

great house, but their fortune was sadly shrunk. Unlucky speculations had eaten into Benson's fortune. The mother was away traveling; since her daughter's departure she had spent little time at home.

But Kitty's return was the occasion for a great reception. All the old friends were there, for Benson was at bottom a friendly man. Lester was now a rising man, and looked of as candidate for the bench. But in his heart he felt that Kitty would never be his.

Her smile and glance were no less friendly, but there was no longer the cordial spontaneity of old. She seemed to have become frozen by the artificialities of the world in which she had moved. And when she sang, though her voice was praised and her father pompously told of the acclamations which she had received in Europe, there was nothing that touched Lester's heart as those simple strains had done upon the night of her departure.

He dared not tell Kitty of his love now. She could not know that he had always been true to her. Her light words, "Well, Lester, I suppose you have another sweetheart," showed him how little she remembered her words on the evening when she went away. And her talk at dinner was all of foreign capitals and people whom she had met, the light and soulless persiflage of those who have become cosmopolitans. They gain much but they lose much more.

The party broke up at last; all the guests had gone, and Lester found no excuse for remaining. He knew that unless a miracle occurred he would not see Kitty again. As a matter of fact, he had received an offer from a corporation to represent them in a near-by town. He had told Kitty, and she had congratulated him.

At last he rose and took his hat. Kitty's hand was cold in his. Mechanically she said good-bye. Old Mr. Benson, yawning, shook hands with him and went upstairs. The

door was closed behind Lester. He went off sadly down the avenue.

No, he could not leave her like that. Every inch of that ground had become sacred to him in the days of their courtship. Under this tree, glimmering in the moonlight, he had first kissed her. They had sat upon that gate together, when they were boy and girl. A rush of memories swept over him. He turned and hurried back. It was now or never. He must speak with her; it was his right; he would.

As he approached the door he saw a figure standing in the moonlight. "Kitty!" he cried.

She was weeping. Her voice was shaken with sobs. He caught her in his arms and kissed her. It was the first time in three years. But she drew herself out of his embrace.

"Kitty, I love you," cried Lester. "I want you. O, Kitty, be my wife. Remember the old days!"

"Lester," she said slowly, with broken accents. "I am not worthy to be your wife. I am a fraud and a sham, and if you thought me cold it is because I have had to steel my heart against my better nature.

"Do you know that I am a failure? Yes, I who thought myself so fine, so grand a singer, destined to become famous in Europe, am nothing but a lie. I never had a voice. I thought I had. My father's money procured me the best teachers. They listened to me and sent me away. 'She has a good ear,' they said, but she will never amount to anything."

"My mother, who was with me, thought this jealousy because I was a foreigner. At last we found second-rate men who pretended to believe in me—for money. I studied at a college. Through the lavish expenditure of my father I obtained a trial in grand opera. You know what the cultivated Italian public is. I was laughed off the stage, Lester.

"And the worst of it was I had to pretend. I shall always have to pretend that I was a success. People