

which hung from the verandah of Mrs. Lawford's drawing-room, retained probably in their fantastic pendules by the keen easterly wind, which seemed to penetrate through every crevice. In an easy chair, drawn close to the blazing fire, the old lady sat knitting, while her two daughters were busily occupied with the many-tinted Berlin wools. At a table near the bay-window stood Mary Marston, in the midst of her morning duties. She had conferred with the cook touching the state of the larder, she had combed the poodle, and dusted the china, and now she was tending some rare hyacinths, much prized by Mrs. Lawford, who had a passion for floriculture. But a sad accident had happened—one of them had slipped from her cold fingers (she had not been near a fire that morning,) and the flower had snapped from the stem. A bright drop stood in each of her soft dark eyes, for she had been chidden somewhat harshly for her carelessness. Her heart was too full of regret to make excuses, and she only murmured, "I am most unlucky."

"Now I do not think you are," said Matilda Lawford, who was a good-natured girl, and wished to bring round the mind of her mother, a most irritable-tempered woman, to a pleasant subject. "I know we all thought you very lucky to have a present of the splendid bouquet the very night of our ball. Was it not a piece of sheer luck to come so apropos?—And you were a dear girl to divide it between us. Everybody thought the flowers were from our own conservatory."

"Surely you were not so silly as to undecieve them," chimed in the matronly lady; who, besides being ill-tempered, was one of those weak and narrow minded mothers, whose children, if they have good qualities, possess them *in spite* of evil culture; "we should have had quite as fine a show," she continued, "if that stupid Ellis had not let out the fires on Christmas-eve: and there is no use in proclaiming one's mortifications."

"I think the greatest piece of luck was getting back your sovereign with the flowers!" exclaimed Hannah, in a tone which proclaimed her to be a great deal more "her mother's daughter" than Matilda. "I am sure I never expected you would see it again. And the white and silver purse in which it was returned, is a love of a thing, just fit for a card purse." (Miss Lawford was eight-and-twenty, and had lately grown a desperate whist-player.) "I don't think you ever use it, do you, Mary?"

This was not the first "gentle hint" her

cousin Hannah had given with reference to the white and silver purse; but Mary, unusually as quick at understanding as ready to yield, seemed unaccountably dull or uncomplying whenever this subject was named. But the arrival of the postman changed the conversation; and among the letters was one for Mary, which being rather an unusual occurrence, excited a proportionate degree of interest.

The contents were scanned in a few moments; but short as they were, they alternately blanched and flushed the cheek of Mary Marston. Then, bursting into tears, she dropped the letter, exclaiming—

"It is a hoax—a cruel hoax; it cannot be real!"

But that official letter was no hoax. Indeed, the steady, old-established firm who signed themselves her "most obedient servants," would have shuddered at the perpetration of anything so outrageous. No, no; the fact was too well authenticated for doubt or hesitation on the subject; Mary was no longer poor and dependent—old Sir Digby Randle, known throughout the county as a most eccentric character, and whose death had been chronicled three days before in the *Herald*, had bequeathed Mary, by a codicil to his will, the sum of ten thousand pounds, in trust for her sole use till she should become of age, when it would pass into her own hands! The strange part of the story was, that not to her knowledge had Mary Marston ever seen, or been seen by her kind benefactor!

The icicles had departed, and the frost-bound streams were again ebbing gently along as they sparkled in the sunshine; the birds were trilling merrily, and the trees were unfurling their pale green leaves, hoary winter departed, and the spirit of youth was again abroad in the world. On a morning early in May, Mary Marston commenced her journey, by railway, to the metropolis. But though a few months older than when we introduced her to the reader—though her worldly knowledge was somewhat increased, and her purse extremely well lined—it was not considered proper, expedient or safe for her to travel, as she had done before, unprotected. Accordingly, an old dependent of the family, whose office was something between nurse and housekeeper, was deputed as her attendant to London, where she had other near relatives to receive her. We do not attempt to account for this different arrangement, we but state the fact, and shall only observe that on this occasion she bore a