

past you have hung around her, followed her everywhere, surrounded her with the most lover-like attentions—”

“It is you ; you, Virginia Weston, whose steps I have followed, whose smiles I have sought,” he interrupted with passionate abruptness, surprised for the moment out of his usual perfect self-command. “You, the first woman I have ever really loved, and for whose lightest smile I would barter all hopes in earth and heaven !”

The strange light in Mrs. Weston’s eyes deepened and defined itself more clearly. It was a blaze of overwhelming indignation, and in a voice low, but vibrating with scorn, she said :

“Is this your return for the hospitality, the kindness that has ever been shown to you under this roof? What has led you to venture on such an insulting avowal ?”

“Your own conduct, Mrs. Weston,” he retorted, stung beyond all self-control by the scornful repulse he had just received. “When a married woman, who is rarely seen with her husband, tolerates, encourages the constant visits and escort of another man, what is that man to think ?”

The young wife fairly quivered with anger. “Ah ! I understand now, Captain Dacre, how some of my sex have at times so utterly demeaned themselves as to have struck the caitiffs who ventured on insulting them.”

“Your words wound more deeply than blows from your hand could possibly do,” he grimly replied.

“Silence, sir ! Even whilst scorning myself for stooping to explain or defend my conduct, I will tell what you cannot but know yourself, that I have always looked on you as a suitor of Miss Maberly, and supposed your visits and attentions were directed to her.”

“Thank you for the poor compliment you pay to my taste and judgment. If ever I should marry, which is more than doubtful, I will seek a mate of a different stamp to the free, fast, husband-hunting class of young

ladies to which Miss Maberly belongs.—Stop, Mrs. Weston, do not interrupt me with a defence of your friend, nor upbraid me with duplicity. I have but flirted with a flirt, as great an adept at the pastime as myself. And now, let me ask you, have you not noticed that I sought Miss Maberly’s society merely when I could not obtain yours ; that I addressed myself to her ear only when you were otherwise engaged or unwilling to listen to me ?”

“I noticed nothing of the sort, or if I did I attributed it entirely to the courtesy you supposed due to the mistress of the house. I thought the mere fact of my bearing another man’s name should have been guard sufficient against an insulting mistake such as you have just made.”

“Can you blame me for forgetting a fact of which you yourself seemed so often and so utterly oblivious ?” retorted Dacre, forgetful of courtesy, civility, every better feeling, in his terrible disappointment and deep humiliation.

“Day after day have I visited here, scarcely ever seeing the husband of whose claims you are now so jealously watchful, without hearing his name even mentioned by yourself or friend, till he almost seemed to me a sort of mythical being. Then when you chanced to be together, a few words of indifferent politeness, a careless smile, far less bright than those which you vouchsafed my unworthy self, were the only tokens of affection you ever gave him. To a keen, close observer, what was to be inferred from all this ?”

“Thank you, Captain Dacre, you are determined on making me drink to the last drop that bitter cup of humiliation which my own folly has earned for me. Well, a portion of that unutterable contempt I so freely bestowed on you at the commencement of our interview, I now transfer to myself. Are you satisfied, Captain Dacre ? I will go still farther, and acknowledge that I feel utterly degraded in my own eyes, humbled to