

I hurried as I was, the nosegay in my hand, to the end of the avenue. He asked me 'who it was for?' I said 'for my mistress, who was passionately fond of flowers.' Then again, he blamed me for having prevented him, by my indiscreet talkativeness, from enjoying the satisfaction of contributing to your pleasure in that respect. He also asked me, 'if he brought some choice blossoms, would it be possible for me to mingle them with others, so that you would not discover the imposition?' I said, 'yes,' and he came this morning himself with these, not wishing, as he said, 'to send his servant, lest it should in any way compromise you.'

Compromise! the word startled Eva, and she commanded her to take the flowers away instantly—to keep them or destroy them, as she liked, but never to attempt, on any account, to introduce any more into her apartment.

Greatly incensed, the attendant caught up the floral treasures and darted out of the room, dropping half of them on the way. One, a superb Provence rose, fell almost at Eva's feet, and as the door closed upon her maid, she raised it, exclaiming:

"Surely, surely, I may keep this. 'Tis too beautiful to destroy, and besides, the giver at least deserves that much at my hands."

She placed the rose in a vase, looked long at it, and then murmured with a sigh:

"Oh! how I should like to know him!"

Shortly after, Mr. Arlingford's voice was heard in the hall, and Eva quickly descended to meet him; but neither his presence nor the difficulties of the French lecture, could drive entirely from her thoughts the remembrance of the flowers, nor of their interesting and handsome donor. Her companion at once perceived her pre-occupation, but he made no comment at the moment, and they proceeded with the task, of which Eva acquitted herself rather indifferently. Mr. Arlingford often devoted a half hour to conversation, at the end of the lesson, and those moments of quiet intercourse were among the happiest of Eva's existence. At her urgent request, he had recounted to her almost every incident he could remember—of his boyhood and that of his brother Florestan; and she had listened and questioned till she was as familiar with their history as himself. That day, however, when he closed the volume, Eva had no eager question to propose, no childish remark to offer, and after a brief silence, he exclaimed:

"You seem unusually pre-occupied to-day, Eva. Would it be unfair to ask what you are thinking of?"

The question dyed Eva's face with crimson, and she half hesitatingly, half smilingly rejoined:

"Oh! I would not tell you for the world. You would think me so vain, so foolish!"

"'Tis a secret, then, my little friend? I thought you had none."

"Well, I have but this one, and I would not wish for another, for I am annoyed and embarrassed enough as it is."

"A sure remedy, Eva, would be to disclose it. It would not trouble you then."

"Ah! but I have not courage to do that. True, I have promised never to conceal anything from you; but I know you will free me from my promise in this case."

"Certainly, had Eva, I would not be so unreasonable as to seek to force your confidence; but do, like a good, sweet child, reveal it, if 'tis of any importance, to your governess or to lady Huntingdon."

"Why, Mr. Arlingford!" rejoined his companion, in tones of earnest surprise. "Do you imagine, for one moment, that I would reveal any secret I possessed, to mamma or Mrs. Wentworth, in preference to yourself? On the contrary, I would tell you many things that I would not, that I dare not, breathe to them."

"Many thanks for the assurance, Eva. 'Tis most flattering, if I can only put implicit faith in it."

"Ah! I see, Mr. Arlingford, that you doubt me. Well, I will convince you at once, by revealing to you this, my first, my only secret; even though you will laugh at me—even though you will deem me vain and foolish."

With a heightened colour and many an embarrassed pause, Eva faithfully recounted the episode of the handsome unknown, up to the flowers he had sent that morning, and then, she abruptly paused. Mr. Arlingford's countenance, which had become somewhat grave during the relation, cleared again, and he smilingly exclaimed:

"Is that all, Eva! Have you omitted nothing?"

"Yes, one circumstance," and the colour mantled to her very brow as she spoke. "It is," she added, with a desperate effort; "it is, that I was foolish enough to preserve one of his flowers, and—and to wish very much to meet him again."

Her companion, despite his efforts, could not repress his smiles, and he laughingly exclaimed:

"Well, my little friend, I grant you full and free absolution for that, as well as the rest. The admirable candour with which you have told your story, would alone have atoned for faults of double, treble the extent. But, you do not know the name of this mysterious personage, who puzzles you so deeply with his flowers and devotion?"