

"By the simplest accident in the world. He opened the door of my sitting-room in mistake for his own. I never was so surprised in my life. I nearly screamed!"

"Then you have met him before?"

"Yes—oh yes!—of course—many years ago."

"But why have I never seen him, then? He says he lives in Leicestershire: why did he never come to my father's house?"

Mrs. St. John looks uneasy. She shifts about in her chair, and rolls up her satin cap-strings till they are ruined, and talks rapidly with a faint, guilty color coming and going in her faded cheeks.

"Well, to tell you the truth, dear, your father and Colonel Mordaunt, although cousins, were not the best of friends; that is to say, they once 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 his 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 dishonorable thing. And at all events, it is not necessary to quarrel forever."

"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 toward women which one so seldom meets with in young men nowadays. 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 St. 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 Quinconce, and push her way among a mob of Bruellois at eight o'clock at night, or to attend opera or *file*, 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 any way, 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 to 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