

THE PROMISED KISS.

'House full? Why, how much company have you, Louise?

Mrs. Louise Anslie, our pretty little hostess, who was on her knees before my trunk, engaged in admiring my embroideries while she chatted, turned immediately to my sister.

'My dear Julia, we are actually crammed,' said she. 'There hasn't been such a summer rush for The Maples since I can remember. First came the Athertons and Wilsons; then Hattie Lorthrup and her sister; then Harry Vernon, Charlie Wayne, Fred Lawton, and his pretty little cousin, and consequently her ardent admirer, Mr. Maynard. I thought we were certainly full, and James was just saying, last night, that we couldn't possibly accommodate another one, when a carriage drove up, and out sprang Roy Cheston. I—'

'Roy Cheston!' said I, my face flushing. 'Roy Cheston!' exclaimed my elder sister, Gertrude. 'Oh, I'm delighted!'

'He's the best catch in London, Louise,' said Julia. 'Well, of course, he has come to spend the summer, and James was just as glad to see him as it there wasn't a soul in the house; and we had whole suits of rooms; but I was at my wits' end for a place to put him in. At last I remembered what a good little soul you are, Mattie, and so ventured to let him have the chamber I had reserved for you. You won't think it imposition, will you, dear?'

'No, indeed; I shall get along very well with Julia,' said I. 'It's very good of you. He's just from the continent,' continued Louise, 'and has brought home a French valet, who is almost as handsome as his master, and who is turning the head of every maid in the house. So delightful as it is to hear them talk French—master and man!'

'I haven't seen him for nearly five years,' said Gertrude, 'but used to be desperately in love with him. Such handsome eyes as he had!'

'He is worth half-a-million, which is much more to the purpose,' said Julia, whose twenty-six summers had brought her to appreciate the practical part of life. 'Mattie, you homely little brown thing, what are you dreaming about?'

I got up from the floor where I had been sitting for the last fifteen minutes, with my hair about my shoulders, and went to the mirror.

I did not want them to see what a bright color there was upon my cheeks.

My sisters were dressed in a few moments more, and went downstairs with Louise.

When the sound of their voices had died away I dropped the comb, and, throwing myself upon the carpet by a chair, fell to dreaming.

Five years before—it did not seem so long—I had seen Roy Cheston, and for the only time in my life.

It was on the night of a party given at my father's house, in honor of my sister Gertrude's eighteenth birthday.

Little more than a year before, I had lost my dear mother, and the idea of a crowd of gay people thronging the room where she had rested in her coffin on that last, sad day, filled my childish heart with grief and indignation.

But no one minded me. I knelt there by the window of my little room, which was in a wing of the house, and overlooking the piazza of the main building—my face wet with tears, and the most wretched feeling I had ever felt lingering around me.

Suddenly a light from the drawing room streamed out broadly upon the darkness, as someone drew the window drapery aside, and, an instant after, two persons stepped out upon the piazza.

It was my sister Gertrude and a gentleman.

I could hear their words plainly as they passed to and fro.

They talked carelessly and gaily about a great many things, some of which I could not understand, and some I could.

At last I was startled by the words of my sister's companion.

'What is that?' he said.

'What? What do you mean, Mr. Cheston?'

'I thought I caught a glimpse of a child's face at the window,' replied the gentleman. 'And, if I am not mistaken, it was wet with tears.'

I drew back quickly, with a quickly beating heart, but I heard my sister say—'Oh, it's Mattie, my little sister. I suppose! The child is averse to our giving

this party to-night—declares that it is sacrilege and that we are all heartless and forgetful of my mother. Of course, the idea is very absurd, you must know, but no one could make her believe it, and she has shut herself in her room and cried all day.'

Gertrude has told the truth.

These were just the facts of the case.

It her words had called forth a smile from her companion. I should have hated him forever; but peeping carefully from behind the curtain, I saw his face as he passed by the lighted windows, and it was as grave and gentle as I could have wished.

He made Gertrude no reply.

A few moments after, they stepped through the window into the drawing-room.

Leaning back into my old place, I dropped my head into my arms and fell to thinking, but not of my troubles.

Suddenly I was startled by hearing my name called.

After a moment's bewildered hesitation, I leaned forward and looked out.

Mr. Cheston was standing alone upon the piazza.

'Won't you come down a moment?' he said, smiling at my frightened face. 'I want to talk with you.'

Springing up, I left my room, and tripping lightly downstairs, stepped through the hall window upon the piazza, and stood before him.

He took my hand, and looked kindly into my face.

'What have you been crying for?' he said, gently.

'You know,' I replied, laconically.

He smiled.

'So I do, little Mattie, and I called you down because I wished to tell you that I don't think you foolish at all, as the others do, and that I'm very sorry for you.'

I allowed him to kiss me, which was a liberty I should indignantly have resented under any other circumstances.

'In a few months I am going abroad, and shall be gone several years,' he said, after a pause, during which he looked keenly, but kindly, into my downcast face. 'When I come back, you will be a young lady, Mattie.'

'I know it,' said I, 'and I'm very sorry for it.'

'For what reason?'

'Because I don't like young ladies.'

'Why not?'

'They are so foolish. They talk about dresses, and gentlemen, and parties all the time, and are always the crossdest people in the world to me.'

The idea that Mr. Cheston was laughing at me, flashed into my mind as I finished speaking, but glancing up quickly into his face, I saw that it was unusually grave.

'Your opinion of your own sex is not a very flattering one, however truthful it may be,' he said. 'Do you believe all young ladies are like these whom you see every day?'

'I don't know.'

'Do you think it necessary that they should be?'

'No; for I don't think my mother was ever such a young lady.'

'Don't you think that you could grow up to be a sensible, useful woman, if you were to try?'

'Yes.'

'Will you try?'

'I will.'

'And I hope you may succeed, my dear Mattie, both for your sake and my own. Now I must leave you. Will you kiss me good-bye?'

I astonished myself very much by the act, when I pressed my lips to his, as he bent down.

Something in my face attracted his attention a moment after, and he laughed.

'You're a queer little thing,' he said.

'What would you tell me if I were to ask you if you liked me?'

'The truth, of course.'

'Then I'll spare your blushes, you remarkable morsel of womanhood. Mattie?'

'Sir?'

'Will you kiss me when I come back?'

'Yes.'

'You will be a young lady then, remember.'

'But I shall be myself just the same.'

'So you will. I shall hold you to your promise. Remember it. Now, good-bye.'

He turned away as someone came upon the piazza, and I flew back to my room.

And this was the scene I was thinking over as I sat upon the floor of my room at the beautiful country-seat of the Anslies—a girl of seventeen, dark, plain, shy, and sensitive.

'Mattie, what for Mercy's sake are you doing that you are not dressed yet? It's nearly tea-time,' said my sister Julia, clashing into the room for something, and stopping short as her eyes fell upon me.

'Have you been asleep?'

'No,' said I, suddenly, getting up and going to the mirror.

'Oh, you queer child! Now hurry. You'll find me in the drawing-room, if you ever get ready to come down,' and out she swept.

I think there are but few persons in the world who can understand what I suffered when I entered the room where Mr. Cheston was.

Everything was a blank to me as I crossed to the window where my sisters sat.

I realized nothing in existence but the heavy pulsations of my heart, which seemed as if they would beat out my life.

When I came to the use of my senses I was sitting by good Mrs. Wilson, who was always kind to me, and whom I sometimes thought I loved better than either Julia or Gertrude.

'You did not expect to see so many people, dear, and were frightened,' she said, with a smile on her kind, motherly face. 'I saw it the moment you opened the door.'

I answered only with a glance, and slipped my hand into hers.

'Mrs. Wilson,' said my sister Gertrude, 'if Mr. Cheston comes this way again I want you to take Mattie round to the other side of you. You will, won't you?'

'No, my dear; that's very ungenerous of

you. I shall warn Mr. Cheston that you have serious designs on him.'

'I don't see the necessity of warning a person against a danger of which he is already aware,' snapped a young lady with very black eyes, who stood behind the coach on which we sat.

Gertrude turned round with a crimson face.

'What is the subject of discussion? Won't you admit me to your confidence, ladies?' said a familiar voice, so near my ear that I started in affright.

The black-eyed young lady slipped aside to give Mr. Cheston a place near us.

Several persons were presented to him, I among others.

He gave me no particular attention, and took a chair beside Gertrude.

'Didn't you inquire what we were talking about, Mr. Cheston?' said the black-eyed young lady.

'I believe I had the audacity,' he replied, smiling.

But the smile was very different from the one I remembered to have seen upon his face.

'We were speaking of kisses,' said Gertrude, quickly, with a saucy smile; 'and Hattie here declared that she didn't believe you cared for them.'

I started. I had never before heard my sister utter a deliberate falsehood.

'I am very sorry that Miss Hattie thinks me so indifferent to the most perfect luxury in life,' he replied, glancing up at her.

'Victory, Hattie! Mr. Cheston does believe in kisses!' cried Gertrude, with a smile, whose brightness dazzled the eyes so that but two of us saw the hidden malice.

I think Miss Hattie was about to make an attempt to struggle out of the position into which my sister had thrust her; but Louise Anslie, who had sauntered up a moment before, exclaimed—

'Oh, Mr. Cheston! don't you remember that you once attended a forfeit party, and wore the most disgusted face I ever saw in my life all the evening?'

'But, Mrs. Anslie, that was because I considered forfeits a sacrilege of the carcer. It is converting the beautiful into the useful, and utterly ruining its peculiar value by so doing. I regret, however, that my face betrayed my feelings. I assure you that the rudeness was not intentional.'

'Mr. Cheston is apparently unconscious that several ladies are looking at him very admiringly,' said a low voice near me.

I turned round.

It was Mr. Maynard, who was in a fever of jealousy because Rose Lawton's bright eyes were fixed upon the gentleman in question.

'Take care, Mr. Cheston,' cried Gertrude. 'I'm afraid you don't know what you are bringing upon yourself. Having declared yourself so much in favour of the "most perfect luxury in life," we young ladies may have you quite as our martyr. According to your assertion, I doubt if you could resist the reward of a kiss from a pretty girl who might be suing for a favour. Could you?'

'Yes.'

'How so?'

'Because a kiss given in that way would be of little value.'

'I consider that a very unkind speech, coming as it does from the lips of a man who is well aware that kisses are a lady's favourite bribe,' replied Gertrude, flushed, but laughing. 'It is a most ungallant speech. Mr. Cheston, you must stand trial for punishment.'

'I will make it short by choosing Miss Lawton for my judge,' he replied, glancing up into the smiling eyes of the little beauty.

'Your chastisement shall be to confess whom you kissed last,' she replied, gaily.

'That is not fair,' he said.

'Why?'

'Because the lady is present, and the punishment would fall upon her rather than upon me.'

They burst into a merry laugh.

'Well, then, you can tell whom you intend to kiss next,' said Rose.

'That will not do either. I should never be able to put my intentions into effect.'

'Do you keep an account of your kisses as you do of your expenses, Cheston?'

called out Mr. Maynard.

'Yes,' replied Mr. Cheston, quietly.

'Now I have it!' cried Rose Lawton. 'You shall tell us how many ladies you have kissed during the last five years.'

'I will do so, on condition that my word shall not be doubted,' he answered, gravely.

'We will believe you, certainly. Now listen, good folk.'

'Not one,' said Mr. Cheston, quietly.

Everybody looked astonished.

'Oh, Mr. Cheston, you amaze us!' cried Rose.

'Roy is probably faithful to some fair lady who favored him some time before,' said Mr. Anslie, who had been listening quietly for a few moments.

'Exactly,' said that gentleman, rising with a bow, and turning away to someone who called him impatiently.

Such significant glances and exclamations of wonder as were circulated through the group after his departure!

'And what are you thinking of little mouse?' said Mrs. Wilson, bending towards me. 'Your cheeks are as red as roses.'

She would have been overwhelmed with astonishment if I had told her.

Three weeks passed, and Mr. Cheston and I were on no more intimate terms than we had been on that first evening.

We rarely met, except at the table or in the drawing-room of an evening, and he seldom addressed me when we did meet.

By degrees I overcame my shyness and sensitiveness regarding him.

He had forgotten the romantic incident of my childhood which had always such a charm for me, I thought, and wondered at myself for ever supposing that he had remembered it beyond the moment.

It made me a little sad to know that all my pleasant thoughts concerning it were castles in the air, and it was slightly humiliating, taken in connection with his polite indifference to me, to know that those thoughts were so many. But I said to myself—

'Mattie, it has been a good lesson for you, you foolish little dreamer!'

Mr. Cheston was a great lion among the party at The Maples.

The ladies all liked him; the gentlemen were jealous, while they strove to imitate him.

Gertrude declared privately that she was seriously in love with him.

Everybody talked of him, everybody admired him, either secretly or openly.

One evening as I was passing Mrs. Anslie's chamber, she called me.

'Mattie,' said she, as I entered, 'my cook has left me. She has gone off with Mr. Cheston's valet.'

'Gone! Where?'

'Why, eloped, you little simpleton!' exclaimed Gertrude, who was sitting on the foot of the bed laughing immoderately. 'Oh, dear I never heard of anything so ridiculous in my life!'

'That is all she will say to me, and James gone, and I half crazy for advice,' said Louise, half laughing and half crying. 'Mattie, what shall I do? How am I to get breakfast for all those people? I don't know the first thing about cooking, any more than chamber-maid or Dolly. Oh, to think that the ungrateful girl should serve me so!'

And my pretty friend threw herself upon a lounge and burst into a passion of desperate tears.

'Don't give way, Louise,' said I, trying to soothe her. 'I promise you that I'll cook the breakfast and help you to find another servant before dinner.'

'You cook!' exclaimed Gertrude.

Louise looked at me in doubt and astonishment.

'I'll do the best I can,' said I, beginning to realize the responsibility I had taken upon myself, but determined to brave it out. 'I will get up early, so as to have time for all necessary delays and experiments. But you must promise to keep the servants out of the kitchen, Louise. I do not feel capable of undergoing the ordeal of their criticisms.'

'I don't envy you your position, Mattie,' sneered Gertrude. 'Fancy Mr. Cheston making wry faces over the results of your cooking in the morning!'

'It would best serve Mr. Cheston to be as undemonstrative as anyone in the house, said I, indignantly. 'If it hadn't been for his man, Louise would not have lost her cook.'

'Whew! perhaps you think Mr. Cheston ought to be responsible for the breakfast?'

'He is as much called on as I am. And the best he can do under the circumstances is to quietly receive the consequent evil.'

An hour afterwards we were all in the drawing room.

Suddenly my attention was attracted by the exclamations of a group who stood at one of the windows.

Among them were Gertrude, Louise Anslie, and Mr. Cheston.

I listened, and heard Gertrude say—

'And Mattie thinks you ought to be responsible for the breakfast, as well as Louise, whose coadjutor she is.'

Louise, looking up, caught my eye, and beckoned to me.

'I want to say to you that I consider your view of the matter a very sensible one, Mrs. Mattie,' said Mr. Cheston, smiling. 'And that I feel myself called upon to help you get breakfast in the morning.'

'I should be very glad of your assistance Mr. Cheston,' I replied, quietly.

Everybody laughed, and declared the matter a good joke, and I thought some of the ladies regarded me with envy when Mr. Cheston deserted them to compare notes with me.

He could make the fire and boil the eggs and coffee, he said, and I thought I could do the rest.

He declared that we should get along nicely.

The next morning, I was awake at dawn and in a few moments after was up and dressed.

I brushed my hair smoothly behind my ears, tied an apron over my morning-dress and proceeded, not with a very stout heart, I confess, to the kitchen.

But at the sight of Mr. Cheston, kneeling before the stove, his white hands soiled with smut, and the linen apron of his quondam valet tied over his rich dressing-gown, I burst into a merry laugh.

That morning's experience was a strange and also happy one.

The most ridiculous things happened, and were received in the best possible spirits.

Once I gave Mr. Cheston a pan to

sprinkle with flour while I went to the pantry, and as I was gone some ten minutes, and he in his zeal to obey me, and be of all possible use, continued his employment till I returned, the consequence was that the pan was half full of flour, and the dredging-box nearly empty.

Then we let the fire go out in the midst of our operations, and burnt our fingers taking hold of things which we had no idea were hot.

The breakfast caught fire and flamed almost to the ceiling, nearly frightening us out of our wits, and the coffee boiled over upon the stove.

But by eight o'clock we came out bravely, and served up breakfast in fine style. I was a bit nervous when the meal commenced, lest some blunder should be discovered, but nothing of the kind occurred, and the affair went off in grand order.

Before dinner, Louise was provided with a protegee cook.

After that, Mr. Cheston and I became the best possible friends.

He said we had formed ourselves into an exclusive mutual admiration society.

Gravely courteous as he was to others, and as he had been to me, he now always met me with a familiar demeanour, and friendly pleasantry.

Gradually the summer wore away.

Several of our party returned to the city, and one clear September morning Mr. Cheston informed Mr. Anslie that he should be obliged to return to London the next morning.

That evening, when the drawing-room was deserted of the few that remained of the gay company, and I could hear their voices far down the moonlit road, I strolled into the dark, silent room, and sank upon a window-seat.

Instantly someone started up in the dusky light, and, coming forward, sat down beside me.

It was Mr. Cheston.

'Mattie,' said he, 'I intend going away before six o'clock in the morning, and shall probably not see you again.'

I did not reply.

'Haven't I a right to ask for a good-bye kiss?' he said.

'You have the right which the promise of a child gives you, I suppose,' I replied, a little annoyed by his light manner.

'A child in years you were, Mattie, but more of a woman at heart than thousands twice your age. Do you know that you made a conquest of me, little one, when you kissed me upon the piazza in the darkness.'

'A conquest?'

'I carried that kiss away with me. I loved the remembrance of it as I did my life. I would not have parted with it for millions, for it was a sweet hope on which hung all my light of the future. The lips of no other woman have pressed mine since. I said to myself that, until I kissed another your kiss remained. Do you understand?'

My eyes were full of tears, but I tried to smile.

'You were a sweet child, Mattie, and have grown into a sweet woman—such a woman as I have been waiting to find that I might marry. Now I ask you for that promised kiss, and, if you give it to me, I shall take it for granted that you give me yourself with it.'

He was sure of what I had never acknowledged to myself—my love for him.

I felt it in the confident clasp of his arm—I saw it in the confident glance of his eyes, and, content that he should read the heart of which he was so certainly the master, I acted my simple self and kissed him.

Black Will be a Fashionable Autumn Color.

Diamond Dye Blacks are the Richest, Fastest and Best.

Black dresses, capes and jackets will be much worn this autumn; this will be a blessing to the woman who wishes to look well and who cannot afford to buy much new clothing. Any woman can