

dishments, would have done under the circumstances. I promised I would be present at the appointed hour; but if I took any at all it must be one of the most subordinate parts—even this I felt was a fearfully rash promise for me to give—and I must again disabuse her of any illusion she might be under, that I possessed any musical capacities, for I really had none.

'Ah no,' she said, 'Mr. Hastings cannot convince me of that. The naturally soft tones of his voice, when speaking, forbade the idea that he had no voice for singing.'

I blushed deeply at this compliment, which I knew to be so totally unmerited. But who of us can be insensible to flattery, especially when it comes from the lips of a young, beautiful and charming woman; certainly not I—not even while I felt myself to be so thoroughly undeserving of it—our self-pride—and who is without a touch of it?—is gratified, and that is sufficient. So I again repeated my promise that I would come and contribute my humble share to the general entertainment, and I was then suffered to depart in quest of Helen.

I found her alone in the library. She was writing at a small table in one corner, and as the morning's sun flooded the cosy little apartment with his warm and golden effulgence, I thought that never before had she appeared more beautiful, so like the Helen of old, as on this glorious summer morning. Her every motion had always been the embodiment of grace, ease, and quiet dignity; and now, although engaged in one of the most ordinary of occupations, her head slightly inclined over the paper upon which her eyes were intent, and resting lightly on her left hand, supported by her elbow, I thought her the very personification of grace itself. I was treading upon dangerous ground, and I knew it; but I could no more have contended with the emotions which she at that moment inspired me than could one of her fabled victims of old

have withstood the wiles of the Siren.

She looked up with one of her old smiles, and said,

'I am writing to Alice Lea; you of course remember her.'

'Oh yes,' I replied, seating myself at a window, the furthest from her; 'I remember her well. But it is so long ago since I have seen her, that I doubt if I should know her now.'

'I hardly think you would,' said Helen, 'she has altered so greatly. She is as handsome as ever, though, and just as full of fun. And she is like myself (with a most becoming blush), still a spinster.'

'That is certainly, to the great discredit of some one,' I observed with a laugh.

'Whom do you mean,' said Helen with a roguish twinkle of the eye, 'Alice or myself?'

'Why, I—I mean Alice,' I stammered, blushing to the very roots of my hair. But fearing this reply might seem somewhat impolite, I added, with as gallant an air as I could assume; 'of course I intended to include Miss Mowbray.'

'How polite you have grown,' she laughed. 'You used to call me Helen.'

I never yet did pay, or try to pay, a compliment, or to say what by a violent stretch of courtesy might be called a gallant thing to the fair sex, without immediately falling into such a state of embarrassment, that I heartily wished the words unsaid. The polite things I had said to the supposed Miss Morley were uttered under the most exceptional circumstances, when I was responsible neither for my words nor my actions.

Helen's last remark rather added to my embarrassment, but I managed to reply with a laugh:

'Oh yes; but that was very long ago.'

'But not so long ago that I make it an excuse to call you, Mr. Hastings,' she remarked with a smile.

The charming ease and old time heartiness of Helen's manner were not