

"I will write to you on the subject," is all her answer, and they are obliged to let her go, and trust to persuading her to take up her final abode with them more effectually by letter than by word of mouth.

But when she has been at Sydenham for about a week, Irene writes to tell Oliver that he must at once abandon all hope that she will ever return to Fen Court. She has fixed on her future residence, she affirms, but intends for the present to keep its destination a secret, even from her own relations, in order that he may have no excuse for attempting to seek her out. It is a long letter, full of explanation, but written so calmly and resolutely that Oliver feels that there is nothing to be done but acquiesce in her decision. She begs him, however, so earnestly, for her sake and the sake of her dear dead husband, *not* to abandon the property confided to his charge, that he feels bound to follow her wishes and remain where he is. He makes several attempts, nevertheless, to trace her whereabouts, by letters to Mrs. Cavendish and Mr. Walmsley, the solicitor, but the lady appears as distressed at her niece's leaving her in ignorance as he is, and the lawyer is deep and silent as the grave. And so for the nonce Oliver Ralston—or Mordaunt, as he must now be called—tries to make himself contented by wielding the sceptre at Fen Court and devising plans with the sapient Isabella for circumventing the young widow's resolution to remain undiscovered. But all in vain; three months pass, and they are still ignorant of her destination. It is close upon Christmas-day, when one afternoon a card is brought in to Oliver on which is inscribed the name of Lord Muiraven. Now, before Irene's departure she had confided to him all the details of the torn letter, and her last interview with her husband, so that he hopes Lord Muiraven may have seen her or come from her, and goes in to meet him gladly. Two gentlemen await him in the library; one clad in deep mourning, whom he concludes to be Muiraven; the other, a shorter, fairer, less handsome, but more cheerful-looking man, whom we have met once before, but doubtless quite forgotten; who was Muiraven's chum at college, and is now Saville Moxon, Esq., barrister-at-law, and owner of the loliest set of chambers in the Temple.

"Mr. Mordaunt, I believe," says Muiraven, rather stiffly; "the—the nephew of my late friend Colonel Mordaunt."

"I am Mr. Mordaunt; and I have often heard your name from my uncle's wife. Won't you sit down?"

His cordial manner rather overcomes the other's *hauteur*.

"Let me introduce my friend Mr. Moxon," he commences, and then, taking a chair, "We shall not detain you long, Mr. Mordaunt. I was much surprised to learn that Mrs. Mordaunt is not living at the Court. I came here fully expecting to see her. I am anxious to ascertain her address. Will you kindly give it me?"

"I wish I could, Lord Muiraven. I do not know it myself. I was in hopes you brought me news of her."

"Brought you news! How strange! But why is she not here? Is there any mystery about it?"

"No mystery—but much sadness. I am not a man to be envied, Lord Muiraven. I stand here, by my uncle's will, the owner of Fen Court, to the wrong and detriment of one of the noblest and most worthy women God ever made."

"You are right there," exclaims Muiraven, as he seizes the other's hand. "But, pray tell me every thing. My friend here is as my second self. You may speak with impunity before him. For God's sake, put me out of suspense! Where is Irene and the child?"

"If I may speak openly, my lord, that unfortunate child has been the cause of all our misery!"

"But—how—how?"

Then Oliver tells them how, in words that would be but repetition to write down again. He conceals nothing, hoping that Lord Muiraven may see the justice of following up Irene and relieving her of so onerous a charge as the protection of his illegitimate child. But as he proceeds he can perceive no blush of shame upon Muiraven's face; on the contrary, although he grows pale with excitement, his eyes never once flinch before those of his informant. When the story is concluded, he turns round to Moxon, and addresses him.

"Saville, we must leave this as quickly as possible. I must begin the search again in London. I feel as though I could not let an hour pass over my head without doing something. Thanks, Mr. Mordaunt, for your candid explanation. You have done me the greatest service possible.—If Irene is to be found, I will send you news of her."

"But, my lord—excuse my curiosity—but will you be as candid as I have been, and let me know if the suspicions Irene holds with respect to her adopted child are correct?"

"They are so, Mr. Mordaunt, and they are not. The time for concealment is at an end. The boy