

though unostentatious qualities, before the brilliant and bewitching Florence had crossed his path, he might have been far happier. Most of the guests returned from their excursion, as the members of many a pleasure party often do, in the sulkiest and most discontented mood imaginable. Lady Westover and her daughter were equally indignant with the little attention the latter had received; Colonel Dalrymple, in climbing a height to enjoy the view from its summit, had unluckily rolled down, and severely scratched his elbow, an accident which happened also to Lord Manvers, with the additional loss of an elegant riding whip, and though the gentlemen made light of the circumstance, it did not tend in the least to improve their tempers. The duke of Hastings and his lady-love, Miss Clifton, had quarrelled on the road; Percival Clinton, annoyed at the first setting out, by being thwarted in his wish to drive Nina, had rode sulkily by himself, whilst all were equally fatigued, ill-tempered, and disgusted. The magnificent collation awaiting them, however, the cheerful lights and sparkling wines soon banished the ill humour of some, though it dispelled not that of others. Of the latter number was Florence, who, suffering from a heart-ache as well as severe head ache, retired almost immediately to her own room, but not before she had seen the earl seat himself by Nina, smilingly declaring that as she had so courageously trusted herself to the mercies of his fiery horses, and his own equivocal driving, he was bound in gratitude to shew her, at least for that night, the most unlimited devotion. Keener than the bite of an asp was that speech, lightly as it was spoken, to the heart of Florence, in which Miss Westover had already so successfully awakened the demon of jealousy. Closing the door of her apartment, she flung herself on an ottoman in a storm of sobs and tears, whose violence remained for nearly an hour unabated. At length hearing Nina's light footsteps approaching, she hastily dried her eyes, and covered them with her hand, in such a manner as to shield them from observation.

"Are you better, Florence?" asked the intruder in an anxious voice. "I retired early to keep you company, for you must be lonesome here alone."

"You might have remained where you were, for I am quite well, and intend to retire to rest immediately," returned the other, in a tone she vainly strove to render gentle, yes, vainly, for at that moment she felt that from the depths of her heart she hated Nina, nor did the novelty of her feelings startle her—the gentle Lucinda had treated her too carefully for that.

The next morning Florence awoke with a violent headache, and she gladly availed herself of the opportunity to remain in her room, at least till evening, when a grand ball was to be given at the castle, invitations for which had been issued some time previous. The dread of meeting her lover, whose anger was still unappeased—the uncertainty of the reception that awaited her, tended to render an interview a thing to be avoided, and more than once she had determined to absent herself from the *fête* under plea of illness; still she thought it best to defer her decision till the last moment. Miss Westover failed not to visit her, and with remarkable generosity devoted a couple of hours to wiling away the tedium of her friend's sick room. To her did the latter confess her doubts and fears, disguising however in a great measure, her devouring anxiety, from the salutary fear of incurring her companion's ridicule. Miss Westover laughed away all her scruples, assured her she was pursuing the right course, that Lord St. Albans was perfectly miserable, wandering about from room to room; longing for an opportunity of reconciliation, and finally concluded by advising her by all means to make her appearance in the evening, dressed with great elegance, and to look, if not feel, in the highest spirits. "By the bye, Florence," she continued, suddenly resuming the seat from which she had just risen. "I had almost forgotten to tell you that you have at long and at last found a powerful, a dangerous rival, and that in the person of the most bewitching and accomplished Miss Aleyn!"

Florence's colour angrily deepened, but she made no reply. Her companion went on:

"Yes, last night he remained at her side, till the young lady, doubtless overcome by the weight of her laurels, chose to retire. If you had seen her all the while looking up in his face with that diabolical, artful, *baby* look of hers, which so charms your clever and sapient lord, as well as that squire of forlorn dames, Mr. Percival Clinton, but which to me is most disgustingly insipid and palpably hypocritical. How on earth do you intend to manage her?"

"Manage her," returned Florence, with a smile of the bitterest scorn, "why, leave her alone. Think you jealousy could ever blind me sufficiently to permit me to imagine, even for a moment, that my betrothed, the earl of St. Albans, could stoop so low as that contemptible, insignificant nobody?"

"Very well, my dear, I am rejoiced to see you in so blessed a state of security," returned the fair Lucinda, who entertained some doubts on the score of her companion's loftily expressed tranquillity. "I would not for the world be so