

Whilst she was yet speaking, the Doctor entered, to say, "her carriage was now prepared." He was immediately made acquainted with the new arrangements, to all of which he unreservedly, and unhesitatingly assented, for he was easily pleased, where his affections were not concerned, and they were anything but deeply interested in the present case. Lady Stanhope then rose to go, and after courteously bidding farewell to her hospitable hosts, and saying she would be very happy to see them at any time at Elm Grove, turned to Ida, and drawing two costly rings from her finger, exclaimed, "For you, and your gentle little friend." She then imprinted a kiss on Ida's fair brow, telling her to be ready for the opening of the season. "And mind, Ida," she repeated in a tone of solemn warning. "Carefully guard your complexion; never go out in the sun, or when the dew is falling. Remember, that like the heroine of the song, your face is your fortune."

"A fortune I am quite contented with," returned Ida, with a slight toss of her graceful head. Lady Stanhope smiled, as she turned to descend the steps, and she was revolving in her mind that very sentence, when, reclining in her luxurious carriage, she was rolling rapidly on to Elm Grove.

"Yes," she exclaimed, half aloud; "the girl is bewitching, and she knows it but too well. However, a season in town, an experience of the mortifications and rivalships of fashionable life, will soon effectually cure her superabundant share of pride, and self esteem. I am really happy to have something on hand, something to occupy me; for since Marion's marriage, I have been literally dying of *ennui* and inaction. I have sometimes been tempted to repent having disposed of her so soon, for she was an unfailing source of anxiety and interest. But, I am now well repaid for all, for I could not have a more promising, a more faultless *protégée*—that is in a worldly point of view. In two seasons I shall close her history. The first present her, the next dispose of her to nothing below a Duke or a Marquis.

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CHAPTER VII.  
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THE hopes and expectations excited by Lady Stanhope's visit occupied Ida exclusively for some days; but the reflection that she had to wait a couple of months longer somewhat calmed her enthusiasm, and she found leisure to indulge in ill temper and folly as of yore. The comments passed on the event by Claude, to whom Lucy had immediately written, proved a fresh subject

of irritation. He said "he was sincerely rejoiced, on Miss Beresford's account, for he had long since perceived that a life of fashionable gaiety was more congenial to her tastes than the quiet, and consequently somewhat monotonous happiness that reigned under his own roof."

Ida bit her lip as Dr. Vernon read aloud the sentence.

"Yes," she inwardly thought, "he not only rejoices at my departure, but has the audacity openly to avow it. Fashionable gaiety, indeed! Fashionable levity and folly, he would have said if he dared. But thank Heaven! if he is so delighted at the prospect of my departure, I am, at least, equally happy."

It might have been supposed that Ida's approaching separation from Dr. Vernon's family would have rendered her a little more amiable, a little more considerate of their feelings; but no! she was the self-same being, selfish, intolerant as ever, and bade fair to fulfil to the letter the prediction of Mrs. Vernon, that she would never be reclaimed by either kindness or any other means. Occasionally, however, though very rarely, some slight trait, some expression would escape her, which proved that with a different education she might have been a different being; and that some good, generous feelings, yet lurked in her heart, marred as it was by so many unworthy passions. During one of the pleasant walks which the family frequently took together, walks which even the indolent Ida sometimes enjoyed, their attention was attracted by a sickly, wretched-looking woman, who held an infant in her arms, as wan and emaciated as herself. To her imploring call for charity, Dr. Vernon returned a short negative, and with a significant glance at his astonished wife, who had never seen him display such insensibility before, passed on.

Lucy, after a pitying look, followed in their footsteps, but Ida, touched in spite of herself, by the abject misery of the petitioner, lingered for a moment behind. Hastily drawing the costly ring bestowed by Lady Stanhope, from her finger, she dropped it into the woman's hand, and immediately rejoined her companions. Had she but known how surpassingly beautiful she looked with that compassionate glance on her classic features, she would never have changed the expression. Dr. Vernon had marked all that had passed—quietly, quickly as it had been done,—and turning to Ida, asked:

"What comfort she had been whispering to the sufferer?"

Ida, literally ashamed of a good deed, which was in such direct opposition to her avowed opinions, became crimson, whilst she haughtily re-