Tom's School-Books.

One night, not long since, as I went to the closet,
A garment of Tom's in its place to deposit,
I heard such a queer noise upon one of the shelves,
Where his school-books all stood in a row by themselves,
That I paused at the door, as in I was walking,
And found, to my wonder, the school-books were talking.
Said one, with a sigh, "I am sure you remember
How nicely I looked a year since in September.
But now," it shrieked out, in the wildest of rages,
As it flung back its cover, "just look at my pages!
And how he could do it is really a mystery,
Maltreating like this a 'United States History.'"
Then a book by her side bowed low, as to please her,
And said, "I can sympathize; I'm Tom's 'Cæsar,'
I'm nearly worn out, and he never translates me
Without saying roundly he 'perfectly hates me,'"
And wishes that 'Cæsar had saved him the trouble
By writing in English.' I'm nearly bent double
By the t rtures he gives me, the thumpings, the thwacks,
And by being slapped down upon little boys' backs.
I could not discern the year through one good omen,
And now I despair" said the noble old Roman.
Then said the Arithmetic, speaking quite grim:
"My Interest isn't of interest to him.
He pays no regard to my Weights and my Measures,
My Cubes and Square-roots and the rest of my treasures.
And myself and my comrade in arms, this good Slate,
If we chose, we, too, could a sad story relate."
Then the Reader, the Grammar, and all, testified
In the very same way. 'Twas a blow to my pride,
For Tom is my boy; but as soon as 'twas morning
I woke him, and told him this tale for a warning,
And he promised at once, when he heard of their pain,
That he never would treat them so rude again.

PHYLLIS.

BY THE DUCHESS.

Author of "Molly Bawn," "The Baby," "Airy Fairy Lilian," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XI

"At last! How late you are! I thought you were *never* coming," is Mr. Carrington's somewhat impatient greeting next evening, as he advances to meet me from under the old oak-tree. My cheeks are flushed with the rapidity of my walk; my breath rushes from me in short, quick, little gasps.

"I was so busy I could not come a moment sooner. I would not be here at all but that I promised, and was afraid you would think me out of my senses yesterday," I say, laughing and panting.

"I certainly thought you rather tragical, and have been puzzling my brain ever since to discover the cause. Now, tell it to me."

"If I do you will think me horribly conceited." I hesitate and blush uneasily. For the first time it occurs to me that I have a very uncomfortable story to relate.

"I will not," says Mr. Carrington, amiably.

"Well then, the fact is down at the trout-river, the day before yesterday, somebody saw you kissing a picture in a locket, and I feared if you mentioned having *my* portrait they might—they take up such ridiculous fancies at home—they *might* think it was *mine*.

"Is it possible they would imagine anything so unlikely?"

"Of *course*"—with eager haste—"*I* know it was not, but they might choose to think differently; and, besides, something has whispered to me two or three times since that perhaps I was wrong in giving my photograph to you at all. Was I?" wistfully.

"That is a hard question to ask *me*, Phyllis, who am so happy in the possession of it. I certainly do not think you were."

"Then you would see no harm in my giving my picture to any one?"

"Of course I do not say it would be right of you to go about giving it to every man you meet."

"No? Then why should I give it to you in particular? After all, I believe I was wrong."

"Oh, that is quite another thing altogether," says Mr. Carrington, biting his lip. "You have known me a long time; I may almost be considered an old friend. And, besides, you can be quite sure that I will prize it as it deserves."

"That is saying very little," I return, gloomily. His reasoning seems to me poor and unsatisfactory. I begin to wish my wretched likeness back again in my untidy drawer.

"But why are you sure it was not your picture I was caught admiring the other day?" asks Mr. Carrington, presently, with an ill-suppressed smile.

"Nonsense!" I reply angrily. (I hate being laughed at). "For what possible reason would you put *my* face into your locket? I *knew* you would think me vain when I began, but I am *not*—and—I am very sorry I took the trouble to explain it to you at all."

"Forgive me, Phyllis. I did not mean to offend you and I do *not* think you vain. I was merely imagining what a fastidious fool I must have looked when discovered in the act you describe. But have you no curiosity to learn who it *really* was I was so publicly embracing?"

"I *know*," I return, with a nod; "it was that little girl you told me of some time since—the village maiden, you remember, whose face was so dear to you. Am I not right!"

"Quite right. What a capital guess you made!"

"May I see her?" I ask coaxingly. "Do let me get just one little peep at her. I am sure she is lovely, from what you say; and I do so like pretty people?"

"You would only be disappointed, and then you would say so, and I could not bear to hear one disparaging word said of my beauty."

"I will *not* be disappointed. Of course—you have had so much experience to guide you—your taste *must* be better than mine. Please let me see her."

"You promise faithfully not to scorn the face I will show you? You will say no slighting word?"

"I will not indeed. How could you think I would be so rude?"

"Very good." He raises his watch-chain and detaches from it a plain gold locket. I draw near and gaze at it eagerly. What will she be like, this rival of Dora's?"

"Now, remember," he says again, while a look of intense amusement crosses his face, "you have promised to admire?"

"Yes, yes," I answer impatiently; and as he deliberately opens the trinket I lean forward and stare into the large gray-blue eyes of Phyllis Marian Vernon.

Slowly I raise my head and look at my companion. He appears grave now, and rather anxious. I know I am as white as death.

"So you have put *me* into a locket *too*," say, in a low tone. "Why?"

"Do not use the word 'too,' Phyllis. You have no rival; I keep no woman's face near me except yours."

"Then it was an untruth you told me bout that girl?"

"No, it was not. Will you not try to understand? *You* are that little girl; it was *your* face I kissed the other day down by the river. There is no face in the world I hold so dear as yours."

"Then you had no *right* to kiss it," I break out indignantly, my surprise and bewilderment making me vehement. "I did not give you my picture to put in your locket and treat in that way. How dare you carry me all over the place with you—making things so unpleasant everywhere? And, besides, you are talking very falsely; it is impossible that *any one* could think me beautiful."

"*I* do," says he, gently. "I cannot help it. You know we all judge differently. And as to my kissing it, surely that was no great harm? It became mine, you know, when you gave it to me; and for me to kiss it now and then cannot injure you or it." He gazes down tenderly upon the face lying in his hand. "The Phyllis here does not look as if she could be unkind or unjust," he says softly.

I am impressed by the mildness of his reproach. Insensibly, I go closer to him, and regard with mingled feelings the innocent cause of all the disturbance.

"It certainly looks wonderfully well," I say, with reluctance. "It never appeared to me so—ah—*passable* before. It must be the gold frame. Somehow—I never thought so until to-day—but it seems much too pretty for me."

"Remember your promise," says Mr. Carrington, demurely, "to admire and say no disparaging word."

"You laid a trap for me," I reply, smiling in spite of myself, and hard set to prevent the smile turning into a merry laugh as I review the situation.

I lean my back against the old tree, and, clasping my hands loosely before me, begin to piece past events. I have not gone far in my meditations when I become aware that Mr. Carrington has closed the locket, has turned, and is steadfastly regarding me. My hat lies on the ground beside me; the wanton wind has blown a few stray tresses of my hair across my forehead. Involuntarily I raise my head until our eyes meet. Something new, indefinite, in his, makes my heart beat with a sudden fear that yet is nameless.

"Phyllis," whispers he, hurriedly, impulsively, "will you marry me?"

A long, long, pause.

I am still alive, then! the skies have *not* fallen!

"*What!*" cry I, when I recover breath, moving back a step or two, and staring at him with the most open and undisguised amazement. *Can* I have heard aright? Is it indeed me he is asking to marry him? And if so—if my senses have not deceived me—who is to tell Dora. This thought surmounts all others.

"I want you to say you will marry me," repeats he, rather disconcerted by the emphatic astonishment of look and tone. As I make no reply this time, he is emboldened, and, advancing, takes both my hands.

"Why do you look so surprised?" he says. "Why will you not answer me? Surely for weeks you must have seen I would some time ask you this question. Then why not to-day? If I waited for years I could not love you more utterly, more madly if you like, than now. And you, Phyllis—say you will be my wife?"

"I cannot indeed," I reply earnestly; "it is out of the question. I never knew you—you cared for me in this way—I always thought—that is, we all thought—you——"

"Yes?"

"We are all quite sure—I mean none of us imagined you were in love with *me*."

"With whom, then?—with Dora?"

"Well"—nervously—"I am sure mamma and papa thought so, and so did I."

"What an absurd mistake! Ten thousand Dora's would not make one Phyllis. Do you know ever since that first day I saw you in the wood I loved you? Do you remember it?"

"Yes," I say blushing furiously. "I was hanging from the nut tree and nearly went mad with shame and rage when I found I could not escape. It puzzles me to think what you could have seen to admire about me *that* day, unless my boots." I laugh rather hysterically.

"Nevertheless I *did* love you then, and have gone on nursing the feeling ever since, until I can keep it to myself no longer. But you are silent, Phyllis. Why do you not speak? I *will* not remember what you said just now; I *will* not take a refusal from you. Darling, darling, surely you love me, if only a little?"

"No, I do not love you," I answer with downcast lids and flaming cheeks.

Silence falls upon my cruel words. His hand-clasp loosens, but still he does not let me altogether go; and, glancing up timidly, I see a face like and yet unlike the face I know—a face that is still and white, with lips that tremble slightly beneath the heavy fair mustache. A world of disappointed anguish darkens his blue eyes.

Seeing all this, and knowing myself its cause, my heart is touched and a keen pang darts through my breast. I press his hands with reassuring force as I go on hastily:

"But I *like* you, you will understand. I may not *love* you, but I *like* you very much indeed—better than any other man I ever met, except Roland and Billy, and *he* is only a boy." This is not a very clear or logical speech, but it does just as well; it brings the blood back to his face, and a smile to his lips the light and fire to his eyes.

"Are you sure of that?" he asks, eagerly. "Are you certain, Phyllis?"

"Quite sure. But then I have never seen any men except Mr. Mangan, you know, and the curate, and Bobby De Vere, and—one or two others."

"And these one or two others"—jealously—"have I nothing to fear from them? Have you given *them* none of your thoughts?"

"Not one," return I, smiling up at him. The smile does more than I intended.

"Then you *will* marry me, Phyllis?" cries he, with renewed hope. "If you *like* me as you say, I will make you love me when once you are my own. No man could love as I do without creating some answering affection. Phyllis," he goes on passionately, "look at me and say you believe all this. Oh, my life, my darling, how I have longed for you! How I have watched the hours that would bring me to your side! How I have hated the evenings that parted you from me! Say one little kind word to me to make me happy."

His tone is so full of hope and joy that almost I feel myself drifting with the current of his passion. But Dora's face rising before me checks the coming words. I draw back.

"Phyllis, put me out of pain," he says, entreatingly. I begin to find the situation trying, being a mere novice in the art of receiving and refusing proposals with propriety.

"I—I don't think I want to get married yet," I say at length, with nervous gentleness. I am very fearful of hurting him again. "At home, when I ask to go anywhere, they tell me I am still a child, and you are much older than me. I don't mean that you are *old*," I added anxiously, "only a good deal older than I am; and perhaps when it is too late you would repent the step you had taken and wish you had chosen a wife older and wiser."

I stop, amazed at my own eloquence and rather proud of myself. Never before have I made so long and so connected a speech. Really the "older and wiser" could scarcely have done better. The marrying in haste and repenting at leisure allusion appears to me very neat, and *ought* to be effective.

All is going on very well indeed, and I feel I could continue with dignity to the end, but just at this moment I become conscious I am going to sneeze. Oh, horrible, unromantic thought! Will *nothing* put it back for ten minutes—for even *five*? I feel myself turning crimson, and certain admonitory twitchings in my nose warn me the catastrophe is close at hand.

"Of course," says Mr. Carrington, in a low tone, "I know you *are* very young, (it is coming)—"only seventeen. And, and,"—(*surely* coming)—"I suppose twenty-eight appears quite old to you." (In another instant I shall be disgraced forever.) "I look even older than I am. But good gracious Phyllis, is anything the matter with you?"

"Nothing, nothing," I murmur, with a last frantic effort at pride and dignity, "only a—a—snee—eeze—atchu—atchu—atchu!"

There is a most awful pause, and then Mr. Carrington, after a vain endeavor to suppress it, burst into an unrestrained fit of laughter, in which without hesitation I join him.

"But, Phyllis, all this time you are keeping me in suspense," says Mr. Carrington, presently, in an anxious tone: "and I will not leave you again without a decided answer. This uncertainty kills me. Darling, I feel glad and thankful when I remember how happy I can make your life, if you will only let me. You shall never have a wish ungratified that is in my power to grant. Strangemore shall be yours, and you shall make what alterations there you choose. You shall have your own rooms, and furnish them as your own taste directs. You shall reign there as the very sweetest queen that ever came within its walls."

He has passed his arm lightly round my waist, and is keenly noting the effect of his words.

"I remember the other day you told me how you longed to visit foreign lands. I will take you abroad, and you shall stay there as long as you wish—until you have seen everything your fancy has pictured to you. You will like all this, Phyllis; it pleases you."

There is no denying it. All this *does* please me. Nay, more; it intoxicates me. I am heart-whole, and therefore can freely yield myself up to the enjoyment of the visions he has conjured up before me. I feel I am giving in swiftly and surely. My refusing to marry him will not make him a whit more anxious to marry Dora; and instinct tells me now she is utterly unsuited to him. Still I am reluctant.

"Would you let me have Billy and mamma and Dora with me very often?" I ask faintly.

His arm round me tightens suddenly.

"As often as ever you wish," he says, with strange calmness. "I tell you you shall be my queen at Strangemore, and your wishes shall be law."

"And"—here I blush crimson, and my voice sinks to a whisper—"there is something else I want very, very much. Will you do it for me?"

"I will. Tell me what it is."

His tone is so quiet, so kind, I am encouraged; yet I know by the trembling of the hand that holds mine that the quiet is enforced.

"Will you send Billy to Eton for me?" I say, my voice shaking terribly. "I know it is a very great thing to ask, but he so *longs* to go."

"I will do better than that," he answers softly, drawing me closer to him as he sees how soon I shall be his by my own consent. "I will settle on you any money you wish, and *you* shall send Billy to Eton, and afterwards to Oxford or Cambridge."

This assurance, given at any other time, would have driven me half mad with delight. Now, though my heart feels a strong throb of pleasure, it is largely mingled with what I know is pain. Am I selling myself?

Some finer instinct within me whispers to me to pause before giving myself irrevocably to a man whom I certainly do not love as a woman should love the one with whom she elects to buffet all the storms and trials of life. A horrible thought comes to me and grows on my lips. I feel I must give it utterance.

"Suppose," I say, suddenly, "suppose—afterwards—when I have married you, I see some one to love with all my heart and mind; what then?"

He shivers. He draws me passionately, almost fiercely to him, as though defying my miserable words to come true.

"What put such a detestable idea into your head?" he asks hoarsely, with pale lips. "Are you trying to frighten me? Shall I tell you how *that* would end? You would be my murderess as surely as though you drove a knife into my heart. What an evil thought! But I defy it," he says, forcing a smile. "Once you are mine, once you belong to me altogether, I will hold you against yourself—against the world. Oh, Phyllis, my child, my *love*——"

He pauses, and, putting his hand under my chin, turns up my face until my head leans against his arm and my eyes look straight into his. His face is dangerously close to mine; it comes closer, closer, until suddenly, without a word of warning, his lips meet mine in a long, eager, passionate kiss.

It is the first time a lover's kiss has been laid upon my lips. I do not struggle or seek to free myself. I only burst into a storm of tears. I am frightened, troubled, and lie trembling and sobbing in his arms, hardly knowing what I feel, hardly conscious of anything but a sense of shame and fear. I know, too, that Marmaduke's heart is beating wildly against my cheek.

"Phyllis, what is it? what have I done?" he asks, very anxiously. "My darling, was I too abrupt? Did I frighten you? Forgive me, sweet; I forgot what a sweet timid child you are."

I sob on bitterly.

"It shall not happen again; I promise you that, Phyllis. I will never kiss you again until you give me permission. Now surely you will forgive me. My darling, why should it grieve you so terribly?"

"I don't know," I whisper, "only I do not want to be married, or have a lover, or *anything*."

Marmaduke lays his cheek very gently against mine, and for a long time there is silence between us. After a while my sobs cease, and he once more breaks the silence by saying:

"You will marry me, Phyllis?" and I answer, "Yes," very quietly, somehow feeling as if that kiss had sealed my fate, and put it out of my power to answer "No."

"Then look at me," says Marmaduke, tenderly. "Will you not let me see my dear wife's face?"

I raise a face flushed and tear-stained and glance at him shyly for a moment. Evidently its dimmed appearance makes no difference to him, as there is unmistakable rapture and triumph in his gaze as he regards it. I hide it again with a sigh, though now the Rubicon being actually passed, I feel a sense of rest I had not known before.

"Who is to tell them at home?" I ask presently.

"I will. Shall I go back with you now and tell them at once?"

"No, no," I cry, hastily shrinking from the contemplation of the scene that will inevitably follow his announcement. It is too late now. To-morrow—about four o'clock—you can come and get it over. And, Mr. Carrington, will, will you please be *sure* to tell them I knew nothing of it—never suspected, I mean, that you *cared* for me"

"That I *loved* you? It would be a pity to suppress so evident a fact. Though how you could have been so blind, my pet, puzzles me. Well, then, to-morrow let it be And now I will walk home with you, lest any hobgoblin, jealous of my joy, should spirit you away from me."

Together and rather silently we go through the wood and out into the road beyond. I am conscious that every now and then Marmaduke's eyes seek my face and dwell there with a smile in them that betrays his extreme and utter satisfaction. As for me, I am neither glad nor sorry, nor anything, but rather fearful of the consequence when my engagement shall be made public in the home circle. As yet my marriage is a thing so faint, so far away in the dim distance, that it causes me little or no annoyance.

Suddenly I stop short in the middle of the road and burst into irrepressible laughter.

"What is it?" asks Mr. Carrington, who is smiling in sympathy.

"Oh, that sneeze!" I say when I can speak "coming just in the middle of your proposal. Could anything have been so unsuitable, so utterly out of place? That odious little convulsion! I shall always think of the whole scene with abhorrence."

"Suppose I propose to you all over again?" suggests Mr. Carrington. "It is impossible you can bring it in so unfortunately a second time; and you can then recollect the important event with more complaisance."

"No, no. A second edition would be flat, stale, and unprofitable; and besides, it does not really matter, does it? Only I suppose it would be more correct to feel grave and tearful, instead of comical, on such occasions."

"*Nothing* matters," exclaims Marmaduke, fervently, seizing my hand and kissing it, "since you have promised to be my wife. And *soon*, Phyllis—is it not so?"

"Oh, no, *certainly* not *soon*," I return, decidedly. "There is plenty of time. There is no hurry; and I do not want to be married for *ever* so long."

My lover's countenance falls.

"What do you mean by 'ever so long?'" he asks.

"Two or three years, perhaps."

"Phyllis! how can you be so unreasonable, so *absurd*?" says he, his face flushing. "*Two years!* It is an eternity. Say six months, if you will; though even *that* is a ridiculous delay."

"If you talk like that," I say, stopping to stare fixedly at him, "I will not marry you at all. We had better decide the question at once. If you mean to say you think seriously I will marry you in *six months*, all I can say is you are very much mistaken. I would not marry the Prince of Wales in six months; *there!* If you once mention the subject to papa, and he discovers I do not wish to be hurried into the marriage, I have no doubt he will insist on my becoming a bride in six *days*. But rather than submit to any tyranny in the matter I would run away and *drown* myself."

I utter this appalling threat with every outward demonstration of seriousness. Really the last hour has developed in a wonderful manner my powers of conversation.

"Do you suppose," cried Marmaduke, with indignation, "I have any desire to *force* you into anything? You may rest assured I will never mention the subject to your father. What do you take me for? You shall do just as you think fit. But, Phyllis, *darling*"—very tenderly, "won't you consider *me* a little? Remember how I shall be longing for you, and how unhappy will be every day spent away from you. Oh, darling, you cannot comprehend how every thought of my heart is wrapped up in you—how passionate and devoted is my love."

He looks so handsome, so much in earnest, as he says this, with his face flushed and his dark eyes slight, that I feel myself relenting. He sees his advantage and presses it.

"You won't be cruel, darling, will you? Remember you have all the power in your own hands. I would not, if I could, compel you to marry me a day sooner than you wish. And, Phyllis, will you not try to think it is for your happiness as well as for mine? In time you will learn to love me as well—no, *that* would be impossible—but almost as well as I love you. The entire devotion of a man's life *must* meet with some return; and I swear it shall not be my fault if every hour you spend is not happier than the last. Speak, Phyllis, and say you will come to me in——"

"A year," I interrupt, hastily. "Yes, that is a great concession; I said *three* years first, and now by a word I take off two. That is twenty-four long months. *Think* of it. You cannot expect more."

"It will *never* pass," says Marmaduke, desperately.

"It will pass all too soon," say I, with a heavy sigh.

CHAPTER XII.

All that evening and all the next day I creep about as one oppressed with sin. As the hour approaches that shall lay bare my secret I feel positively faint, and heartily wish myself in my grave.

Almost as the hall-clock, with its customary uncouthness, clangs out four strokes, Mr. Carrington rides up to the door.

As I sit in an upper chamber—like Elaine, but with what different emotions!—watching my lover's coming, I can see he is looking oppressively radiant, and is actually whistling. I begin to hate him. How detestable a man looks when whistling!

He knocks a loud, determined, and, as it seems to me in my morbid fright, a triumphant knock at the door, and rings the bell until it sends forth a merry peal that echoes through the passages.

Now he is in the hall, and Billy and he are laughing—at some stupid joke, no doubt. *Now* he is in the library; *now* he has told papa it is a fine day; and *now* it must be all over!

I am too frightened to cry. Half an hour, an hour, go by. I long, yet fear, to open the door. Another quarter of an hour elapses, and then mother's step comes slowly along the corridor outside.

"Phyllis, are you within? open the door."

It is mother's voice, but it sounds strangely cold. I open to her, and present a woebegone face to her inspection. She comes in and comforts me for a moment silently. Then she speaks.

"Phyllis, I never thought you deceitful," she says as severely as it is in her to say anything.

"Mother," I cry passionately, "don't look at me like that. Indeed, indeed I am not deceitful. I knew nothing about it when he asked me yesterday to marry him. I was a great deal more surprised than even *you* are now. I always thought it was Dora (and I wish with all my heart it *was* Dora); but, though I refused him at first, he said so much afterwards that I was induced to give in. Oh, mother, won't you believe me?"

"But you must have met him many times, Phyllis, before he asked you in marriage—many times of which we know *nothing*."

"I did not, indeed. Whenever I saw him I told you—except once, a long time ago when we met in the wood, with Billy. But I was climbing a nut-tree that day, and was afraid to say anything of it, lest I should get into disgrace. And when we went for that drive; and two or three times we met here; and that was all. I am sure I do not know what made him fall in love with *me*, and Dora so much prettier and more charming in every way. I don't believe he knows himself."

"It is certainly most extraordinary," says my mother, "and, I must add, very unfortunate. You will acknowledge it looks suspicious. Your father is much disturbed about it; and I really think Dora's heart must be broken, she is crying so bitterly. If we had not all made up our minds so securely about Dora it would not be so bad; but she was sure of it. And his visits here were so frequent. I really do think he has behaved very badly."

"It was a mistake altogether," I murmur feebly.

"Yes, and a most unhappy one. I am sure I don't know what *is* to be done about Dora. She insists upon it that you secretly encouraged and took him away from her; and your father appears to sympathize with her.

"That goes without telling," I reply bitterly.

Then there follows a pause, during which mother sighs heavily once or twice, and I do severe battle with my conscience. At the end of it I cry, suddenly—

"Mother, there is one thing for which I *do* blame myself, but at first it did not occur to me that it might be wrong. One day we were talking of photographs, Mr. Carrington and I, and—two days afterwards I gave him mine. He put it in his locket, and when Dora saw him down by the river it was *it* he was kissing. I never dreamed it *could* be mine until he showed it to me yesterday."

"I had forgotten to ask about that, Dora and your father were discussing it just now, and Dora declared she was certain it had happened as you have now stated. Phyllis, if there has not been actual duplicity in your conduct, there has at least been much imprudence."

"I know that, mother," I return disconsolately

"This will greatly add to your discredit in the affair; you must see that. Really," says mother, sinking into a chair, and sighing again, "this engagement, that should cause us all such pride and joy, is only a source of annoyance and pain."

"Then I wont marry him at all, mother," I cry, recklessly. "I don't want to one bit; and probably if I tell him to-morrow I hate and despise him *he* will not want to either. Or shall I write? A letter will go far quicker."

But mother is aghast at this daring proposal. Because he has disappointed her hopes in one quarter is no reason why she should lose him altogether as a son-in-law.

"No, no," she says in a slightly altered tone. "Let things remain as they now are. It is a good match for you in every sense of the word; and setting him free would give Dora no satisfaction. But I wish it had all come about differently."

With that she turns from me and goes towards the door. My heart feels breaking.

"Oh, mother, you are not going to leave me like this, are you?" I burst out miserably. "When other girls get engaged, people are kind and say nice things to them; but nobody seems to care about *me*, nobody wishes *me* joy. Am I *nothing* to you? Am I to get only hard and cruel words?" Piteous sobs interrupt me. I cover my face with my hands.

(To be continued