

Fleming was still alive. Aye" said the old peasant, drawing close to her and lowering his voice to a whisper. "Miss Alice, and he did ax me if you had a sweetheart."

"That was rather an impertinent question, Michael," said Alice, colouring. "And what answer did you make?"

"I knows," replied the old man, with a shrewd nod of his head; "but I'm not a going to make other folks as wise as myself. Be sure, Miss Alice, I gave him a cunning answer—and then he lapped his arms together, and sythed so loud, that my poor Amy did say as how she thought the old man had a mind to you himself!"

"Michael," said Alice, gravely; "This is a conversation from which I can neither derive pleasure nor improvement. In truth, my good old friend, it savours a little of folly. So pray dismiss the subject."

"Why, Miss Alice, I must confess that it's no proof of wisdom. But an old man will have his joke, so I hopes you'll forgive me. I mean no offence. But as I was going to tell you, it was quite a pleasure to my daughter and me to see how the good stranger took to the little ones. The rogues all got round him. He kissed Bill, and took Johnnie on his knee; and gave them sixpences apiece—and when the babe cried, nothing would satisfy him but he must quiet the child himself—and a better nurse for a man I never seed. I warrant he has been well used to that job. None but a father could have handled the little one so cleverly as he did."

"You do not know who or what he is?"

"No, Miss Alice, there's the pity. He's a stranger in these here parts. Our neebors will have it that he's a foreigner. One of them there folk who run away from France and Spain, because they can't live in them. Ragga-muffins I thinks they call em."

"Refugees," said Alice laughing.

My old dame says that he's lodging at the Abbey Farm; and whether he be a ragga-muffin, or a refugee, Mrs. Hazlewood would have no disrespectful folk to lodge with her."

Never was Alice Linhope's curiosity so deeply excited. During her walk home, her thoughts were entirely occupied by the stranger. On her return, she found her mother in Mrs. Fleming's sick chamber, the old lady having for many days past been confined to her bed. She faithfully related to them all that had passed between her and the stranger; and their surprise far exceeded her own. Mrs. Fleming, in particular, was much interested; and made Alice minutely describe the dress and person of the mysterious old gentleman; but when she mentioned the name of Granger, her grandmother sighed deeply, and sunk back upon her pillow, evidently disappointed and out of spirits.

"Where is Sophy?" said Alice. "I suppose she has gone to the Newtons?"

"No," said Mrs. Linhope, "she told me this morning, that if I wished it she would never go there again."

"I am glad of it," said Alice; "she could derive no pleasure from their society."

"She went to the Abbey Farm," continued her mother, "to carry up a message from me to Mrs. Hazlewood. On her return the servant brought her a note, which appeared greatly to agitate her. I asked—an unusual thing with me—to see its contents; but she threw the paper hastily into the fire, declaring that it was not worth seeing—that it was a nonsensical invitation from Matilda Newton, which she considered as an insult, which required no answer. Shortly after she quitted the room, and has been in her own chamber ever since. Perhaps, Alice, she may inform you of its contents."

"Alas! mamma, there is no confidence between us. Since my cousin's departure, still less than there used to be formerly. Sophia will not listen to my advice on any subject, and experience, I fear, will teach her many bitter things."

Alice left her mother, and went to seek Sophia, thinking that she would be amused by the strange adventure that had happened to her, during her walk. She found her sister in her own apartment, seated at her writing desk, in a dejected attitude, with her head resting upon her folded hands. At the sound of approaching footsteps, she hastily rose, locked up her desk, and appeared to be busy about some lace work. Her face was very pale, her eyes red with weeping, and the whole countenance betrayed a troubled air of disquietude, almost amounting to desperation. Alice tried in vain to read in its perturbed expression what had happened to annoy her. Sophia perceived her aim, shifted her position, and affected an air of indifference, which instead of reassuring her sister increased her uneasiness.

"Dear Sophy," said Alice, taking her cold and reluctant hand; "something must have happened greatly to distress you, or you could not look thus. Do not attempt to hide your grief from me. Tell me candidly what is the matter?"

"Nothing," returned her sister, in a sullen voice.

"I cannot be satisfied with that answer; are you ill, my dear sister?"

"No."

"Can I render you any assistance?"

"None; do not trouble me—I will not answer any impertinent questions."

"But are you sure—quite sure—that I cannot help you?"

"Yes, quite sure," said Sophy, her lips quivering and the tears filling her eyes, as she added, in a softened tone, "My malady is in the heart——" Alice laid her hand upon the Bible.

"No, Alice, no; there is no consolation there for me—or if there is, I cannot bear it now. Shut the