

She was too weak as yet to care to take any trouble for her own benefit or pleasure; but he took it for her. It was from his hand she first became aware that she could still derive enjoyment from the blessings which Heaven provides equally for its children; his protection and tenderness sheltered all her married life; and if her love is Muiraven's, her gratitude is alone due to her husband. The first feeling makes her shudder even to look back upon—so fraught is it with pain, and heart-burning, and misery; but the second (save for the last sad episode, which Irene attributes more to her own fault than his) provokes no thoughts but such as are associated with peace. Because we have been racked with anguish and delirious with pain, are we to turn against the kind hand that is stretched forth to tend and succor us?

There is no greater mistake in the world than to suppose that a man or woman can only love once; though, luckily, the foolish supposition is chiefly confined to establishments for young ladies, and three-legged stools. We may never love again so ardently as we did at first (though that possibility is an open question); but we may love, and love worthily, half a dozen times, if Heaven is good enough to give us the opportunity; and there are some natures that *must* love, and will go on loving to the end of the chapter. They resemble those plants that only require the topmost shoots to be taken off to make them sprout out again at the bottom. And Irene has never resisted the promptings of youth and Nature to make the most of the happiness the world afforded her. She has not, like some people, sat down in the dark with her lacerated love in her lap, and dared her grief to die by tearing open its wounds as quickly as they closed. On the contrary, her first wild burst of sorrow over, she placed it far behind her, and went out gladly to meet returning sunshine, and thanked God that she retained the power to appreciate it. If she has not enjoyed any vehement transports of delight therefore, during her communion with Philip Mordaunt, she has acknowledged that his affection mitigated her regret; her heart has expanded beneath the influence of his devotion, she has known peace and quiet, and contentment; and she misses it all terribly now that it is gone. She feels that she is once more thrown on the world as she was by her mother's death—unloved, unguarded, and alone—and her sorrow is as genuine and honest as was her affection.

Colonel Mordaunt was lucky enough not to possess many relations, but two or three needy

cousins, hitherto unheard of, crop up during the next few days, in hopes of finding their names mentioned in the will, and the lawyer, all bustle and importance, with the precious document stowed away in his deed-box, comes down the day before the funeral and disgusts Oliver Ralston with his loquacity and pertinacious attempts at confidence.

"You know nothing of this, sir," he says, slapping the roll of parchment which he carries in his hand. "You were not in your late uncle's—yes—yes—of course, *uncle's*—secrets? Well, then, I flatter myself, sir, I have a surprise for you. If I'm not mistaken, Mr. Ralston, I have a little surprise here for every one connected with my late client."

"If you have, I have no desire to anticipate it, Mr. Carter. I don't like surprises at any time, and I consider them particularly out of place at a period like this."

"Ah—good, generous, of course—an admirable sentiment, sir; but these things are not in our hands. Had you any reason to suppose, now, that your late lamented er—er—uncle designed to alter his testamentary bequests in favor of—"

"Mr. Carter," exclaims the young man, abruptly, "I have already told you that I can wait till to-morrow to learn my uncle's last wishes, and I consider your attempt to provoke my curiosity a most irregular proceeding. You were of necessity in Colonel Mordaunt's confidence; be good enough to respect it until the proper moment arrives for its disclosure."

"Oh! very good—very good! just as it should be, of course," replies the ruffled lawyer, "only public surprises are apt to be attended with inconvenience, and I thought, perhaps, that a little preparation—"

But here Mr. Carter indignantly breaks off, leaving Oliver in a most uncomfortable state of mind, and dreading above all things the moment when the will shall be read, and these mysterious innuendoes brought to light.

He is very anxious that Irene shall not be present at the reading, but she is resolute to appear in her proper place, as the mistress of Fen Court.

"If I consulted my own inclinations, Oliver, I should remain up-stairs; but *that woman* will be present, and I am determined she shall see that I can bear the fate which she has brought upon me without wincing. It would be such a triumph to her to think that the mere anticipation had made me too ill to appear."

"Why will you talk in this way, Irene?"