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## THWARTED VENGEANCE.

"I AM RASH, Florence; I own to the Southern blood that leaps through my veins,—that makes me, as you say, wilful and passionate. But I am a man, with a man's feelings and high principle of honor. I am no boy, Florence, to be wiled from this gay smile to that,—I must and will be heard."

"It is better not," said Florence Maynard, turning away half impatiently.—"We have been such good friends, Willis, I have hoped that nothing would disturb the calm current of our happiness. And the sweet girl sighed as she seated herself again."

"Florence—Florence—how could I help it?" cried the young man, passionately. "Have I not been always under the spell of your presence? When you were a child, I loved you, madly. I cannot—I will not see the prize that I have toiled for, early and late, slip from my grasp. Oh! if you knew how hard I have tried to be good, for your sake,—to be, if possible, worthy of you,—you would let your heart love me, I know you would."

"If it were in my power," said Florence, sadly and seriously. "If it will comfort you, let me tell you how hard I have tried to find in my heart one chord that would thrill in sympathy with the feelings you profess. It is in vain, Willis. I love you as a friend, as a brother, even, for that you have always seemed, but, oh! you would not take for a wife one whose every impulse revolts at the thought of that other sacred union!"

The man stood up, fire in his eyes, a scarlet flush on his cheek, his arms, folded, his hands clenched (though out of sight) till the blood almost came. He gazed at the girl with a strangely varying expression,—now cruel and relentless, now tender and pitiful.

"Florence, you will never know how much I love you. Two years ago, when I thought that perhaps I had lost you, I sought to put the wide seas between us. I traveled fast and far, even to the wilds of Australia. The suffering of that time has left indelible marks upon my face. I thought I had conquered." He stopped for a moment, his lips working convulsively. He turned away to hide his emotion, but in a few moments resumed. "I came back, hoping, as I had heard nothing from you you were married. If it had been so, all might have been well.—But you met me the same kind tones as of old, the same sweet smile. O Heaven! how my pulses throbbled with hope again. All the past was forgotten. I madly believed that my absence had worked a change in your feelings. I dared to dream again,—I dared to love. I cannot give you up, Florence,—I will not give you up!"

Florence rose from her seat, frightened in his manner, trembling as she noted his changed appearance.

"No,—don't leave me as if you were afraid of me; I cannot endure that. I will not harm you, Florence; but I cannot give up the hope that you don't understand your own heart, that you don't understand me. You, at least, love no one else, do you, Florence?"

"I have never loved any man, Willis," she said, calmly, "and if this is the complexion of that great mystery, I trust I never may."

"Florence, you know not what you saying," cried the young man, his swarthy face glowing again. "What have I done to distress you? Pity me! pity me! It is not love that prompts me to violent speech; it is disappointment where I had staked all my dearest hope. Oh, why was I ever born to endure this misery!"

Florence stood there, plying. She trembled, and could have wept, but it

would not do to show any emotion that might be construed into signs of relenting. This man's fiery nature did not suit her usually calm temperament.—How was it possible that she, so quiet and retiring, had won a love so terribly real,—so enduring? She could not understand it, but stood there perplexed, pitying, yet strong in her resolve.

It was quite true, as she had said; no man had won her love, as she was not prepared to know by one single pang the misery that he was suffering. She knew that his eyes were haggard, his brow too early marked with strong lines, his heart heavy, for many a labored sigh came up from its depths; but she could feel no sympathy with him, and but faint pity. Sometimes she was impatient under his homage,—more than once after this almost stormy interview. His nature was not a fine one; it rather resembled the iron that will corrode till the rust has eaten beyond the surface, than the good gold that bears the tempering heat of the fire and comes out purer than before.

Florence was obliged, in self-defence, to be cool in her demeanor before him, and it sometimes enraged him. His petitions became more like persecutions, and at last for a time they did not speak together. He carried his resolves smothered in his own bosom, till his jealousy grew to be a consuming fire. He watched her at all times with a secret rage, and blood that ran hot to his fingers' ends if he detected her bestowing her smiles on others. She grew to be afraid of him, and yet a sort of pity kept her powerless. If she had confided in her father (she had no mother) there might have been a way of escape. In consideration of the young man's own feelings, he would have placed them apart. But gradually it grew to be a matter of course to see him watch her under his bent, black brows,—to find him following her like a shadow wherever she went; and now he said but little of his love, she hoped it would in some inexplicable manner die out and leave her free.

One Sabbath a stranger appeared in the rector's pew. He was not handsome, though his was one of those faces that suggests beauty rather than possesses it. Yet he was sufficiently attractive in manner and appearance to set the whole parish to talking and wondering.

"I want you to get acquainted with him, if that jealous lover of yours will let you," said Letitia Saunders, a little blonde in pink and white, who called on Florence the following week, and seated herself airily, with an eye to the disposition of her flounces.

"My jealous lover!" cried Florence, in some surprise.

"Yes, that haughty Southerner whom some of us admire so much. Little do we get for it in return, save cool indifference. 'His is joined to his idol; let him alone.'"

Florence smiled at her flippancy, but crimsoned, too.

"He is—no lover of mine," she would have said, but could not with truth.—"Nothing to me," she added, "nothing whatever. Of course he is attentive,—any man would be who holds the position he does in my father's household; but his regards, in my sight, are only brotherly, I assure you."

"Strange! It is all around that you are engaged."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, I heard it at Mrs. James', and even Mr. Felix told me as if, I imagined—perhaps it was only imagination, after all—Willis Boynton had himself told him."

It flashed over Florence suddenly, painfully. Could Willis stoop so low as to circulate this report, and thus, driven by his insane jealousy, attempt to bar all others from approaching her? The thought made her cheeks tingle—gave her a thrill almost of anger.

"I am not engaged to Willis and never expect to be, Letitia. I care nothing at all for him, and only receive his attentions as I would those of my own brother if I had one. You must see how cool I am toward him."

"Yes, I have often remarked that; but people will talk in this village, so I suppose there'll be scandal enough with reference to the new comer who is very rich, and I think splendid looking, don't you? Now there'll be a rush to see who can get him. I am going to stand back and look on. I have always said I

never cared about being married, you know."

"Is he a relation of the rector?" asked Florence, willing to pursue the subject, for to tell the truth she had been somewhat moved by the sight of this stranger—she who met most men with indifference.

"Don't know, likely not; though some say he is a cousin of his wife. At any rate he is distinguished, and all but handsome—just the sort of man to make a hero, don't you think so?"

At that moment, in burst another figure, dress and ringlets in disorder.

"O girls, excuse me, but I'm in such a hurry. We're extemporizing a picnic on Sunbright Lake. It's a capital day, and papa says he will go—and Mr. Allington, that's papa's visitor—and we must be all ready by eleven, with luncheons, and cape-bonnets, and hats, you know. Oh, dear! I'm all out of breath." She sank down rosy and panting. "We shan't have many men, but there is Amos Keith—Captain Keith, I ought to call him, to be sure—but then he's engaged to Mary Danvers, so he's no company; then there's Willis, and Herbert Anthon, and—"

"Willis is out of town; won't be home till night," said Florence.

"Well not much of a loss," laughed the little creature; he would have been devoted to you. It does provoke me to see these engaged people."

"We're not engaged, Minnie," said Florence. "I am surprised. This is second time to-day I have heard what is indeed news to me."

"Oh, I'm glad of that!" cried Minnie, "for I never quite liked Willis; he is so dark-looking. But it's the truth that the engagement is spoken of everywhere."

"You may contradict by my authority," said Florence, calmly.

"I will, then; but come—what about our fun? I can't give it up. If you must know, I was the first one who thought about it, and papa laughed at me and doubted my success. This spurred me. It's a glorious day, neither too hot nor too cool; and we'll have one man there who isn't married or engaged. Won't that be a novelty?"

"And he's so fine looking," said Letitia.

"Isn't he? Papa says he never saw a nobler specimen of manhood. You should have heard papa and him *parley vous* in French last night. It was splendid. Papa says he hasn't had such a treat in a great while; says he is the most finished French conversationalist he ever met with out of Paris. What do you think of that? Brush up your French, girls."

"Dear me, I hope he isn't a learned man," said Letitia, piteously.

"You would think so if you had seen him romp with me last night. If there wasn't a curly headed little boy in the army, for whom I have a strong regard," she added, laughing and blushing, "I don't know what would be the consequences. But come, girls; speak quick; will you go?"

"I will," said Letitia, rising with decision.

"So will I," returned Florence, catching the enthusiasm. "What shall we carry?"

"Oh, anything that will taste good spread out on the grass. Mother is getting table-cloths and ware ready, and Tiny is marking down, so we must get up a party. Oh, dear! I've got to go on the hill for the Denleighs and Amhursts. Be sure and be at the depot at eleven. Won't we have a merry time?"

Yes, Florence felt a strong presentiment that she, at least, should enjoy the occasion. She did not say so to herself in just so many words, but it was an immense relief to feel that she was not to be followed about by the man whose eyes had grown to be almost intolerable to her. Once she had thought them beautiful, for Willis was acknowledged to be very handsome by everybody, and yet, strange to say, he was not generally liked. Many people would say that it was a pity so charming a girl as Florence Maynard could be induced to like him, for there was something uncanny in his appearance. It was such a pleasure to feel that nobody was watching her, or attending to every want, noting every movement. Her spirits rose high as she made her preparations. It was somewhat strange that the open, noble

face of the stranger mingled some way with her anticipations. She laughed at herself for the thought, but it was nevertheless true that she had been very much pleased with the new-comer's appearance, and found herself unconsciously comparing the two faces—that of Willis always losing by the comparison.

Everything was in readiness when the little company met at the cars. Two strong men carried an immense basket well packed between them. Each party had at least a lunch-basket filled. All were merry, gay, and laughing as they took their seats, conscious that no marplot was in their midst.

The ground arrived at, there was plenty to do. Some busied themselves in bringing water and wood, for they were to have a genuine tea-making; others took out the viands and placed them in order; others still strayed nearer the edge of the beautiful lake.

Florence was engaged at the spring.—She had nearly filled her pitcher, when a musical voice said:

"Let me assist you."

She looked up almost trembling to see two dark blue eyes smiling in her face. Strange how that glance shook her equanimity. She, who was generally so fearless and frolicsome, was dumb now.—She merely thanked him, and he, lifting the pitcher, walked slowly by her side.

"I have heard much of your American woods," he said, "but I never thought to find anything half so beautiful as these painted leaves. How gorgeous they are—like the bright birds of a tropical climate, only nestling by hundreds upon boughs and branches."

"Your forests, then, do not exhibit these changes?"

"No; our climate is too damp. And even the sunshine here affects me differently. It is neither lurid, burning, like that of a Southern clime, nor pale and sickly like England's. It is so clear, golden, and exhilarating. You ought to have great poets here. You have—I was reading last night—Whittier and Longfellow. What justice they do the beautiful works of nature. The rivers leap and the forests sing through their verses."

"I am glad you like them," said Florence, with animation.

"Oh, I see much to admire here," and he glanced again in her face, his eyes lingering there for a moment. "Look—they find it difficult to make the fire burn. I must help them."

Saying this, he hurried toward the little group, almost blinded with the smoke and scattering the wood, built up a pyramid with skillful fingers, placed a few coals on the top, set them in a blaze, and presto! there was a fire that shot up a flame of clear amber against the brown trunk of the sturdy oak near.

"That was skillfully done," said the rector. "Neither burnt nor blackened fingers."

"I have been in the woods before," he said, cheerily, but from that moment a sadness came over his face which did not leave it quickly. He drew quietly apart from the rest, and one good at the study of the human face might have seen in his a sad, weary, almost hopeless dejection that the gayety surrounding them might not dispel.

It was a happy time, nevertheless.—There was the snowy cloth set with tempting delicacies; beyond the bright green of the sward, clumps here and there of young trees, mighty growth of oak and maple, and still beyond, in the softness of the shining distance, the deep bright blue of the small lake, sparkling, snapping its wet fingers in the vivid sunshine.

The girls were all anxious to know the new-comer, but though he was very social, dealing his smiles with unstudied partiality, at times it was easy to see towards whose good graces he inclined the most. Sweet Florence, with that nameless charm in lips and eyes, patient, mirthful, or quietly serious, attracted him irresistibly, and more than one pair of knowing orbs sparkled over the discovery. A row on the lake, a circle under the protecting shadow of some pleasant trees, brightened by story and song, and the day's toil and pleasure were over.—It was quite unaccountable how in all the confusion that ensued, it being nearly dark, the young stranger should find himself by the side of Florence Maynard. Yet it was, as she knew, when

once seated, some one took her basket from her tired hands and held it, nodding and smiling as much as to say:—"You see I have taken the liberty."

As for Florence, she was startled at the intensity of her emotions. She had never before admitted the thought of love, but now some strange, sublime instinct told her that she had met her fate. For a few short moments she yielded to the pleasure of this dawning but exquisite happiness, when suddenly a dull, quick sense of pain made her breathless. The light was so placed (for the sun had set) that it threw a strong reflection upon the cracked mirror at the opposite end of the car, and there, distorted by the flaw, no doubt, yet looking hideously sullen, sat Willis, apparently watching her conversation with her new friend. The baleful fires of jealousy burned in his eyes, his brow was black and lowering. At once her comfort was destroyed; a feeling of uneasiness crept into her heart—a dim presentiment of coming evil. Ostensibly Willis was reading his newspaper—in reality, studying her face, and drawing his own inferences from her companionship. Suddenly the paper was folded, the young man arose, turned and moved unsteadily toward her. Arriving at her seat, he stopped and bowed—bowed also to the stranger to whom he had been introduced—and leaning against the back of the next seat, he directed his attention to Florence.

"It is quite an unexpected pleasure to meet you here. Wasn't it rather a sudden arrangement, this excursion?—for I suppose you have had a picnic in the woods?"

"It was rather sudden," said Florence, quietly, biting her lips, galled at the patronizing manner he had assumed.

"Will you have this seat?" asked the Englishman, politely.

Willis declined, but kept his position, chatting to Florence, talking upon such subjects that the stranger must have felt himself uncomfortably in the way, until the cars stopped at the station. Then he insisted upon doing the honors, took possession of Florence and her basket, wished the Englishman good-night as if he had been defrauding him, and accompanied her home. Their walk was a silent one. Willis had gradually worked himself into a fit of jealous desperation.

"I have no doubt you enjoyed your day immensely," he said, as they neared the door of their residence.

"Never better," said Florence, very shortly.

"We do not always know whom we become acquainted with at such places."

"You forget we were all acquainted," said Florence.

"I presume so; you seemed quite chatty and confidential with your friend of yesterday."

"I don't know that I was particularly confidential; I certainly did enter into conversation with our minister's guest. I presume I need not ask your sanction in such matters."

"Oh! no—of course not," he replied briefly and bitterly; "or in any other, as to that."

"I certainly shall not," said Florence and there was a shade of contempt in her voice.

No answer; but Willis rang the bell with such violence that two of the servants came running to the door, fearful that their master was certainly brought home either dead or dying. Florence entered, indignant—Willis followed, angry, and furiously jealous. He could scarcely overmaster his passion. He raged up and down the parlors, after she had gone to her room, like a wild panther; he did not know, himself, but he should go mad—certainly such passions had never possessed him before. Forward and back with a fierce tramp, shoulders set square, teeth locked, eyes glaring, and hands clenched, he raged—cursing in his heart—using the most awful imprecations against his Maker, against Florence, against the stranger, toward whom, if she had smiled on him but once, he felt the most murderous inclinations. Oh! it was terrible, this loss of self-possession; but more awful the loss of that which he had staked his very soul to win. Strangely enough, he had thought that his patient persistence must at length be rewarded. Trusting and fearing alternately, he had watched the scales of his hopes, now vibrating