

bow, she turned towards her friend, and in a languid tone, replied to her interrogatories. Eagerly did Amy scrutinize her. She was certainly handsome, but excessively affected, and as she listened to her drawing tones, and beheld the inimitable coquetry with which she raised, and cast down her eyes, or shook back the rich curls from her face, she could not help inwardly accusing her cousin of marked inconsistency—he had always protested with such warmth against anything like affectation—so often praised her own natural, unstudied manners. Markham, who had been attentively watching her for the last few minutes, and who seemed to read her very thoughts, exclaimed in a low tone:

"You are right, Miss Morton! Delmour has indeed, a wretched taste, to prefer such glaring coquetry and art, to the elegant simplicity, and winning address, I have witnessed in one to-night whom I shall not easily forget."

"Mr. Delmour is the best judge of his own taste," was her reply; "and I do not see of what importance his opinion is to me."

"Nay, nay, Miss Morton! this will not do. Have I not already promised to be his champion, solely because he has found favour in those bright eyes? and am I not bound, by the laws of honour, to absolute silence on the subject?"

A disdainful flash from his companion's dark eye, was his only reply. Stung by her contemptuous manner, he rejoined—

"But cannot you guess the motive of my chivalric disinterestedness? or think you, I would thus devotedly espouse the cause of a rival, without some hope of reward? No! no! I am not capable of such generosity."

"I do not understand you, Sir George," she said, in an accent of marked displeasure.

"Do you remember the Italian proverb, Miss Morton, '*Al buon intenditore, po-che parole bastano?*' However, to be more explicit, Delmour may fall in action, or perchance, wed some dark eyed daughter of another clime; at any rate, 'twill be long before he returns, and absence works wonders. Who knows, but I may be, in course of time, promoted from being his eulogizer, to succeed him in your favour?"

Amy's position was now really insupportable. She felt he was taking advantage of her timidity and inexperience, to amuse himself at her expense; and in her heart, she could almost have hated the volatile Miss Aylmer, who was recounting to Lady Travers, with great earnestness, the tale of some recent conquest, thus leaving her entirely to the conversation of Sir George. Afraid to raise her eyes, for fear of encountering the mocking smile which she knew wreathed his lip,

she sat with burning cheek and throbbing temples, endeavouring to repress the tears, which she felt ready to burst forth at every moment. Her feelings of intense delight may be imagined, when she heard her father exclaim:

"Amy!"

With difficulty repressing a cry of delight, she raised her head. Mr. and Mrs. Morton, accompanied by a tall, grave looking gentleman, stood before her. A peculiar smile sat on her father's countenance, but he merely said:

"Permit me to introduce you to Col. Westly, who requests your hand if you are not engaged."

"I am afraid Miss Morton is not much obliged to us for our interruption," said her stepmother, with a slightly sarcastic laugh; "she seemed so intently absorbed, in either thought or conversation, when we approached. Is that your fault, Sir George?"

"Really, I dare not hope so, madame," he gaily rejoined; "though I have been taxing my conversational powers to their utmost extent, during the last hour, to interest Miss Morton, I fear I have met with but little success."

"I should suppose the contrary, if we may judge from appearances; however, during the space of an hour, you have had ample time to display your every gift."

Amy, who had not spoken during this dialogue, abruptly rose, and taking Col. Westly's arm, joined the dance. He was a quiet, gentlemanly person, and after a few common place remarks, relapsed into silence. She was truly grateful for the opportunity thus afforded her, for regaining her former tranquillity, and calming her spirits, which were excited to a painful degree. The two or three following dances, she saw nothing of her tormentor, and at length, flushed and fatigued, she sought the end of the room, where her father was seated, and placed herself beside him. After passing some observations on the entertainment and company, he asked her how she liked Markham.

"Oh, I cannot endure him!" was her heartfelt exclamation.

Mr. Morton laughed outright.

"You select an extraordinary manner of proving your dislike. Why, we will soon find it impossible to distinguish between your friends and foes. It certainly does not look as if you entertained so cordial a hatred for poor Sir George, when you can pass an hour in his society, so interested in his conversation as to be, to all appearances, insensible to what passes around you. Why, Amy, you never saw us approach till we were close beside you."

Greatly confused, she commenced an explanation.