

As he uttered these words, Sir Henry Cathcart (for such was the name of the last speaker,) stepped gracefully forward to a chair, where reclined the person of a lady apparently about fifty, adorned in a style of profuse magnificence, harmonizing with her portly and massive figure.

The dialogue which we have just been narrating, took place between two individuals as opposite in their characters as they were in personal appearance. Vivian De l'Orme was a young man of French extraction, about twenty-two years of age, with a cast of countenance decidedly foreign, joined to a person of diminutive stature; he had for a considerable period been the most intimate friend of Sir Henry, and although a man of very confined intellect, yet nevertheless was endued with that spurious sort of understanding denominated *cunning*, which is frequently found to be of more use in an *abstract* sense to the possessor, than those stores of original ability and erudition that are so rarely to be encountered in this every-day world. Sir Henry Cathcart was his junior, having just attained his majority; and, by the death of both his parents at a much earlier age, was now the sole inheritor of a handsome fortune and estate. His figure offered a strange contrast to that of his companion, being tall, majestic, and commanding, whilst his character was frank, open, and generous. In short he was what the world would term a fine-looking young man, possessing all the appearance of an aristocratic descent, possessing all that absence of hauteur so peculiarly the attribute of the *true* gentleman.

Lady Featherfield, the lady to whom he was now advancing, must certainly have once been beautiful, if beauty is ever consonant with a style of face which presents us features upon which we can dwell with pleasure, but no expression on which the imagination can hang with rapture, resembling in a remarkable degree some splendid structure wherein fashion is wont to dwell, and which we acknowledge to be well formed and accurately designed, but notwithstanding all its ornamental pillars and decorative balconies, insufficient to attract more than a mere passing and unadmiring gaze.

"I would not ask my friend De l'Orme," commenced the young baronet, "I would not ask him to present me to your ladyship, for when I mention my name I flatter myself you will not consider me in the light of a stranger—Henry Cathcart."

The eyes of the gorgeous widow were turned for an instant upon the fine intellectual countenance of the speaker, as if reflecting where they had before met. Suddenly she appeared to recollect the features, and exclaimed, "Ah, Sir Henry, I'm delighted to see you.—Why, what a height you have grown to; it is near six years since I have seen you, that really I had nigh forgotten you. Dear me what an alteration a few years does make at your age." There was a decided emphasis on your, and smiling complacently as she bethought herself of the comeliness of her own person, awaited his reply.

"Pray, Lady Featherfield," said Sir Henry abruptly, (impatient of farther delay,) did I hear aright, that that beautiful young creature yonder is your niece?"

"Yes; that is my sister's child—she is rather pretty, certainly. Not my style of beauty, though; but still she is attractive amongst some men!" As she spoke she beckoned the object of Sir Henry's inquiries towards her, and taking her hand, said, "This is Sir Henry Cathcart, my dear, who has been pleased to pass some very flattering encomiums upon you, and of whose approbation you ought to be proud, for I hear that he is a connoisseur.—Do you admire tall or little women most, Sir Henry?" added or interrogated the baroness parenthetically to Cathcart.

"I admire both," was the gallant and ready answer; for her ladyship was full five feet nine, and Matilda scarcely above the ordinary size of her sex. (A size which, *en passant* in the present day appears degenerating into lilliputianism.)

"But which most?" retorted her ladyship; "for all men have their tastes."

"Upon my honour, Lady Featherfield, wherever beauty is, I gaze and admire, without thinking on its peculiar merits or order; if I may use an architectural term," replied Cathcart. "Who could say that St. Paul's is not equal to Westminster Abbey? Indeed I acknowledge it to be the grandest; but I prefer the latter individually." Thus dexterously obviating the necessity of offending the aunt, and delicately insinuating his intense admiration of the niece. As a more than adequate counterpoise, Sir Henry applied himself to the pleasing task of eliciting the mental powers of Matilda Saville by a not affected display of his own accomplishments and sentiments. He found her intelligent, amiable, and confiding, but slightly imbued with a taste for the romantic and sentimental.