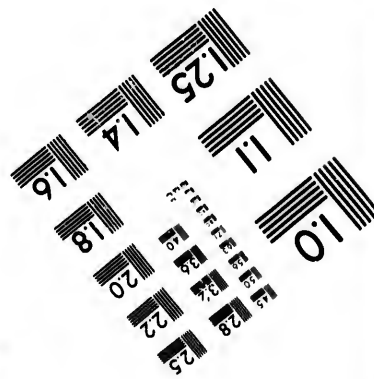
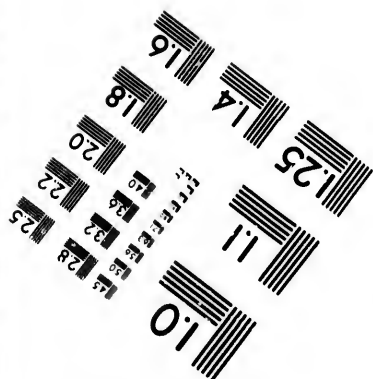
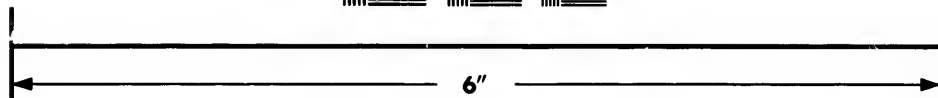
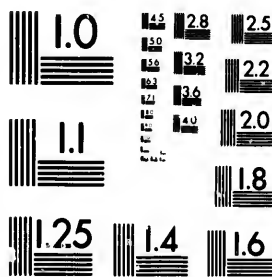


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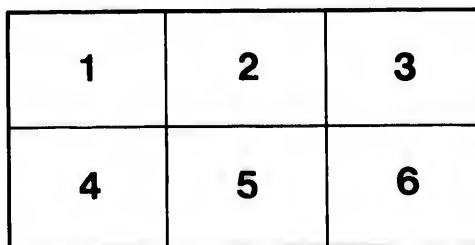
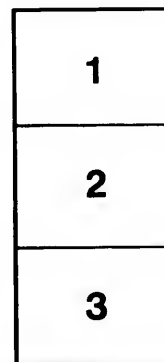
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FORGING THE FETTERS

BY

MRS. ALEXANDER,

AUTHOR OF "THE WOOING O'T" "HER DEAREST FOR," ETC. ETC.


TORONTO:

WILLIAM BRYCE.

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FORGING THE FETTERS

CHAPTER I

“ HIS carriage is engaged, sir.”

The speaker was a stout, elderly lady, with a florid complexion, piercing black eyes, and very white hair. She was well dressed in a travelling costume of black serge, and had an air of importance and decision.

“I beg your pardon,” said the intruder, with a glance at the rugs, books, baskets, scent-bottles, and newspapers which strewed the seats, indicating that the compartment had been for some time in possession of the occupants.

“I beg your pardon,” and he tried to open the door with the intention of retreating ; but the lock

was stiff. and while he attempted to turn the handle, a shrill whistle sounded, and they were off.

"I am exceedingly sorry for my intrusion," he said, with a sort of smile in his eyes, which abundant beard and moustache prevented from showing on his lips, and he took a seat next the obdurate door, as far as possible from the lady who had addressed him. His voice, though deep and harsh, was nevertheless refined. It seemed to attract the attention of another lady, who was comfortably ensconced in the opposite corner, and nearly hidden behind a newspaper.

"Pray do not trouble yourself about it," she said, smiling. "Twenty minutes will end our journey." She lay down her paper as she spoke, and looked with calm scrutiny at the offender.

As their eyes met, the smile died out of his, and was replaced by an expression of intense, displeased observation. Yet the face and form which attracted his notice were pleasant to the eye, and suggestive to the imagination. A pair

of velvety brown eyes gazed at him frankly, wide opened and clear of their long lashes, a delicate, but firm, red-lipped mouth was still slightly parted, and a stray lock or two of ripe chestnut-coloured hair curled, tendril-like, over the edge of a dark velvet toque, which matched an admirably fitting tweed travelling dress, artistic in its simplicity. Nevertheless, the lady was no regular beauty; decidedly tip-tilted nose, and a colourless, though clear, soft complexion, were drawbacks which some dear friends considered insuperable; while others, less sound in judgment, pronounced these defects infinitely more charming than faultlessness of feature. She was not very young either; that is, she had left her teens behind her, and might have been five or six-and-twenty; there was the composure of some experience and an assured position in her quiet pose and steady eyes.

"The trains are so crowded at this season, and there is so little time allowed for changing, that one is glad to jump in anywhere," said the

stranger, who did not seem in the least embarrassed by a sense of being unwelcome.

And the white-haired lady with some dignity, and much animation, exclaimed :

"These Scotch lines are exceedingly ill-managed. The guards are most negligent, and the insufficiency of porters most annoying. I have never found travelling more unpleasant than in Scotland."

"I suppose the staff is seldom quite equal to the demands of the busy time," said the intruder, mechanically, as he watched the newspaper behind which the younger lady had again sheltered herself, as if on the *qui vive* for another glance at her face.

"There is mismanagement somewhere," asserted the first speaker, with a "can you deny it?" air, and then the two were silent for some time.

The younger lady presently lay down her paper, and sat in thought with downcast eyes. Seen thus, there was a pathetic look in her face,

for which her sparkling, intelligent expression, when speaking or smiling, did not prepare you. Their unwelcome companion gazed at her as if lost in contemplation; but there was nothing admiring or presumptuous in his eyes, and when she suddenly raised hers, he looked away immediately. His notice did not appear to disturb her.

"I fancy we are almost at our journey's end. I see a few houses and a spire or two," she exclaimed, presently.

"Well, so far, I don't see much beauty!" cried the other lady. "I suppose that long, melancholy stretch of green, with the hillocks between it and the sea, are the links Sir Frederic told us of! There are some men in red coats standing about," and she began to fold up the papers and collect the books.

A few minutes later the train slackened speed, and came to a standstill, tickets were collected, and they were slowly propelled into the little shed-like station, which was the unworthy halting-

place for the ancient, learned, and picturesque city of St. Cuthberts—the home of golf—the seat of a university, the favourite bathing-place of the neighbouring county families, of Edinburgh lawyers, and even of successful Caledonians, weary with the battle of life in distant London town.

“Ah! there are Sir Frederic and Miss Onslow,” cried the white-haired lady, standing up, and waving her hand. The next moment they had stopped, and a gentleman, a fashionable, good-looking man, picturesquely got up in knickerbockers and a deerstalker’s hat, was opening the door, and greeting the new arrivals with great warmth, an unmistakable look of pleasure in his sleepy blue eyes.

“You are quite half an hour behind time; it is past six! But that is nothing new on this line. How do, Mrs. Bayley? You are looking better than ever! It is quite reviving to see you both.”

While he spoke, he assisted the ladies to alight. Their companion was at the further side

of the carriage from the platform, and when he got out he discovered his fellow-travellers the centre of an animated group, while a smart lady's-maid and a broad-faced German courier proceeded to collect and remove the various properties which littered the carriage.

The man who had been so nearly ejected from it, stood still with a puzzled look for a minute, then he followed the two servants to the luggage van, and, while securing his own portmanteau, read the name on the boxes they were claiming — "Mrs. C. Fane, St. Cuthberts, *via* Dundee."

"Oh, here you are! I fancied you were left behind at that infernal junction," exclaimed a stout, red-faced, "country gentleman" looking man, coming up behind him. "Here, give the baggage to this fellow, he belongs to the hotel, and come along with me to the club; I should like to introduce you to the Captain before we dine. He'll be so taken up to-morrow I may not get a chance, and——"

"Never mind, Dalrymple," returned the other, slipping his arm through his friend's, "I want to have a talk with you before you introduce me to any one. Let us go and secure rooms and order dinner; when I have said my say and had your advice, you may take me where you like."

"Very well! But what's wrong with you?" asked Dalrymple.

Yielding to his friend's pressure, he walked briskly towards the new "Royal Crescent Hotel," which crowned an abrupt hill between the town and the station. Meanwhile, the ladies so warmly welcomed, were chatting with their friends.

"Dearest Mrs. Fane, how very good of you to come round all this way to see me!" cried Miss Onslow, a bright, eager-looking girl, not pretty, but ladylike and pleasing. "I scarcely hoped you would grant my request."

"I was very glad to come," said Mrs. Fane, kissing her kindly, but glancing round to see what had become of their fellow-traveller. "I fancy this is a nice old place to spend a week in."

"It is indeed. Let me introduce my dear uncle, Dr. Methvin, to you."

She motioned to a thin, gray-haired old gentleman, with a massive head and a kindly face, who bowed and raised his hat, greeting his niece's friend with old-fashioned but well-bred cordiality.

"We have been fortunate in securing a pleasant suite of rooms for you, and as soon as we have inducted you we shall leave you to the repose you no doubt need," he said.

"I was greatly surprised to hear you had appeared in these remote regions," said Mrs. Fane to Sir Frederic, when she had courteously thanked the old professor for his attention.

"Were you!" elevating his eyebrows. "Well, I am rather surprised to find myself here. It is some seven or eight years since I visited this scene. You know I am a Drumshire man; but, alas! parted with all my interest in the county long ago—threw the cargo overboard to keep the ship afloat in stress of weather, eh?" he laughed pleasantly.

"Well, I am glad you are here. You must be our guide, philosopher, and friend in this strange country."

"Oh! here is your philosopher," exclaimed Sir Frederic, waving his hand towards Dr. Methvin. "In him you will find unfathomed depths of knowledge and wisdom. I only ask to be the humble but devoted friend."

"Then I am right royally provided," said Mrs. Fane, and she moved on between Miss Onslow and her uncle, followed by Mrs. Bayley and Sir Frederic Morton.

"Well, and how have you been carrying on the war since we parted?" asked the former, turning her keen black eyes on her companion.

"I have been keeping within my entrenchments, though not retrenching, and I can tell you time is nearly up with me. Your notion of a rendezvous at this quaint corner is first-rate. It will go hard but between us we'll contrive some telling *coup* before we part. How deucedly well she's looking!" with a nod in the direction

of Mrs. Fane. "I don't know what it is in her, but I never lost my head in the same way about any one else, and yet there are times when I hate her!"

"Oh, if you go into heroics, I'll have nothing to do with you. Common sense and fixed purpose are the only levers to lift you out of your difficulties."

"And your help, most thorough-going of allies," he added. "If all goes right, you'll find I'll keep faith faithfully."

"You had better," replied Mrs. Bayley, with a pleasant smile, but a sharp, warning look from her black eyes, of which he took little heed.

After seeing her rooms, with which she declared herself delighted, and bidding good evening to Miss Onslow and her uncle, who promised to see her next day, Mrs. Fane asked Sir Frederic Morton to dine with Mrs. Bayley and herself.

"Horrid nuisance! I can't," he returned.

"I am staying with a thirty-third cousin, once removed—old Leslie Morton, the captain of the golf club. He has a dinner to-day in honour of the great golf gathering to-morrow, and I must not absent myself; but—may I have a cup of coffee with you at nine?"

"Yes, certainly; and bring me all the St. Cuthberts news. By the way, did you notice our fellow-traveller?"

"I saw no one and nothing but yourself."

Mrs. Fane held up a warning finger, and went on: "I want to find out who he is. He came into our carriage at that tiresome Lochty Junction, and Mrs. Bayley tried to turn him out. He is a very tall, gaunt-looking man, very dark—or sun-burnt—with nearly black hair, and sombre, angry eyes. He has rather a ghastly scar across the side of his brow and cheek-bone, just missing his left eye."

"What an appalling object!" exclaimed Morton, laughing.

"No; he was not exactly ugly," said Mrs. Fane, laughing too. "He is rather distinguished in style. He has a thick, short, dark-brown beard and long moustache, and looks like a soldier. You can't mistake him. Do find out who he is, for his voice is oddly familiar to me—at least sometimes; but I cannot recall him to my memory."

"I will do my best. You know the place is crammed with strangers for the meeting, so I may not succeed in seeing your *incognito*."

Unpacking, dressing, and dining filled up the time till it was almost nine o'clock, and while Mrs. Bayley settled herself in the easiest chair she could find, with a cushion that supported her head nicely, took up a "fortnightly," which she did *not* read, Mrs. Fane stood in a wide, projecting window, and watched the moon rising over the sea.

Mrs. Fane was not a widow, ~~nor~~ was she separated from her husband. But, years before, she and her young lord parted—why, no one

knew. He went to India, where he was rarely heard of; she retained her fortune, and lived chiefly abroad.

Soon Sir Frederic Morton's entrance broke in upon her meditations. Coffee followed, and then a long and lively conversation ensued. Mrs. Bayley slumbered peacefully over a profound article on "The Feeling Intellect," and Mrs. Fane was virtually alone with her guest. Never had he been more interesting, or talked so delightfully. From satirical sketches of the people he had met since they had parted in Paris, he passed gradually into a graver, softer mood. He spoke of himself and his past follies with manly regret, and betrayed aspirations after better things which surprised his tolerably experienced hearer, and almost persuaded her that a true, wise friend might pierce through the stones and rubbish which choked the outlets of his better nature, and release the imprisoned well-spring of higher things within him, especially if that friend were a woman.

St. Cuthberts' great festival, the autumn golf meeting, when the medal is played for, had never attracted larger numbers or presented a brighter aspect than on this memorable day — memorable, at least, to some of our characters.

The first ball had been struck off at ten o'clock, and the morning's play had sufficed to winnow the competitors, and scatter the chaff of indifferent players. Public interest was now concentrated on the trial between the two successful players, who had scored equally, and were to try their skill again after luncheon.

It was a splendid, mellow, sunny September afternoon, the wide bay, blue as the Mediterranean, the mountains opposite a shade darker, with here and there a fleecy cloud sleeping on their summits. The wide space of the grassy Links, dotted with gaily-dressed groups of people, stretched between gently rising uplands, partially wooded, and a broad belt of golden sands, fringed by little curling, caressing waves that ran in, murmuring

lovingly, to kiss its edge and steal back again, the air pure, balmy, and just tinged with the delicious, briny fragrance of the sea, gave bloom to the cheek and vigour to the step.

Mr. Dalrymple and his companion had been on the ground in the morning, and had returned in the afternoon, as the former was feverishly interested in the play of young Morton—the son of his friend, the captain of the club. A second time they walked round the course and watched each drive, each skilful stroke in the more difficult task of *putting*. At length, amid loud cheering, young Kenneth Morton was declared the winner, having made the round in eighty-three, an unusually low score.

Every one crowded to congratulate the winner, who was a great favourite, and as soon as Mr. Dalrymple had complimented him on his success, and clapped him on the shoulder, he introduced his friend.

“I am glad Colonel Carrington had his first experience at golf under such favourable circum-

stances. He has never had a chance of seeing the game before," he said.

"I hope you will join our ranks," replied the young man, courteously. "There's more play in the game than you would think."

"I see that," returned Carrington.

"Where's your father, Kenneth?" cried Dalrymple.

"He has just gone into the club-house."

"Come along, then, I want to introduce Carrington to him; he is quite a stranger here, and I am obliged to leave by the next train."

"I'm sure my father will be delighted," young Morton was beginning, when other and more noisy sympathisers claimed his attention.

"Come on," said Dalrymple, "I haven't much time to spare. If I can catch old Leslie Morton he'll do all you want, and set you in the right way."

"I am infinitely obliged to you," Carrington began, when he suddenly interrupted himself. "Look, Dalrymple, do you see those ladies coming

down the steps, from the club? They were my travelling companions yesterday."

"By George! And that man in the dark knickerbocker suit, walking beside the lady in gray, is Sir Frederic Morton—no end of a scamp, unless he is terribly belied; as to the lady, you don't see such style every day. She moves like a thoroughbred."

Carrington made no reply. His eyes were riveted on Mrs. Fane, with the same searching, questioning glance he had first fixed upon her. She was talking and laughing easily with Sir Frederic, and looking brighter and better than the day before. Her dress was, perhaps, the simplest of the many toilettes donned to do honour to the day. She wore a costume of soft, pearly-gray woollen stuff, the drapery bordered with narrow lines of silver braid, and a gray hat turned up at one side with a tuft of short gray feathers fastened by a silver butterfly; under it was a thick naturally-curved fringe, neither crisp nor fluffy, the colour of a chestnut; her eyes were

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turned to Sir Frederic as they passed—but Mrs. Bayley, on whose arm she leaned, and who was as gorgeous as a profusion of bugle trimming could make a black silk dress, and glittered like a cut-glass chandelier, evidently drew her attention to Carrington—for she glanced in his direction, but made no sign of recognition.

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“It was the elderly one in black that tried to turn you out of the carriage, hey?” said Dalrymple. “Well, she looks a jolly dame.”

Still no answer from his companion, who turned, and looking after them, saw that they were joined by a young lady, and the old clerical-looking gentleman who had met them at the train.

“Yes,” returned Carrington, after a pause, so long that Dalrymple scarcely remembered to what he was replying.

“I dare say she can be remarkably jolly, but I don’t fancy her.”

“Very likely; men seldom like the——Hallo! here’s our noble Captain. I’m right glad, Morton,

your boy won—won cleverly, too.” Then after a little technical talk, Dalrymple presented his friend.

“Carrington was a great chum of mine in India,” he said, “before my poor brother’s death called me back to be a laird. He has been staying with us up in the Highlands, and came on with me to see the golf meeting. I am obliged to return to-night; but he will stay a few days before he goes south—so——”

“I understand. Very happy to make your acquaintance; any friend of Dal’s is welcome to me. Do me the pleasure of dining with us to-night—we have a golf dinner and a ball on these grand occasions.”

Colonel Carrington accepted readily, and after a little conversation, other matters claimed the Captain’s attention, and Carrington, turning with his friend, walked slowly to the railway station, where they stood in somewhat grave and absorbing talk till told by the guard to take their places.

"Well, you'll be sure to let me hear how you get on—you have my best wishes," cried Dalrymple, from the window of his carriage. "Great bore being obliged to go off home again; but I must be there to receive some guests, as you know."

Carrington walked back to his hotel, and before dressing for dinner wrote several letters which he took to the post himself.

The banquet was a long affair, given in the large dining-room of the club. Here Carrington found himself next to Sir Frederic Morton, who proved an amusing companion, helping to enliven the intervals of the heavy speeches, eulogising the victor, the Captain, the game, the local institutions, the visitors, every one, until some unlucky individual mentioned a local grievance, whereupon an angry discussion broke out, which took all the Captain's tact and social skill to smooth over.

"I think we have had enough of this," said Morton. "The atmosphere is stifling—and the

wine no great things—shall we escape to the billiard-room? There is a door just behind us.”

“By all means,” returned Carrington, and they managed to escape unperceived.

“You play, I suppose?” said Morton, beginning to knock the balls about; “all Indian officers do.”

“Yes, I am rather fond of the game.”

In a few minutes they were trying their strength. Sir Frederic soon found his opponent knew what he was about, and roused himself to exercise all his skill, which was of no mean order. Nevertheless, but for one or two oversights on Carrington’s part, he would not have risen, as he did, the winner of all his antagonist’s loose cash, and a five-pound note into the bargain.

“You would be a foeman worthy of one’s steel,” observed Morton, as they strolled out on the terrace before the club to smoke a last cigar, “if you kept your attention fixed on your game; but you made one or two mistakes.”

“I know I did. My hand is out. I’ll come

all right with a little practice. You must give me my revenge."

"With great pleasure. When?" asked Morton.

"My movements are very uncertain, but I shall stay on a few days."

"Let us dine together quietly to-morrow," said Morton, "if you will give me the pleasure of your company, and we will have a trial of strength afterwards."

"Thanks, I shall be very happy." A little more talk of cards and billiards, and then, after a brief pause, Carrington asked: "Who was that pretty woman in gray you were talking to on the Links to-day?"

"It must have been Mrs. Fane."

"Mrs. Fane? Who is she—a widow?"

"A grass widow; rich, charming, *spirituelle*, everything a woman ought to be, except that she is encumbered with an unreasonable husband, who will neither enjoy his own good fortune, nor clear out of the way and let some more sensible fellow have a chance."

Carrington smiled, grimly.

"A dog in the manger, eh? I fancy I have met this man Fane in India. He commands a corps of irregular cavalry, doesn't he?"

"I know nothing about him; probably you have met. Our Indian Empire is a big place, yet every one seems to run against every one else there."

"I should like to speak to the lady if it is not intrusive to ask for an introduction."

"No; by no means. I shall be happy to present you. But do not mention the husband. I fancy she does not care to have him brought to her notice—a case of mutual repulsion, I fancy."

"She does not look like a repulsive woman," said Carrington, thoughtfully, as he flicked the ash from the end of his cigar.

"No, not exactly; quite the other way round," returned Morton, with a laugh that somehow jarred upon his companion.

"Well, if you are on the Links to-morrow about twelve o'clock," resumed Sir Frederic,

"you will meet the whole party. Mrs. Fane is going to watch her friend, Miss Onslow, play against myself. I'll introduce you to them all. Mrs. Fane generally has a sort of confidential friend with her, to do propriety, and that sort of thing. The present incumbent is a capital, jolly old woman, a sort of relation of mine. Oh, you are going? Well, good night, we'll try our luck to-morrow," and Morton turned back to the club to see if he could find any other adversary at billiards.

Carrington, left to himself, strolled along the beach by the light of a splendid moon, thinking, dreaming, hoping perhaps, though his memory was generally more active than his imagination. He had a warm appreciation of such beauties as are offered by a glorious night—the music of murmuring waves, the still grandeur of the starry heavens—and wandered on in a vague reverie rather than consecutive thought, till the striking of a distant church clock warned him to return to his hotel.

Mrs. Bayley, though fresh and smiling outwardly, was internally bored and disappointed with the result of their first day in St. Cuthberts. They had had only an hour or two of Sir Frederic's company on the whole. He had been quite taken up with that stupid golf. It was all very well his saying that his old boyish love of the game had revived. She (Mrs. Bayley) shrewdly suspected that he had backed some of the players, and hence arose his interest. He was not too lucky, and might seriously diminish his supply of ready money. Mrs. Fane only proposed to stay a week, and he should not throw away a chance, and it was *such* a chance to have Mrs. Fane all to themselves in that sleepy little out-of-the-way corner. If only the rich grass-window could be moved to use the information Mrs. Bayley was willing and able to bestow, she might free herself from the loosened, yet still hampering fetters of her unfortunate marriage, and form an alliance which would give her rank and assured position, and really not a bad husband, as husbands go.

So she mused as she stood in the pleasant window of Mrs. Fane's sitting-room, waiting for that lady, who was putting on her hat, in expectation of Sir Frederic Morton's arrival to escort them to the Links.

"Well, my dear Mrs. Bayley, what profound problem occupies your mind?" cried Morton, entering unperceived. "Those who lie down with the dogs, eh? You know that graceful proverb. You dined with a brace of professors yesterday, didn't you?"

"A brace—a trio! I never was more bored. We had the humanity man, and the Greek professor, who succeeded Dr. Methvin, and they talked quite over my head. One of them had a terrific accent! I was almost provoked with Mrs. Fane, she was quite interested and animated, and asked all sorts of questions, and the old creatures—at least two were old—seemed ready to eat her up; she is such a puzzling woman. I never know when she is in earnest; wasting her money too, as she does. She sent off a cheque this

morning for £200 — I saw it myself — to that designing woman, Mrs. Riddell, who used to be with her, for the girls' refuge she worries herself about. She really wants a husband to guide her."

"What hideous waste of money!" cried Sir Frederic, laughing. "But here she comes. Mrs. Bayley has just been abusing you for enjoying your dinner yesterday, and for talking over her head. I suspect you did not give her a chance with either Herr Professor."

"I do not believe you, Sir Frederic!" returned Mrs. Fane, smiling, as she buttoned her glove. "I assure you the dinner was charming; and the humanity professor is an old dear! His profound book-learning seems only equalled by his ignorance of the world; and he said such quaint, original things."

"Well, I honestly confess I did not care for the conversation," said Mrs. Bayley, with her accustomed good-humoured candour—candour was her line. "But the mere material dinner was excellent. The doctor gave us a glass of really

good port wine, which is not to be despised, in my opinion. Good port is very rare now," and Mrs. Bayley laughed in her pleasant, hearty way, as she often did in the pauses of her speech, which had just enough Scotch accent to give raciness to a good story.

"What will you say to your diligent *employé*," said Morton, bending an admiring glance on Mrs. Fane, "if I have found and captured the bold intruder of your story?"

"Have you, really? How, and where?" asked Mrs. Fane, with some interest.

"He sat next me at the golf dinner last night, and we had a game of billiards after; then he confided to me his wish to make your acquaintance; and as old Leslie Morton, who seems to know him, said he was all right, I shall, if you will permit me, present him to you. I believe he has been walking about the Links since daybreak, lest he should lose a chance of meeting you. Another admirer added to your long list, Mrs. Fane."

"Admirer!" she exclaimed, laughing. "I never saw eyes express doubt and disapprobation more distinctly. It is this that has roused my curiosity. How can I have offended him?"

"Clever fellow!" cried Sir Frederic. "He knows how to make himself interesting! But if you are ready, let us come on. I fear Miss Onslow will be waiting for us."

The weather was still fine, but the sky was more overcast, and the shadows of slow-sailing clouds gave variety to the aspect of the bay.

On their way to that portion of the ground called "The Ladies' Links," they overtook Miss Onslow, who was accompanied by her uncle—himself an enthusiastic golfer. He had devoted some hours each day since she was his guest to instructing his niece in the mysteries of the game.

As they grouped themselves to see Miss Onslow strike off, a tall figure came up from the beach between two sand-hills and approached them; but it was not till he had put his ball safely into the first hole, that Sir Frederic exclaimed:

"Ha! have you come to see this exciting match? I assure you I expect to be shamefully beaten. Mrs. Fane, allow me to present my friend, Colonel Carrington. Mrs. Bayley, Colonel Carrington. Mrs. Bayley understands the game, and will expound its complications. Now, Miss Onslow, for No. 2. Capital! Well driven!" and the combatants moved to the next hole, followed by Dr. Methvin and Mrs. Bayley.

"I am glad to have an opportunity of explaining to you that my intrusion the day before yesterday was involuntary," said Colonel Carrington. "The guard opened the door, and——"

"You were in the lion's den," put in Mrs. Fane, with a pleasant smile, as he paused. "Pray do not think it necessary to apologise, or if you will, address yourself to Mrs. Bayley, who is more disposed to uphold her rights than I am."

She looked with friendly frankness into his grave eyes, instinctively seeking to disperse whatever prejudice against herself might exist in his mind, and endeavouring to recall his face and

figure to her memory. She had met so many people, she had had sentimental, platonic friendships with so many men, that it might be possible her new acquaintance had been the friend of some one who had quarrelled with her, though in truth she had a knack of retaining the regard of her admirers. But the steely blue-gray eyes that looked into hers did not change or soften a he replied :

"It is a sound principle to uphold one's rights. People come to grief who lose grip of what is justly theirs."

"Provided they do not clutch what belongs to others. Rights overlap sometimes, you know."

"Not often," he returned, and they walked on a few paces in silence, which Mrs. Fane broke by asking :

"Is this your first visit to St. Cuthberts ?

"It is. I came with an old friend, a man of this country, who is an enthusiast in golf. The attraction of the game is rather a mystery to outsiders."

"Yes, I am told there are men here who spend their lives on the Links. I cannot understand it."

"There is a certain fascination in the effort to win anything," said Carrington. As he spoke, their eyes met, and Mrs. Fane was startled, even annoyed, at the new expression in his—and at the effect it produced on herself. A sudden glow, a gleam of sudden resolution, lit up the deep-set windows of his soul, and sent a thrill of apprehension through her veins.

"Come on!" said Morton, waving his driver towards them. "It is mortifying to see how indifferent you are to the splendid play going on under your eyes! Miss Onslow is beating me hollow. She is beating me hollow—three holes up."

"I am proud of my pupil," said Dr. Methvin, in high delight. "Now, then, Sir Frederic, it is your turn. You must go on: there are others behind us."

They all kept together for the remainder of the

course, and talked only of the game. Finally, to the great exultation of her uncle, Miss Onslow came off victorious.

"Suppose," said Dr. Methvin, "we walk on to the flagstaff and go down on the sands. The wind has gone round to the east, and is rising. We will have a view of the waves beating over the castle rocks. I am afraid we shall have a wet day to-morrow."

"A terrible prophecy," exclaimed Mrs. Fane, "but I have a French novel, so am fore-armed."

Still conversing with the ex-professor, she walked on over the short, elastic turf, Carrington keeping at the other side, so that it was impossible for Sir Frederic to approach. When the flagstaff was reached, they all grouped round Dr. Methvin, who pointed out some of the dangerous reefs, and then Mrs. Bayley said:

"We had better go homewards; the wind is getting disagreeable."

"Very disagreeable, indeed," cried Mrs. Fane,

as a sharp gust caught a light shawl she was trying to wrap round her and nearly carried it away.

"Allow me," said Sir Frederic, endeavouring to lay hold of it; but Carrington had it already in his grasp.

"Allow *me*," he said, with grave emphasis, and not seeming to hear or see Morton, he wrapped it carefully round its owner, with a touch of authoritative decision in his care, that partly amused, partly piqued her, and made Morton vow to himself that the grim Indian should pay for his cool audacity at billiards that night.

"If you don't mind a steep descent we can get upon the sands at once, and be sheltered by these hillocks."

He led the way, gallantly assisting Mrs. Bayley. Miss Onslow, accustomed to the ground, tripped lightly down; but when Mrs. Fane found herself on the edge of some huge rough stones, which lay at the foot of the little eminence, Carrington again stepped before Morton with an

indescribable air of decision, saying quietly: "Take my hand," and she did so, smiling to herself. Mrs. Bayley, turning to see how matters were going on, noticed the little by-play, and compressed her lips with a confirmed dislike of the bold stranger, whom she resolved most firmly to rout and unmask. She therefore attached herself to Mrs. Fane in their homeward walk, and proceeded to cross-examine the foe.

"Pray, have you any relations in the South of England? I knew some Devonshire Carringtons years ago."

"No, I have not," rather shortly.

"Then there are the Herefordshire Carringtons, rather an old family—perhaps you belong to that branch?"

"I can't say I do."

"Ah! There was a rich old Bombay merchant of that name who died lately, and made a curious will, leaving his money to some stranger. Did you know him?"

"I have heard of him."

"It must be a great bore having hosts of cousins," said Mrs. Fane.

"Oh! do you think so?" cried Miss Onslow. "I dote on some of my cousins! Then Aunt Julia and Uncle Methvin are delightful."

"I suspect," said Sir Frederic, "there is something in yourself that attracts the better part of even crusty cousins."


"I am afraid that is nonsense."

Here, being close to the hotel, Carrington thought it wise to say good morning.

"There is something original about your friend," said Mrs. Fane, as she parted with Morton at the door; "bring him to coffee any evening you like."

Mrs. Bayley sniffed.

CHAPTER II.

ONFIDENT as Morton was in his powers of pleasing, in his superiority in looks, youth, knowledge of the world, and general attractiveness, to the grim soldier, who had somehow made a place for himself in their party, it caused him no little uneasiness to observe that his society was not unacceptable to Mrs. Fane. It was absurd to suppose he could be a rival, or, if he were, a formidable rival.

In truth, Sir Frederic Morton's affairs were in a desperate condition; not only was he in love with Mrs. Fane after the headstrong fashion natural to him, but his chief hope of retrieving his fortunes lay in his chance of appropriating hers. Hitherto he had felt himself compelled to play a waiting

game, but now events were pressing. He must lose no time in persuading her to give him a conditional promise, and commence that suit for a divorce, in which she was certain to succeed. It was impossible that she could be indifferent to him. It suited her intolerable pride to fence herself round with platonic affections, but let things only come to a crisis, and she would soon make up her mind; he must have a consultation with his ally, Mrs. Bayley. However, as a sort of acknowledgment of the money he had won from Carrington, he felt obliged to introduce him at Mrs. Fane's uncereemonious "at homes." Here he was silent and unobtrusive enough, but as he sat with half-closed eyes, lulled by sweet sounds, when Mrs. Fane and Miss Onslow played or sang, he was watching with keen observation the aspect of the society into which he had been unexpectedly thrown. Violet Onslow, he decided, was an ordinary young lady—less sharp and more kindly than the generality. Mrs. Bayley—somehow he did not take to that frank and lively widow—

"not to be trusted," was the verdict of his instincts; but Sir Frederic Morton excited his strong aversion as he watched his graceful, sympathetic manner, and noticed, with a bitterness that surprised himself, the confidential tone existing between him and Mrs. Fane. He knew all her songs and which suited her best; he was full of reminiscences of little adventures at Naples and *rencontres* at Rome; and though there was profound and pleasant repose in Mrs. Fane's way of speaking to him, might not *that* arise from too complete a mutual understanding?

Was it possible a woman so long separated from her husband would be proof against the sustained attentions, flatteries, arts of so accomplished and good-looking a man? Yet she ought to be true to herself, if not to the husband who had deserted her. One had a right to expect a high standard in women—even while he thought so, a wave of indignation swept over his heart, as Mrs. Fane raised her eyes to Morton's, with a smile so sweet, so confiding, that Carrington

could have put her in a penitentiary on the spot. Still, he had an ingrained sense of justice, and told himself the next moment that had he been the recipient of such a glance he could amply forgive the infidelity. Nevertheless, the dangers surrounding so attractive a woman were too clearly visible. He longed for the power to banish Morton, whom he suspected of being a gambler and a scamp. It was too bad of any man to have deserted such a woman, when she must have been a mere girl. What had her life been since? He would watch and try to discover if she were true and high-minded, or a merely frivolous, lightly-conducted coquette.

Brooding over these ideas, he was almost startled by Mrs. Bayley, who brought herself and her knitting to a seat beside him.

"I suspect I have roused you from a pleasant doze," she said, smiling benignly on him.

"Far from it; I have been enjoying the duet Mrs. Fane and Miss Onslow have just sung. I was keenly awake."

"So you are the reverse of the weasels—they sleep, *on dit*, with their eyes open, and you wake with your eyes shut."

"The latter is least fatiguing."

"Ah, people learn to be very indolent in India. You have been a long time in India, have you not, Colonel Carrington?"

"Yes, a long time."

"It must be very pleasant to find yourself in England—I should say Great Britain—again."

"I have no objection to Great Britain; but I am not overjoyed."

"Ah, some people grow enamoured of India, and find the restraints of English society intolerable."

"I assure you we are stiff enough in India."

"Indeed! I fancied everything was as free as air. I am sure the accounts Frank Bayley, a nephew of mine, who was for some time at a station on the frontier—I forget the name of the place—the stories he tells about the 'goings on' of the men—and women, too, for that matter—

are enough to turn your hair gray; mine has become a shade or two whiter since I listened to him."

"Frank Bayley?" repeated Carrington, looking at her with unusual attention. "Is he a doctor?"

"Yes, in the Indian service. Did you know him?"

"I have met him," a slight frown contracting his brow.

"Yes; he is a very clever fellow," said Mrs. Bayley, picking up a stitch with much dexterity, and continuing the conversation in an imperative kind of whisper, as Miss Onslow began to play a dreamy nocturne. "A very clever fellow. He is not going back to India; he is going to practise at Huddersfield. Ah, what queer experiences he has had!"

"He seems to have been communicative," said Carrington, with a tinge of contempt.

"To me, yes. You see we had a sort of professional intimacy. After I lost my poor husband, having no ties, I turned hospital nurse, and was

able in that way to do a little good. I was fortunately in the same hotel with Mrs. Fane, when she had that frightful attack of Roman fever—through which I nursed her—about two years ago. We have stuck to each other ever since. Poor dear! Her life has been cruelly spoilt. That wretch of a husband of hers, I don't know what he deserves! You should hear Frank Bayley's account of him!"

No answer. Carrington, his eyes fixed on the ground, his brows sternly knit into a frown, prompted no doubt by righteous wrath, was pulling his long moustaches.

After waiting in vain for a reply, Mrs. Bayley recommenced.

"Do you think of making any stay here?"

Still no answer. He seemed lost in thought, and then, as though he did not hear her, suddenly rose and crossed to where Mrs. Fane was sitting in her favourite window. The chair beside her was tenanted only by a little pert black Pomeranian dog.

"This is a little beauty," said Carrington, lifting it and taking its place, while he stroked the little creature, who seemed quite happy on his knee.

"The little beauty is mine," cried Mrs. Bayley, "and used to be a good, obedient little dog—my one possession—but Mrs. Fane has bewitched 'Midge,' and now he is so spoiled that he cares for no one else. She quite ruins him—even gets up at unearthly hours to take him out before breakfast" Here Mrs. Fane's courier brought in some letters, and Mrs. Bayley soon became absorbed in hers.

Though Morton stole many impatient glances towards Carrington and his hostess, good breeding forbade him to break in upon their virtual *tête-à-tête*—and so he kept himself usefully employed, as he imagined, by getting up a flirtation with Miss Onslow, rather to that young lady's astonishment.

"I suppose it is a great pleasure to you to sing?" said Carrington, rather abruptly, and

looking at Mrs. Fane in the peculiar, searching, sombre way that always impressed her so much.

"I am fond of singing, certainly; but why do you think so?"

"Because you put your heart into it, or seem to do so, and for the pleasure you bestow, seeming suffices."

"That is a polite way of saying I do not feel at all."

"I did not mean it, and I would rather believe you *do* feel."

"Why? To ensure my suffering?"

"God knows, no! *Must* you suffer because you feel?"

"I suppose to sensitive people, sorrow is more sorrowful and joy more joyful than to ordinary men and women. I do not think I am peculiarly sensitive; my life has been tranquil enough." But a quick, half-suppressed sigh belied her words. "You are fond of dogs, Colonel Carrington?"

"Yes; I had a lot of dogs about me always in India. One was a special friend; I brought him

home with me. He would have died of grief if I had left him behind."

"And you thought of that? So much consideration is surely rare in a man."

"Is it? Have women much more unselfishness than men?"

"They have the credit of unselfishness. I suppose it is some accident of constitution."

Carrington was silent for a moment, and then said:

"Isolation tends to foster selfishness, at least. I have been a good deal in remote, lonely stations, and——"

"You have, contrary to your nature, grown a selfish man," interrupted Mrs. Fane, playfully.

"Not contrary to my nature, I fear," he answered, smiling.

Then Mrs. Fane grew silent, but she was an admirable listener, and Carrington was unusually moved to speak. He was not smoothly fluent like Morton; but there was force and earnestness in his abrupt, unadorned sentences that had a

charm of their own for the rather spoiled and somewhat *blasée* woman of the world to whom they were addressed. At length Carrington, to Sir Frederic's infinite relief, rose to take leave. Some talk ensued of a proposed expedition to a castle and some caves at a little distance, and then, as Mrs. Fane appeared to think that Morton was going too, he felt obliged to retire.

"For my part, I cannot understand what you all see in that Colonel Carrington to take a fancy to! He has nothing to say for himself, and he is as proud and stiff as he can be! So different from Sir Frederic, who *really* has birth and position!" cried Mrs. Bayley, as soon as she found herself alone with Mrs. Fane. "I rather suspect he ~~is~~ a nobody; he is remarkably reticent about his family, which is not usual if there is anything to boast of."

Mrs. Fane smiled. "I could never imagine Colonel Carrington boasting; and pray remember I have more sympathy with nobodies than you can possibly have."

"My dear Mrs. Fane, I did not deserve that little sting. You well know that if Nature had not made you a perfect gentlewoman, no amount of filthy lucre, nor even the pressure of my miserable poverty, would have induced me to throw in my lot with you. I could not endure the bore of being with an ill-bred or a purse-proud person; but you know my independence."

"I do, Mrs. Bayley, and I am much gratified by your flattering opinion; but really I had no intention of stinging."

"I forgive you," said Mrs. Bayley, laughing; "but I reiterate my opinion that Colonel Carington is not thorough-bred, or he would not treat me with such scant ceremony. Oh, don't be afraid to laugh. I dare say you think me an exacting old woman; but a man's conduct to a person in the position he *imagines* I hold, is a very good test. *He* fancies, I dare say, that you *pay* me."

"No doubt he thinks I ought. Nor do I see why you should decline."

"No, no: I never will accept a salary. 'Freedom and independence' is my motto, and equality is the soul of friendship. Why should you pay for what is a pleasure to me to give?"

"Well, as you please; and so good night. My head aches a little; I shall be glad to be in darkness."

Though Mrs. Fane soon dismissed her maid and put out the lights, she did not go to bed. She sat long in an extremely easy chair, musing vaguely, first, with a slight smile, on Mrs. Bayley's independence, and remembering, not in any niggard spirit, but with a certain sense of humour, that during the years in which she had given a salary of a hundred pounds to a lady for whom she had a sincere regard, her general expenses were considerably less than during the Bayley régime. This was merely a passing thought. The young grass widow was truly liberal; but whether from indolence, or some reluctance of the heart to avail itself of its comrade intellect's shrewdness, she was often taken in with her eyes open. Thus,

in a way, she saw through the lively, impulsive Mrs. Bayley, and recognised that her independence was a sham. Nevertheless, she imagined her sincere in her shamming, that she herself believed in her own assumptions. Her depreciation of Colonel Carrington did that gentleman no injury in Mrs. Fane's estimation; in fact, it did not recur to her mind. Yet she thought a good deal of him. He puzzled her. She had been used to admiration—to the most overt and troublesome devotion, and that he should seek her with perseverance, carefully masked as it was, did not surprise or move her. But why was it that his watchful eyes only expressed scrutiny, not untinged with disapprobation or distrust? Why should he, a stranger, approach her with preconceived prejudices, certainly not in her favour? Some one must have spoken against her, but who? She would try and find out.

Though she had often been imprudent, she had never knowingly hurt any one, or deserved enmity. Perhaps, after all, it was only Colonel Carrington's

way of looking at people and things. He would probably smile and look pleasant oftener if he knew how much better he looked. Certainly when silent and thoughtful he looked rugged and stern enough. I wonder how old he is? Thirty-eight or forty, I am sure. There! why should I trouble my head about him?

"Yes, Sir Frederic is very nice to Mrs. Bayley. Why is he trying to persuade Violet Onslow that he is in love with her? I hope she will not listen to him. He would not make a good husband to a girl of her simple character. Why, it is half-past eleven! If the morning is fine I will have a stroll on the sands, and frame quite a new set of resolutions for my future conduct and pursuits. I am too self-indulgent—too fond of pleasure."

The next morning was fine and fresh. The blue waters of the bay glittered in the sunshine, crisped by a light breeze into rippling life, and dashing on the beach in short, quick waves, full of youthful vigour.

Mrs. Fane's maid found her mistress nearly dressed when she came to call her. She was immediately despatched to find Midge.

"I will take him for a run on the sands," said Mrs. Fane. "Don't let Mrs. Bayley wait breakfast, though I'm pretty sure to be back before she appears."

It was deliciously invigorating as Mrs. Fane descended the low range of sand-hills, covered with coarse grass, which separate the Links from the beach. A few schoolboys, loitering about, or wading with joyous cries into the advancing tide, were the only living creatures to be seen; and Mrs. Fane, with a keen sense of enjoyment, walked briskly on, Midge barking and gambolling before her in wild delight.

"Come along, Midge," she cried to the dog; "we shall get as far as the wreck and back before your mistress is out of her room!"

The wreck was the remains of an old vessel half buried in the sand, from which its skeleton ribs protruded in a ghastly fashion.

She had left the boys behind, and seemed the only person moving on the wide stretch of dry, firm sand ; but before she had gone many paces further, a large, fierce-looking, ill-conditioned dog, of no particular breed, came trotting out of one of the hollows between the grassy hillocks, and paused a moment, with an ominous growl, to watch the pert, busy little Pomeranian who was scampering hither and thither, and barking aggressively. To him ran Midge, full of innocent pleasure and with the most friendly intentions. But the low-bred ruffian returned his advances with a surly snarl, and then, urged by some inexplicable doggish antagonism, pounced with a growling bark on the unoffending little creature. A scuffle, a cloud of sand torn up in the conflict, despairing yelps from Midge, loud growls from his foe terrified Mrs. Fane, but she was too generously brave to let her poor little *protégé* be destroyed. Armed only with her sunshade she ran to his succour. More potent aid, however, was at hand. A tall man, in a dark shooting-dress,

rushed up from behind her. In a twinkling the mongrel assailant was seized by the back of the neck, shaken violently till he released his little victim, and then hurled to a distance, whence he fled howling and discomfited.

"I don't think the poor little fellow is much hurt. His neck has had a squeeze, that's all."

"Oh, Colonel Carrington! You came just in time. Poor little Midge! It would have been all over with him in another moment. What a savage, ill-natured brute!" cried Mrs. Fane, taking the little animal from him.

Midge was all trembling and palpitating, and trying to express his thanks by frantic attempts to lick her face and hands.

"Quiet. Poor little thing. You are safe now. I am so very much obliged to you. How lucky that you should have been here! Do you always walk before breakfast?"

"Not often. Let me carry him, Mrs. Fane."

"Thank you, I don't think he likes to leave

me. He will go down and run soon. Are you sure he is not much hurt?"

"Yes, the brute hadn't time to harm him. He will soon forget all about it. Injuries do not rankle in a dog's heart."

"Happy creatures," returned Mrs. Fane, laughing. "What a wonderful balm there is in forgetfulness!"

"I suppose there is," said Carrington, walking on beside her.

"Perhaps you do not forget or forgive readily. I fancy there is a tinge of implacability about you," she returned, looking up in his face with a sweet, arch smile and glance from her speaking brown eyes.

"Why?" very gravely, meeting it with a look, half sad, half resentful.

"Ah! that is puzzling," she exclaimed. "It is so hard to account for these vague, yet vivid impressions, which are none the less irresistible because they are perhaps illogical. There is something in your eyes, in the way you carry your

head, that makes me feel that you would not easily forgive. I fear I am impertinent?"

Colonel Carrington smiled, keeping his eyes fixed on hers. "I don't fancy I am worse than other professing Christians of my sort! But you are very active for a fine lady, Mrs. Fane. Do you always get up at six or seven and walk before breakfast?"

"I fear I am not very methodical. Sometimes I am very late—sometimes I am guilty of reading in bed! I am quite sure the absence of a controlling necessity is a terrible want. The great incentive to these early walks is that I can be free and alone; at other times I hardly belong to myself. Here I am at my own disposal."

"I can understand the charm your solitary rambles must possess, and"—raising his hat—"will intrude no longer."

He paused.

"I did not mean any hint," she said, colouring slightly. "If you care to walk with me to the

wreck," and she pointed to it, "pray do; besides," laughing, "you must guard Midge and myself past the cruel monster's haunt."

"True; I may be of some use," he said, gravely, resuming his place beside her. "Suppose you let Master Midge run; he seems anxious to get down."

For a few minutes Mrs. Fane was occupied in observing that the little dog limped slightly and seemed stiff; but gradually these symptoms disappeared, and he ran about as inquisitively as ever.

Then his guardians fell into pleasant discursive talk on many subjects, Carrington's somewhat sombre views calling forth much bright and playful contradiction from his companion, whose keen, picturesque observations roused him to think before he replied. She was frank and thoroughly at ease, holding her own with infinite good breeding, and curbing her latent enthusiasm with graceful tact, yet through all her brightness sounded the echo of a minor chord, a subtle breath of

resignation that suggested some loss, some bruised place in her full harmonious being.

Carrington listened and looked with all his soul, and thought that never had an hour passed so swiftly.

"I shall report your gallant rescue," said Mrs. Fane, as she parted with him when they reached the road. "Pray come in to luncheon and let Mrs. Bayley thank you in person."

"I shall be most happy," returned Carrington, as he stood aside to let her pass.

"I have got a footing," he muttered to himself as he turned back to the beach, "and it will go hard if I do not make it a foothold."

As the luncheon party included Sir Frederic, Miss Onslow, and Dr. Methvin, besides Colonel Carrington, Mrs. Fane took the opportunity of organising an expedition to visit an old castle, which, with the adjoining fishing village and some caves, were one of the few excursion points available for visitors at St. Cuthberts.

The preliminaries were soon settled, and ten

o'clock the next day but one fixed upon as the hour of departure.

"There is a tolerable little inn at Craigtoun," said the ex-professor, "and I will write to the landlord to have luncheon provided."

"Pray do," cried Mrs. Bayley. "I find that the contemplation of scenery in keen sea air has an alarming effect on the appetite."

"I think I'll get old Morton to let me have his wife's ponies to drive you over, Mrs. Fane. She has been away all the summer, and the little brutes are eating their heads off."

"How many will the carriage hold?" asked Mrs. Fane.

"Four, I think."

"Then you can take Mrs. Bayley, Violet, and myself," said Mrs. Fane.

"And leave Dr. Methvin and me without a lady to escort!" exclaimed Carrington. "That is a most unfair division of good things."

"It is indeed too bad," said Mrs. Bayley. "I cannot countenance such an injustice. If the

gentlemen will have me, I shall be delighted to go in Colonel Carrington's carriage, and you had better come too, dear," to Miss Onslow, "then Sir Frederic can take a groom."

"Well, you will see about the ponies, and we can arrange details afterwards," said Mrs. Fane, and the party rose from table, dispersing soon afterwards. Mrs. Bayley declared her intention of finishing a novel in which she was deeply interested, and Mrs. Fane said she must return the visits of some old ladies—friends of Dr. Methvin's—who had thought it necessary to call upon her.

Left alone, Mrs. Bayley found her novel and settled herself in the sitting-room, but she was not absorbed by her book. She laid it down at intervals, and went to the window, which commanded the approach to the hotel on one side; she looked at the clock, she compared it with her own watch. She took a note from her pocket and read it over, tearing it carefully into little bits, and placing the scraps in the waste-paper

basket. At length the door opened, and Morton came in. He walked to the window, kicking a chair out of his way as he went. After a glance through the open sash he turned, muttering something—not a blessing.

“What is the matter? You seem to be in a tantrum,” said Mrs. Bayley. Her voice sounded harder, commoner than it did when she talked genially with Mrs. Fane.

“Probably I am. I am coming to the end of everything. I had a warning from Jephson that Mosenthal, the brute who holds nearly all my paper, is determined to smash me; and at the first breath of legal proceedings, the whole fabric of my fortunes, of my present chances, will crumble to dust like the skeletons at Pompeii when exposed to light and air.” He threw himself on a sofa as he spoke, his good looking face completely changed by an angry scowl, and the sleepy blue eyes, which many a maid and matron considered irresistible, lit up with baleful fire.

“This is bad, very bad,” returned Mrs. Bayley.

"What are you going to do? You have some time before you. No steps can be taken till Michaelmas."

"I must see Mosenthal. He is out of town disporting himself like his betters. I trust and hope to have some positive proof to give him of an understanding with Mrs. Fane. I rather think he would prefer getting his money without a row and an *exposé*. I have told Jephson to let me know the moment the rascal is in town. Meantime, I must make all the play I can here; if I could but see my way. That woman maddens me."

"Who? Mrs. Fane? I always told you it is the greatest mistake you can make in such a game to let yourself go headlong into a passion for the prize."

"That's all you know about it. I suspect the sort of insanity she has inspired gives an impetus which may bring me in a winner. I never met so baffling a woman. By heavens, I sometimes hate her! I'd risk the hottest fire

down below to have some hold upon her, to have her at my mercy."

"If you talk such nonsense I shall think your brain is softening! Be reasonable, and look at your real position. You are nearly at the end of your ready money, and your creditors are pressing. You have been trying for the last year and a half to kindle a responsive flame, such as would impel Mrs. Fane to seek a release from her already half-broken fetters, to marry you, and let you squander her money."

"I shouldn't squander it. By Jove, I'd turn the biggest screw out if she were mine, and I had something to save!"

"Then the age of miracles is *not* past!" returned Mrs. Bayley. "Candidly speaking, I would give less for your chance now than when we were at Rome last winter. You seemed to make more way at first."

"True!" He paused. "But I had a gleam of encouragement just now. She was contradictory, and slightly ill-tempered about Violet Onslow,

warning me that we were not calculated to make each other happy, etc. I believe my best card is to assume a good deal of devotion to that very harmless young person."

"Wouldn't she do?" asked Mrs. Bayley. "I could assist you there also. You must own that I am a useful ally and not a costly one."

"Hum, useful certainly, and I have been no end of use to *you*. But *no*—not Miss Onslow. She has a father, too, which might be troublesome. Now Mrs. Fane is, or might be, free. She has a solid fortune, and if she could get rid of the husband, might either openly as my wife, or secretly as my *chère amie*, deliver me from my difficulties, and enjoy life infinitely more than in her present widowed condition."

He paused in a troubled walk and looked hard at his interlocutor.

"You are an exceedingly nice, well-brought-up young man," said Mrs. Bayley, quietly, returning his gaze. "Remember, I will have nothing to do with any immoral scheme, from a

sincere desire for the happiness of dear Mrs. Fane and yourself. I wish you to be united in holy matrimony, as her scamp of a husband deserves to be put out of court. If you had known how to win her, matters would have been *en train* now, and I should be almost within reach of that modest competence which would assure me a peaceful and honoured old age; as it is, I have taken an infinitude of trouble to no avail."

"Really, Mrs. Bayley, I am inclined to bow down before the magnificent height of humbug to which you have attained! I suppose the various retainers you have received don't count?"

"They were pleasant tokens of good-will," said Mrs. Bayley, calmly, taking up her knitting, "but they do not affect our final arrangement!"

Morton made no reply, but resumed his pacing to and fro, gnawing his moustaches with his sharp white teeth. "I never failed in this way before," he explained. "But I am staking real coin against her counters; she is so wrapped

up in her own vanity and dreams, and is so cold."

"She is *not* cold," interrupted Mrs. Bayley, emphatically. "No woman so well proportioned, mentally and physically, is. The fire is there, if you know how to reach it. My impression is that she might be fascinated by some daring *coup*."

"You think so? And you are a shrewd woman. We must make some plan as soon as I have seen Mosenthal, and ascertain what time he will give me. I will make some plan. I am not going to give in yet."

"Very right; and I have so far thrown in my lot with you, that if you succeed I look for my reward. If you fail, I shall keep silence."

"I am ready to stick to our original agreement," said Morton, sullenly.

"In one direction you have certainly behaved like a fool," resumed Mrs. Bayley, with much candour. "What induced you to introduce that Carrington? He may prove a rival."

"That ugly, rugged, taciturn fellow! I am infinitely flattered, Mrs. Bayley."

"Yes, I am certain he has produced a certain effect on Mrs. Fane's imagination. Moreover, I believe he has some object or attraction in seeking us."

"By Jove!" cried Sir Frederic, "you may be right. I remember the first day I met him. He said he had known Fane in India."

"You don't say so! Why did you not mention it before? I shall use this against Carrington. She has an utter horror of her husband interfering with her. I am convinced she would give a great deal to escape from him!"

"Well, I shall not despair yet. Her irritability about Violet Ouslow to-day was a good sign, and your astute remarks encourage me." Then, after a pause, he added: "I must hold myself ready to start at a moment's notice. By the way, I think young Kenneth Morton has come back. I'll ask him to join us on Thursday. He'll do to escort Violet Ouslow and leave me free to out-

manœuvre Carrington, who, by the way, puzzles me a good deal. I must go now, so adieu for the present, Madame Benevolence; the game is not up yet."

"I am afraid the weather is not very promising," said Mrs. Fane, at breakfast on the morning fixed. "I hope the sun will come out. Light makes such a difference, and if the rain begins we shall have a great deal, I suspect, after so long a spell of fine weather. Then we shall see nothing, and I shall try to get away on Tuesday."

"There is no reason why we should not," cried Mrs. Bayley, with alacrity. "We shall have a good deal of shopping to do, and if you think of Paris for the winter——"

"Sir Frederic Morton!" interrupted a waiter, ushering in that gentleman.

"A thousand pardons," exclaimed Morton, "for intruding at so early an hour; but I have just had a telegram—unfortunate devil that I am—summoning me to keep a very important appoint-

ment in London to-morrow ; in fact, I have no choice, I must start at once, and endeavour to catch the night express at Perth."

"I am so sorry."

"It is most unfortunate," exclaimed Mrs. Fane and Mrs. Bayley together.

"For me, utterly unfortunate. Mrs. Fane, as I am so unfortunate as not to be able to drive you to-day, let me recommend my cousin Morton in my place: he knows the country and the ponies. Now I must not lose another minute. Good-bye for a few days. If you remain I shall return."

"I shall be in town myself next week. *Au revoir !*"

"Pray let me know how you get on," continued Mrs. Bayley, following him out of the room. "I suppose it is the business you told me of." Then in a whisper: "I will put a creditable construction on it, and keep Carrington at bay. Don't address your *private* letters in your own hand," and then raising her voice: "Take care of yourself. Good-bye."

"How very sudden!" exclaimed Mrs. Fane.
"We shall miss him greatly. I hope he has no bad news."

"Not on his own account," said Mrs. Bayley, mysteriously. "He is just too ready to help others. I only hope he may not suffer himself."

"I hope not, indeed. Come, Mrs. Bayley, we had better attire ourselves. I am afraid Violet Onslow will find the party dull."

"Not when young Leslie is one of us!"

The expressions of surprise and regret when the rest came to the rendezvous, were various and reiterated. Carrington was the only silent member of the group.

"How shall we arrange ourselves?" he asked young Morton, with whom he had a slight acquaintance. "Mrs. Fane, of course, has the pony carriage, but I fear Miss Onslow will find it dull, making the third with Dr. Methvin and Mrs. Bayley."

"All right," said the obliging holder of the medal. "I'll go in their carriage, then you can

have the groom, who will be useful in looking after the ponies."

When Mrs. Bayley, who had re-entered the hotel to give some last directions to the lady's-maid, descended the steps, to her infinite annoyance and bewilderment she saw Colonel Carrington taking his place beside Mrs. Fane, while Kenneth Morton, with ostentatious care, was handing Miss Onslow into Dr. Methvin's carriage.

"Does Colonel Carrington know the way?" was the only objection that came to her aid.

"Quite well," called back that gentleman, as he gathered up his reins. "I walked over there a couple of days ago—it's straight going."

He whipped up the spirited little steeds, and was soon clear of the roughly-paved streets.

"I believe it is really going to be fine. I am so sorry Sir Frederic will lose this pleasant excursion," said Mrs. Fane, as soon as she could make herself heard.

"I am not," returned Carrington, with the frank familiarity into which he always glided

when they were alone, yet which was too natural to be offensive. "I am too great a gainer to regret it." And they fell into conversation, which soon grew interesting, as it turned on the curious effect Buddhism was producing on thoughtful and imaginative people in India, the strange ideas respecting thought-reading, and the irresistible influence some natures exert over others even when far apart. Mrs. Fane could hardly believe that they had accomplished ten miles of a hilly road when they arrived at Craigtoun.

The usual routine of such an expedition followed. They were led through the ruined Castle by an extremely taciturn youth, who answered most queries with an impartial "I dunno," and they were conducted to the entrance of the cave by an ancient and exceedingly fishy fisherman. Carrington suggested something in the way of torches, or other illumination, to show the height of the cave, which, their guide asserted, reached a hundred feet at one point.

Mrs. Bayley had shown symptoms of fatigue,

and sat down on a large stone at a little distance from the entrance, to which the shingly beach sloped steeply.

"Is it not getting late?" she asked, as Miss Onslow, attended by her uncle and Kenneth Morton, approached her.

"I fancy it is," returned Dr. Methvin. "But Colonel Carrington and Mrs. Fane are so deep in a discussion of Cave Temples, that I do not think they will be ready to start for some time. The old guide is trying to light some driftwood, to show the extent of the cave. But we are feeling chill."

"Well, I will wait here," said Mrs. Bayley; and the others went on to the hotel.

"Cave Temples," thought Morton's ally. "I don't believe a word of it. It won't do to have them too long together. I'll just go and interrupt their *tête-à-tête*."

She rose and began to scramble towards the entrance of the cave as fast as she could, when a treacherous stone gave way as she stepped upon it,

and she fell to the ground in great pain. Her foot twisted under her, and her ankle was severely sprained. The consequences of this unfortunate accident arrayed themselves formidably before her mind's eye; she screamed loudly for help, and Mrs. Fane and Carrington came quickly out of the darkness to her assistance.

CHAPTER III.



UCH as Colonel Carrington disliked Mrs. Bayley, he could not help approving the fortitude with which she bore considerable suffering, and the intelligence with which she suggested measures for her own relief.

“It is not a very bad sprain, I hope,” she said, as Carrington helped her to a very convenient stone. “You must get a chair or something to carry me on, and some men, for I am no trifling weight. Just get off my boot before the foot swells. my dear Mrs. Fane. Then take your handkerchief to that little rill trickling over the rocks up there, and we’ll manage a cold compress.”

“I’ll return as quickly as I can. You don’t

mind being left here?" said Carrington. "Mrs. Bayley has her wits about her, and is very plucky. I don't fancy you'll want anything while I am away."

"Oh, no. Pray don't lose any time; go as fast as you can," cried Mrs. Fane, who was kneeling on the shingle at Mrs. Bayley's feet. "She must be in dreadful pain."

But the physical suffering was as nothing compared to the carefully hidden tempest of wrath, against herself and her ill-luck, which raged in the sufferer's heart. If she had only resisted that spiteful impulse to interrupt Mrs. Fane and Carrington in their *tête-à-tête* explorations, she would not only have escaped pain and discomfort, but the worse result of a fortnight or three weeks of helplessness, during which an infinitude of mischief might be done, and Morton absent, too! There never was anything so unfortunate; still her only plan was to make the best of it, and instil what poison she could into Mrs. Fane's mind against Carrington. Whatever happened, she

must keep cool and free from fever, either of mind or body. Meanwhile, under her directions, and with the help of a small silk scarf she had round her throat, Mrs. Fane contrived a very successful compress; and, before long, Colonel Carrington reappeared with a chair and bearers, followed by the ex-professor, Miss Onslow, and Kenneth, all full of dismay and sympathy.

It was soon arranged that Miss Onslow, Carrington, and Kenneth Morton should drive on quickly in the pony carriage and have due preparations made at the hotel for the arrival of the sufferer, and that Mrs. Fane and Dr. Methvin should accompany Mrs. Bayley in the doctor's carriage, where an impromptu couch was made up to keep her foot in a horizontal position.

"Don't worry yourself too much," said Carrington aside to Mrs. Fane, with the kind of familiar interest which seemed curiously natural. "You are looking as white as the foam down there. I must insist on your taking a glass of wine."

"It was only the start of seeing her fall," said

Mrs. Fane, her colour returning quickly, for the tone of imperious tenderness in his voice and manner affected her strangely. "I fancied she was more seriously hurt. Do send for a doctor as soon as you reach St. Cuthberts. She fancies she can manage herself, but I wish her to be properly cared for."

"I will see to it. Good-bye for the present;" this with a lingering look, which suggested to Mrs. Fane the reflection, "I think he is getting over his objection to me," and having seen her swallow a little sherry, Carrington and his division of the party drove rapidly away.

This accident changed the face of affairs. The local doctor insisted on treating the injury as decidedly serious, and though Mrs. Bayley stoutly contested this opinion, she found it practically impossible to disobey his sentence of seclusion and repose. All that the kindest forethought could devise to lighten her imprisonment was provided by Mrs. Fane and eagerly seconded by Violet Onslow, who postponed a promised visit to a certain dear

Aunt Julia and a house full of company, in order to assist in nursing that nice, kind Mrs. Bayley.

"I do not know that I am of much use," said she, plaintively; her opinion of her own powers was very humble. "But I am better than nothing. I can read aloud to you when Mrs. Fane goes out; and she must go out, you know. She is looking quite pale and ill. I would do anything for Mrs. Fane, she has been so good to me. Until I knew her I never had any pleasure. My mother is always ill, you know."

"Of course, a bright, sympathetic creature like you is always of use, and a comfort to a poor, disabled body such as I am; both Mrs Fane and myself ought to be very much obliged to you," cried Mrs. Bayley, warmly.

"Ah! I can do very little for Mrs. Fane; and I am always afraid she can't care much about me. I wish she were really fond of me."

"I am sure she is."

"Not as fond as I am of her; but I can't expect that."

"Oh! don't be sentimental, my dear; you ought to put a proper value upon yourself."

But while time went heavily with Mrs. Bayley, it made itself swift wings for Mrs. Fane. Although she gave many hours to the invalid, there were many at her own disposal, and of these Carrington was the constant companion. Sir Frederic was still detained in London about his friend's business, and Carrington became Mrs. Fane's general adviser and agent. It was wonderful how familiar they grew. His grave, calm manner inspired confidence; his unspoken but keenly-felt sympathy seemed to supply the lack of old acquaintanceship; and, spoiled as Mrs. Fane had been by admiration and flattery, she had seldom enjoyed any triumph so satisfactory as the gradual disappearance of the distrustful, disapproving expression which originally attracted her notice, and which was replaced by a wistful and at times almost pained look, when his eyes dwelt upon her.

"And what does *that* Colonel Carrington do

with himself now? Why is he staying on here when *his* ankle is all right?" asked Mrs. Bayley, three or four days after her accident, in a tone half-querulous, half-jesting.

"Oh, he makes himself most useful, and he plays golf with Kenneth Morton and Violet."

"Hem! And gazes at *you*, I suppose, still, as if about to pass sentence of death for your many crimes."

"No. I suppose he has got used to my enormities," said Mrs. Fane, laughing.

"You don't think you ever saw him before?"

"No; I don't think I ever did. I must remind him of some one he disliked, or——"

"I can give you the key to the riddle if you like," interrupted Mrs. Bayley.

"But can you?"

"I can. He is the spy of your husband, sent, no doubt, to find out whatever he can against you; and I consider it mean and ungentlemanlike to worm himself into your confidence to betray——"

"But when there is nothing to betray?" inter-

rupted Mrs. Fane in her turn, and greatly surprised.

"What has suggested this idea, Mrs. Bayley?"

"He himself told Sir Frederic that he knew Colonel Fane well, and he was evidently full of curiosity about *you*; then he has sought you so persistently!"

Mrs. Fane did not reply for a minute, during which she sat with her clasped hands resting on her knee, the colour slowly rising in her cheek. Could this be the sole reason of Carrington's marked devotion? for she alone perceived to the full, how absorbed he was in her—and she had never before been so fascinated as she was by the mixture of resistance and yielding to her irresistible attraction which he betrayed. Never before had she been conscious of the same curious, tacit, mutual understanding with any one—was it possible that all this delightful secret harmony could be the mask of mere espionage? No! Whatever Carrington's object in seeking her, he could not stoop to be a detective, even for friendship's sake. Might he not think it wise

and advisable to reconcile those whom "God had joined together," "though," thought Mrs. Fane, "there was very little heavenly influence about *my* marriage."

Mrs. Bayley kept a watchful silence, thinking that Mrs. Fane's rising colour indicated deep resentment.

"I do not see why we should be displeased with Colonel Carrington, even supposing he is an emissary of my husband," she said, at last, "nor why we should think him an enemy and a spy. His wish may be to reconcile us, and that, though impossible, is not reprehensible."

"Are you sure it is impossible?" asked Mrs. Bayley, sharply.

"Quite sure. I never intend to see Colonel Fane again, if I can help it! Why did not Sir Frederic warn me before? I don't want to quarrel with Colonel Carrington, but had I known his connection with my husband——"

"You would have had nothing to do with him, and quite right, too. Believe me, my dear, you

will come round to my opinion, and the opinion of your friends in general. You owe it to yourself to sue for a divorce. As to poor Sir Frederic, he never thought of mentioning this man's intimacy with your husband, until he was going away; and then he was so full of you that he mentioned it to me."

"There is no harm done, at all events, in any direction," said Mrs. Fane, coldly; "but I think it will be as well if I let Colonel Carrington know I am aware of his friendship with my husband, and more, that his intervention will be useless."

"Certainly," returned Mrs. Bayley, with emphasis. "You would be quite right."

The day after this conversation was dull and wet; but Carrington was not sorry to spend an hour, perhaps two, in the pleasant, quiet atmosphere of Mrs. Fane's drawing-room, perfumed as it usually was by hothouse flowers. To-day a bright fire glowed in the grate, and Mrs. Fane had established herself and a piece of high-art needle-

work on a sofa near it. She was alone. Miss Onslow had some visitors, and Mrs. Bayley was indemnifying herself for a bad night by a long afternoon sleep.

At first the conversation flagged. Mrs. Fane seemed preoccupied. Carrington, who had drawn a low chair near her, watched the motion of her deft fingers in silence.

"Is it true," she said, suddenly looking up, "that you know my husband?"

"It is," he returned.

"Do you know him intimately?"

"I think I may say I do."

"You have known him since he was in India?"

"And before."

"Ah!" dropping her work in her lap. "It is an old friendship, then. Perhaps he has spoken to you of me?"

"Yes; often."

"I presume you did not receive a favourable impression of me?"

"Not very," taking up a skein of silk, and beginning to entangle it. Mrs. Fane's colour faded, and a smile played over her lips.

"You did not come here, then, prepared to make friends with me?"

"I came here," said Carrington, "utterly unprepared for—for what awaited me."

His expression struck Mrs. Fane as peculiar.

"You did not expect to find your friend's wife?"

"Certainly not. I should never have sought her."

"Ah! I understand!" A pause. "Colonel Carrington, may I ask you a few questions about my husband? A little curiosity on my part is excusable; is it not?"

"I may answer any question you would ask," returned Carrington.

"Tell me," hesitatingly, "is he well and happy? I mean contented with his life?"

"On the whole, I believe he is now. He has had lots of work, and is steady enough. At first he

was a little reckless. Of course he is not as young as he used to be."

"He is not old," said Mrs. Fane, thoughtfully.

"About my age, I suppose," replied Carrington, looking keenly at her.

"Oh! I imagine he must be younger," returning his gaze calmly, critically.

"I look older than I am," said Carrington, smilingly.

"Pray excuse me! I do not want to pry into Colonel Fane's life. I do not feel I have any right to do so. Nor am I disposed to be harsh or unfriendly towards him; but our position is peculiarly unfortunate and difficult. Nor do I see any way out of it."

"That," returned Carrington, speaking emphatically, "depends on the view you take of certain questions. A divorce is by no means impossible."

"I strongly object to being dragged through the mire," she said, with some hauteur which became her well. "May I tell you my

story?" she continued. "It is well to know both sides."

"I shall feel honoured by your confidence," said Carrington, with much feeling.

Mrs. Fane, leaning her elbow on the end of the sofa, and her cheek on her hand, turned slightly towards him, a dreamy, far-away look in her eyes.

"You have probably heard the outlines of the history. I was very young, an orphan, rich, ignorant, I fear arrogant. My aunt, under whose care I was brought up, spoilt me, yet worried me with small restraints and perpetual espionage. She was very pleased to marry me to Mr. Fane; he was a lieutenant in the Guards then; especially as he was to be Earl of Milford when his uncle died. As to my own ideas, I can hardly tell what they were. I must be a totally different creature now from what I was then. I liked the notion of being mistress of my own house and free from my aunt's rule. I don't think I cared for Mr. Fane, though I was rather proud of him. He was not at all good-



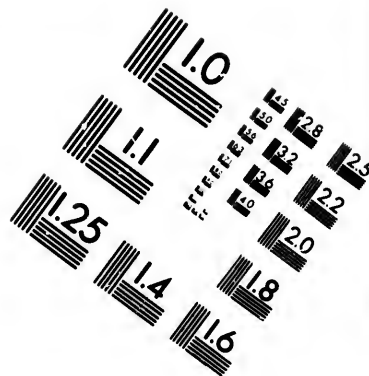
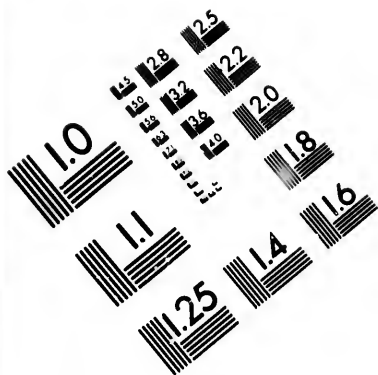
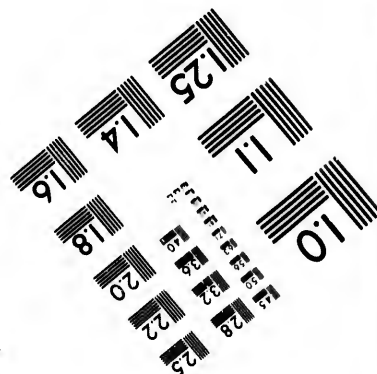
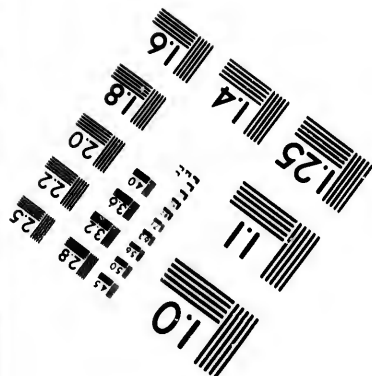
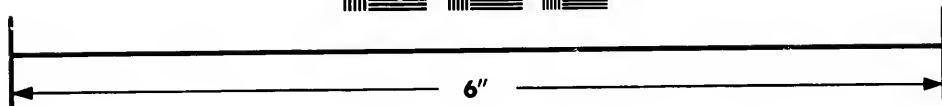
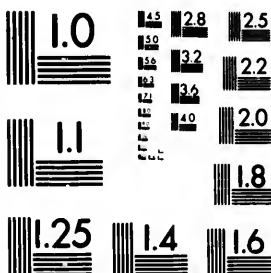


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looking, but tall and *distingué* and haughty I took it for granted that he would love me, for I fancied myself charming. The lawyers squabbled over the settlements, and it was finally arranged that the original Fane estates should be cleared of encumbrances, and handed over to Mr. Fane, and the rest of my fortune settled strictly on myself. Well! We were married! My husband was no indulgent lover; but he was polite and condescending, and tried to teach me good manners. Oh! yes," in reply to a murmur from Carrington, "I was dreadfully bad style; loud in dress, hoydenish, everything I ought not to be. He used to mortify me perpetually. Yet," a soft blush rose in her cheek, a sweet, half-mocking smile parted her lips, "I believe I could have loved him if he had not disdained me. Ah! how cruel it was to let two such young creatures as we were rush into certain misery! Clifford—my husband, I mean—was only three-and-twenty, and I was seventeen and a half. How could we bear with each other, untrained, undeveloped as we were? I imagine the contrast

between myself and the clever, high-bred women of the world he was accustomed to, must have been trying ; but he might have had a little patience."

"I am afraid he acted like a brute !" ejaculated Carrington.

"No ; he was always gentlemanlike ! That first year was miserable enough. My aunt took great offence at some trifling neglect of which Mr. Fane was guilty, and did her best to set me against him. He insisted on living in the country, so I fancied he was ashamed of being seen with me in town. I began to dislike and defy him. Then his uncle suddenly acknowledged a private marriage and a son and heir. This finished the measure of Mr. Fane's iniquities in my aunt's eyes ; she never ceased complaining and fretting about him. But I will not weary you with these details. We were drifting apart, and I was very wretched, nor without reason. When one day driving with my aunt, I saw Mr. Fane standing by the door of a carriage, which was waiting at the entrance of a pretty little house in one of the side streets. He was talking

and laughing, as *I* had never seen him talk and laugh, with a very handsome, dark-eyed woman. My aunt exclaimed, and told me she was—oh! a well-known actress—adding much that was most painful—perhaps absurd. Then she gave me from time to time unpleasant morsels of information as to the past and present. Ultimately, Mr. Fane one evening brought about a crisis. He chose to lecture me because I laughed too loud, and made myself remarkable by dancing too often with one of his brother officers; his tone of cold scorn was maddening—all my pent-up indignation overflowed. I had borne a good deal, and now I let myself go. I told him I fully returned his contempt, and with better reason, for whatever my faults might be, I did not, like him, flourish on the fortune of a person I disdained, and repay with faithlessness or ingratitude the benefits frankly and willingly bestowed, winding up by expressing my determination to live with him no more.”

Her eyes lit up, her delicate brows contracted as she spoke. She seemed to feel again the

fire of that moment's passion. Carrington gazed at her, entranced by this glimpse of the real woman, which throbbed with such strong vitality under the softness and languor of her exterior.

"Do you know," she resumed, with a laugh, and slightly raising her shoulders, "I am still surprised at my own courage, for I was rather afraid of my husband; but that burst of anger, which may have been righteous wrath, carried me over the rubicon. I have never been afraid of anything since!" She clasped her hands, and, resting them on her knee, went on: "Mr. Fane was greatly astonished, but intensely indignant. He said our marriage had been a fatal mistake; that he would do his best to further my wishes for a separation, which was our only chance of tranquillity, and so we parted. I never saw him again. His pride was so hurt that he sold his whole estate and replaced every sou of the money my trustees had expended in clearing it. He exchanged into an Indian regiment, as the least noisy mode of separation, and since then I have been, not exactly

unhappy—indeed, I have enjoyed myself a good deal; but I have always felt a worm of mortification gnawing the fair outside of my existence. My position was doubtful, difficult, or might have been. There is always a slur on a separated wife, and it is impossible to carry the true version of the cause printed on one's sleeve, that those who run may read! Yet I doubt if I should have been better off had I dragged on with Mr. Fane. Still, I do not like to think I have spoiled *his* life."

"He ought to have understood you better," said Carrington, huskily, after a moment's silence.

"Perhaps he could not," she returned. "You see there was no love between us to pour its balm upon the bruises we inflicted on each other. No; the blame lies on those who hurried us into that terrible, indissoluble marriage. But I have been prosy over my early troubles."

"If you knew the deep interest every syllable you have uttered possesses," said Carrington, huskily, and stopped short.

"You are very good to sympathise with me so

kindly," returned Mrs. Fane, looking at him with suspiciously moist eyes. "There is my side of the story. I am no angel, nor was my husband a monster; but it has been our misfortune to spoil each other's lives."

"By heaven!" exclaimed Carrington, starting up and pacing once or twice to and fro. "There never was so unfortunate a devil as Fane to lose *you*, and without an effort to save himself!" He resumed his seat, and, pressing his hand upon his brow, sheltered his face for a moment as if to hide his emotion. Mrs. Fane, greatly touched, looked at him in surprise. What a warm heart must be hidden under his stern, cold manner! Her own beat quickly with an emotion more thrilling, delightful, disturbing, than she had ever felt before.

"I don't suppose Colonel Fane takes your view of the subject," she said, with a slight smile; "and do not suppose I have any wish for reunion with him. I bear him no malice; but I never desire to see him again."

"That is only natural," returned Carrington, in his usual tone. "Am I indiscreet," he continued, "in asking how life has gone with you since—since you and Fane parted?"

"Oh, smoothly enough on the whole. At first I was feverishly fond of pleasure and somewhat imprudent, so got into scrapes. My aunt died not long after Colonel Fane left me, and I had two or three failures in the shape of lady companions; but I was fortunate in making a few steady, solid friends who found a chaperone for me, one of the best and most high-toned of women. She did me a world of good. I owe her an enormous, never-to-be-repaid debt; but she married an old lover and left me."

"It has been a trying position for such a woman as you are," said Carrington, his brows knitting as he looked keenly at her.

"It has had its worries," she said, colouring at the meaning she well understood, and, with a frank laugh, added, "it would amuse you if you knew the tremendous declarations that have been made to

me by all sorts and conditions of men. The amount of sage advice I have received as to the best way of setting myself free — of revenging myself on that heartless villain, my husband! At first I believed every man to be in earnest, and used to be frightfully troubled about the pain I inflicted; but gradually I perceived how largely the love offered to me was compounded of vanity, selfishness, and greed. There were one or two exceptions, of course — more gravely — “but when I found myself deserted, and, in a sense, repudiated, I resolved never to bring the shadow of disgrace on the name I bore — never to give my husband the right to say, ‘This woman is the commonplace, low-toned creature I thought.’”

“Then you never held any communication with Fane since?”

“Yes,” colouring quickly, and looking down. “Once word came to us that he had been dangerously wounded in some obscure fighting on the N.W. frontier, and was about to come home in bad health. I wrote, offering to nurse him. In truth I

feared that he had deprived himself of the means necessary to make ill-health bearable, and that I might be useful financially. However"—with a slight gesture of resignation—"I was not accepted. He wrote a civil letter of thanks declining my offer, and stating that he was better, and entertained no idea of returning to England! I can't tell you how infinitely ashamed I felt of having tried to force myself upon him. That finished everything."

Carrington muttered something inarticulate between his teeth, and then remained silent for a moment. "You are a wonderful woman," he said, at length, "to have so little bitterness against the man who has ruined your life."

"We are, I fear, tolerably equal in the matter of blame," she replied.

"The man has the best of it, though! Do you know when I found out who you were, my first thought was to ascertain if there was any chance of smoothing matters between you and Fane. Morton I confess puzzled me! I could not quite make out your relations."

"You understand now?" with a calm, superior smile.

"I understand more than you think—more than Morton does."

"How do you mean?"

"He wants to be more than your friend; he is playing a deep game."

"I don't think you have any right to think that," returned Mrs. Fane, gravely. "I have known Sir Frederic Morton now for nearly two years, and I think I may say he is only a pleasant friend."

"I am probably too much a stranger to have ventured to speak as I did."

"That is the curious part of our acquaintance!" said Mrs. Fane, turning to him with the frank, sunny expression, which at times gave such a charm to her face. "I never felt you were quite a stranger. You must have lived a great deal with Colonel Fane, for you have caught some tones of his voice. Not the most musical intonations," and she laughed.

Carrington looked sharply at her, then a smile

relaxed his face. "The resemblance is no recommendation, I fear."

"Well, perhaps not, when I remember the occasion on which I last heard him speak." There was a pause.

Carrington leant his elbow on his knee, and his brow on his hand. "Yes," he said, at length, "life must have been difficult to you, and it has not been smooth for Fane. He is not an amiable fellow, and makes few friends; he has had little hope, and is, I know, oppressed with a sense of having been guilty of injustice. Poor and proud, existence has not had too many pleasures for him. Until lately, he had no idea that you were a woman who cared for home or——"

"How does he know I am?" asked Mrs. Fane.

"He has heard of you, he has some means of information," said Carrington, brokenly, with confusion.

"Mrs. Leslie Morton," announced a waiter, throwing open the door. Carrington, cursing the interruption in his heart, rose, and with a hasty

"good morning," passed out, as a portly, handsomely-dressed lady, all smiles and civility, advanced to greet Mrs. Fane.

He walked slowly down the hill from the hotel, and strolled along a little-frequented path across some fields, to the beginning of the wooded uplands, in deep thought. "It is a curious position," he mused. "How shall I extricate myself? I might well say Fane was an unlucky devil, to lose, to throw away such a woman! And she was inclined to love her husband! Gad! how sweet, and arch, and shy, she looked when she admitted it! If that husband had not been blinded and stupefied by an idiotic entanglement, he might have perceived her real value. She is not quite happy. How does she regard that designing scoundrel, Morton?

"She hardly knows herself. She shall *never* get free to bestow herself on him; but, would it be right to hold her still to so irksome a marriage, if freedom was really essential to her happiness? She shall yet know that Fane can

be generous. I sometimes dream there is a spark of hope in the curious understanding that has sprung up between us. By Heaven! if I could believe *that*, I would forge the fetters again so strongly, that she would never even wish to break loose. Boldness and caution may carry me through, but there is no time to be lost. Fate was on my side when that confounded old woman sprained her ankle. The doctor must not let her move for a fortnight to come. A fortnight! It will be sharp work, deucedly sharp; but nothing venture, nothing have." He quickened his pace, and with brows still knit in active thought, and the air of a man who had taken his resolution, stepped out for a long round through the neighbouring fields and thickets, that he might, unmolested, mature his plans.

Mrs. Bayley was quite elated to find her bold conjecture confirmed when Mrs. Fane told her the result of her interview with Carrington.

"I hope you gave him his dismissal, my dear," she exclaimed, "and showed a proper

degree of indignation at his sneaking round us to pick up information. In my opinion he is a very doubtful character. Sir Frederic cannot make out who he is."

"I do not see why I should be angry with Colonel Carrington for wishing to reconcile me to my husband!" said Mrs. Fane. "Most people would consider it a meritorious attempt. He cannot know its helplessness; and as to dismissing him — he is not in my service — he pays his own hotel bills, and can do as he chooses."

"At any rate, I hope you will not be so weak as to let him influence you in favour of that husband of yours. I am sure my nephew, who was in the same station with him, could tell you such stories."

"Which you are dying to tell me, and which I do not want to hear," said Mrs. Fane, laughing. "I don't like ugly stories, and I assure you, I never felt more averse to reunion with Colonel Fane than I do now."

"I am glad to hear it," returned Mrs. Bayley, shortly.

The lively widow fancied that time hung very heavily on her hands, and declared that nothing made the days pass so pleasantly as crewel work. She was, therefore, obliged to trouble that clever, artistic creature, Sir Frederic Morton, to send her some patterns, wools, etc., which compelled a brisk correspondence; twice, indeed, Morton wrote to Mrs. Fane herself, and declared his intention of coming north to escort her and the invalid to London.

Several days passed before Carrington had another opportunity of being alone with Mrs. Fane. His *bête noir*, Mrs. Bayley, was now permitted to move into the drawing-room, where she lay upon the sofa, while Miss Onslow and young Kenneth Morton usually spent their evenings there. Still Carrington always came, and he always asked Mrs. Fane to sing, which she rarely refused. He seemed to enjoy listening, as he sat silent and immovable, his tall, dignified

figure reclining in an easy-chair. He and Mrs. Bayley were quite alarmingly civil to each other, as Mrs. Fane observed with some amusement; but the latter never failed to dart some stinging queries as to his family connections and experiences, whenever he left the smallest opening.

She was growing intensely anxious for Morton's return. His enforced absence at such a juncture was most unfortunate. That wretch Mosenthal only passed through town, and promised to be back in a week, so poor Sir Fred was detained day after day.

The weather had been bad and variable, and Mrs. Fane was not able to take much exercise; but about a week after this conversation with Carrington, having left Violet Onslow in attendance on Mrs. Bayley, she called Midge and set out for a solitary ramble through the same woods where Carrington had walked and mused. She was soon aware of rapid steps following her, and almost immediately a now well-known voice said :

"If I am intruding, pray send me away, Mrs. Fane. I saw you leave the hotel, and followed. I have some news you may care to hear. May I come with you?"

"Yes, I am curious to hear what you have to tell."

"It seems a year since our talk last week," began Carrington, abruptly. "I sometimes fear I may have spoken too freely. But I am bound to plead for my friend; I know he would be glad to be forgiven, and I ought to mention that his poverty and your wealth have been obstacles to his seeking a reconciliation."

"I don't see how that affects the question."

"Well, I think I can."

"But your news, Colonel Carrington."

"Fane is in England, and most anxious for an interview with you. Nay! hear me out," for her cheek flushed, and her lips parted as if to speak. "His great desire is to meet your wishes—to carry out your views. He knows that I

have met you. He is anxious to atone for the past. If a final separation is essential to your happiness he is prepared to assist you in obtaining it. If—but it is absurd to suppose you would contemplate reunion with him.”

“It is,” said Mrs. Fane, gently, but firmly. “With our memories, our long estrangement, how could we make each other happy? I am not bitter or unforgiving, yet I would rather not see Colonel Fane again.”

“I must be true to my friend,” returned Carrington, with some agitation. “Knowing you as I now do, seeing that you are the most delightful companion man could have, I must make some effort to rouse your interest and compassion. Do sit down here, and listen to me.”

“Here” was a seat placed by a paternal Town Council at the beginning of a little wood, on a rising ground commanding a pretty view of the Links and the bay. Mrs. Fane replied by sitting down in one corner of it, and taking Midge into her lap.

"I will listen, and then *you* must," she said.

Carrington looked at her for a moment, with a lingering, pained, imploring expression that affected her strangely, and then began in a low tone, while he beat the ground softly with his walking-stick.

"I grant that Fane mistook and undervalued you ; but you, with the candour, the justice which seems natural to you, admit that evil influences made you impatient with him, that he was not altogether without provocation. Just think of his lonely and disappointed life—a proud, ambitious man, reduced to poverty and insignificance, by his own fault, I grant, friendless, and left to his rugged and somewhat implacable nature. Is it to be wondered at that he did not keep as straight as he might have done, or that he shrank from seeking the rich wife from whom, if they were reunited, he must receive everything? Now he is wealthy, free, anxious to make up for past neglect either by personal devotion or self-abnega-

tion, do not refuse to see him; let him see what he has lost, and hear the voice that might have comforted him in sickness and sorrow! Give him at least a memory to hold for ever of what might have been his."

In the ardour of his petition, Carrington caught and imprisoned her hand in both of his own, and his voice trembled with passionate feeling.

Mrs. Fane was touched almost beyond her self-control, and yet wounded that he should be so anxious to restore her to another. "Surely no man ever had so warm an advocate," she faltered, her eyes filling with tears. "If you think so highly of me, why are you so anxious to hand me over to a husband who for nine years——"

"Hand you over to any one!" interrupted Carrington, pressing her hand tightly. "You don't know, you can't understand." Then, as she tried to draw away: "I don't know what you will think of me, I have no right to expect

you to trust me; but will you grant one request—see Fane once, only once, when you go to London?”

“It would be useless,” she cried, stroking Midge rapidly—nervously; “I never can return to my husband, it is more impossible than ever. How can you ask me?” The pretty, soft lips trembled, and the moist eyes overflowed. Carrington was suddenly, profoundly silent—a curious, softened expression stole over his face.

“I feel I have been presumptuous,” he said at length, as Mrs. Fane, bending over the dog, strove to recover herself. “I can only plead for forgiveness, and leave my unfortunate friend to your mercy. I trust that your indignation may not fall on me; mine is a difficult task, but come what may, I will not be a traitor.”

“No,” said Mrs. Fane, rising, “cost what it may, I shall never fall into so low a depth. But I feel disturbed, and unequal to walking further; let us go back.” They went on for some distance in silence, Carrington carefully

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removing every little obstruction that occurred in her path, and watching her looks with wistful attention. "I will think of all you have urged," she said, as they approached the roadway which led to the hotel. "You are going to London, are you not? You must come and see me there—and I will try and make up my mind to something. Hitherto I have had comparative peace. I feel now as if the flood-gates of trouble had been opened."

"And you hold me responsible?" asked Carrington.

"No, I do not think you can help yourself."

"You are right," he exclaimed, emphatically. "My destiny is no longer in my own hands."

As they approached the hotel, Mrs. Fane noticed the bustle of an arrival which was more of an event than it had been a month before.

"I will go in by the side entrance," she said. "I do not want to speak to any one."

I want to sit down in my own room and think."

"Do we part friends?" asked Carrington, earnestly looking down into her face.

"Yes," she said, sadly. "You mean kindly, I do not doubt; but—you do not—you cannot know."

Carrington with some hesitation held out his hand, and held the one she gave perhaps a minute too long. She bent her head silently, and went into the house.

"Is it possible," murmured Carrington, as he turned away towards the sands, "is it possible I am my own rival? The situation is decidedly novel."


Mrs. Fane sped swiftly to her own room and locked the door, then sat down and took off her hat, and, in spite of her worldly experience, her social training, her self-control, burst into a fit of crying, stormy and uncontrollable.

"Have I lost my senses," she murmured,

"after all I have seen and all I have passed through unscathed, to break down because this cold, stern, audacious stranger wants to hand me over to my husband? What spell has he cast over me?"

"Dearest Mrs. Fane! May I come in?" said Miss Onslow, outside. "Sir Frederic has arrived!"

CHAPTER IV.

O you have come at last!" cried Mrs. Bayley, when Sir Frederic Morton was ushered into the room where she was established on a sofa with a plaid laid carefully over her feet. "I am afraid luck is against us. Was there ever anything so unfortunate as my accident?—which is due to zeal in your cause."

"I wish you had remembered the advice of the French diplomatist to his subordinate, 'above all, no zeal,'" said Sir Frederic, sulkily.

"I can tell you you want all my zeal. Things have not been going on as we could wish. That Carrington turns out to be a spy of Colonel Fane's—confessed it himself; and yet that

silly woman has not sent him about his business, as she knows well how to do. I suspect he is perpetually urging her to make friends with that reprobate of a husband, and she will not listen to me when I want to tell her the facts my nephew, Dr. Bayley, is ready to prove."

"I cannot make out who this Carrington is; no one seems to know him. Had he not been introduced as an old friend by that tower of respectability, Dalrymple, I'd suspect him of being a detective or an adventurer," said Morton, after a pause.

"What have you been doing with yourself?" asked Mrs. Bayley. "You look awfully thin and worn."

"Fighting wild beasts at Ephesus; or worse, trying to melt that unscrupulous old flint, Mosenthal, my dear Ally. I am working with a rope round my neck. He seems to know all about my doings for the last eighteen months, and is good enough to consider that I have a fair chance of success; but if I cannot bring

him a promise in writing from Mrs. Fane, within a month from the present date, he will commence proceedings immediately. It's a desperate position."

"What do you propose to do?"

"I shall press my suit — make a tremendous declaration. I have a good excuse, for I heard on pretty good authority that Fane is in England — arrived some time ago, but has been staying with a sister somewhere in the south. I fancy his approach will frighten his wife into some decided step."

"Take care. Better wait till we are in London. We might then contrive some compromising situation. Mrs. Fane is desperately proud, and infinitely careful of her reputation. She might agree to much if she could save a scandal and follow her own inclination at the same time, for I do not believe she is indifferent to *you*—she has let no one else hang about her so much!"

"True! Well, I'll not lose my chance for

want of daring ; but—ah”——interrupting himself —“here is Miss Onslow, bright and graceful as a May morning. How and where is Mrs. Fane?”

“She has been out, but felt a bad headache coming on, so she came back, and is lying down. I only stayed to tell her we were going away, as she wishes to be quiet.”

“Oh, indeed! And pray where are you going?” asked Mrs. Bayley, quickly.

“To Aunt Julia’s—Lady Preston, you know. She has a large party at Blebo Castle, and they are getting up theatricals, so they want me for a super, I suppose. Uncle Methvin is coming, too. Now you are better, dear Mrs. Bayley, you will not want me, especially as you have Sir Frederic, who is a host in himself.”

“I shall miss you dreadfully, my dear, nevertheless,” cried Mrs. Bayley, beaming graciously upon her. “You have been a sweet little nurse; but I am very glad you are going to have some amusement. Next week will, I

hope, see us *en route* to London. I am really much better, and very weary of St. Cuthberts——”

“Theatricals,” exclaimed Sir Frederic. “Could you get me an invitation? I would go a long way to see *you* act.”

“Ah, *farceur!*” returned Miss Onslow. “If indeed it were Mrs. Fane, you *might* take a journey. She acts, as she does everything, charmingly.”

Violet Onslow had one of those romantic, adoring attachments which warm-hearted girls sometimes conceive for women older and cleverer than themselves who condescend to notice them.

“When do you start?” asked Morton.

“The day after to-morrow, and I must run away now. I have a hundred and fifty things to do. But my uncle and I are coming back to dinner; and, Sir Frederic, Mrs. Fane desired me to ask if you will join the party. She hopes to be better in an hour or two. So good-

bye for the present. I will bring you some fresh flowers, Mrs. Bayley."

Sir Frederic escorted her to the door.

"A very meritorious young person," he remarked, when he returned. "Takes herself out of the way in the nick of time."

"It is the first turn in the tide we have had since you went away," said Mrs. Bayley. "If Carrington would only be off, you'd have the field to yourself. She took walks with him, and will of course with you. There will be precious opportunities."

The little dinner that evening was very pleasant. Mrs. Fane, though looking pale and somewhat weary, was bright and successful in putting her guests on their intellectual mettle. Sir Frederic bloomed out into new life and spirits in the warmth shown him by his charming hostess, who had just heard an effective sketch from Mrs. Bayley of Morton's imprudent but generous sacrifices to assist a friend who was afflicted with a delicate wife and several children.

The ex-professor told quaint, picturesque stories connected with the old Tower and its history, and Mrs. Bayley and Violet formed an appreciative audience.

It was altogether a day worthy to be marked with a white stone by Morton and his fellow conspirator.

While coffee was being served, Colonel Carrington made his appearance, and it soon transpired that he too had been summoned away, and had called to make his adieux, as he was obliged to see his friend Dalrymple on particular business, and intended to go on from his place direct to London. Morton grew more animated and full of amusing chaff—anecdotes of dramatic and other celebrities, club gossip, and all the matter which goes to make up what is termed brilliant conversation—under cover of which Carrington asked Mrs. Fane for a certain Gondolier's song, for which he often petitioned. Glad to be saved speaking, Mrs. Fane complied, and when she

had finished it, she continued to play on as if in thought. The song had started Dr. Methvin on some Venetian reminiscences, under cover of which Carrington approached the piano.

"You will let me see you in London," he said, low and earnestly. "I might be a less adamant negotiator between you and Fane than a firm of solicitors. It might spare you something."

"I shall not want your services in that capacity," she returned, looking down. "There can be no repairing of our broken fetters. Why do you trouble yourself about so hopeless a prospect?"

"I must be true to my word, cost what it may; nor is it easy to count the cost," he added, almost in a whisper. "When are you likely to be in town, and where?"

"I should think within the next ten days certainly. I always stay at a private hotel in Half Moon Street."

"Thank you. This summons to Dalrymple is unexpected and unwelcome, but I must see him, though I leave you in Morton's hands."

"No, Colonel Carrington, in *my own* hands, and none other," with hauteur.

"Can they take a firm grip, though they look so white and soft? I believe they can. Do you forgive me for urging the cause of my unfortunate friend too warmly?"

"No!" she returned, raising her eyes to his with a smile. It is an unpardonable offence."

"Perhaps," he said, still in the same low tone, his eyes aglow, an air of youth and hope transforming his face. "Perhaps when we meet again you may give me plenary absolution?"

"That is not at all probable," said Mrs. Fane, rising from the piano with a strange—to her, very strange—sense of embarrassment.

Carrington stayed only a few minutes longer, and Mrs. Fane strove hard to be as animated as before; but in spite of her efforts, dulness fell upon the party, at least so it seemed to her,

for Morton and Mrs. Bayley were particularly lively.

At last she was free and alone—free to dream and to conjecture. What could Colonel Carrington mean? She had never been so puzzled before. He was contradictory, and more audacious; yet she was not as angry as she ought to be. But happen what might, she would never permit *him* to persuade her to see Colonel Fane—*never*.

The next week seemed to Mrs. Fane the very longest she had ever spent. The weather was unsettled. She missed Violet Onslow; she missed Carrington infinitely more. Morton's incessant efforts to amuse and please her in no way atoned for the loss. She was puzzled and vexed with herself; and, as was often the case with her, self-dissatisfaction made her seek relief by interesting herself in the troubles of others. She listened kindly to Morton's rose-coloured account of his difficulties and depression. He fancied he was making way with her; still

some subtle consciousness that matters were not ripe enough to hazard a second declaration, held him back. He was surprised to find she was not overwhelmed by the news of Colonel Fane's return. Yet on the whole, he and Mrs. Bayley were satisfied with his progress.

"I think we shall do now," said Mrs. Bayley, one morning, after the doctor left her, when she found herself alone with Morton. "That old humbug sees I am determined to go, so he has given me leave to travel this day week. It's frightful to think of all he will charge for what I could have done as well myself."

"I don't suppose *you* will pay him?"

"I? Certainly not; I was distinctly on service when I hurt myself, and am entitled to surgical aid." Morton stood before the fire for a moment or two in silence, and then said: "I must go to Edinburgh to-morrow."

"Why?"

"Because I have come to the end of my cash, and I know a rich old fellow who used to

manage my affairs when I was a youngster, who has lent me a hundred now and again, which I have always been careful to repay. He is a sure card."

"It is very awkward having to leave just now; can't you write to him?"

"A personal interview is more effective; besides, I shall have to sign papers, etc."

"I am afraid you are a very bad manager. I don't at all like your going."

"Will you lend me fifty yourself?" with a laugh.

"No, my dear young friend, it would have an ugly appearance when the inevitable revelation of all things takes place. So look up your sure card, and don't waste time."

"It may do Mrs. Fane no harm to feel my loss."

"I have given up attempting to understand Mrs. Fane. I leave her to you."

The truth was that Mrs. Fane was by no means inconsolable for the departure of the irresistible baronet. He had latterly assumed a

tone of despairing devotion that annoyed her, and yet she scarcely knew how to check it; and, on hearing of his projected visit to Edinburgh, remarked, that it was a pity he should take the trouble of returning to St. Cuthberts merely for a day or two, when Mrs. Bayley and herself would be leaving so soon.

The time hung heavily, however. Mrs. Fane was uneasy, fearful of the future, and infinitely annoyed with herself for the irritation and distress Carrington's advocacy of her husband caused her. Had he urged a divorce, she would no doubt have rejected the suggestion; but to be implored to bestow herself upon another by the only one who in all these years had impressed her imagination, her heart—no, not her heart—she could not really be in love with the incomprehensible Carrington!

In this mood it was quite a relief to receive a note from Miss Onslow.

“Dearest Mrs. Fane,” she wrote, “if you

can spare time, I wish you would agree to the following little plan which my uncle has suggested. He wants you to see a most lovely bit of Highland scenery, about half-way between this place and Perth. It is not so well known as other places, but he thinks you would enjoy it. If you will start by the 1.20 train, changing at Perth for Findarroch, you will reach it about five, and we will meet you. There is a nice homely little inn where we can dine and sleep, then the next day we can ramble about, look at the ruins—there are ruins, too—and either stay another night there, or return to Perth. We go on to Edinburgh, and you can go back to St. Cuthberts. Pray write at once. If I do not receive a speedy reply, I shall conclude you have started for London, and go on direct for Edinburgh, as I have seen Findarroch. I was so glad to hear Mrs. Bayley is so much better. We will meet in London at all events.

“Ever your most loving,

“VIOLET ONSLOW.

"P.S.—You will think me a goose; but *do* write kindly. I sometimes think you don't care a straw for me, though *I* love you so much."

"Poor Violet! she really *is* a goose, but I must gratify her," said Mrs. Fane, laughing as she finished reading this effusion aloud. "I should like to see this Highland Paradise. But on Thursday we were to have begun our journey."

"That is of no consequence," said Mrs. Bayley, briskly. "Saturday or Monday will do as well, and you will be the better for a change. You are looking ill—decidedly ill."

"I don't quite like leaving you."

"Pray do not trouble about me; you can scarcely travel without Kemp, if——"

"Of course I can," interrupted Mrs. Fane; "I am no helpless fine lady, incapable of moving without a maid. Kemp shall stay with you. I will write at once to Violet and say I will meet her. We can get off late on Saturday

and stay the night in Edinburgh. I must make haste, for Mrs. Leslie Morton said she would call for me to drive with her. Oh, there is a note for Sir Frederic, and another postscript, I see. I am to give it or post it for him."

"Pray enclose it," said Mrs. Bayley, whose brows were knit in deep thought, "and a line to say you are going away. I don't want him moping here, on my hands."

A shade of annoyance crossed Mrs. Fane's face as she sat down to write.

"Do make your epistle properly affectionate to that poor girl," said Mrs. Bayley, "she is quite devoted to you."

"What! Are you turning sentimental?" cried Mrs. Fane, scribbling away rapidly.

She had scarcely finished when her own servant came to say that Mrs. Leslie Morton was waiting, but would not leave her carriage.

"Ah, I must fly!" cried Mrs. Fane, starting up. "There, dear. I haven't time to put this in its cover; do fasten them up and send them

to the post for me." She hastily threw the notes into Mrs. Bayley's lap.

"Miss Onslow's is fastened," said that lady, examining them.

"Is it? Will you see that Mrs. Bayley is put carefully into the carriage, Hans? It ought to be round now," and Mrs. Fane flew to get ready.

The drive was rather a sleepy performance. Mrs. Leslie Morton was a kindly, self-satisfied, conventional person, to whom a separated wife, however excellent and irreproachable, was nevertheless reprehensible and vaguely in the wrong. It was in obedience to her husband's wishes that she offered Mrs. Fane any civility, and she was surprised to find herself pleased by this breaker of conventional rules.

It was not difficult, Mrs. Fane found, to please her charioteer. To listen with an air of interest to her constant flow of small talk sufficed, and it was with a sense of relief that Mrs. Fane said "good-bye" when the drive was over.

Mrs. Bayley was still out, and calling Midge, Mrs. Fane set out for a walk on the sands, as the day, though somewhat dull and leaden, was mild and balmy. Skirting the Links to avoid the balls of the golf players, she approached a foot-bridge which crossed a small burn, where it ran down to the beach, and leaning against the handrail—gazing out to sea—she perceived a gentleman, a tall, distinguished-looking man, whom she instantly recognised. While hesitating whether to advance or retreat, he stood upright and turned towards her.

“Ah! I am in greater luck than I dared to hope,” he exclaimed, rapidly descending a couple of steps which led to the bridge. “I have just been at the hotel and found you were out, and your return uncertain, so I strolled down here to dream away the time.”

“And pray what has brought you back?” asked Mrs. Fane, looking up at him with a sunny, welcoming smile, as she gave him her hand.

"I don't know, or rather, I cannot tell. I found myself at that most inconvenient junction, Lochty, and could not pass on without another look at the Links. I must go up to London to-night. And you, Mrs. Fane? How is it that you are here alone?" searching her eyes with wistful tenderness in his own.

"Because I have no one to walk with me," laughing; "Miss Onslow is away, and Sir Frederic is in Edinburgh."

While she spoke they moved on, and without any apparent design walked side by side along the smooth, firm sand. Words did not come readily to either. Carrington was thoughtful, and Mrs. Fane too anxious to avoid any topic that would lead p to forbidden subjects, to be fluent. He was very anxious to ascertain positively what day she would be in town. She explained her intention of joining Miss Onslow and her uncle the day after to-morrow. This started a safe theme for conversation. So they discussed and praised Dr. Methvin, spoke warmly

of Miss Onslow, and laughed kindly at her enthusiasm.

"She is wonderfully fond of you," said Carrington. "I never saw any woman show the same amount of devotion to another as she does."

"She is a little jealous, though," replied Mrs. Fane. "She is always accusing me of coldness and indifference. I had a note from her this morning asking me to join her and her uncle at a place called Findarroch on Thursday, and she begs me in a postscript to write kindly to her."

"What is the name of the place?"

Mrs. Fane took the note from her pocket and referred to it.

"Yes, Findarroch; look, there is her postscript; doesn't she write a pretty hand?"

"Um, a little undecided; but she will make some lucky fellow a charming wife one of these days."

"I trust she may find a good husband," with a sigh.

"Is Morton to be of the party?"

"I don't know; I did not ask him."

They walked on some paces in silence. Suddenly Mrs. Fane exclaimed: "If you want to get on to Stirling to-night, you must not lose the 4.50 train; they have taken off the later train for the winter."

"I have twenty minutes yet," said Carrington, "and can walk across that angle of the Links to the station. How shall we meet again? Will you tell your husband when you see him that I was faithful to my word?"

"I will not see him, Colonel Carrington," her eyes filling with tears. "Why should I distress myself and him? He cannot care for reunion now! It is too late!"

"I can venture to swear to you, on his behalf, that if, after hearing him plead for himself, you still think complete separation better for your happiness, he will assist you to obtain it."

"I cannot understand you," cried Mrs. Fane,

with some passion. "You show so much sympathy with the one trial of my life, and yet you would give me back to the man who has scorned and rejected me?"

"Will you hear my explanation when we meet in London, that is if you permit me to see you, and will you believe that I would give my life to save you from suffering?"

He spoke with intense feeling, and taking her hand in both his own, pressed it almost painfully, looking into her face with a curiously imploring expression; then, letting her hand go, he turned sharply and struck off across the Links towards the station at a rapid pace.

It was a curious, novel sensation to Mrs. Fane to find herself travelling alone without attendant or companion of any kind. She rather enjoyed the little adventure, and the uninterrupted reverie and self-examination in which she was able to indulge. The long delay at Perth she found tiresome, for a fine day was

shining outside, clear and crisp, with the first slight frostiness of October, and the ladies' waiting-room was a dismal dungeon. Patience and a sensational novel helped her through the interval. She was beginning to feel rather lonely, however, and anxious to see the welcoming faces of her friends, when she got into the train, which travelled leisurely on a single line of rail to the mountain village for which she was bound.

It was nearly dusk when she came to her journey's end. To her surprise no one was waiting to meet her, and an odd sensation of woman's uneasiness began to creep over her.

"Is the hotel near?" she asked the porter, who took her little portmanteau.

"It's not far. Just down the street and turn west."

"You must come with me."

"Ay, I'll do that."

The moon was rising, and Mrs. Fane, even in the faint light, perceived how picturesque

was the position of the little inn. A lamp lit the entrance, and as she crossed the threshold a gentleman came quickly from a side-room—a gentleman whom to her infinite surprise and annoyance she perceived to be Sir Frederic Morton.

“You are earlier than I expected. I am so sorry I was not at the station to meet you,” he exclaimed. “Have you had a tolerable journey? Do come in; your room is ready for you. I am sure you must be tired.” He spoke with *empressement*, and looked radiant, triumphant, while he held her hand longer than she approved.

“Thank you, I am a little tired. But where are Dr. Methvin and Miss Onslow?”

“Oh! Dr. Methvin and Miss Onslow?” repeated Morton, with a smile. “They have not arrived yet; they will come by the next train, no doubt. There is another train, is there not?” to a red-haired waitress who had taken Mrs. Fane’s luggage.

"Eh, yes, sir; just one, at six ten up fra' Blebo."

"Then we will not dine till the lady and gentleman arrive. Let me show you the way——" and taking Mrs. Fane's fur cloak over his arm, Morton led the way up a crooked stair to a comfortable sitting-room, where a table was laid for dinner and a bright wood fire was glowing. He threw open the window and began to expatiate on the beauty of the view, which was but dimly visible in the last faint light of the dying day and the pale glimmer of the rising moon. His manner struck her as less tranquilly assured than usual, that there was a suppressed excitement about him that made her long very much for the presence of Miss Onslow and her uncle.

"I shall go and take off my hat while we are waiting," she said; "my head aches a little."

"I have been thinking all day of your lonely journey," said Morton, in a low tone, as she turned to follow the red-haired lassie.

"Indeed," rather freezingly uttered, while she thought, "what on earth induced Violet to invite him?" and she determined to keep in her own room till the arrival of the six o'clock train brought a break to the *tête-à-tête* to which she so much objected. Her room was next to that where they were to dine, and she could hear Morton walking to and fro. At last, after what seemed a vast period of time, the waitress knocked at the door and announced that dinner was ready. Mrs. Fane, therefore, was obliged to return to the sitting-room, her annoyance and embarrassment increasing every moment, yet not liking to seem foolishly prudish.

"There is no use in waiting longer," said Sir Frederic, coming to meet her; "the last train is in, and our friends have not arrived. We must enjoy our dinner without them."

"I am quite uneasy," returned Mrs. Fane, taking her place; "I fear they have met with some accident. Can I telegraph to Blebo Castle?"

"We must send to the town—that's eight miles off—for a telegraph," said the waitress.

Mrs. Fane was silent, and dinner proceeded. Sir Frederic seemed in wild spirits, and did all he could to amuse his companion. At last the cloth was removed.

"No, you need not leave the wine," said Morton; "bring coffee at once."

"We have not made the coffee."

"Oh, never mind!" said Mrs. Fane, wearily; "it would be very bad, no doubt."

"Very well; I will ring when I want you."

Mrs. Fane rose and walked to the fireplace as the waitress left them alone.

"I am infinitely distressed about Violet," she exclaimed. "What can have happened?"

"Don't you think that we may let that question rest, now we are alone?" said Morton, coming over and standing near her. "The moments are precious. Let me enjoy the blessed gleam of happiness you have been graciously

pleased to grant. You cannot, surely, regret the confidence you have placed in me?"

"I do not understand what you are talking about, Sir Frederic," haughtily.

"This is too absurd, dearest, most charming, bewildering of women," he cried, his eyes glittering with a sort of malign exultation. "I am here by your own appointment, your own blessed, kindly-written directions, that have lifted me from the depths of despair to such rapture as I never dared to hope for! Do not mock me with assumed indifference. I am a desperate man."

"I have made no appointment with you," said Mrs. Fane, stepping back, her heart sinking within her, yet keeping a brave front. "You are under some extraordinary mistake. I have never written you or any man a line that would entitle you to use this tone to me."

"What, have you turned coward? Will you let paltry fears hold you back from the happiness

you were ready, two days ago, to give and to share?" he cried. "Do you mean to deny your own letter which I have here," pressing his hand against his breast, "in which you say, for I know it by heart, 'Dearest, I will be at Findarroch at about five on Thursday. I shall come quite *alone*, and we shall have a happy time together. Believe me I look forward to our meeting with as much joy as you do. You shall have no reason to call me cold. All else when we meet. Ever your own, Gertrude Fane. P.S.—Is this loving enough to please your jealous heart?' Could man desire a more rapturous summons?"

"Those are my words, certainly," said Mrs. Fane, "but not addressed to you, nor, I am certain, do you believe I meant them for you."

"Do you mean, then, to avow your belief that I am a villain?"

"I do. You know my life, my ideas, my calm friendly regard for you, and——"

"Do not defy me. Nothing can alter the fact

that I am here to meet you by your own ardently worded request. This will be an unfortunate fact for Fane to get hold of; but do you think I am actuated by anything save the most intense, devoted love?" He rushed on into impassioned avowals, to which Mrs. Fane listened in terror, seeing vividly all the while the frightful scandal, the irreparable mischief, which would arise from the *contretemps*.

"I do defy you," she said at length, when he paused. "There is no difficulty in the matter. I shall order a carriage, and drive to the town of which that girl spoke," looking round for a bell.

"The only carriage here was taken on to Blebo this morning. Believe me, you have no remedy; you can only accept the situation, and with it the devotion of my life, for"—the door opened, the little waitress announced "A gentleman, ma'am," and Carrington walked in.

Never was mortal more welcome. "I am so glad to see you," cried Mrs. Fane, advancing

with outstretched hand. "Where have you come from?" Carrington did not speak for a moment; his dark, angry eyes dwelt with scornful fire on Morton, who stood silent, pale with fury and disappointment.

"I came from Edinburgh," he said. "I thought it possible that for once a third person might be welcome."

"Most welcome," cried Mrs. Fane, hardly able to command her voice.

"May I ask to what we are indebted for this intrusion?" cried Morton, carried out of himself. "For a most unwarrantable intrusion it is. I am here at Mrs. Fane's desire, and if the rest of the party failed to present themselves, that is no reason why you should thrust yourself where you are not wanted."

"Is it your wish that I should leave you?" said Carrington to Mrs. Fane.

"No; by no means," she exclaimed. "I cannot believe that Sir Frederic Morton is in his right mind; his conduct is most extraordinary."

A letter of mine, couched in very affectionate terms, to Miss Onslow, has fallen into his hands, and he persists in asserting that it was addressed to him. *You* know I expected to meet Miss Onslow."

"I do. You showed me her letter."

"Ha!" cried Sir Frederic, "a light breaks upon me; the note appointing a meeting here may have been meant for *you*, and *I* may be the intruder. No matter, I am master of the position. I hold the damning paper; to Fane and to society it matters little if Mortimer or Carrington is the hero of the adventure!" Seeing the game was up, his fury blinded him; he was incapable of mastering his impotent thirst for vengeance.

"I repeat that I am master, and Mrs. Fane must make terms with *me*, if she wishes to be spared the consequence of her cruel faithlessness."

"Silence!" said Carrington, in a ringing tone of command, as he made a step towards him, his eyes flashing fire, while Mrs. Fane's

heart stood still with terror. "Give me that note, or take the consequences of refusal."

"By what right do you demand it?" cried Morton. "Are you, too——"

"By the best right—the right to protect and uphold her. I am her husband. I am Clifford Fane; the name of Carrington I have lately adopted, and am legally entitled to."

"I suspect you are an impostor. Do you admit this? Do you recognise him?" to Mrs. Fane, who had sunk into a chair overwhelmed by this avowal.

"I am not sure. I do not know," she faltered; "at all events, I accept his protection against you. I beg you will leave us."

"And I undertake to prove my words," added Carrington. "You have heard Mrs. Fane's request. Do not compel me to enforce it. Leave us; and remember, your character is in *my* hands."

Morton hesitated, and darted a deadly glance at Mrs. Fane.

"We shall meet again," he exclaimed to Carrington.

"I fully intend it," returned the other, coolly, following him as he flung himself out of the room.

Carrington closed the door carefully, and walked back to the table, by which he stood in some embarrassment. Mrs. Fane had also risen, and leant against the chimney-piece, the folds of her bronze-green cloth and velvet travelling-dress visibly moved by the beating of her heart.

"Is he quite gone?" she said, almost in a whisper, as she put back the soft curls of her rich brown hair, that she might better gaze, with troubled, frightened eyes, at the man who claimed to be her husband.

"Yes, quite; he shall never cross your path again!"

"And you; how am I to believe you?" She sank into a chair, for she could hardly stand, and, grasping the arm of her chair with one hand, she looked at him searchingly.

"I don't know how to speak to you," he returned, "how to apologise for the sort of trick I have played upon you! From first to last we have been the victims of unkind fate! When I got into that railway carriage I recognised you the moment you spoke. I saw you did not know me, and the temptation to make your acquaintance in a new character was irresistible. I had just assumed the name of Carrington, in compliance with the will of a friend who had bequeathed me all his fortune. I told my scheme to Dalrymple, who heartily assisted me, and I succeeded in utterly losing my heart to my wife! I have dreaded unspeakably the moment when I should be compelled to reveal myself, and it has come most unexpectedly! I implore you not to make any hasty decision. Yet do not fear my forcing myself upon you. What you think will be best for your own happiness, that I will agree to."

"Your voice has always seemed familiar to me," said Mrs. Fane, and her own trembled as she spoke. "But I still can hardly credit your assertion. Give me some proof; tell me of some passage in my former unhappy life which may convince me."

Carrington smiled.

"One or two circumstances have dwelt in my memory, though you may have forgotten them. Do you remember a certain ball on Twelfth Night at our neighbour's of Ripton Court? You wore a white lace dress, and while waiting for the carriage I told you you ought to wear your sleeves shorter, and show a certain very pretty mole high up on your left arm. I was thinking the arms looked very graceful when you silenced me by saying scornfully enough that you had not yet lost your plebeian modesty, and could not rest satisfied with a strap instead of a sleeve, like my fair friend Mrs. Fitz Warren."

"I *do* remember," she exclaimed, colouring vividly to the roots of her hair. "You must be Clifford."

"I am," he said, coming nearer, "your very faulty, misguided husband. If you can forget and forgive, Gertrude, and let me show you how fondly and passionately I can love, we may yet have many happy years. Your marvellously generous version of your own side of our story thrilled me with shame for myself, and admiration for you. I urge no immediate decision, but give me some kind thought."

Mrs. Fane did not reply. A tide of memories, of painful mortified feelings and tremulous indecision, flooded her soul. What trying moments, what bitter regret, he had inflicted! Could she forgive? Could she trust her future to him? By some strange mental operation the dread of her husband neutralised the attraction of her new admirer. Yet there was something touching in the sort of humility of the haughty-looking man who laid his rights at her feet.

"I liked Colonel Carrington, I confess," she said at length, looking down, "but I am afraid of Colonel Fane."

"They are alike in your hands," he returned, gravely. "But you must be worn out with the day's adventures; will you not rest?"

"It is quite impossible I can stay here," she interrupted; "it would be a frightful breach of propriety! How can I get back? Do help me."

Carrington smiled.

"When the horses that brought me over from Torriemurchan are rested, I think you might drive back in time to catch the ten o'clock express, and reach Stirling at twelve—sleep there, and get on early next morning to St. Cuthberts. I will make the landlord let that rather neat-looking girl go with you; you will feel more comfortable with an attendant. I will not intrude on you myself, but——" he paused.

"You are very good," murmured Mrs. Fane;

"you know, in deciding so momentous a question as separation or reunion, we should be prudent and deliberate."

"Perhaps so," he said, slowly, and left the room to make arrangements for her journey. When he returned she was sitting by the table, her face buried in her hands.

"I am afraid you are awfully done up," he exclaimed, looking tenderly at her. "Come near the fire; you are trembling with cold."

"Not with cold," she returned.

While waiting for the carriage, Carrington told her how he had met Miss Onslow in Prince's Street, and to his great surprise heard she had had no reply from Mrs. Fane; instinct suggested mischief, and he determined to save his wife the annoyance of disappointment and enjoy the delight of a few hours alone with her. He therefore took the train to Torriemurchan, and thence drove to Findarroch.

"But how did my note get into Sir Frederic's hands?"

"Did you put it into a wrong envelope? Did you post it yourself?"

"No; I left two notes with Mrs. Bayley to post."

"Then I would not mind betting heavily that *she* did the mischief."

"Oh! impossible."

"We shall never know positively."

"The carriage is at the door," said the landlord.

"In a moment; take care the lamps are lit." Then, as the man left them: "My love! my life!" he exclaimed, "for whatever you decide, I love you with all my soul, I must let you go. Will you send me a line to-morrow, to let me know if all is well?"

"I will," she said, turning from his eyes, which made her heart throb wildly. She went to the window, and looked at the night. "It is very dark. I suppose the road is safe?"

"It is, or I would not let you go. Gertrude" — catching her hands — "look at me! May I

come with you?—may I stay with you till death us do part?"

Yielding to his embrace with tenderest grace, she whispered, "Yes, till death!" And in their long kiss the past was all forgiven, and its bitterness blotted out.

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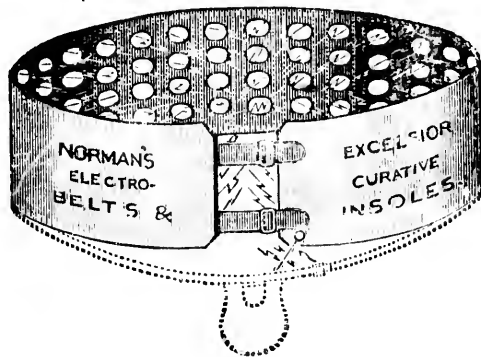
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