

had a quarrel about something, and after that they ceased to visit each other."

"It must have been a serious quarrel to cause such a complete separation. Are you sure that Colonel Mordaunt was not the one in the wrong, mother? Would my father have liked us to become intimate with him again?"

Irene has a great reverence for the memory of her father; she is always questioning what he would or would not have wished them to do, sometimes to the ruffling of her mother's placid temper.

"Dear me, Irene! I should think you might trust me to judge of such matters! Do you think I would have introduced him to you otherwise? The disagreement had nothing to do with Colonel Mordaunt's conduct. He behaved extremely well throughout the whole affair. Only your father did not choose that the intimacy should be renewed."

"And yet he was his nearest relative."

"Quite the nearest. You know what a small family ours is—ridiculously small, in fact. Your great grandfather was a Baddenall, and his two daughters, co-heiresses, became respectively Mrs. Mordaunt and Mrs. St. John; and each left an only son—your father and this cousin. You see how absurdly it makes the family dwindle! There are females, of course, but they don't count—your own married aunts, you know; but Colonel Mordaunt's sister is still single. So you see, if you are to have any family at all on your father's side, it would be quite wrong not to make friends with this man, now that we have so happily fallen in with him again. And, indeed, the quarrel was about nothing that need concern you, Irene; nothing at all."

"I will take your word for it, mother. Colonel Mordaunt does not look like a man who would do a mean or dishonourable thing. And at all events, it is not necessary to quarrel for ever."

"It would be very wrong and senseless to do so. You will find him a most interesting companion; full of life and conversation, and with that charming deference in his manner towards women which one so seldom meets with in young men now a days. They have not improved since the time when I was young."

"I suppose not," says her daughter, with a sigh; and then she laughs, quite unnecessarily, except to hide that sigh. "I really like Colonel Mordaunt, mother, and should be sorry not to be able to take advantage of his overtures of friendship. I think he is one of the handsomest old men I ever saw, and his manners are quite courtier-like."

"You should have seen him when he was young!" replies her mother, with an echo of the sigh that Irene was keen enough to check.

Colonel Mordaunt fully bears out the promise of his introduction. He is with them every day—almost every hour; he is at the beck and call of Irene and John from morning until night.

If she desires to attend the *Marché aux Fleurs* at five o'clock A.M., to lay in flowers and fruit for the day's consumption, Colonel Mordaunt, faultlessly attired for the occasion, is waiting to attend her footsteps, even though it has cost him half his night's rest in order to be up and dressed in time.

Does she express a wish to visit the Quincoone, and push her way amongst a mob of Brussels at eight o'clock at night, or to attend opera or f. t. e., still is the faithful gentleman ready to accompany his young cousin wherever she may choose to go, only anxious to be made use of in many ways, so long as the way accords with her own desires. And he is really no less desirable than pertinacious a chaperon, this Colonel Mordaunt; so highly respectable, as Irene laughingly declares: so thorough a gentleman, as sighs her mother, who has to be content to hear of his gallantry and not so share in it!

Set almost free by the companionship of Colonel Mordaunt, Irene St. John rushes about at this period far more than she desires. She is feverishly anxious to conceal from her mother the real pain that is gnawing at her heart, and poisoning every enjoyment in which she attempts to take a share; and she is madly bent on destroying for herself a remembrance that threatens to quench all that is worth calling life in her. So she makes plans, and Colonel Mordaunt backs them, until the two are constant companions. In a few days he seems to have no aim or desire except to please her; while she goes blindly on, expressing genuine surprise at each fresh token of his generosity.

One day she buys a huge bouquet, which he has to carry home, and tells him that she wants flowers.

The next, a basket of the rarest specimens that Brussels can produce lies on her table, with her cousin's kind regards.

"What exquisite flowers!" exclaims Mrs. St. John. "What he must have paid for them!" remarks her daughter, quite indifferent as to the motive of the offering.

But the next day the offering is repeated.

"More flowers!" says Irene: "what am I to do with them? There are no more vases, and the last are too fresh to throw away."

On the third day, a bouquet more beautiful than either of the others lies before her.

"Oh! this is too bad!" she exclaims, vexedly. "This is sheer waste! I shall speak to Colonel Mordaunt."

What does the speaking result in? An adjuration that no blossoms can be too fresh for one who is fresher herself than any blossom that ever grew in house or in field, etc., etc.

"Stupid old fool!" is Irene's grateful, though unexpressed rejoinder. "The idea of taking everything I say as gospel! I declare I will never tell him I like anything again."

Yet she is pleased by the man's attention, though she hardly knows why. It soothes the pride which has been so sorely wounded: it makes her better satisfied, not with the world, but with herself. Colonel Mordaunt is not a brilliant conversationalist nor a deep thinker: he is quite content to follow her lead, and to echo her sentiments; but though he gives her no new ideas, he does not disturb the old ones, and she is not in a mood to receive new impressions. He is thoughtful, and generous, and anxious to please. He attends her, in fact, as a servant attends his mistress, a subject his queen: and all women, however broken-hearted they may be, dearly love to keep a retinue of slaves. Irene likes it: she is a woman born to govern, who takes submission to her as a right. It never strikes her that slaves may dare to adore.

Mrs. St. John receives Colonel Mordaunt's attentions to her daughter and herself with very different feelings. She is more than gratified by them—she is flattered. And if she can secure his undivided attention for an hour or two, she makes the most of it by thanks and confidences. One day Irene is lying down upon her bed with a headache, as she says—with a headache, as she might more correctly have expressed it—and Mrs. St. John has the Colonel to herself. It is a warm afternoon, and the heat and the agitation of the interview have brought a rosy hue into the old lady's face which makes her look quite handsome.

"Colonel Mordaunt—Philip—if I may still call you so—I have a great anxiety upon my mind."

"A great anxiety, my dear Mrs. St. John! if it is anything in which I can assist you—"

"I was sure you would say so! Yes; I think you can help me, or, at all events, it will be a comfort to consult you on the matter. I have so few friends in whom I can confide."

"Let me know what distresses you at once."

"It is about money. Oh! what a hateful subject it is. I believe money, either the want of it or the excess of it, to be at the bottom of almost every trouble in this world; and, though poor dear Tom left me very comfortably off yet—"

"You are in want of it? My dear friend, every penny I have is at your disposal!"

"How like you to say so! No; that would not help me. The fact is I have been spending more than my income since my husband's death—intrenching largely on my principal—much more largely than I had any idea of till I received my banker's book a few weeks back."

"But I thought my cousin left you so well off."

"Not nearly so well as the world imagines. He had indulged in several private speculations of late, and the loss of them preyed on his mind—sometimes I think it hastened his death; I know that at the last he was greatly troubled to think he could not leave us in better circumstances."

"But, my dear Mrs. St. John, excuse my saying so—considering it was the case, how could you be so foolish as to touch your principal, the only thing you and your daughter had to depend on?"

"Ah! it was foolish, wasn't it? but don't reproach me: you can't think how bitterly I am repenting of it now."

She lies back in her chair quite overcome by the idea, whilst Colonel Mordaunt sits by her side, silent and absorbed.

Suddenly Mrs. St. John starts up and clutches his hand.

"Philip! Philip! I am dying; and my girl will be left all but penniless!"

"Good God! if it cannot be as bad as that! You be mistaken, Mrs. St. John! You are weak and ill, and matters look worse to you than they really are. Put the management of your affairs into my hands, and I will see that they are set right again."

"It is beyond your power. You cannot think how mad I have been. When Tom died, and I found it would be impossible for us to live in the style to which we had been accustomed, I thought it would be better to give Irene a season or two in town—to let her be seen, in fact. She is so pretty she ought to have made a good marriage; and I never thought the money could run away so fast until I found it was nearly all gone."

"But who are your trustees? What have they been about to permit you to draw upon your principal in this manner?"

"There are no trustees. I am sole legatee and executrix. The money was left absolutely to me. I wish now it had not been so."

"And—and Irene," says Colonel Mordaunt, presently, "she is not then in a position to make the good match you speak of?"

"Ah! there's my worst trouble, Philip! I was so sure she was going to be married—such an excellent connection, too. I looked upon the matter as settled, and then it came to nothing."

Colonel Mordaunt's brow lowers, and he commences to play with the ornaments on the table.

"And who may the gentleman have been?"

"Well, I mean't tell you, for my child's sake, for he behaved in the most dishonourable manner to her, Philip; dangled after her all the season, meeting her everywhere, and paying her the most undivided attention, and then, when I felt bound to ask him what he intended by it all, turned round and said he had never considered her as anything more than a friend."

"The second one!" cries Colonel Mordaunt, jumping up from his chair and pacing the room, "the unmitigated scoundrel! Mrs. St. John, let

me have his name and bring him to book, as he deserves."

"Ah! not for worlds. Irene would never forgive me! You cannot think how angry she was even at my asking him the question."

"And I suppose she—she—felt the business very much?"

"I cannot tell you. She assured me at the time that she was utterly indifferent to him; but I have had my suspicions since. Any way, it has broken my heart! To hear my child refuse in marriage by a man who had caused her name to be so openly connected with his own that it was quite unlikely any one else would come forward, and when I had been risking her dependence in order to further her prospects in life. I shall never recover it, Philip; that blow has been the death of me."

"Why should you say so? You are not really ill."

"I am sinking fast, my dear friend; I am growing weaker every day; and very soon I shall be gone, and my Irene will have to suffer for my imprudence. Oh, Philip! for the sake of old times, promise me you will befriend my girl."

"For the sake of both past and present," he replies, warmly, "trust to me. I will do everything in my power to assist her. I am rich, as doubtless you know; the income which poor Tom and I equally inherited from our mothers has, in my case, never been fully used, for I have had no one to spend it on, and so long as I have a pound Irene shall never want one."

"Generous as of old. Ah, Philip! if I had only known what you were; if I had only had the sense—"

"My dear lady, what is the use of reverting to the past? You acted as you thought right. It has all been for the best."

"For the best that I should have deceived one of the noblest and most honorable of men?"

"Hush, hush! not deceived: you must not call it by so harsh a term," replies the Colonel, with the ready forgiveness which we find it so easy to accord to an injury for which we have long ceased to grieve; "you are too hard upon yourself. Remember how young you were."

"I should have been old enough to recognise your worth," replies the poor lady, who, like many of her fellow-creatures, has committed a great error on setting out in life, and never discovered her mistake until it was past remedy; "but it is something to know that I leave you Irene's friend."

"You may rest on that assurance with the greatest confidence," he replies, soothingly, and tells himself that the past, when the poor faded wreck of a woman who lies before him took back the hand she had promised to himself to bestow it on his cousin, will indeed be amply atoned for if he can only claim the friendship of the bright creature who has sprung from the union which went far to make his life a solitary one.

He really believes that he shall be satisfied with her friendship. So we deceive ourselves.

Mrs. St. John's conversation appears to be almost prophetic; at least, the state of mind which induced it naturally predisposes her to succumb to illness; and when, a few days after, she is seized with a low fever that is decimating the city, her weakness greatly aggravates the danger.

A foreign doctor is called in; he immediately proposes to bleed the patient; Irene flies in her distress to Colonel Mordaunt.

"He will kill my mother; what can I do to prevent it? Pray help me."

She is so lovely in her distress, with all thought of self vanished, and the tears standing in her great gray eyes, that it is as much as he can do to answer her appeal rationally.

"Be calm; I will not allow this Belgian rascal to touch her. I have already telegraphed to London. Mr. Pettigall will be here to-morrow."

"How can I ever thank you sufficiently?"

Mr. Pettigall arrives to time, and remains as long as his professional duties will permit, but he can do nothing. Mrs. St. John becomes unconscious, and sinks rapidly. It takes but a few days to accomplish that in her which a robust body would have been fighting against for weeks. In a very short time Irene is awakened to a sense of her mother's danger, and in a very short time after that the danger is past—the illness is past—everything is past, indeed, except the cold, still figure lying on the bed where she had watched life fade out of it, and which will be the last thing of all (save the memory of a most indulgent mother) to pass away for ever.

Mr. Pettigall has returned to London by this time, and Irene and Colonel Mordaunt are alone. What would she have done without him?

Mrs. St. John has left no near relatives who would care to incur the expense of attending her funeral or personally consoling her orphaned daughter; two or three of them receive letters with an intimation of the event, to which they reply (after having made more than one copy of their answer) in stereotyped terms, interlarded with texts of Scripture and the pieces where they may be found and "made a note of." But not one pair of arms is held out across the British Channel (metaphorically speaking) to enfold Irene; not one pair of eyes weep with her; pons go and tongues wag, yet the girl remains, save for the knowledge of Colonel Mordaunt's help and presence, alone in her sorrow.

During the remainder of that sad week she sits almost entirely in her mother's room; confident, though he has not told her so, that everything that should be done is being done by the man who has expressed himself so kindly towards her; and when, on the day of the

funeral, she meets him again, she feels as though he were her only friend.

When the interment is over and they have returned to the hotel, Colonel Mordaunt remarks how pale and worn the girl has become, and ventures to ask what care she has been taking of her own health.

"My health! oh, what does that signify?" says Irene, as the tears well up freshly to her swollen eyelids. "There is nothing left for me to live for now."

She has born up bravely until to-day, for she is no weak creature to render herself sodden by tears that cannot undo the past; she is a woman made for action rather than regret; but the hardest moment in life for self-control is that in which we return to an emptied home, having left all that remains of what we loved beneath the ground. The voice that made our hearts rejoice was silent; the loving eyes beamed on us no longer; the warm, firm hand was cold and claspsless; yet, we could see and touch them. God only knows what joy and strength there comes from contact—and how hard faith is without sight. We look on what we love, and though we have had evidence of its estrangement, still delude ourselves with the sweet falsehood that it is as it ever was: we lose sight of it, and though it be strong as death and faithful as the grave, cold doubts will rise betwixt it and ourselves to torture us until we meet again.

It is well the dead are buried out of sight; else would they never be forgotten. Human love cannot live for ever, unless it sees and touches. So Irene feels for the first time that she has really lost her mother.

But Colonel Mordaunt has lived longer on this world than she has, and his "all" still stands before him, more engaging than ever, in her deep mourning and distress.

"You must not say so," he answers, gently. "You must let me take care of you now; it was a promise made to your poor mother."

"Ah! Mother, mother!"

"My dear girl, I feel for you more than I can express, but I entreat you not to give way. Think how distressed she would be to see you neglecting the health she was always so anxious to preserve. I hear that you have made no regular meals for a week past. This must continue no longer; you must permit me to alter it."

"I will permit you to do anything that you think right, Colonel Mordaunt. I have no friend left but yourself."

"Then I shall order dinner to be served for us in your sitting-room, and expect you to do the honors of the table."

"Since you wish it, I will try to do so."

"I do wish it, my dear cousin, for more reasons than one. Mr. Walmesley, your mother's solicitor, will be here to-morrow; and it is quite necessary that I should have a little conversation with you before you meet him."

"When the dinner is ready I shall be there."

And in another hour Colonel Mordaunt and Irene St. John are seated opposite to one another at table. Her eyes are still red, her cheeks pale, and she neither eats nor talks much; but she is quiet and composed, and listens to all her cousin has to say with interest and attention. He does not broach the subject of money, however, until the dinner has been cleared away again, and they are safe from the waiters' supervision.

Then Irene draws her chair nearer to the open stove, for November has set in bright and cold; and Colonel Mordaunt, still playing with his fruit and wine, commences the unwelcome topic.

"I have something to say to you, my dear Irene, less pleasant than important; but money considerations are generally so. Have you any idea of the amount of your mother's income?"

"My mother's income? No the least. But it was a large one, was it not? We always lived so well in London."

"Too well, I am afraid, my dear. Women are sadly ignorant about the management of money."

"Yes; I am sure I am," she replies, indifferently. "In fact, it never entered my head to make any inquiries on the subject. We had a house in Brook Street, you know, and our own carriage, and everything we could desire. I never remember poor mamma refusing me money in my life, or expressing the slightest anxiety on the subject."

"It would have been better if she had done so, my dear. I had a long talk with her about her affairs a week or two before her death; and she was anxious that I should look into and arrange them for her. Your father did not leave so much behind him as the world thinks; and your poor mother was improvident of the little she received. I am afraid, from what she told me, that a large portion of her principal was sunk during those two seasons in town."

"Was it? Well, it will signify little now. Whatever remains, there is sure to be enough for me."

"My dear child, I am not so sure of that. You have been brought up in every luxury; you have never known, as you said just now, what it is to be denied."

"I can learn it. Others have done the same before me."

"But supposing the very worst—that you have actually not enough to live on. What then?"

"That is scarcely probable, is it? But if so, I can work."

"Work, child! You work to earn your living? No, no; it would never come to that; you are far too beautiful. You must marry first."

"What I marry for a home? Colonel Mordaunt, you do not know me, if you think me capable of doing such a thing."