

I have come to ——.” She was utterly confused.

“Probably to induce me to retract my orders that a certain young man in my employ must exchange places with another.”

Rosa’s face suffused with color.

“That would be scarcely worth the trouble.”

“Not? Or would it please you to have me dismiss the same young man on New Year’s?”

“Will you do so?”

“It is my privilege,” he mockingly replied.

Rosa breathed heavily, but she answered quietly: “Then he’ll find employment elsewhere. Competent and industrious young men like he are desired everywhere.”

“Certainly! certainly! especially such as neglect their duties to run after the girls.”

She stood motionless, silent, and with shining eyes. He laughed maliciously at her: “Don’t you wonder how I know it?”

“That is not difficult to understand. You were eavesdropping and are not ashamed to confess it.”

“The stairs are free to all so far as I know. ’Tisn’t very pleasant to have others discover one’s private affairs, is it.”

Her eyes began to glitter. “Do you believe that I am ashamed on that account? When two have won the love of each other wherefore should they be ashamed to confess it?”

“Even in the evening, upon the stairs?” he interrogated, tantalizingly.

“Even in the evening, upon the stairs,” she repeated assertively. “Love does not question when or where. But then,” and her lips curled contemptuously, “what do you know about love? You do not appear as though you could ever have loved any one.”

“What surprises me is that in spite of that you should include the ‘old bugbear’ in your calculations. I have yet to thank you for the kind invitation to your wedding.”

Rosa was trembling with excitement. “If we had hoped to depend upon you, this much should be apparent, that we thought more of you than what you prove to be, and that we believed you had a noble heart in spite of your gruff manner. But we were mistaken. Not content with playing the spy, something which no gentleman would do, you use what you have overheard to mock and to shame us because we have innocently incurred