

"And this is your answer—well be it so," he said, "you are the first who ever had the power to humble me; but perhaps it is right—you think mine an unfortunate name to bear—it has been so, I am too well aware—yet I think I could have made you happy."

"Oh, spare me, spare me, I beseech you," returned Blanche, whose distressed countenance he could not behold as she listened to words uttered in a tone the most melancholy—you little know the pain you are inflicting."

"Tell me only one thing," said Lord De Melfort pausing, and with increased agitation; "has another been so fortunate as to obtain your affections?"

"Oh! no, no, no! believe me never."

"And yet you deny them to me. It is well. Miss Neville forget my words, henceforth I shall carefully avoid a subject so hateful to you."

The tears of Blanche were falling fast—but he knew it not—her silence convinced him of her indifference, and he suffered her to relinquish the support of his arm without endeavouring to detain her; at this moment a strange dark object suddenly emerged from the thicket and ran before them; Blanche screamed, while Lord De Melfort again flew to her side. The whole party stopped, when the creature, uttering a wild discordant laugh drew near them; in figure, height, and deformity he was another Flibbertigibbet, while in the vacant expression of his hideous face, as he grinned upon them, the idiot was at once revealed. Blanche, almost sinking with terror grasped her father's arm; at the same time Colonel Lennox laying his hand on the shoulder of the hunchback demanded:

"In the name of all the goblins, from whence do you come, and who are you?"

"I am Lord De Melfort," replied the creature in a hoarse voice, and with another wild laugh.

"I wish your lordship joy of your title," returned Colonel Lennox with a low bow; "who then is this?"

The dwarf glared on Lord De Melfort a few moments with distended eyes and open mouth, then pointing at him with his long bony finger, muttered:

"He—he is mad."

"I have often thought so," returned Colonel Lennox, laughing; "I give you credit for your discernment."

"Poor, poor creature," said Mr. Neville, looking on him with compassion; "who can behold a human being reduced to so abject a state without pity, and a feeling of thankfulness that we are blest with the noblest gift of Heaven—reason. To whom can he belong? it is highly improper that he should be suffered to roam abroad alone."

"Oh, do let us hasten on, papa, the sight of him is dreadful to me," cried Blanche, covering her face with her hands, to shut out the hideous object.

"He is perfectly harmless, rest assured, Miss

Neville," said Colonel Lennox; "do not be alarmed." A shrill female voice now called from a distance.

"Hugh, you idle varlet, what keeps you,—come hither, sir; I have lost my way in this infernal wood."

"Hark, there is granny," cried the hunchback, in a tone of alarm; "she will beat me, for I have gathered no sticks for her fire." And wildly tossing his arms above his head, as he continued to gabble some unintelligible folly, he darted back into the thicket and was immediately lost to their sight.

Mr. Neville then proceeded with redoubled speed, on account of Blanche who trembled violently; a few more minutes brought them to the verge of the wood where stood the game-keeper's cottage; lights were still burning within it, but no sound was heard save the baying of the dogs. The spirits of our little party seemed to have gradually become depressed and all except Colonel Lennox maintained a profound silence until they reached the gate of the Parsonage. Here Mr. Neville turned to thank his escort, inviting them to enter and take some refreshment, which they both declined—he then said to Lord De Melfort:

"Should we not endeavour to learn who this unfortunate being is tomorrow, in order that we may place him in some asylum where he would be taken care of?"

"Certainly, and I shall be most happy to aid you in your kind intention, sir," replied Lord De Melfort. "Good night."

He slightly touched the half extended hand of Blanche; then abruptly turning round he walked rapidly away, followed by his friend. The moment Blanche found herself alone with her father in their peaceful home, she threw herself on his bosom and burst into a flood of tears.

"My dear child, what can have produced this emotion," enquired Mr. Neville, in a tone of astonishment; "surely the sight of that poor harmless idiot, who is only an object for pity, cannot have so moved you."

"Oh, no, no," returned Blanche, sobbing bitterly; "I am unhappy, my father, and sadly want your advice."

"Blanche, have you a thought concealed from me," enquired Mr. Neville, seriously; "your words surprise me. I have observed you of late to be more grave and silent, at times even sad; but as I conceived you were anxious about your cousin, I made no remark. It touches me more nearly that you should have a grief in which I share not."

"My dearest father, I could not have kept it from you another hour," replied Blanche; "but till I felt more assured of the real sentiments of Lord De Melfort, there seemed a vanity bordering on indelicacy in speaking on the subject."

Mr. Neville looked still more astonished, he drew