

O M B R A.

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CHAPTER I.

THE fact was that Ombra, as she said, had not given her confidence to anyone; she had betrayed herself to her mother in her first excitement, when she had lost command of herself; but that was all. A real and full confidence she had never given. Ombra's love of sympathy was great, but it was not accompanied, as it generally is, by that open heart which finds comfort in disclosing its troubles. Her heart was not open. She neither revealed herself nor divined others; she was not selfish, nor harsh in temper and disposition; but all that she was certain of was her own feelings. She did not know how to find out what other people were feeling or thinking, consequently she had a very imperfect idea of those about her, and seldom found out for herself what was going on in their minds. This limited her powers of sympathy in a wonderful way, and it was this which was at the root of all her trouble. She had been wooed, but only when it came to a conclusion had she really known what that wooing meant. In her ignorance she had re-

fused the man whom she was already beginning to love, and then had gone on to think about him, after he had revealed himself—to understand all he had been meaning—to love him, with the consciousness that she had rejected him, and with the fear that his affections were being transferred to her cousin. This was what gave the sting to it all, and made poor Ombra complain so mournfully of her temper. She did not divine what her love meant till it was too late; and then she resented the fact that it was too late—resented the reserve which she had herself imposed upon him, the friendly demeanour she had enjoined. She had begged him, when she rejected him, as the greatest of favours to keep up his intercourse with the family, and be as though this episode had never been. And when the poor fellow obeyed her she was angry with him. I do not know whether the minds of men are ever similarly affected, but this is a weakness not uncommon with women. And then she took his subdued tone, his wistful looks, his seldom approaches to herself, as so many instances that he had got over what she called his folly. Why should he continue to nourish his folly when she had so promptly announced her indifference? And then it was that it became apparent to her that he had transferred his affections to Kate. As it happened, by the fatality which sometimes attends such matters, the unfortunate young man never addressed Kate, never looked at her, but Ombra found him out. When Kate was occupied by others, her cousin took no notice, but when that one step approached, that

one voice addressed her, Ombra's eyes and ears were like the lynx. Kate was unconscious of the observation, by means of being absolutely innocent; and the hero himself was unconscious for much the same reason, and because he felt sure that his hopeless devotion to his first love must be so plain to her as to make any other theory on the subject out of the question. But Ombra, who was unable to tell what eyes meant, or to judge from the general scope of action, set up her theory, and made herself miserable. She had been wretched when watching "them;" she was wretched to go away and be able to watch them no longer. She had left home with a sense of relief, and yet the news that they were not to return home for the Winter smote her like a catastrophe. Even the fact that he had loved her once seemed a wrong to her, for then she did not know it; and since then had he not done her the cruel injury of ceasing to love her?

Poor Ombra! this was how she tormented herself; and up to this moment any effort she had made to free herself, to snap her chains, and be once more rational and calm, seemed but to have dug the iron deeper into her soul. Nothing cuts like an imaginary wrong. The sufferer would pardon a real injury a hundred times while nursing and brooding over the supposed one. She hated herself, she was ashamed, disgusted, revolted by the new exhibitions of unsuspected wickedness, as she called it, in her nature. She tried and tried, but got no better. But in the meantime all outward