

CHAPTER II.

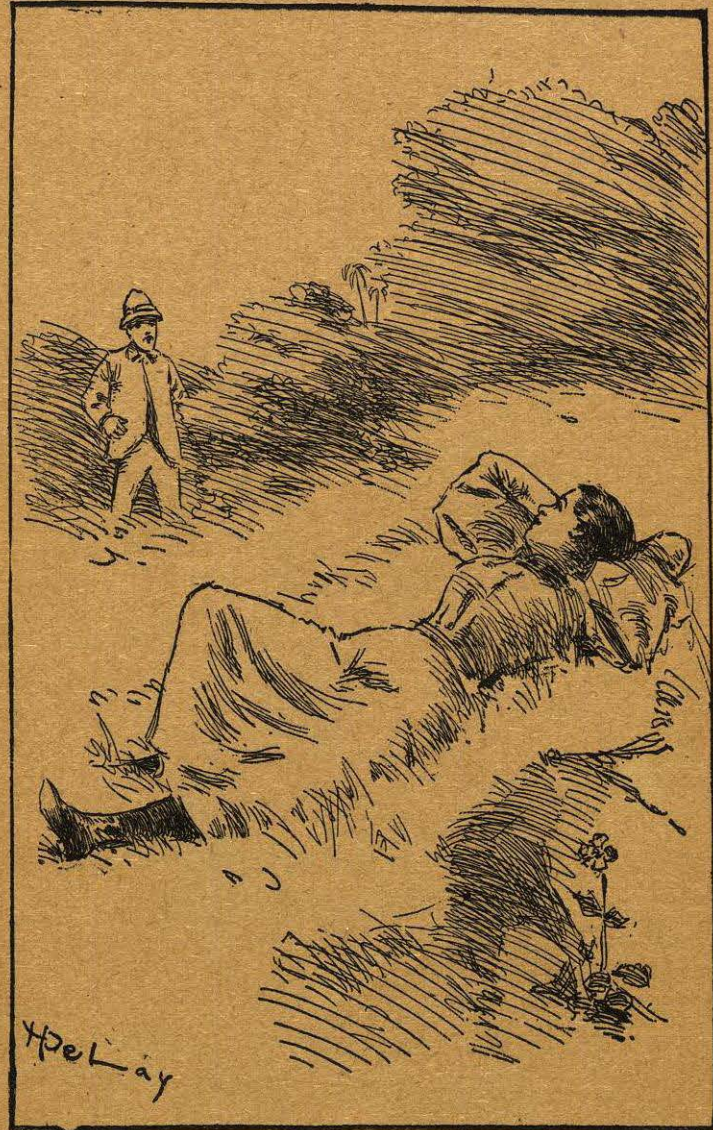
LOVE.

Six months had passed since Harry had arrived at the Winterstine's. Six months of ceaseless toil; for Harry Lovejoy had come to the mines with the full determination to win his fortune, if, by patient toil and a strict attention to business, such an object could be accomplished. But, after these six months of unremitting labor he found that he was poorer than when he came.

"Oh, it's no use," he mused dejectedly, as he wandered away down by the little brook. "It's no use, everything has gone against me—everything, even little Tom! Ah, I wonder," he said, as he strolled along to where the brook emptied into a beautiful little lake which nestled so cosily among the hills, "I wonder what the trouble is with Tom? I have done nothing to merit her displeasure, yet she shuns me, she avoids me in every way possible. I don't believe that it is her own choice—some one else has something to do with this. Those half-sisters of hers—Ah," he exclaimed, as the low, musical notes of some one whistling fell upon his ears, "ah, that's Tom; I wonder where she is? if I can find her, I will have an explanation of this affair. Oh, but I would like to catch her off here alone! I will make her tell," he exclaimed passionately.

Listening, he located the place from whence the whistling came—a place far up on the face of a high cliff which overlooked the lake.

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HE EMERGED FROM A THICKET AND CAME SUDDENLY
UPON THE UNSUSPECTING GIRL.

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"Yes, she is up there," he mused, and in a moment he was making his way along a narrow foot-path which led up along the cliff. A few minutes later he emerged from a dense thicket and came suddenly upon the unsuspecting girl as she lay at full length upon a mossy rock and gazing away across the lake, and so deeply absorbed in her own thoughts that she did not hear the approaching footstep.

"Tom," said Harry, advancing toward her, "may I come for just a little while? I want to talk with you, please."

"No, no," she exclaimed, rising quickly, "come, let's go home; it's getting late, mother will scold!"

"No," declared Harry, effectually barring the way. "No, you don't evade me this time! O Tom, why do you treat me so cruelly? What have I done to merit your displeasure? Tell me, Tom, that I may ask your forgiveness!" he pleaded, and clasping the girl in his strong arms, he held her.

"What have you done?" she cried. "O Harry, I can't, I won't tell! Let me go, please do," she pleaded, struggling to free herself. "Let me go!" she cried, bursting into tears.

"Tom," said Harry, reproachfully releasing her. "Tom—" but she turned and, without heeding his call, fled down the path toward home.

Hastening home, she tried to avoid the family and escape to her own room, but the ever-watchful eye of her mother detected her and she called out—

"Tom, Tom, come here, I want you, my dear."

In silence she obeyed her mother's call.

"Tom," said the mother tenderly, as the weeping girl came up to her, and kneeling beside her, buried her tear-stained face in her mother's lap. "Tom, you are too young to be thinking of love; you are but a child yet, Tom; you know nothing of such things; it will soon wear away and then you won't care. Come, my little girl," said the mother, stroking her daughter's golden curls affectionately, "give up this nonsense."

"O mother!" moaned Tom, "I can't help it, I love him, but, of course, I must give him up to Lucy—she wants him, and of course, I—"

"But Tom, do you think that he loves you? Isn't it Lucy that he wants—that he would be the most apt to choose for a wife? Think, Tom, you are but a child yet. I couldn't spare my little Tom, even if he does love her. No, no, Tom, you are too young—it is Lucy that he wants."

"Oh, it makes no difference what I want, I must give up everything to my older sisters; and I am expected to do it without complaint!" she cried bitterly. "You call me a baby and tell me I don't know anything about love, when you know that you wasn't any older than I am when you married papa!"

"Tom, Tom!" cried the mother, a little frightened at the girl's impetuous words and manner, for she had always been willing to give up to her older sisters and always with such a meek and submissive spirit that such a sudden and unexpected outburst of passion frightened her gentle, loving mother.

"O Tom!" she cried, this is not my little Tom;" and she raised the girl's head and gazed down into her dark,

blue eyes inquiringly. "Ah," she murmured, "I don't know, perhaps that he does love her. I don't wonder that he should."

For several weeks things went on as usual at the Winterstine's.

Tom treated her lover with an indifference that would have done credit to an older and more experienced person than she.

"I will show him," she cried, "that though he may break my heart, he can't make a fool of me! Ah, there he comes now with Lucy; they have been out boating on the lake, I suppose," she said, struggling to keep back the tears and turning away to avoid them.

"Look," laughed Lucy, "Tom was always so bashful! I wonder if she will ever get over it?"

But Harry made no answer; he saw and understood all but too well the meaning of that act. She had avoided him so much of late, that it was very seldom that he had an opportunity of speaking to her alone. So rarely, indeed, and so constrained had become their meeting, so cold and uninteresting their conversations, that he felt rather relieved than otherwise when he learned that she was going on a visit to her aunt Jane's, who lived some fifty miles to the north, at the little town of Perth.

"It will be rather hard for us to get along without her and I hardly know how I can manage, but it will be better for her, poor child," said the mother in her pity for the forlorn little Tom. "She loves Harry and I don't know but he loves her—he acts kinder queer of late."

"What!" exclaimed the father, "my little Tom wanting to get married? Good heavens! who ever put such a foolish notion into her head? Ah, it's Harry, of course; I might have known it. Yes, yes; I see, I see it all now! But mother, why don't you let her get married if she wants to? What are you going to send her away for?"

"She wants to go and I think it will be better for her to go. Harry can't marry both of the girls, even if he wanted to, and Lucy claims him; so, I think, it's better for Tom to go away."

"O ho! so the girls are quarreling to see which shall have him, are they?" said the old man. "Well well! that's the way they do it now, is it? he mused and he looked back to a time some sixteen years ago and remembered the bitter rivalry between him and his partner over the fair, sweet-faced woman who is now his wife, and the mother of little Tom. "Ah, yes," he mused, "it ain't as it used to be."

The day had arrived when Tom was to set out for her Aunt Jane's and everything was ready. The cart stood before the door in waiting, while the father, who was to drive her over was mounted upon the seat and waited impatiently.

"Tom," said the mother, clasping the girl in her arms and kissing her, "don't feel so bad; if Harry loves you, it will come out all right; if he don't, you don't want anything to do with him. Don't you want to see him before you go? He wants to see you."

"Oh, I can't, I can't!" she sobbed, "let me go before he comes—papa is waiting for me." And she ran

quickly down the steps and climbed into the cart and taking the reins from her father's hand, she drove away.

"Ah," mused Harry, as she drove off without giving him even a parting glance, ah, I understand now, better than ever before, the meaning of all this. I don't believe that Tom is to blame for it; some one else is engineering this business for her, but it won't work."

Days and weeks passed swiftly by, still the prospect of gaining his fortune grew less and less. Harry was thoroughly discouraged now.

"There's no use," he said one evening some two months after Tom had left; "everything goes against me now! I believe that I will go up to the new mines at Amboy and go to prospecting."

"It's very uncertain business," said Mr. Winterstine, after Harry had told him of his intention; "but then—ah well, perhaps that you had better go for a while at least, I can get along all right—perhaps you can do better up there," he said, for he thought that he divined the young man's purpose in going there. "Yes, yes, let's see, it will be but little out of your way to go by Perth, as it's only ten miles from Perth to Amboy. But prospecting is uncertain, thousands lose where one gains."

"Well, I have nothing to lose and everything to gain," reasoned Harry. "Perhaps I may be the thousandth man; at any rate, I will try it."

So it was arranged, and a few days later he bade good-by to Cliffside and his many friends and set out to seek his fortune in other fields.

CHAPTER III.

AT AUNT JANE'S.

Nearly two months had passed since Tom's arrival at Aunt Jane's. Two busy months they were too, for little did Tom care for company; so she set herself to work with a will and, instead of being the careless, frivolous girl that Aunt Jane had expected, she settled down into a quiet, busy little woman.

The change was so sudden and complete that even Tom herself was no little surprised as she found herself going about her work in that quiet, peaceful resignation which came to her. It was a surprise, for she thought that her heart was broken and she could never be happy again.

Aunt Jane, with that peculiar discerning power, or instinct, as the case may be, which some elderly ladies—and as for that matter, some younger ones too—possess, had discovered the cause of little Tom's exile.

"Yes, yes," she said, "it's love, of course. A little time will cure her. Love, like a flame, will burn up brightly for a time, consuming everything; but when the object of one's affections is removed, it will flicker and die. Ah yes, a plenty to do to keep her busy and to keep her from having the blues, is all that she needs with a little time to effect a cure."

Aunt Jane was one of those busy ladies who believe that every one should have an object in life and should follow that object perseveringly, unremittingly, let come



HER SOFT ARMS STOLE LOVINGLY AROUND HIS NECK.

what would. So it pleased her immensely to see little Tom take so kindly and resignedly to her busy little home.

Kind, old soul! Her heart went out to the little sufferer as only a kind, generous heart could do, giving and doing many little things, as she said—

“Just to please her and cheer her up a little, for it’s lots of help, you know.”

But a change began to steal over the scene. Silas Coffden, a wealthy land owner, had seen the sweet, shy face of little Tom and was deeply interested. Perhaps that his interest was deepened by the peculiar name which she bore. Be that as it may, he wondered within himself, that he would win this charming little woman for his wife. So it happens that we find him, ere long, a regular visitor at Aunt Jane’s.

Wealthy beyond all calculation, he was, in the eyes of Aunt Jane, a very desirable suitor. But not so with little Tom, for she looked upon his suit with a feeling of utter disgust.

“No, no,” she declared to herself, “I can never love any one but Harry.”

More frequent became his visits, and more pressing and ardent his wooing, till, at last, driven to desperation, Tom used every means within her power and resorted to every possible scheme to elude him and to give him to understand that his case was hopeless, but all to no avail.

About this time—something over two months since she had left home—a letter came from home, bringing the sad news that they were financially ruined, and that

they were soon to be turned out of Cliffside and left homeless. A mining speculation in which Mr. Winterstine had invested not only every cent of his own property but that of Harry Lovejoy's as well, had resulted in a complete and disastrous failure.

Left penniless, they were coming to Aunt Jane's to live till they could settle upon a new home.

Aunt Jane threw open wide her doors to them, and gave them such a welcome as only a generous-hearted aunt and sister could give.

"Though," she declared to herself, "I know they'll bring me deal of trouble. The other girls arn't a bit like Tom. Stuck up—aristocratic, they call it—they feel themselves above work, for, bless their hearts, they were brought up that way and arn't to blame for it! But, thank stars! two of 'em are married and have homes of their own, so there's only Lucy, and they do say she's the most stuck up of all; but she will have to come to it now—she'll have to work."

This misfortune fell heavily upon them and, it seemed, there was no hope for their future but a life of poverty. Mr. Winterstine was old and feeble and totally unable to work. In his extremity he would have to rely wholly upon his family for support, and, save little Tom, not one member of that family could even support themselves. And now, to make matters still worse, and soon after their arrival at Aunt Jane's, the mother, who had always been the mainstay of the family, took sick and, after a short illness, died.

Thus, some two weeks after their arrival at Aunt Jane's, we find the doubly stricken family.

Alas for poor little Tom! who had laid so many brilliant plans for the future, who had suffered so much in the past few months, her troubles had only begun.

"Oh, what shall I do?" moaned the bereaved parent. "What will become of us? O Tom!" he groaned.

"O papa!" cried Tom, and her soft arms stole lovingly around his neck, while her warm, red lips pressed his cold cheek. "Papa, can't you cheer up a little? Don't feel so down hearted papa dear, you have little Tom yet and she won't see you suffer!"

"Poor, little Tom!" moaned the old man. "Poor, little Tom! What can she do?"

"There are many, many things that I can do, papa!" cried the brave girl. "If only Lucy could get something to do, I could make a living for you and I."

Just then, the door bell rang and in a moment more, Silas Loffden entered and confronted the bereaved pair.

"Ah, Mr. Loffden," said the old man, "it has been many years since I saw you—you were but a lad then. Ah, yes, I remember your father," he said, and there was a dark frown upon the old man's brow at the remembrance of old Silas Loffden.

"Let the past be forgotten, Mr. Winterstine," implored young Loffden. "Hold me not responsible for my father's misdeeds. Believe me, I hold but the very best of feelings toward you, and I have come to you in your extremity, offering, as best I can, to right the wrongs which my father has done you. Mr. Winterstine, I have come to offer you a means of escape from your present dilemma—a means whereby you can regain Cliffside and yet lead a peaceful and happy life, and your

daughter's can be provided for, as becomes their station in life. This is my offer:

"I love your daughter, little Tom—wait, don't answer yet, let me speak—don't answer yet, consider what I offer—I will return Cliffside to you free of all incumbrance and will fix an annuity upon you for life. Your daughters shall retain their present position in society—all of this will I give you upon our wedding day," declared Loffden.

For some time the old man sat in silent wonder and amazement, while Tom, none too bold at best, sat in dumb consternation.

"Can it be possible," thought the old man, "that this can be the son of old Silas Loffden, my most bitter and unrelenting enemy?"

"Miss Winterstine," continued Loffden, "I love you as no other man can love, and I offer you what no other man can offer; can you accept it? Ah, I will not urge you now, all I ask is for you to consider my offer; promise me that you will consider my proposal, and I will hope for happiness. For, in your love, I will be the happiest man living."

"What do you say, Tom?" asked her father, scarcely yet recovered from his astonishment.

"O I— I don't—I can't, I can't!" wailed the poor girl in despair.

"Think Tom, think, that's a dear little girl," urged her aunt earnestly, "just think, wealth, position, happiness and, perhaps, even the life of your father depends upon your answer. Think, Tom, it was this blow of misfortune that killed your mother; shall it kill your

father also? O Tom! think how much depends upon your answer to Mr. Loffden."

Confused and bewildered, Tom could not think, could not hardly realize the nature of the questions which she was asked to consider. So young, the thought of marriage had scarcely entered her mind. And then, there was Harry, whom she loved so dearly. O, what could she do? She loved Harry and she could love no other. Should she blight her own young life to give pleasure and luxury to her sister? for, she reasoned—

"I can take care of papa; oh, I know I can."

"What do you think, Tom, my dear little girl?" asked the father anxiously.

"O papa!" she cried, throwing her arms around his neck and hiding her pale, frightened face on his shoulder, "I don't know what to do—what to think—I—I can't—I don't—O dear! O dear!" she cried, "give me a little time!"

"Will you give me a little hope by promising to consider my offer?" asked Loffden.

"Yes, yes, I will think of it!" answered Tom.

"Thanks, thanks, my dear Miss Winterstine," murmured Loffden, and bidding them good evening, he left the house.

"O Tom!" cried Aunt Jane, "just think, Silas Loffden is the richest and handsomest man in all this country! You can't refuse him, Tom; it's an offer of a lifetime; its—"

"O Aunty!" cried Tom, "I don't love him—I can't love him, O I can't, I can't! I love—I—I—"

"You love that poverty-stricken Harry Lovejoy!" cried Aunt Jane, in a rage. "O, you ungrateful little—" But Tom had fled to her own room.