

diant in beauty and happiness, but such kindly thoughts were promptly put to flight by the appearance of Captain Dacre, who approached the hostess, and after a moment of gay conversation, moved off with her to join the dancers.

It was not so much the bright smiles Virginia vouchsafed her partner that annoyed Weston; he was accustomed to her gay, coquettish ways, and knew that they meant nothing. But there was that in the devoted manner of Dacre, in the rapt attention with which he, usually so apathetic both with women and men, listened to the airy nothings of his beautiful partner, that filled Weston with anger and vague alarm. Time wore on, the revel reached its end, and as the last guest descended the steps, Clive entered his dressing-room and flung himself on the sofa with a heavy heart.

Ah! where would it all end? Would he, could he speak to her; and if he did what would it avail? Look at the estrangement a word of remonstrance had caused between them already. Still, if she entered the room now, he would kindly meet her, and freely, openly renew his warnings about this new military acquaintance. But she came not. Miss Maberly had waylaid her, and under pretext of talking the party over, had drawn her into her own cosy room, where nearly two hours were spent in the important discussion.

Mr. Weston left for his office the following morning, long before Virginia was up, and the latter was still sleeping when Letty entered with the intention of sitting on the foot of her bed, as she often did, and planning the programme of the day. Her glance; in carelessly wandering round the room, fell on a tiny note placed in a conspicuous position on the toilet table, and she took it up. Imperfectly fastened, it almost opened of itself, and after a glance at the quiet sleeper she walked towards the window, intending to seal the note more

carefully after reading it, and to put it back. It contained but these lines:

“MY DEAR WIFE,—I feel assured you will not set me aside to-day for Captain Dacre or anyone else! I shall return at two this afternoon, and despite the tyrannous laws of fashion, hope to have a pleasant drive with you, for once without the *inevitable* Letty or any other of your followers. Yours fondly.

“CLIVE.”

Moved by a sudden impulse of anger, Miss Maberly tore the paper in two, and then, startled at her own act, cast an alarmed glance towards the bed, but Virginia still slept on. Her resolution was at once taken. Thrusting the note into her bosom, she stole from the room and rapidly regained her own. “Thank fortune!” she murmured, committing the fragments of the note to the fire, “none of the servants saw me leaving Virginia’s chamber, and the disappearance of the letter will be attributed to their carelessness. Ah, Clive, the inevitable Letty will yet pay the debt she owes with interest!” And then sinking into the easy chair in front of the fire, she gazed into its depths, an angry light yet gleaming in the deep brown eyes that could look so dove-like when she willed it. “Yes, you will be set aside for Captain Dacre to-day, and your wife will not go out with you, despite your tender entreaty. Letty Maberly is not to be slighted with impunity.”

CHAPTER IV.

THE two friends met, gay and talkative, at the breakfast table, and during the course of the meal Miss Maberly requested Virginia to accompany her and Captain Dacre to town that afternoon, for the purpose of selecting some new waltzes. A remembrance of the conversation with Mr. Weston, in which he had so