

giving him a slight push. "You will be late."

He hesitated, looked at her, bit his lip and went out.

Marcia went back to her beloved harp and began to sing to its weird melody the song of Chaminade's:

Now bear away my folly—as wills the wind,
Thou flower culled so gayly, with heavy heart resigned,
Now bear away my folly—as wills the wind.

As fades a broken blossom, so love doth die,
The hand that sought thy bosom—in my hand ne'er may lie.
As fades a broken blossom, so love doth die.

Jim had stopped outside in the hall to listen, and now went slowly back into the room to find her leaning her head on the harp.

"Marcia," he said, in a low voice, going up to her.

She started and looked up with a careless smile, so well done that he would not have thought anything unusual had he not seen tears in her eyes.

"Is there anything that troubles you, my dear?" he said, gently, "Can I serve you in any way?"

"No, indeed, Jim, thank you. Why should you think so? Because I sang that wretchedly mawkish song?"

"It is not that," he said, shrugging his shoulders. "Well, then, good night again, my dear girl. I fancy you are tired." He went straight toward the door.

"Jim!"

"Yes?"

"I—er—have something I want to say to you, but how best to do it I don't know. Spare me a few moments more."

He came back and seated himself.

"Will you promise to hear me to the very end?"

"I will not rave, if you mean that, Marcia, but I shall not promise not to be displeased," he said, growing pale and stern, while in his heart he feared what she might have to tell him.

"I had hoped to have the whole evening to lead up to this, but since you are so determined to leave me I must plunge into the midst of things.

"Perhaps you had better not attempt it tonight if you are tired, unless it is something imperative," he said, trying to keep his face as expressionless as possible.

"Well, then"—she drew a long breath—"when we parted in this room as we did when I went away, I felt rather bitterly toward you, Jim. I thought you might at least have wished me a comfortable journey or said some pleasant thing. Perhaps the thought, considering how seriously annoyed you were with me at that time, was unjustifiable." She looked at him, smiling.

"Annoyed," he said, "is rather a delicate word for the state of mind that was mine at that time. I have conquered my annoyance, as you may have seen, and have met you on your return with pleasure, and consider these friendly relations the more desirable, as long as it be possible."

"You make it very difficult for me, Jim," she said, turning her eyes away from him. "To come, however, directly to what I have to say. I suppose being from Chicago without my husband, and with no disconcerting children about me, I was pretty desirable this summer. Anyway, I had all I cared to attend to on my hands. There was nothing complex, however, until this certain man appeared. He was some one whom you know of, and had the best of introductions to me. You know how particular"

"Granted," said Jim, quickly. "Go on."

She lowered her eyes for a moment to hide the light in them, then continued:

"He—well, Jim—he fell in love with me."

"Like the others," observed Jim, grimly.

"Yes and no," she answered, "for I liked him very much. It was only just before I came away that he said anything. You see I am perfectly open with you, Jim; you can act as you choose upon it. He told me that he

loved me; he did not embellish it or make any protestation, or insinuate that he would say more if I gave him the encouragement. As nearly as I can remember, these were his words: 'Right or wrong, Mrs. Carleton, I am going to tell you that I love you. I do not know what relation you bear toward your husband. You have told me enough to assure me that you are living under the same roof, although I have gathered from certain things that you are not devoted to each other. If you contemplate a divorce—pardon my rudeness, but that is the rumor here; I've heard it from several sources—I wish to know. I mean no insult, nor do I wish to presume in the slightest upon your kindness to me, but if you are to be free I ask you in mercy to tell me.' He was holding himself back so tremendously, Jim, that I could see anger on my part would be a mistake."

Jim looked as if he were holding himself back as he said, "This is a somewhat difficult recital for a husband to hear from his wife's lips, Marcia. However, will you tell me what you replied?"

She hesitated, and then said in a low tone: "My mind went back to the night last spring, when we talked over our future and the advisability of a separation, and your words to me then—'Make a long summer of it, Marcia, and I will not see you or write to you during the time, and in the fall we will decide the rest.'"

She rose and began to walk up and down, but stopped before him as she said: "I told him that I was sorry people had been busy with my affairs, but that I was glad to be able to tell him the reports were untrue. I asked him not to inform me of them again. I felt that I had not quite the right to dismiss him at once, or be very angry with him, as I was conscious of the fact that I had encouraged him to a certain extent, and was, therefore, responsible for what I had brought on myself. You are perfectly aware that I have had affairs before this, but none which in the least affected me. I have accepted the men and their devotion—knowing well what was meant by them—at their true worth. But this man was the first I have ever cared in the least for. So Jim, I tried to imagine myself a free woman again, and how, under those circumstances, I should regard him. I was so silent that he turned to me and said: 'Mrs. Carleton, are you hopelessly offended, or may I interpret your silence in another way?' And oh, Jim, for a moment I was tempted; I turned to him and held out my hand."

Jim drew a sharp breath and rose to his feet. "There are limits, Marcia, to my endurance. There may be a time when I shall require every detail, but until then I think I have heard sufficient."

A glad light came into her eyes, and she went up to him and took his hand. "Let me finish, Jim, now. As I sat there it suddenly came over me what it would mean to lose you entirely out of my life; to live in the same country, the same town, perhaps, as yourself, and yet be less than nothing to you; so I forgot all the disagreeable things that have happened between us, and remembered only the time when you cared for me; so I said to him, 'I realize, on account of my being here without my husband, or any one, that I may have given rise to this gossip in regard to my private affairs. I also realize that I have not been fair to you—and I hadn't, Jim!—'but I love my husband in spite of evil report,' and Jim," she said, throwing her arms around his neck, "I'm sick of it all. I've had my fling. I've had my liberty, and I've given you yours. Are you satisfied now? Are you willing to begin again?"

"He held her away from him, and said gravely: 'To say that this is a surprise to me is not expressing it. I am transfixed, for I thought you had run through what little sentiment you felt for me long ago. But,' he said, smiling, 'I am

glad of any experience that brings back this highly inartistic commonplace state of mind that permits interest in a husband to rise once more."

He looked at her for a moment, then took her into his arms in a long, close embrace.

"Ah, Jim," she panted, "incompatibility isn't so bad. There were two old and thoroughly incompatible people from Boston there this summer, who have stuck it out thirty years together. We have tried it five, and if they can, can't we, Jim?"

"Incompatibility be —," he began, but substituted a long kiss for the strong word. —The Story Teller.

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