

place since I left it—that Lady Brereton has become serious. Is this really the case?"

The question was ironically asked, and replied to with some warmth by Beatrice.

"She has become extremely amiable, and I love her dearly."

"Indeed! that is change the first; and Sir Claude, has he too become infected with the religious mania? Nay, does that offend you; let me amend my error and enquire for *les jumeaux*, whose praises I hear so extolled. When will you show them to me?"

"Whenever you please, I shall be delighted to do so," returned Beatrice, at once appeased and gratified. "But tell me, Lady Julia, is not that Lord Stepney coming towards you? If so, I must leave you; how dreadfully ill he is looking."

Lady Julia applied her glass to her eye.

"Yes, it is his lordship: but why shun him, perhaps it is you who he wishes to speak to."

"Oh! no, no; I must not, I dare not," said Beatrice, rising in confusion, as he drew nearer. Her voice attracted a knot of gentlemen, who were standing near her, and one advanced to enquire "if she had any commands."

"Have the goodness to lead me to Sir Claude," she replied, accepting his arm, and walking quickly away, to the evident surprise of Lady Julia, who received Lord Stepney with a most gracious smile, entering into an earnest conversation with him. After some trouble, Beatrice found Sir Claude talking with Lady Stormont, who appeared to be deeply interested in his discourse. She was looking elegant and very fashionable, but several seasons spent amidst scenes like the present, had robbed her of her natural colour, which was replaced by art, to light up a face that had prematurely lost the freshness of youth. Beatrice could not control a secret exultation as she glanced towards a glass, and contrasted her own young and beautiful form with the fading charms of her still hated rival. She passed on through the crowd until she drew quite near them.

"Well, what do you want," enquired Sir Claude, in that careless indifferent tone, which he always assumed when addressing her before strangers. She quickly replied to the salutation of Lady Stormont, who had started in sudden admiration at her lovely appearance, and whispered a few words in the ear of her husband, whose eye flashed indignantly as he drew her arm within his own. Lady Stormont, in the next moment, left them standing together to join the gallopade.

"Did you say that Lord Stepney had presumed to speak to you?" enquired Sir Claude.

"Oh, no; I only feared that he might do so, as he was coming up to Lady Julia. But see, there is Lady Stormont waltzing; if you wish me to acquire her polish, surely I ought to follow her excellent

example," she added, looking archly in his face. "Is she not sadly changed, Claude?"

"Poor thing," was all the reply of Sir Claude, who shrugged his shoulders and turned away.

A later hour again found Lady Julia Russel at the side of Beatrice.

"You cannot think how severely you wounded Lord Stepney, by shunning him so palpably," she observed; "of what dire offence can he have been guilty, to tempt you to do so?"

With all the ingenuousness belonging to her character, Beatrice confided to her the quarrel of Sir Claude with Lord Stepney, and its unhappy cause, the fate of Fanny Belson, and her maniac grandmother. Lady Julia listened to her with deep attention, fixing her large dark penetrating eyes upon her as she narrated the story with pathos and feeling; but when she ceased she burst into a fit of uncontrollable laughter.

"Oh! Lady Julia, is this the way you receive a tale so full of misery!" exclaimed Beatrice, shocked at her ill-timed mirth.

Lady Julia laid her hand upon her arm to support herself, while yielding to the impulse.

"Pardon me, my dear creature, I entreat of you; but indeed it was irresistible. And for this you have been commanded to shun poor Lord Stepney. How very absurd of Sir Claude! Pray did it never occur to you that he must have taken great interest in the young peasant girl, whose destruction caused him such regret, that you say he cannot even bear to hear her named before him?"

"Oh! no, no; never," said Beatrice, turning very pale, and clasping her hands. "Lady Julia, why torture me with such an idea."

Again Lady Julia laughed.

"Cara mia, I shall certainly expire under the influence of your simplicity, it is so amusing. And so you imagine him to be immaculate, do you; that arrived at his age he can have passed unscathed through the numerous temptations that must have been cast in his way. If I did not fear to make you unhappy I could many a tale unfold; but that would be cruel."

The beautiful countenance of Beatrice betrayed that she had already done so. She pressed her hand over her eyes, while her whole frame trembled with emotion. Lady Julia looked on her with a malicious satisfaction, then feeling that she had said enough, and anxious to change the subject, she exclaimed: "Ah! there is Signor Rubicani, the Improvisatore, quanto mi gioia di vederlo," and as she spoke she lightly tripped away, leaving the agitated Beatrice standing alone. She raised her head and perceived the crowd thronging to one spot, but her gaiety had vanished and she remained quite still, unconscious of the observation of a young guardsman, who for some time had been gazing on her with admiring eyes; he now approached her and