

dared to think of only as the flitting pageant of a dream,—was now before her, suing for her hand and heart. She turned deadly pale, but too fearfully agitated even to think of framing a reply, sank upon the nearest seat. Encouraged by her emotion, Pemberton continued, more passionately than before.

"Accuse me not of boyish rashness, of an over hasty decision. No! my reason fully sanctions the dictates of my heart. I am entirely independent—no parent or guardian to consult, to interfere with my choice. I possess rank and wealth, and I seek not such gifts with my wife. Of her I ask only a fond, faithful heart, and a disposition, gentle, sweet, such as you possess. Speak! tell me, Miss Vernon, have I vainly flattered myself in hoping that I have at length found such a treasure, and that it may be mine."

Fearful was the conflict passing then in Lucy's heart. The first wild burst of delight, which thrilled through her when Pemberton's meaning dawned upon her thoughts, was soon merged in the remembrance that he who stood before her, was the object, as she supposed, of Ida's affection, the cause of her secret unhappiness. She, then, had supplanted her friend, her adopted sister; but it was not of her seeking. Without any arts, any efforts of hers, Pemberton had sought her out, and was she rashly to fling aside the future of extatic happiness thus proffered her. Though these latter thoughts glanced through the mind of Lucy, they left no impression there, and she murmured.

"It must not, it cannot be. Weak, childish as I am, ignorant of even the customs, the usages of your world, I am unfit for the rank to which you would raise me. Banish me forever from your thoughts, and choose her who is so well calculated by nature, by education, to be your wife. Farewell!"

"Nay, you go not thus," said the Marquis, forcibly detaining her hand, which was on the door. "Speak! What am I to understand? Do you indeed reject me? and yet, your words would lead me to hope, that I am not entirely an object of aversion. Have mercy upon me! Explain yourself."

"I have nothing to explain, nothing to add, save that the unworthy hand you covet, can never be yours."

"And wherefore?" he impetuously rejoined. "Is there any insurmountable barrier between us? Are you affianced, or your affections engaged?"

"Yes!—No—!" returned Lucy, her face flushing with the consciousness of her intended falsehood. "An obstacle that can never be overcome, interposes to prevent our union."

"But is there no hope, Miss Vernon? Can no efforts, no sacrifices of mine, procure an alleviation of that stern sentence? I am willing to wait till——"

"All is unavailing; and now try me no further," she added, in faltering accents, for her strength was failing fast. "Thanks, my Lord, for your noble offer. I but ask in return, that you will learn to forget even the name of her to whom it was made. And now, farewell, it must be for ever!"

"Aye, for ever!" he repeated in tones whose mournful intonations lingered long after on the ear of his listener. "My hope of domestic happiness again dashed to the earth. I shall seek it no further. I'll leave England to-morrow, and in other scenes and pleasures I may learn to forget that I have loved in vain." And raising her cold hand to his lips, he bounded through the open window, sprang on his fleet steed, and was soon out of sight.

Pale, cold as a statue, Lucy sought her room, and threw herself in her usual seat near the window: her eyes still stedfastly fixed on the spot where he had disappeared. No clear, tangible idea filled her thoughts: she was conscious alone of a dreamy impression that Pemberton was lost for ever both to her and Ida; that happiness, such as this world seldom affords even to its most favored children, had rested a moment in her grasp but to vanish forever. Naturally fragile and delicate, this was the first real affliction that the carefully nurtured daughter, the cherished sister, had ever known, and it proved almost too much for her strength. The shadows of evening had darkened the apartment, and yet she continued gazing from the casement as if that earnest watch could restore the object she mourned. At length her door unclosed and Ida entered. Surprised at the statue-like quietness of Lucy she advanced towards her, and by the faint light perceived her deathlike paleness. Shocked beyond measure, she exclaimed:

"For God's sake, Lucy, tell me what has happened? Are you ill?" The sight of Ida, of the one for whom she had made so fearful a sacrifice, seemed to dispel the clouds that dimmed her spirit, and with a convulsive sob she fell into the arms of her companion. Ida pressed her hand, but spoke not till the first paroxysm of grief was over, and then gently whispered.

"No explanations to-night, my poor Lucy. You are unfit to make them. To rest at once."

"No, no, Ida. Hear me, while I have strength," she returned, with almost unnatural calmness. "Know, that the Marquis of Pemberton has been here." Ida started, but betrayed no farther emo-