

"But that is impossible for thee," said her father, shaking his head—"I know thee too well."

"Father," said Marguerite, "you have often called me strong; now is the time for me to prove that I am so. But you must help me. You must let Claire marry Maurice."

"Never, Marguerite, never!"

"She loves him, father, and he adores her. He will make her a good husband. It is not his fault that he loves Claire better than me; he cannot help it. She is beautiful as an angel, gay, sweet, bright-hearted——"

"And thou, my Marguerite, art the noblest of women. As for him, he is selfish, heartless and false."

"No, father, he is not heartless, he is not false—he did not mean to be selfish. He deceived himself when he thought he loved me, that was all. Many a one has done the same."

"Yes, many a one among the vain, the weak, the fickle. And shall such a one be made happy with a loving and lovely wife like Claire, after having trampled on such a heart as thine? I say again, never!"

"But you must not say it, father. Do not grieve for me, beloved father. Shall I not have all that sufficed to make me abundantly happy before I knew him? Shall I not have the glorious heavens and the beautiful earth, my beloved father, and my divine art? But before I can be happy you must let Claire marry Maurice. Trust to me, father, he is good, and kind, and honourable, and he will make our Claire happy."

"Well, daughter," said Christian Kneller, "I have never refused thee aught, and I suppose I must not begin now. I am glad thou art not to marry Master Maurice, I own; and I have no doubt thou wilt soon rejoice, in thy escape as much as I do. Kiss me, my brave girl, and let it be as thou wilt."

"That means, father, that Claire has your permission to marry Maurice."

"Yes, yes. To please thee, Marguerite, I would consent to anything."

Marguerite kissed her father gratefully, and then left him to finish his pipe and his afternoon slumber.

CHAPTER XVI.

HOW MARGUERITE BEARS HER PAIN.

THE next few weeks were like a wild bewildering dream to Marguerite, in which past, present, and future seemed all mingled together, filled with a confused throng of fleeting images of misty objects and shadowy faces—vague, unmeaning words and uncertain voices sounding in her ears. When not engaged with her father, she employed herself on Claire's new wardrobe, and other preparations for the marriage, which was to take place immediately. Her only thought about herself was that she must not have a moment's time for rest or reflection. Day after day she persisted in walking to the most distant part of Paris, to make the purchases that were needed; and, coming home foot-sore and weary, would sit down to work at her needle far into the night; till, at last, thoroughly exhausted and worn out, she would throw herself on her bed and in sleep, more resembling the stupor of disease than healthful slumber, find a short oblivion. From this she would waken dizzy and bewildered, only conscious that a burden, no effort could remove and no eye must see, oppressed her, till the truth would pierce her heart with a sudden pang, and she would rush up and hasten to find some work to do—something that might aid in the struggle against thought and feeling, which now filled her days. Yet she looked better at this time than perhaps she had ever looked before. The strained tension of mind, the hurry of spirits, the