

her amusement; and each day he brought bouquets of sweet and rare flowers, to refresh her with their fragrance and their beauty. Cecilia was touched by these delicate attentions, so heart-felt and so unwearied; and, though her lips uttered not the thought, she could not but painfully contrast Arthur's kindness with the unconcern, and almost constant absence, of her husband.

So time passed on—the evening named by Mrs. Sinclair for the exhibition of the tableaux, had arrived and gone. Grace, though invited, had lost all wish to see them, and Arthur positively declined going; nor was Evelyn in any spirits for the evening—but his presence could not be dispensed with, for he was to form, either alone or with his gay hostess, some of the finest tableaux—and so he went. The next day he spoke of the beautiful effect produced by the various subjects represented, but did not enter into detail, and Cecilia had no wish to question him closely. She was alone at the time, for Grace, by her persuasion, had gone to ride with Arthur, and Evelyn, as if ashamed to quit her immediately, lingered longer than usual beside her. Yet he was evidently ill at ease—he looked pale and disturbed—and for a few minutes traversed the apartment with a restless step, then cast himself into a fustian, and, complaining of a violent head-ache, he closed his eyes, and leaned back his head in silence.

Cecilia's heart was full to overflowing—she fixed her soft and pitying eyes upon his face, and, touched by his evident suffering, she arose, weak as she was, from her sofa, and, stealing gently towards him, began silently to bathe his throbbing temples with cologne. He seemed at first to shrink from the soft touch of her hand, but in another moment, he raised his eyes towards her, with a look resembling those which had once been the joy and sunlight of her heart. Unable calmly to bear that glance, her frame trembled with emotion, and her warm tears dropped fast and bright upon his brow. He seemed as deeply moved as herself, and, throwing his arm around her, he drew her gently towards him.

"Cecilia," he said, in broken tones, "I am unworthy of you—unworthy your love—your care—your regret."

"Be to me what you have been, Maurice, and all may yet be well," she replied.

He leaned his head against her as she stood encircled by his arm, passively beside him, and groaned aloud, but spoke not.

"Tell me, Maurice," she said, struggling with her tears, "tell me what means this fearful change—this terrible estrangement that has come between our hearts?"

"Oh, Cecilia, spare me! spare me!" he exclaimed, in strong emotion; "some other time I will tell you all."

"And why not now?" she said, casting herself in perfect abandonment of grief upon his breast; "I cannot longer bear this dreadful suspense—tell me all, my dearest husband—all that you have so long concealed—all that disturbs and changes you—all that is making shipwreck of your peace and mine—and yet—even yet, perhaps, we may be once more happy?"

"You know not what you ask, Cecilia—nor dare I confess how far I have strayed from right—yet hope for your forgiveness."

"Then, Maurice," and she hid her burning face upon his shoulder as she spoke, "tell me only that the love once pledged to me has not been given to another, and I will not ask if there remain might else to be forgiven?"

How sharper than a serpent's tooth was the pang which shot through his guilty heart at these low and whispered words, from the tender wife he had so deeply wronged. Yet he folded her fondly to his bosom, and kissed her trembling lips with all the ardour of his early and unclouded love, as he softly said:

"To you belong, my own Cecilia, the purest, the truest, the holiest emotions of my soul—and, vain and forgetful as I sometimes seem, yours they have been, and they are. Allured and dazzled I may be by a meteor light, but ever yet, before it hured me on to death, have I turned from its blinding ray to the remembrance of your love—even as the mariner upon the midnight sea looks upward to the pole star, which, through every peril, shall guide him safely to the shore at last."

Cecilia threw her clinging arms around her husband's neck, as he uttered these words, and wept such tears of joy as for many weary weeks had not bedewed her eyes. The full and perfect confidence of her fond and guileless heart was re-established by the magic of those brief and tender words; and for other causes of disquiet—she was far too kind and generous, by a single question to allude to them. The silence for a moment remained unbroken, and then Evelyn spoke:

"This excitement is too much for you, my Cecilia," he said. "Let me place you back upon your pillow, and you shall rest there while I sit near you, and endeavour, by a quiet half hour, to subdue this intense pain," and he pressed his hand, with a look of acute suffering, upon his forehead.

"Ah, let me bathe your head, dear Maurice, it always relieves you," she said; "for indeed I am strong now—quite well, I think," and she