

ONE PENNY WEEKLY.

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## A SWEET OLD-FASHIONED FLOWER

"ROSE, MY DARLING, I CAN HARDLY BELIEVE THAT I HAVE FOUND YOU AT LAST."

### A SWEET OLD-FASHIONED FLOWER.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "PHILIP MORDANT'S WARD."

#### CHAPTER I.

"THE CHESTNUTS" was a bright, cheery-looking homestead, even in winter, when the huge tree that gave its name to the house and grounds was bare. Perhaps the lofty branches and the broad girth of trunk were seen to more advantage when it was stripped of its leaves and the full grandeur of its size made visible.

Although late in December, the well-kept acres in which the house stood had much that was attractive; the bright colouring of the laurels and other evergreens shone out in contrast to the dusky

fir-trees, while, in a sheltered corner, a little colony of Christmas roses grew and flourished famously, their pale wax-like blossoms peeping out from among their bright, crisp, green leaves. What frail, delicate things they seemed, and yet how bravely they could stand the bleak, wintry weather.

The house itself was a spacious building, without any pretensions in the way of architecture, yet as plainly as the grounds denoted the gardener's constant care, the house, at every turn, gave evidence that its owner was a man of wealth.

For twenty years the only women-folk about "The Chestnuts" had been those belonging to the servants' hall, and it had known no other mistress than Mrs. Giles, the housekeeper. James Donnythorne, to whom the place belonged, had, as long as his neighbours could remember, lived the life of a recluse. He had little thought



outside his library, but there among his books he was happy in his own way, busy from morning till night with learned translations and elaborately planned dictionaries, works never destined to see the light of publication, yet which served a purpose in keeping the old man industriously employed.

Mr. Donnythorne had few visitors—one or two old scholars, book-lovers like himself, and his friend and legal adviser, Mr. Hammond. It is true there was his nephew, Neville Seymour, whom everyone, save Mr. Donnythorne himself, persisted in considering would be his heir. And not unnaturally, for Neville was the son of Mr. Donnythorne's only sister, the one relation the old man had left. He had taken great interest in the boy, educated him well, and when he left college had articulated him to Mr. Hammond, who was a solicitor in Lincoln's Inn.

Mr. Donnythorne told his nephew he would start him well in the world, leaving him perhaps some small legacy, but he must expect nothing more; so that if the young man did indulge in any false hopes he would have no one but himself to blame for his disappointment. This being thoroughly understood, the uncle and nephew were on very amicable terms; and the old man would rouse himself from his books and give a very hearty welcome to the young one whenever he came down to "The Chestnuts" for a holiday.

James Donnythorne was a kind-hearted man; his servants all spoke well of him, and were ready to do their best for his comfort, and, on the whole, his quiet, monotonous life was not unhappy; and yet he had had a great sorrow, one which, although it had not soured him, he was never likely to forget.

Mrs. Giles, the housekeeper, would tell the little history to any new-comer among her retinue of servants, and there were often tears in the good woman's eyes as she spoke of the "master's" trouble, which, to her, was a personal calamity.

Mr. Donnythorne had been early left a widower, with one child, a daughter. Bright, handsome Rose Donnythorne, before she was twenty years of age, had been the acknowledged beauty of the county. She was the ideal of her father's heart. From quite a child she had been the mistress of his house, having her own way in every matter. Being naturally of a wilful, somewhat selfish disposition, nothing could have been worse for her than this over-indulgence. Her father saw this when it was too late. Never having been accustomed to obey, it was hardly to be wondered at that she married entirely to please herself, and without her father's consent; in fact, in direct opposition to his wishes.

There was much that was distressing connected with her marriage. The man she had chosen was a gay, reckless fellow, with nothing to recommend him but his handsome face, that had captivated her. His people, however, were the chief objection, for he belonged to a rough set, certainly not of the better class, in Cornwall, who were more than supposed to have been connected, years before, with some notorious smugglers of the same name. Mr. Donnythorne felt degraded at the mere thought of his daughter's entering this family, and nothing would make him consent to the union; but, if he was firm, she was still more determined, and, being of age, she openly defied him. The father showered no storm of abuse upon her, he spoke in the bitterness of his heart.

"My daughter," he said at parting, "the time must come when you will have to acknowledge your mistake. Some day, when you are left—perhaps deserted—you will return to me, and say that I was right."

He could have used no worse argument to a proud, passionate nature such as hers. She vowed, then and there, that this should never be, that she had chosen her lot, and would abide by it. And she kept her word, for the years went by, and he heard nothing of her.

When his first anger subsided, he would have been glad enough to make terms with her, for, after all, she was his only child, and very dear to him; but she was gone, and, in spite of every inquiry, he could learn nothing of her whereabouts. After two or three years of silence, Mr. Hammond assured his friend and client that his daughter must be dead.

"She is too proud to come back and be forgiven," Mr. Donnythorne said sadly; "but when I am gone you may hear something of her; then she shall find that I have left her everything."

The lawyer smiled incredulously. A little of the world's rough usage, a taste of poverty and neglect, would, he felt convinced, have knocked the pride and self-will even out of Rose Donnythorne, and if she were living she would have come down upon her father long ago; therefore, notwithstanding all Mr. Donnythorne's elaborate instructions that all his property should be left to his daughter Rose, Mr. Hammond, in his own mind, fully believed that Neville Seymour would come in for everything.

Mrs. Giles and the rest of the servants at "The Chestnuts" spoke of Neville as "the young master," and often wondered, among themselves, whether he would keep the place up as his uncle had done. In fact, Mr. Donnythorne was the only one who did not recognise his heir-presumptive, and consequently he was the least surprised of

any of those interested in the matter, when one day he received news of his missing daughter.

It was close upon twenty years since Rose Donnythorne had left her home, and now came the announcement of her death; the superioress of a French convent in a little seaport town wrote to say that she had died there a few days previously, and that she had left a letter to be sent to her father after her death. The superioress ended by informing Mr. Donnythorne that his grand-daughter remained in her charge until she should receive his instructions.

Rose's letter contained a certain amount of penitence and sorrow, but the whole object of the letter was to win her father's interest in her orphan child; she begged that he would give her a home.

"She will be a comfort to you in your old age, such as I could never have been," the mother wrote. "You will not find it difficult to love her; she is a sweet, docile little creature, unlike me in every respect save in name, but I call her my Christmas Rose, for she came to me at Christmas time, and she is as fair and fragile-looking as the little white flowers I remember so well at home."

Mr. Donnythorne's sorrow at the knowledge of his daughter's death was in a great measure diminished by his satisfaction that she had left her child to him.

As soon as he had learnt the fact of his grandchild's existence, the old man made up his mind to go himself to France and bring her home. It was with a feeling of intense pleasure, not unmixed with triumph, that he summoned Mrs. Giles, and bade her prepare the house to receive its mistress; for Rose's letter had informed him that her daughter was just seventeen, and had just finished her education, therefore he intended at once to place her in the position he meant her to fill. But if he had a sense of triumph in making his communication to the housekeeper, what were his feelings as he laid the true facts of the case before his solicitor? for he had telegraphed for Mr. Hammond as soon as the news reached him. As to Mr. Hammond, his one thought was of Neville, upon whom he felt the sudden change of affairs was truly hard. It never struck Mr. Donnythorne in this light, however, and the only mention he made of his nephew was to say, just before he set out on his journey:—

"Well, Hammond, you must tell Neville all about it. I am more glad than I can express that I never let him indulge in false hopes; so that I have nothing to reproach myself with on his account."

In the household of "The Chestnuts" there was not one, from the little scullery-maid to the all-important Mrs. Giles, but had a regretful, pitying thought for "the young master," who, to their thinking, had been very hardly used.

"If Miss Linscott is at all what her mother was at her age, we are likely to have a lively time of it," Mrs. Giles remarked to her special confidante, a housemaid who had been almost as long in Mr. Donnythorne's service as she had herself. The housemaid assented, for, though she had not a personal knowledge of Rose Donnythorne, stories of her imperious temper and domineering ways were fresh in her remembrance.

After ten days' absence Mr. Donnythorne returned home, bringing his grandchild with him, the first sight of whom filled the housekeeper and her followers with a sense of relief. Could this timid, shrinking girl indeed be Rose Donnythorne's daughter? Mrs. Giles felt bewildered. There certainly was no trace of her mother, either in looks or manner. She was hardly pretty; her face was too pale and delicate, but there was an air of grace and refinement about her, and, although she appeared rather shy and nervous, her soft, grey eyes and sweet, gentle voice were very winning. But who did she take after? the housekeeper wondered, so utterly unlike what either father or mother had been.

Mr. Donnythorne was not so puzzled. When he had first beheld his daughter's child he had been struck by the wonderful resemblance she bore to the young wife he had lost so early. She had not her beauty, it was true, but in manner and expression she was strangely like the girl-wife whose memory had held the same place in the old man's heart for fifty years. And yet it was hard for him to realise that this girl was the grandchild of one who was ever present to his memory—as he had seen her last—in all the freshness of her youthful beauty!

Mr. Donnythorne had been prepared to be cordial to his grand-daughter, but the striking resemblance which he recognised in her had drawn her closer to him than anything else could have done, and from the first moment that they met she became very dear to him.

## CHAPTER II.

It was some time before Mr. Donnythorne's grand-daughter really understood what his intentions were in her regard. It had seemed like a fairy tale to the lonely girl to find herself in this beautiful place, the like of which she had never seen, and to be told that it was her home! But after a while, as she listened to the old man's repeated references to her as his heiress and the mistress of his house, the true state of affairs began to dawn upon her, and the new



life seemed more of a fairy tale than ever. Her timid nature was half frightened at the prospect before her.

"Grandfather, surely I cannot be the only relation you have?" she asked a few days after her first arrival at "The Chestnuts."

"You are the nearest and the dearest," he answered, with a smile; "and, indeed," he added, "with the exception of Neville, you are the only one I can boast of."

"Neville? Ah! that is the nephew I have heard you speak of," she returned slowly; then, after a pause, she said: "I suppose, grandfather, if I had never been, or if I had died, all you have would have been Neville's some day?"

Mr. Donnythorne frowned, by no means pleased with the suggestion.

"You might as well conjecture what would have happened if Neville had never been heard of!" he said quickly; "the one is as likely as the other." He spoke almost sharply, and Rose was startled, so said no more.

But the next day, when she was going with Mrs. Giles on a tour of inspection over the house, the subject came up again.

"This is the young master's room," the housekeeper said, throwing open the door of a comfortable apartment on one of the upper floors. "I always keep it in readiness, never knowing when he may pop down."

"The young master?" Rose said, in surprise. "Oh! of course, you mean Mr. Seymour," she added, with sudden remembrance.

"Yes, miss, I mean Mr. Neville. I have known him since he was a small lad from college, and this seems like his home."

Rose fixed her clear, candid eyes on the old servant's face.

"Then, I suppose, before I came here, you thought he would have been my grandfather's heir?" she said.

Mrs. Giles was much taken aback by the directness of the question. She stammered some confused reply that she did not know what to think, and that, never having heard of her master's grand-daughter, it was only natural that she had sometimes fancied Mr. Neville might have filled his uncle's place.

"Yes, it was very natural," the girl answered, with a quiet sadness, "but I wonder if he thought so too?"

"Who, miss?" the housekeeper inquired wonderingly.

"Neville—my cousin?"

Mrs. Giles was bewildered how to answer her, and only begged Miss Linscott to forget what she had said, and to forgive her impertinence, for of course it was no concern of hers.

"Do not apologise to me," Rose said gently; "it is I who feel the stranger and the interloper."

She said nothing of all this to her grandfather, or, indeed, to anyone, but in her own thoughtful way she brooded over it, and, looking at the matter from Neville Seymour's point of view, felt that he had been cruelly used by fate, and that she was the unwilling cause.

About ten days after Rose had arrived in England, Neville announced his intention of running down to "The Chestnuts" on a visit. He was rather curious to see his newly-found cousin, whose coming had been—although he was too proud to acknowledge it even to himself—a bitter disappointment. He was of too manly and generous a disposition to feel anything like personal resentment; still, had Rose Linscott been one who would have asserted herself as mistress of the situation, or attempted in any way to patronise him, he would have taken a strong aversion to her from the first. As it was, however, the timid, shrinking little creature surprised and interested him. She was scarcely more than a child, he told himself, which accounted for the extreme shyness of her manner, that gave her at times the awkwardness of a schoolgirl.

After the first few hours of their acquaintance he became convinced that he himself was the chief cause of her nervous embarrassment. She seemed almost frightened of him. For a while he was at a loss to understand it, but gradually the true state of the case became evident to him. The poor child, without doubt, did not enjoy her new position; she had, he felt certain, persuaded herself that she was an intruder, and the knowledge did not make her happy. Perhaps, too, she fancied that he objected to her presence, regarding her as coming between him and his future prospects.

The more Neville thought the matter over the more sure he became that his own conjectures were right. He had come down to "The Chestnuts" prepared to treat his unknown cousin with a calm, though marked indifference, but now all his generous feelings were aroused, and they prompted him to treat her with a gentle kindness which should reassure her and place her at her ease. He had a pleasant, genial manner, and it was not long before he succeeded in drawing Rose out of her sad, nervous state.

During the remainder of his stay Neville was devoted to her, taking her about to all his favourite haunts, and trying to interest her in everything. He was familiar with every nook and corner of the old grounds, and he would never be more than a visitor, while she, who was one day to be the owner of the place, saw it all with a stranger's eyes. Perhaps something of this was in the mind of both, but if so they kept the thought to themselves.

It was wonderful the effect that Neville's generous kindness had upon the girl. Delicate and fragile as she was in appearance, hers was a strangely earnest nature, one capable of the deepest feeling. She had expected coldness, perhaps dislike, from her cousin Neville, and she had been met instead with a chivalrous, almost a tender, care and consideration; what wonder then, that her heart went out to him in gratitude?

She was too young really to understand herself, and she took him for her hero without one questioning thought as to the future.

No one had ever been to her what Neville was—that was all she knew. She did not realise how it was that his presence made her so strangely and intensely happy, or why her heart stood still with a pain she had never felt before when she found that their parting was at hand.

Neville Seymour had only come down for a few days, but he had lingered on for three weeks, at the end of which time he was called back to town. Neville was well satisfied with himself; he felt that he had taken his disappointment with a very good grace, and as few things are so gratifying as having a good opinion of one's own conduct, he was, in consequence, in a very amicable frame of mind. He treated Rose with a friendly playfulness, calling her his "Christmas Rose," and assuring her that when her summer namesakes were in bloom she should see him again. He was pleased with the agreeable intimacy which had sprung up between them. He acknowledged to himself that he had enjoyed his visit all the more for her bright companionship.

"She is a dear little thing," he mused, "whom one could not do other than like."

Still, for all this, Rose Linscott was not the kind of girl that Neville really admired, and certainly not the one he would choose for a wife. If a half-formed idea as to what the unknown cousin might possibly be in the future had crossed his mind before they met, he had never given it a second thought since he had seen her. He had accepted Rose as she was—a gentle, childlike creature, whom he felt bound to treat with a protecting kindness. So Neville Seymour went back to town without one misgiving as to the part he had played, and never dreaming that he carried with him all the love of a very loving heart.

As for little Rose, all unconsciously to herself something new and wonderful had come into her life, and, in her quiet, unobtrusive way, she was very happy. Her one desire as the months passed was for the time to fly faster and faster, for with the summer and the roses Neville would come again.

As Mr. Donnythorne grew accustomed to Rose's presence in the house, he relapsed into his old habits, and the greater part of each day he was shut in his library, buried among his books, so that when Neville arrived at "The Chestnuts" on his second visit he and Rose were left almost entirely to entertain each other. Neither objected to this arrangement. So the days passed pleasantly, Neville taking his holiday with a sense of placid enjoyment, and Rose with a happiness that certainly was too keen to last.

One afternoon Mr. Donnythorne was strolling through the grounds, refreshing himself after his literary labours, when he came suddenly upon the two returning from some boating expedition. They were full of youthful gaiety, and Neville's laughing, bantering tones rang out merrily as they approached. Mr. Donnythorne had never before seen his grand-daughter with that bright, animated



LOOKING AT THEM AS THEY CAME ALONG TOGETHER, MR. DONNYTHORNE WAS STRUCK WITH AN IDEA.



expression on her face. Looking at them as they came on together, Mr. Donnythorne was struck with an idea which, strangely enough, had never suggested itself to him before.

He passed them with a nod and smile, and walked on through the trees to think this new problem out in solitude. The more he thought the better pleased he became. Yes, surely the best thing possible was for these two to marry! All the trouble connected with his daughter had come from her choosing a man of whom he had known nothing; so that what could be happier than for this second Rose to marry one of their own family, a lad that he had been interested in from childhood? Added to this, if Neville ever had indulged in any expectations—not that he had any right to do so—he would not be disappointed, but would gain more than he could have hoped for.

Altogether Mr. Donnythorne felt it to be a delightful arrangement, and one which, if he had his own way, should certainly be carried out. He determined to say nothing for the present, but to watch the young people, and if they did not come to some definite understanding before long, to put in a word. He waited with some impatience for a week or two, and then broached the matter to Neville, assuring him, in his kindest way, that nothing would give him greater pleasure.

"But, indeed, uncle, you are mistaken," Neville said hastily; "Rose and I are friends, nothing more."

Mr. Donnythorne shook his head.

"I don't believe in those platonic friendships," he said, with a smile. "But I see how it is, Neville, you are too proud; you are afraid it should be thought you are marrying Rose for what she will bring you. But take care, my lad, that your pride does not break the poor child's heart. There, there!" he said, as Neville was about to make some indignant protest, "I can trust you, and I leave you to manage your own affairs, only I thought it would be a satisfaction for you to know that you have my hearty good wishes."

This conversation with his uncle was a revelation to Neville. He could not help seeing the advantage such a marriage would be to him in the future, and it was true he had grown very fond of Rose, but it was only in that protecting elder brother fashion which he had adopted from the first; she was a dear little thing, yet she fell very short of his ideal. Still, he reflected, he had never seen a woman he cared for half so well as he did for Rose, and perhaps, after all, it was not in his nature to feel an absorbing, passionate love. So Neville reasoned with himself, uncertain how to act.

The consideration that weighed with him the most was the supposition that he had gained the girl's affection; he would have given much to save her from an hour's unhappiness, and if it were, as his uncle had said, a question of breaking her heart, what were his pride or his feelings in the matter compared to that? There was certainly something rather flattering to his self-love in the thought that she had possibly already learnt to care for him; and in the end he resolved that if he could satisfy himself that he should be able to make her happy, he would ask her to be his wife. Having once come to this determination the rest was easy, and scarcely a week after Mr. Donnythorne's words of advice were given, Rose and Neville were betrothed. Everyone was pleased, Mr. Donnythorne could not tire of expressing his delight. His nephew had never stood so high in his estimation before.

Mr. Hammond came hurrying down from town to offer his good wishes, and openly declared the extreme pleasure he felt at the happy turn affairs had taken. And last, but not least, the important body in the housekeeper's room were in a state of high jubilation. Rose, in her own gentle fashion, had long since won their favour, so that it was a pleasant settlement of difficulties to realise that, without wronging her, Mr. Neville was still "the young master." Altogether it seemed, as people said, the best thing that could have happened; and Neville Seymour felt the truth of this, and congratulated himself upon the course he had taken.

Rose Linscott was supremely happy. She had given herself to Neville without one questioning thought as to the future, for her love was deep and true. But she was very young, and her shy, childlike manner was not demonstrative, so that Neville, although he fully believed in her love for him, did not in the least understand the real depth of her affection. If she had measured his love for her by that which she felt for him, Rose might have been disappointed; but that would have been like doubting Neville, therefore it never entered into her imagination.

Neville stayed at "The Chestnuts" late into the autumn, and then went up for a few months' work before the year was quite over. Perhaps the pleasantest part of his engagement was the feeling that from henceforth he was independent. Still, he was not the man to rely solely upon his wife's fortune, and he had determined not to abandon his profession. But it was not one that could be lightly taken up and then laid aside; if he meant to do anything in the way of law, he must go in for much study and hard reading. So he went back to his place in Mr. Hammond's office and set to work with a will.

Rose admired this resolution, but then she was ready to admire

all he did. Still, it was a great disappointment to her, as Christmas drew near and she was looking each day for his arrival, to receive a letter saying that he could only spare a very few days, as he had undertaken some work for Mr. Hammond which would take up all his time for the next month or two. It did seem rather hard, she thought sadly, when there was no real occasion for him to work at all! And yet, after all, she told herself that she was a very favoured child of Fortune, with all that could make life happy, and she must not be ungrateful.

Neville arrived on Christmas Eve. He was delighted to be at home once more—only full of regret at the briefness of his stay. He was very tender in his manner to Rose; he treated her with an air of proprietorship which was very dear to her.

Mr. Donnythorne was anxious to settle all business with his nephew. The young people were to be married in the spring, but Mr. Donnythorne wished the marriage settlements to be drawn up without delay. He began the subject the evening before Neville's return to town, when they were all three seated round the drawing-room fire.

"You see, Neville, it's all very well now," he said, "but if



SO PRETTY WITH THAT HAPPY LIGHT IN HER SOFT EYES.

anything were to happen to me, there is no knowing but that Linscott's people might come forward and make a disturbance, for you must remember that Rose is much under age."

The girl's face flushed painfully. It was not often that her grandfather spoke of her dead father's family, but when he did it was always in that tone. Neville perceived her distress, and hastened to say:—

"All right, uncle, I will speak to Hammond, and I have no doubt he will arrange things before long, though he is over head and ears in work just now."

Mr. Donnythorne appeared satisfied, and after a while, remembering that it was Neville's last evening, he went off to his books, leaving the young people together. They sat for a little time in silence. Neville, with his eyes resting on the gentle face beside him, thought he had never seen Rose look so pretty, with that happy light in her soft eyes and the cluster of white flowers at her breast. They were some Christmas roses from the old plant in the garden that her mother had remembered.

"Well, after all, a Christmas rose is very sweet, and I doubt if one would change it for a *Gloire de Dijon* if one could!" was his unspoken thought, and then he said aloud:—

"What are you pondering over so deeply, little one?"

Rose lifted her eyes to his with a smile.

"I am thinking of something, Neville, which, clever as you are, you cannot understand."

"And what may that mighty problem be?" he inquired, in some amusement.

She did not answer for a moment, then she said, almost under her breath, "How much I care for you."

"Why should you suppose that I do not understand?" he asked in surprise. "I should be an ungrateful wretch indeed if I did not appreciate your affection."

"I did not mean that," she said quickly. "No, Neville, you are too good for me in every way; what I meant was, that my one wish was for you to be happy. I would give my life to buy your happiness. Ah! I would do more than that, I would live for years, until"



I was an old, old woman, and never look upon your face again, if, by doing so, I thought you would be happier."

"A strange way of providing for my happiness," Neville said lightly; but he took her in his arms and held her very close, touched by the loving earnestness of her words and manner.

### CHAPTER III.

NEVILLE SEYMOUR had many friends in London, but he was too engrossed by his work to give much time to pleasure; still, he was young, and a little gaiety now and again was an agreeable change. It was not until the press of business was over, however, that he found himself at liberty to attend a small but fashionable gathering that called itself a New Year's party.

Most of the guests had arrived when Neville made his appearance in a spacious mansion near Kensington Gore, but he did not recognise any that he knew as he strolled through the brilliantly lighted rooms. There was to be dancing, of course, and everyone seemed to be making their way to the rooms set apart for that purpose; Neville followed with the rest, and soon found his hostess presenting him to a partner. As Neville glanced at the girl before him he thought she was undoubtedly the handsomest girl he had ever seen.

Beatrice Holt certainly possessed more than the average share of good looks; hers was a bright and sparkling beauty that lost no opportunity of showing itself to the best advantage. She was rather above the middle height, with a fine, commanding figure. Her hair and eyes were dark, while her complexion was perfect in its colouring. She was magnificently dressed, her style was becoming and in the utmost good taste. Added to these outward charms, she was a bright, clever girl, with a lively, amusing manner. Her smart sallies and gay fire of repartee quite fascinated Neville during the next half hour.

Miss Holt was very gracious to him, and allowed him to put his name down several times upon her programme, so that by the end of the evening they had struck up quite a friendly acquaintance.

When the last guest had departed, the mistress of the house turned to her niece with a smile.

"You have made a complete conquest to-night, Beatrice," she said gaily.

Beatrice Holt laughed, and then yawned a little wearily.

"Who is he, Aunt Lydia?" she inquired.

"Well, I have not heard anything of him all this season. Indeed, I have not seen him till this evening, but there was some talk a while ago of his being heir-presumptive to an aged uncle with a long account at his banker's and a fine estate in the country."

"Dear me, that sounds very promising," Beatrice said lightly; "and, to tell you the truth, Auntie, seeing he was handsome and agreeable, to say nothing of his being a perfect gentleman, I made up my mind he was a pauper; so many good qualities seldom go together."

"That is true enough, my dear," the elder lady remarked, "so we will suppose that Neville Seymour is one of the happy exceptions that go to prove the rule."

Meanwhile, Neville had returned home with his mind in rather a disturbed condition. He asked himself, angrily, how he could be so weak as to allow a woman's brilliant beauty to so charm and captivate him. In his rooms he found awaiting him a letter from his betrothed, and he opened it with a guilty feeling at his heart.

Rose Linscott was quite an artist in her way. In the French convent, where the greater part of her life had been spent, she had been well taught. Neville was very proud of her skill, and now he drew out the New Year's card she had sent him and looked at it admiringly. The design was simple, but the work was exquisitely finished. Sprays of vivid crimson and pale creamy roses crossed each other with a careless grace.

"I thought you might like some roses for a change," the girl had written playfully, little thinking the sharp, quick remorse the words would send through him as he read them.

Neville sat down, and burying his face in his hands tried to think. At last he came to the determination—the only one he could well arrive at, under the circumstances—that he must not give another thought to the girl he had just seen; it was but a first impression, and if he did not meet her again he must soon forget her.

Unfortunately for Neville's good resolutions, however, not many days elapsed before fate again threw him in her way. It was not his fault, he told himself, for he had intended to avoid her; still, he resigned himself to the inevitable very readily. After this they met frequently, and the charmed influence she possessed over him increased.

Neville was unhappy; he felt, although no word of love had passed his lips, that he was wronging Rose, and one afternoon, when he had spent some hours in Miss Holt's society, he hurried back to his chambers with the fixed determination to write to Rose and tell her everything. His was an impulsive nature, and once

his mind was made up nothing could shake his purpose. Accordingly, the instant that he entered his room he drew out his desk and began to write.

He would tell Rose the truth, he had resolved, no matter what it might cost him, and he did not give himself time to think what it might cost her. He assured her that when he had asked her to marry him he cared for no one as he did for her, and that he had believed the warm affection he had felt for her, and which he felt still, was enough; but within the last few weeks he had learnt for the first time what love meant. This was a cruel sentence, but he did not stop to analyse it. He wrote rapidly, as if afraid that he should hesitate and change his mind. He did not ask Rose to release him, but said he put himself in her hands; she should decide as she thought best. He had never wronged her in word, and, although he knew she must despise him, yet if in spite of his folly she could bring herself to forgive him, he would try his utmost to make amends to her in the future.

All this, and a great deal more, he wrote; but, to do him justice, if he had paused for an instant and had pictured to himself what the feelings of the gentle loving girl would be as she read it, there is little doubt but that he would have thrown the letter into the fire; as it was it was fastened up, stamped, and directed in that quick, breathless haste that admitted of no delay. Neville had even taken down his hat to start at once to the post-office, when a sharp, sudden knock came to the outer door of his apartments, and a telegram was handed to him. He tore it open, and the few words it contained sent all else out of his thoughts:—

"Come at once, your uncle is dying."

For a moment he was bewildered; then, as he began to realise the truth, he felt that there was much for him to do. He glanced at his watch—he might possibly catch the five o'clock express. Hastily thrusting a few necessities into his travelling bag, he called a hansom and in a very short time was at Waterloo. All this while his thoughts were very busy, and almost outweighing his grief for his uncle was his sorrow for Rose; it would be hard on her he knew, and alone too with only the servants about her. Neville had never thought of her so tenderly, or longed so earnestly to be with her.

It was not until he was fairly on his journey that the remembrance of his letter to Rose suddenly came over him.

"Thank heaven the telegram came when it did!" he ejaculated fervently. "I should never have forgiven myself if she had received that letter; and at a time like this, too, when she has so much to trouble her, poor child!"

And when, a few hours later, he held the girl's trembling, clinging form in his embrace, and saw, despite the tears of sorrow on her pale face, the light of welcome in her eyes, the mad dream of the past month seemed to fade from Neville's mind, and he had no thought that was not for Rose. Or if, indeed, the recollection of his folly did come over him, it was only in the shape of remorse, which gave an added tenderness to his manner. Rose felt this, though she little guessed the cause.

Mr. Donnythorne had been stricken down very suddenly. He had been found lying unconscious among his beloved books in the library, and had never recovered. He lingered a few hours after his nephew's arrival, and then passed peacefully away. There was, after all, nothing very mournful in his death, for it came at a ripe old age—a painless ending to a very tranquil life. Still, both nephew and grand-daughter felt a keen regret for the kindly old man who had been so much to them.

"Ah! Neville, you are all I have left in the world now!" Rose said, through her tears; yet in her secret soul the girl was angry with herself for not grieving more. But how could she be very unhappy with Neville by her side, ready, by his tender, considerate care, to shield and comfort her? The day or two that elapsed before the funeral, which they spent together, were strangely quiet days. Neville took the whole management of business matters, the little mistress of the house gladly resigning everything to him.

Rose had declared her intention of going to the funeral, but on the morning of the day on which it was to take place she did not make her appearance downstairs. On each of the three days since Mr. Donnythorne's death she had not been absent from her place at the breakfast table, and now Neville missed her strangely; the place seemed deserted without her.

In answer to his inquiry he was told that Miss Linscott was not feeling well, and was not going to leave her room just yet, and a little later in the day he and Mr. Hammond, who had come down for the funeral, each received a message to the effect that Miss Linscott did not feel equal to accompany them to the church, so the little procession set off without her. When the ceremony was at an end, and the few guests had taken their departure, Mr. Hammond adjourned to the library to read the will. There was no need for any but those concerned in it to be present, the lawyer said; and Neville went in search of Rose. He found her in the still darkened drawing-room. He had not seen her since the evening before, and then they had parted very tenderly, and now Neville looked sadly



at the girl's pale face, as he laid his hand upon her shoulder and bent to kiss her, but she drew back quickly as if shrinking from him.

"Ah! Neville, leave me, I am not myself to-day," she said; her tone was gentle, but there was something in her manner that Neville could not understand. This was the first time that she had ever repulsed him, and for a moment he was hurt, even annoyed; but then the remembrance of how much coldness he really deserved at her hands checked his indignation, and he said soothingly:—

"My poor little Rose, this has been a trying time for you, and I hardly think you are quite up to hearing the will read as Mr. Hammond wishes."

"Does Mr. Hammond want me?" she said, rising quickly. "He is in the library, I suppose; let us go to him at once."

And Neville could only follow her.

"This will," Mr. Hammond said, as soon as they had taken their seats, "was drawn up the first week that Miss Linscott came here, and the purport of it is known to both," and then he proceeded to read the document. With the exception of a few legacies to the servants and the sum of three thousand pounds to his nephew, Mr. Donnythorne had bequeathed the whole of his property to his grand-daughter. Despite the wordy elaboration that legal forms rendered necessary, the will did not take ten minutes to read. When he had finished Mr. Hammond laid down the paper and looked at the two before him.

"I wish you young people had been married during my poor client's lifetime," he said, with the familiarity of an old friend.

"I suppose it would have simplified matters," Neville admitted.

"Still, I have no doubt we can soon arrange things."

"Mr. Hammond," Rose said, speaking for the first time—and there was an air of quiet dignity about her that neither of them had seen before—"I do not think we are, any of us, equal to discussing our future plans to-night, but I, for one, shall be quite ready to-morrow to settle everything. Therefore, I shall be glad if you will put off your return to town until the following day."

The lawyer looked surprised. This was the first occasion on which Mr. Donnythorne's grand-daughter had ever expressed her opinion to him.

"Most certainly, Miss Linscott, I will remain another day, as you wish it," he said, "and no doubt you are right; after a night's rest and reflection we shall all be better able to look matters in the face."

"I am quite sure of it," she answered. And then she rose and



"AH! NEVILLE, YOU ARE ALL I HAVE LEFT IN THE WORLD NOW!"

offered him her hand. "You must excuse me now," she said, "for I am very tired."

Neville followed her from the room, but at the foot of the staircase she paused.

"I cannot talk to you to-night, dear Neville," she said, very gently; and then, without another word, or even giving him her hand at parting, she was gone. Neville was at a loss to understand her, she was so totally unlike herself. If his own conscience had not been so ready to reproach him, there is little doubt but that he would have been both angry and indignant; as it was, however, he was only subdued and pained.

The next day he was walking disconsolately about the deserted

grounds when a servant came to inform him that Miss Linscott was in the library and wished to see him. Neville hastened to join her, hoping as he did so that Rose would be herself to-day.

"Neville," she began, before he could approach her, "I have something to tell you which I could not bring myself to say before. It was only yesterday that I received your letter."

"My letter?" he questioned, in bewilderment. Then the truth flashed across him. "Ah, Rose, is it possible that it did reach you after all?"

She looked up quickly. "Did you not wish it to reach me?" she asked.

"No! a thousand times no!" he cried excitedly. "At least," he added, somewhat incoherently, "if I did when I was writing it, I did not afterwards; I do not now, heaven knows!"

"Then you have not fancied," Rose said slowly, with a pause between each word, "during these days we have been together, that I had received it? I am glad of that, Neville."

But there was not much gladness in the sad, wistful eyes raised to his.

"Still, how was it that it did not reach me sooner?" she questioned. "I do not understand?"

"It never should have reached you at all, if I had had my way," he answered, almost fiercely, "but in my hurried departure from home I must have left the letter on the table, and some officious person has put it in the post."

"Yet I must have known the truth sooner or later, so that it has not made much difference," she said quietly.

Neville was silent. He knew not how to answer her. How could he tell her—as he longed to do—that he would not give her up, that she should not cast him off? It would be like an insult after the assertion which she had just read in his letter. And could he trust himself, knowing how weak he had been, if he were thrown in the way of temptation again; might he not be false to his betrothed a second time?

Altogether Neville Seymour had never felt such bitter self-contempt as he did at that moment. The girl's gentle eyes were fixed upon him, and she seemed to read his thoughts.

"Neville," she said, softly, "you must remember that I never could have been happy if you had sacrificed yourself for me! I told you once that your happiness was all I thought of, and, believe me, that was true. If I know you are happy I care for little else."

Neville covered his face with his hands; he could not answer her. If she had uttered one reproach he could have borne it better. After a short silence, Rose spoke again:—

"We must put the past away, Neville, and look only to the future. Now, listen to my plans. In the first place you understand, of course, that you are perfectly free! Still, I would rather, for the next few days at least, that no one but ourselves should know our engagement was at an end; for you must let me break it off in my own way. You will go back to town with Mr. Hammond to-morrow?" and she looked up at him inquiringly.

"I suppose so," he said gloomily, "if you wish it."

"Yes, that will be best," she answered; "and as for me, I shall remain here for the present. There are all my grandfather's papers and manuscripts to put away; I do not wish anyone to touch them but myself. They will take me a few weeks, and, most likely, when that is done, I shall go away for a change; but I will write to you, Neville, and let you know what I decide."

How strange it seemed to him to hear her talking thus: mapping out the future, in which he was to have no concern, when, but a few hours ago, she had not a thought in life that was not bound up with him.

He stood before her, gazing down at her, and thinking that, small and fragile as she was, she had far more strength than he. He had ruined both their lives—now that it was too late, he understood.

"Rose," he cried passionately, "can you ever forgive what I have done?"

"There can never be a question of forgiveness between us," she said simply, and this was all she would answer him, either then, or the next morning, when, before they parted, he again entreated her to think kindly of him.

Mr. Hammond's quick eyes saw that something was amiss. It was a strange time for a lover's quarrel, he thought to himself, but then lovers were strange people, and he supposed it would all come right in the end.

Neville was a very silent companion as they journeyed back to town. In his innermost heart Neville had resolved to win Rose yet, if that were possible; but the future, which had been so bright, was now filled with difficulties, and they were of his own making. He was roused from his reverie by Mr. Hammond's voice:—

"Did I tell you, Neville," he inquired, "that the other day a lady was asking all kinds of questions about you?"

"Indeed," Neville returned absently; "who might she be?"

"A Mrs. Bennet. I can't say I know much of her myself," the



lawyer answered, "but she seemed to take a most extraordinary interest in your affairs!"

Neville winced, for Mrs. Bennet was no other than Beatrice Holt's aunt.

"Yes," Mr. Hammond went on musingly. "She wanted to know all about you. She seemed to have been rather misinformed, for she declared she had heard you were immensely rich, and was almost indignant when I assured her this was not the case. However, I told her she need not trouble herself on your account, as you were to marry your cousin, who was an heiress!"

#### CHAPTER IV.

For the next fortnight Neville devoted himself to his work, and tried hard to wait patiently for Rose's promised letter, as he felt he could not take any fresh step until he had heard from her.

At length the long-looked-for epistle arrived. He scarcely knew



"ROSE, CAN YOU EVER FORGIVE WHAT I HAVE DONE?"

what he had expected her to say; but certainly he was wholly unprepared for the decision the letter contained. She wrote to him very frankly, confessing that she had been unable to make up her mind before, but that now everything was arranged, she hoped and trusted for the best. She had been wrong, she said, when she had spoken of him as being the only one she had left in the world, for she believed that many of her father's people were living, and although they were unknown to her, they were, nevertheless, her people, and she had resolved to seek them out. Very likely she might take up her abode with them, and if so, Neville must understand that she had taken this course of her own free will, because she believed it to be for the best.

It would be useless for Neville to try and dissuade her, she went on, as by the time he received her letter she would have already left home. Then Rose told him she had taken a letter from her grandfather's desk which threw a new light over everything. No one could ever understand, she said, how truly thankful she should be if Neville agreed to abide by the terms of this letter. She knew he would object to it at first, but if he would try to look at it from her point of view—realising that it was the only thing that could ever make her happy—she felt he must consent at last. She had told Mr. Hammond that nothing would prevent her from adhering strictly to the terms set forth in the paper she had sent him, which paper he would show to Neville.

Neville was completely bewildered; he could make nothing of all this. He only understood that Rose had left her home and seemed resolved that they should remain apart. He lost no time in making his way to Mr. Hammond's office.

The lawyer looked up quickly from his papers as Neville entered the room.

"Well, Neville Seymour," he said, with almost comic indignation, "I expected you young people would give me some trouble, but I was not prepared for anything like this. May I ask you what is the meaning of it all?"

"I came here to get some explanation from you," Neville answered; "Rose says she has written to you."

"So she has, and she tells me that your engagement is at an end; is that the case?"

"I fear that she means it to be so," Neville replied sadly.

"You fear it? Then it is, I presume, Miss Linscott's fault, and not yours?"

"It is not my wish, certainly."

"But a little your fault? Ah! I expected as much. Still, don't you think that a misunderstanding like this might be got over in time?"

Neville admitted that he had hoped as much, but that Rose's letter of that morning seemed to be final.

"Did she tell you anything of a letter of her grandfather's?" the lawyer inquired, while his shrewd eyes were fixed upon the young man's face.

"She said that she had forwarded it to you," Neville answered; "and it is that which I have come to see."

"Well, you must judge it for yourself," Mr. Hammond exclaimed, as he placed an open letter in Neville's hand.

It was not written with Mr. Donnythorne's usual clearness and precision; the writing, in some places, showed a trembling, unsteady hand; but Neville did not notice this, all he thought of was the purport of the letter, and this was seen at a glance. A few brief sentences explained that the one condition which the old man exacted from his grand-daughter was that never, for any consideration, should she hold any intercourse with her father's people. If she disobeyed him in this matter, he revoked his will and desired that everything should pass to his nephew, Neville Seymour.

If he had learned this by hearsay Neville would never have believed his uncle capable of such a piece of folly; but there was the firm, bold signature he knew so well, and he could not doubt his eyes. He tossed the letter upon the table.

"The old man must have been in his dotage when he wrote that!" he cried. "But what an unfortunate time for Rose to have come across it!"

An odd smile passed over Mr. Hammond's face.

"Then you do not fancy that we shall do much good with it?" he said. "I did not think myself that it was very valid."

"You did not think!" Neville said impatiently. "You know as well as I do that it is so much waste paper. And you know, too, that if it had been twenty times witnessed, and proved beyond a doubt, it would have made no earthly difference to me!"

Mr. Hammond looked up sharply and seemed satisfied.

"I believe you, Neville," he said cordially, "and I am glad of the belief." Then he added, with a change of tone:—

"But, come! Do you mean to tell me that you, with all your experience of your uncle's plain commonsense, can, even for a moment, imagine that he could be the writer of a thing like this?"

"I do not see what my imagination has to do with it," Neville answered. "It is a self-evident fact!"

Mr. Hammond laughed. "Why, Neville, my good fellow," he cried, "you are not the cute lawyer I have always thought you if you cannot see through such an obvious fraud as this!"

"Fraud?" Neville repeated in bewilderment, "what do you mean?"

"What I say. That this letter is an imposition! Your uncle is as innocent of it as I am!"

"But who has written it?" Neville began; then he hesitated, and, as a sudden idea of the truth occurred to him, his face grew pale with excitement.

Mr. Hammond saw his embarrassment, and went on talking in his calm, businesslike way. "We must try to look at the affair as dispassionately as we can," he said. "After all there is not much harm done as it is. If it had been the other way, now, a cleverly drawn-up document like this might have got a certain young lady into trouble. But as it is, I do not think the law makes any provision against getting rid of one's money under false pretences!"

Neville took up the letter and examined it carefully. "I cannot realise it yet," he said. "What can make you fancy that Rose has written it? To me it seems impossible!"

However, it was not long before he also was convinced. The only part of the writing that had struck him from the first as being unquestionably Mr. Donnythorne's was the signature, and this, as the lawyer pointed out, was the easiest bit of the work, being an exact copy.

"I do not in the least excuse Miss Linscott," Mr. Hammond went on presently. "I consider that she has acted very foolishly and is much to blame. Still, as far as I can see, the only thing to be done is to find the poor child and show her her mistake, for after all this is more the act of a child than anything else; although," he added, "it is skilfully carried out."

Neville agreed to this, and endeavoured to take a hopeful view. Mr. Hammond advised him to go at once to "The Chestnuts" to ascertain, if possible, where Rose had gone, and he set off without



delay, but he could learn nothing. The servants had no idea where Miss Linscott had gone when she left home.

The man-servant who had accompanied Rose to the railway station could give no further information, as his mistress had only taken a ticket to the junction.

Neville returned to London in a state of distraction, entreating Mr. Hammond to tell him what he could do.

"I am truly sorry for you," the lawyer said sympathisingly. "Still, you must remember that you have in some way brought this on yourself."

Neville felt that this was the case, but the knowledge that he had himself to blame did not make things easier.

Mr. Hammond agreed to accompany Neville into Cornwall. He had a dim notion of the locality where the family into which Rose Donnythorne had married used to reside, and, after much trouble, they succeeded in discovering several persons of the name of Linscott, but none of them had seen or heard anything of Rose. At last, however, they came upon a woman of a different name, who was a widow, and who proved to be a sister of Rose's father. She had been the only one of his people who had kept up any intercourse with her brother and his family, and, after his death, she had heard nothing of his wife and child, so she informed the lawyer, until a week or ten days back, when her niece had unexpectedly come to visit her. No, she was not with her now, she said, in answer to Neville's eager question; she had only remained a few hours; nor could she give them any idea as to where Rose had gone after she had left her. The girl had not been communicative, she said, so she had not pressed her as to her address, thinking that her mother's people, with whom she found that she was living, would not wish her to have any close intercourse with her father's family.

Mr. Hammond cross-examined her in the closest way, but could learn nothing more; and he and Neville quitted Cornwall no wiser than they had been on their arrival. The lawyer was somewhat irritated at being baffled by a child like Rose. He was not so anxious about her personally, as, in her letter, she had assured him that, if she were in any difficulty, she would apply to him at once, remembering that he was her grandfather's oldest and truest friend. Therefore, feeling sure the girl would want money before long, the lawyer made up his mind to wait.

Neville could not take things so philosophically, and as the weeks and months went by he grew hopeless. His heart ached as he thought of the frail, timid little creature away among strangers, perhaps putting up with unknown hardships, and for his sake! He would have given much could he have found her and brought her back to the home she had left, and tried, by his unwearying love and devotion, to atone for the past, but he seemed powerless to do anything.

Fate, which had thrown Beatrice Holt so persistently in his way a short time previously, now kept them apart, and when next Neville encountered her she was married. She was just as beautiful and as fascinating as she had ever been; but, somehow, her beauty had lost its charms for him, and he found himself wondering how it could ever have enthralled him as it had done.

It was a weight off his mind when he fully realised that this infatuation was a thing of the past, and that he could conscientiously believe he had only to discover Rose to be happy.

A whole year went by, and still there were no tidings of her, and even Mr. Hammond began to look grave and doubtful.

One bright wintry afternoon Neville was strolling up Regent Street when, outside a well-known perfumer's shop, he came across Mrs. Hammond, the lawyer's brisk little wife. Neville was a great favourite of hers, and now she hailed him gladly, declaring that she was just going to choose some Christmas presents, and he must come and assist her in the selection.

Neville was amused by the invitation, and followed her into the shop. Many pretty and costly trifles were spread out for the lady's inspection, but, although she admired everything, she was not easy to satisfy. Neville, after the first few bantering words, stood by her chair in silence, busy with his own thoughts. He was roused from

his abstraction, however, by Mrs. Hammond's holding a dainty satin screen towards him.

"See, Neville, how beautifully this is painted," she said; "and that sweet, old-fashioned flower one so seldom sees now, a Christmas rose!"

Neville was interested in a moment. He took the screen from her hand to examine more closely the little white flowers that had such a tender association for him; but as he gazed intently at the painting, a strange excitement came into his face.

"Where did you get this?" he asked excitedly.

"From our house in Paris, sir," answered the shopwoman whom he addressed.

"Can you tell me anything of the artist you employ?" he went on eagerly. But she could tell him nothing, except that it came from the Paris house.

"I will take this," Neville said, indicating the screen.

Mrs. Hammond was about to make some laughing remark, but something in his face stopped her.

Neville gave her no explanation until they were in the street then he said quietly:—

"I am certain that Rose Linscott painted this, and I shall start for Paris to-night!"

"My poor boy," Mrs. Hammond said, sadly, "do not be too sure. It may only cause you fresh disappointment."

But Neville was not to be dissuaded, and the following day found him at the great Paris perfumer's, trying to discover what

he wanted. Those whom he questioned were not very ready to satisfy him; he might be, for aught they knew, an artist for some rival firm, who wished to secure their artist. At last, however, he succeeded in dispelling their doubts, and then he was informed that most of their hand-painting, indeed that which fetched the highest price, was done in the convents. The painting in question had come, with a number of others, from a convent in a seaport town at a great distance.

Thither Neville started with out loss of time; this was doubtless the convent where Rose had been brought up and where they had taught her the art that he had so much admired. It was strange, he reflected, that the idea of her returning there for shelter had never occurred to him before.

It seemed ages to Neville, in his impatience, but in reality it was not many hours before he was waiting in a long, silent room, with its dark-polished floor and its bare, wooden chairs and table, expecting each moment that Rose would appear.

At length she came, little knowing whom she was to find awaiting her. The small pale face that looked thinner and whiter than when he had seen it last grew bright with a sudden gladness as she saw him, which for the first moment left room for nothing else; then, the next instant, she tried to draw her hands from his.

"Oh, Neville, why did you come?" she cried, with gentle reproach; "it only makes it harder."

But he held her fast, as if afraid she might elude him again.

"Rose, my darling, I can hardly believe that I have found you at last," he whispered.

He could not explain things to her all at once, but gradually, little by little, he showed her the mistakes that each had made, and all the sorrow these mistakes had caused. As Rose listened to his earnest words her doubts began to fade, and a sweet, blissful happiness crept into her heart.

"I do not deserve your forgiveness, or that you should give back your promise," Neville said, "and yet I know you will, because, my darling, you once told me that you would do anything for my happiness, and you must realise now that there is no happiness for me without you."

Rose did realise it, and the knowledge was very sweet.

Presently she lifted her loving eyes to his.

"Neville," she said, softly, "my little white flowers brought good luck after all. I shall never forget that we owe a debt of gratitude to the Christmas roses."

THE END.



"WHERE DID YOU GET THIS?" HE ASKED EXCITEDLY.