

every one being engaged with their own or another's story, gently touching the arm of Frederick Bond, requested him to turn over with her a portfolio of engravings which had been sent for her inspection.

With every appearance of earnestness, she descanted on their various merits; and then, while her eyes were still fixed upon the same objects, and her voice maintained the same tone, she went on to say, "I hate all formal appointments; they frighten me to death. But I want to tell you, Mr. Bond, that I have formed a desperate resolution, and I depend on you for helping me to keep it."

"You know how entirely I am your devoted servant," said Frederick, with unusual complaisance, for he was just sufficiently elated to be charmed, with himself, and with every one else.

"Hush! hush!" said Lady Mornford. "That is not the style of conversation I am desiring just now. You must answer me quickly, and to the purpose, for this tale of the winds and the waves will not last forever, and before it ceases, our tête-à-tête must come to an end."

"Go on," said Frederick, somewhat sobered by the unusual gravity of her manner.

"Well then," (and Lady Mornford gasped as if her last breath had been escaping from her bosom;) "I have decided upon what you recommended a year ago. I cannot bear this torture without making Sir James as wretched as myself. I am determined at last to have an operation."

Frederick started, "He had strongly recommended an operation a year ago, but the case might now be materially altered. He has, however, been wonderfully successful in all the operations he had undertaken, and if there was the slightest probability of a cure, he was not the man to flinch from his duty."

"But Sir James?" said he. "He was opposed to it before; what does he say now?"

"He is to know nothing of it until all is over."

Frederick shook his head.

"Ah, you may look as threatening as you please, but tell me one thing—Have I not a right over my own life?"

"As far as you command it, you certainly have."

"Why remind me of that? I mean, of course, as far as I can command it. Now, hear my plan:—Sir James goes into Scotland to shoot, on the first day of the season; I shall have a new governess, who will know nothing, except that I am taken ill, and you, and Mr. West will manage all the rest."

"Pardon me, my dear lady: Mr. West is a timid man. He will never be brought over to assist me, without the knowledge and consent of Sir James."

"Nonsense—perfect nonsense! Can you not make him understand the generous feeling of desiring to spare my poor husband all the suffering he would endure to see me suffer; and the delight, the immeasurable delight, of receiving him home when all is over?"

"But suppose—only for the sake of viewing the subject in every light—suppose—"

"You don't mean to say there is the slightest shadow of danger?"

Frederick saw that she was watching his face with an expression of almost frantic anxiety, and, unable to answer her appeal as he felt that he ought—unable in short to discuss the subject in any satisfactory manner, under such peculiar circumstances, he requested permission of Lady Mornford to call on her the following day.

"Not for worlds," she answered; "not for worlds, until Sir James has left home. I think he had some time ago a lurking suspicion of my purpose, and if he had the least idea that I was plotting with you, nothing could induce him to leave me. This is the reason why I have chosen so strange a situation for such a subject. But see, we are observed; and now what do you think of this moonlight scene? Our artists always make the moon herself, and the earth, and the water beneath, look exactly as they ought: but they run the whole by rendering the clouds the most conspicuous part of the picture."

"Ah, Sir James; are you, too, there? I am but too happy you are come to suffer under my triumph. Mr. Bond advises me to purchase this—and this; and he says that favourite of yours is a perfect horror."

By this time the company had gathered round the table, and Lady Mornford spread the engravings before them, with a sort of dashing remark upon each, when, finding the party sufficiently interested, she drew back unobserved. The circle closing after her, she escaped into another apartment, where refreshments were already prepared, and after swallowing an unusual quantity of

wine, into which she poured a powerful opiate, she was soon enabled to return to her guests, with an appearance of composure by which they were easily deceived.

Shocked and perplexed by what he had just witnessed, Frederick Bond felt no relish for the mirth or the chit-chat of the evening; and on withdrawing to a remote corner of the room, he found there a little coterie of gentlemen, all as weary as himself.

With mutual consent they left the drawing-room, for there were other apartments thrown open to the guests that night, and happening by chance or by choice to return to the apartment where they had dined, they soon found a use for the glasses which still remained upon the table.

In the mean time, Eleanor Bond was one of the most animated and the most happy of the party who remained. Exulting in her triumph over Miss Masterman, she seated herself beside her with great complacency, and even went so far as to request she would have the carriage ordered for them, to conduct her home, as her residence was a little beyond their own.

Whether this proposal was made in pure kindness, or with a desire of proving to the greatest gossip in the town, that her husband could return from a dinner party, even to his own door, a sober man, it is not our business to inquire. Suffice it that the offer was readily accepted, and Eleanor watched with impatience for her husband's reappearance, in order that she might inform him of the arrangement she had made.

"Where is your master?" said she to Saunders, who assisted in attending on the company.

"In the dining-room, ma'am, with Sir James and three other gentlemen."

"In the dining-room?" said Miss Masterman, repeating his words with a peculiar emphasis; and Eleanor would certainly have had some misgiving in the secret of her heart, but for the confidence she still continued to repose in her husband's word. It was a confidence which had never yet been shaken; and though the hour grew late, and many of the guests were gone, she still believed his promise would be kept unbroken.

Miss Masterman was now becoming anxious to leave the house, but having sent away her own servant, she had no alternative but that of waiting until Mr. Bond should be pleased to appear.

"Go and tell your master that we wait for him," said Eleanor to Saunders, as soon as she could speak to him without being overheard.

The servant went as he was ordered, and a scuffling sound was soon after heard on the stairs. At last the door of the drawing-room was thrown wide open, and Frederick Bond appeared. He did not, however, advance many steps towards the company, but stood bolt-upright, looking from side to side with a vacant leer, and nodding his head with such an idiotic expression of contentance, that the gentlemen found it impossible to conceal their laughter, and even the ladies joined in a sort of suppressed titter, interrupted only by occasional exclamations of "odious," "monstrous," and "absurd," with entreaties that he might not be permitted to come nearer.

Alas for poor Eleanor! She had so loved the world, and courted its approbation for the sake of its friendship, its courtesy, and its gentle dealing towards her and hers, that a bitter sense of its fickleness and its ungenerous treatment, now mingled with other feelings of disappointment and wounded pride. Every thing seemed to be against her on that miserable night. Not only was Miss Masterman her companion in the carriage, and witness to all the absurdities of her husband; but Mr. Stanley impatiently awaited their arrival at home, having called many times during the evening to consult his son-in-law on some important business. Every thing seemed to be against her that night, and she threw herself upon her couch in a state of utter wretchedness and despair.

Not long after this evening, Sir James Mornford left home, as had been expected, to enjoy his favourite amusement of grouse shooting in the north of England; and on the very day of his departure, Lady Mornford had a long interview with Mr. Bond and his partner. As Frederick had predicted, Mr. West declined taking any part in her scheme, without the consent of Sir James, he even went so far as to speak of danger, though neither of the doctors thought of dissuading her entirely from the operation. So far from that, Mr. Bond was rather anxious it should be performed, partly from personal regard, for he knew that she must otherwise fall a victim to her malady; and partly from the confidence he felt in his own skill, and the hope he entertained that a successful operation would be the means of restoring in some measure the reputation he was so much in danger of losing. He knew