

thering courage from the very depths of her confusion, she at length vehemently exclaimed:

"And if I have stooped to falsehood, if I have unblushingly denied the truth, who is to blame? You, Sydney, you alone. It was to avert your stern anger, your bitter reproaches, that I have degraded myself as I have done."

"My stern anger, my bitter reproaches—never have I heard that accusation from other lips than yours, Florence, and 'tis a painful thing to know that the first human being who has ever feared me, is my plighted bride, she from whom, above all others, I would keep that sad lesson."

For some time they rode on in silence, his pale countenance betokening his inward emotion, whilst Florence's brow wore a look of careless indifference which she was far from feeling. Oh! well had it been for her then, had she listened to the secret whisperings of her own heart, which told her to end the disgraceful part she was acting—to unbend from the haughtiness so foreign to her character, and instead of braving her incensed lover, to seek his forgiveness. But Miss Westover's baneful counsels had taken deep root in her weak, unformed heart; already she deemed that she was reaping the good effects of following them. Never had the earl proved more tractable, and never had she been less humble or conciliating. Yes, Miss Westover was surely right, and she would obey her to the letter. In the midst of her virtuous resolves, they arrived at the bank of a narrow, but deep stream, which after flowing through many a shady dell, and velvet lawn of the park, dashed over a high ledge of rock, falling in a shower of living diamonds. Florence, who was a splendid horsewoman, bounded over the rivulet with fearless grace, and St. Albans quickly followed, but as he did so, he contemptuously cast the unlucky book which had fallen like an apple of discord among them, into its depths, exclaiming:

"Thus, Florence, do I cast from me all faith, all belief, in your sincerity or honour."

"'Twere better for you to stoop then, my lord, and gather them up again, as quickly as you can, for, believe me, I shall make no effort to restore them to you," was the haughty rejoinder.

"Florence, for both our sakes have done with this. You are trying me too far," he returned, with a wonderful effort of self-command.

"No, 'tis you, lord St. Albans, who are trying my patience and submission beyond all bounds," returned his companion, who was now getting into the spirit of the thing, as she fixed her sparkling eyes upon him, with an expression of haughty defiance, such as he had never yet beheld her wear.

"Good God! Florence, how fearfully you are changed!" exclaimed the earl, involuntarily recoiling from her; "or is it," and a smile of the bitterest scorn curled his lip, "or, is it that you are only appearing now for the first time in your true character? Pardon me, but have you not thrown off the mask rather prematurely?"

"Nay, 'tis you, my lord, who have been masquerading, not I—you, who beneath your apparent gentleness and diffidence, have concealed so stern and unrelenting a spirit—you who have taught me to shrink before your anger, to tremble at your frown; but I will do so no more. I will assert a little of my rights, and prove to your lordship, that I do not intend allowing myself any longer to be tutored like a child, or rather ruled as a slave."

"By Heaven! this is too much!" passionately ejaculated the earl, dashing his spurs into his steed. The animal bounded impetuously forward, but the rider suddenly reined him in, murmuring: "I will have patience yet awhile."

Turning towards Florence, his face pale but perfectly composed, he exclaimed:

"Words have passed between us, which I would give worlds to recall—to blot out from the pages of the past. That may not be, the hideous shadow of discord and anger hath already fallen between us, but let it not be so again. Drop the false character you have assumed, for, I know—fortunately for you—know that you are but acting a part, and that this haughtiness or bravado belongs not to your character. Now, mark me," and his brow grew rigid, "if I thought for one moment, that you were the proud, unwomanly being you have just affected, we should never look on each other again. I would leave home, friends, title, go to the uttermost ends of the earth, rather than wed eternal misery, by uniting my destiny with thine. These are harsh words, still 'tis better for me to speak them now, than at a later period. But we have not done yet. From my experience of your character, I feel convinced that you have not acted thus without a prompter, and I insist on learning who that prompter is. Certain am I 'tis not the gentle, pure-minded Nina Aleya. Answer me, then,—who has dared to poison your heart thus, to instil into your heart such detestable maxims? I request, I insist upon knowing."

"You ask in vain; if it were even so, honour would command me to be silent, my lord."

"I commend your principle," returned the earl, in an accent which savored strongly of disdain. "Honour is a sacred thing, but honour does not prohibit me exercising my powers of judgment and reflection. Yes, I will tell you who has fitted you for the scene you have just