

not wish to speak harshly to you, Bessie; on the contrary, I believe you will find me more kindly disposed to you, than many who are smoother spoken: but I cannot, and will not, conceal from you, that your conduct towards my friend, Claude Forester, has forever destroyed my esteem for your character. It is impossible I should not feel this—and particularly at a time when I know him to be ill and heart-broken.” “I did not forsake him—he chose to distrust and forget me,” said Bessie, while she struggled in vain to choke back the tears that rose to her eyes. “And why? why did he distrust and forsake you? because that spirit of coquetry, which is the curse of your existence, prompted you to encourage every one round you—to traffic for compliments; to barter looks for words, and words for feelings—and to make him miserable for the gratification of your vanity. Yet you might, if you had tried, have won him back again: you might even now.” “Win him back again!” exclaimed Miss Ashton passionately, “I have no need to make so vast a struggle to be loved; there are many, who are thought Claude Forester’s superiors, who like me in spite of those faults you and your friend are so quick in observing; and pray, on what occasions have I played the coquette, my wise cousin?” “Bessie, Bessie, you need not be bitter with me; for the time is gone by when you could provoke or sadden me. Have you forgotten young Mildmay, to whom you were forced to apologise for having led him to believe you would accept him? Have you forgotten Lawrence Gordon and his laboured gifts, which you returned when weary of the giver? Have you forgotten Lord Curtown and his flowers? Mr. Montagu and his blood-hound, which you caressed for the sake of making a *tableau*? Have you forgotten that at one time you even thought it worth your while.....” a peculiar and confused expression passed over his countenance; he stammered and paused. Miss Ashton raised her eyes, and a short, quick smile of triumph lit every feature of her expressive face, as she gazed on his. “I do think you are jealous,” exclaimed she, “it is ill receiving advice from a lover, Mr. Ashton.” “I am not your lover, Bessie; God forbid that my