

sufficiently collected to appreciate so signal an honor. Mrs Stanley was too truly refined and well-bred to share in her daughter's embarrassment. She was not ashamed of the simplicity of their dress, and she did not look upon the proofs of Clara's industry and Edward's literature scattered about the room, as at all disgraceful. Moreover, she was very proud of her son, and thought she had never seen him appear to such advantage as at this moment, when engaged in animated conversation with this graceful and charming lady. Mrs. Clifton admired the garden, the vines that made such fairy lattice-work around the windows, the pictures that hung upon the walls, till every thing around her became exalted in Clara's eyes; with charms unknown before. When she rose to depart, she urged Mrs. Stanley so warmly to visit her, and to suffer her to see much of Clara, it was impossible not to believe she was soliciting a favor. She was so lonely she said—the friends who had accompanied her were returned, and she had nothing but her books and harp for companions.—Her harp! Clara was crazy to hear a harp. The very idea carried her at once into the fairy land of romance, of Ossian's heroines and Milton's angels.

'Is she not the most charming woman you ever saw in your life?' exclaimed Clara, the moment she had left them. 'I quite forgot my calico frock and these linen shreds, long before she was gone. Did you ever see any one so polite and condescending? I wonder how she came to select us from all the village, to call upon,' and she smiled at the importance it would give them in the eyes of their neighbors.

'I am not so much surprised,' said Mrs. Stanley, 'as her father and yours were on intimate terms, and it is probable she has taken pains to ascertain his friends. She had just married when Mr. Lee came into the country, and as she went immediately abroad, she never visited the place during her father's life. She married very young, and I think I have heard she was not happy in her union. She certainly does not seem inconsolable at her husband's death.'

'Is she not delightful, Edward?' continued Clara, in a perfect fever of admiration. 'Did you ever see such eyes and teeth? and though she is dark, her complexion is so glowing and clear, I don't think she would look as handsome if she were fairer. I wonder if she will marry again?'

'You wonder at so many things,' replied Edward, laughing, 'you must live in a perpetual state of astonishment. But I do think, Clara, that Mrs. Clifton is very delightful, and very charming, and graceful, and I hope my dear little rustic sister will try to imitate her graces.'

Edward would never have breathed this unfortunate wish, had he anticipated how faithfully poor Clara would have obeyed his injunction.

The visit was soon returned, and if Clara admired her new friend before, she was now completely fascinated. She saw the white rising of her hands upon the harp, and heard the mellow tones of a voice tuned to the sweetest modulation of art. The rich furniture, the superb curtains, the paintings in massy gilt frames, seemed to her unaccustomed eye, equal to oriental splendor, and Mrs. Clifton some Eastern enchantress, presiding over the scene, with more than magic power.—Edward Stanley was passionately fond of music. He had never heard it in such perfection. But there was a charm in Mrs. Clifton's conversation even superior to her music. It was full of spirit, sensibility, enthusiasm and refinement. Then its perfect *adaptedness* to all around her! Every one talked with her better than with any one else, and felt when they had quitted her society, that they had never been so agreeable before; confessing at the same time, that they had never met with any one half so pleasing as herself. She certainly did flatter a little, that is, she told very pleasant truths, with a most bewitching smile, and another thing, which perhaps was the great secret of her attraction, she seemed completely to forget herself, in her interest for those around her.

It is very certain Mrs. Stanley's family thought more of their new neighbor that night, than their old ones. Even Edward forgot to dream of the blue eyes of Fanny Morton. His conscience reproached him for the oblivion, and when he saw the unenvying interest with which she listened to Clara's praises of the *dashing widow*, as she was called by the villagers, he admired the sweetness and simplicity of a character, pure as the untracked snow. He admired, but for the first time he felt a want in this sweet character. He had never discovered before, that Fanny was deficient in sensibility, that the shadows of feeling seldom passed over her celestial countenance.—He found too a dearth of thought and variety in her conversation, of which he had never been sensible before. A pang of self-accusation shot through his heart, as he made these discoveries, and feeling as if he were guilty of injustice, his attentions became still less frequent and he tried to restrain his restless and wandering thoughts.

Clara sat one morning in a deep reverie.—'Mother,' said she, at length, 'do you remember that fall crimson damask petticoat, grandmother left me, as a memento of old times?'

'Yes,' answered Mrs. Stanley, surprised at the suddenness of the question, 'why do you ask?'

'I was thinking it would make some beautiful window curtains for our parlor. The sun shines in so warm it is really uncomfortable to sit there, and the reflection of real curtains is very beautifying to the complexion.'

'Ah! Clara,' cried her brother, 'you never discovered how uncomfortable it was, till you saw Mrs. Clifton's fine curtains. You forget the blinds and the vines and the rose bushes. Pray have more reverence for dear grandmother's ancient relics.'

Clara blushed and was considerably disconcerted, but nevertheless continued her dreams of improvement. Her latent love for show and splendor to glimmer forth and to illuminate many an airy castle, she amused herself in building. To imitate Mrs. Clifton was now the end and aim of her existence. She practised her step, her air, her smile, before the looking glass, in her own chamber, till from a very simple and unaffected girl, she became conspicuously the reverse. She strung every window with *Aolian* harps and tried to sing in unison, when the wild winds swept the chords—but they disdained the harmony of the human voice, and mocked at her efforts. Edward felt quite distressed at an effect so contrary to his wishes, but he concealed his chagrin under a good humored ridicule, which somewhat checked her progress in the graces.—Once, when they were to accompany Mrs. Clifton in an excursion on horseback, and the lady, arrayed in her suit of forest green, was already waiting their motion, he knew not whether he was most amused or grieved, to see Clara descend in a dress of the same color, in which the imitation was too obvious and too defective not to border on the ridiculous, with a green veil wreathed around the crown of her bonnet, and suffered to stream back behind, in the form of a feather or plume. Though the affection of her brother would not allow him to wound her feelings, by making her fully aware of the extent of her folly, and he chose rather gently to lead her back to true simplicity and good sense, she did not escape a severer lash from those who envied her the distinction of Mrs. Clifton's acquaintance, and who revenged themselves on her damask curtains, *Aolian* harps, and new-born airs. Her present ambition was to possess a gold chain, an ornament she deemed indispensable to the perfection of a lady's dress. She did not aspire to so magnificent a one as wreathed the graceful neck of Mrs. Clifton, but she thought she would be perfectly happy with one of far inferior value surrounding her own. She had a long string of large gold beads, a parting gift from her sainted grandmother, an ornament too obsolete for wear, and which she had often sighed to convert into modern jewelry. An opportunity occurred, at the very moment of all others she most desired it. Mrs. Clifton was to give a party. The day before the event, Clara was examining her simple wardrobe, trying to decide on the important articles of dress, and mourning over her slender stock of finery, when a pedlar stopped at the door, with a trunk filled with jewelry and trinkets. He spread them before her admiring eyes, and when she hesitated and regretted—he offered to take any old ornaments in exchange, holding up at the same time a glittering chain, the very article for which her vitiated fancy was yearning. The temptation was irresistible and unfortunately she was alone. She flew to her little trunk of treasures, drew out her grandmother's beads, and the pedlar's eyes brightened as he saw the pure, rich, old-fashioned gold, knowing their superior value to his own gilded trifles.

'Will you exchange that chain for these?' said she in a faltering voice, for in spite of her vain desire, the very act seemed sacrilege to her conscience.

'That would not be an even bargain,' he replied, and it was true—for the chain was nothing but brass, thinly washed with gold. Clara hung down her head. In proportion to the difficulty of obtaining the bauble, her longing increased.

'That is a very pretty little trunk,' cried the pedlar, 'it would be very convenient to hold my jewels. If you will throw that in, we will strike a bargain.'

Now the trunk was not Clara's. It belonged to her brother. It was the last keepsake bequeathed to him by this same good grandmother, whose legacies of love Clara was converting to purposes of vanity and pride. There was a letter in it, directed to him, with a clause on the envelope, that he was not to open it till he was of age unless he should find himself in some emergency, and especially in need of counsel. The old lady was supposed to possess considerable property, and it was also believed that Edward would be her heir. On her death, however, these expectations proved vain, and her grandson did not honor her memory the less, because he was not enriched by her loss. He took the letter as a sacred bequest, wondering much at the singular injunction, and told Clara to keep the trunk for him, as it was of no use to him, and she would preserve it with more care. Clara knew it was only entrusted to her keeping; and she turned pale at the thought of betraying a brother's trust; but she repeated to herself it was of no possible use to him, that he would probably never enquire for it, and it could not hurt her dear grandmother's feelings, who was sleeping cold beneath the clods of the valley. It was a thing too of so little consequence—and the chain was so beautiful. She emptied the trunk of its contents, gave it hastily into the pedlar's hands, with the beads which had remained on her grandmother's neck till she died, and gathering up the chain, felt—instead of the joy of triumph—self-upbraiding and shame. She would have recalled the act; but it was too late—the pedlar was gone. So poor was the gratification of vanity—but the bitter consequences of a deviation from rectitude she was yet to experience.

When arrayed for the party, she put a shawl carefully round her neck, before she made her appearance, to conceal her ill-got-

ten splendor—but the consciousness of having something to hide from the affectionate eyes that were bent upon her, gave a disturbed and anxious expression to her countenance that did not escape the observation of her brother; and when she saw Fanny in the unadorned simplicity of her own loveliness, she secretly loathed the acquisition for which she had sacrificed her principles of right.

'Let me see you, Clara, before you start,' said Mrs. Stanley—and she added, smiling, 'I hope you have not tried to look too well.'

Oh pray, mother, take care,' cried Clara, shrinking from the dreaded hand that touched her shawl; it will tumble my dress to take it off now. It is only my plain muslin frock,—and hurrying away, with blushes and trepidation, she felt that her punishment was begun. Arrived at Mrs. Clifton's—she became still more dissatisfied, when she saw their elegant hostess, dressed in the simplest attire, consistent with fashion and taste, with no ornament, but a cluster of roses, wreathed amidst locks of gipsy blackness and oriental redundancy. Her piercing eyes rested a moment on the beautiful Fanny, then flashed towards Edward, with a very peculiar expression. He understood their meaning, and an undefinable sensation of pain and displeasure oppressed him. Mrs. Clifton was too polite to confine her attentions to those she most wished to distinguish, but moved amongst her guests, endeavouring, as far as possible, to adapt herself to their different capacities and tastes. She had invited her father's friends, wishing extremely to make them her own, and to convince them that she valued their sympathy and good will.

'You seem dispirited this evening, Mr. Stanley,' said she, as Edward, unusually silent, stood leaning against the harp, from which he had more than once heard such thrilling music;—'perhaps I ought to say, pre-occupied. It may be wise to abstract the mind in the midst of a throng, but I am afraid it is rather selfish.'

'I should think the wisdom consisted in the subject of the abstraction,' replied Edward, 'and I believe I am as unwise as I am selfish.'

'I do not think so, said Mrs. Clifton, and she looked at Fanny, whose serene countenance was beaming from the opposite side of the room. 'Beauty, whether the subject of abstraction or contemplation, fills the mind with the most delightful ideas, and elevates it by the conviction that the hand that made it is divine. I do not agree with the moralist who would degrade it as a vain and valueless possession. The woman who possesses it, may exercise a boundless influence over the heart of man, and if exerted aright how glorious may be the result! Often and often have I sighed for the celestial gift—yet, perhaps, I should be neither better nor happier.'

You,' exclaimed Edward.

It was but a monosyllable, but the most labored panegyric could not have been half so expressive. The clear olive of Mrs. Clifton's cheek was coloured with a brighter as she laughingly resumed—'I did not solicit a compliment, but its brevity recommends yours. I know I am not handsome. I cannot be if beauty depends upon lilies and roses. In the gay and heartless world I have learned to shine as others do, and have tried the rules of art. My life has been passed much with strangers. You, Mr. Stanley, surrounded as you are, by all the sweet charities of home, living in its warm and sunny atmosphere, you do not know the coldness and the loneliness of the brotherless and sisterless heart.'

She spoke in a tone of deep feeling, and cast down her eyes with a deep expression of profound melancholy. Edward did not attempt to reply. He could not embody the new and overpowering emotions that were filling his soul, and he would not utter the common-place language of admiration. He felt like a man who had all his life been walking in darkness, and a dream had all at once awakened in a blaze of light.—Several now gathered round Mrs. Clifton, entreating her to play; and Edward availed himself of the opportunity of drawing back, where he could listen, unseen by her, to the melodious songstress of the hour. He looked at Fanny, who was now near the instrument, and compared the calm feeling of happiness he had enjoyed in her society to the tumultuous tide that was now rushing through his heart.

'I have loved Fanny like a brother,' thought he, 'ignorant of a deeper passion. And now I am a man and a fool!—'

A hand was laid upon his arm. 'Brother, are you not well? You look pale to-night.'

Clara was looking anxiously in his face, and he saw that her own was flushed with excitement.

'Yes, Clara, I am well—but what has disturbed you? Indeed I noticed before we left home that something seemed to weigh upon your spirits. Tell me the cause?'

She drew her hand affectionately through his arm, and for the first time noticed her new ornament.

'It is not the weight of this new chain that oppresses you,' said he, lifting it from her neck—'though it does feel rather magnificent. You have never showed me this new gift of yours. Who could have been the donor? and he thought of Mrs. Clifton.'

'Do not speak of it here,' whispered Clara, with so much embarrassment, it confirmed Edward's suspicions with regard to the donor; and though he regretted the nature of the obligation, he could not think it was prompted by kindness to an observation of Clara's imitative decorations. The truth was, Clara had been ex-