

Nellie Ashleigh was an orphan: her mother had died in her infancy; and her father, a very wealthy ship-owner, had, while on his death-bed, intrusted his only daughter, then scarcely sixteen, to the guardianship of George Burton, one of his oldest friends, but then, unhappily, absent in India. This, however, was arranged; and Nellie, for the present, was to remain with a maternal aunt, occupying one of his mansions at the west end, until he could return and fix her future residence. Three years had passed, and now he was coming for the first time to make the acquaintance of his ward. A year previous to this, while riding one day in the Row, Miss Ashleigh had received an introduction to Arthur Knightbridge. This soon ripened into a warm friendship, which in its turn took the natural course in such cases, and resulted in a mutual attachment.

In birth, social position, etc., they were equal. Like his betrothed, Arthur was also an orphan, and, with the exception of the Uncle George before mentioned, was, as far as relations were concerned, entirely alone in the world. The news of his father's death had reached him while at Oxford, when he was on the point of graduating with the highest honours. After leaving College, by the assistance of this uncle, Mr. Knightbridge, he entered a lawyer's office, and applied himself so steadily to the work, that in a short time he had won the reputation of a rapidly rising man in the profession.

Nellie had written to her guardian, with an inclosed letter from Arthur, asking his consent to their marriage. Mr. Burton wrote that he could not think of such a thing, without first seeing the young man; and that she was quite young enough as yet. To Arthur's note he returned no answer whatever, which was certainly very ungentlemanly, to make the best of it. And now, on this particular day, when Mr. Knightbridge had come to the conclusion to await quietly the course of events, Mr. Burton's arrival in England was anxiously expected by the inhabitants of 105 Westbourne Terrace, and which fact Nellie had, while talking with her lover, completely forgotten—an oversight that seems scarcely possible, as he was mostly the theme of their conversation; but which was nevertheless quite true.

Stopping before a large stone mansion, Miss Ashleigh alighted, dismissed the cabman, and running lightly up the steps, rang the bell. Her first question was, "Has my guardian arrived?" and being answered in the affirmative, she went at once to her own apartment, to prepare for an interview to which her heart whispered she must look forward with dread.

## CHAPTER II.—MR. GEORGE BURTON.

An hour later and Nellie was standing outside the library, wishing, yet fearing, to enter. At length, assuming a cold, stern expression, she resolutely grasped the handle of the door and pushed it open.

No sooner did she stand on the threshold than the unbecoming look on her face passed away, giving place to a warm, genial smile. Had he not come, then, after all? You shall see. Standing there, she looked on a very pleasant picture—one essentially home-like and comfortable. The room was not large, but everything in it was arranged with regard to the most perfect taste. Heavy folds of rich, crimson satin draped each window; while the walls were covered from ceiling to floor with cases of beautifully bound volumes, comprising the choicest works of the first authors. A cheerful fire glowed in the highly-polished steel grate, reflecting its warmth on all around; and in the centre of the apartment a tea-table was daintily laid for three persons. Nellie