

you," and again her eyes closed and she slept. From that hour her convalescence, though slow, was assured, and Miss Murray's devotion was rewarded by the certainty that her patient would soon be restored to life and health.

A few words now about Nina Aleyn. A conversation which we will transcribe for our readers, and which passed between Miss Murray and Florence about a fortnight after the evening which had operated so beneficial a change in the condition of the latter, will at once put them in possession of everything important relating to our other heroine. Florence was lying on her couch, her eyes closed, whilst her aunt, seated at her side, scarcely dared to turn the leaves of the book with which she strove to enliven the heavy weariness of the sick room, lest their rustling might disturb the sleeper. Suddenly the latter raised herself on her arm, and exclaimed:

"Tell me, aunt Mary, how long have I been ill?"

"About three weeks, my child," and Miss Murray gently adjusted her pillows to support her in an upright posture, her heart beating with secret joy, for it was almost the first indication of consciousness or interest in external objects, which Florence had as yet given since the commencement of her illness.

"Three weeks," she murmured.

"Now, dear aunt, tell me, I conjure you, without falsehood or equivocation, what has become of lord St. Albans? Do not fear to agitate me,—you see I am calm, quite calm."

"My darling Florence, you had better not distress yourself with such subjects. You are too weak yet."

"Oh! no; suspense is worse than certainty. Speak, speak, I am prepared to hear all, everything."

"Well, my child, as he mentioned in his letter, he has gone abroad. St. Albans' castle is shut up, and his town residence advertised for sale. Young Clinton left a few days before him, after disposing of all his property at a great sacrifice."

"And Nina?" ejaculated Florence, convulsively closing her hands, but articulating with singular distinctness.

"Alas! for her, poor child!" said Miss Murray, averting her head to hide the tears which gushed to her eyes. "Feeling she could know neither peace nor happiness in our stranger land, she has returned to her early home."

"Say, did she forgive me, did she ask to see me, ere she went?"

"Yes, my child, and her last evening was spent at your bedside, though you were insensible to the tears she shed over your sufferings, or the cares she lavished upon you."

"And did she take it much to heart, aunt Mary? did affliction overwhelm and prostrate her as it has done to me?"

Miss Murray was silent a moment, and then, even at the risk of adding to the depression of her young companion, she replied:

"Florence, Nina sorrowed as a christian; yet, even despite her resignation and her patience, the tale of suffering is as plainly stamped on her face, as on yours. Yet, to me, she uttered no complaint, no murmur, whatever; she only entreated me to permit her to depart from a home and a country which recent events have rendered insupportable to her. You ask if she grieved as much as you have done. Well! the roof she returned to, is poor, and inhospitable; the guardian of her youth a cold and loveless woman, and her husband a rude tyrant. Judge, then, if the regret which has driven her to such an alternative, is deep or not. She accompanied the Honorable Mrs. Morris, who was married a few weeks since, on her bridal tour to Switzerland, less as a companion, than a ward, for Mrs. Morris, who has promised to deliver her up safely to her former guardian, the instant they arrive, has assured me, she will treat her with the affection and care of a sister. You remember she took quite a fancy to Nina during the couple of times she happened to meet her here."

"'Tis well for her," whispered Florence; "she is out of reach of my cruelty and unkindness."

After a moment she added, with a smile, sadder in its sickly misery than the most passionate lamentations.

"To-morrow was to have been my wedding day. Ah! aunt Mary, will it not be a sad one?"

Miss Murray could not command her voice sufficiently to reply, and Florence covered her face with her hands; but the bright drops slowly trickling through the white fingers, told that memory and sorrow were busy at her heart. Suddenly she turned to Miss Murray, and in quick gasping accents, sobbed:

"Take me away, aunt Mary, from here. Take me abroad, any where; I care not whither, so that I may lay down my weary head, sheltered, shielded, from public mockery and scorn. We must go to-morrow, to-day, it will kill me to stop longer here—here, 'mid scenes where every object recalls to me all I have lost, all I have madly thrown away. Oh! my heart is breaking!"

"Florence, my child, I implore you to be calm. This agitation will bring on a relapse. Yes, we will go abroad, when you like; but you are too weak yet. I will prepare everything; no strangers, not even our most intimate friends, will be admitted to see you on any account, and when you are