

**A MARRIAGE IN
HIGH LIFE**

VOL. II

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A
MARRIAGE IN HIGH LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

Now, in his turn, offended and surprised,
The knight in silence from her side withdrew;
With pain she marked it, but her pain disguised,
And heedless seemed her journey to pursue,
Nor backward deigned to him one anxious view,
As oft she wished.

PSYCHE.

EASTER was now fast approaching, and Fitzhenry announced to Emmeline his intention of going out of town for a fortnight,—but not to Arlingford—And he concluded by saying, that, of course, he supposed she would like to pass the time with her father at Charlton.

At any other time, and under any other circumstances, how gladly would she have availed herself of the opportunity of returning to her former, peaceful, happy home! But, like a sick person, her feverish mind had for some time past dwelt on Arlingford. She longed to find herself again there, for there, they *must* meet—there they *might* be alone! and she could not help hoping for some explanation between them, which might make her, at least, less miserable. Fitzhenry's manner towards her had of late changed: it had no longer the ease of indifference, the coldness of mere civility; but, alas! it had only changed to apparent dislike, or at least displeasure. He observed her more; but his observations seemed always to prejudice him still more against her.

And yet, what could she do? or what leave undone? She had tried all means to please him, and all had failed. She first had followed the dictates of her own heart, and then, relying on Pelham's knowledge of her husband's character, and on his advice, she had played a part most unnatural to her—that of a gay, unfeeling woman of the world, when her heart was breaking. All, in turn, seemed to be wrong.

For an instant, a horrid thought had crossed her mind. Could Pelham be deceiving her? Could he, for any view, either of his own, or Fitzhenry's, be endeavouring to draw her on to what was lowering her still more in her husband's opinion? Was Pelham untrue to his friend? or what would be still worse, was it a concerted plan, to exasperate her, and at last to force her to break a connexion, which, to her husband, had become intolerable thralldom. Emmeline, shuddering, turned away from such thoughts, almost reproaching herself for ingratitude in having, even for a moment, entertained them. But again disappointed in what she had looked to with some degree of satisfaction, and finding she must relinquish even those faint hopes which she had built, on their return to Arlingford, her sick mind preyed on itself, and conjured up these painful surmises, producing doubt and suspicion in the most confiding of all characters.

Emmeline heard Fitzhenry's notification about leaving town in silent acquiescence; and, having no choice, to Charlton she went; but her heart sank within her as she drove up to her father's door, for, aware of how much she was changed, she dreaded her parents' observation, and feared, that when constantly in their society, she could not keep up those false

spirits which she always endeavoured to assume when with them. Poor Emmeline was in truth sadly changed. Instead of the active, cheerful being she used to be, she was now generally abstracted, and sometimes even apparently totally insensible to every thing around her; and then, when fearful of betraying herself, she suddenly broke forth into those unnatural bursts of feverish spirits, so painful to witness, because so evidently proceeding from internal suffering.

Mrs. Benson watched her in silent anxiety; but her loss of bloom, of activity, and appetite, even of spirits, all was attributed to a far different cause; and, after some enquiries respecting her health, which Emmeline always evaded, the warm-hearted mother, not without smiling at her daughter's overstrained shyness and delicacy, questioned her no more on the subject; but contented herself with paying every possible attention to her bodily comfort, while she indulged in the delightful anticipation of new objects for her maternal pride and fondness.

And thus deceived as to the cause of Emmeline's altered appearance, she spared her any more embarrassing conversations.

The stated fortnight was past, and still she did not receive from Fitzhenry the promised letter, announcing his return to town. But one day the servant put into her hand one with the Arlingford post-mark. It was not franked by Fitzhenry; the writing was unknown to her; and, in alarm, she hastily broke the seal.

She found it was from Brown, the housekeeper, informing her that Reynolds had been seized with a violent and dangerous illness; that the doctors, who attended him, gave little hope of his recovery; and that he so constantly expressed his anxiety to see her, and Lord Fitzhenry, that she could not help complying with his request, and informing her ladyship of his situation and wishes. She added—"I have also taken the liberty to write to my lord; and not knowing where his lordship is, have sent the letter to the steward in town to forward to him."

Emmeline knew but too well whither the letter would follow him; but thinking he might not receive it in time, or that, possibly, in the society he then was, he might be little inclined to attend such a summons, she determined immediately to go to Arlingford. How much the desire of being there, of visiting every spot, every inanimate object in her mind connected with Fitzhenry, and the possibility even of thus meeting him, might have influenced her benevolent decision—probably she herself did not know.

On arriving at Arlingford, Emmeline's first question was, whether Lord Fitzhenry was there: and the feeling of deep disappointment with which she learnt that he was not, and that he was not even expected, betraying to herself her real object in coming, made her half-ashamed when at length she enquired after the poor invalid.

The accounts of Reynolds's situation had been in no way exaggerated. He was still alive, and sensible; but there was no possibility whatever of recovery. Emmeline therefore endeavoured to overcome her own selfish feelings, and went immediately to the sick room.

Independent of the gratification she received from witnessing the pleasure which her presence seemed to give to the faithful old servant, the duty she undertook then was one every way better suited to her present state of mind, than the dissipation in which she had been lately engaged. It soothed and quieted the tumult of her feelings, and brought back to her mind some of the innocent, calm remembrances of happier days. Educated by her mother in the exercise of every religious duty, she, who had so lately been seen glittering in ball rooms, now knelt by the bed of sickness; and while raising the dying man's mind and hopes to that better world to which he was hastening, she found herself strengthened to bear the sorrows of that, in which she was still appointed to suffer.

Towards the end of the second day after Emmeline's arrival at Arlingford, Reynolds grew rapidly worse; the symptoms of death seemed to be fast increasing, and, aware of his approaching dissolution, his anxiety for Fitzhenry's arrival, and the nervous perturbation of his mind, were painful to witness. Emmeline frequently asked if he had any request to make, any wish she could communicate to him; but his only answer was, that he must see him before he died.

To compose, and turn his thoughts to other things, Emmeline had again recourse to religion; and, when thus employed, and while the last rays of the evening sun shone faintly through the curtains of the sick room on her kneeling figure, and on the sacred book she held in her hand, the door of the apartment slowly opened, and Fitzhenry appeared.

He started back on seeing Emmeline, and, for a moment, stood still, as if awed by the scene before him; but Reynolds

recognizing him, and exclaiming—“’Tis him! God be praised, I shall now die in peace,” Fitzhenry hastened up to him, kindly taking his extended hand; then again looking at Emmeline—“Good God! Lady Fitzhenry, since when have you been here?”

“Only a day or two; I was sent for,” said Emmeline, hardly knowing whether thus unexpectedly seeing her had given him pain or pleasure.

“I was so bold as to send for her ladyship,” said Reynolds. “It was my request, my dying request. I knew I had not long to live. I knew I should not die easy, unless I could once more see you, once more see that angel!” and still grasping Fitzhenry with one hand, he held out the other to Emmeline.

At such a moment, not to comply with any wish of the sick man, was impossible; though, half fearful of his intention, she tremblingly put her hand in his.

“Dear, dear Lord Fitzhenry,” continued Reynolds, “you know I love you as if you were my own son. Death makes us all equal, and it makes me bold. I have often wished, longed, to speak to you, but felt it was not my place; and I had not courage; but listen to a dying man’s advice. I know all—you know I do. Oh, my dear master! repent, and turn from your evil ways! Do not any longer trifle with God, and with the happiness he has offered you! Do not cast from you the angel Heaven has sent you!”—and he joined their hands. “God of heaven!” he continued, with a trembling voice, “look down on these, thy servants, and make them happy together!”

Fitzhenry's head fell on the bed, as if wishing to avoid the eyes of Emmeline, as he involuntarily sunk on his knees.

As for Emmeline, overcome and terrified at what had passed; fearful as to the manner in which Fitzhenry might interpret such a seemingly premeditated appeal to his feelings in her behalf; perhaps, even, humbled at the situation in which it placed her, she hastily, almost unconsciously, withdrew her hand from the feeble grasp of the dying man, while his dimmed eyes were still raised to heaven; and, before either he, or her husband, had time to discover her intention, she hastily left the room.

But she had no sooner quitted it than she repented her hasty flight. When Reynolds joined their hands, although Fitzhenry had not clasped hers in token of affection, still he had suffered his to remain with it; and, overcome by the old man's address to him, he had appeared to have given way to the kind—the virtuous impulse of the moment. That impulse, and those virtuous feelings, might possibly have produced a favourable explanation; and she, by leaving him so abruptly, had now, she feared, evidently shown a reluctance to any thing which might have produced a reconciliation between them.

Twice she had her hand on the lock to return; but, timid from excess of affection, each time her courage failed her. The door which she had scarcely closed, reopened of itself, and she heard these words uttered by Fitzhenry: "It is impossible—indeed it can't be so;—but depend upon it, nothing shall be wanting on my part to contribute to her happiness, and——"

Emmeline waited for no more. As one pursued by a horrid vision, she hurried to her own room. The shades of evening deepened around her, as, alone and half stupified with her various feelings, she counted the striking of the heavy hours as they passed. Not a sound was to be heard in the uninhabited house—no one came near her.

At length, when the clock slowly, solemnly sounded twelve, she started up, and, recollecting that her maid was probably waiting for her, she rung the bell, that she might dismiss her for the night; but she first sent her to enquire after Reynolds, whose room was in a distant part of the building. On the return of Jenkins, the report she brought was—“That my lord was still with Reynolds—that they were apparently engaged in serious conversation—for that no one was allowed to go into the room, my lord himself giving him the necessary medicines, and having dismissed the nurse.”

After her maid had taken off Emmeline’s gown, unplaited her hair, and, at her desire, lit the fire in her dressing-room, as she fancied it would be a sort of companion to her, which, in her present state of mind, she felt to be necessary, she sent Jenkins to bed, and, drawing her chair close upon the hearth, Emmeline remained lost in reflections neither cheering nor soothing. The near neighbourhood of a death-bed gives an awful feeling even to one in the full pride of youth and health. To be aware that so close to us a fellow-creature is probably just then passing, through the agonies of death, to that eternity to which we all look with awe, is an overpowering sensation; and Emmeline shuddered as these thoughts crossed her mind. She cast her eyes fearfully round the room, and endeavoured to brighten

the flame in the grate. Still death and its horrors hung over her imagination, which wandered now to future scenes of pain and punishment; and the thought that Fitzhenry—her loved Fitzhenry, who had wound himself round every fibre of her heart—might perhaps be an outcast from that heaven to which she had been taught to look, as the end and aim of her existence, was agony. For she could not conceal from herself that he was living in bold defiance, or rather in total disregard and indifference to the will and laws of his God.

Emmeline's blood curdled, and a cold shiver crept all over her frame. Instinctively she sunk on her knees, and prayed for him who had never been taught to pray for himself. Her head sank on her clasped hands, which rested on a chair beside her; her long hair falling over her face and shoulders. The dead silence that surrounded her, appalled her awe-stricken mind; she eagerly listened for some sound of human existence and neighbourhood; but nothing was to be heard but the regular vibration of the great clock in the hall. Emmeline remained kneeling, till her nervous agitation grew so painfully strong, that she hardly dared to move, and had not power to shake off the superstitious horror which had taken possession of her. Every limb trembled; the cold sweat stood on her forehead; and it was an inexpressible relief to her disordered mind, when, at length, she heard a slow step in the gallery, and a gentle knock at her door. She concluded it was her maid, bringing her some tidings of Reynolds, and she quickly and joyfully bade her enter. The door softly opened, and Fitzhenry appeared.

An unearthly vision could scarcely have startled Emmeline more. She uttered an exclamation, almost of terror, as she

hastily rose from her knees; but almost directly sank into the chair beside her, her trembling limbs refusing to support her.

“I think you gave me leave to come in,” said Fitzhenry, still standing at the door. Emmeline bowed assent, when, closing it after him, he came up to her, and put his candle on the mantle-piece.

It was the first time he had ever entered her room since that day when, on her parents’ first arrival at Arlingford, he had conducted them to it; and, dreading the possible purport of his visit *now*, after the scene that had lately occurred, she had not courage to say a word. For a minute, both were silent—at length Fitzhenry said—

“I thought you would be anxious to hear about poor Reynolds; and as he has now sunk into something like sleep, I came away for a minute to tell you he is more easy and composed; but I fear this stupor is only the forerunner of death, and that all will soon be over. I shall lose a most faithful servant—indeed, an attached friend—.”

He paused; but Emmeline, still too nervous to speak, said nothing.

“I also came,” said he, in an agitated, hurried manner, “to thank you for your kindness in coming to him: it was most kind—good—excellent;—like yourself. I feel it deeply, I assure you, as well as Reynolds.”

These few words of praise, so unlike what she had expected from him after what had passed, still more overpowered Emmeline. Had she dared to give way to the feelings of the

moment, she would have thrown herself into her husband's arms, and, in his tenderness, claimed a reward for an action which he seemed to take as a kindness to himself. But alas! not for one moment could she be deceived as to the nature of *his* feelings; not for one moment, after the decisive declaration which she had again heard him make, could she attribute his present manner towards her to any thing but mere gratitude for her attentions to his old servant; and, repressing the throbbings of her bosom, and scarcely knowing what she said, with a breathless voice she answered:

"I came to Arlingford because I thought Brown's letter might not reach you in time, and I did not know where to write to you—I mean, I thought you might be otherwise engaged yourself."——And then struck with the appearance of coldness and reproof in her words, and the possible interpretation to be given to them, she stopped short.

Fitzhenry made no comment. Both were now standing seemingly occupied with watching the dying embers of the fire—at last he turned towards her, she felt his eyes were on her.

"Poor Reynolds often names you," he said; "but I think, unless you wish it—perhaps you had better not go to him again—such scenes are painful, and——"

He was continuing, but with the quick touchiness of love, (of unrequited love, which interprets every thing to its disadvantage,) Emmeline, catching at those words, and fancying they alluded to what had lately passed, and were meant as a hint to her to avoid any possible recurrence of the

same scene, immediately, with a voice scarcely audible from agitation, said:

“Oh no, certainly. And perhaps now that you are here, and that my presence is no longer desired—I mean not necessary—it may be more convenient if I return to Charlton——or to town.”

“Just whatever you prefer,” said Fitzhenry, coldly; and, after a moment’s pause, “you know my wish is, that you should always do whatever you like and judge to be best.” And he put up his hand to take his candle, as if in preparation to leave the room.

Poor Emmeline had, in a moment of perhaps excusable irritation, artfully made the proposal of leaving Arlingford, in the hope of its being opposed; and this cold acquiescence quite overcame her. She could not speak, for her lips quivered when she attempted it; and, depressed and nervous with all that had passed, big tears again rolled down her cheeks, and she kept her head averted to conceal them from Fitzhenry.

In raising his hand to take his candle, he somehow had caught on the button of his coat-sleeve a lock of her long hair, which was hanging loose over her shoulders; and, during the pause that followed his answer, he was endeavouring to disentangle himself; but in vain. Surprised at his still remaining near her, and in silence, she at last looked up, and seeing what had happened, her trembling hands darted on the entangled hair, and with the vehemence of vexation, she broke and untwisted it till she again set him free. He looked at her for a minute in seeming astonishment, and then, coldly wishing her good-night, left the room.

He had scarcely been gone a minute, when recalling the kindness of his manner on first entering, and blaming herself for the irritation she had given way to, she determined to recall him; and, passing from one extreme to another, and buoyed up with instant hope—though she scarcely knew of what—she hastily collected her hair with a comb, folded her wrapper closer around her, and opening her door, hurried into the gallery. All there was dark and silent; she turned towards Fitzhenry's room—his door was open—but he was gone! Stopping a minute to listen and take breath, she heard him crossing the hall below on his way to Reynolds's apartment. She determined to recall him, and hurried along the gallery to the head of the stairs for that purpose. When she got there, she saw the last faint ray of the light he was carrying glimmering across the hall. Twice she endeavoured to pronounce his name—but it was a name that never could be pronounced by her calmly. She was frightened at the sound of her own voice, faint as its accents were, (so faint that they never reached him to whom they were addressed,) and her courage totally failed her.

“Alas!” thought she, as she sadly leant against the bannisters for support, “if he came, what could I say to him? what have I to ask of him, but pity for feelings which he can neither understand nor return? and may I at least never so far forget myself. I am humbled enough already.” And now, even alarmed at what those feelings had so nearly betrayed her into, she returned to her own room as hastily as she had a minute before quitted it; so capricious, so inconsistent does passion render its victims.

Towards dawn of day, Emmeline, whose heavy eyes sleep had never visited, heard a bustle below; several doors were hastily opened and shut. In a little time, Fitzhenry (for she could never mistake *his* step) passed hastily along the gallery to his own room, and closed the door immediately after him. Then there was again a dead silence.

“It is all over,” thought Emmeline; “Reynolds is at peace: the only being in this house who loved me is gone!” A cold shiver crept over her; she buried her tear-bedewed face in her pillow, and thus lay for long immoveable, no conscious thought passing through her agitated mind.

When her maid came to her in the morning, she informed her Reynolds had died about five o’clock; that Lord Fitzhenry had never left him; that he had supported him in his arms to the last, and, when all was over, appearing much affected, he had gone immediately to his own room, giving orders that no one was to go to him till he rung.

Jenkins, unbidden, brought Emmeline her breakfast in her own apartment, although at Arlingford that was a meal at which she and Fitzhenry had always hitherto met. How painfully did she then feel the separation between them! Fitzhenry was in sorrow, and she, his wife, dared not go near him; even the servants seemed to dictate to her her conduct, and to be aware of her situation.

As to her departure, she knew not what to determine. She had said she would go. Her husband had not opposed her declared intention, and she did not like again to be accused of caprice. Not feeling, however, that she could leave Arlingford without at

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