

**THE ILL-TEMPERED
COUSIN: A
NOVEL; VOL. III**

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The ill-tempered cousin: a novel; Vol. III by Frances Elliot

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FRANCES ELLIOT

**THE ILL-TEMPERED
COUSIN: A
NOVEL; VOL. III**

May 1888-

THE ILL-TEMPERED COUSIN.

A NOVEL.

BY

FRANCES ELLIOT,

AUTHOR OF 'DIARY OF AN IDLE WOMAN IN SPAIN,'
'THE RED CARDINAL,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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THE ILL-TEMPERED COUSIN.

CHAPTER I.

IN the general silence which ensued, the sound of John's departing footsteps echoed through the hall. Then the front door shut with a bang, and all was still.

'Tell me,' said Lady Danvers, after a pause, a somewhat softer intonation in her high-set voice, 'have you any other attachment to account for this?'

In an instant a burning blush mantled on Sophia's cheeks. She stretched out her hands imploringly.

'I had rather not say,' she faltered. 'I beg you not to ask.'

'Certainly not,' answered Lady Danvers coldly; 'but I am sorry to find you put no confidence in those who have a right to know.'

With these words, the remembrance of Edward Maitland's message flashed across Mrs Winter. It must be for his sake she had refused John Bauer. It was his absence which was driving her to despair. By her culpable silence she had unconsciously brought about this scene; but if her whole life depended on it, she could not at that moment have summoned courage to tell her.

'May I speak?' said a faltering voice, as Jane timidly stole over to where her mother was standing. 'Dear mamma, I beg your pardon for daring to interfere, but oh! the whole happiness of my life is at stake.'

'What do you mean, child?' said Lady Danvers, sharply, bringing her glass to bear on the alarmed eyes of Jane, raised to hers in an agony of entreaty.

'I mean—I mean,' she said, turning now red, now white, 'that I am alone at home, except the dog Nep, and he does not count—quite alone, mamma. I love Sophia dearly; I think I understand her.

Could she not come to us, until she has made up her mind? You have always been so good to me when I have asked you anything in earnest. And you are Sophia's aunt, mamma, the same as Aunt Amelia.'

Never did a few short sentences cause such a commotion. Lady Danvers, who had evidently never dreamt of such a proposal, turned away with an angry frown.

Sophia, fixing her eyes first on Jane, then on Lady Danvers, was uncertain what to say. Aunt Amelia started to her feet, and Uncle Louis, by a violent jerk, presented his back to the company, with a grimace of intense disgust.

'This is a mad scheme,' said Lady Danvers, after a painful silence. 'I suppose' (to Jane) 'you and Sophia have concocted it together.'

An ominous cloud darkened her brow.

'No, no!' cried an eager, young voice, and a pair of clasped hands were thrust forward. 'I have not even told Sophia.'

'No, indeed, Lady Danvers,' from Sophia, the astonishment of whose looks backed up her words. 'I never heard of it before.'

'Well, be that as it may, it is asking of

me a most unwarrantable sacrifice. You hardly know Sophia, Jane.'

'Oh yes, indeed I do, mamma; I know her, and I love her.'

('Dear, generous little cousin,' murmured Sophia, drawing her eager face to hers and kissing it, 'it is no use.' Jane, in the same low tone,—'No use, Sophia! We shall see. No one can resist you, not even mamma.')

'A most unexpected proposal,' continued Lady Danvers, after a pause, during which she reflected that Sophia would, in all probability, shortly marry, and that a temporary residence under her roof would give her a much better chance of doing so creditably, than the protection of such a man as Louis Winter. Then turning to Mrs Winter, who had never moved from her seat,—'I would gladly relieve you, dear Amelia, from the presence of Sophia. I see you do not get on; but it seems to me she will not like a residence with me any better. You are all gentleness; a great deal too yielding. In my house, I take into consideration no peculiarities of temper, or accidents of position. Those who enter my door as inmates must conform to my rules. Because Sophia is a

motherless girl I can make no exception for her: No, Jane. No!'—putting back from her eager Jane, whose face was streaming with tears—'don't be silly. There is no use crying in that violent way. You have sacrificed me enough already to your foolish fancy without making a scene. Let Sophia decide for herself.'

Sophia was brave; she was almost heroic, but her heart sank within her as she contemplated the stony expression of Lady Danvers' handsome face; but, stung by the recollection of that insulting letter, which had not only deprived her of Edward, but had set all her old wounds bleeding afresh, she was conscious of but one overwhelming longing, and that was to escape far from the scene of her degradation. No spot on earth could humiliate her as much as Twickenham.

'I understand you,' she replied, in a voice out of which all expression was gone, 'and I accept. If you will allow me, I will come to you on a visit. I fear I am not sufficiently grateful. I have been differently brought up. People in India are not ashamed of their poor relations. Even the animals and plants