

awoke from his dream with a start, which made Lord Newbury smile, and whisper to Lord Bernard Stuart.

"You were very anxious for your fair cousin, Captain Audley," said the King. "It must make your mind easy to see her under the roof of such a friend as the Lady d'Aubigny, and so well recovered, too, from her late malady."

"Sir," said Frank, "a life-time will not be long enough to shew the Lady d'Aubigny my gratitude."

"And what will Sir Marmaduke Lyne say, when he returns from the war? On my honour, Lady Kate, you will scarce be able to bear the load of so many thanks."

"Your Majesty may tell them that I would far sooner be without such a load," said Lady d'Aubigny, smiling.

"That we doubt not," said the King, and he moved on to speak to the Duchess of Richmond, leaving Dorothy more loyal, if possible, than ever before.

The evening passed on, and the guests, following King Charles's example, went away early to their several lodgings. Only Frank remained, talking with the ladies by the wood-fire that blazed up cheerily on the Warden's hearth. He was a privileged person, and what could be pleasanter than lingering there after all the rest were gone, with Lady d'Aubigny and his cousin Dorothy. Presently, her Ladyship got up, and moved towards the door.

"Stay till I come back," she said to him; "I am going to kiss my boy, and wish him pleasant dreams."

Dorothy sat still, gazing into the fire, and Frank leant against the high-carved mantel-piece, gazing at her, but she seemed quite unconscious.

"Could anyone have been more kind, more gracious, than the King was!" exclaimed Dorothy, after a minute's silence. "Do you not love him, Frank?"

"Yes! I am his loyal servant."

"If I could but do anything for him," she went on, with the enthusiastic manner that Frank had so often seen before. "I would not mind what I went through,—what pain,—what danger,—so that I could but serve him in any way. I wish I was anything but a poor weak girl, of no use

in the world, only a trouble to my friends."

"Only a trouble!" repeated Frank, in a low, deep voice.

"Ah, yes! nothing better," said Dorothy, clasping her hands together, while her eyes suddenly filled with tears. "Every one is very good to me,—you, Frank, and Lady d'Aubigny, and all,—but what am I, except a burden and a charge?"

Could she be in earnest? her cousin thought as he looked at her: did she not know what she was to him? He paused a moment, and then spoke suddenly:—

"Dorothy, we have known each other for many years now, and I have always loved you better than life itself. A brother's love is very deep, but mine is far deeper. You feel yourself lonely and unprotected: may I not protect you, as you are my dearest treasure? My sweet cousin, as you once gave me a rose, will you not now give me yourself?"

Frank was no longer leaning against the chimney-piece, but standing before Dorothy, speaking in eager, earnest, hurried tones, and watching her face as he spoke. His life-long affection had found words at last. But she only looked frightened and distressed, turned first red, and then pale, and seemed hardly to understand him. She rose from her chair, and glanced towards the door, when he began to speak again.

"Do not you believe me? Cannot you imagine that I have never dreamed of any face but yours, and have lived in the constant hope of calling you one day my own? You might, indeed, have a richer and a nobler lover, but never a truer one. Look at me, dear, and tell me that I may guard you all my life long. Give me your hand, Dorothy: see, I ask for it on my knees."

Of all the troubles that beset the maiden of Dering, this was almost the worst. That Frank, who had always been like a brother to her, should suddenly declare himself her lover, and that she should be obliged to wound so old and dear a friend, and perhaps estrange him for ever: what could be worse? For the idea of accepting Frank's offer never even occurred to her mind. She turned away, and wiped the tears from her eyes, but they only flowed faster.