

you and done 'you injustice, that I thought you had scorned and forsaken me—it means that I have found out my mistake—it means—O God, Hugh! it means that my heart is broken!'

With a cry she sank down again as he had first found her, with her arms stretched out before her and her head bowed upon them, whilst convulsive sobs shook her whole frame.

Scarcely as yet understanding her meaning, but filled nevertheless with a great yearning pity for her sorrow, Hugh Fleming stood by her side softly stroking the small dusky head as it lay bowed down in bitter grief before him.

'My poor child!' he said gently, whilst his compassionate hands strayed tenderly as a woman's over her soft dark hair, and by degrees the soothing touch quieted and calmed her.

'Now tell me, Juliet,' he said at length, when her sobs had ceased, and he had with gentle force raised her and placed her in an arm-chair; 'tell me now, for I hardly understand what you mean, and why the sight of that old forgotten letter should have upset you so strangely.'

'Oh, don't you understand,' she said, wringing her hands together, 'don't you see that I never received it—never saw it until to-day?'

Colonel Fleming started.

'Never saw it before!' he repeated in amazement. 'What do you mean! can you mean that you never received it?'

'Never!'

'That you thought I had left England for years without a line or a word—that I had deserted you in such a heartless way, Juliet! did you think that of me?' he asked in great agitation.

Juliet nodded sadly.

'I did think all that of you,' she answered sorrowfully. 'I lost my belief in you and in all mankind.'

'But I cannot understand it,' he said, passing his hand in a bewildered way over his forehead; 'it seems impossible. Why, I wrote it quite a week before I left England; and, yes—I remember perfectly that I posted it myself—and, of course I could not have addressed it wrongly—it seems impossible that it could have gone wrong! and besides, if so, how did it come into

your possession now? by what chance have you suddenly found it again?'

'It was brought to me not ten minutes ago by Ernestine—you don't remember Ernestine? she was my stepmother's French maid. It seems that Mrs. Blair has sent her away very suddenly for some cause or other; and partly, I suspect, from revenge, partly to extract money from me, she brought me this letter.'

'But how on earth did she get it?'

'Her story is that she only just found it slipped down between the linings of an old dress which Mrs. Blair gave her about that time, and which she had never unpicked nor made any use of; but that in turning out all her things, in order to pack them to go away, this old fragment of a letter fell out. She says—what must be true—that Mrs. Blair stole it out of the post-bag and destroyed it.'

'Good God! what could induce the woman to commit such an iniquity!' exclaimed Hugh, pacing excitedly up and down the room. 'What cause, what possible reason, could she have for such a wicked action?'

'It seems indeed hardly conceivable that any one could do such a thing,' answered Juliet; 'and yet I suppose that there is very little a spiteful wicked woman would not do to injure another.'

'But was she indeed so wicked and spiteful?' asked Hugh, as he came back and sat down beside her. 'Are you indeed sure that it was Mrs. Blair who did this thing? it hardly seems consistent with her character. I remember she used often to speak of you to me with great affection; and although she always seemed to be a very silly and conceited woman, yet I should have thought her a perfectly harmless one. Indeed, Juliet, I used often to think that you were hard on her.'

'Did you?' said Juliet in astonishment; 'did you really? In what way could you have thought me hard on her?'

'I never thought that you made sufficient allowance for her very frivolous and childish nature.'

'Ah, you did not know her as well as I did!' said Juliet, with a short bitter laugh. 'All that silly gushing childishness was put on. Mrs. Blair is by no means a fool: she is as cunning and designing a woman as I have ever met in my life, and perfectly dis-