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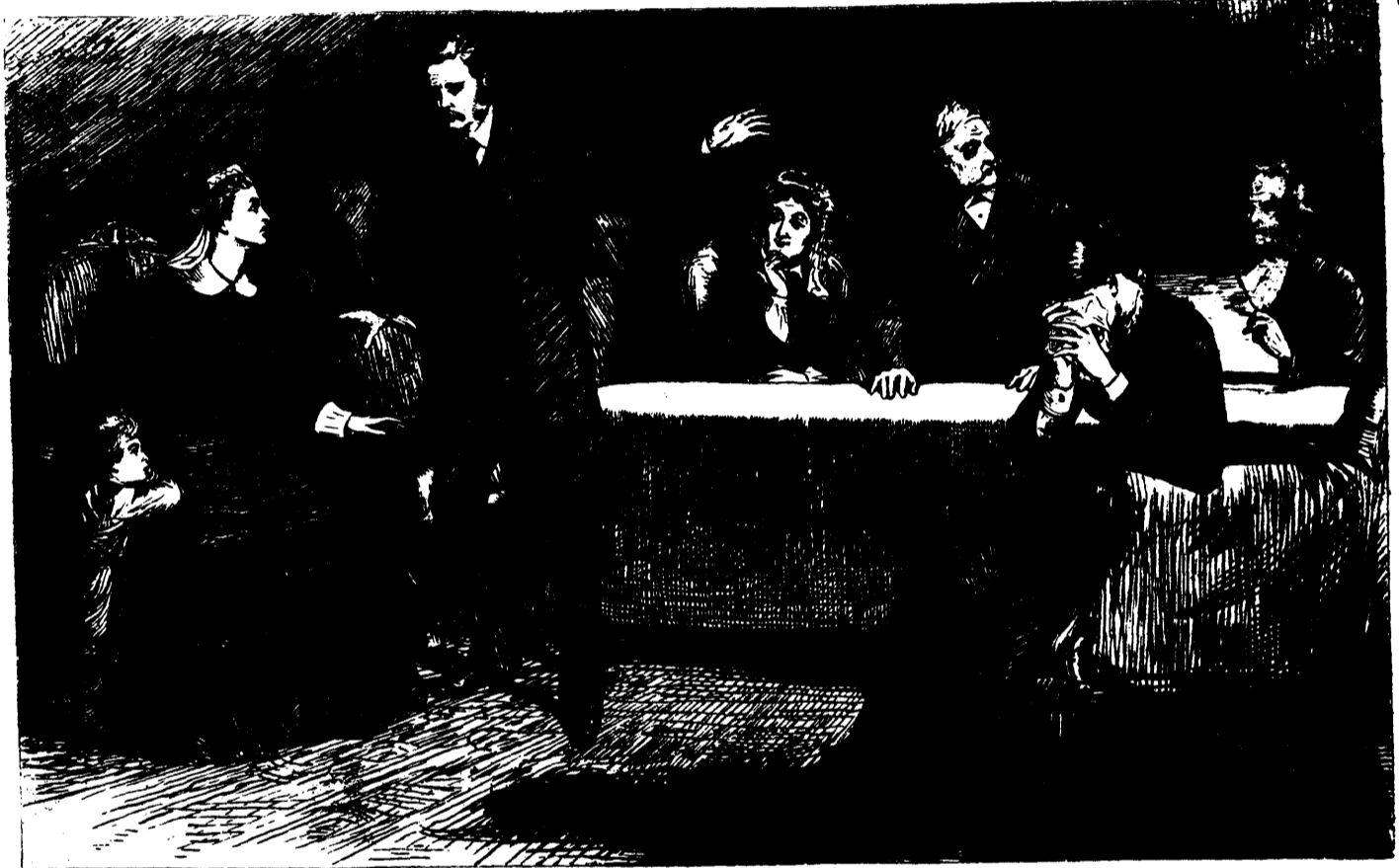
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"I WON'T BELIEVE IT," HE MUTTERS AS HE STAGGERS BACKWARDS."

"NO INTENTIONS."

BY FLORENCE MARRYAT.

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

CHAPTER XI.

The words which have struck him to the ground are these:

MY DEAR
has decided me
which has given me
it is very painful to
to it before you, but I
You have taken a great
called Tommy Brown, and

discover who is his father to let him know of the boy's will you say if I tell you he is your own child. Do not condemn you without proof my possession, contain your his mother—your photograph your hair so that I cannot be taken. I love the dear child as he is my own, and it would break to part with him so you may it costs me to make this known since he belongs to you I feel right to him. In the old days I

And here the letter, which is but a fragment of one of the many epistles which Irene commenced to Lord Murraven, and then, in her uncertainty, tore up again, comes to an abrupt conclusion.

It lies upon the desk before him, but he has not the courage to lift his eyes and look at it again, nor is there need, for every word is lithographed upon his brain in characters that nothing in this life will have the power to efface.

Colonel Mordaunt has received his death blow.

And so the wretched man lies where he has fallen, across his study table, and, regardless of the sweet sights and sounds with which the summer evening has environed him, suffers himself to be led forth by that relentless guide, Suspicion, into the dark mysterious Past, and loses Hope at every footstep of the way.

It is true then—he has been fighting the good fight of faith in her innocence and purity in vain. Quekett is right, and he is wrong. His wife and Lord Murraven have not only met before, but there is a secret understanding between them relative to her adopted child. And why has not he also been admitted to her confidence?

He tries to remember all the incidents that took place at the time of Myra Cray's death and the boy's admission to Fen Court; and he cannot satisfy his own mind that Irene did not intentionally deceive him. How astonished was every one who knew her at the unusual interest she took in that child's welfare—how distressed she was at the idea of not being allowed to succour him—how she has clung to and indulged and petted him ever since he has been in her possession! What other poor children has Irene been thus partial to? What anxiety does she now evince at the fate of many other little ones left in the same predicament? She knew the boy belonged to Lord Murraven all the while; and yet she declared at the time of the Glottonbury ball that she had never met him!

God! is it possible that this creature, whom he has almost worshipped for her saint-like purity and truth, can be a mass of deceit—a whitened sepulchre—fair to the view without, but inside nothing but rottenness and dead men's bones?

He writhes upon his seat as the idea occurs to him. And yet upon its impulse his thoughts go hurrying madly back into the Past, tripping each other up upon the way; but collecting, as they go, a mass of evidence that appals him. What!—what in Heaven's name was it that her mother said so long ago in Brussels, about Irene having had a disappointment which compelled her to bring her abroad—about some scoundrel who deceived her, and had broken down her health?

What scoundrel? What disappointment? How much or how little do women mean when they use such ambiguous terms as those? And then Irene herself—did she not confirm her mother's statement, and refuse altogether to marry him until—Ah! what was the reason that made her change her mind so suddenly at the last? Is this another devil sprung up to torture him? Yet she seemed happy enough

