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into bloom. And as I gazed out on the terrace I pondered the wonderful thought that all I saw was mine—the room, the house—and I looked round at the dainty pictures and the furniture and the Japanese knick-knacks—mine only in trust for Gilbert, but mine as its mistress when it was Gilbert's. I thought how good Providence had been to me—how wonderful, how strange to have given me so grand and true and noble a lover!

Our marriage was not to be postponed very long. I was going home for a while first—home, where the news of my stupendous fortune had greatly flattered the devoted. Lady Martin would, I hoped, join her husband. Hilda was to return to London, in care of the military cousin's wife until he became Lady Ormsby; and Gilbert and I were to settle down at the Grange, with Urie and Annis at the Lodge. Did not life seem pleasant as it was unrolled before my eyes? Could my book be as enchanting?

So I sat dreaming, with a smile on my face, when Hilda came into the room. She looked very fair in her mourning, and her pale gold hair shone in contrast to the long black dress that trailed after her. But during all the months I had been at the Grange she had never spoken to me pleasantly; the sapphiric eyes had never softened, nor the proud curve of the mouth grown gracious and sweet. Now, as she fixed those eyes on my face, a gleam like the glimmer of bright steel, but there was a slight tremor in her bell-like voice.

"I think it fair to tell you, Miss Thorne," she began—she never called me Viola—"that you may possibly be resting on false security at present, and that in a short time you will find the scene changed. I tell you this that you may be prepared to hear from my lawyer, and also that you may know what I think, and that every one is not deceived by you."

I looked up at her wonderingly. "What do you mean, Miss Farquhar?" I asked. "I will tell you what I mean," she answered calmly. "Simply this. You came here, to find an eccentric old man and three girls you thought, I suppose, fools. You hunted up family quarrels, and spied into family secrets—No; allow me to speak."

For I was about to interrupt her with indignant anger; but I let her speak on, holding back my wrathful words; and the clear voice grew more passionate and intense.

"You shall hear me out, Miss Thorne. You are clever—I admit it. I did not think so at first, and I seemed to interfere with you; and so far you have been successful. You exerted your influence over a childish old man by telling lies about his nieces and betraying confidences you should have been the last to reveal. To be safe on both sides, you threw yourself into the way of his nephew, and managed him with brazen skill too. But I, at least, shall not tamely submit to your success. Gilbert is befuddled, and you have charmed Annis, child as she is; but I can act for myself and fight against your schemes. And I tell you this—that I intend to fight my uncle's will to the last, and, whether lawyers and judges can or cannot be brought to see the influence you obtained over a decrepit, half-crazed invalid, you shall, at least, be better known than you are now!"

When she paused, her voice, still clear and steady, had in it the white heat of suppressed rage. I was startled, bewildered, confounded. But I tried to answer her quietly. I wanted to be at peace with them all, and Hilda was the last who held out against me. "You do not believe what you have said, I am quite sure, Hilda. You know Mr. Gas-

coigne was as clear-headed as yourself; and you know, and I know too, that he left the Grange to me that Gilbert might have it. I did not want it; I have no wish for it now but for his sake. It is simply preposterous to suppose he would ever have bequeathed it to me, or that I could have schemed for such an outrageous thing. If I have done you any wrong, I am sorry; but you have no right to insult me by such words as those."

"Insult you!" she cried. "I am only preparing you for what every one will say before long."

"I have not sought," I went on, "to learn a single word of your private concerns. I asked for no one's secrets; once told me, I have betrayed none. For betraying confidences you can hardly impugn me, you who tried to insure me, even at the cost of your sister's happiness, by telling my secret, which you had learned, to your uncle."

She made no answer, but a faint color stole over her face.

"You have been very hard and very cruel to me since I came and put myself in some measure at your mercy, Hilda, and I thought at first you were unjust without intending to be so. You supposed me to be everything you had imagined I might be, and you never sought to learn whether your supposition was true or not. But you cannot believe in these accusations. Why are you so unjust?"

"Am I unjust?" she said. "At least I am no hypocrite. Why did you come? Why did you stay when you knew we wished you gone, and allow yourself to be thought a spy and an informer?"

"You had no right, no excuse to think such abominable things of me. Ask your sisters if, a week after I came, they did not both ask me to stay. I came, innocent and ignorant of the persecution which you and Lady Martin had determined to subject me to, and I stayed to fight against your prejudices, since they had no ground in reason or justice. I know my position tempts you to say hard things; but it is fair and right that the Grange should come to Gilbert, and I hold it for him. Lord Ormsby's home is a hundred times grander, Hilda; you need not be envious of Gilbert and me."

I had thought that she was growing softer, and I did not speak angrily. I was wounded to the heart that Gilbert's cousin, should cherish such implacable hatred of me, and so sorely grieved, but not angry.

Now however her face was set more relentlessly than ever.

"Gilbert and you?" she echoed in bitter tones. "You talk well, Miss Thorne; you should have been an actress. But I know you too well to be deceived by evasion and clap-trap! I have no more to say to you."

I did not attempt to say another word, and she left me.

I marvelled over and pondered what she had said, and for a time I was very miserable, wretched, and pained that any one should think so cruelly of me, and that one of Gilbert's relatives should be my enemy. But as I thought of her words I became more wroth, and the hot indignation dried up my tears. I had done no wrong, I had injured no one; it would not have been right that she should inherit the Grange. What was it to her that Gilbert had chosen me to be his wife, to share whatever fortunes should be his; and how dared she thus insult his promised wife in what was already my own house?

I should have understood better her words and actions, which seemed to me then madly unreasoning, had I known that the lawyer she consulted was Crawford Carden, who had told her the lies invented by his own black heart, had told her that my promise was given to him—him whom I

hated from the first moment I heard his false voice—and only broken when I learned that the old man I disesteemed was relenting towards his nephew—had told her that it was I who had persuaded Mr. Gascoigne to leave the property as it was left, and that she, Hilda, had played my game in betraying the secrecy with which I theatrically enshrouded for a while my meetings with Gilbert.

"I do not doubt," Carden had said, "that you can get the will set aside on the ground of unsound mind or undue influence; but you will see how impossible it is for me to undertake the case. I believe she is marrying Mr. Gilbert Gascoigne now only to silence talk and stop such an action."

They could do him little good, those wanton, deliberate lies; but he knew I hated him, and he sought but to injure me in any way he could, infuriated as he was by the slight put upon him by Mr. Gascoigne's will, for which he imagined I was partly responsible.

One or two, who know the story, say that they believe he loved me and wished in any way to break my engagement with Gilbert. But I do not credit it. There are many ways of loving, I have learned to know; but I do not believe one spark of real affection dictated his treachery. It was ambition—ambition which made him feign love for me when he watched my growing favor in Mr. Gascoigne's eyes, and disappointed ambition which made him anxious to wreak his vengeance on me, whether by so doing he might or might not think ever to obtain for himself the riches of the Grange. He was furious too with Gilbert, who frankly and steadfastly independent, had won what he had plotted and lied to win.

I can understand that jealous love was the mainspring of Hilda's cruelty; it filled her whole heart and mind, and perverted her reason so that she may have accepted as truth what she was ready and willing to believe. But he? No; there was not room for love in his self-absorbed and scheming life.

But of all this I thought nothing then. I guessed nothing of Hilda's jealousy; it never for a moment occurred to me that she would consult Mr. Carden, and I fell to wondering what would come of her threat, whether she could do anything, supposing others thought as she did, to dispossess Gilbert and me of the Grange. I never imagined it was I only she wished to drive away. My every thought was bound up in Gilbert.

I told Gwendoline of the threat, but of Hilda's insulting words I told no one. She only laughed sarcastically.

"You need not be afraid, Viola. Hilda can do nothing. No one else will ever accuse you of influencing my poor uncle. Is there any other will?"

"I don't think there is one in existence." "Then what can it matter? Without a will, everything, Hilda's fortune and my own also, goes to Gilbert; and I do not suppose Hilda can dispute existing arrangements without Gilbert's aid. So long as you two love each other, child, you need not care."

"Are you sure?" I asked her wistfully. "Are you sure?" she said, in return, "that she cannot make Gilbert believe as she does? If accusations are made, will he stand by you through them all?" "I hope so," I faltered. "I think he would."

She put her hands on my shoulders; and looked me keenly in the face. "There should be no 'thinking,' Viola," she said earnestly. "Don't marry him unless you can trust him wholly, and he you. Take my word for it, nothing will make marriage bearable but confidence in one another."

(To be continued.)

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