

She lit the taper on the stand beside her and drew from her desk a small package of letters written in Mr. Arlingford's well known hand.

"My only solace," she whispered, "my only comfort for many a long year. Oh! how hard to part with them, but it must be done and then will my sacrifice be complete."

Without permitting herself to glance at the cherished contents, a mournful satisfaction for which her heart so fondly yearned, without pressing them a last time to her lips, she held them over the flame of the taper and with inexpressible solemnity beheld the beloved characters gradually moulder away. The ashes were yet warm when a knock sounded at the door and a well known voice exclaimed:

"May I come in?"

A strange expression of mingled impatience and despair flitted across the girl's face and she quickly, almost peevishly rejoined;

"Indeed you cannot, Sir George, I am too busy present."

"I am very sorry for it, Eva, for I have fifty things to say to you. I sought a few words with you yesterday, but you refused me under plea of indisposition and to-day you are too busy. Tell me, at least, when you can or rather when you will see me."

The young man's voice betrayed both pain and mortification, and Eva ashamed of her late petulance, which to one unacquainted with the cause must appear so unkind and capricious, unfastened the door and admitted him.

"Thank you, Eva. Hope you are not angry at my disturbing you."

His glance falling by accident on some French drawers which Eva's maid had left some hours before on the couch for her mistress' selection, and which the latter had never even glanced at, he laughingly added;

"I thought, Eva, your voice was unusually sharp to-day, but I do not wonder at it now. Few voices can stand the test of being interrupted at their mirrors."

The remark spoke so eloquently of the speaker's want of discernment, his poor appreciation of the character he had had such opportunities of studying and that for years, in the noblest lights, Eva's only reply was a faint smile either of compassion or contempt. Surprised at her silence he glanced enquiringly at her and perceived for the first time the traces of agitation her countenance still revealed.

"Now, Eva! you have been crying?" he quickly exclaimed, "Have you been ill, or has your domineering ladyship been lecturing you

again? By George! she won't carry it so high once we get into Leland Park. You'll be mistress there, any how, and so I mean to tell her, if you will allow me, the very first opportunity. I thought she would have annihilated me on the spot the other day because I happened to address her during the course of a very animated conversation as "old lady". She drew herself up like a Cedar, bidding me remember, whatever might be the degree of respect I thought fit to accord my mother-in-law, I was not to forget what was due to Lady Huntingdon. To pacify her, I was not only obliged to make the humblest apologies for my wonderful offence, but also to settle an extra hundred on yourself. But do tell me, Eva, what on earth makes you so dull and unhappy looking."

"Not unhappy, but serious, Sir George," rejoined Eva with a faint attempt at a smile, "The step I am about to take is an important one and demands, at least, serious reflection."

"Yes, so poor Lord Huntingdon must have found out when too late, but I beg your pardon, Eva, 'tis wrong for me to talk of your mother so. To change the topic, I will tell you at once the purpose for which I intruded on your solitude. There! What, think you of these?"

And he placed before Eva a casket containing a set of emeralds of the most exquisite beauty. Eva's girlish taste for jewels had long since passed away and with a smile which despite her utmost efforts was sad and spiritless, she rejoined:

"Thank you, Sir George, they are really very beautiful and you are exceedingly kind."

"Well, that itself is something from you, Eva, but I certainly wish you could appear a little more cheerful when your future is in any way alluded to, and not look all the while as if we were cutting out and measuring crapes for your funeral. But, perhaps it is the fashion for young ladies in your position to look sad and anxious? If so, I have only to say that I think it a very hard task for the future mistress of Leland Park and I wonder how you contrive to act your part so perfectly."

"A true woman and a Huntingdon can always do her duty, however painful it may be," exclaimed her ladyship, who entered in time to hear the baronet's last words. The latter sprang to his feet annoyed and confused, and the new comer, seating herself in the chair he had thus unconsciously vacated, calmly exclaimed.

"Excuse me, Sir George, but I wish to have a few words with Miss Huntingdon, now. You can see her again after dinner."

Sir George without a word bowed himself out,