

dious Clinton, tolerate your singular style of dressing, your obstinate rejection of all ornament? I overheard a sort of lover-like dispute between you, concerning the wearing of that gem of an emerald bracelet, like the countess of Warburton's, which he wrote expressly to Paris to procure for you. How on earth did you contrive to carry your point with your lordly suitor?"

"By gentleness and submission alone. I told him, if he insisted upon it, I would unhesitatingly obey, even though it was an act contrary to my taste and feelings. With his usual kindness he immediately withdrew his request, and permitted me to pursue my own path in peace."

"And peacefully indeed you do pursue it. I would be almost tempted to believe your love is anything but true love, it flows so smooth. See, Sydney and I have had half a dozen of eternal separations and farewells, besides innumerable lover's quarrels. But mercy on us! there is seven striking, and I forgot to tell you that our respective suitors and a few other young friends, are expected here this evening. How very careless of me! Aunt Mary charged me this morning to tell you, but I was so taken up with my dress; it entirely escaped my memory. If we hurry through we can be ready in time. We had better commence at once."

She was right, and thanks to their double diligence, they were both prepared to attend Miss Murray's first summons to the drawing room. Florence's bright smiles, however, were soon somewhat clouded, for guest after guest arrived, whilst the one she most wished for came not. As soon as Clinton made his appearance, she asked him about the earl. The latter had charged him with earnest apologies for his absence, but some awkward business with his agent, who had just arrived from the country, rendered it impossible for him to leave home that evening. The intelligence did not tend to make her either amiable or agreeable, and he gladly left her to seek out Nina, who, at all seasons and at all times, had a quiet smile to greet him. The evening passed cheerfully enough, notwithstanding Florence's dissatisfied mood, and already some of the guests were thinking of leaving, when the genius of discord unfortunately drew Clinton's attention upon her, as she sat silent and wearied in the recess of one of the windows. Taking a chair near her, he gaily exclaimed: "Your spirits seem overcast to-night, Miss Fitz-Hardinge. Is it because the chosen one is absent?"

"No, but because so many stupid people are present," was the peevish reply.

"In my own name, and that of the assembled company, I return you a thousand thanks, fair

lady," and he bowed low; "but, how could we be otherwise than dull, when Miss Fitz-Hardinge withdraws the light of her smiles from us?"

"Miss Fitz-Hardinge values her smiles too highly to lavish them on all who seek them," Florence coldly rejoined. The haughtiness, not to say insolence, of her manner, could not but promptly act on Clinton's irritable nature, though he contented himself with simply saying:

"Well, 'tis a deprivation we must learn to bear as best we may. The most brilliant planets are sometimes subject to eclipse."

"Yes, but they are certainly more tolerable than those which are in a state of perpetual cloudiness. Do you know any one belonging to the latter class, Mr. Clinton?" A sudden suspicion that she hinted at Nina, brought the angry blood in a rapid tide to his cheek; but she had mentioned no name, he might be mistaken, and he therefore calmly rejoined.

"There is also another order whose lustre, though never very brilliant, shines always with pure unwavering light. The latter, I think, are far superior to the shewier meteors which bewilder us one moment with their overpowering radiance, and the next, leave us in utter darkness."

"Your metaphor is even plainer than mine was, Mr. Clinton; but remember, even if my smiles are not always at your disposal, you have no claim to them. Content yourself with those of Miss Aleyn, which shine ever with so unwavering a light." A certain curve of the speaker's delicate lip, a scornful inflexion in her tones, kindled at once what she called "the fiery spark" of Clinton's character, into a blaze, and with a glowing cheek he rejoined:

"Yes, Miss Aleyn's smiles should satisfy me, for they are at least sincere, and not lavished alike on all who choose to offer incense to her vanity."

"If she restricted herself to smiling on the latter, I fear her smiles would be few and far between," said Florence with an insulting laugh. This was too much, and he passionately retorted:

"Better is one smile from her truthful unsullied lips, than the sweetest glances of a saloon full of artful flirts, or, to give them their self-imposed and highly prized title, ball-room belles."

"Thank you, Mr. Clinton! Without any stretch of imagination, I may suppose that you include myself in the class you have just so flatteringly eulogized. I would be certain, however, if my interpretation of your words is correct."

"You may interpret them how and when you like: they will bear any interpretation you choose to put upon them, Miss Fitz-Hardinge."