

**IN THE WEST
COUNTRIE, IN THREE
VOLUMES, VOL. II**

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In the West Countrie, in Three Volumes, Vol. II by May Crommelin

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MAY CROMMELIN

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COUNTRIE, IN THREE
VOLUMES, VOL. II**

IN THE WEST COUNTRIE

BY

MAY CROMMELIN

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“QUEENIE,” “ORANGE LILY,” “A JEWEL OF A GIRL,”

“MY LOVE, SHE'S BUT A LASSIK,”

kc., &c.

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IN THE WEST COUNTRY.

CHAPTER I.

THE night was half-spent. But our ball was not flagging at all! rather, as supper began in the lighted-up conservatories, the dancers sped round with fresh vigour in the clearer space of the great hall.

Every one seemed happy : all amused.

As I was resting beside a pillar with Mr. Bracy, after our first dance together, we detected Mrs. General Jones and another old busybody carefully threading their way down the side of the hall ; their eyes fixed

on the walls with curious intentness, though discreetly; and their lips moving. 'One hundred and eighty-nine,' we heard murmured sagaciously as they passed us. 'Are you taking that chandelier on the far side, my dear Mrs. General? One hundred and ninety-five already, I do declare, and real wax every candle of them.

'Well, well. No one can better afford it than dear, good Mr. Brown Sugar, as they call him; and a very good name too, considering his sweetness of disposition,' placidly returned the she-general.

Mr. Fulke—as I still secretly called him in mind—met my eyes, and we both laughed. It was now the middle of the ball, but this was the first dance I had in honesty been able to give him, to my regret. Alice, however, had unscrupulously thrown over her other partners

to dance three times already with him ; assuring every one she talked to that night, in her impulsive childish fashion, that he was the most fascinating man she had met with *for ages!*

‘There certainly is a different *régime* here from what I remember in my young days, of our troubled fortunes. I can truly assure you that I am glad the old traditions of Stoke are so delightfully revived, for your family’s sake, as well as that the dear old place is so well kept up,’ said Mr. Bracy, with an earnest tone running through the well-bred easy lightness of his speech. It told me he was keenly sensible of the feeling that he was here, a stranger, dancing in the home of his forefathers ; but would not allow himself to weigh on our sympathies at all, for that.

It would have given me real pleasure to have said a word or two, showing him I

could enter a little way into the mingled crowd of memories, regrets, and associations I felt certain he *must* feel; but foolish shyness weighted my tongue. The thoughts were all in my head. I could have almost spoken them with my eyes, loving Stoke's every stone and tree and grass-blade as I did, and so intensely pitying him; my heart was so soft and wide-set this night with my own vague gladness I would have had all the world as happy—But not a word of what would have been graceful to utter would come, though I did look up at him. At last, after a pause, came merely the blundering question: 'I beg your pardon—but why was it you called yourself only Mr. Fulke on Dartmoor?'

'Did I call myself so? I think rather that it was Mrs. Gladman who used to address me so by my Christian name, having known

me very well ; whilst with Jack there was no mister-ing, but he called me "plain Fulke"—as a mother once said with pride of her ugly son, when the neighbours called him Johnny or Jack, "His name is plain John."

My old friend laughed at his simple tale himself—it may have been to hide some amusement at another thought—but that did not strike me at the time, so I answered, staidly :

'It was my mistake, and Bob's then. How silly you must have thought us !'

Fulke Bracy turned quickly to look at me, and my good faith seemed to beget his, for he immediately apologized.

'Not quite so ! To confess all, since you look at me in such an intensely truthful way yourself, the mistake once begun, I rather wished to encourage it. I own (being now