sally walked to the hotel the young man had made up his mind that the wedding should be put off as much as possible.

Suddenly Sally touched him on the arm just as they reached the flight of steps leading to the veranda.

"I have one request to make of you," she said. "Please do not tell any of my folks that you do not care for me, and that it is not a *bonâ-fide* love-match."

He bowed coldly.

She went on: "Mamma has a relative – an old maiden cousin, ever so old – who liked my picture so well that she declared she would make me her heiress. She's worth almost as much as you are. They named me after her – Sally Rogers Pendleton. That's how I happen to have such a heathenish name. But I'll change it quick enough after the old lady dies and leaves me her money.

"And you will call to see me often?" asked Sally.

"Before I promise that, I must ask what you call 'often.'"

"You should take me out riding every afternoon, and call at least every other evening."

Again that angry look crossed Jay's handsome face.

"In this case the usual customs must be waived," he answered, haughtily. "I will call for you when I drive. That must suffice."

Jay Gardiner's thoughts were not any too pleasant as he wended his way to his boarding-house. He had always prided himself on his skill in evading women, lest a drag-net in the hands of some designing woman might ensnare him. Now he had been cleverly outwitted by an eighteen-year-old girl.

He suddenly lost all pleasure in driving. He was thankful for the rainy week that followed, as he was not obliged to take Sally out driving.

One day a telegram came from New York, requesting his immediate presence in that city to attend a critical case. With no little satisfaction he bid the Pendletons good-bye.

"We intend to cut short our summer outing. We will return to New York in a fortnight, and then I hope to have the pleasure of seeing you as often as possible," Sally remarked.

"I lead a very busy life in the city," he said. "A doctor's time is not his own."

"I shall not enjoy staying here after you have gone," she said, a trifle wistfully.

But he paid little heed to the remark.

The happiest moment of his life was when the train steamed out of Lee.

"Why don't you stay over and see the next race?" said one of his friends, wringing his hand on the platform of the car.

"I shall never go to another race," he remarked, savagely.

"What! were you a plunger at the last race?" asked his friend.

But Jay Gardiner made no answer.

"I am sorry if I have called up bitter recollections," laughed his friend.

Then the bell sounded, and the train moved on.

Jay Gardiner turned resolutely away from the window, that he might not catch a look of the hotel.

"I wonder if my patient, Miss Rogers, and the relative this girl speaks of are one and the same person?" he asked himself.

He had once saved the life of this Miss Rogers, and since that time she had been a devoted friend of his.

She was a most kind, estimable woman, and he admired her for her noble character. Surely she could not be the lady of whom Sally Pendleton spoke so derisively?

He reached the city at last, and, without taking time to refresh himself, hurried to see who it was that needed his help.

It was eleven o'clock, and the crowds on the streets of the great metropolis had begun to thin out.

His office clerk, who was expecting him, said, in answer to his inquiry:

"It is Miss Rogers, sir. She is dangerously ill, and will have no other doctor."

"I will go to her at once," said Jay Gardiner.

But at that moment a man who had been hurt in a railway accident was brought in, and he was obliged to devote half an hour of his valuable time in dressing his wounds. Then with all possible haste he set out on his journey.

He gave orders to his driver to go to Miss Rogers' residence by the shortest route possible.

At that very moment, in another part of the city, a woman who had once been young and beautiful lay dying. The room in which she lay was magnificent in its costly hangings; the lace draperies that hung from the windows represented a fortune, the carpets and rugs which covered the floor were of the costliest description. Rare paintings and the richest of bric-a-brac occupied the walls and other available places. Even the lace counterpane on the bed represented the expenditure of a vast sum of money. But the woman who lay moaning there in mortal pain would have given all to have purchased one hour of ease.

"Has the doctor come yet, Mary?" she asked.

"No," replied her faithful attendant, who bent over her. "But he can not be long now, my lady. It is several hours since we telegraphed for him, and I have telephoned for him every hour since. At the office they say that he has already started for here."

"Are those carriage wheels? Go to the window, Mary, and see."

The attendant glided noiselessly to the heavily draped window and drew aside the hangings.

"No," she answered, gently; "he has not yet come."

"Something must have happened, Mary," half-sobbed the sufferer; "I am sure of it."

Ay, something out of the usual had happened to Doctor Gardiner.

As his handsome brougham turned into Canal Street, the doctor, in looking from the window, noticed a young girl hurrying along the street.

There was something about the symmetrical figure that caused the doctor to look a second time.

He said to himself that she must be young; and a feeling of pity thrilled his heart to see one so young threading the streets at that hour of the night.

So many people were making their way through the streets that the driver was only able to proceed slowly. And thus the young girl, who had quite unconsciously attracted the doctor's attention, kept pace with the vehicle.

Once, as Jay Gardiner caught sight of her face, he felt as though an electric shock had suddenly passed through him. For a moment he was almost spell-bound. Where had he seen that face? Then suddenly it occurred to him that it was the *fac-simile* of the picture he had bought abroad.

And as he gazed with spell-bound attention, much to his disgust he saw the young woman stop in front of a wine-room and peer in at one of the windows. This action disgusted the young doctor immeasurably.

"How sad that one so fair as she should have gone wrong in the morning of life," he thought.

Suddenly she turned and attempted to dart across the street. But in that moment her foot slipped, and she was precipitated directly under the horses' hoofs.

A cry broke from the lips of the doctor, and was echoed by the man on the box.

"Are you hurt?" cried Doctor Gardiner, springing from his seat and bending over the prostrate figure of the girl.

"No, no!" cried the girl, in the saddest, sweetest voice he had ever heard. "They must not find me here when they come to the door; they will be so angry!" she said, springing to her feet.

At that moment there was a commotion in the wine-room, the door of which had just been opened.

As the girl turned to look in that direction, she saw a man pushed violently into the street.

"Oh, it is father – it is father!" cried the young girl, wildly, shaking herself free from the doctor's detaining hand. "Oh, they have killed my father! See! he is lying on the pavement dead, motionless! Oh, God, pity me! I am left alone in the wide, wide world!"

CHAPTER VII

BERNARDINE

Doctor Gardiner sprung forward quickly.

"You are unnecessarily alarmed, my dear young lady," he said. "The gentleman is only stunned."

So it proved to be; for he had scarcely ceased speaking when the man struggled to his feet and looked about him in dazed bewilderment.

"Oh, papa, darling, have they killed you!" sobbed the young girl, springing wildly forward and throwing her arms about the dust-begrimed man.

"I don't know, Bernardine," he answered in a shrill voice. "I am sure every bone in my body is broken – quite sure."

"No," interrupted Doctor Gardiner, pitying the young girl in her distress; "you are only bruised. I am a doctor; if you will give me your address, I will look in and give you something when I return this way. I may return in an hour's time, I may be as late as to-morrow morning."

"We – we – could not pay for the services of a doctor, sir," sobbed the young girl. "If there is anything the matter, I will have to take poor papa to the hospital."

"I would never go to the hospital, Bernardine," whined the man in a low tone. "That will be the last of me if I ever have to go there."

"I would make no charge whatever," said Doctor Gardiner. "My services would be rendered gratis," he added, earnestly.

The young girl looked at him with tears shining in her great dark eyes.

"We live in the tenement just around the corner, sir," she said, "on the sixth floor. My father is David Moore, the basket-maker."

Doctor Gardiner dared not remain another moment talking with them, and with a hasty bow he re-entered his carriage. But during the remainder of his journey he could think of nothing but the sad, beautiful face of Bernardine Moore, the basket-maker's daughter.

"What in the name of Heaven has come over me!" he muttered. "I have seen a face, and it seems as though I have stepped through the gates of the old world and entered a new one."

He collected his thoughts with a start, as the carriage reached its destination.

He had not realized how quickly the time had passed. He resolutely put all thoughts from him as he walked up the steps of the mansion before which he found himself.

The door opened before he could touch the bell.

"We have been waiting for you, doctor," said the low-voiced attendant who had come to the door.

He followed her through the magnificent hall-way, and up the polished stairs to the apartment above, where he knew his patient was awaiting him.

The wan face lying against the pillow lighted up as the doctor entered. His bright, breezy presence was as good as medicine.

"You!" he cried, advancing to the couch. "Why, this will never do, Miss Rogers! Tut, tut! you are not sick, you do not look it! This is only an excuse to send for me, and you know it. I can see at a glance that you are a long way from being ill, and you know it!" he repeated.

He said it in so hearty a manner and in such apparent good faith, that his words could not help but carry conviction with them.

Already the poor lady began to feel that she was not nearly so ill as she had believed herself to be.

But the doctor, bending over her, despite his reassuring smile and light badinage, realized with alarm that his patient was in great danger, that there was but a fighting chance for her life.

An hour or more he worked over her unceasingly, doing everything that skill and science could suggest.

With the dawning of the morning he would know whether she would live or die.

"Doctor," she said, looking up into his face, "do you think my illness is fatal? Is this my last call?"

He scarcely knew how to answer her. He felt that the truth should not be kept from her. But how was he to tell her?

"Because," she went on, before he could answer, "if it is, I had better know it in time, in order to settle up my affairs. I – I have always dreaded making a will; but – but there will come a time, sooner or later, when it will be necessary for me to do so."

Again Doctor Gardiner laughed out that hearty, reassuring laugh.

"That is the natural feeling of a woman," he said. "Men never have that feeling. With them it is but an ordinary matter, as it should be."

"Would you advise me to make a will, doctor?" and the white face was turned wistfully to him.

"Certainly," he replied, with an attempt at light-heartedness. "It will occupy your mind, give you something to think about, and take your thoughts from your fancied aches and pains."

"Fancied?" replied the poor lady. "Ah, doctor, they are real enough, although you do not seem to think so. I – I want to leave all my money to *you*, doctor," she whispered. "You are the only person in the whole wide world who, without an object, has been kind to me," she added, with sudden energy. The fair, handsome face of the young doctor grew grave.

"Nay, nay," he said, gently. "While I thank you with all my heart for the favor you would bestow on me, still I must tell you that I could not take the money. No, no, my dear Miss Rogers; it must go to the next of kin, if you have any."

Her face darkened as an almost forgotten memory rose up before her.

"No!" she said, sharply; "anything but that! They never cared for me! They shall not fight over what I have when I am dead!"

"But you have relatives?" he questioned, anxiously.

"Yes," she said; "one or two distant cousins, who married and who have families of their own. One of them wrote me often while I lived at San Francisco; but in her letters she always wanted something, and such hints were very distasteful to me. She said that she had named one of her children after me, saying in the next sentence that I ought to make the girl my heiress. I wrote to her to come on to San Francisco, when I fell so ill, a few weeks ago. She answered me that she could not come, that she was very sick herself, and that the doctors had ordered her out to Lee, Massachusetts, to live on a farm, until she should become stronger. When I grew stronger, I left San Francisco with my faithful attendant, Mary. I did not let them know that I was in New York, and had taken possession of this fine house, which I own. Suddenly I fell ill again. I intended to wait until I grew stronger to hunt her up, and see how I should like her before making overtures of friendship to her. I should not like to make a will and leave all to these people whom I do not know. There are hundreds of homes for old and aged women that need the money more."

"Still, a will should always be made," said the doctor, earnestly. "I will send for some one at once, if you will entertain the idea of attending to it."

"No!" she replied, firmly. "If anything happens to me, I will let them take their chances. Don't say anything more about it, doctor; my mind is fully made up."

He dared not argue with a woman who was so near her end as he believed her to be.

This case proved to be one of the greatest achievements of his life. From the very Valley of the Shadow of Death he drew back the struggling, fluttering spirit of the helpless lady. And when the first gray streaks of dawn flushed the eastern sky, the doctor drew a great sigh of relief.

"Thank God, she will live!" he said.

When the sun rose later the danger was past – the battle of life had been won, and death vanquished.

Although Doctor Gardiner was very weary after his night's vigil, still he left the house with a happy heart beating in his bosom.

He scarcely felt the fatigue of his arduous labors as he stepped into his carriage again. His heart gave a strange throb as he ordered the driver to go to the tenement house, the home of the old basket-maker and his beautiful daughter.

How strange it was that the very thought of this fair girl seemed to give his tired brain rest for a moment!

He soon found himself at the street and number he wanted.

"Does Mr. Moore, the basket-maker, live here?" he asked, pausing for a moment to inquire of a woman who sat on the doorstep with a little child in her arms.

"Yes," she answered, in a surly voice; "and more's the pity for the rest of us tenants, for he is a regular fiend incarnate, sir, and has a fit of the delirium tremens as regularly as the month comes round. He's got 'em now. A fine dance he leads that poor daughter of his. Any other girl would get out and leave him. Are you the doctor Miss Bernardine was expecting? If so, walk right up. She is waiting for you."

CHAPTER VIII

"OH, I AM SO GLAD THAT YOU HAVE COME, DOCTOR!"

Doctor Jay Gardiner, with as much speed as possible, made his way up the long, steep flights of dark, narrow stairs, and through the still darker passages, which were only lighted by the open doors here and there, revealing rooms inhabited by half a dozen persons. They were all talking, fighting or scrambling at the same time; and the odor of that never-to-be-forgotten smell of frying onions and sausages greeted his nostrils at every turn until it seemed to him that he must faint.

"Great heavens! how can so fair a young girl live in an atmosphere like this?" he asked himself.

At length, almost exhausted, for he was unused to climbing, this haughty, aristocratic young doctor found himself on the sixth floor of the tenement house, and he knocked at the first door he came to.

It was opened by the young girl Bernardine. He could see at a glance that her face bore the traces of trouble, and the dark eyes, still heavy with unshed tears, showed signs of recent weeping.

"Oh, I am so glad that you have come, doctor!" she said, clasping her little hands. "My poor father is so much worse. Please step in this way!"

He was ushered into a little sitting-room, and as he entered it he saw that everything was scrupulously neat and clean.

"Poor papa is out of his mind, doctor. Please come quickly, and see him!"

It did not require a second glance for the doctor to understand all; and straightway he proceeded to give the man a draught, which had the effect of quieting him. The young girl stood by the man with clasped hands and dilated eyes, scarcely breathing as she watched him.

The young doctor turned impulsively to the girl by his side.

"Pardon me for the question, but do you live alone with your father?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied in a voice that thrilled him as the grandest, sweetest music he had heard had never had power to do. "We have only each other," she added, watching the distorted face on the pillow with a fond wistfulness that made the young doctor, who was watching her, almost envy the father.

"I will come again to-morrow," he said, "and prescribe for him. I have done all the good that is possible for the present."

"Good-morning, Miss Moore," he said, standing with his hat in his hand, and bowing before her as if she were a princess. "If you should have occasion to need me in a hurry, send for me at once. This is my address." And he handed her his card.

Again she thanked him in a voice so sweet and low that it sounded to him like softest music.

He closed the door gently after him; and it seemed to him, as he walked slowly down the narrow dark stairs, that he had left Paradise and one of God's angels in it.

CHAPTER IX

"WHAT A LONELY LIFE FOR THIS BEAUTIFUL YOUNG GIRL!"

All that day the sweet face of Bernardine Moore was before Doctor Gardiner. He found himself actually looking forward to the morrow, when he should see her again. He deceived himself completely as to the cause, telling himself that it was because of his pity for her, and the desolate life she was leading.

The next day when he called, Bernardine again met him at the door.

"Papa has been calling for you," she said. Then she stopped short, in dire confusion, as she remembered the reason why he was so anxious to see him. "He has just fallen into a light sleep. I will go and awaken him at once and tell him you are here."

"By no means," he said. "Pray do not awaken him; the sleep he is having is better than medicine. Will you permit me to sit down and talk with you for a few moments, until he awakens?"

She looked anxiously at him for a moment, then said, with charming frankness:

"Would you mind very much if I went on with my work. I have several baskets to be finished by night, when they will be called for."

"By no means. Pray proceed with your work. Do not let me disturb you," he answered, hastily. "I shall consider it a great favor if you will allow me to watch you as you work."

"Certainly," said Bernardine, "if you will not mind coming into our little work-shop," and she led the way with a grace that completely charmed him.

The place was devoid of any furniture save two or three wooden chairs, which the girl and her father occupied at their work, the long wooden bench, the great coils of willow – the usual paraphernalia of the basket-makers' trade.

She sat down on her little wooden seat, indicating a seat opposite for him. He watched her eagerly as her slim white fingers flew in and out among the strands of trailing willow quickly taking shape beneath her magic touch.

"It must be a very lonely life for you," said Jay Gardiner, after a moment's pause.

"I do not mind; I am never lonely when father is well," she answered, with a sweet, bright smile. "We are great companions, father and I. He regales me by the hour with wonderful stories of things he used to see when he was a steamboat captain. But he met with an accident one time, and then he had to turn to basket-making."

As he conversed with the young girl, Jay Gardiner was indeed surprised to see what a fund of knowledge that youthful mind contained. She was the first young girl whom he had met who could sit down and talk sensibly to a man. Her ideas were so sweet, so natural, that it charmed him in spite of himself. She was like a heroine out of a story-book – just such a one, he thought, as Martha Washington must have been in her girlhood days. His admiration and respect for her grew with each moment.

CHAPTER X

WHAT IS LIFE WITHOUT LOVE?

Every evening, on some pretext or other, Jay Gardiner managed to pay David Moore, the basket-maker, a visit, and the cynical old man began to look forward to these visits.

He never dreamed that his daughter was the magnet which drew the young man to his poor home. They were evenings that Jay Gardiner never forgot.

Bernardine was slightly confused at first by his presence; then she began to view the matter in another light – that the young doctor had taken quite an interest in her father. He had certainly cured him of a terrible habit, and she was only too pleased that her father should have visits from so pleasant a man.

She always had some work in her slender white hands when the doctor called. Sometimes, glancing up unexpectedly, she would find the doctor's keen blue eyes regarding her intently, and she would bend lower over her sewing. Jay Gardiner, however, saw the flush that rose to her cheek and brow.

As he sat in that little tenement sitting-room – he who had been flattered and courted by the most beautiful heiresses – he experienced a feeling of rest come over him.

He would rather pass one hour in that plain, unpretentious sitting-room than visit the grandest Fifth Avenue mansion.

And thus a fortnight passed. At the end of that time, Jay Gardiner stood face to face with the knowledge of his own secret – that he had at last met in Bernardine Moore the idol of his life. He stood face to face with this one fact – that wealth, grandeur, anything that earth could give him, was of little value unless he had the love of sweet Bernardine.

It came upon him suddenly that the sweet witchery, the glamor falling over him was – love.

He realized that he lived only in Bernardine's presence, and that without her life would be but a blank to him. His love for Bernardine became the one great passion of his life. Compared with her, all other women paled into insignificance.

He fell, without knowing it, from a state of intense admiration into one of blind adoration for her. He had never before trembled at a woman's touch. Now, if his hand touched hers, he trembled as a strong tree trembles in a storm.

Looking forward to the years to come, he saw no gleam of brightness in them unless they were spent with the girl he loved.

Then came the awakening. He received a letter from Sally Pendleton, in which she upbraided him for not writing. That letter reminded him that he was not free; that before he had met Bernardine, he had bound himself in honor to another.

He was perplexed, agitated. He loved Bernardine with his whole heart, and yet, upon another girl's hand shone his betrothal-ring.

When the knowledge of his love for sweet Bernardine came to him, he told himself that he ought to fly from her; go where the witchery of her face, the charm of her presence, would never set his heart on fire; go where he could never hear her sweet voice again.

"Only a few days more," he said, sadly. "I will come here for another week, and then the darkness of death will begin for me, for the girl who holds me in such galling chains will return to the city."

Why should he not see Bernardine for another week? It would not harm her, and it would be his last gleam of happiness.

At this time another suitor for Bernardine's hand appeared upon the scene. On one of his visits to the Moores' home he met a young man there. The old basket-maker introduced him, with quite a flourish, as Mr. Jasper Wilde, a wine merchant, and his landlord. The two men bowed stiffly and looked at each other as they acknowledged the presentation.

Doctor Gardiner saw before him a heavy-set, dark-eyed young man with a low, sinister brow. An unpleasant leer curled his thin lips, which a black mustache partially shaded, and he wore a profusion of jewels which was disgusting to one of his refined temperament.

He could well understand that he was a wine merchant's son. He certainly gave evidence of his business, and that he had more money than good breeding. The word *roué* was stamped on his every feature.

Jay Gardiner was troubled at the very thought of such a man being brought in contact with sweet Bernardine. Then the thought flashed through his mind that this was certainly the man whom the woman on the doorstep had told him about.

Jasper Wilde, looking at the young doctor, summed him up as a proud, white-handed, would-be doctor who hadn't a cent in his pocket.

"I can see what the attraction is here – it's Bernardine; but I'll block his little game," he muttered. "The few weeks that I've been out of the city he has been making great headway; but I'll stop that."

The young doctor noticed that what the woman had told him was quite true. He could readily see that Bernardine showed a feeling of repugnance toward her visitor.

But another thing he noticed with much anxiety was, that the old basket-maker was quite hilarious, as though he had been dosed with wine or something stronger.

Jay Gardiner knew at once that this man must have known the basket-maker's failing and slipped him a bottle, and that that was his passport to favor.

Doctor Gardiner talked with David Moore and his daughter, addressing no remarks whatever to the obnoxious visitor.

"The impudent popinjay is trying to phase me," thought Wilde; "but he will see that it won't work."

Accordingly he broke into every topic that was introduced; and thus the evening wore on, until it became quite evident to Doctor Gardiner that Mr. Jasper Wilde intended to sit him out.

Bernardine looked just a trifle weary when the clock on the mantel struck ten, and Doctor Gardiner rose to depart.

"Shall I hold the light for you?" she asked. "The stair-way is always very dark."

"If you will be so kind," murmured the doctor.

Jasper Wilde's face darkened as he listened to this conversation. His eyes flashed fire as they both disappeared through the door-way.

On the landing outside Doctor Gardiner paused a few moments.

How he longed to give her a few words of advice, to tell her to beware of the man whom he had just left talking to her father! But he remembered that he had not that right. She might think him presumptuous.

If he had only been free, he would have pleaded his own suit then and there. That she was poor and unknown, and the daughter of such a father, he cared nothing.

Ah! cruel fate, which forbid him taking her in his arms and never letting her go until she had promised to be his wife!

As it was, knowing that he loved her with such a mighty love, he told himself that he must look upon her face but once again, and then it must be only to say farewell.

"The night is damp and the air is chill, and these narrow halls are draughty. Do not stand out here," he said, with eager solicitude; "you might catch cold."

She laughed a sweet, amused laugh.

"I am used to all kinds of weather, Doctor Gardiner," she said. "I am always out in it. I make the first track in winter through the deep snows. I go for the work in the morning, and return with it at night. You know, when one is poor, one can not be particular about such little things as the weather; it would never do."

CHAPTER XI

A SHADOW DARKENS THE PEACEFUL HOME OF THE BASKET-MAKER

Sweet Bernardine Moore laughed to see the look of amazement upon the young doctor's face.

He who had been reared in luxury, pampered and indulged – ay, spoiled by an over-indulgent mother, what had he ever known of the bitter realities of life, the struggles many have to undergo for their very existence?

He looked at this delicate, graceful girl, and his lips trembled, his eyes grew moist with tears.

Oh, if he but dared remove her from all this sorrow! The thought of her toiling and suffering there was more than he could calmly endure.

He turned away quickly. In another moment he would have committed himself. He had almost forgotten that he was bound to another, and would have been kneeling at her feet in another minute but for the sound of her father's voice, which brought him to himself.

"Bernardine!" cried her father, fretfully, "what are you doing out there so long in the hall? Don't you know that Mr. Wilde is waiting here to talk with you?"

A pitiful shadow crossed the girl's face. Evidently she knew what the man had to say to her.

Tears which she could not resist came to her eyes, and her lovely lips trembled.

Doctor Gardiner could not help but observe this.

"Bernardine," he cried, hoarsely, forgetting himself for the moment, "I should like to ask something of you. Will you promise to grant my request?"

"Yes," she murmured, faintly and unhesitatingly.

"Do not trust the man to whom your father is talking."

"There is little need to caution me in regard to him, Doctor Gardiner," she murmured. "My own heart has told me that already –"

She stopped short in great embarrassment, and Doctor Gardiner thought it best not to pursue the subject further, for his own peace of mind as well as hers.

He turned abruptly away, and was quickly lost to sight in the labyrinth of stair-ways.

With slow steps Bernardine had re-entered her apartments again. As she approached the door, she heard Jasper Wilde say to her father in an angry, excited voice:

"There is no use in talking to you any longer; it must be settled to-night. I do not intend to wait any longer."

"But it is so late!" whined the basket-maker in his high, sharp treble.

"You knew I was coming, and just what I was coming here for. Why didn't you get rid of the poor, penny doctor, instead of encouraging him?"

"I could not say much to the doctor, for he had my life in his hands, and saved it."

"There might be worse things for you to face," replied the man, menacingly. And the poor old basket-maker understood but too well what he meant.

"Yes, yes," he said, huskily, "you must certainly speak to Bernardine this very night, if I can get her to give you a hearing. I will do my best to influence her to have you."

"Influence!" exclaimed the man, savagely. "You must command her!"

"Bernardine is not a girl one can command," sighed the old man. "She likes her own way, you know."

"It isn't for her to say what she wants or doesn't want!" exclaimed the man savagely. "I shall look to you to bring the girl round to your way of thinking, without any nonsense. Do you hear and comprehend?"

"Yes," said the old man, wearily. "But that isn't making Bernardine understand. Some young girls are very willful!"

Trembling with apprehension, the old basket-maker dropped into the nearest chair.

His haggard face had grown terribly pale, and his emaciated hands shook, while his eyes fairly bulged from their sockets. The agony of mind he was undergoing was intense.

"Will Bernardine refuse this man?" he muttered to himself, "Oh, if I but dared tell her all, would she pity, or would she blame me?"

He loved the girl after his own fashion; but to save himself he was willing to sacrifice her. Poor Bernadine! Had she but known all!

CHAPTER XII

"YOU ARE FALSE AS YOU ARE FAIR, BERNARDINE!"

"I should think your own common sense would tell you. Surely you must have guessed what I am so eager to say, Miss Bernardine?" Jasper Wilde began, taking little heed of her father.

The girl's white lips opened, but no sound came from them. He was right; she quite expected it; but she did not tell him so.

"I might as well break right into the subject at once," he said. "My errand can be told in a few words. I have fallen deeply in love with your pretty face, and I am here to ask you to marry me. Mind, I say to marry me! What do you think of it?"

The girl drew back hurriedly.

"I think you might have guessed what my answer would have been, and thus saved yourself."

Again his face darkened, and an angry fire leaped into his eyes; but he controlled himself by a great effort.

"Why do you refuse me?" he asked. "I am a big catch, especially for a girl like you. Come, I have taken a notion to you, Bernardine, and that's saying a good deal."

"Spare yourself the trouble of uttering another word, Mr. Wilde," she said, with dignity. "I would not, I could not marry you under any circumstances. It is as well for you to know that."

"So you think now; but I fancy we can change all that; can't we, Moore?"

The old basket-maker's lips moved, but no sound came from them; the terror in his eyes became more apparent with each moment.

"I will never change my decision," said Bernardine.

Jasper Wilde drew his chair up nearer to the girl.

"Listen to me, Bernardine," he said. "You shall marry me, by all the gods above and all the demons below! I have never been thwarted in any wish or desire of my life. I shall not be thwarted in this!"

"You would not wish me to marry you against my will?" said the girl.

"That would make little difference to me," he rejoined. "You will like me well enough after you marry me; so never fear about that."

"I do not propose to marry you," replied Bernardine, rising haughtily from her seat. "While I thank you for the honor you have paid me, I repeat that I could never marry you."

"And I say that you shall, girl, and that, too, within a month from to-day," cried the other, in a rage.

"Oh, Bernardine, say 'Yes!'" cried the old man, trembling like an aspen leaf.

"I have never gone contrary to your wishes, father, in all my life," she said; "but in this instance, where my interests are so deeply concerned, I do feel that I must decide for myself."

With a horrible laugh, Jasper Wilde quitted the room, banging the door after him.

With a lingering look at the beautiful young face, her father bid her good-night, and with faltering steps quitted the little sitting-room and sought his own apartment. A little later, Bernardine was startled to hear him moaning and sobbing as though he were in great pain.

"Are you ill, father? – can I do anything for you?" she called, going quickly to his door and knocking gently.

"No," he answered in a smothered voice. "Go to your bed, Bernardine, and sleep. It is a great thing to be able to sleep – and forget."

"Poor papa!" sighed the girl, "how I pity him! Life has been very hard to him. Why are some men born to be gentlemen, with untold wealth at their command, while others are born to toil all their weary lives through for the meager pittance that suffices to keep body and soul together?"

She went slowly to her little room, but not to sleep. She crossed over to the window, sat down on a chair beside it, and looked up at the bit of starry sky that was visible between the tall house-tops and still taller chimneys, then down at the narrow deserted street so far below, and gave herself up to meditation.

"No, no; I could never marry Jasper Wilde!" she mused. "The very thought of it makes me grow faint and sick at heart; his very presence fills me with an indescribable loathing which I can not shake off. How differently the presence of Doctor Gardiner affects me! I – I find myself watching for his coming, and dreading the time when he will cease to visit papa."

Doctor Gardiner's coming had been to Bernardine as the sun to the violet. The old life had fallen from her, and she was beginning to live a new one in his presence.

As she sat by the window, she thought of the look the young doctor had given her at parting. The remembrance of it quickened the beating of her heart, and brought the color to her usually pale cheeks.

How different the young doctor was from Jasper Wilde! If the young doctor had asked her the same question Jasper Wilde had, would her answer have been the same?

The clock in an adjacent belfry slowly tolled the midnight hour. Bernardine started.

"How quickly the time has flown since I have been sitting here," she thought.

She did not know that it had been because her thoughts had been so pleasant. She heard a long-drawn sigh come from the direction of her father's room.

"Poor papa!" she mused; "I think I can guess what is troubling him so. He has spent the money we have saved for the rent, and fears to tell me of it. If it be so, Jasper Wilde, at the worst can but dispossess us, and we can find rooms elsewhere, and pay him as soon as we earn it. How I feel like making a confidant of Doctor Gardiner!"

Poor girl! If she had only done so, how much sorrow might have been spared her!

CHAPTER XIII

HE WISHED HE COULD TELL SOME ONE HIS UNFORTUNATE LOVE STORY

During the weeks Doctor Gardiner had been visiting the old basket-maker and thinking so much of his daughter, he had by no means neglected his patient, Miss Rogers, in whom he took an especial, almost brotherly, interest, and who rapidly recovered under his constant care, until at length he laughingly pronounced her "quite as good as new."

One day, in mounting the handsome brown-stone steps to make more of a social than a business call, he was surprised to see the mansion closed.

He felt quite grieved that his friend should have packed up and departed so hastily – that she had not even remembered to say good-bye to him. He felt all the more sorry for her absence just at this time, for, after much deliberation, he had decided to make a confidante of Miss Rogers, and pour into her kindly, sympathetic ear the whole of his unfortunate love story from beginning to end, and ask her advice as to what course he should pursue. He had also resolved to show her the last letter he had received from Miss Pendleton, in which she hinted rather strongly that the marriage ought to take place as soon as she returned to the city.

And now Miss Rogers was gone, he felt a strange chill, a disappointment he could hardly control, as he turned away and walked slowly down the steps and re-entered his carriage.

The next mail, however, brought him a short note from Miss Rogers. He smiled as he read it, and laid it aside, little dreaming of what vital importance those few carelessly-written lines would be in the dark days ahead of him. It read as follows:

"My dear Doctor Gardiner – You will probably be surprised to learn that by the time this reaches you I shall be far away from New York, on a little secret mission which has been a pet notion of mine ever since I began to recover from my last illness. Do not be much surprised at any very eccentric scheme you may hear of me undertaking.

"Yours hastily and faithfully,

"Miss Rogers."

The terse letter was characteristic of the writer. Doctor Gardiner replaced it in its envelope, put it away in his desk, with the wish that she had mentioned her destination, then dismissed it from his mind.

At the identical moment Doctor Gardiner was reading Miss Rogers' letter, quite a pitiful scene was being enacted in the home of the old basket-maker.

It was with a shudder that he awoke and found the sunshine which heralded another day stealing into his narrow little room.

Bernardine had been stirring about for some time, and at length the savory odor of the frugal breakfast she was preparing reached him, and at that moment she called him.

When he made his appearance she saw at a glance that he must have passed a sleepless night. He had no appetite, and pushed away the plate with his food untouched, despite Bernardine's earnest efforts to induce him to eat something.

He watched her deft fingers in silence as she cleared the table at length, washed and dried the dishes and put them away, and tidied the little room.

"Now, father," she said, at length, "the sun is shining now, and I will give you half an hour of my time to listen to the story you have to tell me. Don't look so distressed about it, dear; no matter

what it is, I will utter no word of complaint, you shall hear no bitter words from my lips, only words of love, trust and comfort."

"Tell me that again, Bernardine," he cried; "say it over again. Those words are like the dew of Heaven to my feverish soul."

She uttered the words again, with her soft white arms twined lovingly around his neck, and she held them there until he came to the end of his wretched story.

"Bernardine," he began, softly, with a pitiful huskiness in his voice, "I rely on your promise. You have given me your word, and I know you will never break it. Don't look at me. Let me turn my face away from the sight of the horror in your eyes as you listen. There, that is right; let my poor whirling head rest on your strong young shoulder."

"It happened only a few weeks ago, Bernardine," he continued, brokenly, "this tragedy which has wrecked my life. One night – ah! how well I remember it – even while I lie dying, it will stand out dark and horrible from the rest of my life – I – I could not withstand the craving for drink which took possession of me, and after you slept, I stole softly from my couch and out of the house."

"The few dimes I had in my pocket soon went where so many dollars of my – yes, even your humble earnings have gone before – in the coffers of the rum-shop."

"The liquor I drank seemed to fire my brain as it had never been fired before. I remember that I went to that place around the corner – the place that you and Doctor Gardiner saw them throw me out of that night you thought they had crippled me for life."

"The man who keeps the place saw me coming in, and made a dash at me. Then a terrible fight took place between us, and a crowd gathered, foremost among whom I dimly saw the face of Jasper Wilde outlined amidst the jeering throng."

"To hasten the telling of an unpleasant tale, I will say he ejected me, the while hurling the most insulting epithets at me. Then he spoke of *you*, Bernardine, and – and turning upon him with the ferocity of an enraged lion, I swore that I would kill him on sight."

"'Beware! take care,' laughed Jasper Wilde, turning to my enemy; 'the old basket-maker always keeps his word. You are in danger, my boy.'"

"At this the crowd jeered. I hurried away. I never remembered how far I walked to still the throbbing of my heart and cool the fever in my veins."

"At length I turned my steps toward home. How far I had traversed in the darkness I did not take note of; but as I was hurrying along, I heard a loud cry for help. I ran around the corner from which it seemed to proceed, and then I fell headlong across the body of a man lying prone upon the pavement."

"I drew a box of matches from my pocket, and hastily struck one. Yes, it was a man dying with a wound in his breast, made from a clasp-knife, which still stuck in it."

"In horror I snatched the knife away; and as I did so, the blood from the wound spurted up into my face and covered my clothes. In that instant I made the awful discovery that the knife was my own. I must have lost it from my pocket during my encounter with my enemy, who kept the wine-room."

"By the flickering light of the half-burned match, which I held down to the man's face, I saw – oh, God! how shall I tell it? – I saw that the man who had been murdered with my knife was the man whom I had sworn before the crowd I would kill on sight."

"As I made this startling discovery, a man laid a heavy hand on my shoulder, and Jasper Wilde's voice, with a demoniac ring, cried in my horrified ears:

"'I see you have kept your word, David Moore! You have murdered your enemy!'"

"All in vain I protested my innocence. He only laughed at me, jeered at my agony with diabolical glee."

"'You will be hanged,' he said. 'Of course, you realize that, David Moore.'"

"I would not care for my life – what became of me – if it were not for Bernardine!" I moaned, wildly.

"'Yes, it *is* a pity for Bernardine,' he made answer. 'I am sorry for you on her account. How sad it will be to see you torn away from her, and she all alone in the world! Moore,' he hissed, close to my ear, 'for her sake, and upon one condition, I will save you from the gallows. No one but me has seen you bending over the murdered man with that knife in your hand. If I keep silent, no one can *prove* the crime was done by you. Do you comprehend – do you realize of what vital interest that which I am saying is to you?'

"'Yes,' I answered in a choked, awful voice. 'But the condition! What have I, a poor, penniless basket-maker, even at this moment owing you money – what have I which you, the son of a rich father, would stoop to accept?' I cried in the utmost despair. He stooped nearer, and whispered in my ear:

"'You have a treasure which I long to possess. Give me Bernardine. I – I will marry the girl, and will forever hold my peace. It will save you from prison. Think and act quickly, man. You can *make* the girl accept me if she should desire to refuse.'

"I heard the whistle of an advancing policeman coming leisurely along his beat. Another moment and he would turn the corner where I stood almost paralyzed.

"'Speak, man!' cried Jasper Wilde. 'Am I to save you, or call the officer to arrest you? Am I to get Bernardine, or not?'

"'Oh, child! forgive me – pity me! Life to an old man even like me is sweet. I could almost feel the rope of the gallows tightening about my poor old throat, and I – oh, God, pity me – I promised him, Bernardine.'

"'Save me, and Bernardine shall marry you!' I cried; 'only save me! Don't call the police, for the love of Heaven!'

"'Then fly!' he cried, shrilly. 'Take the knife with you; go as quickly as you can to my rooms, back of my place, and there I will give you something to wear until you can get home!'

"I made my way to his place, as he directed. He was there before me. He took the blood-stained clothes and knife from me, remarking, grimly:

"'I shall keep these, the evidences of your guilt, until you succeed in making Bernardine my wife. If she refuses, I shall need them.'

"Oh, Bernardine, from that hour to this I have lived a perfect hell on earth. I am as innocent of that crime as a babe; but everything is against me. Jasper Wilde has proof enough to send your poor, wretched old father to the gallows, if you refuse to marry him. Oh, Bernardine! I dare not lift my head and look up into your dear young face. Speak to me, child, and let me know the worst. This gnawing at my soul is intolerable – I can not bear it and live!"

But the lips of the hapless girl whose arms were twined about his neck were mute and cold as marble.

"Won't you speak to me, Bernardine?" he wailed out, sharply. "Your silence is more than I can bear. For God's sake, speak!"

CHAPTER XIV

"HAVE I BROKEN YOUR HEART, MY DARLING?"

Bernardine Moore slowly untwined her white arms from about her father's neck, and turned her white, anguished face toward him, and the awful despair that lay in the dark eyes that met his was more piteous than any words could have been.

"Have I broken your heart, Bernardine?" he cried out. "Oh, my child, my beautiful Bernardine, have I ruined your life by that fatal promise?"

She tried to speak, but no words fell from her white lips; it seemed to her that she would never speak again; that the power of speech had suddenly left her.

"My poor old life is not worth such a sacrifice, Bernardine!" he cried out, sharply; "and you shall not make it. I will put a drop of something I know of in a cup of coffee, and then it will be all over with me. He can not pursue me through the dark gates of death."

"No, no," said the girl, great, heavy tears – a blessed relief – falling from her eyes like rain. "Your life is more precious to me than all the world beside. I would take your place on the gallows and die for you, father. Oh, believe me! – believe me!"

"And you feel in your heart the truth of what I say – that I am innocent, Bernardine?" he cried. "Say you believe me."

"I would stake my life on your innocence, father," she replied, through her tears. "I believe in you as I do in Heaven. You shall not die! I will save you, father. I – I – will – marry Jasper Wilde, if that will save you!"

She spoke the words clearly, bravely. Her father did not realize that they nearly cost her her life – that they dug a grave long and deep, in which her hopes and rosy day-dreams were to be buried.

"You have saved me, Bernardine!" he cried, joyously. "Oh, how you must love me – poor, old, and helpless as I am!"

She answered him with kisses and tears; she could not trust herself to speak.

She rose abruptly from her knees, and quitted the room with unsteady steps.

"Thank Heaven it is over!" muttered David Moore, with a sigh. "Bernardine has consented, and I am saved!"

The day that followed was surely the darkest sweet Bernardine Moore had ever known. But it came to an end at last, and with the evening came Jay Gardiner.

He knew as soon as he greeted Bernardine and her father that something out of the usual order had transpired, the old basket-maker greeted him so stiffly, Bernardine so constrainedly.

Bernardine's manner was quite as sweet and kind, but she did not hold out to him the little hand which it was heaven on earth to him to clasp even for one brief instant.

Looking at her closely, he saw that her beautiful dark eyes were heavy and swollen with weeping.

"Poor child! She is continually grieving over the drinking habit of her father," he thought; and the bitterest anger rose up in his heart against the old basket-maker for bringing a tear to those beautiful dark eyes.

Again the longing came to him to beat down all barriers that parted her from him, take Bernardine in his arms, and crying out how madly he loved her, bear his beautiful love away as his idolized bride to his own palatial home. But the thought of that other one, to whom he was in honor and in duty bound, kept him silent.

He realized that for his own peace of mind and hers he must never see Bernardine again; that this must be the last time.

"I am sorry your father has fallen asleep, yet I do not wish to waken him, for I have come to say farewell to him and to you, Miss Moore," he said, huskily.

He saw the lovely face grow as white as a snow-drop; he saw all the glad light leave the great dark eyes; he saw the beautiful lips pale and the little hands tremble, and the sight was almost more than he could endure, for he read by these signs that which he had guessed before – that the sweet, fond, tender heart of Bernardine had gone out to him as his had gone out to her.

"Are you sorry, my poor girl?" he asked, brokenly.

"Yes," she answered, not attempting to stay her bitter tears, "I shall miss you. Life will never be the same to me again."

He stopped before her, and caught her passionately to him.

"Dear Heaven, help me to say good-bye to you!" he cried; "for you must realize the truth, Bernardine. I love you – oh, I love you with all the strength of my heart and soul! Yet we must part!"

CHAPTER XV

"I LOVE YOU! I CAN NOT KEEP THE SECRET ANY LONGER!"

For a moment Bernardine rested in his arms while Jay Gardiner cried over and over again, reckless as to how it would end:

"Yes, I love you, Bernardine, with all my heart, with all my soul!"

But it was for a moment only; then the girl struggled out of the strong arms that infolded her, with the expression of a startled fawn in her dark, humid eyes.

"Oh, Doctor Gardiner, don't; please don't!" she gasped, shrinking from him with quivering lips, and holding up her white hands as though to ward him off. "You must not speak to me; indeed, you must not!"

"Why should I not tell you the secret that is eating my heart away!" he cried, hoarsely.

Before he could add another word, she answered, quickly:

"Let me tell you why it is not right to listen to you, Doctor Gardiner. I – I am the promised wife of Jasper Wilde!"

If she had struck him a blow with her little white hand he could not have been more astounded.

His arms fell to his sides, and his face grew ashen pale.

"You are to marry Jasper Wilde?" he cried, hoarsely. "I can not believe the evidence of my own senses, Bernardine!"

She did not answer, but stood before him with her beautiful head drooped on her breast.

"You do not love him, Bernardine!" cried Jay Gardiner, bitterly. "Tell me – answer me this – why are you to marry him?"

Her lips moved, but no sound came from them.

"If I should sue to you upon my bended knees to be mine, Bernardine, would you not turn from him for me?"

He knew by the piteous sob that welled from the very depths of her heart how deeply this question must have struck her.

"Bernardine," he cried, hoarsely, "if ever I read love in a girl's heart when her eyes have met mine, I have read it in yours! You love me, Bernardine. You can not, you dare not deny it. I repeat, if I were to sue you on my bended knees, could you, would you refuse to be my wife?"

"I – must – marry – Jasper Wilde," she whispered, wretchedly.

Without another word, stung by pride and pain, Jay Gardiner turned from the girl he had learned to love so madly, and hurried down the dark, winding stairs, and out into the street.

For one moment poor Bernardine gazed at the open door-way through which his retreating form had passed; then she flung herself down on her knees, and wept as women weep but once in a life-time.

Wounded love, outraged pride, the sense of keen and bitter humiliation, and yet of dread necessity, was strong upon her. And there was no help for her, no comfort in those tears.

"Was ever a girl so wronged?" she moaned.

She wept until there seemed to be no tears left in those dark, mournful eyes. As she lay there, like a pale, broken lily, with her head and heart aching, she wondered, in her gentle way, why this sorrow should have fallen upon her.

While she lay there, weeping her very heart out, Jay Gardiner was walking down the street, his brain in a whirl, his emotions wrenching his very soul.

Miss Pendleton had written him that she would expect him to call that evening. He had been about to write her that it would be an impossibility; but now he changed his mind. Going there would be of some benefit to him, after all, for it would bring him surcease of sorrow for one brief hour, forgetfulness of Bernardine during that time.

It touched him a little to see how delightedly the girl welcomed him. She, too, was a money-seeker like the rest of her sex; but he could also see that she was in love with him.

"I have been home for three days, and you have not even remembered that fact," she said, brightly, yet with a very reproachful look.

"If you will pardon the offense, I will promise not to be so remiss in the future."

"I shall hold you to your word," she declared. "But dear me, how pale and haggard you look! That will never do for a soon-to-be bridegroom!"

His brow darkened. The very allusion to his coming marriage was most hateful to him. Sally could see that, though she pretended not to notice it.

Mr. and Mrs. Pendleton came in to welcome him, being so profuse in their greeting that they annoyed him.

Louisa was more sensible. Her welcome was quiet, not to say constrained.

"If it had been Louisa instead of Sally," he mused, bitterly, "the fate that I have brought upon myself would be more bearable."

He was so miserable as he listened to Sally's ceaseless chatter that he felt that if he had a revolver, he would shoot himself then and there, and thus end it all.

CHAPTER XVI

"WHERE THERE IS NO JEALOUSY THERE IS LITTLE LOVE!"

It was a relief to Jay Gardiner when he found himself out of the house and on the street. The short two hours he had passed in Sally's society were more trying on his nerves than the hardest day's work could have been.

He groaned aloud at the thought of the long years he was destined to live though, with this girl as his companion.

He had come at seven, and made his adieu at nine. Sally then went upstairs to her mother's room with a very discontented face, and entered the *boudoir* in anything but the best of humors.

Mrs. Pendleton looked up from the book she was reading, with an expression of astonishment and wonder.

"Surely Doctor Gardiner has not gone so soon!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, he has," replied Sally, laconically.

"I suppose some important duty called him away so early?"

"He did not say so," returned her daughter, crossly.

"Is he coming soon again?" questioned Mrs. Pendleton, anxiously.

"I don't know," replied Sally; adding, slowly: "When I tried to find out when he would call again, he seemed annoyed, and replied, curtly: 'That will be hard for me to determine, Miss Pendleton. You must remember that those in my profession have few leisure hours.' He would not set a time. I had to let the matter rest at that."

"He is not very much in love, then, I fear, my dear Sally," said her mother, reflectively. "Still, bad beginnings often make good endings. But I had almost forgotten to tell you the startling news, my dear," added Mrs. Pendleton, hastily. "Your aunt, Sally Rogers, is here. Louisa is entertaining her up in her *boudoir*. You must not be surprised, or show too much amusement when you see her. She is a sight. We would be eternally disgraced if the neighbors were to see her. She is fairly covered with rags – yes, rags! There are holes in her shoes; there never was such a bonnet worn since the time of the ark; and as for gloves, she disdains such an article of feminine attire altogether. I do not think one will have to wait long to come into possession of her fortune. But run up to your sister's room and greet old Miss Sally as affectionately as possible."

Sally was rather glad of this intelligence, for it prevented her from having a very bad case of the blues in thinking over her lover's coldness, and how irksome this betrothal was to him.

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