

confiding affection, is a sight to make angels weep with joy!" and here Mrs Blair, to show her sympathy with the angels, applied the corner of her lace pocket-handkerchief to her eyes, looking furtively at it afterwards to make sure that she had not rubbed off any of the bismuth.

Colonel Fleming pushed his hand into his trousers' pockets, stared at his own feet, lifted his eyebrows, and said, "Ah yes; very true!" with the air of one who expects shortly to be hanged, after the manner of men in such embarrassing circumstances.

"So sure you would agree with me," murmured the widow with a sigh. "You will feel, I am sure, what a comfort it must be to see everything going on so well with my darling Juliet and dear Cecil Travers—so suitable in every way; in position, in fortune, in mind, and in age, Colonel Fleming?" and here she glanced up at him with a little cunning in her cold blue eyes.

"Certainly, Mrs. Blair; but you yourself—"

"Ah, don't speak of my unhappy life! pray spare me allusions to my widowed state. It is because, alas! I felt the discrepancy myself; because, because—" Here a gentle fit of sobs interrupted her, and she retired again behind her handkerchief.

"My dear Mrs. Blair," remonstrated Hugh Fleming, feeling more and more ill at ease, "I am sure I am quite distressed to have recalled anything painful; pray, forgive me."

"Say no more, dear friend," said the lady, holding out a white hand towards him, which common politeness forced him to hold for a moment in his own. "Say no more; I know your good heart, I can appreciate the delicacy of your sentiments: but to return to our beloved girl. Is it not a comfort to think that a husband is already found for her; one who is so suitable to her, so desirable in every way, and so devoted to her, so *devoted* to her?"

"Am I to understand, Mrs. Blair, that your step-daughter is engaged to this Mr.—Mr. Travers?" said Colonel Fleming, with a cold stiffness which he in vain attempted to conceal.

Again Mrs. Blair looked up at him with a quick sly glance of curiosity.

"Well, not engaged exactly," she resumed, looking down again and smoothing out the soft folds of her dress. "I suppose to say *engaged* would perhaps be rather pre-

mature; but the dear children understand each other thoroughly. Cecil is most eager, dear fellow, but Juliet is a little coy and uncertain as yet. Of course, girls are always timid in such cases, as I was myself, I well remember!" with a little sigh over the recollection.

"Ah, then, Juliet is not quite so *devoted* as the young man!" said Hugh, with a little smile.

"Now, now, Colonel, you mustn't be hard on the dear child. No lack of tenderness and heart *there*, I can assure you. But girls ought to hang back a little, and it has been so long planned and arranged for her—her dear father was so anxious, and settled it long ago with old Mr. Travers—and he spoke of it on his deathbed, he did indeed, almost with his dying breath; and the properties adjoining and all made it so very important—and Mr. Bruce and I, of course, have always felt it our duty to place it before her, and we do *hope*, Colonel Fleming, that we may count upon your support and influence in this matter, as you know she must have your consent before she marries. I do hope you will not let any little dislike you may feel to the scheme stand in the way of her dear father's last wishes."

"I, my dear madam! what can you be thinking of? I have no dislike whatever to any scheme for Miss Blair's happiness; my only wish is to do what is best and most desirable for her; what other object could I possibly have?"

"Thanks, thanks, dear friend," murmured Mrs. Blair, again putting forth her hand, which Colonel Fleming was again obliged to take; it was a very pretty hand, as he could not help noticing as he bowed over it. Poor woman, she seemed very devoted to Juliet's interests, and if she was a little affected and gushing, why was it not a sweet feminine failing? And then she was a pretty woman still, in spite of the pearl powder and rouge, a very pretty woman; a graceful figure too, he further reflected. And so he did not feel very hard-hearted towards her, although she had managed to worry him considerably about Juliet. After all, said Hugh Fleming to himself impatiently, what did it matter to him as long as the boy was steady, and fond of her, and a suitable match, as no doubt he was? That was all he, Colonel Fleming, had to