

FAIR OPHELIA.

CHAPTER I.

"Come, Basil; are you ready?" Hazel Glandore spoke impatiently, regarding her brother's slow movements with growing disfavor. Basil said nothing, and tying the big bouquet he had been gathering with a dainty satin bow, followed his sister down the avenue. "Where are Rita and Lilly?" he asked, as they entered the broad shady road. "I thought they were coming?" "Rita went on before, having promised to call for Lilly on her way. I do hope we sha'n't be late!" "No fear of that. How impatient you are, Hazel!" Basil exclaimed merrily. The girl smiled, then glanced down at the pale blue muslin robe she had put on so carefully an hour ago. "As we promised Peggy faithfully we would be there, I do not see why you should make me break my word. Won't she be pleased, though, when she sees you?" "She ought to be; anyhow I wouldn't have missed the wedding for all the world. I never shall forget how bravely the dear girl nursed me through that terrible fever when no one else dared come near me. I owe her a debt of gratitude."

his pretty bride, and Basil's eyes had spoken just as eloquently as his voice. "Thank you, Master Basil; it is like you not to forget those who did you a good turn in the old days. Peggy is proud of having saved your life, and I am prouder still of her having done so." "Bravely spoken! Come Simon, give me your hand; once more I wish you happiness." Simon grasped Basil's hand in his own hard palm, and watched jealously as the squire's young son pressed an affectionate kiss on Peggy's rosy cheek. The next instant the bridal train had continued on its road, and Basil turned to find another addition to their own small party. Standing beside Lilly, with his cold dark eyes fixed amusedly upon Basil, was a singular-looking man, whose face wore but one expression now—that of silent scorn. As young Glandore met his regard, however, he quickly averted his eyes, and bent them admiringly upon the tall fair haired girl beside him. "I wonder Simon is not jealous of Master Basil!" he whispered mockingly. "I should be were I in his place!" Lilly glanced swiftly up, and a faint tinge of color dyed her cheeks. "You forget. Peggy has known Basil nearly all her life, besides saving his life by her unselfish devotion. Simon would not be the true-hearted fellow he is if he saw harm in that kiss." There was a sneer on Ralph Rosslyn's face, and for one moment he savagely ground his teeth. Lilly's haughty voice had stung him bitterly, making him feel how little she really cared for him. "All I can say is, Glandore's a lucky man, and I only wish I had two such devoted admirers." "I do not know what you mean," Lilly answered, her eyes flashing with sudden anger. As Basil neared her side she placed her hand on his arm, and an expression of relief crossed her fair face; without so much as a parting glance she left Ralph standing there—alone. He bit his moustache fiercely, and mastering his rage with an effort, hastened after Hazel and Rita. "Where are you going now?" he asked quietly. Hazel smiled, and lifted her soft brown eyes to his moody face. "Did not Gipsy tell? We are to have a tennis fight this morning, and she is coming. I wonder you did not bring her with you." "I did not see her. But who else will be there?" The pretty color deepened in Hazel's cheeks, and even Rita averted her face that he might not see the conscious look so plainly visible. "Only the Belmont."

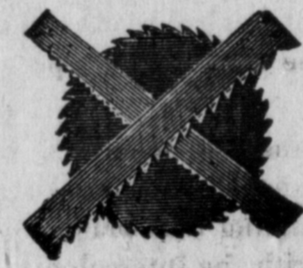
maining near her sister or Lilly when he was there. "Ask him to-day if you like—I don't care," Hazel whispered shyly; then, as he would have murmured some words of thanks in her tiny ear, she broke from his clasp, and crossed the lawn. "How is it, Mr. Rosslyn, you have not a partner yet?" she said, as she passed the spot where Ralph stood alone. "I have been waiting for you," he answered, speaking the untruth with calm serenity. "Thank you. But where is Gipsy?" "Talking to your father." Hazel hurried off, and soon found Ralph's young sister chatting gaily with the squire. "Come, Gipsy; Mr. Belmont is waiting for you; we want to begin our game," she said gently. There was a frown on Gilbert's brow he tried in vain to banish. Hazel's arrangement did not quite suit him; but he was forced to be content and lead Gipsy to the lawn. The game was soon ended; and the young people dispersed into several couples wandering happily about the garden. Later, meeting Squire Glandore in the hall, Rosslyn paused to speak to him. "You look delighted. I expect Basil's return was as pleasant as unexpected?" he said calmly. "Yes; but that is not the only good thing which has happened this morning. Gilbert Belmont has just been asking me for little Hazel; and only a moment before my boy told me of his engagement to Lilly Audley!" The squire was not looking at his companion, or he might have remarked the singularly pallid hue that overspread Ralph's face. His eyes grew black and glittering; his mouth was drawn into a cruel straight line. Before he answered those bright words, the brief spasm had passed, and his face had regained its old indifferent expression. "I congratulate you!" he said icily, as soon as he had regained his composure. "The match is a good one, and your son has chosen well." A few more sentences passed between them, then Ralph Rosslyn left Glen Innes shutting the gates behind him with a loud crash. Now no one was near to see him, he let the fury burning in his soul rise to the surface. His face looked like a demon's, full of hideous rage; his eyes expressed all the hate and bitter vengeance which he felt for Basil Glandore. "He shall not wed her. My sweet Lilly; the only flower I ever coveted in my life, to be culled by him! Come what will, in the fight that has now commenced, I shall win—he shall fail!" Ralph hissed these words from between his clenched teeth, and struck his hands with sudden force one against the other. The sense of his own power—an iron will united with almost callous recklessness—gave him a little relief after all. What was Basil's strength compared to his? Some impulse made him enter Audley Towers as he passed, and finding Lord Audley at home, he forced a smile to his lips, and a gentle softness to his tones he was far from feeling. Their interview lasted long; but when he left Lilly's father there was a deep triumphant look in his eyes, which showed that he was not wholly dissatisfied. The first cloud had commenced its steady course across the fair brightness of Basil's love-dream. If he had only known, how passionately he would have taken Lilly in his arms, and borne her far away, where no envious hate could step between them.

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