

ONE AFTERNOON.

Laurencina was walking slowly back and forth under the arch that connected the two wings of the house. There were orange trees in large wooden tubs standing in a row on the brick pavement under the arch, and Laurencina had come out here to wait for a visitor. He had sent word only the day before that he had returned to Charlotte-Amelie from St. Croix and asked to come to see Laurencina that afternoon. She had been ready for him for some time - although it was only four o'clock. Now she thought of going in to see if the wind had ruffled her hair, but she decided to wait outside as she had planned. In order to seem to herself that she was occupied, she began to examine the leaves of the orange plants picking off a few that had dried. Some of the plants were in blossom, the fragrance was faint because the wind of late autumn blew through the courtyard and made a draft of air under the arch. Laurencina pressed her face against the hard leaves to breathe the perfume. It made her think of their plantation in the country, a corner of the garden near a red garden seat. Unlike the daughters of the other English families, she had spent her life on the island, and now she was twenty-five. When Charles Durrain came, she thought that she

would ask him to pick a spray of the orange flowers for her. One that grew beyond her reach was very beautiful, there were three blossoms and a small orange.

It gave her pleasure to remember that he was a little taller than she.

Presently the bell sounded at the entrance, and Laurencina was not surprised that her heart beat faster. Her thoughts grew a little confused and she controlled a desire to go into the drawing room, at the other end of the orange walk. In a moment or two she could hear steps coming from the entrance wing - down the passage to the courtyard. When she turned, she saw Charles Durrain, as she expected; he was coming toward her between the orange trees. She thought that he looked pale and ~~seemed~~ older, and she noticed that he was in riding clothes. He came near her and shook hands nervously, without looking at her directly. She found herself very quiet and at ease.

He spoke first - hurried and self-conscious.

"Well, at last we meet again, Laurencina."

She answered very gently, "Yes, it is a long time." And then it seemed to her that she must continue speaking.

"You rode over from the Embassy?"

"No - the de Vere's asked me to dine and go for a moonlight ride. I hoped that you would excuse me if I came dressed for that."

Laurencina moved toward the steps leading to the house. Durrain kept close beside her instead of following - although the passage was narrow.

When they were inside she remembered her plan of staying in the courtyard and picking some of the orange flowers. After all it did not seem worth while.

She went and sat down on the long seat by the window where she had ordered tea to be brought. Durrain had continued to talk as they crossed the long, beautiful drawing room. He sat down now, near her - and kept on with a description of how he had chanced to meet the ^{de} Veres that morning, and of the invitation that they had at once given him. Laurencina had forgotten that he talked so much, she remembered now how she used to try to answer politely and respond even though her attention wandered. But to-day she could not listen - although she looked at him and smiled occasionally. She had seen from his manner when they met, and from his nervousness now that he was still in love with her. She felt indifferent and relaxed.

"Do the de Veres interest you?"

"Oh no," he answered, "they are nothing to me - . Dolly de Vere is fatter than ever!" and he laughed noisily.

"Why do you accept their kindnesses, then?" she began to say, but she did not wait for his answer and asked him instead how he enjoyed Christiansted where he had been

since he left their island.

"Have you enjoyed yourself?" she said.

"Yes, after a fashion. I've made some very good friends. If I do say it the nicest people have been tremendously kind to me. I never dined at home. How is your father?" he asked abruptly.

"Papa is not very well," Laurencina answered, longing to express herself to him as she had imagined doing, before he came.

"Poor papa has given up everything at the English Bank, everything anywhere - except backgammon with Mr. Gibbon. I read aloud to him, but he is very lonely now that he is not strong enough for visitors."

"Yes - yes - it must be so," Durrain answered. He was leaning forward looking at her, and Laurencina felt that she must cry out all that she longed to tell, to ~~have share~~ ^{have} and understood.

"Edith is here now - and her husband, but she will go very soon, then we shall be alone again."

"Oh, is Edith here - I should like to see her. And, by the way, I met some people in St. Croix who said very flattering things about you - " And then he began a story of these friends, laughing a good deal as he talked and making nervous gestures with the closed forefinger

and thumb of both hands. Laurencina watched him, sitting very still with her dark eye-brows raised. He did not attract her, she could not marry him. Since her sister's visit, marriage had seemed suddenly desirable, beautiful. Edith looked so pretty and gay - Peter was always admiring her and making her seem even more brilliant than she was.

Laurencina had refused Charles Durrain a year before - and yet, ever since, he had written to her. His coming, just now had been full of possibilities to her imagination.

"Charles - " she broke out, in the midst of something that he was saying, "I am so dissatisfied with my life - You have known me a long time - Why is it that I seem to be accomplishing nothing? I feel that I could be so wonderful, do so much, and here I am day after day." The thoughts that had crowded her mind for so long - now seemed to have left her. After all, she could not express them.

"Don't be dissatisfied," Durrain was saying. "Think of your influence in the family here - and then your father!" There is a reason for being of use. What would he do without you?" He spoke in the voice of a teacher.

"Yes," Laurencina answered in a low tone, "I must not be dissatisfied." And then her passion broke out again. "You are a man, and cannot judge fairly. There is your work at the Embassy, and your visits here and there, moonlight rides - "

"Oh well -" Durrain spoke triumphantly. "You must not be envious - you could have moonlight rides if you wanted to accept them!"

"That is true -" Laurencina gave up trying to say what was in her heart.

"I must not be envious - but I am, I am -" She rose suddenly and moved away. Durrain looked astonished and ill at ease. Laurencina came back and sat down quietly taking up some knitting.

"You know, I want you to be happy -" Durrain began - speaking uncertainly - "If there is anything that I can do, you must let me know." He looked at her eagerly, leaning forward closer to her.

Laurencina drew back - she saw that she had roused him, and she was sorry - and a little afraid.

"No - no - You are very kind - but you wouldn't understand -" She wished that he would insist - that he would ask her to tell him how she felt - but he did not. She began to ask him about his experiences. He told her several amusing anecdotes of the people whom he had met. They were presently laughing and Laurencina thought him more entertaining than she had remembered, now that he was at ease.

Tea was brought in - and the beautiful room where they sat grew lovelier with the last gleams of sun.

Laurencina noticed that Durrain was silent every now and then - looking at her. She examined him as well. His face had a certain expression of sadness and gentleness in repose. The hair grew thick off his high forehead, but his mouth was not firm, and his teeth were crowded and prominent.

Yet in his presence, under the flattering appeal of his eyes - Laurencina felt herself expand into a certain pleasure. She knew that he thought her lovely and clever, she was delighted to be reassured of her charm. It stimulated her to say careless, witty things. Durrain seemed to be an audience that missed the fine points - and yet could be counted on for admiration. Laurencina enjoyed making him witty - as well. She flattered him a little and he grew almost brilliant. His egotism seemed less noticeable. He was really very clever and successful at the Embassy - but he denied her praises in a way that was simple and modest.

"No one needs me - " he said. "Of course I am fortunate I like my work - the world has been very kind to me - still you needn't think that I am satisfied; I get along - that is all." He gave one of his nervous gestures which every now and then displeased Laurencina.

"May I smoke?" he asked. She enjoyed having him. It made him seem more masculine. He smoked three cigarettes rapidly, striking a great many matches. Suddenly he broke

off in his talk.

"Well - Laurencina -" There seemed such emphasis in his tone that she believed him about to say something very serious - perhaps even to propose to her again. He had grown pale, and stood up.

"I suppose I must go -" he said, looking at her with a curious expression.

Laurencina did not rise. "Oh yes, to the de ~~here's~~," she answered languidly. Then something gave her a sharp pang of grief. He was leaving, this was all. And yet he did not attract her as he stood there.

"It has been splendid to see you - I'll ring you up and see if you can't let me come again."

"Oh - yes -" Laurencina went with him toward the door. "Good bye," she said.

He took her hand in a thick, nervous grasp - shaking it hard. Then he left.

Coming back into the room with its beauty and quiet - walking over the polished floor - Laurencina moved slowly. She was very unhappy. Her imagination had suggested such strange, exciting - satisfying things, and now there was nothing.

Turning when she reached to the table, she walked the length of the room again - past the scarlet cabinets, the old Danish tapestried chairs, the tables with glass

vases of tall tuber-roses and jessamine. It was so suggestive of every joy and romance. In the narrow mirrors as she passed - Laurencina saw her face - it seemed to her that a strange, beautiful woman looked at her sorrowfully. Moving back again - the silent room laughed at her. She felt that she carried a treasure, desirable, lovely, priceless, here in her hands she held it and there was no one to accept it. The passion to give overwhelmed her. She reached the mantle and put her head on her arm. For a long time she stood there.

That evening the family sat at dinner. Laurencina was opposite her father - who looked very angry at being old. Edith and Peter were there as well. Peter was very handsome in a tall, decisive way. His fine Danish colouring made him conspicuous among these English people. Edith was very pretty, like a lovely, soft plumed bird.

"Charles Durrain asked to be remembered to you, Papa," Laurencina said.

"Oh, he was here - again. I should like to see him. You ought to marry him, Laurencina."

Laurencina moved her plate a little. She felt very tired. Edith was speaking in her kind, high voice.

"Oh, Laurencina is so hard to please."

Laurencina made an effort and smiled a little.