

of her persistent friendship for the gay military cavalier who so closely hung around her, rose at that moment to his recollection, no expression of anger darkened his face, and with the murmured words: "Poor Virginia!" he passed into his dressing-room.

## CHAPTER VII.

**B**REAKFAST was long over when Virginia awoke, and after a purposely protracted toilet, and the pretence of a morning meal, descended to the sitting-room in a supremely defiant mood.

The two friends looked at each other, and each noted the traces a sleepless night had left impressed on brow and look, but they quietly interchanged some words on the weather, and Miss Maberly, who generally contrived to retain wit in her anger, led the conversation to the coming entertainment. It was decided that it must be a brilliant affair.

During dinner, for which the master of the house arrived at the latest possible moment, the subject of the intended ball was for the first time mentioned to him. An expression of sharp pain passed across his features, but he made no remark.

"Remember, Mr. Weston, to keep yourself disengaged for the occasion."

"Why, who would miss me, Miss Letty?"

"Mrs. Grundy, to begin with, and she would insist on a formal explanation as to why you were not present at the ball of the season, when given in your own house."

"Then I fear Mrs. Grundy will have occasion to talk, for I cannot possibly be present."

"Why not, Clive?" sharply asked his young wife, her ears yet tingling with Captain Dacre's comments on the rarity of her husband's presence at her social gatherings.

"Because I cannot. Important business calls me to Quebec to-morrow, and I fear I shall not be able to get back in time."

"But, Clive, I beg, I insist on your making your appearance. You have no idea how much your absence would mortify me."

"Had I known of your project a little earlier, as well as of your special wish that I should be present, I would have endeavoured to gratify you—to do so now is impossible."

Virginia, seeing in this answer only a blunt refusal, and an implied rebuke to her tardiness in informing him of her plans, made no reply, and pettishly played with her fork.

"'Tis a clear case of *Ledger versus Wife*," playfully remarked Miss Maberly.

"In which the former wins for the latter's sake," was Weston's grave rejoinder.

"Do you leave very soon, Mr. Weston?"

"In a couple of hours, to be back, if possible, for Thursday night; but I must see to the trifling preparations I have to make," and he courteously withdrew.

Miss Letty soon after begged to be excused as she had letters to write, and she also withdrew.

"Always repulsed or baffled by him, and before Letty too!" murmured the wife, biting her lips. "I so rarely ask a favour, I thought he would have granted me this one. Well, I will try to do without him on this occasion, as I have done on so many others."

The eventful night came, and Mrs. Weston's mansion, gay with lights, flowers, and garlands, was thronged with the fairest and gayest of Montreal society. Very beautiful looked the hostess and her inseparable friend, dressed alike in clouds of silver-spotted azure tulle; but a restless light shone in the eyes, a feverish flush burned on the cheeks of both.

That morning Miss Maberly had written a brief, familiarly worded note to Captain Dacre, urging him to come in the evening, or at least to call and explain to her the cause of his absence during the last two days.

The answer came just as Letty was placing a trembling spray of blue hyacinths in