

lips, and she suffered Claude to change the subject, which he quickly did. Hours, long hours, were passed by that mother and son in sad, yet gentle intercourse, and they parted not till the first rays of that sun that was to witness their separation, streamed in upon them. Meanwhile poor Ida, who had passed but a feverish, restless night, rose from her couch, contrary to her usual wont, with the first rays of the sun. Her head was aching violently, and hoping that the cool morning air might serve to revive her, she dressed herself, and stole softly from the room to avoid awakening Lucy, who was in a deep sleep. Directing her steps to the garden, she took two or three turns through its shady walks, and then, greatly fatigued, sought the arbour, and threw herself on its mossy seat. As she did so, the thought of the conversation she had overheard in that very spot, and the agony it had inflicted on her, rose upon her memory. But she questioned herself was there not greater suffering still in store for her? How easily was that question solved! At that moment a shadow suddenly darkened the entrance of the arbour; she looked hastily up, and beheld Claude.

"Miss Beresford! So early!" he ejaculated, in tones of surprise. "This is indeed unexpected good fortune, for I have desired much to see you alone; but may I enter?"

Ida, who was too much taken by surprise, even to frame a reply, bowed her head in token of assent. He advanced a few steps, and leaning against the porch, exclaimed with some degree of embarrassment:

"I fear 'tis an ungracious task I have to perform; but I shall at least solicit your forgiveness before entering upon it. 'Tis but a simple question I have to propose. May I proceed?"

Ida's heart was throbbing so violently, that she dared not trust her voice, and her only rejoinder was a slight inclination of her head.

"Then, Miss Beresford, are you not the secret benefactor, to whose liberality I owe yesterday's princely donation?"

His companion became fearfully pale; she actually trembled. The shame of discovery; the dread of Claude's anger, or, still worse, his suspecting the sentiments which had prompted her generosity, completely overpowered her, whilst he, amazed beyond measure at these signs of feminine weakness in one whom he had supposed incapable of such feelings, paused a moment, and then resumed in lower and less firm accents:

"Will you not answer me, Miss Beresford? and yet, farther reply is almost unnecessary. The very first instant of its reception, unworthy as I knew myself to be of your generosity, surprising

and unaccountable as such a gift to me was, the conviction flashed upon me with overwhelming force, that you, and you alone, were the donor, though to avert from you suspicions you were evidently desirous to evade, I appeared to coincide in my mother's opinion. Say, is it not so? I know you are incapable of deceiving me."

The vivid scarlet that suddenly flushed Ida's neck and brow was even more explicit than her silence.

"Thank you," he exclaimed, after a moment's silence. "I am answered. I have only to express my deep gratitude for a gift which was as undeserved, as it was generously bestowed."

"Talk not of generosity," murmured Ida, speaking for the first time. "That paltry offering would not half redeem the debt I owe your family, and 'tis but just I should at least make some return for all that I have received."

"Seek not to deceive yourself, Miss Beresford. You may indeed owe something to my parents, and even Lucy, for she has been a fond friend; but to me you can owe nothing. Permit me then to return your princely gift, for which I shall ever feel myself your debtor, even though I cannot retain it."

"You dare not, surely, Mr. Vernon, insult me, by returning that money?" rejoined Ida, fixing her dark eyes full on his face.

"And I dare not retain it, Miss Beresford," was the reply. "My self-respect forbids the thought."

"I understand you. The thought of being under obligation to me; and yet I scrupled not to solicit *your* assistance when I required it, as in the case of my letter to the Marquis of Pemberton, when I did not even hesitate to apply to you."

"True, but in reality it was not for yourself you solicited that aid; it was to benefit another, and that very act laid on me a debt of gratitude which I fear I shall never have the opportunity of repaying."

"Then will you not consent, Mr. Vernon, to retain it as the gift of a friend?" she asked.

He hesitated whilst his heightening colour, and perplexed look, plainly betokened his embarrassment; at length he rejoined with averted glance, for he felt most unwilling indeed to hurt her feelings:

"Forgive me, but not even in that light, Miss Beresford; you must take back your gift."

"Then be it as you wish," she retorted, and snatching the paper from his extended hand, she tore it into fifty shreds, and threw the fragments at his feet. "And now, Mr. Vernon," she added, fixing her sparkling eyes upon his face. "Now, you may retire, secure in the proud consciousness