

same direction, but it was instantly averted. "I see she requests an immediate reply. Will you amuse yourself with my new album, dear Florence, whilst I am writing it. I will not detain you five minutes; and you, Alfred, like a good creature, hand me an envelope and seal out of my secretary."

Colonel Delamere obeyed, and as he drew the desk towards him, Florence took advantage of the favorable moment to examine him more closely than she had yet dared to do. The first thing which struck her was the singular beauty of his head, which was exquisitely shaped, though its perfection was in some degree concealed by the thick clouds of his dark glossy hair. His forehead, too, lofty and commanding, bore the stamp of intellect and noble feeling, and as he smilingly presented the envelope to lady Howard, Florence felt that the real Colonel Delamere, though vastly different in style and feature, was in no respect inferior to the one her childhood had dreamed of.

"If you wish, I can leave it for you, Cecilia," he exclaimed, as his cousin sealed the note. "I will be passing there."

"What! going so soon? This is really ungallant on your part. Miss Fitz-Hardinge, will you not exert your usually irresistible influence and induce him to remain?"

With a mixture of embarrassment and coldness, very different from her customary elegant self-possession, Florence briefly replied, that "when lady Howard had failed, she had no hopes of success." Again Colonel Delamere's fine dark eyes turned upon her, and she felt his glance was more scrutinizing than complimentary. With some measured careless speech about "duty compelling him to forego what would otherwise be a great happiness," he bowed low to the two ladies and withdrew.

"What think you of him, Florence?" was lady Howard's immediate question.

"I can think of nothing but the hateful *contre-temps* that has marked our first meeting. You may laugh, Cecilia; of course, 'tis very entertaining for you, but 'tis not quite so agreeable for me. The eastern grandeur of the man, too, his magnificent coldness, is still more provoking, and I, blushing, stammering, like a school girl."

"Yes, indeed, you both appeared under false colours to-day, for Delamere, though never very lively, is in general cheerful and friendly enough, whilst you have ever boasted a composure which all the eyes of Almacks and the crowds of gazers in the Park could never ruffle. Well, it cannot be helped. The next time you must be truer to yourself; but I have a little anecdote to tell you,

apropos of our present subject. You know my cousin only arrived in town about two days ago, and he is stopping with us. Yesterday we had a few gentlemen friends at dinner, and the conversation, after touching on different topics, turned on the ornaments of creation, that is, ourselves. Some one jestingly proposed that they should choose a *billé* for Delamere, as he is to remain for some months here. Several ladies were instantly named, but a fault was found to each by some member or other of the party, when my better half at length proposed Miss Fitz-Hardinge. Quite a contest ensued—some depreciating you in the most untruthful, the most ungenerous manner, whilst others, and amongst them lord Howard, contended warmly that your beauty and your wit were more than sufficient to outweigh any failing you might possess."

"And what did Delamere say?" asked Florence, with an eagerness of which she was herself unconscious.

"Oh! like a prudent politician he remained neutral, and after briefly replying that he would not judge too hastily in so important a matter, turned the conversation."

In a short time Florence beginning to find her companion rather insipid, for Colonel Delamere was no longer her theme, bade her farewell, having first received the pleasant notice, that lady Howard would be happy to see herself and Miss Murray, the next evening, as she intended having a few young friends. First and gayest among the guests was Florence, and her smile grew strangely bright when Colonel Delamere entered. If it were in expectation, however, of answering devotion on his part, she must have been sadly disappointed, for his attentions were equally impartial to all; and a bow and a few courteous words were all that fell to her share during the earlier part of the evening. To a beauty, spoiled and petted as Florence was, such insensibility was deeply mortifying, and as she stood alone at one of the deep windows overlooking the gardens, then shining dimly in the pale starlight, she half resolved to seek Miss Murray, and ask her to return home at once. Soon, however, other thoughts succeeded. Colonel Delamere and his fastidiousness, his cold dignity of manner; then her first meeting with him again recurred to her, and as she thought of its awkward singularity, a smile played over her features. A shadow suddenly darkened the ground beside her, and Colonel Delamere's well known voice exclaimed:

"Yours are pleasant thoughts, Miss Fitz-Hardinge, that is, if we may judge from the pleasant smiles that mark their passage."