

with which she had expressed herself. But he quickly resumed:

"However you may look upon it, Miss Beresford, I have but accomplished a duty, and one whose immediate fulfilment your approaching departure rendered necessary."

"You might have left it unperformed, then, to console me on my return," said Ida, with an involuntary smile of bitterness, as the remembrance of the welcome he had given her on her return from London, rose on her recollection.

"In that case it might never be performed," he quietly replied; "for if Elm Grove prove more agreeable than your present home, you may never return; but I have already intruded too long on your time. Pardon me!" and with a cold but deep inclination he passed out.

Ida's heart was full of bursting, and she passionately murmured:

"He is right! I may not, I will not ever return!" She sank on the chair near her, and pressed her hands to her eyes as if to restrain her gushing tears, but in vain. As the sound of his retreating footsteps died away, she gave vent to the passionate emotion that must else have suffocated her, but not as she had done heretofore, in convulsive sobs, in wild out-bursts of grief. No! her head, bowed on her folded arms, and enveloped in the rich superfluity of her hair, the total immovability of her figure, might have led a spectator to believe that she slept, but the large burning tears that fell like rain from beneath her half closed lids, told that she was awake to the bitterness of sorrow.

Another half hour had chimed since Claude's departure, and she still remained in her attitude of hopeless grief, when the door opened, and Mrs. Vernon's kind voice exclaimed:

"Ida, dear, I have come to assist you,—but is it possible? Are you asleep?"

Ida heard her, but her energies, her mental powers, were totally prostrated, and she felt incapable of uttering a word. Mrs. Vernon softly approached, thinking she slept, and raised the rich tresses, damp with her tears.

"Ida, my child!" she exclaimed, as she perceived the cause of her silence, "whence is this grief? Can it be regret for leaving us, or is it Lady Stanhope who calls it forth?"

"No! no!" sobbed Ida; "but leave me, leave me, Mrs. Vernon, I am too utterly miserable."

"And why so, Ida? Can I, your mother, your friend, impart no comfort, no solace?"

"Ah! far from it, you but make me more hopelessly wretched."

A keen pang shot through Mrs. Vernon's heart, but it was only momentary, and seating herself

in the large chair which Ida had of late occupied, she passed her arm round the slight waist of the weeping girl, and drew her gently towards her.

"And now, my child," she exclaimed with a degree of firmness she rarely displayed, "I, your adopted mother, the representative of her who first held that title, and who, alas! was so soon snatched away from you, I entreat, I command you to repose your confidence in me. Long since I have perceived your sorrow—long since have I known that some grief is struggling at your heart, wearing away your life and spirits, but I forebore to press you. Further silence would be criminal. You are now leaving, at least for a time, my protection, perhaps to be exposed to new trials, new sorrows, or it may be a repetition of those that have already commenced to prey upon your existence, and I would be unworthy of the office I hold, did I permit you to depart unquestioned and un comforted. Speak, speak to me, my child!"

"I cannot, I dare not," murmured Ida, as she covered her crimsoning temples with her hands. "Even you, who are so gentle, would despise me. My secret shall die with me."

Mrs. Vernon regarded her for a moment with a look of sorrowful perplexity, and at length rejoined with a heavy sigh:

"Tis well, Ida, I'll press you no further; I yield to you now as I have ever done; you have never yet sacrificed one wish, one inclination to me, and I need not hope you will commence now, but God knows that though you will not consent to be to me as a daughter, I have loved and still love you as a mother."

"Mother!" reiterated the girl with bitterness. "Mother! Ah! you know well the emptiness of that title for me; I know you have watched over, cared for me with the tenderness of one, but you never did, you never could, love me as a mother. None but the one who gave me birth could have witnessed my errors, endured my failings, and yet continued to love me. Though you fulfilled your heavy task nobly, its labours were never lightened by a mother's feelings, a mother's affection for me. Your care, your patience was for me,—your heart was for Claude and Lucy alone."

"Ida, listen to me," said her companion, gently yet impressively. "Listen to me, and judge whether I am not bound by ties the most sacred, to love as well as protect you. Whatever care or tenderness I have shewn was but the just return of the love that others that have gone before you, shewed to me when I was a portionless orphan. An alien! like yourself, Ida, I found not only a refuge but a home under the same