

CHAPTER II.

There is a grief which sears the brain
 With fierce and feverish glow;
 And nature's last convulsive throes,
 Is rapture to that pain.
 It thrills the nerves and rends the heart,
 And suffers not a tear to start
 To quench that burning woe.
 Alas! it was my lot to bear,
 And writhe beneath its fiery breath;
 To mock at life, and laugh at death,
 And triumph in despair.

"WHEN I entered the sitting-room, after my abrupt and anxious separation from my betrothed husband, the fire was out, and the girl informed me that my brother had returned from market in a very ill-humour, and was gone to bed.

"I think he heard something in the town about you, Miss, said the girl, 'for I heard him swear in an awful manner to Mr. Miller; and he declared that if the reports were true he would murder you.'

"I made no answer, but took the light from her hand, and bidding her good night, ascended the stairs with a cautious tread. This information was too important not to make a deep impression upon me. Some prying eyes might have discovered the fearful truth, and I could not wonder at Joshua's anger.

"*'Thank God!'* I thought, *'I shall soon be placed beyond the reach of his vengeance.'*

"Yet as I passed the door of the chamber where my brother slept, the thought rushed across my mind, that in all probability I should never see him again—that we were about to part forever—that he was the only relative I had in the world, and that in spite of all his harshness I could not help feeling that the tie which bound me to him was one of nature's strongest links, which could not be severed without the violation of her most holy laws. The yearnings of affection were too strong to be resisted, and I determined to look upon his face once more.

"The door was ajar, and slipping off my shoes, and scarcely venturing to draw my breath, with stealthy steps I entered the apartment. How like a thief, a guilty, self-condemned wretch, I approached the bed where my brother slept! He was buried in profound slumber, yet his countenance still exhibited traces of anger and vexation, yet he looked so like my poor father, that my tears unconsciously fell fast upon his handsome face. He started—I drew back—turning impatiently in the bed, he said in accents peculiar to those who talk in their sleep—

"Is it you, Jane? So you are home at last! If my father had been living you dared not have

acted thus. Thank God! he is dead, and knows not the shame and disgrace you have brought upon us all. Out of my sight, unhappy girl! to bed—and act so foolishly no more.'

"I would have kissed him, but his words overwhelmed me with the most horrible upbraidings. I shrank weeping out of the room, and retired to bed. For hours sleep was a stranger to my pillow; in vain darkness drew around me the curtain of repose; conscience was awake—and I could not close my aching eyes. At length a stupor came over me, and methought I heard a death-bell toll, and a funeral procession passed slowly before me. I started up in the bed and gazed fearfully around. A pale, delicate-looking young female stood at the foot of the bed. Her features were very interesting, but her form was wasted with misery, with that misery which gnaws the heart and preys upon the springs of life. Conscious that an apparition of the dead was before me, a sudden horror thrilled my whole frame—my limbs shook convulsively, and my teeth chattered in my head—my hair stiffened round my brow—my eye-balls swelled as though they would burst from their sockets—I endeavoured to speak, but my voice died away in indistinct murmurs. The figure raised one of its thin, attenuated hands, and said in a voice of warning earnestness:

"Go not to the church to-morrow! Death is in the path!"

"With a shuddering scream I awoke.

"*'Thank God!'*" I exclaimed, *'it is only a dream!'*

"Sleep again overpowered me—again the melancholy form stood before me—again were the solemn words pronounced. I struggled with the horrible vision, but my reason was too weak to overcome the terror which was upon me and which palsied every limb. Three times the awful warning was denounced. I sprang from the bed—the first faint streaks of light were visible in the east—I threw open the window—the fresh breeze passed over my burning brow, and my tears began to flow.

"Does this look like a bridal?' I said, as with trembling hands I attempted to arrange a few things which I considered necessary for my journey. Then the injunction given by Armyn recurred to me, and I concluded that it was his intention to provide me with clothes and money, and I hastily abandoned the task.

"While standing irresolutely at the window, impatiently watching the angry red dawning, I beheld my brother issue from the house. I drew back from the casement, and watched him from behind the curtain. He stopped in front of the