

"I cannot conceive," she said, "how any one can be so absorbed. It is beyond me."

"Have you never loved anything so fondly that you felt you would sacrifice anything, even life itself, for it?" he asked.

"Love!" said the maiden. "Yes, I have read of it in books—of how it makes fools of the wisest men. But I,—I have never known it."

Carl opened his eyes in astonishment. From that instant this girl held a strange fascination, a new interest for him. He had long scouted the idea that any one could live to mature age without experiencing the thrills of the grand passion. At last he was face to face with a living example.

"I cannot understand it," he said, slowly.

Then, unconsciously using her own words, "It is beyond me."

While he was speaking she had been silently turning over his drawings. At length she came to one which he had signed.

"Carl Delayle," she mused. "That is your name, no doubt."

"Yes," he assented. "Carl Delayle, artist at heart, idler by nature, dreamer through all."

"And yet you are happy and contented," said she.

"One who is ambitious is never contented," said Carl.

"Then I am glad that I am not ambitious, if it destroys peace of mind," returned the girl.

Carl looked at her sharply once more.

"I cannot understand you," he declared.

As he spoke, he saw her draw her light mantle more closely about her shoulders. And then he noticed that the sun had sunk behind the hills, and that the shadows of early eventide were falling.

"Night is gathering," he said, "and I must take myself off at once or I shall never be able to find my way back to the hostelry."

"To the hostelry," she echoed. "Why, it is six miles away."

"So far?" said Carl. "I did not think I had wandered so widely."

"It is clearly impossible for you to reach it in the darkness. You must accept the hospitality of a stranger, and come with me. We do not often entertain, for few ever pass through the forest. But such as we have belongs to every belated passerby."

And thus speaking, she gathered her light dress about her and