

"You don't seem much overwhelmed with fatigue," Vaughan cried after her.

"No, indeed!" She turned round at the landing, and waved her hand gaily, with the sunniest smile in the world. "I am quite ready to begin the evening all over again."

They all three smiled, very different smiles. Then she disappeared, and so the birth-day fête was over.

PART II.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. HESKETH did not appear down stairs, the next morning. He had caught cold, it seemed, and was now paying the penalty for his chivalric politeness of the night before.

So Caroline announced at the breakfast table, at which she took her usual place only a little after the usual time. It was a lovely morning after the previous day's rain. The most gracious sunshine was making all things radiant out-of-doors; the softest clouds were wafted gently athwart the sky by a southern breeze, that just stirred the pine tops, and caused the silver birch to wave her graceful tresses. All the flowers glowed with redoubled brilliancy of colour; a spirit of cheerfulness seemed abroad.

Caroline looked out on the garden from the low study window, and smiled to herself delightedly.

"O, Vaughan, what a day for Crooksforth! The air is so soft, and the sunshine so pleasant! This sort of day makes me feel as if I could fly!"

"Well, you'll find wings very convenient in mountain Crooksforth," observed Vaughan, who had entered the room with his hand full of letters, just arrived by the morning's post. "Three for my uncle, one for you, George, two for me, and—yes, this one is to Miss Maturin. Carry, surely I know that writing?" He deliberately examined the direction before giving her the letter. "It is, isn't it, from Miss Kendal?"

"Yes," said she, taking it.

She turned away to read it. It was a long letter, apparently, and took more time to peruse than either Vaughan's or his friend's correspondence. The former, having tossed his letters aside, with muttered exclamations at their insipidity, strode to the distant window whither Caroline had betaken herself.

"We're waiting for our coffee," he intimated.