

‘The Two Sisters’

Mr Westmore was a wealthy merchant of the city of London. He had entered upon life as the son of indigent parents, and had raised the foundations of his fortune solely upon the basis formed by his own industry. He did not marry until he had arrived at an advanced age; and this union was blessed with two daughters, whom he called Emmeline and Rosa. He however lost his much-loved wife shortly after the birth of Rosa, and thus found himself peculiarly placed with regard to the delicate task of rearing the two gentle buds which had emanated from the parent stem that was no more.

Emmeline and Rosa were two of the most beautiful and accomplished girls in the English metropolis, at the period when the former became attached to an individual, whose attentions to the young lady were not approved by the careful father. At the epoch alluded to Emmeline was about eighteen years of age, and Rosa was sixteen. The beauty of the former was calculated to dazzle with its splendour: the charms of the latter fascinated by their bashfulness and reserve.

The old merchant was proud, as well he might be, of his two daughters; and he had formed high and exalted hopes relative to the matrimonial alliances which he was anxious that they should contract.

It was therefore with feelings of sorrow and disappointment that he perceived the attachment that had grown up between Emmeline and a young man of the name of Percy, – an attachment which Mr Westmore only discovered by one of those occasions which are afforded through the carelessness of lovers. One evening, while Edgar Percy was at the merchant’s house, Emmeline was requested to sing; and while Edgar conducted her to the piano the young lovers exchanged glances of affection, – but glances so expressive, that the father, who was observing them at the moment, instantly comprehended their meaning.

On the following morning, Mr Westmore addressed Emmeline upon the delicate subject; and the open-hearted girl fell at her father’s feet, and confessed her sincere – her devoted – her unchangeable affection for Edgar Percy. In vain did Mr Westmore urge, as arguments against the possibility of such an alliance, the facts of Percy’s poverty, and the rumour that he was wild and addicted to habits of dissipation, amongst which gaming was the most prominent; Emmeline declared that her happiness depended upon her union with Edgar, and vowed that she would never love another than him. The father acted with injudicious and dangerous precipitation: he ordered his daughter to renounce all ideas of being allied to him she loved; and he then wrote a note to Percy, politely to interdict his future visits to the house.

Every female is naturally self-willed and impatient of contradictions; and this impolitic line of conduct on the part of the father was the one most calculated to urge the daughter to disobedience. She soon consented to receive a note from her lover – then, after a little hesitation,

to answer it; and at length she maintained regular correspondence with him. The lover soon requested an interview; and this favour, after a little more repugnance, was likewise granted.

Percy had an aunt, who encouraged her nephew to persist in paying his addresses to Emmeline Westmore, because the designing woman saw in a marriage with the merchant's daughter the aggrandizement of her own family.

The lovers accordingly met at her house; and there did Emmeline, unknown to either her father or her sister, plight her vows and receive the troth of Edgar Percy. But those were not sanctified by the priest; and yet the misguided – the unprotected Emmeline, in an unguarded moment when she was not mistress of her affections, surrendered her honour to him on whom she so fondly relied.

Time passed away, – week followed week: and month succeeded month; and the two lovers continued to meet, so often as Emmeline could steal from home, at the house of the wily aunt. At length Emmeline could not conceal from herself the appalling fact that she was in a way to become a mother; and she resolved upon throwing herself at the feet of her father, confessing her weakness, and imploring his consent to a union which could alone save her fair fame from ruin. Alas ! She had misconstrued the mind of her only surviving parent; and she foresaw not that the revelation she had to make to him would only irritate him the more violently against him whom he would consider the 'author of her disgrace'. Mr Westmore was a man who imagined that the felicity of his daughters was only to be secured by the splendid alliances which he hoped they would contract; and he was not inclined to listen to tales of love and disinterested attachment.

'My dearest father,' said Emmeline, on the morning when she had made up her mind to confess her fault to her parent, whom she found in his private office, – 'my dearest father, I ask your pardon for interrupting you in the midst of your business, but I have a matter of the greatest importance to consult you upon.'

'Speak, Emmeline,' returned the merchant, fondly patting his daughter's cheek, as she seated herself on a chair near to the high stool on which he was placed.

'Alas ! My dear father,' continued the poor girl, 'I am afraid that you will not regard me with that kindness of manner, when I have unburdened my mind to you without reserve.'

'What !' ejaculated the merchant, his brow contracting: 'is it relative to that love ... that foolish attachment which I fancied had long ago subsided – that you would now speak to me ?'

'Would that the subject were of no graver import !' cried Emmeline, clasping her hands together. 'O my dear father, how can I ever look you in the face ?'

'Emmeline, you alarm me,' said the old man. 'You surely cannot have been foolish enough to have seen this youth again ?'

‘I have seen him, my dear father –once – twice, – very, very often,’ cried Emmeline earnestly.

‘That was wrong – foolish in the extreme,’ said Mr Westmore in a severe tone: ‘but you have not made him any rash promise – you have not admitted to him that you love him in return – that –’

‘All *that* have I done, father,’ ejaculated Emmeline; ‘and much more ! And now – spurn me away from you – despise me – cast me off, – but do not upbraid me !’ and as she uttered these words, she threw herself upon her knees at the feet of the parent to whom she was compelled to avow her frailty.

‘Unhappy girl, what do you mean ?’ demanded the father, his anxiety now excited to a painful degree.

‘I mean, my dear father,’ answered Emmeline, burying her face in her hands, – ‘I mean that if Edgar were here, he would fall at your feet beside your daughter, and implore your pardon in the name of the child which that daughter bears in her bosom !’

‘No – no – it is impossible !’ ejaculated the old man, his countenance becoming ashy pale, and his whole frame trembling with anxiety.

‘It is true – too true !’ cried Emmeline: and a long pause ensued, the silence being only interrupted by the sobs of the wretched girl.

Suddenly the old man started up, and seizing his daughter’s wrist, he raised her forcibly from the ground.

‘Emmeline,’ said he, in a low and hoarse tone; ‘do you know that your poor father will expire in a mad-house unless you consent to follow the path which he shall now point out for you to pursue ?’

‘Speak – speak: I swear to do your will ! I have sinned – I have been disobedient, – and I can bear the penalty.’

‘This circumstance must be religiously concealed from the world: measures to that effect shall be immediately adopted.’

‘The most effectual one is to consent to my union with him who will give a name to my child,’ said Emmeline.

‘Daughter,’ cried Mr Westmore, in an accent of despair, ‘did I not say that you would drive me to a mad-house ? Listen to the sad tale which I have to relate to you !’

‘You, my dear father;’ exclaimed Emmeline, anxiously.

‘Yes – I !’ answered the old man, striking his desk forcibly with his hand. ‘Alas ! That I should be compelled to unfold the ruin of my fortunes to the child for whom, with her sister, I heaped them up.’

‘You, my father – ruined !’ almost screamed Emmeline, while her countenance was distorted with an expression of horror.

‘Ruined !’ repeated the old man, grinding his teeth, and tearing his white hair: ‘ruined – ruined ! A luckless speculation, by which I fondly hoped to double my capital, has ruined me; and you alone can save my credit, and retrieve my fortunes !’.

‘I !’ exclaimed Emmeline, her anxiety and grief now suddenly turning to surprize.

‘Yes, Emmeline,’ reiterated Mr Westmore, – ‘you alone can save me ! You know that James Campbell, the only son of the wealthiest merchant in the city, has long sought your hand – that he loves you – that the settlement he will make upon you is munificent in the extreme. His father will prove my largest creditor, in the re-action consequent upon the failure of my speculation, and I have already promised his son the hand of my daughter Emmeline.’

‘Impossible !’ exclaimed Emmeline; ‘Oh ! No – you could not permit me to put so gross a cheat upon a generous and confiding man ?’

‘The mad-house, then, will be my fate !’ cried the old merchant; ‘I see that my presentiment will be fulfilled.’

‘Father,’ said Emmeline, after a long pause, during which she had braced her mind up to a tone of unnatural firmness, – ‘command me, – I will obey you.’

‘Thanks, dearest daughter – a thousand thanks,’ ejaculated the old man; ‘hope still beams upon me !’

At that moment the door of the office slowly opened, and Rosa, with her cheek ashy pale, and scarcely able to drag herself along, so agitated was her mind, entered the room. She hastened to throw herself into her sister’s arms, and then fell at her father’s feet, exclaiming, ‘Pardon, dear father –pardon, dearest sister, – but I have overheard all !’

‘You !’ cried Emmeline and Mr Westmore simultaneously.

‘Yes – I,’ answered Rosa. ‘I saw my sister seek the office in a timid and anxious manner – I observed that her bosom was oppressed with some secret grief – and I felt jealous that any one should know the source of her affliction before the sister who loves her so tenderly. I stole down to the door – I listened – I heard a few words – and from that moment till now I have been unable

to tear myself away from the spot, so thrilling, so absorbing was the interest which I naturally felt in the communications you have just now made to each other.’

‘I am rejoiced at an indiscretion on your part, Rosa,’ said Mr Westmore, ‘which has thus saved us both the pain of revealing to you circumstances which neither of us could long keep concealed. You will now demonstrate your affections to your father and your sister – ’

‘I will sacrifice myself for both !’ ejaculated Rosa, as if her mind were made up to act in a certain manner, the precise nature of which neither her sister or father could comprehend. ‘Yes,’ she continued, seeing that they waited an explanation of her remark, – ‘I will sacrifice myself to save the honour of my sister, and to place her in a position to espouse the individual whose wealth will re-institute the fortunes of my father.’

Will man believe the full extent, to which the love and affection of this heroic girl carried her, in order to fulfil the promise which she had made ? But let the continuation of the thread of the tale, develop the noble sacrifice made by this most generous of the female sex !

Mr Westmore’s first care was to call upon Edgar Percy’s aunt, assure her that her nephew should never espouse his daughter, and offer to purchase him a commission in a regiment stationed in India, as the condition of his immediate renunciation of all pretensions to her hand. Edgar, who loved Emmeline with a purely disinterested passion, refused to comply with the proposal; but when the old man produced a counterpart of his own wish, written and signed by Emmeline, the young man resisted no longer. He cursed the faithlessness of women, accepted the post obtained for him by Mr Westmore, and sailed for India, without a hope to console his love-lorn heart.

Mr Westmore then signified to James Campbell the assent of Emmeline to become his wife. He however demanded, on the part of his daughter, a year’s delay ere the celebration of the bridal, supporting his request upon an alleged wish expressed by his deceased wife that neither of the children should marry previous to the attainment of a certain age. Marriage settlements and contracts were however signed; and by the aid of Campbell’s resources, the old merchant was enabled to retrieve the fortunes of his house.

Some weeks passed away, and it was at length rumoured that Rosa – the merchant’s younger daughter – had suddenly disappeared from the house. The friends of the family were disconsolate at these tidings; and in a few days it was whispered amongst them that the unfortunate girl had been seduced by a designing villain, who had induced her to fly with him to Scotland, where he had abandoned her. Mr Westmore and Emmeline immediately set off, as it was reported, in quest of the fugitive Rosa; and at the expiration of a fortnight the merchant’s nearest relative in London received a letter, stating that he would not return to town with his daughter, until the remembrance of Rosa’s disgrace had partially died away.

The family took a small cottage in a secluded part of Scotland, and there was Emmeline delivered of a daughter, upon whom the name of Rosalie was bestowed. As soon as Emmeline was sufficiently recovered to endure the fatigues of travelling, she returned to London with her father; and a rumour was then set afloat among their friends and acquaintances that Rosa – the unfortunate Rosa – possessed a living evidence of her frailty. It is now easy to comprehend all the generosity and the sacrifice made to the honour of her sister and the welfare of her father, by that noble girl, – a sacrifice unparalleled in the annals of the history of woman !

A small cottage was hired at Twickenham; and thither, at the expiration of a few months after the period of her supposed *accouchement*, did Rosa proceed, bearing the innocent Rosalie in her arms. Rosa resigned reputation and society, and devoted herself to the little being whom she had made her charge. She often received visits from her father and sister: but all her old acquaintances and playmates of her youthful days abandoned her, who was known as the `erring girl`. A suspicion that she was the victim of a base seducer, or else a rumour to that effect, produced similar results in the neighbourhood where the poor creature resided: no one called upon her – no one visited her; and she was shunned and avoided for a frailty of which she never was guilty !

The year passed away, and Emmeline became the wife of James Campbell. Her father retried his fortunes, and, by a successful speculation founded upon the capital brought into his family by his elder daughter's husband, he acquired possessions more colossal than those which he had previously lost. In the course of three or four years after the union of Emmeline with Mr Campbell, the old merchant died, and left the bulk of his property to his son-in-law.

Emmeline has invariably been deeply grateful to her sister Rosa; and as she has no children by her marriage, she frequently makes that circumstance the excuse for having the little Rosalie for hours and days together at her own mansion in London. But Rosa doats upon the child as if she were really its mother; and the sweet disposition, and beautiful countenance of Rosalie, as she grows up, only endear her the more to the being whom she has always been taught to look up to as her mother.