

was an inquiry from the writer concerning herself; she had feared she was found out. But what darker suspicion was this which was entering her mind.

"Tell me first, dear Lady Julie," she exclaimed, "if Captain Brand is a friend of yours?"

"Bring me that casket, if you please."

Margaret brought the casket and placed it before her.

"Do you see this ring," rapidly tossing rare chains, jewel cases and bracelets. "Yes, here it is. I am not superstitious about such things, but I don't like to be labelled 'out of the market,' so I do not wear it often; but it is my engagement ring—is it not magnificent? This ring was given to me by Captain St. Udo Brand six months ago, and some day I shall be mistress of Seven Oak Waaste."

Margaret clasped her hands and gasped.

To think of the hungry kestrel pouncing upon this innocent bird! To fancy the terrible Captain Brand wooing the affections of her Lady Julie!

"I did not know it," was all she could articulate.

"Of course you did not; how should you? But you have not told me how you came to know Captain Brand's writing?" insisted her ladyship.

Margaret saw that exposure was coming; she expected it to be in that letter.

"Read what your fiancé says, and then listen to my explanation," she murmured, turning away.

My lady, slightly irritated, tore off the seal and began to skim over the contents.

"Heavens!" she ejaculated, "what is this? He writes from New York, saying that he has left England, he hopes, forever; that he is going to get a commission in the Federal army, and win his spurs, and he gives his reasons: 'At present, my Julie, your fiancé is a penniless man, with only a pedigree, and it is to win something more substantial that I have left England. My grandmother has died, and contrary to all expectations, the estate of Seven Oak Waaste has departed out of the family and gone to my grandmother's companion. If I had been obedient to the injunctions of my hoodwinked relative, Mrs. Brand, I would have married the clever adventuress, Miss Margaret Walsingham, who I firmly believe plotted to supplant me as she has done, and I would have thus shared the estate. But love, one thing held me back. I have pinned my faith in woman's purity to Juliana Ducie's sleeve, for I think, my child, you are about the best of your sex; and honor forbade me to retract my faith to you. So the future I offer you is this: Will you

wait patiently and constantly for the man you swore to be true to forever? Don't say yes, without knowing your own strength. If you can be brave, patient, wise, unselfish, you will be the first woman I ever met who deserves the much travestied title of "woman." My little darling, you know that I love you, and that I would become a good man if your hands cared to beckon me, and I place my future life at your feet. Make it bright and pure by your constancy, or make it black and sullied by the universal peculiarity of your sex—treachery!"

"What can he be thinking of?" cried the reader, with a burst of angry tears. "Why should he expect such an unheard of thing from me, if he has lost Castle Brand and Seven Oak Waaste?"

Margaret listened as in a dream.

This was a new light upon St. Udo Brand's movements. Did his character suffer by it? He had gone away and given up his lands to one whom he considered a greedy schemer; and he had flung himself into another life, for the sake of her whom he loved. How had she wronged him by her terror of him?

Quick as light her feelings underwent a change, and my lady gazed in astonishment as her quiet companion threw off the guise which she had worn for security.

"Dear Lady Juliana," panted Margaret. "do not blame Captain Brand, who has been honorable to his engagement with you where meaner men have failed. Perhaps—who knows? yours may be the hand which will lead him into a higher way. Oh, my darling, do not hold lightly your power."

"Why should you espouse Captain Brand's cause?" demanded my lady. "What can Miss Blair have to do with Captain Brand?"

Tears burst from the eyes of the quiet companion, and rushed in a volcanic shower down her cheeks, as she answered,

"I am Margaret Walsingham."

"You!" exclaimed my lady, after a stare of unutterable astonishment.

"My darling Lady Julie!" cried Margaret, catching my lady's hands and holding them in her own. "I am that unfortunate, that wretched *protegee* of Mrs. Brand's unwise affection; but never think that I would accept the Brand estates when obtained in such a way, or that I would willingly defraud St. Udo Brand. I thank Heaven that these hands," proudly holding them out, "are yet unsullied by such sin."

"How is it that you are here under the name of Blair?"

"I left Castle Brand to win my bread, and did not wish to be traced."

"How strange! Then the fortune will