

Mrs. Vernon replied somewhat sadly, "that it might be so, and that she never would wish to stand in the path of Ida's advancement."

"Nay, say no more, dear Mrs. Vernon," interrupted her companion, who had marked her reluctance. "If the project meets not your approbation it shall be abandoned forever, and the young lady shall never know that it was even entertained for a minute; but if it should prove otherwise, and that you and your husband should consent, after deliberate reflection, to entrust her to my charge, I would ensure her not only a favorable introduction, but a flattering reception in the fashionable world. How old is she now? Seventeen, I should think."

"No! she is but fifteen, and some months."

"But fifteen! wonderful! But then she is so tall, and her carriage is so easy and self-possessed! 'Tis all the better, for if you and Dr. Vernon should agree to entrust her to me, I shall present her this season. She is indeed very young, almost too young; but then her want of fortune makes a material difference, and 'tis better to introduce her, while she yet possesses the freshness and delicacy of extreme girlhood. But you have not yet answered me. Give me your decision, and whatever it be, I shall submit to it, unmurmuringly; only premising, that if it be in my favour, it will prove of incalculable benefit to the child herself."

"Then be it as your ladyship desires. As I have before said, I shall never interfere in any plan which may redound to Ida's advantage; but still she must have a voice in the matter. She herself shall decide, whether she stays, or accompanies you."

This was said with a half sigh, for too well Mrs. Vernon knew the choice that worldly heart would make, whilst Lady Stanhope smiled in anticipated triumph. One glance at Ida had told her that she was as little suited to the monotony of a country life, as it was repugnant to her tastes, Mrs. Vernon rang for the servant, and told her to send Miss Beresford. After some time she was heard leisurely approaching, and with her usual ease, she entered the room.

"Ida, my dear," said Mrs. Vernon, "I have sent for you, to introduce you to Lady Stanhope, your god-mother, and maternal relative." Her ladyship advanced a few steps, but Ida made no movement towards her, and after a cold bow she turned to Mrs. Vernon, exclaiming, somewhat bitterly:

"Lady Stanhope claims relationship rather late. You, madam, are the only friend, or relative I possess, or acknowledge."

"Ida! Ida!" hastily ejaculated Mrs. Vernon;

but Lady Stanhope's deepening colour, and kindling eye, proved the taunt had told well. An embarrassing pause succeeded, during which Ida unflinchingly met the steady gaze of her aristocratic relative; who, to speak the truth, when the first feeling of anger had subsided, was charmed with her haughty independence.

"She is a true Stanhope," inwardly thought the lady, "and if she is ruled by me, she will yet rise even above the station she has lost; but I see, I must be conciliating, nay humble, or she will reject my offers with scorn."

Accordingly Lady Stanhope rejoined with her blindest smile.

"I feel your reproach, and much as it has pained me, cannot but acknowledge its justice; but permit me now to make atonement for former neglect; yes! Ida, if you are willing, I shall restore you to that brilliant position which you are entitled by birth and education to fill; and believe me, your *debüt* will not be the less successful because it is made under my auspices."

Ida's dark eyes flashed with almost overpowering brilliancy; as, losing in that moment of wild delight, all her habitual proud reserve, and self-possession, she sprang to the side of Lady Stanhope, exclaiming in quick, vehement accents:

"What! will you really befriend me as you say? Restore me to London; that earthly paradise, which fills my thoughts by day, my dreams by night! Will you make me again the Ida Beresford of yore."

"Yes, all that, and more," returned Lady Stanhope, as she rested her hand on the rich tresses of the weak, vain girl, who so eagerly longed to exchange the quiet, happy home, she possessed, for the heart-burnings and selfishness of the world. Mrs. Vernon mournfully gazed upon her. 'Twas what she had expected, and yet it grieved, deeply grieved her. A feeling of tender compassion filled her heart, and when Ida next encountered her soft eyes, they were filled with tears. This somewhat sobered down her wild exultation, and in a low tone, she murmured:

"But you have been kind, patient and generous, when others cared not, thought not of me. How can I consent to leave you forever?"

"There is no forever in the case," said Lady Stanhope, with a smile; who thought that Ida, childish and vacillating, was now shewing in the most unfavorable light in which she had as yet seen her. "We can easily accommodate matters; you shall spend one half of your year in town, with Lady Stanhope, the other half in the country with Mrs. Vernon. That is, if this arrangement meets with Mrs. Vernon's approbation."