

at least in sincerity, patted Belinda on the shoulder, as she said :

"God grant you every happiness, my dear, and that you may not find the casket more beautiful than the jewel contained within it. I trust that the hour of your departure is near at hand, for there are those who would destroy your hopes, if it were in their power ; every means, every art has been used—you look alarmed—my caution is given not in spleen, but in real regard."

Belinda's buoyant spirits gradually declined, after each visit that we paid—Mrs. Fortescue had been repeatedly alluded to, accompanied by expressive shrugs and insinuations, while a manner of assumed pity was exhibited towards herself.

"Shall we call on Mrs. Fortescue?" asked the dear girl, in a reluctant tone, as we drove rapidly from the last house.

"Yes, surely," replied Marion ; "her name is on our list."

We accordingly stopped before her door. She was at home, and we were ushered into the drawing room, where we found her sitting *tête à tête* with Captain Blanchard. Belinda involuntarily started, but he instantly came forward to receive her, with a surprised smile, so ingenuous, that it reassured her. Not so, Mrs. Fortescue ; there was a palpable confusion in her address, and a very evident feeling of chagrin at our interruption. She appeared to have been in tears—she was beautifully dressed, reclining in a fauteuil of yellow damask—the chastened light of the room lent a becoming shade over her figure and face, which were pleasing without being beautiful when at rest, but her excessive affectation destroyed every charm the moment she spoke. She was surrounded by ornaments, and all the *recherché* collections of a fashionable fine lady, while in the luxurious couches, chairs, and even in the pictures, might be traced her prevailing character—there was an absence of all simplicity, which was replaced by enervating indulgence.

"I have been cruelly distressed this morning, Miss Harrington," said the lady, turning languidly to Marion ; "after all the preparations for my play being completed, Mr. Fortescue will not allow me to perform in it, and I am constrained to give it up."

"Cannot you engage a substitute," enquired Marion.

"Oh, no, no, never—none shall be Juliet but myself," and she looked towards Blanchard, who was at that moment showing one of his drawings to Belinda, from the splendid album which lay open on the table. He cast a furtive glance on her in return, but it was so rapidly withdrawn, that I could not read its expression.

"I am going to have a fancy ball instead of the play," resumed Mrs. Fortescue ; "my amiable sposo would have even denied me this indulgence,

but he could not resist my entreaties—it is fixed for Thursday, I have already sent out my cards ; I fear Mrs. Mary, you will not honour me, or Miss Harrington."

"Belinda," said Blanchard, laying his hand on hers, as it rested on the table ; "are you aware that you are now under martial law, and that I, as your commanding officer, order you to attend on Thursday evening."

There was a playfulness in his words, but an earnestness in his manner, which particularly struck me. I felt happy that Belinda was spared an immediate answer, by the entrance of a servant with a note to his mistress. Marion now mentioned our appointment with Captain Harrington, and we rose to take leave.

"Oh, I should delight in accompanying you," said Mrs. Fortescue ; "I have long wished to see the Bellona."

Of course we expressed our readiness to gratify her, when she hastened from the room to attire herself. She soon returned, carrying in her arms a delicate little boy, of apparently two years old, who was duly caressed and noticed by us all. Blanchard gazed on her with admiring eyes, as she fondly pressed the child to her bosom ; but he gave his arm to Belinda as we left the house, to stroll towards the spot appointed by Captain Harrington—we found him surrounded by his people, giving numberless orders, and applying terms that I dare not trust my memory to repeat. He conducted us over the stately vessel, which was indeed magnificent, well worthy to ride the blue waters of Albion, to stem the dark and stormy seas, and dare her foes to the combat. I had never seen Blanchard in such light spirits as today. He led Belinda to the state cabin, which her uncle had prepared for her reception, and displayed to her astonished gaze all its beautiful arrangements.

"To whom do I owe all this kind thought for my comfort—to you, or to my uncle?" she asked.

"We have both been watching over your tastes," he replied ; "our youthful wanderer surely deserves our tenderest care."

A gentle sigh, breathed by Mrs. Fortescue, who was standing immediately behind them, caused Blanchard to start round.

"Good heavens, you are fatigued," he said ; "give me your boy," and she placed the child in his arms, while tears bedewed her cheeks.

Blanchard's gaiety vanished. After viewing all that was interesting in the ship, we proceeded to the beach—the day was delightful, and the band of the — regiment playing at the moment, enhanced the pleasures of the scene, which to me was exhilarating in the extreme. Mrs. Fortescue now hung on Blanchard's arm in pensive mood, while she led the child in her other hand. Engaged in conversation, she soon forgot her young charge, and suffered