

THE GOLDEN KEY.

"Will you take a little journey with me, Cinderella?" the Prince asked persuasively.

"Where?" said Cinderella, pensively, poking the smoking coals with the toe of her shabby shoe.

"Into fairyland, dearie."

"It does not exist except in the imagination, and I am tired of make-believe—I want something real."

"Are you in earnest, Cinderella, truly in earnest, at last?"

"No sensible person is in earnest about anything." She dug her foot spitefully into the fire.

"I can make the journey real, Cinderella, and it will be better than fairyland."

"I thought we settled that long ago," the girl said, impatiently; "it's a tiresome subject."

"Aren't you a little cross tonight, Cinderella? What have I done, dear?" the Prince asked, penitently.

"Done?" she cried, passionately. "Everything that is fine and loving and good; but I am not satisfied; do you understand? Tonight I would go to the ends of the earth with you. I am tired of being respectable. Tomorrow I should loathe you for taking me. Now do you understand?"

"Don't say things like that to me, Cinderella. It is like putting a cup to the lips of a thirsty man and then snatching it away."

"Would you have him drink poison?"

"A man can die only once."

She went over to the window and gazed out on the grim walls opposite without apparently being aware of their existence. A wild, reckless mood was on her, born of the discouragements of the day. She was tired of the struggle and strife of life, tired of adjusting herself to her environment, tired of being conventional. What she told him was true. Here within her reach was freedom, luxury, congeniality, love—Prince Charming standing with open arms. She had but to put out her hand, and the grim scene would change as if by enchantment. All the rebellion in her clamored for a richer, fuller life; a sob rose in her throat and her eyes filled with tears. "Dear God," she cried, "save me from the temptation!"

The Prince came over and put his hand on her shoulder, turning her about so that he saw the tears. "Little one," he said, "we are not children to misunderstand each other."

He took out his handkerchief and wiped her eyes gently, as if she were indeed a child. "I am not going to take you away, dear; do you know why?" he asked, endeavoring to speak lightly. "Because of the tomorrow when you would loathe me. That would be worse than death."

He drew her back to the fire and put her into a chair, pulling up a stool on which he sat at her feet. Then he took her hands in his, and the clasp of his fingers seemed to quiet the girl and give courage.

She bent her head and kissed his hair before she spoke. "You always understand my moods, dear. See, I am reasonable and repentant now. Ah, you help me so."

"Do I, sweet? But not as you help me. Sometimes," he said, earnestly, "I think I cannot endure this life apart from you another day, and then I remember all the wise and beautiful little things you say to me, and I take a fresh grip and go on."

"It is curious," the girl said, slowly, "how desperately one has to strive to do right. We fight, fight, and for what? To die with a broken spirit at the end."

"You don't mean that, Cinderella."

"No, I don't," she said remorsefully. "There is always the chance of slaying the enemy."

"That sounds like my brave little girl. Do you know her, Cinderella?" The Prince looked up into her eyes.

"I have heard you talk about her." "She is everything one loves; sweet and tender and strong in the face of temptation. No saint, mind you, but no sinner either. Do you like her, Cinderella?"

"I detest her," she said savagely; "I know her weaknesses."

"Out of her weaknesses comes great strength—for herself and the man who loves her. Won't you like her a little, Cinderella?" he pleaded, tightening his hold of her hands.

"Y-e-s," she answered, reluctantly; "to please you I would do anything."

"Then smile at me, dear, and we'll be happy ever after."

"More fairy tales!" she exclaimed with a laugh, as she pulled her hands away.

"Cinderella, I've got an idea! Isn't it wonderful!" he said, gaily.

"I should think so! What will you do with it?"

"Give it to you for safekeeping."

"Suppose you never get it back?"

"Oh, I'll get another," he said, confidently.

"Impossible!" derisively.

"You should treat your elders with more respect, Cinderella."

"Have you lost your idea?" she asked flippantly.

"You saucy jade! I'm going to run away with you just for tonight. There, it's out. Will you listen, Cinderella?"

"If you promise not to be serious."

"How can I, over so frivolous a matter? We'll have our little journey, after all. First, you're coming to dine with me, then we'll go for a drive in the Park, then—"

"Then the clock will strike twelve. But I never dine out, Prince Charming."

"Are you afraid of the world, Cinderella?"

"No."

"Or of me?"

She shook her head.

"I would not make you the subject of talk. You trust me, Cinderella?"

"Absolutely." Her voice had a triumphant ring.

The man laid his face on her hands. The moment was laden with a delicious silence. Presently she raised his head and laughed in a tremulous fashion suggestive of tears that had not risen to the surface.

"We're a bundle of inconsistencies taking our flight into fairyland in such a ponderous fashion. They won't let us in!"

"Oh, yes, they will—I have the golden key. We will go to a little Bohemian place I know, where Madame, in an immaculate white apron, smiles benignly upon her guests. Shall we start at once?" he said, rising.

"But I have not a festive gown."

"As if you were not adorable as you are!"

"Pooh!" making a little moue at him; "I am not even presentable except to a prejudiced person like you."

"Then we'll call in the fairy godmother."

"She is here. Wait, and you will see."

She vanished from the room, and presently returned, laughing merrily.

"How do you like me?" sweeping him a curtsy.

He surveyed her from the crown of her dainty hat to the toe of her pointed shoe, marvelling at the transformation.

"Dame Fashion has stolen you away from me." He gazed at her reproachfully.

"Are we going to dine, Prince Charming?" she said.

He was almost jealous of the covert glances of admiration bestowed upon her by the persons dining about them, and stared haughtily at one who, with frank good nature, dared look more often than the rest. Cinderella, all un-

conscious, glowed with happiness, and her eyes shone with lustrous light.

"You look like an elf," he said, filling her glass with champagne.

"And I feel like a precious royal."

"Will your Gracious Highness deign to look at a slave?"

"I do not see him," she answered, looking into his eyes.

He leaned forward, holding her gaze by the intensity of his. "I would give my freedom to kiss you!" he said.

She threw back her head and smiled bewitchingly. "Reckless Prince, what is your kingdom?"

"Two principalities. One of the world, where success crowns a man king—a barren soil, yielding only of necessity. Envy, hatred and malice grow there, born of ambition's strife. The bitter irony of Fate hovers round the throne. The other"—his voice grew soft and low.

"Yes?" she whispered.

"The other is a land of golden dreams, where sweet-smelling flowers blossom, holding in their hearts the imperious bee. The wind whispers love to the leaves that tremble and flutter in response to his ardent wooing. A princess reigns over the kingdom—sweetest of all the flowers!"

BENISON.

Forth rides a knight on a milk-white steed,
Dight for battle, and shod for speed;
The Knight rides under a saint-blest shield,
The red-cross blazed on its azure-field:
And his sword is keen.

A king on the earth who marks him ride,
World-honors proffers to sway his pride;
A maiden beckons him to her bower;
Stronger is love than kingly power:
If the sword be keen.

The knight yields nought to the monarch's guile,
No lure for his soul has the maiden's smile;
He dies on the plain where for Christ he warr'd:

His spirit, in passing, great angels guard,
And their swords are keen.

—IDYLA.

The second floor of the Harris block, 1134 N street, has been fitted up for a dancing hall. The floor has received the attention of experts. It is of hard wood, and the boards are laid parallel with the length of the hall. Parties desiring to rent it can do so at the Courier office, in the same block.

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