

Virginia, though followed and admired, as she always was, soon wearied of the scene. The remembrance of the interview with Captain Dacre recurred more than once to her mind, filling her with uneasy fears lest she should again render herself worthy of such strictures. Flushed and tired from a gallop, she sought the dressing-room with the intention of securing a short interval of rest; but remembering that she could not feel safe from interruption there, she threw an opera cloak over her shoulders and passed out on a small balcony overlooking the gardens, closing the door behind her. Though October, the night was as pleasant as in summer, and as she adjusted herself on a seat, she resolved to remain there some time and enjoy the calm beauty of the night, so refreshing a contrast to the ball room she had just left. Suddenly the odour of cigars rising up almost at her feet warned her that gentlemen were near, and at the same moment the voice of a Mr. Colford Stone, with whom she had danced two or three times during the evening, became plainly audible, for he was apparently standing under the shadow of the balcony as he pronounced the words:

"Yes, Clive Weston's wife is decidedly the belle to-night."

"Now I should move out of this," said Virginia to herself, "but I will not. I have chosen a pleasant, secluded nook for myself, and they have no business to stand under it chattering nonsense. Besides, they will begin to abuse me presently, and I shall thus be sufficiently punished."

Her presentiments were destined to be painfully and promptly realized.

"Poor butterfly," continued the speaker, "her wings will soon be clipped."

"How—what do you mean?"

"Well, I do not mind telling you, Macdonald, what the whole world will know to-morrow. Poor Weston is ruined. His paper was refused this afternoon at the banks. For some time past he has been

losing ground. The failure of Darrell & Co., followed by that of some other firm in the townships, gave him the first push down hill. Other misfortunes followed, and matters became worse and worse. Grown desperate, he staked his remaining all in a large flour speculation. News came this afternoon that flour had fallen, and his ruin is complete."

"Poor fellow," interposed the other speaker, "I am truly sorry for him. He has always shown himself a thorough gentleman."

"Ah! Macdonald, his marriage was a sad mistake. I prophesied on his wedding day, as I saw the bridal party drive off, that the anniversary of the day would not find him as happy as he seemed then. My prophesy was only too correct."

"For my part," resumed the other, "I cannot help feeling sorry for the poor butterfly too. What will she do in the storm?"

"Harg like a mill-stone round his neck, or perhaps run off with that intolerable coxcomb, Dacre, with whom she has been flirting for months past."

"Come, Stone, you are hard on her. He is paying attention to that matchless flirt, Miss Maberly."

"Nothing of the sort. Has he not declared a dozen times that he would never marry in Canada, and sneered, like the puppy that he is, when quizzed about Miss Letty. I've watched them often, and noticed that he only danced with her when he could not get her friend."

"But Mrs. Weston brought her husband a large fortune—what has become of it?"

"Swamped, every cent. She would not allow her guardians to have a penny settled on herself."

"Well, you must at least give her credit for a generous spirit."

"Tush! mere obstinacy. Did so, probably, to spite her guardian. Weston made a gallant fight of it. Norris, who lives opposite, says that he and his clerk, Reeve,