

town, yes, every house, not only within the boundaries of Britain, but throughout the earth, to find her; but as the less active mind of his lordship could discover no real advantage likely to result from this search, he for once rejected the counsel of her ladyship, and on the following morning set out for Devonshire.

## CHAPTER XXII.

It was again early summer, and reanimated nature was clad in her most verdant robes. The grassy carpet of the earth shone forth in its liveliest hue: the tall trees displayed their richest attire of dark green leaves, while flowers bloomed in rich profusion.

Lady Harriet Villiers stood within the delightful arbor in the garden at Fitzmorton hall; but not now as formerly, was she surrounded by much-loved friends: no, she was alone, and as her thoughts went backwards through the space of one short year, a tear dimmed the lustre of that ever bright eye. Yes! she sighed for the companionship of those who had once, with her, shared the quiet of that delightful spot.

None were near, and all, except lady Ellen, were likely to continue absent; lord Frederick had declined the invitation of his parents to spend the summer at the hall. Lady Julia was still abroad; the earl had intimated to Lawton that his visits were, at least to him, far from acceptable: Sir Edgar, together with Lord Arthur Percy, had joined lord Percival and lady Maria, in their continental tour;—and Florence, where was she? Alas! who could tell?

A light step was heard; lady Harriet raised her eyes to see who might be the intruder; and then sprang forward with a cry of wild surprise, and was clasped to the heart of Ernest Lawton.

"To what fortunate event, dear Ernest, am I indebted for the pleasure of this meeting?" asked lady Harriet, as she disengaged herself from his arms.

"I am going down to Devonshire, to rejoin lord Frederick, but as I could not do so, without again seeing you, I remained at the porter's lodge, until I received intelligence, no matter how, that you were in the garden, and then I hurried here to meet you!"

"And you may take your leave with equal haste!" cried the earl, approaching from an adjoining walk. "I have before informed you, that your presence in my family was not only undesired, but unwelcome, and I hope I may not find it necessary to communicate that which is disagreeable for me to impart, and I doubt not would be unpleasant for you to hear!"

"But permit me so observe," said lady Harriet, in a low, calm voice, "that to me at least, his presence is not unwelcome! and as Mr. Lawton is my guest, not yours, you will oblige me by permitting him to remain, during his pleasure; neither do I think a third person at all necessary on the present occasion."

"Silence girl! and away to your chamber, this moment! No, stay! Here, on the pain of my displeasure, I command you to renounce, at once, and forever, all connection with Ernest Lawton!"

"I regret that it is your pleasure to issue a command which it is impossible for me to obey; but as I am the promised bride of this same, Ernest Lawton, you must see the impossibility of obedience."

"Then permit me to inform you, that you have made an engagement which I shall never ratify, and from this moment I command you to consider it as ceasing to exist!"

"That is what I cannot do, my lord! You have destroyed the happiness of my brother, think not to make me also the victim of your pride."

The hand of the earl was raised on high, but ere the blow which would have smote her to the earth, was permitted to fall, its course was arrested by the hand of Lawton, who, placing himself between the infuriated earl and the offending daughter, said,

"My lord Fitzmorton! Although I cannot, and will not, resign my pretensions to your daughter's hand, yet do I promise that, during her minority, without your approbation, I will not claim her promised faith! But when, by our sacred laws, she is no longer subject to paternal authority, then will I hope to receive, as the reward of my patient waiting, the hand of your lovely daughter!"

"Sir James Wilmot awaits, my lord!" cried a servant, who having done his duty in announcing the baronet, disappeared.

"Go to your room, girl! And you, sir, I desire you to leave Fitzmorton at once, and forever!" said the earl, and as they disappeared from his sight, he remained a few moments, to calm the perturbation of his mind.

On returning to the house, the earl found the baronet awaiting him in the drawing-room, and after some time, passed in discourse on indifferent subjects, they retired to the library, where after carefully locking the door, they seated themselves beside a table, which occupied the centre of the room.

"Now that we are safe from listening ears, and prying eyes, tell me I pray you, how prospers