

CHAPTER I.

"O married love! each heart shall own;
Where two congenial souls unite,
Thy golden chains inlaid with down,
Thy lamp with heaven's own splendor bright."
LANGHORNE.

"There, there, little woman! light of my eyes, and core of my heart! if you don't stop this pretty soon, I very much fear I shall be compelled to join you," Edward Travilla said, between a laugh and a sigh, drawing Zoe closer to him, laying her head against his breast, and kissing her tenderly on lip and cheek and brow. "I shall begin to think you already regret having staid behind with me."

"No, no, no!" she cried, dashing away her tears, then putting her arms about his neck, and returning his caresses with ardor of affection. "Dear Ned, you know you're more than all the rest of the world to your silly little wife. But it seems lonely just at first, to have them all gone at once, especially mamma; and to think we'll not see her again for months! I do believe you'd cry yourself, if you were a girl."

"Altogether likely," he said, laughing, and giving her another hug; "but, being a man, it wouldn't do at all to allow my feelings to overcome me in that manner. Besides, with my darling little wife still left me, I'd be an ungrateful wretch to repine at the absence of other dear ones."

"What a neat little speech, Ned!" she exclaimed, lifting her head to look up into his face, and laughing through her tears—for her eyes had filled again. "Well, you know I can't help feeling a little lonely

and sad just at first; but, for all that, I wouldn't for the world be anywhere else than here in your arms:" and with a sigh of content and thankfulness, she let her pretty head drop upon his breast again.

"My darling! may it ever be to you the happiest place on earth! God helping me, I shall always try to make it so," he said, with a sudden change to gravity, and in low, moved tones.

"My dear, dear husband!" she murmured, clinging closer to him.

Then, wiping her eyes, "I sha'n't cry any more; for, if I'm not the happiest woman in the world, I ought to be. And what a nice time we shall have together, dear Ned! each wholly devoted to the other all winter long. I have it all planned out: while you are out about the plantation in the mornings, I'll attend to my housekeeping and my studies; and in the afternoons and evenings, — after I've recited, — we can write our letters, or entertain ourselves and each other with music or books; you can read to me while I work, you know."

"Yes: a book is twice as enjoyable read in that way — sharing the pleasure with you," he said, softly stroking her hair, and smiling down into her eyes.

"Especially if it is a good story, or a bit of lovely poetry," she added.

"Yes," he said: "we'll have both those in turn, and some solid reading besides."

"I don't like solid reading," she returned, with a charming pout.

"One may cultivate a taste for it, I think," he answered pleasantly.

"But you can't cultivate what you haven't got," she objected.

"True enough," he said, laughing. "Well, then, we'll try to get a little first, and cultivate it carefully afterward. I must go now, love," he added, releasing her: "the men need some directions from me, in regard to their work."

"And the women some from me," said Zoe. "Oh! you needn't laugh, Ned," shaking her finger at him, as he turned in the doorway to give her an amused glance: "perhaps some of these days you'll

find out that I am really an accomplished housewife, capable of giving orders and directions too."

"No doubt, my dear; for I am already proud of you in that capacity," he said, throwing her a smiling kiss, then hurrying away.

Zoe summoned Aunt Dicey, the housekeeper, gave her orders for the day, and the needed supplies from pantry and storeroom, they went to the sewing-room, to give some directions to Christine and Alma.

She lingered there for a little, trying on a morning-dress they were making for her, then repaired to her boudoir, intent upon beginning her studies, which had been rather neglected of late, in the excitement of the preparations for the departure of the greater part of the family for a winter at Viamede.

But she had scarcely taken out her books, when the sound of wheels on the avenue attracted her attention; and glancing from the window, she saw the Roselands carriage draw up at the front entrance, and Ella Conly alight from it, and run up the veranda steps.

"There, I'll not do much studying to-day, I'm afraid," said Zoe, half aloud; "for, even if it's only a call she has come for, she'll not leave under an hour."

She hastily replaced the books in the drawer from which she had taken them, — for she had a feeling, only half acknowledged even to herself, of repugnance to having Ella know of her studies, — Ella, who had graduated from boarding-school, and evidently felt herself thoroughly educated, — and hurried down to meet and welcome her guest.

"I told Cal and Art, I thought you'd be sure to feel dreadfully lonely to-day, after seeing everybody but Ned start off on a long journey, and so I'd come and spend the day with you," said Ella, when the two had exchanged kisses, and inquiries after each other's health.

"It was very kind and thoughtful in you," returned Zoe, leading the way into the parlor usually occupied by the family, where an open wood fire blazed cheerily on the hearth.

"Take this easy-chair, won't you?" she said, wheeling it a little nearer the grate; "and Dinah shall carry away your wraps when it suits you to doff them. I wish cousins Cal and Art would invite themselves to dine with us too."

"Art's very busy just now," said Ella: "there's a good deal of sickness, and I don't believe he's spent a whole night at home for the last week or more."

"Dear me! I wouldn't be a doctor for any thing, nor a doctor's wife!" exclaimed Zoe.

"Well, I don't know: there's something to be said on both sides of that question," laughed Ella. "I can tell you, Art would make a mighty good husband; and it's very handy, in ease of sickness, to have the doctor in the house."

"Yes; but, according to your account, he's generally somewhere else than in his own house," returned Zoe playfully.

Ella laughed. "Yes," she said, "doctors do have a hard life; but, if you say so to Art, he always says he has never regretted having chosen the medical profession, because it affords so many opportunities for doing good. It's plain he makes that the business of his life. I'm proud of Art. I don't believe there's a better man anywhere. I was sick last summer, and you wouldn't believe how kindly he nursed me."

"You can't tell me any thing about him that I should think too good to believe," said Zoe. "He's our family doctor, you remember; and, of course, we are all attached to him on that account, as well as because of the relationship."

"Yes, to be sure. There, Dinah, you may carry away my hat and cloak," Ella said, divesting herself of them as she spoke, "but leave the satchel. I brought my fancy-work, Zoe: one has to be industrious now, as Christmas is coming. I decided to embroider a pair of slippers for each of my three brothers. Walter does not expect to get home; so I made his first, as they had to travel so far. I'm nearly done with Art's, and then I have Cal's to do."

"Oh, how pretty!" exclaimed Zoe, examining the work: "and that's a new stitch; won't you teach it to me?"

"Yes, indeed, with pleasure. And I want you to teach me how to crochet that lace I saw you making the other day. I thought it so pretty."

The two spent a pleasant morning chatting together over their fancy-work, saying nothing very wise, perhaps, but neither did they say any thing harmful: an innocent jest now and again, something—usually laudatory—about some member of the family connection, and remarks and directions about their work, formed the staple of their talk.

"Oh! how did it come that you and Ned staid behind when all the rest went to Viamede for the winter?" asked Ella.

"Business kept my husband, and love for him and his society kept me," returned Zoe, with a look and smile that altogether belied any suspicion Ella might have had that she was fretting over the disappointment.

"Didn't you want to go?"

"Yes, indeed, if Edward could have gone with me; but any place with him is better than any other without him."

"Well, I don't believe I should have been willing to stay behind, even in your place. I've always had a longing to spend a winter there visiting my sister Isa, and my cousins Elsie and Molly. Cal and Art say, perhaps one or both of them may go on to spend two or three weeks this winter; and in that case I shall go along."

"Perhaps we may go at the same time, and what a nice party we will make!" said Zoe. "There," glancing from the window, "I see my husband coming, and I want to run out and speak to him. Will you excuse me a moment?" and scarcely waiting for a reply, she ran gayly away.

Meeting Edward on the threshold, "I have no lessons to recite this time," she said; "but you are not to scold, because I've been prevented from studying by company. Ella is spending the day with me."

"Ah! I hope you have had a pleasant time together—not too much troubled by fear of a lecture from the old tyrant who bears your lessons," he said laughingly, as he bent his head to press a kiss of ardent affection upon the rosy lips she held up to him.

"No," she laughed in return: "I'm not a bit afraid of him."

Zoe had feared the hours when Edward was unavoidably absent from her side would be very lonely now while the other members of the Ion family were away; but she did not find it so; her studies, and the work of making various pretty things for Christmas gifts, keeping her very busy.

And, when he was with her, time flew on very rapid wings. She had grown quite industrious, and generally plied her needle in the evenings while he read or talked to her. But occasionally he would take the embroidery, or whatever it was, out of her hands, and toss it aside, saying she was trying her eyes by such constant use; and, besides, he wanted her undivided attention.

And she would resign herself to her fate, nothing loath to be drawn close to his side, or to a seat upon his knee, to be petted and caressed like a child, which, indeed, he persisted in calling her.

This was when they were alone: but very frequently they had company to spend the day, afternoon, or evening; for Ion had always been noted for its hospitality; and scarcely a week passed in which they did not pay a visit to the Oaks, the Laurels, the Pines, or Roselands.

Also a brisk correspondence was carried on with the absent members of the family. And Zoe's housekeeping cares and duties were just enough to be an agreeable variety in her occupations: every day, too, when the weather permitted, she walked or rode out with her husband.

And so the time passed quite delightfully for the first two months after the departure of the Viamede party.

It was a disappointment that Edward found himself too busy to make the hoped-for trip to Viamede at Christmas-time; yet Zoe did not fret over it, and really enjoyed the holidays extremely, giving and receiving numerous handsome presents, and, with Edward's assistance, making it a merry and happy time for the servants and other dependants, as well as for the relatives and friends still in the neighborhood.

The necessary shopping, with Edward to help her, and the packing and sending off of the Christmas-boxes to Viamede, to the college-boys,—Herbert and Harold,—and numerous other relatives and friends far and near, Zoe thought altogether the most delightful business she had ever taken in hand.

A very merry, happy little woman she was through all those weeks and months, Edward as devoted as any lover, and as gay and light-hearted as herself.

"Zoe, darling," Edward said one day at dinner, "I must drive over into our little village of Union—by the way, do you know that we have more than a hundred towns of that name in these United States?"

"No, I did not know, or suspect, that we had nearly so many," she interrupted, laughing: "no wonder letters go astray when people are not particular to give the names of both county and State. But what were you going to say about driving over there?"

"I must see a gentleman on business, who will be there to meet the five-o'clock train, and leave on it; and, in order to be certain of seeing him, I must be there at least fifteen or twenty minutes before it is due. Shall I have the pleasure of my wife's company in the carriage? I have ordered it to be at the door by fifteen or twenty minutes past four, which will give us plenty of time, as it is an easy matter to drive from here to Union in ten minutes."

"Thank you," she said. "I accept the invitation with pleasure, and promise to be ready at the minute."

"You are the best little woman about that," he returned, with an appreciative look and smile. "I don't remember that you have ever yet kept me waiting, when told beforehand at what time I intended to start."

"Of course not," she said, with a pleased laugh; "because I was afraid, if I did, I shouldn't be invited so often: and I'm always so glad to go with you."

"Not gladder than I am to have you," he said, with a very lover-like glance and smile. "I always enjoy your society, and am always proud to show my friends and acquaintances what a dear little wife

I have. I dare say I'm looked upon as a very fortunate fellow in that respect, and sometimes envied on account of having drawn such a prize in the matrimonial lottery."

They had left the table while he spoke, and with the last words he passed his arm round her waist.

"Dear me, Ned, what a gallant speech!" she said, flushing with delight; "you deserve a reward:" and she held up her face for a kiss.

"I am overpaid," he said, when he had bestowed it.

"In spite of the coin being such as you have a right to help yourself to whenever you will?" she returned with a merry laugh. "O Ned, my lover-husband!" she added, laying her head on his breast, "I am so happy in belonging to you, and I can never love you enough for all your goodness to me!"

"Darling, are you not equally good and loving to me?" he asked in tender tones, and holding her close.

"But I owe every thing to you," she responded with emotion. "If you had not come to my aid when my dear father was taken from me, what would have become of me, a mere child, without a near relative in the world, alone and destitute in a foreign land?"

"But I loved you, dearest. I sought my own happiness, as well as yours, in asking you to be my wife. So you need never feel burdened by the idea that you are under any special obligation to me, to whom you are the very sunshine of life."

"Dear Ned, how very kind in you to say so," she responded, gazing with ardent affection into his eyes; "but it isn't burdensome to be under obligation to you, any more than it is a trial to be ruled by you," she added, with playful tenderness; "and I love to think of all your goodness to me."

It was five minutes past four by Zoe's watch, and she just about to go to her dressing-room to put on her hat and cloak, when visitors were announced, — some ladies who always made a lengthened call at Ion; so she at once resigned herself to the loss of her anticipated drive with her husband.

"O Ned!" she whispered in a hasty, vexed aside, "you'll have to go alone."

"Yes, dear," he returned; "but I'll try to get back in time to take you a drive in the other direction."

They stepped forward, and greeted their guests with hospitable cordiality.

They were friends whose visits were prized and enjoyed, though their coming just at this time was causing Zoe a real disappointment. However, Edward's promise of a drive with him at a later hour so far made amends for it, that she could truthfully express pleasure in seeing her guests.

Edward chatted with them for a few moments, then, excusing himself on the plea of business that could not be deferred, left them to be entertained by Zoe, while he entered his waiting carriage, and went on his way to the village, where he expected to meet his business acquaintance.

CHAPTER II.

"The truth you speak doth lack some gentleness."—
SHAKSPEARE.

Edward had met and held his desired interview with his business acquaintance, seen him aboard his train, and was standing watching it as it steamed away and disappeared in the distance, when a feminine voice, close at hand, suddenly accosted him.

"O Mr. Travilla! how are you? I consider myself very fortunate in finding you here."

He turned toward the speaker, and was not too greatly pleased at sight of her.

"Ah! good-evening, Miss Deane," he said, taking her offered hand, and speaking with gentlemanly courtesy. "In what can I be of service to you?"

"By inviting me to Ion to spend the night," she returned laughingly. "I've missed my train, and was quite in despair at the thought of staying alone over night in one of the miserable little hotels of this miserable little village. So I was delighted to see your carriage standing there, and you yourself beside it; for, knowing you to be one of the most hospitable of men, I am sure you will be moved to pity, and take me home with you."

Edward's heart sank at thought of Zoe, but, seeing no way out of the dilemma, "Certainly," he said, and helped his self-invited guest to a seat in his carriage, placed himself by her side, and bade the coachman drive on to Ion.

"Now, really, this is very good in you, Mr. Travilla," remarked Miss Deane: "there is no place I like better to visit than Ion, and I begin to think it was rather a fortunate mishap—missing my train."

"Very unfortunate for me, I fear," sighed Edward to himself. "The loss of her drive will be a great disappointment to Zoe, and the sight

of such a guest far from making it up to her. I am thankful the visit is to be for only a night."

Aloud he said, "I fear you will find it less pleasant than on former occasions,—in fact, rather lonely; as all the family are absent—spending the winter at Viamede, my mother's Louisiana plantation—except my wife and myself."

"Ah! but your wife is a charming little girl,—I never can think of her as a woman, you know,—and you are a host in yourself," returned the lady laughingly.

Zoe's callers had left; and she, having donned hat and cloak, not to keep her husband a single moment, was at the window watching for his coming, when the carriage came driving up the avenue, and drew up at the door.

She hurried out, expecting to find no one there but himself, and to be at once handed to a seat in the vehicle, and the next minute be speeding away with him, enjoying her drive all the more for the little disappointment that had preceded it.

What, then, was her chagrin to see a visitor handed out, and that visitor the woman for whom she had conceived the most violent antipathy!

"Miss Deane, my dear," Edward said, with an entreating look at Zoe, which she did not see, her eyes being at that instant fixed upon the face of her uninvited and unwelcome guest.

"How do you do, my dear Mrs. Travilla? I hope you are glad to see me?" laughed the intruder, holding out a delicately gloved hand, "your husband has played the Good Samaritan to me to-night—saving me from having to stay in one of those wretched little hotels in the village till two o'clock to-morrow morning."

"I am in usual health, thank you. Will you walk in?" returned Zoe in a freezing tone, and utterly ignoring the offered hand. "Will you step into the parlor? or would you prefer being shown to your room first?"

"The latter, if you please," Miss Deane answered sweetly, apparently quite unaware that Zoe's manner was in the least ungracious.

"Dinah," said Zoe, to a maid-in-waiting, "show Miss Deane to the room she occupied on her last visit. Carry up her satchel, and see that she has every thing she wants."

Having given the order, Zoe stepped out to the veranda where Edward still was, having staid behind to give directions in regard to the horses.

"Zoe, love, I am very sorry," he said, as the man turned his horses' heads, and drove away toward the stables.

"O Edward! how could you?" she exclaimed reproachfully, tears of disappointment and vexation springing to her eyes.

"Darling, I really could not help it," he replied soothingly, drawing her to him with a caress, and went on to tell exactly what had occurred.

"She is not a real lady," said Zoe, "or she never would have done a thing like that."

"I agree with you, love," he said; "but I was sorry your reception of her was so extremely ungracious and cold."

"Would you have had me play the hypocrite, Ned?" she asked indignantly.

"No, Zoe, I should be very far from approving of that," he answered gravely: "but while it was right and truthful not to express pleasure which you did not feel, at her coming, you might, on the other hand, have avoided absolute rudeness; you might have shaken hands with her, and asked after her health and that of her father's family."

"I treated her as well as she deserved; and it does not make her any the more welcome to me, that she has already been the means of drawing down upon me a reproof from my husband's lips," Zoe said in tremulous tones, and turning away from him with her eyes full of tears.

"My words were hardly intended as that, little wife," Edward responded in a kindly tone, following her into the hall, catching her in his arms, and imprinting a kiss on her ruby lips.

"And I wanted my drive with you so badly," she murmured, half hiding her face on his breast; "but she has robbed us of that, and—O Ned! is she to come between us again, and make us quarrel, and be so dreadfully unhappy?" Her voice was full of tears and sobs before she had ended.

"No, no; I could not endure that any more than you," he said with emotion, and clasping her very close: "and it is only for to-night you will have to bear the annoyance of her presence; she is to leave in the morning."

"Is she? that is some comfort. I hope somebody will come in for the evening, and share with us the infliction of her society," Zoe said, concluding with a forlorn attempt at a laugh.

"Won't you take off that very becoming hat and cloak, Mrs. Travilla, and spend the evening?" asked Edward playfully.

"Thank you. I believe I will, if you will accompany me to the dressing-room," she returned, with a smiling look up into his face.

"That I will with pleasure," he said, "provided you will reward me with some assistance with my toilet."

"Such as brushing your hair, and tying your cravat? Yes, sir, I will: it's a bargain."

And so, laughing and chatting, they went up to their own private apartments.

Halt an hour later they came down again together, to find Miss Deane in the parlor, seated by a window overlooking the avenue.

"There's a carriage just drawing up before your front entrance," she remarked: "the Roselands family carriage, I think it is."

Zoe gave her husband a bright, pleased look. It seemed her wish for an addition to their party for the evening had been granted.

The next moment the room-door was thrown, open, and Dr. Conly and Miss Ella were announced.

They were cordially welcomed, asked to tea, and staid the evening, greatly relieving Zoe in the matter of entertaining her unwell-

come guest, who devoted herself to the doctor, and left Edward to his wife and cousin, a condition of things decidedly agreeable to Zoe.

A little after nine the Roselands carriage was announced; and the doctor and Ella took their departure, Edward and Zoe accompanying them to the outer door.

The sky was black with clouds, and the wind roaring through the trees on the lawn.

"We are going to have a heavy storm. I think," remarked Arthur, glancing upward: "there is not a star to be seen, and the wind blows almost a gale. I hope no patient of mine will want the doctor very badly to-night," he added with a slight laugh. "Step in out of the wind, cousin Zoe, or you may be the very one to send for me."

Doing as directed, "No, indeed," she said: "I'm sure I couldn't have the heart to call anybody up out of a warm bed to face such a cutting wind as this."

"No, no; never hesitate when there is a real necessity," he returned, speaking from his seat in the carriage, where he had already taken his place beside his sister, whom Edward had handed in. "Good-night, and hurry in, both of you, for my sake if not for your own."

But they lingered a moment till the carriage turned, and drove swiftly down the avenue.

"I am so glad they came," remarked Zoe, as Edward shut the door and locked it for the night.

"Yes," he said: "they added a good deal to the pleasure of the evening. As we couldn't be alone together, three guests were more acceptable than one."

"Decidedly; and that one was delighted, I'm sure, to have an opportunity to exercise her conversational gifts for the benefit of a single man instead of a married one."

"Zoe, love, don't allow yourself to grow bitter and sarcastic," Edward said, turning toward her, laying a hand lightly, affectionately, upon her shoulder, and gazing down into her eyes with a look of grave concern.

She colored under it, and turned away with a pout that almost spoiled the beauty of her fair face. She was more than ever impatient to be rid of their self-invited guest.

"She always sets Ned to scolding me," was the bitter thought in her heart as she went slowly back to the parlor, where they had left Miss Deane, Edward following, sighing inwardly at the change in his darling always wrought by that unwelcome presence in the house.

"How the wind roars down the chimney!" Miss Deane remarked as her host and hostess re-entered the room, where she was comfortably seated in an easy-chair beside the glowing grate. "I fear tomorrow will prove a stormy day; but in that case I shall feel all the more delighted with my comfortable quarters here,—all the more grateful to you, Mr. Travilla, for saving me from a long detention in one of those miserable little country taverns, where I should have died of *ennui*."

"You seem kindly disposed, my dear madam, to make a great deal of a small service," returned Edward gallantly.

But Zoe said not a word. She stood gazing into the fire, apparently lost in thought; but the color deepened on her cheek, and a slight frown contracted her brows.

Presently she turned to her guest, saying courteously, "You must be weary with your journey, Miss Deane: would you like to retire?"

"Thank you, I should," was the reply; and thereupon the good-nights were said, and they sought their respective rooms.

"You are not displeased with me, dear?" Zoe asked, lifting her eyes inquiringly to her husband's face as she stood before their dressing-room fire with his arm about her waist: "you are looking so very grave."

"No, dearest, I am not disposed to find fault with you," he said, softly caressing her hair and cheek with his disengaged hand; "though I should be glad if you could be a trifle more cordial to our uninvited guest."

"It's my nature to act just as I feel; and, if there's a creature on earth I thoroughly detest, it is she!" returned the child-wife with