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FLORENCE; OR, WIT AND WISDOM.*

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CHAPTER XIV.

WHEN Florence and Miss Westover made their appearance in the court-yard, they found the whole party assembled waiting for them. Lord St. Albans and Clinton were standing beside one of the carriages, conversing with Nina, whom they joined and earnest entreaties had succeeded in inducing to join the party, but as soon as the earl perceived his *fiuclt*, he hastened to assist her to mount, and then springing on his own steed, took his place beside her.

Miss Westover passed just then, conversing gaily with the young diplomatist, and a meaning smile lit up her face, which was not lost on its object. For some time after the cavalcade were in motion, Florence and her companion maintained an unbroken silence, his countenance grave, almost to sternness, hers calmly indifferent. Through wood and lawn and shady dell they journeyed on, without interchanging a word, but such harsh constraint was foreign to the gentle character of the young earl. His contracted brow relaxed, his eye softened, and he at length exclaimed:

"We had better be sincere with each other. This silence is wrong and unnatural. You will candidly confess that you have erred, and I will as candidly acknowledge that I have been angry and indignant, even perhaps beyond what I had a right to be."

"You have been angry with me—may I ask wherefore, my lord?" was the reply, uttered in tones, whose coldness proved how well the speaker had profited of Miss Westover's instructions.

"Wherefore! Your own heart can best tell you, why," he rejoined in accents less gentle, for her manner surprised and annoyed him.

"Really, your lordship seems fond of enigmas this morning; however, as I am but a poor guess, you will please unravel them for me."

"Here then is the key," and with a look of unusual irritation, he drew the sketch-book from his bosom.

"And what have I to do with that?" was the lofty reply.

"Have done with this farce, Florence; your clever acting, though it deceived many this morning, is wasted on me. That volume is yours, and 'tis useless to deny it."

For a moment she wavered—his suspicions evidently amounted almost to certainty, but still he had no proofs of her guilt, and it was better to adhere to the course she had entered on. With an affectation then, of angry warmth, she rejoined.

"You seem bent on insulting me this morning, lord St. Albans. Must I again reiterate to you, that I am innocent?"

"Florence! Florence!" said the earl, in mingled accents of bitterness and sorrow. "You had done better to confess your guilt, even in worldly policy, for your name, in your own hand-writing, is on the last page. Suspecting the truth, I fortunately succeeded this morning, in getting it out of Lord Manvers' hands ere he had time to decipher it. Tell me, will you assert your innocence still?"

This was indeed, an unexpected stroke, and his companion crimsoned to the roots of her hair, then paled again. Terrified, ashamed, ga-