

"That will not answer; I must have it to-morrow evening: I want it in time for a party which I must attend."

"I shall scarcely be able to get it done without working all night, but I will do my best."

"Well, let me have it at any rate by eight o'clock to-morrow evening, and be sure not to disappoint me. I will send you the lace trimming in the morning; the weather is so dark and stormy, I am afraid to trust you with it to-night, for you might lose it or be robbed of it on your way home. Why didn't you come before dark?"

"Mother was not well, and I could not leave her sooner."

"Oh, I remember, she is blind and gives you a great deal of trouble; I will send the lace in the morning, and you know how I want it laid on the skirt and sleeves."

Lilbourne heard the hall door close, and the next moment, with a smile of gentle benignity, Julia re-entered the room.

"I am completely chilled," she exclaimed, as she drew her chair to the fire; "the hall is like a north-west passage, and these work-people are so dreadfully tedious."

Charles had risen from his indolent position, and now with a knit brow and folded arms, stood leaning against the chimney-piece.

"With whom were you talking?" he coldly asked, while the keen glance of his dark eyes betrayed his interest in the answer.

"It was a poor dress-maker, whom I employ out of charity," said Julia, with a meek air of conscious rectitude; "she is poor and supports her blind mother, and I therefore patronise her, instead of employing a more fashionable *modiste*."

"I dare say you are quite satisfied with her skill, or else your taste would overcome your charity."

"I believe you are right, cousin Charles," was the apparently frank reply; "but Clara certainly has an innate idea of the 'fitness of things;' tell me if you ever saw anything more perfectly adapted to the figure than the dress I am now wearing?"

"You should not ask such questions, Julia, they break the sweet illusions of fancy. Until you suggested a different idea, I really thought that it was the figure which so beautifully moulded the dress, and now I am afraid I shall never admire the admirable proportions of your fine form without thinking of the poor little dress-maker."

There was a tone of lurking sarcasm in this remark which puzzled and annoyed Julia; but,

pretending not to perceive any latent meaning, she gayly answered: "Take care how you waste thoughts on a pretty woman *absent*, when you should be absorbed in attentions to a prettier one *present*; we women never forgive such an act of *lèse-majesté*."

"Is the poor girl pretty?"

"Quite so; with soft dove-like eyes and beautiful brown hair; but she is pale and thin, and lacks the roundness of healthful symmetry."

"Where does she live?"

"Somewhere in——street, quite near your hotel, I believe."

"Have you never visited her in the course of your *patronage*?"

"Certainly not; I always sent for her to come to me; I would not, for the world, enter one of those close and crowded places where poor people huddle together; I am sure I should catch some frightful fever. I am laughed at by many of my acquaintances for my folly in employing such persons, and I don't know what would be said if I were seen going to such places to seek them."

Charles Lilbourne was silent, and as Julia drew her harp again towards her, he fell into another fit of musing. But now his thoughts were apparently less agreeable, for the expression of languid enjoyment in his countenance had given place to a stern coldness which Julia could neither comprehend nor dissipate. That night he returned sad and dissatisfied to his home. Captivated by Julia's beauty, he had, as usual, believed her gifted with all womanly feelings and sympathies, and now, like all seekers after perfection, the discovery of a single flaw in the diamond made him regard it as utterly false and worthless. Indeed Julia could scarcely have done anything which would so suddenly have disenchanted him. He had witnessed her selfish gratification of her own whims even at the expense of another's comfort—he had listened to a falsehood from her lips, for he well knew that the party for which she required the dress would not take place till the day after that which she had named, and that, therefore, the requisition which would deprive the poor seamstress of her nightly rest was as unnecessary as it was cruel—he had seen her shrinking from a moment's exposure to that inclemency from which she had not sought to screen a woman as delicate as herself—he had heard her express fears for the safety of a paltry lace trimming, while she scrupled not to suffer the unprotected and timid girl to return alone through the darkness and tempest to her distant home; in fine, he had discovered a want of womanly tenderness in the character of his lovely cousin;