

thus coldly rendered, the gift would be inexpressibly dear, and the path of life bright and smiling, could it be traversed in close companionship with you,—even, should those sweet affections which I covet, be denied me, from the confidence and friendship which I am sure of winning, I should derive a solace and a happiness, not to be gathered from the fondest devotion of another.”

“Oh, Mr. Mowbray, forbear,” said Annabelle, with emotion, “the expression of such sentiments pains and oppresses me beyond measure. Why has it been my misfortune to awaken them in a heart, which I would gladly see crowned with all its tenderest and dearest wishes. Could I again love any one in life, it might perhaps be you, but my soul is like a broken lute, which returns no sound to the gentle touch that seeks to awaken its melodies.”

“And you forbid me ever to hope that time, the great miracle worker, may produce some change in my favour?” he asked despondingly.

“I must,—I do;” she answered. “I should do wrong to deceive you,—but let us ever be friends, Mr. Mowbray,” and she extended towards him her hand; “and that our friendship may be firm and enduring, let us from this moment forget that we have ever thought of being more to each other, than that which we now pledge ourselves to be.”

“You impose upon me a difficult, I fear an impossible task,” he said, as he raised her offered hand with respectful tenderness to his lips,—for independently of his designs upon her fortune, the beautiful and gifted Annabelle, had inspired him with an ardent affection, and in the feelings of disappointment awakened by her refusal, he almost forgot that any mercenary views blended with his desire to possess her. “Grant me only,” he continued, after a momentary pause, “the most distant hope of possible success at last, and it will yield some slight alleviation to the anguish of the present moment.”

“I cannot bid you cherish a false hope,” said Annabelle, gently; “but should any change ever come over my heart you shall know it;—and now let us go; it is useless to prolong this subject, and if you would not give me unnecessary pain, you will forbear again to renew it.”

She arose while speaking, and taking his offered arm, they walked in silence to the house.

When they entered the drawing room, Mr. Hope, and Denham, were deeply engaged in a game of chess, while Mrs. Seldon, a widowed relative of Mr. Hope’s, who had long superintended his household, sat on the corner of a sofa, absorbed in the mystery of a new fashioned purse, which she was netting for Annabelle. Directly, however, Mr. Hope made an important move, and his emphatic “check mate!” might have put to shame those startling monosyllables as uttered by the lips of the automaton chess player. Denham, always annoyed when beaten in this

his favourite game, sat looking intently at the few remaining pieces on the board, till convinced there was no longer a place of retreat for his unfortunate king; when pushing back his chair, he passed out to the piazza, whistling merrily to the air of “Moll Roone.” A few turns in the moonlight soon restored his equanimity, and he re-entered in time to echo the laugh of the pleased old gentleman, who was deliberately replacing the pieces in their box, and chuckling with delight over his well-earned triumph. Mowbray had thrown himself into an arm chair by the table, and was intently examining an illustrated edition of Shakspeare, which he had looked at a hundred times before,—while Annabelle, after leaning for a few minutes over her uncle’s shoulder, turned to Mrs. Seldon, and whispering that she could not remain to supper, glided away, though not unobserved, and sought her own apartment.

And how welcome to her were its solitude and silence, for on this evening, her heart had been more than usually disturbed and pained; first, by a conversation held with her uncle during their drive, in which he had urged her with more warmth than usual, to accept the addresses of Mowbray, and again, directly after her return, by the interview in the summer house which has been detailed. Almost unconsciously to herself, she cherished a secret hope that Delaney still lived and would return to her, and this hope tended to nurture the deep and fervent love which she had lavished upon him, and to render the offered affection of another, revolting to her very soul. Yet she was distressed to be the cause of suffering and disappointment to Mowbray, whom she liked, and regarded with sentiments of the sincerest esteem and friendship. She admired his handsome person, his prepossessing manners, and his brilliant mind,—but she had seen none of the darker shades of his character; these he had sedulously kept out of sight, well knowing they would win him no favour, either with the single hearted Mr. Hope, or with his high-principled, and pure minded niece. Neither of them knew, that a dangerous love of play was one of his most prominent vices; that he constantly sacrificed his time, and the fruits of no ordinary talents, at the gaming table, and that to furnish sums for the future indulgence of this fatal passion, the fortune of Annabelle was coveted by him, with an intensity worthy of a higher object.

Mowbray’s father, a barrister, of commanding genius, and prominent station, had been the bosom friend of Mr. Hope, who consequently felt a deep interest and affection in the son, and contemplated with pleasure an union between him and his favorite niece. He was aware that his own life hung upon a slender thread, for the physicians had long since pronounced the disease under which for years he had laboured, to be an organic affection of the heart. He knew consequently, that with the grasp of death, as it were, upon him, he might without the warning of a moment, be summoned from life; and having there-