

morning, either completing preparations in one room, or admiring them in another, or altering them somewhere else. Besides, as flowers were to form the decorations, there was necessarily much left to be done on the last day. The gardener brought in huge bunches of his most gorgeous dahlias, and other floral magnificence. Festoons of ivy, with glowing groups of flowers inserted here and there, were arranged on the walls of the dancing-room, and long wreaths of roses and myrtle reached from each corner of the room to the central chandelier. The wax-lights rose, slender and snowy, from luxurious nests of soft, rich colour—geranium, and verbena, and heliotrope, artfully inserted into small dishes of water among the glass facets of the chandeliers. It all looked very pretty, Caroline thought, as she gave the finishing touch to the great wreath of cedar and oak, which she had arranged round Mr. Hesketh's picture over the mantelpiece. And with a look of mutual congratulation, she and Mrs. Brownlow, the housekeeper, who was serious and solemn, with a sense of heavy responsibility, left the room. Then there were the drawing-room bouquets to arrange, books and prints to fetch from the library, the supper table to inspect, the decorations in the hall, executed conjointly by the gardener and Stokes, the tall groom, to duly admire. Finally, she led Mr. Hesketh through the rooms, was satisfied with his warm appreciation of all the arrangements, and then gave him his tea in the study, chattering busily all the while.

"We shall have just enough people to fill the room without crowding it," she observed; "thirty-five ladies and twenty-nine gentlemen. An admirable proportion, isn't it?"

"Is that counting Vaughan and his friend?"

"No; I forgot them—at least, I did not count them.—But there will be plenty of *cavalieri*, after all your ill-natured doubts on that point. You see, sir, I feel quite proud of living in a neighbourhood that can furnish a ball-room so well."

"Do you intend to enjoy yourself very much this evening?"

"Indeed I do," she replied, with great emphasis. "I have been looking forward to it for nearly three weeks."

"Does it look more radiant now that you are close to it?"

"I don't know; I have n't stopped to think—I have been too busy. Of course it does, though; it must. A ball—a real ball! I never was at a real ball in all my life."

"In *all* your life!" repeated Mr. Hesketh, with his old, amused, affectionate smile at her. What a long waste of existence to look back upon. Hark! was that the gate-bell? Is it time for them to be here?"

"Not yet," said Caroline, composedly. But the flush came into her