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lids were more to him at the moment than any dazzling display of charms; and the apologetic "I am sorry-I am afraid I have kept you waiting-I see I am late," was all that was needed to draw him to her

"In the best of time," he said heartily. "One minute only after the dinner has been announced. That is quite as near as any one can expect, isn't it?" and he pressed the hand on his arm kindly.

"Is it? I-I am very glad."

"You were late coming in. I think, from what my sisters tell me, that you deserve a medal for accomplishing such a transformation in so short a time. You certainly must be the quickest dresser in the world. I daresay it comes from being alone. Two, when they get together, talk."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"You had a run before dinner?"

"Yes. I had asked your sisters to go round the gardens with me," continued Rosamund, "but they seemed to prefer being taken to their room, being just off a long journey-"

--- "Ay, they are no great travellers. and had had an early start. Besides, coming here is an event to them. So you had to go alone? You did not think of me?" as he led her to her seat.

"You? No. I-I thought you had had a long walk already."

"You might have given me the re-

But it was said without ill-will, and was so obviously meant to be taken in good might it now have become! Her father? part that she went so far as to make no answer at all.

They seated themselves at the table, and

For Em and Etta there was certainly now their first taste of the sweets of grandeur. To begin with, all preliminary terrors-even to the first shake of their the neighbors would have gathered round; host's hand, and to the donbt as to which he would offer his arm to, and the wonder what should be done if he offered it to the wrong one-had now been happily dis posed of. Then the tempting dinnertable, sweet with flowers, and shining with glass and silver, had been reduced to square to suit the smallness of the party, and the party itself was disposed to be cheerful. So that, though the room in which they sat was large and lotty, and the meal was a composed, noiseless, and stately affair, so far as eatir g and serving was concerned, it was by no no means either what it would have been beneath the iron sway of the dead Lady Caroline, nor yet what Rosamund might have made it had she been so minded.

There was no oppression in the air. There was even a general consciousness that conversation, or rather prattle which could hardly be dignified by the name, was being anxiously encouraged and timorously cultivated.

Then Major Gilbert talked and jested freely, having soon begun to do so under such condition. He could almost have fancied the earliest days of his courtship back again, in meeting Rosamund's supporting applause, and the challenge that her dark eyes flashed around.

When he drew her on to unite with him in recounting games they had won, and fights they had fought together on the archery or tennis lawn, she was ready to attest and smile almost as she once had been. When he went still further, hinting broadly at what the future might have in store, the flush on her brow told of no cold rebuke nor indifference, but rather of a vivid and strong emotion, and the silence which followed seemed but its natural

He was more than satisfied-he was absolutely radiant.

"Come, Em, bless my soul? you don't say you don't like apple-fritters?" said he, as she let the appetising dish pass. "Why, there's nothing in the world beats apple-fritters when they're good, and they are always good in this house," helping himself plentifully. "These are simply first-rate," after the first mouthful. "Your own apples, of course, Rosamund You have had a rare crop of apples this

His next sally was confidential.

"I say, Etta," to the sister next him, "look at Em now. By Jove! she knew what she was about. She waited for the pancakes, the greedy monkey. I thought one ought never to have pancakes except on Shrove Tuesday. I thought it went against people's consciences, Rosamund.'

"I don't know about consciences," said Rosamund, "but certainly neither of these are correct company dishes. Your sisters must excuse our very old-fashioned cook.'

"Faith, I will if they don't," said Gilbert, laughing. "Long may old-fashioned dishes abound for me! I hope you will remember the sentiment, Rosamund. There's no resisting 'em. But, I say, how's this? You take nothing. Now I think of it, I don't believe you have eaten a single thing all through the dinner! You have said 'No 'to everything. How is it? 'Not hungry?' Oh, but that will never do. You must have a glass of wine, anyway," and he seized the decanter from the man who was pouring out some for himself.

She took it to please him.

Had he offered her a cup of poison at that moment, I almost think she would have taken it all the same.

• put the wine-glass to her lips, and he laid other painful complaints.

The changing color and dropping eye- his hand on hers. "Why, it is burning hot!" he cried. She started as if she had been pricked with a dagger's point. She stared at him as if she wondered what he meant when he spoke.

> CHAPTER XXI. TEMPEST.

No, she was not going to break with

She had only had the idea presented to

An hour before, she had met Hartland in the garden, and he had come upon her in an unguarded moment : some scene, some recollection, had been present immediately before, and fancying herself unseen and unheard, she had been giving vent in irrepressible sobs, and sighs, and broken articulations, to the tempest of her

She knew now that she did not love the man to whom her troth was plighted-that she never had, never could have loved him; and forthwith it seemed to her that every living creature, free from such a chain as bound hershlf, was to be envied.

Her own hands had, as it were, locked the chain, and locked it must remain; but oh! would God she had never known Frederick Gilbert!

All her youth, all the brightness and sweetness of the life on which she might now have entered as a free, glad, heedless creature, seemed at once to rise and mock her folly, who had erewhile held it cheap.

Her old home, that she had once panted to be quit of, how dear, how delightful He would have promoted everything. tolerated everything, given her free scope in everything. Aunt Julia would have been the head and front of every sort of happy misrule. The children should have had a bright childhood. The boys should have brought home their school friends; summer festivals, autumn shooting-parties and winter revelries in accord with the merry Yule-tide season-all would have been within reach, and there would have been now no one to run counter to, and extort a grudging consent from (alas! it was Rosamund's own mother of whom the girl thought, although the vision was an involuntary one)-and on all this fair prospect she had now to turn her back, and receive, as solitary compensation, Frederick Gilbert, whom every day she loved less, and matrimony, which every day she

It had never been these; it had been the gratification of self-will, and the thirst of her soul after emancipation and freedom which had been the bait.

That very morning—the morning of the sister's arrival-something-some triffehad vexed her spirit afresh. She had meant to conceal the annoyance, but had been betrayed by her lover's sudden appearance into revealing more than she had been herself aware of, as we know. She had but been pettish, she thought, and Frederick never seemed to mind such pettishness. It was not worth thinking about on his account, but-but-and she had rushed into the balmy dusk afterwards like a wild thing escaped from its snare,

there to wring her hands and sob unseen. Inadvertently Hartland had caught her thus. He did not waste time in pre-

"You may as well tell the truth, Rosamund," he said; " nothing but the truth will save you and him now."

"The truth ?" She struggled to rein in the rushing breath and quivering lip, and, with head averted, made a desperate feint even yet to hold her own. "The truth! What truth?"

"It is only doing Gilbert injustice," proceeded her cousin, unheeding the question. "He has acted in a plain, straightforward manner towards you, and vou-I am afraid you are deceiving him." "Hartland !"

"And yourself too."

" Hartland !"

"I have no motive for saying so, you know; and, of course, if your mother had been alive, I should never have interfered; but the fact is, it seems there is no one else to speak. No one else seems to see."

"And you-you-?"

"Oh, I see plainly enough. You took this good fellow in an obstinate fit, and now you have got him, you don't care to keep him. You think he is not worth the trouble. Well, I'll be plain, and I'll say I think he is being confoundedly badly used. What's more, Rosamund, if it were were bound to stick to him. You would have no right to throw him over. But

"You think he is too good for me?" (TO BE CONTINUED.) -405-

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