

discovery that it was Minnie that the Italian wanted.

"Well, do you know, old chap," continued Dacres, "I couldn't stand it; so I offered to make it all up with her."

"Oh, I see you've done that, old boy. Congratulations—"

"Pooh! wait a minute," said Dacres, interrupting him. "Well, you know, she wasn't my wife at all."

At this Hawbury stood utterly aghast.

"What's that?"

"She wasn't my wife at all. She looks confoundedly like what my wife was at her best, but she's another person. It's a most extraordinary likeness; and yet she's isn't any relation, but a great deal prettier woman. What made me so sure, you know, was the infernally odd coincidence of the name; and then I only saw her off and on, you know, and I never heard her voice. Then, you know, I was mad with jealousy; and so I made myself worse and worse, till I was ripe for murder, arson, assassination, and all that sort of thing, you know."

To all this Hawbury listened in amazement, and could not utter a word, until at last, as Dacres paused, he said,

"By Jove!"

"Well, old man, I was the most infernal ass that ever lived. And how I must have bored you!"

"By Jove!" exclaimed Hawbury again. "But drive on, old boy."

"Well, you know, the row occurred just then, and away went the scoundrels to the fight, and in came that parson fellow, and away we went. I took Mrs. Willoughby to a safe place, where I kept her till I heard the trumpet, you know. And I've got another thing to tell you. It's deuced odd, but she knew all about me."

"The deuce she did!"

"Yes, the whole story. Lived somewhere in the county. But I don't remember the Fays. At any rate, she lived there; and do you know, old fellow, the county people used to think I beat my wife!"

"By Jove!"

"Yes; and afterward they raised a report that my cruelty had driven her mad. But I had a few friends that stood up for me; and among others these Fays, you know, had heard the truth of it, and, as it happened, Kitty—"

"Kitty?"

"Well, Mrs. Willoughby, I mean—her name's Kitty—has always known the truth about it; and when she saw me at Naples she felt interested in me."

"Oho!" and Hawbury opened his eyes.

"Well, she knew all about it; and, among other things, she gave me one piece of intelligence that has eased my mind."

"Ah! what's that?"

"Why, my wife is dead."

"Oh, then there's no doubt about it!"

"Not a bit. She died eight years ago, and in an insane asylum."

"By Jove! Then she was mad all the time."

"Yes; that accounts for it, and turns all my curses into pity."

Dacres was silent now for a few moments. At length he looked at Hawbury with a very singular expression.

"Hawbury, old boy."

"Well, Sconey?"

"I think we'll keep it up."

"Who?"

"Why, Kitty and I—that is, Mrs. Willoughby and I—her name's Kitty, you know."

"Keep what up?"

"Why, the—the—the fond illusion, and all that sort of thing. You see I've got into such an infernal habit of regarding her as my wife that I can't look on her in any other light. I claimed her, you know, and all that sort of thing, and she thought I was delicious, and felt sorry, and humored me, and gave me a very favorable answer."

"Humored you?"

"Yes; that's what she says now, you know. But I'm holding her to it, and I've every reason to believe, you know—in fact, I may as well say that it is an understood thing, you know, that she'll let it go, you know, and at some early day, you know, we'll have it all formally settled, and all that sort of thing, you know."

Hawbury wrung his friend's hand.

"See here, old boy; you see Ethel there?"

"Yes."

"Who do you think she is?"

"Who?"

"Ethel Orme!"

"Ethel Orme!" cried Dacres, as the whole truth flashed on his mind. "What a devil of a jumble every thing has been getting into! By Heaven, dear boy, I congratulate you from the bottom of my soul!"

And he wrung Hawbury's hand as though all his soul was in that grasp.

But all this could not satisfy the impatience of the Baron. This was all very well in its way, merely as an episode; but he was waiting for the chief incident of the piece, and the chief incident was delaying very unaccountably.

So he strode up and down, and he fretted and he fumed and he chafed, and the trumpeter kept blowing away.

Until at last—

Just before his eyes—

Up there on the top of the bank, not far from where Dacres and Mrs. Willoughby had made their appearance, the Baron caught sight of a tall, lank, slim figure, clothed in rusty black, whose thin and leathery face, rising above a white neck-tie, peered solemnly yet interrogatively through the bushes; while just behind him the Baron caught a glimpse of the flutter of a woman's dress.