

the consciousness of that inferiority was accompanied by a pang, so bitter, that the colour which had hitherto equally dyed cheek and brow, retreated, leaving her pale as a statue, and with a haggard, worn-out look, which certainly appertained not to a girl of sixteen. Her confusion was further increased, by the contemptuous scrutiny with which the lady opposite, (the same with whom St. John had been dancing when she had first perceived him,) regarded her. Though fully twelve or thirteen years older than Alice, with a dark, colourless complexion, and haughty, irregular features, yet her air of dignity, of fashionable repose, combined with an elegant and faultless toilette, gave her a strange and wonderful advantage over the latter, with all her youth and beauty. What an hour of torture was that quadrille to Alice; and when her now silent and inanimate partner, after leading her to her seat, and uttering a few words of cold, common-place civility, left her, she felt too unhappy, too disheartened, to wish for his return. Nor did he return. The film which had invested, even for a few moments, the poor and portionless girl with winning charms, had fallen from his eyes, and he saw again, with his usual faultless clear-sightedness. The young and beautiful creature, with the aristocratic name and graceful address—for Alice was then at her ease, who had attracted his admiration when he had first met her in the company of his sister,—was a very different being from the unfashionable, neglected, unknown girl, whom he had been entrapped into dancing with. Inwardly vowing it would be his last folly of the like nature, and muttering, we will charitably suppose, only a doubtful sort of benediction on his sister's officiousness, which had led to such a result, Henry St. John, the hero of the ball-room, immediately sought out the lady with the faultless toilette, and engaged her hand for the ensuing dance, endeavouring, by increased devotion and graceful flattery, to obliterate any evil impressions his late ill-directed choice of a partner might have left on her mind. The lady was placable, and to Henry St. John's great delight, for Miss Aberton was a wealthy heiress, he succeeded. Meanwhile, poor Alice was nearly half dead with agitation and inanition, for she had as yet taken no refreshment whatever, save one jelly, which a tall, grave-looking gentleman, with a bald head, had presented, chancing to observe her glance at the tray which he was setting down on the table beside her. This abstinence was the more acutely felt, as she had not tasted food that day; her excitement and the bright hopes and anticipations which had thronged upon her, effectually precluding such a thing. It had been

with the greatest difficulty Mrs. Sydenham had prevailed upon her to take a cup of tea an hour or two before leaving. What would she not have given now for that, or any other refreshment. She looked around in despair; no one knew, noticed, or saw her, and she was too young and timid to think of asking.

At length, beginning to feel really ill, she formed the desperate determination of seeking Mrs. Graham, and begging her to send her home immediately. Twice she rose to cross the brilliantly lighted room, and twice her courage failed her; but finally taking advantage of the confusion of a rapid *galop*, she succeeded in gliding unobserved into the next apartment. It was a small sitting room, opening on the conservatory, and was empty at the time, but, ere she had half crossed it, the sound of laughter and voices approaching, filled her with dismay. Hastily raising the purple draperies which hung before a recess at the other end, she sprang behind them, and had hardly time to readjust their folds, when the party entered.

"Do let us rest here a moment," exclaimed a fashionable, and not unmusical voice. "I am completely exhausted! The heat is so oppressive in that dancing room."

"Permit me, then, to bring you some refreshments," rejoined the clear, yet soft accents of Henry St. John. "I will not be absent a moment."

Alice glanced through a small opening in the fold of the curtain, which commanded a full view of the room. Thrown negligently but gracefully on a crimson couch, was her disagreeable *vis-à-vis*, the object of Henry St. John's devotion; whilst two or three young ladies were sitting or standing round; St. John himself, and the other gentlemen of the party, had gone in quest of refreshments.

"My ringlets are all out," exclaimed the youngest and prettiest of the group; as she twined a glossy auburn tress round her white fingers. "They are positively straight."

"Yes, something like the abundant locks of Henry St. John's partner," was the laughing rejoinder. "Where on earth did he contrive to find her? He may certainly pride himself, on having had a partner who, if she possessed no other attraction, had at least the rare one of being *unique* of her kind. But, seriously, Miss Aberton," she continued, addressing the lady on the couch; "do you know who she is? I would never have noticed her, nor I dare say would any of us, but for the circumstance of the usually exclusive, and over fastidious Henry St. John, having chosen her for a partner. Who can she be?"