

may, and did so still. Was this an omen, too?"

CHAPTER II.

The clear winter's morning had given place to a bleak, wintry night, and the snow dashed sharp and cutting into the faces of the Rector and his old pupil, John Westmacott, as they whirled along the dreary Scottish road from the railway-station to the rectory.

"Now, Doctor," exclaimed Jack, merrily, "let me take the reins while you tell the news. Remember the road? Aye, every stone of it, as if I had travelled it but yesterday. How kind it was of you on such a night to come and meet me. How jolly I feel to see old Caithness again. What song is that May used to sing about there being no place like home? Neither is there. And how is May—bless her heart! Older, of course; and pretty, I will swear."

"Well, all the change you will find in her, Jack, is for the better; and I have one piece of news that will surprise you, perhaps, but I think I will leave it for May herself to tell, or your own eyes to read."

Why did John Westmacott start and grow anxiously nervous for that news and no other?

"Nay, doctor," he remarked, "remember how long I have been away, and don't tantalize me. What is it? Does it concern—concern May?"

"Yes, Jack. She is engaged to be married."

John Westmacott gripped the reins so sharply that the horse reared. It gave excuse for his temporary silence; then rather huskily came the interrogation:

"To whom, doctor?"

"Your friend, Thomas Mildmay."

"My friend!" muttered the ex-pupil between his teeth; "course him!" Then aloud: "How long has she been engaged, doctor?"

"Only since you have been on your voyage home, dear boy, or she would

have written to tell you. You will have to wish her joy."

"I do, and"—but this under his breath—"him. He has robbed me of her."

It was so. John Westmacott had come back to the home of his childhood, the love of his youth. In those days he had termed her his little wife; laughingly she had accepted the title. In nothing had he been more serious. During all his absence, while fighting for that fortune he had realized, amid care and trouble, one idea had upheld him,—the returning to England and marrying May Westleigh. He had never doubted that she knew of and reciprocated his affection. He had come back to find his happiness scattered to the winds.

How he went through the evening that ensued, he never knew. How he calmly kissed the cheek of May in all innocence presented to "her brother;" how quietly he listened to the story of the holly-bough; and how he took Thomas Mildmay's hand, was a mystery he never unraveled. All seemed the acts of another person, not himself. Once when he found himself unexpectedly alone with May, just before leaving, did he lose his self-control. Flinging out his hands towards her, he cried bitterly:

"May, why have you thus deceived me? You knew I loved you. Why did you not warn me of this? Why let me return to be so cruelly disappointed. Why of all men did you select Thomas Mildmay, who knew my secret? He is a crafty coward to have won you from me; but, by Heaven, he shall rue his treachery."

"Jack!" exclaimed the girl, pale and alarmed, "what do you mean?"

"That I love you, May; have always loved you—must love you to my dying hour."

Before she had divined his intent, he had taken her in his arms, pressing a kiss on her forehead; then he had gone, and the girl, full of grief, dropped weeping on a chair. A voice aroused her. Looking up, she beheld