

"I ought to be very much offended with you, for refusing to grace my ball."

"You are very kind," replied Annie, blushing deeply, "I hope Mrs. Fludyer explained why."

"Oh yes, Mrs. Fludyer explained," interrupted Lord Randolph, apparently amused at her confusion; "did you think of me during the storm, and reflect on all the mischief it would cause my fine preparations. No, I see you did not—it is an ill wind, says the proverb, which blows nobody any good—it swept away my flowers, and carried them down the stream to you, did it not?"

Annie could not withstand the arch expression of his fine countenance—a smile played on hers. He pressed the hand he had retained while speaking, and added warmly, in a lower tone, "I congratulate you from my heart—he is a noble fellow—and you have gained more than perhaps you are aware, and you deserve it."

"I do not think Miss Bertram so beautiful as she is considered," whispered the fashionable young lady, who was present, to her mama, "that rustic colour is so unbecoming."

"She has certainly nothing very *distingué* in her appearance, my dear," replied the portly matron, drawing herself up, "but then you know she has not had many advantages. I dare say she is a very good girl."

"She is the most charming creature I ever beheld," said Lord Randolph, warmly, who had overheard these remarks, as Annie left the room with Mrs. Fludyer; "her real nature and simplicity are quite refreshing, after the constant affectation of those qualities, one so frequently meets with. She speaks in her own tone—her smiles, her laugh, thrill you with delight, because they proceed from her heart. *Self* appears forgotten while she is conversing with you. Yes, Selby is a fortunate man—but he is, one, who will fully appreciate the prize. I know him well; he is one of the best of beings."

"A very plain one," remarked the young lady in a low tone. A slight curl on Lord Randolph's lip, explained his thoughts. As I looked at him, I could not help mentally saying: "You are a magnificent creature, but I should not like to rouse your anger."

On Annie's return, after her consultation with Mrs. Fludyer, I rose at her request, to pursue our drive. Lord Randolph assisted us into our pony chaise, saying gaily: "Addio cara; we may meet again ere long. Behold that pretty little village church, peeping from amidst those trees; its white fane gleaming in the sunbeams—shall that be our place of rendezvous; say, will you promise?"

"I may not promise," replied Annie, softly, laughing as the colour flew back to her cheek.

"Not if he has promised?"

"Ah, I see you will—farewell; I will not fail you."

Annie gracefully bowed, as she drove away, while

I perceived Lord Randolph still standing where we had left him, until we were out of sight.

At the gate of the parsonage, we met Mr. Bertram, with a letter in his hand, which he held up, smiling, to Annie. She sprang like a fawn from the little carriage, to receive her treasure—it could only be from *one*, and she ran with it into the house. A letter from those we love, how powerful are its charms—the well known hand-writing is a talisman of enchantment—the very fold, the seal, possessing the power to cause happiness—while the bearer, be he who he may, becomes an object of deep interest.

Who has not felt this in this vale of separation, where we meet but to say farewell.

Annie's pursuits at this time were not confined to self—I constantly visited with her, the poor in the neighbourhood, and her little school; while rich were the treasures she gained daily in the study of her excellent father.

It was in one of our pleasant walks to the village, that I ventured to say to her, as we strolled along, conversing on those subjects most interesting to us.

"Tell me truly, dearest Annie, what made you first take so warm an interest in our valued friend, Captain Selby."

She replied, in that delightful, ingenuous manner, so natural to her—

"It was the story of his mother. As I gazed on him while relating it with so much feeling—I thought—and this being, once so beloved, so tenderly watched over—is now alone in the world. I have beheld him looked on with contempt for his plain appearance—whose form, whose footsteps, whose voice, gave such happiness to the tenderest parent. If she could behold him now, neglected, coldly received, what would be her surprise—her grief. These reflections led me to give him more of my attention—I delighted in entering into those subjects with him, which reminded him of earlier, happier days. In the flower garden, he would watch more particularly over those which his mother had most loved—and these I made my favourites. He would point out to me passages in his books, marked by her hand, and constantly dwell on the hours he had passed in reading aloud to her—I listened till I felt an interest, becoming daily more powerful—I studied to make him happy—but I knew not that he held the power to confer it on me; till those few days he was absent—then, indeed, I discovered how painful it would be were I never to see him more. His very appearance produced a tenderness far greater than had he possessed a handsome exterior. I loved him the more, because I thought others would look coldly on him—I now love him because I am proud of him, as one of the best, one of the noblest of men—as I think him one of the finest."

"Annie, your sentiments charm me," I replied