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SOMERVILLE HALL.

BY MRS. ELLIS.

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Kate Somerville opened the piano, and began to play a lively air.

“It is not often,” she said, “that ladies invite themselves to sing; but here is an old Scotch ballad that I think will just suit your taste; unless, indeed, seven years have altered you as much as they have altered some others.”

I disclaimed, of course, all change of taste in this respect; and she began to sing without farther prelude.

I have looked at the faces of what are called good singers, when their voices were in full operation, and the charm of their performance has been instantly destroyed; but with Kate Somerville the case was widely different. She had too much truth, even in her countenance, for it to suffer distortion under the influence of music so sweet and touching as her own; and it was not the least charm amongst the many she possessed, that when she was singing, you might gaze with pleasure, as well as listen with delight.

There was certainly something in her music which exercised a sort of spell over me, for no sooner was her ballad concluded, than I forgot myself so far as to exclaim—“This will not do, Kate. You must not sing to me, unless you are prepared to go back with me to India, to share the good and the evil of my wandering and uncertain life.”

I never shall forget her manner of receiving this very dubious expression. She neither smiled nor blushed, but looked at me for one moment with a degree of distressing earnestness; then, closing the piano, she walked to the other end of the room, took a chair by the fire, and as soon as I had joined her, began to question me in a very commonplace but determined manner, about some of the customs of the East.

This conversation was only interrupted by the servant bringing in tea, which we took alone, there being no disposition in those we had left at the dinner-table to join our party.

The tea-service had scarcely been dismissed, when Miss Somerville was called out of the room, and such were the confused and mysterious sounds in the hall, which immediately followed, that I unconsciously, and by a sort of natural impulse, opened the door. What, then, was the horror I experienced, on beholding the almost senseless, and deathlike form of Mr. Somerville supported in the arms of his servants and borne, as quietly as they could carry him, to his own chamber. My attention, however, was chiefly directed to the figure of his daughter who had placed her arms beneath her father, with his head resting on her shoulder, and his white hair against her cheek, and who in this manner took her part—the most arduous of all—in bearing the helpless burden.

Shocked at having been the witness of such a scene, I still persuaded myself none of the party had observed that I was so; when Kate Somerville, on returning to the room, entered immediately upon the subject by alluding to what I had seen.

“I am little skilled,” said she, “in keeping my feelings to myself. And why should I attempt it when the cause of my disquietude is so obvious. My poor father!”

And as she uttered these words, she covered her face with her hand, and burst into an agony of tears.

“You know,” she continued, as soon as she had partially recovered her self-possession, “that he used to be fond of sitting long at the table over his wine. But I never thought it would come to this! And that man—that cruel man—keeps humouring him up to his bent, and I have no influence with him whatever.”

“Have you tried your influence?” I asked. “Have you spoken to him on this subject, kindly and candidly?”

“Why, no. There lies my sorrow, and my guilt. There lies my difficulty too. My poor father, you know, was always so correct, and so precise, that I thought he would be shocked beyond measure, and offended past forgiving me, if I hinted such a thing to him in the beginning of the evil; and then as it grew, and became established, I felt more and more repugnance to act so ungenerous a part, for he had ever been so indulgent and so kind to me, it seemed too dreadful to be thought of, that I should turn upon him with the accusation of so gross a sin. So, as I said, the thing went on: and now it would be of no use, for I believe he has lost the power to resist.”

“You might still make the experiment,” said I. “That could do no harm; and you would at least enjoy the satisfaction of having done a part of your duty.”