

soon ended by completely forgetting their existence. Great then was the surprise and wonderment, when after the long period above mentioned, the gates of Huntingdon Hall were thrown open, the building crowded with mechanics and artisans, and the preparations and improvements carried on in a scale that betokened the proprietors were returning to it, as ostentatious and luxurious as ever. The taciturn old steward was plied on all sides with questions and conjectures, but the extent of the information he imparted was, that he had received a letter a short time previous from Lord Huntingdon, bidding him see to the arrangement of the Hall immediately, as the family were returning home.

It was towards the close of a gloomy November day that the heavy carriage drove up to the mansion, and it needed all the cares and wealth that had been lavished on the edifice itself, and all the accessories of cheerful fires and countless lights, to counteract the almost ominous gloom of the evening that witnessed the return of the travellers to their home.

Lady Huntingdon who seemed fearfully exhausted, retired at once to her apartment and as she slowly ascended the stairs leaning on her husband's arm and pausing every second step for breath, many a foreboding sigh was breathed by those who had seen her some few years before, sweep past them with a lofty carriage and haughty step that seemed to disdain the very earth on which it trod. But Lady Huntingdon was not the only one on whom time had heavily left its trace. Eva, the young and once blooming Eva was also strangely changed and few would have recognized in the pale silent girl, whose saddened features and deep, mournful eyes spoke so long a tale of grief, the happy, child-like being who had first come among them as bright as the flowers that had formed for a while her only world and her only joys. With a cheerfulness which even their unsuspecting natures could easily detect was assumed, she replied to the warm greetings of the retainers, but when one or two old and privileged servants respectfully but pittingly breathed their hopes "that the pure air and tranquil repose of the old Hall, would restore health and bloom to their dear Miss Eva's cheek again," she hurriedly turned from them lest they should read in the tears that blinded her eyes, the mournful fear her own heart had long ere then acknowledged, that health or happiness for her, existed not on earth again.

How coldly did the desolate stateliness of the drawing-room strike upon her as she sat there a moment alone. What, a mockery, seemed the

lighted candelabras, the blazing grates, the countless tapers. The master of all had not deemed it worth his while to cast even a single glance into the apartment, the proud mistress, broken in health and spirits, was fit only for the quiet gloom of a sick room, and she their unloved and unregarded child, she, on whose brow the cares and sorrows of womanhood had been stamped, ere the very first freshness of childhood had passed from it, surely it was not for her that all this pomp was displayed? Oh! that were indeed the wildest mockery of all! Impatiently turning from its glaring light, she hurriedly sought her own dressing room, whose quiet, unpretending comfort, was more soothing to her, then, morbidly excited feelings. Dismissing her maid who was overpowered with sleep and fatigue, she looked sally around. All was still the same. No alteration, save the new curtains and hangings that had replaced the former ones, and the costly Mosaic table, a reminiscence of Rome, that had superseded the olden, rosewood stand.

"All unchanged!" she murmured, with a deep sigh, "All unchanged, save myself."

For a moment she paused before a full sized portrait, which had been taken about a month after her first arrival at the Hall, and which was full of the radiant bloom that had characterized her as a child. For a moment her weary glance rested on the bright features, the happy smile that parted the glowing, coral lips, and involuntarily she turned to a mirror beside her. The contrast appalled even herself. The faultless features alone were there, the colouring, the expression, the very life of the picture were gone.

"The girl and the woman!" murmured the gazer, with a quivering lip. "Oh! what a fearful change, and six years have wrought all this!"

Eva had drank long and deeply of the cup of earthly sorrow, she had seen her dearest hopes blighted, her affections trampled on and flung back on herself, and yet, that moment brought with it a pang as bitter as if it had been her first initiation into suffering. No woman can look on the ravages sudden sickness or sorrow have wrought on her personal beauty, however previously she may have undervalued it, without a sinking of the heart, a feeling of weary hopelessness beyond almost the reach of earthly consolations, and however entire may be her succeeding resignation, its first intensity is ever overwhelming. So at least, Eva found it, but she yielded not long, and when she raised her head after the lapse of a few moments from the clasped hands on which it had fallen, her countenance was calm, almost as before,