

"Oh, Claude! Claude!" pleaded Lucy; "be not so hasty, you know not—"

"Silence!" he thundered, darting an angry glance upon her. "You, at least, should be silent." 'Twas the first time she had ever seen him under the influence of passion, and his fierce tones, his indignant looks, terrified her beyond reply; covering her face with her hands, she burst into tears. Pemberton's countenance, which had hitherto remained unruffled, now grew dark, and turning angrily towards her brother, he exclaimed:

"'Twould be fitter, sir, and more manly for you, to exhaust your passion on me, who can return it, than on a weak defenceless girl. I am here to answer for myself, but not to you shall my explanations be made."

"You shall at least answer me in one way," fiercely returned Claude; "and ungentlemanly, unmanly as your conduct has hitherto been, I will still believe that you will not refuse the satisfaction of a man of honour. Leave us now, but you shall hear from me to-morrow."

A tearful glance from Lucy checked the rejoinder hovering on the lips of the Marquis, and with a smile which had recovered its customary good humour, he bowed lowly to her and turned away. Claude prepared to follow his example, when his sister laid her hand on his arm to detain him. Angrily shaking it off, he exclaimed:

"Begone! You can deceive me no longer with your affected gentleness, your false timidity. Better, the honest, frank character, that displays its faults, whatever they may be, without attempt at concealment, than one who employs amiability as a cloak to veil its unworthiness."

"But Claude, for Mercy's sake! hear me—"

"No! I have listened to you too long; but implicitly as I have trusted to you heretofore, my eyes are now opened, and in proportion to the love once lavished on you, is the contempt with which you are now regarded. 'Tis not so much for the deception you have practised towards your kind parents, towards a brother who would have laid down his life for you; 'tis not the paltry vanity which blinds you so far as to think your pretty face could ever raise you to the dignity of Marchioness of Pemberton; a dignity which women of rank, fortune, and beauty far superior to your own, so eagerly contend for, and contend for in vain. 'Tis not all this which excite my indignation so much as the base treachery with which you have acted towards the being you profess to call your friend, your sister. Loading her as you daily do, with caresses, with protestations of affection, to thus basely betray her confidence, to sacrifice her happiness on the shrine of your

own, unworthy, grasping ambition. Lucy! Lucy! Ida Beresford, faulty, imperfect as she is, as far surpasses you in true nobleness of sentiment, as day does night. But 'tis enough that I know and blush for your weakness. Promise me never to see this man again, to banish him from your thoughts for ever, and our parents shall never know aught of what has passed,—never know how unworthy their idolized daughter is of their affection."

Touched by his kind consideration, harshly as it was expressed, and overcome by a thousand emotions, Lucy threw herself into his arms, and buried her face in his bosom. Completely softened, her brother flung himself on the seat near her, and parting the shining hair from her brow, imprinted a fond kiss upon it.

"My own gentle Lucy!" he murmured, "pardon me. 'Tis your first, your only offence, and I have been too severe. But need I say 'tis the passionate love I bear to you that prompted my harshness?"

"I know it, dear Claude," she rejoined, raising her soft eyes, now sparkling through her tears to his face; "I know it, and that is why I am not angry with you, though you have been blaming me unjustly all this time. Listen to me for one moment, and you will see I am still worthy of your love, still your own Lucy." And with a crimsoning cheek, and faltering voice she recounted her brief but eventful tale. The feelings it excited in her auditor may well be imagined. Her story concluded, a long pause followed, which was at length broken by Claude, exclaiming:

"And is it, can it be possible, that you, my humble, quiet little sister, are the destined bride of one of our highest, wealthiest noblemen? It surpasses belief. Pemberton is a noble, generous minded being, and you, my Lucy, are every way worthy of him. But, believe me, sincere as is the pleasure I feel to see you thus exalted, I derive a much purer, truer satisfaction, to know that you are innocent of the error I imputed to you."

He thought of Ida at the moment, for Lucy had not omitted in her narrative the circumstance of the letter sent by the latter. He remembered the generous self-devotion with which she had borne for another's sake, the imputation of an error equally great, an error from which a proud spirit like hers, must have shrunk with aversion, but he mentioned not her name; and discussing a thousand questions interesting to both, the brother and sister, arm in arm, leisurely returned to their home.

(To be continued.)