

may still be alive, in which case he is sure to turn up before long.'

'Well, everybody has been led to consider him dead for the last four years, and I think it will be the very height of selfishness and inconsideration in the young man if he is alive after all,' remarked Lady William, in the same acid tone. 'What made him run away from home in the first instance?'

'An unhappy disagreement, I understand, with his stepmother. His father, the late General Chasemore, chose, when Mr Vivian was already twenty years of age, to marry again, and his choice unfortunately fell on a lady who was addicted to—that is, who had a weakness for—'

'What' demanded Mrs. Runnymede, as she stared the little lawyer full in the face with her bold black eyes.

Mr. Farthingale seemed to be in a dilemma.

'It is difficult to speak of such things before ladies of your position;' he murmured after a pause; 'but the fact is that the second Mrs. Chasemore had what the doctors term an inclination to the use of alcoholic stimulants, which caused much dissension and unhappiness in her family circle.'

'Oh, is that all!' said Lady William, contemptuously. 'That's common enough nowadays, I can tell you. I could point out half-a-dozen women in this room to-night who do the same thing.'

The subject did not seem to interest Mrs. Runnymede. She leaned over the table to Lady William and whispered:

'How beautiful Miss Nettleship is looking this evening!'

The remark was irrelevant, but it seemed to distract the mother's attention.

'Where is she? Ah, talking to Sir Arthur Chasemore! I thought as much, They are such friends. But I should like her to hear this story. Would you step across the room, colonel, and bring my daughter to me? Say I wish to speak to her for a moment.'

The old colonel rose stiffly from his chair to do the Lady's bidding, and in a few minutes returned with Miss Nettleship upon his arm.

'What is it you require of me, mamma?' she said indifferently.

Regina Nettleship was not a pretty woman, but she was very handsome. There was no rippling charm about her laughter, no quick, sweet lightning in the flash of her eye, that would have made a man turn back to look at her. She was tall, fair, and perfectly self-possessed, with good features and a fine figure; but her eyes and her

mouth were cold, and her whole manner reserved. She looked like a queen, but a queen that kept her subjects at a distance. She was almost shabbily attired in a black net dress that had turned brown with age, and a pair of gloves that had been both cleaned and mended. Yet no one could have mistaken her for other than she was; a gentlewoman with good blood in her.

'Mr. Farthingale is telling us such a wonderful story, Regina, and I want you to listen to it. It is all about Sir Arthur's cousin, that eccentric young man who disappeared from his home some years ago, and now it seems that Sir Penegrine has left all his fortune to him. Here, my dear, just sit down on the edge of my chair and hear what Mr. Farthingale has to say on the subject. It is really most interesting and romantic.'

'Thank you, mamma, but I would rather stand!' replied Regina.

'I was just telling Lady William,' said Mr. Farthingale, recommencing, in deference to the new-comer, 'that, four years ago, owing to some unhappy dissensions at home, Mr. Vivian Chasemore left his father's house and never returned to it. At the time of General Chasemore's death, the young man was advertised for, but did not respond, so it was concluded he was dead himself or had left the country. The grandfather, Sir Penegrine, never made any sign on these occasions; but two months ago, when he died and his will was opened, it was found that he had always looked upon Mr. Vivian as his favourite, and passing over his elder son's child, the present baronet, and all his other grandchildren, had left the whole of his fortune to Vivian Chasemore, in case he re-appeared within three years' time, during which period an unremitting search is, by the provisions of the will, to be made for him. Of course it was a disappointment to Sir Arthur, who has only his very small patrimony and his profession on which to keep up the title. However, should his cousin not be found within the stipulated time, the fortune is to revert to him, so he has still a chance.'

'Oh, Mr. Vivian will not be heard of, depend upon it!' exclaimed Lady William, confidently.

'I am not so sure of that, my lady. I think there is every likelihood of his returning as soon as the advertisements which we have sent out catch his eye.'

'But if he is alive, why didn't he come forward at his own father's death! Didn't he inherit some money then, Mr. Farthingale?'

'None at all, General Chasemore died in