

was "paying her off" for her former unwelcome jests at his expense, and resolving not to leave him "victor of the field," she rejoined:

"You are too complimentary, Mr. St. John. I am not the only one who does occasionally display traits of a better nature. What greater example could we require of unworldly enthusiasm, of heroic indifference to the world's opinion, than that with which you edified us to-night in your selection of the being to whom you doubtless offered your heart as well as hand. Ah! she indeed is a bright specimen of that sweet, silent sensibility, that fascinating, rural timidity, so highly eulogized by boarding school teachers and middle aged people, and so signally distinguished by Mr. St. John."

"But, really, St. John," said a tall, affected looking young gentleman, who rejoiced in the appellation of Viscount Howard. "Really, you, whom the lady promoted to the dignity of her *preux chevalier*, are bound by all the laws of chivalry and knighthood to go in search of her. She is doubtless at the present moment, making signals of distress for an ice, or calling on you to rescue her from some remote corner, where no other partner can penetrate."

"Had you not better make the experiment yourself, my lord? As your fancy is so very lively in conjuring up scenes of distress, probably your generosity is equally prompt in relieving them."

There was a very perceptible tone of sarcasm in the words, and a slight contraction of the high brow of the speaker, which told that further jesting on the subject would prove anything but conducive to mirth or friendship, and Lord Howard, taking the hint, drew the fair Lady Helena's arm in his own, and passed on to the adjoining saloon. The others followed in like order—Miss Aberton and St. John last. The latter had lingered to gather a blossom from a superb Indian jasmine that stood in the conservatory, which he presented, repeating in a tone half playful, half serious, the sentiment it imaged: "I attach myself to thee." It was graciously accepted, and the delicate compliments, the words of homage he whispered, as they slowly followed their companions, proved that Henry St. John was a proficient in the science of flattery.

Meanwhile, what were the feelings of the young and sensitive girl, who, an unsuspected listener to that long dialogue, with all its bitter contemptuousness, its heartless egotism, had thus received her first terrible lesson in the world's ways. For an hour, a long hour after the thoughtless revellers had passed out, she stood leaning against the tapestried wall, her eyes

closed, her small hand pressed on her heart as if to still its wild, convulsive throbbing. At length a feeling of strange bewildering weakness crept over her, and, conscious that she was on the point of fainting, she left the recess, and, with some difficulty, reached the table on which fortunately stood a vase of water, a glass of which somewhat revived her, and a few moments rest on the couch on which Miss Aberton had late reclined in all the pride of wealth and rank, comparatively restored her. But, with returning force returned her old fear, that some gay party, if not the same one that had lately passed, might enter and see her sitting there, so lone, so neglected. That would have been indeed the last drop in her cup of bitterness; but what was she to do? There was no alternative save to seek Mrs. Graham, and entreat her to return; but where was she to be found, and how could Alice summon courage to approach her before a crowded room, and importune her, perhaps at a time where she might be totally engrossed by some other subject.

"Oh! that I might go home myself," murmured Alice, clasping her hands. "How willingly would I set out on foot in damp and darkness. Yet alas! I have no resource save patience. But I must seek my former place of refuge. There at least I may remain unobserved, unseen—how happy I shall feel if I can but reach it without meeting any of those heartless fashionables. I will not be tempted to leave it again."

With a beating heart and timid step she re-entered the ball-room, and was quietly and unobservedly gliding back to her former seat, when directly in her path, advancing towards her, was Henry St. John, Miss Aberton leaning on his arm. Alice stood transfixed with positive terror; but she was at least spared that mortification, for without having perceived her, they turned off in another direction. With renewed hope she continued to advance, when something soft, crushing beneath her foot, caused her to stoop. It was the white rose, now soiled and discoloured, which her fond mother had placed with such maternal pride, some hours before, amid her dark tresses. The sight brought back in all their vivid bitterness, the mortifications, the humiliations, which had been her portion that night. What a contrast to the roseate visions, the soft hopes, that had flitted before her, when that rose, white and lovely, had been placed amid her hair. The hot tears of acute mental suffering gushed to her eyes; spite of her efforts, they fell faster and faster. Half blinded by them, she hurried on. At length her haven was all but won, when suddenly—how closely is the sublime blended with the ridiculous, the mournful with the mirthful,