

THE FAVORITE

OF AMUSING AND AN ILLUSTRATED JOURNAL USEFUL READING

No. 23

1874

Vol. III.

JUNE 6.

16 PAGES

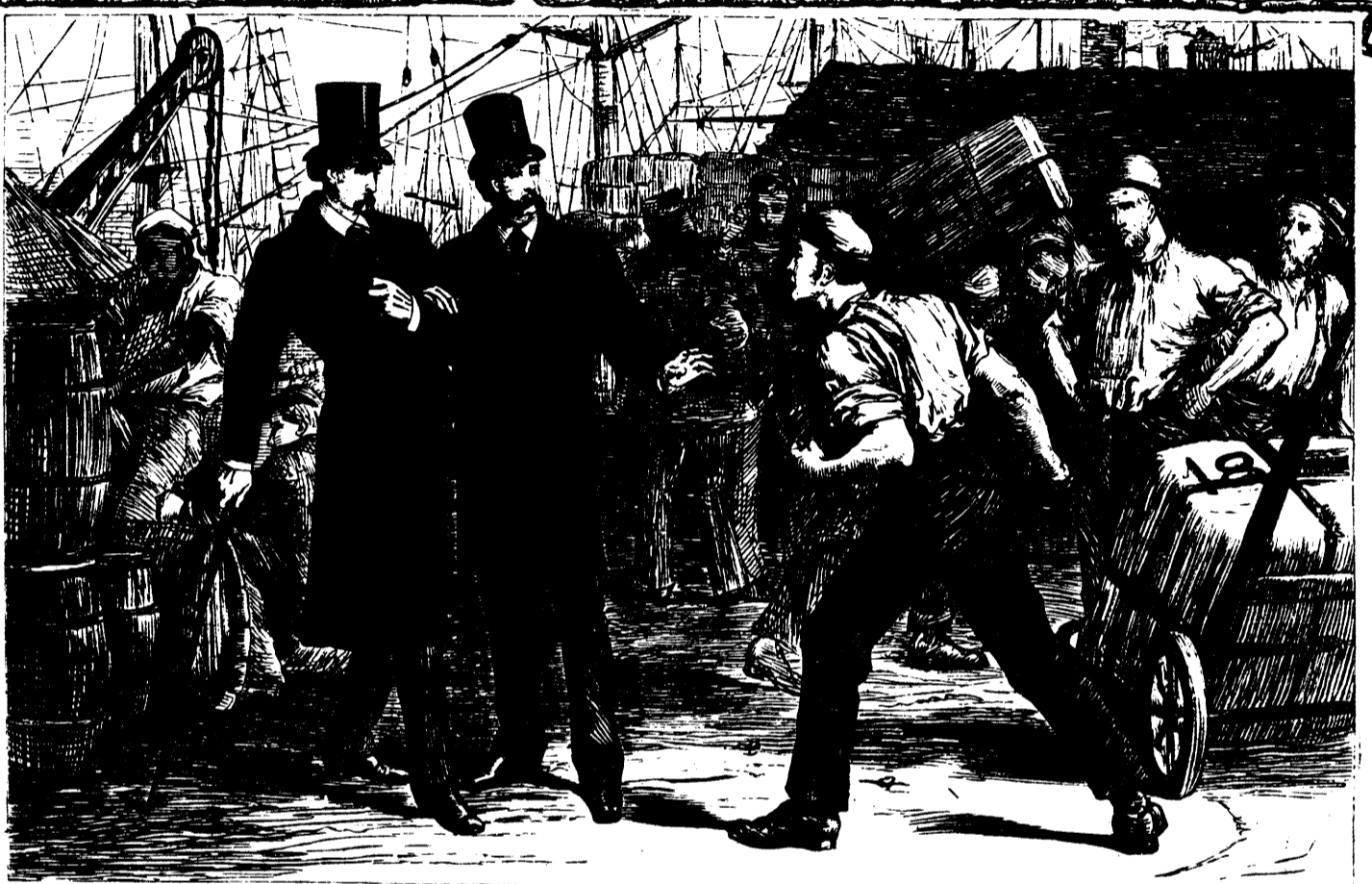
5

CENTS

For Sale by all NEWSDEALERS.

FOR TERMS OF SUBSCRIPTION

See Tenth Page of this number.



"NO INTENTIONS."

BY FLORENCE MARRYAT.

Author of "Love's Conflict," "Veronique," etc.

CHAPTER XII.

Confused voices, some earnest and some quivering, but all low, except one, whose inquiries culminate in a little shriek which makes Irene's blood turn cold to hear. She has advanced to the drawing-room door, and stands there, grasping the handle and shuddering with fear: half guessing at the coming shadow, but too frightened to go out and meet it, face to face. What are those feet which seem unable to tread otherwise than heavily, yet are accompanied by others stepping upon tip-toe, whose owners keep on whispering caution as they go? Why is the hall of Fen Court full of strange sounds and presences? what is it they have brought home so helplessly amongst them?

"LET GO, MATES! LET ME HAVE AT HIM."

She knows: the instinct of affection has told her the truth, but she is not yet able to receive it, and stands there listening, with the life-blood frozen in her veins, waiting till the visitation of God shall descend upon her head.

There is no such agony in this world as suspense. When we know for certain that death or treachery, or separation has come between us and those whom we hold dearest, the pain may be acute, but still the worst is before us: we can measure it and our own strength, and every day we find the difference, between the two grow less, until, with a thankful heart, we can acknowledge that, even though it embitter the remainder of our career, it is not unbearable.

But to be kept in suspense: to be left behind the black veil that reserve, or cruelty, or want of thought may raise between us and our fellow-creatures: to fluctuate between hope and doubt and despair until our outraged affection sickens and dies of repeated disappointments; this is the most terrible trial the human heart is capable of enduring, compared to which physical torture in its worst shape would appear trifling. And yet at times we inflict it on each other. But I think Heaven will hold the murderer, who strikes down his victim in a fit of rage, as innocent beside the man or woman who, having gained supremacy over another heart, kills it by inches with slow, drawn out suspense. The nature of the poisoner, who deals out death by infinitesimal grains of powder, is angelic by comparison.

Irene's deepest feelings are not here concerned, but she is torturing herself cruelly by standing at the drawing-room door. She is in the condition of the criminal condemned by martial law, who, his last moment having arrived, awaits with bandaged eyes and almost pulseless heart the volley that is to put him out of his misery. At last she is roused by the sound of Isabella sniffing behind her handkerchief.

"Oh! my dear Mrs. Mordaunt. I really feel

quite frightened; do you think it is possible anything can have happened? I don't want to alarm you, of course, but still—and Philip not having come home, you see—"

She can stand it no longer then, but with an effort dashes open the door and walks out blindly into the passage. The way is barricaded by Phoebe, who has evidently been set to keep guard, and whose eyes, red with crying, and wild with fear, are wandering incessantly from the hall to the drawing-room, and the drawing-room to the hall.

"Oh! my dear lady," she exclaims, as soon as she catches sight of her mistress. "Pray go back again; they don't want you there just now."

"Where? What do you mean? Tell me at once," says Irene in a tone of authority.

"Oh, it's nothing, my dear lady; indeed it's nothing; but they're busy, and they say you must keep in the drawing-room. And, oh! what am I to do?" continues the girl despairingly, as her mistress advances on her without the slightest hesitation.

"It is the Colonel! I know it. It's no use your denying it; where have they taken him?"

"Oh! I'm not sure, ma'am—into the morning room, I think; but do stop and see Mrs. Quekett first."

"Mrs. Quekett!" in a voice of the supremest contempt. "Let me pass, Phoebe; do not attempt to stop me. I should have been told of this at once."

She hurries on—half fainting with fear, but so majestically grand in her right to know the worst, that the servants that line the hall make no effort to bar her progress, but draw back, awe-struck, and look after her with their aprons to their eyes.

The morning-room seems full of people, and the first who make way for her upon the threshold are the whipper-in and her own coachman. About the table are gathered Sir John Coote and several gentlemen in hunting costume, with

