

"I for one, know nothing about the girl," returned Miss Aberton, closing her haughty eyelids; "but I rather suspect she came with Mrs. Graham. Perhaps some country cousin."

"Who is paying the usual penalty of the absent now?" gaily interrupted St. John, who entered at the moment. "I hope that I am not the hapless one."

"Not exactly," returned the former speaker, with a mischievous smile. "Still, there is no material difference—for 'tis your whilom partner. Pardon me, but as I really feel a friendly solicitude regarding your peace of mind, I must inquire her name," and she raised her sparkling eyes with a pretty air of gravity to his face. St. John's brow instantly became scarlet, and he bit his lip as if to restrain his impatience.

"Surely, Mr. St. John, *sur ce chapitre on peut se rapporter à vous*," said Miss Aberton, with a somewhat sarcastic smile, curling her lip. "A guest of your sister's, and a partner of your own choice."

"Her name is Sydenham," rejoined the young man with ill dissembled annoyance. "That is all I know of her, beyond exchanging a few words, when introduced to her by Mrs. Belmont."

"Oh! fie, fie, Mr. St. John," interrupted his former tormentor, the Honorable Miss Templeton. "Do you count for nothing all the flattering smiles and compliments you showered upon her, during that short but blissful dance? A dance too, of your seeking, for 'tis to be presumed, the lady did not solicit your hand."

"Not exactly, Miss Templeton," was the cool reply; "but when my sister, who was a school-fellow of Miss Sydenham's, gave her to me as a partner, I could scarcely, even to win Miss Templeton's priceless approbation," here he bowed low, "be sufficiently ungallant to inform the young lady I had no particular desire for the honour."

"Dear Mrs. Belmont has so warm a heart," sweetly lisped the Lady Helena Stratton. "How few of us are so faithful to those delightful things, school-girl friendships."

"Sydenham is a good name, though," said another, in a more matter of fact tone; "and Miss Aberton says she came with Mrs. Graham."

"I said, I supposed so, from the circumstance of perceiving on her arm, a rare and magnificent bracelet, the only passable thing the young girl had on her person, which I am convinced belongs to Mrs. Graham."

"An opal set in rubies," exclaimed Lady Helena. "I have seen it on her several times, and 'tis a very rare ornament. I also saw Mrs. Graham address a few words to her at the beginning of the evening."

"But Mrs. Graham has not troubled herself much about her since," rejoined Miss Templeton.

"How could she? Mrs. Graham, ethereal soul! being, as she herself says, poetically, a creature whose whole being is devoted to sweet sounds. I really believe she has been in the music room all night, and hush! I hear her full tones at the present moment."

"She certainly has a beautiful voice," said St. John, sincerely delighted with the change the conversation had taken. "We can distinguish the words partly from here, 'I'll hang my harp on a willow tree.'"

"I sincerely wish she would 'hang her harp on a willow tree,' for I am heartily sick of its strains," said Miss Aberton, as she rose from the couch; "but, come, let us leave Mrs. Graham, and her charming *protégée*, to their fate. The subject is worn out."

"Nay, do not let us leave this sweet spot so soon," returned Miss Templeton. "I really shall change the hangings of my morning room, and adopt this beautiful shade. And what a charmingly mysterious recess! Do you remember the words of the old song.

'I'm weary of dancing now, she cried,
Here tarry a moment, I'll hide, I'll hide.'

Shall I follow her example?" and with the graceful *étourderie* of a child, she sprang forward, and grasped the purple draperies in her small hand. What a moment of fearful, of breathless agony, must that have been for the trembling being they screened! For a second, Miss Templeton held the curtains, and then with a gay laugh, she turned away, exclaiming: "No! I had better not be too rash. Who knows but yonder draperies conceal some solemn mysteries? There never was such a thing heard of in a romance, as a recess without its grisly skeleton, or mysterious portrait, making awful descents from its frame, and taking short pedestrian excursions through the halls and passages. Really, I appeal to you, Miss Aberton, does it not look like the nooks we read of in old fashioned novels? Dark, rich folds, hanging from the lofty ceiling!"

"It looks like a nook marvellously well adapted to play the eaves-dropper in," drily returned Miss Aberton, who concealed with difficulty, the disgust which the *enfantillage* of her friend excited.

"Nay, do not check Miss Templeton's delightful enthusiasm," said Henry St. John, in a tone, whose double refined politeness savoured strongly of sarcasm. "Really, such freshness, such *naïve* eagerness, is a charming deviation from our customary monotonous insipidity."

Miss Templeton saw at once that Mr. St. John