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"THEY ARE SO ENGROSSED WITH ONE ANOTHER THAT FOR THE MOMENT THEY DO NOT PERCEIVE HER."

"NO INTENTIONS."

BY FLORENCE MARRIAT.

Author of "Love's Conflict," "Veronique," etc.

CHAPTER IX.

"Lord Muiraven, my love—friend of our new member, staying with Sir John Coot—desires an introduction to you," continues Colonel Mordaunt, in explanation, as he perceives that his wife and her new acquaintance both look awkward, and neither smile at nor address each other, as is usual under similar circumstances. But Irene's head is swimming, and all power of action, or of acting, has deserted her.

She tries to smile, but the effort dies away in a sickly flicker about the corners of her mouth.

She tries to speak, but no sound issues from her trembling lips except a nervous cough. She hears the words her husband utters, but her mind is rendered incapable of understanding them.

For in the first shock of this most unexpected meeting, she remembers nothing, except that Eric Keir is there, and that he is Eric Keir. She forgets the reputed insult cast on her affections; the irreparable injury wrought poor Myra; her mother's misery; the orphanhood of her adopted child; forgets the silence, heartlessness, and shame that intervenes between them and their last meeting; and remembers only that the friend—the lover—from whose presence she has been exiled for two weary years has come back to her again.

Muiraven thinks no more than she does—the rencontre falls on him with quite as great a shock as it has done on her—but feeling that he must say something, he stammers forth mechanically the first words that come to his assistance:

"May I have the pleasure of this waltz with you?"

"Most happy!" rising from her seat.

"Going to dance together!" exclaimed Colonel Mordaunt, with unfeigned surprise and a good-tempered laugh; "well, this beats everything! You come out, Irene, under a vow not to stir from this sofa all the evening; and when, after considerable trouble, I find some one with similar tastes to sit by and talk to you (I have offered to introduce Lord Muiraven to all the prettiest girls in succession, but he refused my good offices), the first thing I hear is that you're going to spin round the room like a couple of teetotums!"

"Not if you do not wish it, Philip," says Irene, drawing back, and already repenting of her bewildered acquiescence.

"My dear child, what nonsense! I like nothing better than to see you enjoy yourself. And I think Lord Muiraven pays me a great

compliment in choosing my wife for a partner, when he has refused every one else. An old married woman like you, Irene—why, you should feel quite proud!"

"It is I," says Muiraven, looking steadily away from Irene and into the face of her husband, "it is I who have reason to feel proud at Mrs.—Mrs.—Mordaunt's gracious acceptance of me as a partner."

"Oh, very well! settle it between yourselves, my lord. For my part I must be off to find some less fastidious gentlemen to accept the honors you declined. No sinecure being master of the ceremonies, I can tell you. It's the first time I ever accepted such a responsibility, and I'll take good care it shall be the last. It is fortunate that I have not more of the ruder sex upon my hands, with your idiosyncrasies, my lord!"

"You shall have no further cause to complain of me," replies Muiraven, with an uneasy laugh, as the Colonel leaves them; "I will be as tractable as a lamb from this moment." And then the wretched victims are left alone in the crowd standing opposite each other, and neither daring to lift a glance from off the floor.

"Trois-temps, or deux-temps?" inquires Muiraven, in a low voice, as he puts his arm round her waist.

"Whichever you please."

"It must be as you like."

"Trois-temps, then."

The dance has been going on for some minutes, and they start at once. But by this time Irene's mind has recovered its balance, and enables her to realize the position in which her sudden nervousness has placed her. Clearly and forcibly she recalls with whom she is whirling about in such familiar contiguity; whose arm is firmly clasped about her waist; whose hand holds hers;—and with the recovered powers of judgment comes the recollection of that cruel day in Brook Street, when the scent of the stock and mignonette and the strains of the "Blue

