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Gertrude: A Novel (Chapters 6-8)

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The young ladies met at breakfast the next morning with all the warmth which characterizes newborn and violent friendships. This is a sort of hot-house growth which requires forcing. Hence its early fervor, and hence too the frailty which exposes it to destruction from the first breath of the harsh atmosphere of every day life. They soon withdrew from the breakfast room to a snug little back parlor. There Gertrude was soon deep in the confidence of Miss Bernard, and, in return for this, having little else to communicate, gave the history of the few hours she had spent in Washington.

In this nothing seemed so much to interest Miss Bernard as the attention of Colonel Harlston, and the description of his equipage.

"What a brilliant turn out," said she. "But the gentleman! That is the main point. Handsome! Agreeable! Intelligent! Genteel!"

"Handsome certainly," said Gertrude. "To me quite agreeable. As to the other points, Ignorance and Awkwardness are incompetent to judge of them."

"How humble we are!" said Miss Bernard. "But you will soon learn to have more confidence in your judgment."

"I hope not, unless I become better qualified to judge."

"That you will, of course; and I venture to predict, that, when that time comes, all the judgments you now form in secret will be ratified. To test this, tell me what you think now, that we may compare it with what you will think a month hence."

"Well then: I have seen men whose conversation was more original and interesting than Colonel Harlston's; but not more proper and decorous, or more sure to give no pain."

"A beautiful picture of a negative character!" exclaimed Miss Bernard. "But an outline indeed; but, in such a case, the outline is all that can be expected. Doubtless true to the life, as we always feel assured, when we see the hand of a master in the execution. Well! Ladies do not fall in love with negatives; and you must see him with other eyes, before your heart is in any danger."

"Some terrible infatuation must indeed come over me, before I could permit myself to think at all of one who only thinks of me as the protegée of a lady, whose hospitality and high-breeding entitle even casual inmates of her family to the attention of her guests. I am sure I have received none from Colonel Harlston which would not have been paid, were I the very opposite of the image, which I see in that flattering mirror you hold up to me. When I receive attentions on my own account, it will be time enough to scan the merits of him who pays them."

"You are certainly right," said Miss Bernard. "But it is not always that we can even act rightly, and to think and feel as we ought, is often exceedingly difficult. I am not sure how I might be affected, under any circumstances, by the attentions of a handsome, well-bred, clever man, with high birth, high station and a large fortune to back him. But I need not pray to be kept from such temptation. I am in no danger of it."

"And why not? My life upon it, that as soon as Colonel Harlston is introduced to you as the friend and guest of my aunt, he will pay you just the same sort of attention with which he has honored me."

"If that be so," said Miss Bernard, in that peculiar tone which had already struck the ear of Ger-
The beautiful eyes of Gertrude were lifted with a glance of approbation, which plainly showed how exactly the speaker had expressed her thoughts. At the moment she said nothing; but her mind presently recurred to her mother, and was soon engaged in devising some palliatives for the very different doctrines taught by her.

"Is there no allowance," she said, uttering the ideas as they rose in her mind, "to be made for the peculiar circumstances in which a poor girl is sometimes placed! Without property, dependent perhaps on those who are too rich to feel for her, or on those too poor to bear the burdens; sometimes alone in the world; sometimes connected with others helpless and destitute as herself, whose only hope of escape from penury is in the chance of her making an advantageous match! In such a case, the world ought to be merciful in its judgments, nor add to the pangs which self-reproach, perhaps disappointed love, might inflict on their victim."

"The suffering of the victim," said Miss Bernard gravely, "is the punishment of her crime. The world has no need to enhance its severity, but should not dissemble its condemnation."

"But, in the last case, there is nothing to condemn but the sacrifice of her own happiness to a sense of duty. Suppose it mistaken! Is selfishness so rare that we can afford to censure disinterestedness! May we not rather trust to self-love to secure the world from the frequent commission of any crimes which imply self-abandonment?"

"You may be right; but having never had occasion to think of such a case as one in which I might be called on to decide for myself how to act, I have perhaps never considered it as I ought. I am not rich; but I am not dependent; and no one has any claims upon me. We do not know ourselves. Differently circumstanced I might think differently."

"Oh no! You would not; nor did I myself mean more than to offer a plea for mercy on behalf of those, who, if they sin, must suffer for their sin."

The ingenuous simplicity of Gertrude's manner made it impossible to doubt the sincerity of this assurance. Whether Miss Bernard was equally sincere in her professions, or no, she at least ascertained, to her entire satisfaction, the true sentiments of Gertrude on this point. She had indeed made no profession, and much that she had said, in a spirit of charity to others who might think differently, was susceptible of being quoted against her in proof that she did not think very unfavorably of mercenary matches.

Miss Bernard, though not quite so young as she had been, was still a beautiful woman. She was precisely at that time of life, when a lady's desire to get married begins to be stimulated by the fear of failure, and a consciousness that the fleeting charms, which the hand of time has not yet impaired, may vanish before another season. But if her beauty was not so fresh as it had been, it was more mature and mellow. If her manner had lost the artless grace of extreme youth, its place was well supplied by address and tact. She still retained at command the wild and playful notes and gloeful laugh, which give a charm to all the pretty nothings that fall from the lips of "bread and butter misses;" and these she changed, in a moment, and as if unconsciously, to a deep and tender tone, which, coming in the close of a sentence, seemed to indicate that whatever of folly, frivolity or vanity she might have just uttered, had not come from the heart. Such as did not think it foolish, frivolous or vain, might not perceive the disclaimer: and hence it was quite possible that two persons of different ways of thinking might each be led by the same sentence to impute to her sentiments exactly in accordance with his own. Time too had enlarged her experience, extended her acquaintance with books, and increased her powers of conversation, while the accomplishments of music, dancing, drawing, &c., increased, and with which she excelled, remained a fixed quantity.

Miss Bernard was, upon the whole, not less attractive than at her first appearance in society; and, as it was certainly her fault that she was not long since well married, and as she was now fully determined that it should be her fault no longer, she came to Washington with a fair prospect of leaving it, as the wife of some wealthy Southern planter, or Northern merchant. It is remarkable, by the way, how little importance ladies seem to attach to the difference between the two. Men is said to be an animal of all climates, and this is most especially true of the female of the species. The climate of the Andes does not more readily exchange the frigid atmosphere, in which he floats above the ground, for the burning soil of the Pampas, than a lady will pass from the bleak rocks of New Hampshire to the sands and swamps of Florida. The man and the fortune are the essentials. Climate, friends, manners, habits, tone of society, pestilence of the physical or moral atmosphere—all these are but accidents. But this is a digression.

I have said it was Miss Bernard's fault that she was not already well married. How so? She had rated her pretensions too high. It was true, as she had said, that, though not rich, she was not dependent. She lived on her own income, which, being sufficient to supply the expenses of a fashionable young lady, was, of course, enough for the essential comfort of a plain family. She was not driven by the scowl or sneer of reluctant charity to throw herself into the arms of the first man that might...
Her celibacy wronged no one. But she erred in not perceiving that, though her little fortune made marriage not necessary as a means of independence, yet it added little or nothing to her value in the estimation of the sort of man she wished to marry. To a poor man it might be a great inducement. To one as rich as herself it might be a matter of importance to double his income with his expenses. To the affluent lord of thousands it might be a decidedly favorable as to determine her to win Miss Courtney, and express a hope that she had made marriage not necessary as a means of independence, yet it added little or nothing to her value in the estimation of the sort of man she wished to marry. To a poor man it might be a great inducement. To one as rich as herself it might be a

CHAPTER VII.

The conversation I have detailed was interrupted by a summons to the drawing-room, where the young ladies found several gentlemen who had dropped in to make a morning call. Among these was Colonel Harlston, come to pay his respects to Miss Courtney, and express a hope that she had experienced no inconvenience from the fatigue of her drive the day before. The formal commonplace of this enquiry afforded no means sure that she was aware of any thing more than a difference of style, kindly designed by Providence to accommodate different tastes with objects best suited to each.
voked, I suppose, by a reflection on the sapient body of which you are a member. But I did not mean to be personal, for I beg you to recollect that it is only by fiction that you yourself are there. If you were to see in fact, then the other might be no fiction. So you see my remark teaches you not. You bachelor members have no great cause to take offence at any censures which may be cast on Congress. I assure you, ladies, it would be rendering essential service to the country if you would frown him back to his duty."

"Might we not render your clients a similar service?" asked Miss Bernard.

"My dear lady, do but tell me who they are, and I will engage to make amends for all my remissness. The only speeches I can get leave to make are to the ladies, and their smiles the only fee I can hope to win."

"You briefless lawyers are much wronged, if you do not seek to be rewarded, even for such speeches, with something more valuable than smiles."

"What, kisses? How can you think us so presumptuous?"

"You shocking creature! No. Your conscience tells you what I mean."

"Indeed it does. Guineas! The sweet yellow dainties! 'O gie me the lass that has acres of charms.' You are right, Miss Bernard, and I calculate on your cooperation. You know you and I have been fast allies, these two winters."

"How so? I assure you I am at the first of it."

"Oh! the only sort of alliance that can be relied on, Miss Bernard, is of interest. While you use all your art to inveigle the rich bachelors, your success will leave the rich girls no choice but to take up with poor fellows like me; and so by your means I may accomplish my aim at last."}

"I declare I had not thought of that. It is a capital scheme. But 'gif-gaf' you know. If I take off your rivals you must take off mine."

"Agreed. You have only to let me know whom you have a design on, and I will hold myself bound to occur forthwith to any lady he seems disposed to attend to."

"Why, you unreasonable wretch! would you have me make you my confidant. No no. You must exercise your sagacity and act accordingly."

"Must I. Well then let us begin. There Harlston, do you talk to Miss Bernard, and leave Miss Courtney to me."

As he said this Harlston turned his head mechanically toward Miss Bernard, while Ludwell, cooly drawing a chair, placed himself near Gertrude.

"Mr. Ludwell recommends me to your notice, Colonel," said Miss Bernard, "by giving me a very bad character."

"Unless I am to believe him more serious in his accusation than in his confession," said Harlston, "it can hardly prejudice you. I believe he is too truly generous to wish to involve any woman in poverty; but if he never marries till he marries for money, he will die a bachelor."

"I have always thought so," said the lady; "and hence I could not remain interested. To my instruction he has had good reason to believe he could have made his fortune by marriage if he would. How I do love such a character!"

"Is there then so much merit," asked Harlston, "in merely forbearing to commit a crime, without temptation?"

"Crime! Temptation!" exclaimed the lady. "Why where have you lived? What every body does not see. You bachelor members have no cause have made his fortune if he would."

"My dear lady, do but tell me who they are, and I will engage to make amends for all my remissness. And as to Temptation! A fine establishment, plate, furniture, entertainments, dress, jewels! O dear! Gilded misery must be so sweet!"

"The tone of this last sentence falsified the words: falsified all that had gone before; and fully convinced Colonel Harlston that Miss Bernard was not less disinterested than her friend Ludwell."

Meantime young Ludwell, addressing his conversation to Gertrude, assumed a tone and manner so different from the saucy badinage in which he had just been indulging, that he seemed like a different creature. Gifted with taste, genius and wit, he could be somber, serious, intellectual: and his trains of thought and raciness of expression brought Henry so strongly to Gertrude's mind, that she found a pleasure in his conversation, such as she had not experienced since she left home. The interest with which she listened to him engaged the attention of Colonel Harlston in spite of the efforts of Miss Bernard to secure it to herself, and he could not forbear, at one moment, from breaking into the conversation, by answering some remark.

"Miss Bernard," said Ludwell, suddenly turning to that young lady, "Harlston is passionately fond of music, and you must play him that delightful piece I heard you play the other day in the country."

"You are very kind to Colonel Harlston," said Miss Bernard. "It might have sounded more gallant to say a word for yourself."

"You forget. That is not my cue. Do you not see how busy I am here working for you. You must do your part too! Set your shoulder to the wheel, and Hercules will help you."

"My dear Laura," said Mrs. Pendarvis, rising and leading the young lady to the piano, "don't hear YOIl."

"Come: no refusal."

And she did play; and she played divinely. And she sang; and her voice had a strange charm, analogous to the spoken tongue; which seemed to impart to the words a meaning never perceived before, and addressed itself to the heart, as in a sort of mystic language. Ludwell immediately turned again to Gertrude, and would have resumed
his former strain of conversation. But she had not yet acquired that refinement of manners which teaches a young lady to accompany the music of another with a rattling peal of nonsense and laughter; and her taste for music, though little cultivated, made her a delighted listener to Miss Bernard’s performance. Colonel Harlston, who was indeed a connoisseur, was quite enchanted, but while Miss Bernard had all his ear, his eye still wandered to Gertrude, and marked the ingenuous pleasure which her countenance displayed, and her resolute resistance to all Ludwell’s attempts to keep up the conversation. Miss Bernard was not permitted to leave the piano. Tune succeeded tune, till, in looking for one, the Colonel’s hand alighted on a book of drawings. This bore Miss Bernard’s name, and displayed much talent and more taste. Here was a new theme for conversation, for he was an admirer of the art. He had travelled, and so had she, and they presently wandered together through the galleries of Rome and Florence, and discussed the merits of the great masters of the pictorial art till a morning call was prolonged to a most unfashionable visitation. "Well Harlston," said Ludwell, as the gentlemen walked away from the door, "I think Miss Bernard appeared more sensible to the attraction than you do. And indeed she has been hardly less serviceable to me, for, though Miss Courtney is understood to be nearly penniless, yet may the smile of woman never cheer my poverty, if I would not rather share it with her, than accept the hand of the other with a kingdom for her dowry." "To me," said Harlston, "Miss Bernard appears a beautiful, intelligent, highly accomplished and right-minded woman, in whose society a man might well be happy." "So you thought of her as a pis aller, and so I knew you would think, or I should not have been so unjust as to have thrown her on your hands, at the same time that I robbed you of all the pleasure you proposed to yourself in a visit to Miss Courtney. You must own too that I am, not only a faithful ally, but a generous rival. And yet I know you do not forgive me, and you ought not, were I to leave you exposed to the machinations of the other without a warning." "I do not think," said Harlston gravely, "for though I see much to admire in Miss Bernard, I was never less sensible to the attractions of any young lady." "Instinct is a great matter," cried Ludwell laughing. "Some people have a horror of cats, and turn pale when one enters the room unseen and unheard. Your instinctive aversion to drapery-misses and female fortune-hunters is of the same character. I have never shown anything else like it." "It is not instinct," replied Harlston gravely, "and even sadly, except so far as the desire to be loved for one’s own sake is an instinct of the whole race. It is not instinct. It is a principle, founded in deep and wretched experience; and any, the least allusion to the subject by a lady, though it be to express her indignation against mercenary matches, repels me in a moment. I had no reason to doubt what Miss Bernard said, nor was she to blame for saying it, for you made it almost necessary; and yet that idea came between me and her all the time we were conversing, and even while I was listening to her music." "Think you I was not aware of that, my dear fellow? She has quite too much tact to volunteer professions on the subject, or even to allude to it, in the first instance. Hence I introduced it in a way that I thought would draw her out, and make her show off. She carried it off however quite moderately; but I knew you would be conscious of the presence of the cat, though she did not show herself. In short, Harlston, though I would gladly be rid of your rivalry in the other quarter, I did not wish to do it at your expense. Had I known that Miss Bernard was in the city, I would have warned you against her distinctly." "Who and what is she?" "All that you see and a great deal more. But to sum up all that concerns you in one word, she is a lady who will marry you if she can." "And Miss Courtney! What of her?" "I know nothing of her, but that she is the niece of Mrs. Pendarvis, and that her father died when she was a child, leaving little behind him but a high reputation for honor and talent. Her mother, some years after, married a country physician of great respectability, large family and moderate fortune. The figure she is making here does not accord with her circumstances, and might look suspicious, were not the generosity of her aunt so notorious. I see her hand in this outfit; though she is too honest to intend any deception, and would tell you, at a word, that Miss Courtney has neither fortune nor expectations." "Then seriously, Ludwell, circumstance as you are, what do you propose? For though I am much pleased with Miss Courtney, I am not such a tinder-box as you; and my friendship for you and my interest in her alike prompt the question." "What do I propose? What does a stone propose by falling to the ground? Why, man, she is my fate. Propose! I propose nothing; but if I thought it would be of any use to propose myself—foolish as it would be—wicked as it would be, I am afraid I should do it. But just at present, my dear Harlston, I propose nothing, because I desire nothing but the dreamy, delicious pleasure I enjoy in her presence. Ask a man in the present fruition of all his soul covets ‘what he proposes!’" "You talk," said Harlston, “like a boy in his first love.” "And am I not I" exclaimed Ludwell. “No boy indeed; and I have thought myself in love before.
But it was as if a blind man, restored to sight, should take the moon for the sun he had heard so much of. But let the sun rise! By day and night, there is no mistake this time: and to speak seriously, Hadston, I know I must take my play with his playful tone; "I expect one of these days, to be fished out like a drowned fly out of a punch-bowl."

CHAPTER VIII.

As I do not mean to give a diary of Gertrude's life in Washington I shall not enter into a detail of the occurrences of the next ten days after this conversation. The reader has been made acquainted with the dramatic personæ, their purposes and plans, and, thus initiated, may be left to fill up that interval according to the suggestions of his own imagination. 'I take it for granted that he needs not be told that the impression made by Gertrude on Colonel Harlston was deepened by a further acquaintance with her; that Miss Bernard's experience of the amiable and estimable qualities of that gentleman did not abate the eagerness of her designs on his person and fortune; and that Ludwell's passion, however-voluntary, had little effect on the exuberance of his spirits, the playfulness of his manners, and his love of fun and mischief. Both he and the Colonel saw Gertrude every day, for, even before her short, she seemed to him a pure and single-hearted creature; and how can any man pass his days, to be fished out like a drowned fly out of a punch-bowl?"
at least, it was her habit to give every winter, and as her parties, though numerous, were select, the honor of an invitation was not to be lightly prized. A lady, and the widow of a gentleman, she had all the instinct of high breeding, and, in selecting her society, did not fail to discriminate carefully without the least regard to wealth, rank, or station. There was nothing too high, according to these standards, to be excluded; nothing too low to be admitted; and royalty itself has sometimes had to break the tacit intimation, that a man may be President of the United States, and yet not a gentleman. In what reign this was I do not say.

The evening came; and the whole house was thrown open; and parties for cards, and groups for conversation were formed in every room but that appropriated to the dance, and loungers, arm in arm, promenaded through the whole. In the early part of the evening our young ladies were rarely separated, and Harlston, in constant attendance on them, did not permit himself to be so wholly engrossed by Miss Bernard as she might have wished. Somewhat annoyed by this she asked her address to the utmost, but with imperfect success. She looked around for Ludwell, but he was only to be seen occasionally, and then in attendance on another lady who happened to have particular claims on him. A beck from Miss Bernard's fan at last afforded him an excuse to break away from his fair companion, and he immediately obeyed the summons.

"Lady," said he, "behold the slave of the fan, devoted to do the pleasure of her who bears it! Wherein can I serve her?"

"By giving me the pleasure of your conversation," said Miss Bernard, from whom, at the moment, the attention of Colonel Harlston was wholly withdrawn.

"Ah!" said Ludwell, glancing at the Colonel and Gertrude, "you have managed badly. You have not profited by the hint I gave you."

"What hint? I know of none."

"You know of none! But you did know; and took it, and improved it most dexterously as far as you went: but I am afraid you have since neglected it."

"I protest I do not understand you."

"You do not! What! Not the accusation not to be mistaken. She drew her breath hard, and almost gasped, under the look which Harlston had said, almost, a monomaniac on this subject, was the cold reply."

"With my own consent I would never hear the slightest allusion to it. The difference between my friend Ludwell and myself is, that what is to him an object of playful scorn, is to me one of utterable disgust. He can jest about it: I cannot."

"Few men can carry their detestation of mercenary views in affairs of the heart farther than he does; though, as you remarked, the other day, there is a point at which he stops. He seems to have a nagging abstraction in all he says, or does, and from this I inferred he was in a state of disgust, which Harlston was too keen an observer to notice."

Miss Bernard’s extraordinary power over the terrors of her voice gave these words a meaning not to be mistaken. She drew her breath hard, and almost gasped, under the look which Harlston unconsciously turned upon her. She felt that she had spoken critical words, and she knew that her intimation was unjust. She remembered indeed what Gertrude had said on the morning after they first met: and she had more than once witnessed the docility, or, what she might have called the acquiescence, with which she listened to her aunt's lectures on prudence; and from these she made out a sort of apology to her own conscience, for "having a fault," which she did not believe to exist.

What Miss Bernard herself thought upon the subject was to Harlston a matter of perfect indifference. Forewarned by Ludwell, he had seen that there was a purpose in all she said, or did not say in relation to it. Whether she dwelt upon it, or avoided it, he had thought she could see that she had a design in doing so. A keen observer, and, as Ludwell had said, almost a monomaniac on this point, it was not easy to deceive him. He might suspect unjustly. He was in no danger of the op-
posite error. Much as he disliked the subject, he would even force himself to endure a discussion of it, in order to unmask a character; and on this occasion he determined to follow Miss Bernard's lead, so as to keep up the conversation till Gertrude should return to her seat. This was not difficult, and the first words that struck Ludwell's ear, as he led back his partner to her place, were in a more high flown strain than the lady had before indulged in.

"That's right," exclaimed Ludwell. "That is the way to manage the matter. Do, Miss Courtney, let us now hear something of your sentiments about that sweet romantic thing, Love in a Cottage."

"As I never lived in a Cottage, and have had no experience of Love, I am not prepared to pronounce a very decided opinion on the subject."

"But you have sometimes thought of it."

"Of course I have; for nothing is more talked about. I have observed that all the old ladies deliver lectures on one side, and all the young ladies make speeches on the other, so I suppose I must take the side that seems most appropriate to my time of life."

"And change it, of course, as you grow older."

"I suppose so. People grow wiser as they grow older, and they tell me that this is a subject on which young people are particularly foolish."

"Miss Courtney can hardly be hearty," said Harlston, "in an opinion which she has candor enough to suspect may be foolish."

"I am certainly not hearty in any opinion on the subject," said Gertrude; "for I have formed none. I only know that the history of my own family affords proof that imprudent marriages are very imprudent things."

"But the question recurs," said Miss Bernard, "what is an imprudent match? You would hardly call a happy match an imprudent one; and surely there can be no happiness without love. We are told, you know, that love constitutes the bliss of Heaven itself."

"But in Heaven," said Gertrude, "there is neither cold nor hunger nor crying children. If there were, why then, the more the parents loved them, the less happy they would be. I have heard my mother say, that she was very happy with my father, but then when she was left a widow, with poor me upon her hands, and very limited means of support, she found she had been very imprudent."

This case seemed so exactly in point to poor Ludwell that his consternation fell; while Harlston, in manifest disquietude, walked away and left the conversation to go on as it might. In another part of the room he established himself in a position to watch the countenances of the party. In doing this he at once saw that the keen eye of Miss Bernard had followed him and occasionally glanced toward him; while Gertrude, all unconscious of his whereabouts, continued to converse, with an air of quiet simplicity, with Ludwell; who, by degrees, recovered his spirits. Not so, Harlston. He now felt, more than at any former moment, that Miss Courtney was to him an object of absorbing interest, that his happiness depended on her; and that it was indispensable to him, that she should be entirely superior to the grovelling views imputed to her, and not disavowed by her. He was perhaps better pleased that she had not disavowed them; and yet he was vexed that she had not. He remained perplexed and gloomy in his seclusion, until he again saw her taken out to dance.

Soon after, in one of the pauses of the dance he approached her, spoke a few low words and fell back to his place. As soon as the set ended, he again advanced, claimed the hand he had just engaged, and detained her on the floor. He went through the dance mechanically, and with an air of abstraction, and, as soon as it ended, offered his arm to Gertrude, and proposed to seek fresher air in another room.

"Miss Courtney," said he, as soon as he could speak without danger of being overheard, "I beg pardon for the abruptness of what I am about to say. The shortness of our acquaintance must make me seem precipitate, and the time and place are not the most suitable; but I cannot sleep without telling you that I love you, and laying myself at your feet."

I hope the reader anticipates at least the substance of Gertrude's answer; and it is needless to give the words, as young ladies are rarely eloquent on such occasions; especially when taken completely by surprise. To Gertrude it had seemed, (and she had been pleased to see it,) that Colonel Harlston was quite taken with Miss Bernard; and, giving that young lady full credit for sincerity in all her talk about Love in a Cottage, she had cherished the hope of seeing her magnanimity rewarded by the less romantic bliss of Love in a Palace. Her answer therefore was expressive of surprise, esteem, gratitude and all that sort of thing, but wound up with a very decided rejection.

Colonel Harlston heard her with great composure, though while she spoke his consternation assumed a high and animated expression; and, when she had concluded, he took her hand and addressed her in a tone of earnest calmness.

"My dear Miss Courtney," he said, "I must again entreat your forgiveness for that which may surprise you more than the unexpected declaration that I have just made. Since I first saw you I have meditated such a step, though I beg leave to assure you that I have not been vain enough to suppose that, in our short acquaintance, I could have made such an impression as would have justified your acceptance of my proposal. Indeed I have not permitted myself to cultivate your favor by those attentions which would have made it, if
not more acceptable, at least less startling. It has been rather my study to make myself acquainted with you, and to give you, at the same time, a fair opportunity to know me. But I have been hurried into this step by what passed a few minutes ago. I see you do not understand my allusion. I advert to what you just now said of interested matches. Nay! do not be offended," he added, as she withdrew her hand, while a flush of indignation rose to her cheek. "I did not misinterpret your words. I understood them as a playful and dexterous evasion of an ill-timed appeal, and was better pleased than I should have been at a flight of common-place declamation, which, on such a subject, seems to my mind unmanly. But I was taught to believe that the sentiment which you seemed rather to admit than aver was with you a settled and deliberate principle of action. I was taught to believe this, but I did not believe it; yet the idea that it could possibly be true was not to be endured. There was but one way to bring it to a prompt and decisive test. I had no reason to flatter myself that I had any hold on your affections. But I have no reason to think myself particularly disagreeable to you; and I am sure you must be aware that my circumstances, my station in society, and my standing in life are such, that a woman proposing to marry for convenience would hardly reject me. You see the risk I ran in affording you an opportunity to make us both wretched, by giving me your hand without your heart; but I beg you to believe that had I entertained any very serious apprehension of that sort, I would not have encountered it. But I was impatient to be freed from all doubt, which, on such a point, would have been intolerable, and might have marred all my efforts to please you. We now understand each other. You have but told me what I knew before: that you do not love me. But you have not told me that you never can. You have but done what I expected and wished. But you have not forbidden me to prosecute my suit, and to endeavor to show myself not unworthy of your favor. Let me now beg one indulgence at your hands. It is that you will keep my secret, at least for a season. I do not wish to be thought precipitate without having it in my power to explain my motives; and I do not wish that my endeavors to please you should be embarrassed and disconcerted by the nods and winks and all the nameless impertinences of meddling gossips. I hope your frankness merits this kindness, and that you will not think yourself bound to repulse the assiduities which my feelings will prompt, from the thought that it is your duty to discourage any further attention from a rejected lover. I cannot consent to be considered in that light. I am sensible that a man may lose much by putting his mistress prematurely in possession of his secret. But this I have done cheerfully and I trust you so appre-