

mischievous smile. Just the wild merry Cecilia Stanton, who amused me so much, long ago, and rendered her home during her short vacations, a scene of noise and mirth. I, soldier as I was, and man of the world, though it must be confessed, a very young one, found the greatest amusement in listening to her lively talk, and entering into her childish schemes. What tales of boarding school exploits, of rules broken, and mistresses set at defiance, did she not recount to me—what traits of the friendship, merriment and genius of a certain lively Florence Fitz-Hardinge, who ever bore a prominent part in all her relations. Am I mistaken in thinking I am now speaking to the heroine of all these wondrous tales?"

"Your supposition is correct—I was the early friend and ally of your cousin, but I must say that, for her sake as well as mine, I regret that you still remember the silly adventures and acts on which we then prided ourselves so highly."

"Surely you are mistaken, Miss Fitz-Hardinge. It seems to me, it should only add a feeling of double interest to our present friendship. We cannot help feeling that we are not entire strangers to each other."

Some vivid reminiscence suddenly brought a crimson glow to Florence's cheek, whilst her companion, seemingly not noticing it, continued—

"Yes, indeed! you were quite familiar to me before I went to India. Would it be presumption on my part to hope that Cecilia had performed, at least in some slight degree, a similar kind office with regard to myself?"

Here Florence detected a half suppressed smile flash across his features, which did not tend to lessen her embarrassment, and, with a wretchedly sustained attempt at carelessness, she rejoined:

"Miss Stanton, with whom you were a great favorite, very frequently spoke of you; and I who took an interest of course in every thing which interested her, became quite solicitous about your fortunes and safety."

The blushing embarrassment with which the elegant easy Miss Fitz-Hardinge delivered this speech, excited no unworthy feelings of triumph in her listener's breast, and though inwardly amused as well as gratified, he permitted no smile or glance to betray his feelings. Sensible or indifferent, however, as he might have been, it was impossible for him to resist the pleasing influence of the conviction, that he had been an object of interest and admiration to the beautiful and gifted woman beside him during the earlier and perhaps better years of her life, and though there lurked not one particle of vanity in his character, an innate conviction told him that very little effort on his part would ripen the

girl's fancy into the woman's love. But the latter was a consummation Colonel Delamere in no way wished for, and having no intention of seeking Florence for his wife, he was too honourable to endeavour to win her affections. Before he had ever seen her, she had been represented to him as a being as heartless as she was beautiful, as selfish as she was fascinating. Listening and believing, his resolve to shun her was taken, and notwithstanding the peculiarity of the circumstances accompanying their first interview, the cold politeness he had previously traced out for himself was then steadfastly maintained. In his subsequent communications with Florence, he saw nothing of the arrogant consciousness of her fascinations, of the mocking cruel spirit that had been imputed to her, and unconscious that this was the result solely of the feelings of timidity and embarrassment with which his own presence alone inspired her, he began to think that she had been calumniated by enemies raised up against her by her own beauty and superior attractions. Whilst the whole world was wondering what change had come over her, what event had clouded her usually light and reckless spirit, Colonel Delamere was beginning to find almost unconsciously to himself a sincere pleasure in her society. The simple suspicion of this fact, though unsupported by any open marks of devotion on his part, was happiness to Florence. She made no efforts to disguise her sentiments, and it was already whispered, in the circles in which she moved, that the fastidious and courted Miss Fitz-Hardinge had given her heart to Colonel Delamere, even before he had sought the gift. These rumours troubled her little, for her feelings had long previously lost the delicate sensitiveness of girlhood. There had been a time when such a whisper would have overwhelmed her with shame and indignation, but her intercourse with the world had rubbed off the troublesome delicacy, and now, provided she won Delamere, she cared little what others thought or said. What effect this open unreserved preference had at first produced on the Colonel, it would have been impossible to divine. Long after it was apparent to all others, he, himself, appeared, or affected to appear, to be unconscious of it, and to the jests of his companions, who were one and all jealous of the *éclat* which his good fortune had obtained him, he replied only by a cold reserve, ever speaking of Florence in terms of distant though profound respect. To herself he paid no particular attention, beyond the polite courtesy their intimate friendship warranted; but if in this respect he was ungrateful, he at least gave her no cause for jealousy by evincing more devoted feelings for any rival.