

**AFFINITIES: A ROMANCE
OF TO-DAY; IN TWO
VOLUMES; VOL. I**

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Affinities: A Romance of To-Day; In Two Volumes; Vol. I by Mrs. Campbell Praed

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MRS. CAMPBELL PRAED

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AFFINITIES

A Romance of To-day

BY

MRS CAMPBELL PRAED

AUTHOR OF 'ZERO' 'POLICY AND PASSION' ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.



LONDON

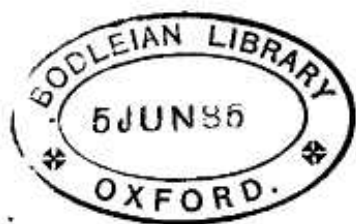
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AFFINITIES.

CHAPTER I.

MAJOR GRAYSETT and COLONEL RAINSHAW had been in the same regiment in India. They had gone out there together; but Major Graysett remained on service some time longer than Rainshaw. The latter went home on sick leave, married an heiress, sold out of the army, and settled himself very comfortably in one of the Midland counties, on a property which had been bought with his wife's money. He did not, however, lose sight of his friend; and when, three or four years later, Graysett found himself in England,

almost the first invitation he received was to Colonel Rainshaw's place, Leesholm.

The visit was arranged under what seemed attractive conditions—good pheasant-shooting, a small party of pleasant people in the house, and a hunt ball in the neighbourhood.

Graysett travelled down by an afternoon train. It was almost dark, therefore, when he arrived at Leesholm; and a raw evening, with a blustering wind and snowy clouds. The building seemed, as he approached it from the back, to be large, rambling, and of the Tudor style of architecture, with low mullioned windows and irregular gables. It was built of pallid gray stone, which in the dim light gave it an almost spectral appearance. The east front looked out upon a prim pleasure-ground, bordered by a high yew hedge, cut at the corners into pyramidal shapes, which stood out sombrely against the

leadens sky. An apparently unused, three-aisled avenue stretched in a straight line beyond the ha-ha; but a bend in the approach, bringing the visitor to the principal entrance, showed him an addition to the structure, of later date and more imposing proportions. On the west side might be seen an extensive prospect of smooth lawn and trimly kept shrubbery, and beyond, in the hazy distance, lay a flat, well-timbered park, over which the gray mist was stealthily creeping.

An owl hooted from an old tree near, as Graysett drew up before the portico. He shivered. Though not impressionable in everyday social matters, his temperament was susceptible to atmospheric influences, and to those of scenery and surroundings; and he was struck now by a certain weirdness in the aspect of the place and of the evening. Possibly, he reflected, this might arise from

the fact that he had for long been unfamiliar with the details of an English wintry landscape.

He got down from the fly in which he had driven from the station—for, the time of his arrival being uncertain, he had requested Colonel Rainshaw not to send for him—and paused for a minute before ringing. Again the eerie feeling seized him as he looked along the broad carriage drive, above which the naked boughs interlaced, spreading a misty fretwork against the sky. The ground was covered with a light sprinkling of snow, whiter upon the turf than where an array of empty flower-beds stretched in a fantastic pattern upon the lawn. There was a dampness in the air which told of a coming thaw; and the wind blew in fitful gusts, moaning plaintively through the trees, and round the gray spire of a church close by. Ghostly white patches lay upon the evergreen shrubs and the funereal

yews, against which the snow had drifted ; while every now and then a flake, loosened by the blast, would hover for a moment and noiselessly fall. A watery moon had just risen, cold and round, concealed at intervals by driving clouds, and shedding broken reflections upon the gleaming ground, and on a stretch of ornamental water shadowed by drooping beeches.

The windows of the house were closed and shuttered, only here and there a light twinkled ; but he caught a faint sound of melancholy music, a waltz air which he did not know, played dreamily and in uncertain time, two long notes quivering in suspense as it were, and then an impassioned turn in the melody, swelling louder and gracefully dying away, like some magic strain of mysterious import. The music, which had indeed a certain wildness and beauty, due perhaps to the manner in which it was played,