

but, alas! too late, of Alice; and he threatened, if he persevered in the pursuit of his object, to renounce his society and friendship forever. Rochester left his friend in anger, for he was annoyed and exasperated, to find such opposition where he had expected aid, and on his next interview with the countess, he told her what had passed between Overbury and himself. An entire change appeared to have come over this lady's character, since the commencement of her acquaintance with Rochester. She was then, little more than an exquisitely beautiful piece of marble, which was ready to become whatever of exquisite or revolting, it pleased the sculptor to make it. Had she never met Rochester, the evil in her nature would perhaps not have been so thoroughly aroused, and she might have left a fair and untarnished name to posterity, instead of that which has come down to us, stained with accumulated guilt. In loving Rochester, she broke the marriage vow, which, though given when a child, she had considered as binding. The barrier of female reserve once passed, there was nothing to restrain her, and her love became like the mountain stream, which leaps over every impediment in its downward course; and through its indulgence she was transformed from the gentle woman into a being of fearful power and purpose. And now, when the crisis was approaching, no wonder she dreaded one whose influence she feared might detach Rochester from her fascinations, and open his eyes to the gulph which yawned beneath him; for, with all a woman's keenness, she foresaw the misery that must ultimately result from a union so unhallowed. She therefore implored her lover to remove Overbury from the confidential post he occupied as his secretary, and represented him as guilty of the basest ingratitude, in daring to oppose a friend who had showered so many favours upon him.

Though deeply irritated against Sir Thomas, it was with reluctance Rochester admitted the thought of severing the tie that had so long bound them; but once admitted, it soon gained ground, and in his next conversation with his friend, finding him still violent in his opposition to his wishes, he plainly told him he should have no further need of his services or friendship. Stung by his manner, Overbury gave way to a naturally violent temper, and both ridiculed and reproached the young viscount, taunted him with his want of knowledge, and insinuated that if he had not carefully guided him, he would long since have fallen from his high station.

Irritated beyond endurance, Rochester went to the king and complained of Overbury's insolence, and pretending great regret at being compelled to dismiss him from his service,

begged the king to provide him with some foreign mission. The yielding monarch consented, and said he should be sent to Brussels on a private embassy. Rochester pleased that he was so easily rid of his mentor, hastened to communicate the intelligence to the countess; but to his surprise she was displeased and discontented; a fury had taken possession of her, and she would have been an admirable model for the Eumenides of old, with her lovely face so fascinating, but for the fires of hate, jealousy, and unlawful passion, which gleamed from her eyes. She spurned the idea of Overbury's receiving a post of honour from the king; she implored the viscount to have him imprisoned in the tower, vowing she should never feel happy while he was free, who had attempted to ruin her happiness by detaching from her the idolized object of her attachment. By her blandishments and entreaties she so won upon Rochester as to stifle his better nature, and he returned to the king with the forged tale, that Overbury had rejected the offer of the mission with insolence, and that from some words he had uttered in the heat of passion, he believed him to be engaged in a conspiracy to place the Lady Arabella Stuart on the throne; and accordingly, advised his immediate imprisonment. James caught the alarm; the order was given without delay, and before night Overbury was a prisoner in that tower which was also to be his grave.

The young Earl of Essex returned, and with a heart full of love, of hope, and high-wrought expectation, he sought his youthful bride, trusting to be welcomed as the husband of her choice, for no rumour of the intimacy between the favourite and his faithless wife had reached him,—since the eyes of the court were only just being opened to the impropriety of their conduct. What then was his surprise on finding himself repulsed by her with coldness and disdain; but not knowing the secret motive which actuated her, he trusted to time and his own assiduity to overcome her reticence. Young, handsome, and chivalrous, he had always found himself well received by "*le beau sexe*," and he could not admit the thought that he should be rejected where he had garnered up his affections. But vain were his attempts to move the heart of the inexorable countess; vain were her parent's commands, and the entreaties of her friends. She would not consent to acknowledge herself the lawful wife of Essex, but insisted that she would throw herself upon the law and sue for a divorce, ere she would be trammelled by a marriage contracted before she was old enough to judge for herself.

James had become deeply interested in the progress of the affair, and now, yielding to the supplications of his beloved Rochester, he took upon