

When Mrs. Blair had completed her dressing and left the room, Ernestine flew to the coalscuttle, and triumphantly drew forth the torn half-sheet of Colonel Fleming's letter.

"Ah, mais c'est trop fort !" she muttered, with a slight compunction for Juliet. "I would never have imagined she would have opened it and then burnt it. Ah, but it is shameful to that pauvre demoiselle !"

But, in spite of her compunctions, Ernestine did her best to decipher the mutilated letter, although, owing to her imperfect education, and to its fragmentary condition, she was not able to make out as much of it as she would have liked.

"I will keep him ! he will be useful to me some day," she said to herself, as she carefully folded it up and put it in her pocket. Then she carried it upstairs to her own room, and wrapping it in a piece of silver paper, locked it up in a little cedar-wood money-box, side by side with her last quarter's wages, a packet of love-letters, chiefly in French, a withered bunch of violets given her by Adolphe, her first love, who had gone for a soldier and died in Algeria, and a pair of gold and pearl earrings, her greatest treasures, which, being very handsome, and having been presented to her by a French count, she was afraid to wear openly in the sterner moral atmosphere of an English family.

Meanwhile Juliet was waiting and watching day after day for that very letter, of which one-half lay upstairs in that box in the French lady's-maid's attic bedroom, and the other half was in ashes in Mrs. Blair's fire-place. She was too proud to show her anxiety ; she would not send for the letters to her bedroom, but every day she got up a little sooner, and hurried downstairs to see what the morning's post had brought her, every day to meet with a fresh disappointment.

At first she was so full of hope, that when his letter did not come she hardly made herself unhappy : she felt so sure he would write to her, so certain that he would keep his word. But when day after day passed and brought her no word, no sign from him, her heart began to be very heavy. She read and re-read the little note he had written to her before he left, and tried to comfort herself afresh with the assurance of that letter which he had promised to write to her. It was impossible, she said to herself, that he could

break his word ! But she began to get restless and impatient ; she could settle to nothing : all her ordinary occupations and duties became hateful to her ; she could take no pleasure in any of them. She began to torment herself with all sorts of horrible conjectures. Could he be ill ? she wondered ; or, good heavens ! had there been any railway accidents the last few days in which he might have been disabled, or possibly worse ? and a hundred ghastly fancies and imaginations haunted her from morning till night.

Every day she longed ardently for the next to come, and when the next day dawned, it brought her still nothing—nothing.

Everyone knows the miserable suspense of that watching and waiting for news that will not come, that hope deferred which maketh the heart sick. Juliet tried to call pride to her aid ; but although she said to herself, over and over again, that if he did not care, neither would she—that it was unworthy of her to waste tears and sighs on a man who could care for her so little as to leave her so heartlessly, that he could not be worth her love who treated her so cruelly—although she said these things to herself a hundred times a day, she found all such arguments singularly unavailing.

Pride is very little help to a woman who really loves.

And the days slipped away silently, swiftly—uneventful days of misery—whilst she waited in vain for that letter that was never to come, and for the answer to which Hugh Fleming up in London was eating his heart out with longings that were all in vain.

At last there came a day when Juliet and her stepmother sat together in the drawing-room—the girl with her work in her hands and her thoughts far away, and the elder woman reading the "Times"—and the latter broke the long silence by saying suddenly,

"Did you not say the 'Sultana' was the name of the ship Colonel Fleming was to go to India in, Juliet ?"

"Yes ; I think that was the name he mentioned," she answered, rather faintly ; "what about her ?"

"Oh, nothing," replied her stepmother, unconcernedly ; "only, I see that she has sailed, so I suppose he is gone. By the way, did he ever write to you again ?"

No answer. The room seemed to swim round her ; a mist was before her eyes ; she rose unsteadily, and began mechanically