

fickleness, nay, more, with actual unkindness and ingratitude. Arthur heard me in silence—never did he insinuate, either by word or look, that he considered Margaret unworthy of his love. One word of explanation would have served to exculpate himself, and yet that word was never spoken by him. Now that I can appreciate the motives by which he was actuated, I cannot sufficiently admire the delicate and consistent generosity displayed by him throughout the entire affair. But now comes the most painful part of my story, the secret cause of my unkindness towards yourself—I would find the task still more painful were I not aware that you must already begin to understand what must have appeared so unaccountable, so that my explanation now dwindles to a trifle. You must ere this have guessed that my coldness proceeded exclusively from my bitter disappointment as regarded Margaret. To see her the wife of my brother, had been, for years, the chosen wish of my heart—before that one darling desire, even that of my own happiness became comparatively slight. Believing her the pattern of every virtue, I deemed that she alone could make my brother truly happy. I knew that my father and mother were equally anxious that the union should take place. What then must have been my regret and disappointment when this long cherished project was rendered impracticable, by what I termed my brother's fatuity? Within a few years we followed both our parents to the grave, and were thus left to console each other for the loss of all we had loved. We were drawn, by affliction, more closely together, but yet that fatal remembrance threw its shadow over our affection, and in my regret for the loss of Margaret's society, I insensibly began to look somewhat coldly on Arthur, whom I believed the cause of this lamented deprivation. Heaven knows, I have frequently given to that dear brother, much cause to doubt my affection, and yet he never complained—never hinted that I accused him unjustly. His marriage with yourself, as you may well believe, gave the finishing stroke to what I termed his offences, inasmuch that I could not bring myself to behave even tolerably civil to you. I knew you had brought my brother a large fortune—I was informed, even by friends of mine, in Dublin, whose testimony was, of course, impartial, that your character was fair as your person, and that you were much beloved by all those with whom you associated. I knew besides, and above all, that Arthur loved you as he had never loved Margaret; but yet my jaundiced imagination could only regard you as the successful rival—the supplanter of my still dear and still lamented friend.

It is some weeks since I became aware of the fact that you were likely to give an increase to our now contracted family circle. This, indeed, staggered my jealous resentment. Ardently desiring to see my father's name continued, I hailed the prospect thus opening upon us, with much inward satisfaction; but yet—yet—in short, the feelings of years were not all at once effaced, and though considerably softened towards you, I still went on, to all outward appearance, the same cold, severe being, you had so long known me. Imagine, then, my astonishment, when on leaving the room so abruptly, yesterday evening, I found in my *escritoire* that letter of Campbell's to Arthur, which you have already seen!"

"Strange," observed Eleanor, "that you have so long overlooked that same letter, where it lay—there is some mystery about that, too—is there not?"

"Why, yes," returned Mary. "It is altogether unaccountable. It is addressed to Arthur, and from its date, must have been some years lying somewhere. How, then, has it found its way into my possession, for I most certainly never saw it before last night?"

"I can answer the question, I trust to your satisfaction," replied the clear, musical voice of Arthur, who had entered behind, unperceived by the ladies—the attention of both being so completely engrossed by the subject in hand. Both started, and perhaps there was but little gladness on the countenance of either. The fact was, they were both disagreeably surprised by his overhearing their conversation."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Arthur, "you can, neither of you, afford me even one word of welcome, and yet my coming is most opportune, seeing that I alone can throw light upon certain portions of Mary's story, which now rest in mystery. Who can explain so well as I the secret of the letter, for I, myself, placed it where you found it, Mary, in order to dispel some part of the illusion which had so long obscured your mental vision. So long as I alone suffered from your tender remembrance of your lost friend, I could patiently endure, but when I found that my gentle Eleanor was also rendered miserable on the same account, I thought it full time to put an end to your fond repining—being of opinion that I ought not to sacrifice the happiness of one so justly beloved for the purpose of screening the errors of one who is utterly unworthy of consideration. Oh! fool—fool—idiot that I was—how could I ever have been so infatuated as to love one so base!—This—this it is which has embittered my inmost soul, and filled it with shame and regret,—would that I could wipe from the too-faithful tablet of