

Alex. McVeigh
Mrs. Miller



*Let Us Kiss and
Part; or,
A Shattered Tie*

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CHAPTER I.

WHEN POVERTY ENTERS THE DOOR.

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To love and hate in the same breath, it is as cruel as a tragedy.

Leon and Verna Dalrymple knew all that subtle pain as they faced each other in the cold, gray light of that autumn day whereon they were parting forever.

It was not simply a lovers' quarrel, either.

The pity of it was that they were husband and wife, both very young, both very fond, but driven apart by unreasoning pride and passion.

The husband was twenty-one years old, the bride but seventeen—a case of “marry in haste, repent at leisure.”

Six months ago the bride, sole daughter of a wealthy family, had eloped from boarding school with a poor young man, a teacher of music.

For her fault the daughter had been cast off by her parents, and the young man dismissed from the school where he taught. Unable to secure another position, misfortune had steadily tracked his footsteps until he could scarcely afford bread for himself and the fair, dainty bride.

Having rushed into marriage without thought for the future, misfortune soured their naturally hasty tempers, and when the fierce wolf of poverty came in at the door love flew out of the window.

They could scarcely have told how it all began, but at last they were quarreling most bitterly. There were mutual recriminations and fault-findings, that increased in virulence

until one day, goaded by Verna's reproaches, Leon cried out in hot resentment:

"I regret that I ever saw you!"

"I hate you!" she replied, with a scornful flash of her great, somber, dark eyes, and whether the words were true or not, she never took them back—neither one ever professed sorrow for angry words or begged forgiveness. The husband, hurt by her sneers, pained by her reproaches, and inwardly wounded by his inability to provide for her better, took refuge in sullen silence that she resented by downright sulking. She was furious at his unkindness, disgusted with her poverty, and unconsciously ill of a trouble she did not suspect, so the breach widened between their hearts until one day she said with rigid white lips and somber, angry eyes:

"I am tired of starving and freezing here where I am not wanted! I shall go home and beg papa to forgive my folly and get me a divorce from you."

The awful words were spoken and they fell on his heart like hailstones, but though he grew pale as death and his whole frame trembled, he feigned the cruelest indifference, saying bitterly:

"You could not please me better!"

So the die was cast.

Perhaps she had wished to test his love, perhaps she hoped that the fear of losing her might beat down the armor of his stubborn pride and make him sue for a reconciliation.

Whatever she might have secretly desired, his answer was a deathblow to her hopes.

At his words a strange look flashed into her large, dark eyes, and for a moment her red mouth quivered like a child's at an unexpected blow. But she swallowed a choking sob, and the next moment her young face grew rigid as a mask.

Rising slowly from her seat, she put on her hat, caught up a small hand satchel from the floor, and passed silently from the poor apartment.

If only she had turned her fair, haughty head for one backward glance—if only——

For his passionate heart had almost leaped from his breast in the terror of his loss.

Anger, pride, and pique were forgotten alike in the supreme anguish of that moment's despair.

As she turned away he stretched his arms out yearningly, whispering with stiff, white lips that could scarcely frame the words:

“Darling, come back!”

Had she only looked back, her heart would have melted with tenderness at sight of his grief. She would have fallen, sobbing, on his breast.

But she never turned her proud, dark head; she did not catch the yearning whisper, and his arms dropped heavily to his sides again, while the echo of her retreating footsteps fell like a death knell on his heart.

Angry and estranged, they had parted to go their separate ways forever, and the stream of destiny rolled in widely between their sundered lives, thus wrenched violently heart from heart.

To be born to the heritage of such beauty, pride, and passion, is not altogether goodly—yet, it is the daughter of this strangely parted pair whom I have chosen for my heroine, for in four months after Verna Dalrymple left her husband she became the mother of a lovely daughter—a girl that in its dainty beauty possessed the blond fairness of the father, the dark, dreamy eyes and proud, beautiful mouth of the brunet mother.

CHAPTER II. SIXTEEN YEARS LATER.

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“Sister Jessie, I am so hungry. Please give me some bread!” sobbed the pleading voice of a little child, clinging to the skirts of the young house mother, a dark-eyed girl of sixteen.

“I’se hungry, too. I want my bekfus!” sobbed a still younger child, petulantly, and for answer Jessie stooped down and gathered both the little boys into her yearning arms, crying tremulously:

“Wait a little while, my darlings, and sister Jessie will go and try to get you some bread!”

Oh! what a tale of wretchedness was told by the bare, fireless room and the pinched faces and hollow eyes of the three children, the girl of sixteen, the boys of six and four, respectively. It was midday, but they had not tasted food for twenty-four hours, and the cupboard was empty of the smallest crust. It was a chilly November day, but the small stove was fireless, though their thin, ragged garments were insufficient to keep out the biting cold.

Jessie kissed the wan, tear-wet faces of her hungry little brothers, then stood up again and looked round the room to see if there was anything left worthy the attention of the old pawnbroker on the corner.

A choking sob escaped the girl’s lips:

“Alas, there is nothing but trash! The little purse is empty, and the rent unpaid for two months. What shall we do?”

A loud rap on the door gave her a violent start, and she sprang to open it, exclaiming piteously:

“They have come again for the rent!”

She was confronted by a medium-sized young man, good-looking in a coarse style with red cheeks, keen, black eyes, and close-cropped, black hair, dressed flashily, with a long, gold watch chain dangling across his breast.

Staring curiously into the room and at the girl, he demanded:

“Is John Lyndon at home?”

“He is not.”

“Where is his wife, then, hey?”

A sob came from all three of the children, but no reply until a little, motherly looking woman suddenly pushed past the young man into the room, exclaiming:

“Arrah, now, how dare ye break the hearts av thim by yer impidence, axin for their mither, and herself dead of a faver six months ago!”

“Ah, and the father?”

“Poor sowl, they took him to the hospital, a month ago, hurt by an accident, and he died there but yesterday. I just came in to take the childer to git the last look at his dead face before they bury him at the city’s expinse.”

“Ah, very sorry, I’m sure, but, of course, now the rent will never be paid, and I was sent here to bring a dispossess warrant, so I may as well read it for the benefit of the children.”

And he coolly proceeded to do so, apparently unmoved by the sad story of death and disaster he had just heard.

Then he beckoned to two rough-looking men who had been standing in the hallway. They came up at once, and at a motion of the hand from the dispossess officer, they began at once to move the few shabby household effects into the street.

Painful sobs burst from the hapless orphans, but the little Irishwoman, with the calmness of one long familiar with the stern face of poverty, said to them gently:

“You see, dears, ye are turned into the street. Have yees any friends to take yees in?”

Jessie answered forlornly:

“We have an aunt, a dressmaker, in a distant part of the city. She was papa’s sister, but he would never let her know that we were so poor after he lost his steady job, saying she had troubles enough of her own.”

“Av coorse she will help yees, when she knows about your troubles, poor things, so now come to my room and have a little snack before we start to the hospital,” said Mrs. Ryan tenderly, marshaling the orphans past the dispossess agent, who remarked insinuatingly:

“The oldest girl’s big enough to go out and earn her own living, and if her aunt won’t take her to keep, I know of a situation she can get as parlormaid with a very nice lady.”

“Thank you kindly, but I hope she won’t need it,” returned Mrs. Ryan curtly, as she led the little flock to her own poor apartment where she fed them on the best she could afford, weak tea, baker’s stale bread, and a bit of cheese, but a feast to the famishing orphans whose thanks brought tears to her kind eyes.

Afterward she took them to look their last on the face of their dead before he was consigned to his grave among the city's pauper dead, poor soul, the victim of penury and misfortune. Then she led them weeping away to their aunt, Mrs. Godfrey, who heard with grief of her poor brother's death and looked with pity on his orphan children.

She said plaintively:

"I'm a lone widow with a sick daughter and no support but my needle, but, of course, I cannot turn John's children out into the cold world. I'll take Mark and Willie and do the best I can by them, but as for Jessie, she is old enough to go out and work for herself. Besides, she has no claim on me, as she was not my brother's child!"

"Not papa's child!" almost shrieked Jessie, in her astonishment, and Mrs. Godfrey, looking ready to faint under the burden of her new responsibilities, replied:

"No, you were only the niece of my brother's wife, though she brought you up as her own child, and loved you just as well."

Mrs. Ryan questioned eagerly:

"Are Jessie's own parents living?"

"The Lord only knows," was the answer, and, seeing the anxiety on their faces, Mrs. Godfrey continued:

"You see, it was this way: Jessie's father and mother were divorced when they hadn't been married more than seven months or so, and afterward their child was born, and when it was a few years old the father in a fit of rage stole Jessie away from her mother and brought her to his sister to raise as her own. He went away and for years sent money liberally to keep and educate the child, but at last letters

and money both stopped suddenly, and 'twas supposed he was dead. The Lyndons kept Jessie all the same, and did the best they could, but misfortunes began to come and death followed—so everything came to this pass. I'll say it for Jess, she's a good child, but I'm too poor to keep her, so she will have to look for a situation."

"I've heard of one already, so I will take her back and try to get it for her. Bid your little brothers good-bye, dear," said Mrs. Ryan gently, in her pity for the forlorn girl, who now turned to Mrs. Godfrey, faltering:

"Maybe you can tell me where to find my mother?"

"I can't, my dear, for now I remember I never heard her name, nor your pa's, neither. You always went by the name of Lyndon, and was considered their child, so you will have to go on calling yourself Lyndon till you find out better. Maybe your ma wasn't a good woman, anyway, or she wouldn't had to be divorced."

Cruel was the parting between Jessie and the little ones, but with kisses and tears, and promises to come again, the desolate girl was hurried away to her fate—every link broken between her and the past, her brain on fire, her heart aching, her future a chaos that no hope could pierce.

"If I could only find my mother!" she sighed to Mrs. Ryan.

"Sure, darlint, don't fix your heart on her, for she must have been a bad woman indade, or your father wouldn't have stole ye away and put ye in his sister's care. Arrah, now, I'm thinking of what the dispossess agent said about knowing of a good place for ye to stay as parlormaid. And good luck to ye, darlint; there he is in front of the tiniment now, having the old sticks of your furniture moved, bad cess

to his eyes! But then ag'in, 'tain't his fault. He was sint by the landlord to do it, and can't help himself, so why should we be hard on him, thin! Och, if you plaze, sir, we would like to have the address of the good lady as you said would take Jessie for a parlormaid."

The agent's face beamed with surprise and delight, and, hastily drawing a card from his pocket, he presented it, saying:

"There's the address, and just tell the lady I sent you, and I know she will give Miss Lyndon the place," beaming on the girl in a way that made her shrink and shudder.

"Why, 'tis the old fortune teller in the next street," said Mrs. Ryan, surveying the dingy card that read:

"Know your fate and fortune. Consult Madame Barto, scientific palmist, No. 16A West Twenty-third Street. Hours between ten and four daily. Fee one dollar."

CHAPTER III.

A YOUNG GIRL'S FIRST THOUGHT.

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Madame Barto's ideas of a parlormaid seemed rather confused, for her gloomy little brick house had no occupants save herself and Jessie, and before business hours in the morning she and Jessie did up all the household work, after which they separated, madame to sit in her dingy parlor and read detective stories in the intervals of waiting for customers, and Jessie to wait in a tiny anteroom off the hall to answer the doorbell.

The first thing that morning madame had gone out and bought her maid a neat, black gown finished with black and white ribbons, at neck and waist, and a neat little pair of buttoned boots that made quite an improvement in her appearance.

"This comes in advance out of your first month's salary, and I think you will agree I am very generous to trust you," she said frankly.

"I am very grateful, madame," faltered the girl shyly, for she stood greatly in awe of the tall, dark, homely fortune teller, with her stern face and grenadierlike walk.

"See that you prove so," the woman said dryly, adding, as she seized the girl's hand and turned the pink palm to the light: "Let us see what fate has in store for such a pretty girl."

"Shall I ever be married?" queried Jessie timidly, and Madame Barto laughed:

“Ha, ha, the first thought of a young girl—‘shall I ever be married?’ Yes, yes, pretty one. I can promise you a husband for certain! Girls like you—so lovely and naïve—are very sure to marry, for the men will not give them any peace. But you’ll repent it afterward if you’re like most women. I know, for marriage is a lottery, and more blanks are drawn than prizes.”

“I am sorry. I thought love must be so sweet,” said the girl with a little, unconscious sigh.

“Poor thing!” answered the woman, with a half sneer, her keen, deep-set eyes following the lines of the delicate palm while she pursued:

“I see dark clouds lowering over your life—and the line of life is strangely crossed. I foresee tragic elements in your future. The chances of happiness are against you, but you may possibly overcome these adverse influences. Let us hope so. Otherwise——” she paused, looked keenly at the girl, and exclaimed:

“You will not thank me if I tell you any more. What is the use, anyway? You will find it out soon enough yourself. These people who pay me a dollar for reading the future, what fools they are! If they wait they will know it for nothing!”

Jessie hung her golden head in cruel disappointment, having hoped that a good fortune might have been promised from the reading of her little hand, while the madame continued briskly:

“Come, now, you will sit here in the anteroom with this bit of sewing until the doorbell rings, then you will answer it,

usher the caller in here, and come to me for instructions. Will you remember this?"

"Oh, yes, madame," sitting down obediently with the roll of ruffling madame had given her to hemstitch, eager to be alone with her sad thoughts.

Sad they were, indeed, poor Jessie, thus wrenched from all she had known and loved in the past, and thrown alone on the world, to face the untried future.

Standing with reluctant feet,
Where the brook and river meet,
Womanhood and childhood fleet.

At the clanging of the doorbell she started quickly to her feet with a strange, inexplicable throb of the heart.

She flew out into the hall and turned the doorknob to admit the caller.

Had she guessed that it was the little god Cupid knocking, would she have unbarred the door?

Alas! destiny is strong. We could not shirk it if we would.

The fair little hand shot back the bolt and turned the doorknob.

And as the lid of Pandora's box was opened, letting out evil on the world, so with the opening of the door Jessie let in love and pain:

Those kinsfolk twain.

On the threshold confronting her stood a young man of perhaps four and twenty, and if you had searched New York over you could not have found a more perfect specimen of manly grace, strength, and beauty.

Tall, athletic, with fine, clear-cut features, eyes like deep, blue pools under thick-fringed lashes, brown, clustering locks of silken gloss and softness, he was a man to look at twice with frank admiration, and when you added to nature's gifts the best efforts of the tailor, a man to set any girl's heart throbbing wildly in her breast.

"I wish to see Madame Barto, please," he said, in a voice of such strong agitation that Jessie looked at him in wonder at the deep pallor of his handsome young face and the lines of pain between his knitted brows.

"I will tell madame," she said, leaving him in the anteroom, walking impatiently up and down.

Madame was deeply interested in her detective story, and she yawned impatiently, saying:

"Tell him I'm engaged with a caller, and will be at leisure in about ten minutes."

"But he is in a hurry, and in some great trouble, madame. You could read it in his face and his voice, so strained and tremulous, poor fellow!" cried Jessie warmly.

Madame laughed heartlessly:

"Oh, I know the type! Jealous young fool, just had a quarrel with his sweetheart and wants to find out if she will ever make it up with him! Let him wait. Suspense will cool his temper. Meantime, I must have ten minutes to finish this thrilling chapter! Go!" turning eagerly to her book again.

The girl hurried back to the caller, who was pacing impatiently up and down the room just as she had left him.

"Madame Barto will be at leisure in ten minutes," she said gently, sitting down to her work again, while the young

fellow went to the window and drummed a restless tattoo on the pane.

Jessie's fingers had grown suddenly tremulous, and the color flushed up in her young face, for through her drooping lids she felt him gazing at her with suddenly aroused attention.

And one looking once at Jessie Lyndon could not help looking twice.

Of that rarest, most exquisite type, a dark-eyed blonde, she was possessed of most alluring beauty that not even want and poverty had sufficed to dim.

A little above medium height, slight and graceful, with perfect features, an oval face, a skin as delicate as a rose leaf, pouting, crimson lips, large, dark, haunting eyes, and a mass of curling golden hair, she would enchant any lover of beauty.

The young man, after watching her in blended admiration and curiosity several minutes, suddenly exclaimed:

"Excuse me, are you Madame Barto's daughter?"

Jessie lifted those large, dark, haunting eyes to his face in wonder, answering:

"No, I am an orphan girl—living with madame and working for her because I have no home nor friends."

The pathos of the low-spoken words went to his heart, and his voice grew soft with sympathy as he said:

"My name is Frank Laurier. May I know yours?"

"It is Jessie Lyndon," she replied, dropping her eyes with a deepening blush at his eager glance.

"A pretty name. I should like to know you better, Miss Lyndon. Will you take a little drive with me in the park some

afternoon?”

She started in such surprise that the sewing fell from her little, trembling hands.

“Sir, I—I—” she faltered confusedly.

He smiled at her dismay, and added eagerly:

“No, no, I don’t mean to be impertinent. I would like the pleasure of a drive with you, and would return you safe to madame afterward. Please say you will accept my invitation,” he pleaded, his dark-blue eyes shining with a light that sent a sweet, warm thrill through her heart like a burning arrow—the flame-tipped arrow of love.

She grew dizzy with the thought of driving with him in the park—she, little Jessie Lyndon, poor, obscure, friendless, to be chosen by this splendid young exquisite, it was too good to be true.

“Will you go—to please me!” pleaded the musical, manly voice, and she murmured tremulously:

“I—would—go—if madame—”

“Leave that to me. I will coax her,” he said radiantly, as a little tinkle of the bell summoned him to the fortune teller.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WINNING OF A HEART.

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Jessie set some very bad stitches in madame's ruffling the next half hour, for her slender fingers trembled with the quick beating of her heart.

She had had her shy dreams of a lover, like other girls, and now they seemed about to become blissful reality.

Could it be he had fallen in love with her? This rich, handsome young man—in love with the face that she could not help knowing was very fair. Madame must be mistaken thinking that his strange agitation came from a quarrel with his sweetheart. He could not have had any sweetheart, surely.

Her dark eyes beamed with joy, her cheeks glowed crimson as a sea shell, and her heart throbbed wildly with suspense. Madame Barto came in presently with the young man, and said blandly:

"I have consented to your taking an hour's drive in the park with this gentleman, my dear, if you wish."

"Let it be this afternoon. I will call for you promptly at four o'clock," he added, smiling at her as he bowed himself out.

Madame Barto laughed knowingly, and exclaimed:

"You pretty child, you are fortunate to have Frank Laurier pay you such attention. He is well-born, and rolling in wealth. Your dark eyes have turned his head! Hark, the bell again!" and she retreated quickly to her parlor.

Jessie hurried to the door, and again her unconscious hand opened the door to destiny.

A beautiful brunette of about twenty, richly gowned, and with an imperious air, entered the hall, and said curtly:

“I wish to see Madame Barto quickly.”

Jessie carried the message, and said:

“This young lady looks as pale and agitated as the young man who has just left.”

“Oh, it’s another love scrape, I suppose. That’s what usually brings them here! Well, you may send her in at once!”

The moment that the beautiful brunette found herself alone with Madame Barto she exclaimed breathlessly:

“Just now as I was passing in my carriage I saw a young man I know—Frank Laurier—leaving this house. Did he come to have his fortune told, or—or—to see that lovely girl that admitted me?”

Madame answered demurely:

“To have his fortune told, of course. In the lines of his hand I found a broken engagement, and he wished to know if it would ever be renewed.”

“And you told him——” eagerly.

“I beg pardon. I cannot disclose the secrets of my customers,” madame returned, rather stiffly, as she bent over the jeweled hand her customer had just ungloved.

A bursting sigh heaved the young girl’s breast, and she cried plaintively:

“Quick! What do you see?”

“Ah, how strange! I see in your hand, also, a broken engagement!” she exclaimed, in surprise.

“Yes, yes—now, tell me, will we ever make it up, our foolish quarrel!” cried the girl wildly.

Madame answered deliberately:

“The fates are against it. I see here that your path will be crossed by a charming rival, who will lure his heart away!”

The girl snatched her hand away and arose, furious with passion, crying:

“Woe be unto that girl! She had better never been born than come between me and my lover!”

“There are other men to love you!” consoled madame.

“What do I care for them? I want only him! And I have been so foolish, I have driven him from me! But no one else shall have him! I swear it!” cried the brunette, her dark eyes flashing wildly, as she paid the fortune teller, adding, “Come, tell me all you told Frank Laurier, and all this is yours!” and she held out a roll of bank notes.

Madame was not proof against the golden bribe, so she answered:

“I told him the engagement would most likely never be renewed—that a lovely blonde was fated to come between them and cause much unhappiness.”

“Let her beware!” hissed the beautiful girl, under her breath, as madame took up her hand again, saying:

“You have much to console you for a single disappointment in love. You are beautiful and rich, and you can have great success as an actress if you wish to——”

“That is an old story. I do not wish to hear any more—not that I believe what you have told me! It is all jargon—he shall make up with me!” muttered the proud, beautiful

creature, tearing her hand from madame's, and flinging out of the room in a rage.

As Jessie opened the door for her exit she gave the girl one keen, disdainful glance, whispering to herself like one distraught:

"A lovely blonde! But she shall rue the day she comes between us!"

She swept out of the house like a beautiful fury, and Jessie sighed.

"She must be very unhappy in spite of her silks and jewels!"

Then she forgot the haughty beauty in tender thoughts of the man who had preceded her—"my lover" she already called him softly to herself.

Ah, they give their faith too oft,
To the careless wooer;
Maidens' hearts are always soft,
Would that men's were truer!

It seemed long to Jessie till four o'clock sounded, though she was kept busy with the customers coming and going all day, eager to know their fate and fortune from the palmist.

But at last business hours were over, and Jessie and her employer lunched frugally, after which the madame said kindly:

"Now you may get ready for your drive with Mr. Laurier, for it is on the stroke of four o'clock."

There was no getting ready for a girl who possessed but one gown, except to bathe her face and hands and rearrange her wealth of sunshiny tresses in the loose plait in

the back, then affected by girls of her age. This done, Jessie placed on her charming head the black sailor hat madame had bought her, while she sighed to herself:

“I fear my dress is not fine enough for a drive in the park with such a grand, rich gentleman as Mr. Laurier. Perhaps his fashionable friends will laugh at me. I wonder why he cares to take me with him like this, when he could have his pick of grand, rich girls like the one that came to have her fortune told this morning!”

The bell clanged loudly, and she flew with a beating heart to the door, her cheeks glowing, her eyes shining with the tenderest love light.

She had not the slightest doubt but that it was Frank Laurier waiting outside.

She opened the door quickly, with a smile of welcome on her coral lips.

Oh, how quickly the glad smile faded when she saw instead the young man who had recommended her to this place but yesterday—the dispossess agent.

He was dressed very fine in a loud, flashy style, and smiled patronizingly at lovely Jessie, exclaiming:

“Ah! Miss Jessie, how sweet you look. That new dress is very becoming. Now, don’t you feel grateful to me for getting you this nice place with my aunt? I didn’t tell you Madame Barto is my aunt, did I? My name is Carey Doyle, and I came to take you for a nice little walk, if you will go with me.”

“I—I—thank you, but—I have an engagement,” Jessie faltered, drawing back in secret disgust from her bold admirer.

“Well, you may break that engagement, my pretty little Jessie, for I’m bound to have you for my little sweetheart, I swear, and you shall give me a kiss to seal the bargain!” protested Carey Doyle, crowding her to the wall and throwing his arms around her slender waist despite her cries and struggles in his effort to press a kiss on the pouting, scarlet lips.

But in the excitement of his entrance they had forgotten to close the door, and Frank Laurier, bounding up the steps, took in directly the situation.

The next moment he had wrenched the burly wretch away from Jessie, and thrust him by force down the steps, aiding his progress by a kick as he exclaimed:

“Take that for insulting the young lady!”

CHAPTER V. THE FIRST KISS.

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Pale and trembling from her fright, Jessie leaned against the wall when Frank Laurier returned to her, jaunty and debonair, saying lightly:

"I have pitched the bold fellow down the steps, and he has gone off out of the way. Why, how pale and ill you look! Were you so much frightened of a kiss?"

"Yes—from that wretch!" she faltered, and his deep-blue eyes laughed at her quizzically, and with something like daring in them as he led her out to the pavement to an elegant little trap, and, taking up the reins, drove off in great style for the park.

Jessie's heart throbbed with pride and joy, but she still trembled violently from the struggle with Doyle.

She half sobbed:

"Oh, I never can thank you enough for driving him away! If he had kissed me—oh, I should have died of disgust!"

"Died of a kiss, ha, ha!" laughed the young man gayly, so amused at the idea that it took firm hold of his memory, to be recalled at a fateful aftertime.

"Have you never been kissed by a young man, then, little Jessie?" he added, still laughing.

"Oh, no, no, never!" blushing deeply.

"Then he will be a lucky young fellow who gets the first kiss from you! I wonder who he will be! Can you guess?"

The great, dark eyes stole a shy glance at him under the drooping lashes, as she whispered demurely:

“Only the man I shall marry!”

“Oh, indeed!”

Did he think she was chaffing him, or coquettishly daring him, or what? It is certain he was in a reckless, flippant mood, and that swift glance of hers warmed his blood like wine. They were in the park now, driving under the shadow of some autumn-colored trees, and all in a flash his arm slipped round her waist, the brown head bent over the golden one.

Two faces bent—

Bent in a swift and daring dream,
An ecstasy of trembling bliss,
And sealed together in a kiss.

She did not struggle, sweet Jessie, against this bold caress, simply yielded to it with a delirious throb of joy, letting his lips drain the sweetness of hers unhindered, as a bee sips the sweets of the rose, her thrilling form resting quiescent against the arm that clasped her close to his heart. When he released her, neither spoke a word, Jessie sat very still, her form inclined slightly toward him, her eyes downcast and shining, her cheeks warmly flushed, her moist lips tremulous, her bosom heaving with emotion, a lovely picture of girlish tenderness on which the young man's eyes rested with pleasure.

He touched up the sleek, black ponies with the whip, and directly they were borne into the thick of the crowd that made the beautiful drives a gay, changeful panorama of fine horses, smart turnouts, and magnificently dressed women.

Frank Laurier blent readily with the animated crowd, sitting erect with a very pale face, compressed lips, and eyes that glittered with a blue fire as he swept them eagerly and restlessly over the passing faces, returning salutations every moment or so, and seemingly almost forgetting the girl by his side in some secret, overmastering excitement.

As for her, if she could have thought of anything but that kiss and the bliss of his nearness, she would have begun to feel out of place in her cheap, simple dress there in the moving throng of richly garbed women, whose glances rested in wonder on the fair face and cheap attire of the girl by Laurier's side. She did not, indeed, guess how different she looked from the others, or how very strange it was for a man in his position to run the gantlet of all those curious, surprised eyes—he, one of the fashionable four hundred, with that little working girl by his side.

If the innocent child gave a thought to the incongruity, she only felt it as a tribute of his regard for her.

She felt an exquisite pleasure in thus being exhibited at his side to the habitués of his particular world, and did not realize the strangeness of his inattention to herself, or the eagerness of his excited glance as it roved from carriage to carriage filled with fair faces and bright, sparkling eyes, as if in restless search for some one.

At last!

Jessie, close to his side, felt the young man give a quick start of surprise and emotion, at the same moment lifting his hat with a low bow.

She saw passing them on the drive a splendid, low victoria, containing two handsome, elegantly dressed ladies,