

in this changing world of ours; in her feverish haste, she stepped on the outstretched foot of an old gentleman, with venerable white hair and rather choleric face, who was reclining in solitary dignity, on a couch adjoining her former seat. The injured individual instantly sprang to his feet with a muttered apostrophe, in which the name of a certain sovereign, whose dominions are not on the earth, nor yet above the earth, was distinctly audible. But the soft, entreating voice, the pale, tearful face of the young girl, as she earnestly apologized, calmed his ire, and he fell back in his former position, murmuring:

"Never mind, ma'am! Accidents will happen to the best-intentioned persons."

With a heart full to bursting, Alice glided past him, and sank on her chair. Secure in the grateful shade of the lamp, she covered her face with her hands, and gave free vent to the passionate emotion she could no longer control or restrain. Suddenly a slight noise caused her to look up. The old gentleman was standing before her, and regarding her with a very benevolent expression of countenance.

"Forgive the meddling impertinence of an old man," he kindly said; "but you seem unhappy, my dear young lady; surely, you are too young for that."

"Oh! I am very, very miserable," sobbed poor Alice, feeling it was useless to attempt controlling her grief.

"No! That can scarcely be at your age; 'tis but a summer shower, heavy while it lasts, but of short duration. The sunshine will be brighter after. But, you look very pale! Let me get you some refreshments?" She gratefully bowed, and he hastened off on his kind mission. Ere many minutes had elapsed, he returned with a cup of fragrant coffee, and some cold chicken,—we beseech our romantic readers to close their eyes to this passage, for 'twill shock every sentiment of their exquisitely refined natures—which our heroine not only accepted, but heartily partook of. Thankful for the old man's kindness, and greatly refreshed, she endeavoured effectually to calm her still excited feelings, and in answer to his question: "If she felt better," replied, with an effort at cheerfulness: "Yes; a great deal. Thanks to your double kindness."

"You are a good girl," he returned, "and more sensible than I expected; but if you do not think it too great a liberty for an old man like me to take, may I ask the cause of your sorrow?"

A pause followed, during which the rich colour mounted to her very temples, and, at length, she replied with downcast eyes:

"Wounded vanity, and self love. I came here

expecting gaiety, attention, admiration; and I have met nothing but contempt and neglect."

"Just so, my child," said her companion; "you expected too much, and you must not repine that your expectations have been disappointed."

"But, surely, I have not deserved the entire, the bitter contempt I have met with. I am neither old nor ugly."

"You are indeed neither, but beautiful, very beautiful," he rejoined as he gazed earnestly on the deep truthful eyes now raised to his; "but you have yet to learn that beauty and grace, when ill dressed or obscure, will meet with nothing but neglect in a ball-room. And now, tell me your name as frankly as you have told me the rest of your story."

"Alice Sydenham."

"Sydenham!" he repeated reflectively. "A high name."

"'Tis all is left us of former grandeur," said Alice sadly. "Poor, unpretending, as we are, how wrong, how foolish of me to thrust myself into a scene so utterly removed from our present sphere; but I acted contrary to mamma's wishes, her earnest remonstrances, and I have been justly punished."

"Your mother—is she here?" said the old man, quickly. "And neglect you thus!"

"No, no! she is at home. I came with a Mrs. Graham."

"A lady very youthfully dressed with a parterre of roses scattered about her robes? She has been screaming Italian *canzonets* in the music room all night."

"The same," said Alice, the first smile that had illumined her pale features that night, stealing over them.

"Hem!" coughed her companion; "but who have we here?"

This exclamation was called forth by the approach of the lady Helena Stratton, leaning on the arm of the Viscount Howard, both of whom Alice had seen with Miss Aberton's party in the ante-room. Deeply engrossed in conversation, they slowly advanced towards the table, as if to examine the engravings upon it.

"Hollo!" suddenly exclaimed a loud voice, "Look where you're going to, young lady!"

Lady Helena, who was unconscious of the sofa's having an occupant, had nearly deposited her delicate satin shoe on the irritable toes of the old gentleman, who seemed as if in very malice to keep them extended in the way. The lady thus cavalierly addressed, sprang round with a violent start, widely different from her usual languid movements, whilst her partner angrily said: