

The unhappy man who had been turned away from that same entrance sighed heavily and went away down the sunny street, hanging his head. He told himself that it would be only a fool or a madman who could pretend to misunderstand so plain a refusal as this.

Perhaps it was meant kindly, he thought, and graced at the thought. Miss Bracegirdle was no coquette, and did not care to have men offer her their love when she had no intention of accepting it. He was so desperately enamoured of her that he busied himself in trying to see this cruel cut as a kind deed. His hopes were gone, but he could not bear so suddenly to lose his idol.

He determined he would not worry her by his unwelcome presence where she could not easily avoid him, nor permit himself to be lashed at by his successful rival. So he excused himself from certain engagements at houses where he knew he should meet her. He gave up dancing and took to cards instead.

"Mamma," said Miss Bracegirdle one day, "doesn't it seem odd that for three weeks Captain Fortescue has not called?"

"It does," said Mrs. Bracegirdle, "and yet, when I come to think of it, we have not met him out anywhere, either. He must be ill, or more likely he has gone out of town. He will call when he comes back."

This she said, noting that her daughter looked a little pale and out of sorts. But, secretly, she was uneasy herself.

Captain Fortescue had showed signs of being so hot a wooer that it seemed very improbable he would leave town without a word to them. At the next opportunity she quietly made some inquiries about him, and learned that Captain Fortescue was neither ill nor out of town.

This was bad news indeed; for Mrs. Bracegirdle knew well that her daughter's heart was seriously touched; and, as Captain Fortescue was perfectly "eligible," all had promised fairly.

Now that fair promise was destroyed. There was nothing to be done, except try by other distractions to erase the impression which Captain Fortescue had made.

Mrs. Bracegirdle devoted herself to her daughter more tenderly than ever, and the girl understood her.

Amid all the gaiety and the many engagements which came with every day, there was a melancholy about the house which had never been there before. It was impossible for them to banish it altogether. Even Master Harry, a cheerful youth of about fourteen, became aware of it at last, and declared his sister was not half so jolly as she used to be.

One day, when his mother and sister were taking a quiet half hour before dressing for dinner, he came into the apartment carrying an umbrella.

"I say, mother, this umbrella has been in the house for a month. The fellow it belonged to has forgotten all about it, I expect; don't you think I might have it?"

"Isn't it your's?" said Mrs. Bracegirdle. "I gave you a silver-handled one last year."

"Oh, I lost that long ago," replied the youth, coolly, "and I may as well have this instead. It's like mine, but ever so much sweller. There's a name engraved on it, but I could have that scratched out."

"Let me see the name, Harry," said Mrs. Bracegirdle.

She took it and read "Fortescue." An odd look came over her face. She said nothing for a moment, but seemed plunged in thought; then rose and went down stairs to the dining room. She rang the bell and the stern-eyed maid appeared.

"Eliza," she said, "can you remember the appearance of that young man who came one day and asked for an umbrella? He came twice, I think you said, and asked for me the second time. Describe him if you can."

"He was quite a gentleman to look at, ma'am," said Eliza, "but this sort mostly are. Tall and broad shouldered, and military-looking, with blue eyes, very short, fair hair, and a long, heavy, fair moustache."

"That will do, Eliza," said Mrs. Bracegirdle, "you can go."

As soon as Eliza had left the room, Mrs. Bracegirdle sat down and wrote a note. Then she tore it up and wrote another, which was merely an informal invitation to lunch the next day. Then she called Harry down to her.

"Harry," she said, "I want you to go to Captain Fortescue's rooms and take this note and the umbrella. See him if you possibly can and try to explain about this unhappy umbrella and that stupid Eliza."

Then she told Harry the story, at which he laughed immensely.

"Now, you must not laugh, but think how you can do the thing nicely. Harry. You can manage it admirably if you choose. It is too absurd to put on paper. And make Captain Fortescue promise to come to lunch, just to show he bears no malice."

Harry put on his best manners, and accomplished his task well, though he felt much aggrieved at having to give up the umbrella. Captain Fortescue came to lunch, and this time Eliza admitted him, and blushed as she did so, etc., etc., etc.

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