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ONLY A ROSE-BUD.

Margaret Radnor stood before the mirror drawing a scarlet ribbon round her collar and fastening it with a bow in front. You would have thought she was wasting precious time over a very small thing, but she was really paying not the slightest attention to the manner in which her hands were employed, but was intent upon a conversation going on near her between her mother and a visitor.

'What has become of your aunt, Mrs. Radnor; that handsome old lady who used to live here in so much style? I have not seen her now in two or three years.'

'My aunt? Oh, you mean Aunt Elenor,' replied Margaret's mother. 'She lost nearly all her property about a year ago, and having nothing left but a place called Linwood, about ten miles out, she went there with her brother to live. The estate is a very fine one, and the house furnished luxuriously; but now those two old people live there with no society whatever. I sometimes wonder how Aunt Elenor manages to live so, for she is very fond of society; but I imagine, with a laugh, 'she is not able to do anything else.'

'Do you never go there?'

'No, not now; I did at first, but it was very lonely; and after Margaret came home from school, I had the excuse that we saw a great deal of additional company, and so I could not leave home.'

'I remember her as a very lovely old lady.'

'Oh! she is, very; so stylish, and all that sort of thing. She sends us most tempting fruit sometimes, which is quite good, as we never go there.'

The conversation branched off upon other subjects after this, and Margaret, excusing herself, left the room. 'She was going out to a party this evening,' she said, 'and there were various preparations to be made.'

All the rest of the day, turning over muslin, and lace, and silk, she thought of the conversation she had heard, and as the hours flew by she laid her plans.

When she came down, by-and-by, in the evening, in her full dress, with her white cloak over her arm, she said to her mother:

'I am going to-morrow, to see my Aunt Elenor.'

'Margaret, you are wild,' said her mother, in despair. 'Why need you go just now, when you have engagements every evening this week and next? Wait a few weeks.'

'Now or never, mamma,' replied Margaret, shaking her head.

'What will Mr. Thornton say, Maggie?' asked her mother, urging her last and strongest plea.

'There he is now,' replied Margaret, evading the question, and rising with a brighter bloom upon her cheek to welcome her escort, who came forward as if the sight of her was a most welcome one.

The mother, meantime, thinking the evening's pleasure, with the prospect of others in the same company, might dispel Margaret's visions of Linwood, said nothing further; but, in a very motherly way, wrapped Margaret's cloak about her, and bade Mr. Thornton 'take good care of her.'

'His 'I will try,' in answer, said enough even for the mother's pleasure.

'I hope I shall see you at our house on Thursday,' said Mr. Thornton, as they drove home after the party.

'You received cards, I believe?'

'Yes,' replied Margaret, hesitating, 'but I must decline. Tell your mother I very much regret it, for I am going out of town on a visit to my aunt.'

'Not to remain long, I hope,' he said.

The light of her Aunt Elenor's lamp gleaming brightly down through the ice-laden trees of the lawn, and over the snowy ground. It gave her a cheery welcome. There had been but few tracks upon the snow from the gate to the house, but Margaret stepped carefully and succeeded in reaching the steps without getting wet.

Her ring brought a woman-servant to the door, who, in answer to her inquiry, led her to the room from which she had seen the light, and ushered her in. Her aunt, a dignified, noble-looking old lady of sixty, with soft, gray curls drooping about her face, sat under the lamp reading, while her brother smoked in an easy chair and listened.

Margaret advanced as her aunt rose.

'Auntie,' she said, 'I've come to see you. Are you glad to have me?'

'I think,' said her aunt, in reply, seizing her and kissing her between the words, 'I never was so glad to see anybody in all my life!'

'Maggie, you have come like flowers in springtime,' said her uncle, taking her as her aunt released her.

Margaret felt the welcome from the bottom of her heart, as she took her seat between the two, and looking from one admiring face to the other, she felt as though she had come to a haven of rest. She said something to the same effect the next morning, when Aunt Elenor had drawn her from the library into the conservatory, and was putting leaves and roses into her hands.

Something about the perfume of the heliotrope reminded her of her last evening at home.

'Auntie,' she said, 'you cannot think what a delightful quiet this is after the turmoil of the past three months. I have been going constantly, and had engagements steadily, but I thought I would come here—'

The sentence ended abruptly, for this noble-minded, unselfish girl had no mind to tell her aunt that the vision her mother had drawn of her lonesome life, had led her to standing just where she did at that moment.

'I hope you will not find it too quiet, love. You may rest assured it is very delightful to have you here.'

I cannot tell you what she was to that old couple in the weeks that followed. She sang for them, and read to them in the evening. She played chess with her uncle, and knit warm riding-gloves for her aunt. She arranged dainty dishes of flowers for the table, and made nice little bits of French Sweetness in the kitchen.

Maggie was everywhere, and made joy out of everything. It was she who found chestnuts down in the village, and having brought them home, sat down before a great, roaring fire to roast them for her aunt, laughing and springing up as they snapped out from under the ashes.

Somehow the evening paper always made its appearance now when the stage came in, and it was Maggie who discovered something new and curious to read aloud.

Fastidious and dainty as Madam De Vere was, Margaret's dress always suited her. She bled colors in a way that rested the lady's eyes when they looked at her. Dress was not thrown aside because she saw no one but the two to whom she was a daily delight. There was no difference between her appearance now and at home, and she most often wore a warm, glowing dress, with glistening trimmings, in which she had been wont to receive Mr. Thornton the evenings when he called. Margaret was very happy.

She busied herself for Aunt Elenor all day long. Sometimes she thought she would have liked to spend a day in the library, but there never was time.

One evening, just before tea, she was standing between the heavily curtained windows, looking out at the trees rocking and swaying in the wind, and listening to the sound of the heavy breeze sweeping round the corners of the house. The stage had just gone by, and she was waiting for Aunt Elenor to come in with the evening paper. She was pressing between her fingers the odoriferous leaves she had just gathered, and thinking of other flowers which had been given her one night early in the winter, when her Aunt's voice roused her.

'My love,' she said, 'I am even more glad for you than I am for myself.'

'For what, auntie?'

'Because, Maggie, the only other person beside yourself who sometimes comes here to make us bright is the son of an old friend of mine, and he writes to enquire that he is about to pop in upon one of his unexpected visits. You will like him,

I know, for he is one in a thousand, and for goodness and kindness of heart I know not a man who is his equal.'

'Who is he, auntie?' asked Margaret, who was on her knees before the fire, trying to persuade it to burn brighter.

'His name is Percy Thornton. He is—'

Margaret was on her feet in an instant. 'Auntie,' she said, hurriedly, 'I know him!'

'Do you, my dear? Then you know what to expect. How very pleasant that is. Was not my description correct?'

'Yes, ma'am,' replied Margaret, very quietly; but the hot blood mounted into her face, under the smiling intencities of her aunt, and when she was fain to run away, Madam De Vere kissed her, and let her go.

Mr. Thornton did not know what day he should arrive, and so the two who were watching looked every night when the stage came up. Margaret from the window of her room, where she would be out of sight, and Madam De Vere from the library.

But it so happened that on the evening when he did come, Margaret had gone down into the village with her uncle, and Madame De Vere was the only one to welcome him.

'I have my niece stopping with me,' said that lady, after she and her guest had been some time chatting by the library fire; 'and she has been like sunshine in the house for the last three weeks. I am only wondering what I shall do without her, when she comes to go.'