

and plain people and I dare call things by their right names. If you still persist in looking so sublimely ridiculous, I must laugh."

"Oh! if you knew the bitterness of my heart."

"Well, well, I can imagine it all. You have been shamefully duped by an ill-bred, coarse-minded country girl. But relations, you know, often take such liberties, and treat each other with disgusting familiarity."

"Say no more, or I shall go mad. Revenge would be sweet; but poverty has rendered me powerless. Ah! how I wish that she was a man."

"Sit down and compose yourself. Let me pour you out a glass of wine. I am rich—I will be your friend. May I—dare I trust you?"

"May I perish! if ever I betray the confidence you honor me with, I should be proud to serve you."

"The obligation would be mutual. Are you a man of strong nerve—of sovereign will? Dare you undertake a business which would require skill, and courage, but which, if effectually performed, would secure to you both fortune and revenge?"

"Try me—and if I fail, call me a coward—a poltroon—a despicable wretch—worthy of all contempt."

"My proposal is a bold one—it will startle you."

"I am an Irishman."

Marianne drew her chair nearer, and fixed her large dark eyes searchingly on his face.

"Your country is renowned for fickleness. Brave as lions in the field, few of you possess that mental courage which, by its silent force, removes all obstacles, and ensures success. Can I rely upon the strength of your hatred?"

"For whom?"

"For Rosamond Sternfield."

"Confound her. I wish she were dead."

"Amen!—It is her death I covet—her death I require of you. Procure but this—which will confer her inheritance on me and mine, and I will settle upon you an income of one thousand a year, to be paid in advance, during your mortal life—and I will advance this moment, one thousand pounds, to assist you in the performance of the scheme."

The Captain rose from his chair, retreated a few steps—then drew nearer to Marianne, and whispered in a bitter tone, which went hissing through her ears.

"Are you a woman?"

"Yes—a true woman—in love—in hatred—in contempt;" returned his companion, also rising, and confronting him; "but what say you to my proposition?"

"It is like yourself—diabolical—cruel—and impossible!"

"It is perfectly feasible. Listen—you have not heard my plan:" and with the utmost coolness, she motioned Captain Doyle to resume his seat—astounded at her wickedness, he mechanically obeyed, and sat staring upon her, like one lost in the tortuous labyrinths of a fearful dream. "Rosamond is ruralizing in a lonely country house among the Derbyshire hills. It would be easy to surprise this romantic girl, and carry her off. A good equipage, and horses, and a faithful servant, on whose attachment you could rely, would be the only agents required. The old tower in Skibberreen would just answer the purpose. Once in your hands, and across the Channel, it is easy to find a grave for a troublesome companion. Her friends would pursue, but you must lay your plans too well for them to trace her, or discover the cause of her absence. For this purpose your residence in the neighbourhood would be necessary, and you must watch, in disguise, for time and circumstance. The means afforded for all this shall be ample. I have placed my life in your hands, and I await your answer!"

The Captain was silent. Far other thoughts than the death of his gentle cousin were working in his mind. Horror-stricken at the depravity of Mrs. Sternfield's character, he felt bound in honor not to betray her, but he determined to secure the fortune she promised him, and save the life of Rosamond; and he was laughing in his sleeve at the bare idea of deceiving her.

"I will think of your plan," he said, "and let you know by this time to-morrow. I have been a careless, thoughtless, dissipated fellow; but I have never yet been a villain. It requires the superior genius of a woman, to make me that. Still, your plan, though fraught with difficulty, offers a strong temptation, and I will not reject it until I have duly weighed the consequences. In the meanwhile, your secret is as safe in my breast as in your own. Should I fail—you must be prepared to share the consequences."

"I will risk that,"—returned the wife of the Major, with a scornful laugh. "A prompt answer: Yes, or No, is all I require."

"You shall have it. Farewell—I wish you a quiet night's rest."

"I am not afraid of phantoms; my conscience requires no opiates. I shall, however, feel anxious for your decision."

"What a monster!" murmured Doyle, as he left her presence. "I shall never be able to think that woman handsome again."

In the evening he despatched his servant with a note, in which he enclosed a card, inscribed with the simple word: "Yes!"

"It is enough," said Marianne,—"her doom is sealed."

(To be continued.)