

maid only, her earliest and most intimate friend. She had persisted in wearing her black dress on the occasion, and in reply to the remonstrances of Mrs. Seldon, quietly said :

"It is in vain to urge me—it were mockery to array oneself in garments of brightness, when the heart is clothed in mourning."

She had, however, after long persuasion, permitted a white veil to be thrown over her head, and a band of pearls to confine her dark hair ; but she would wear no other ornaments, and had, even with that intuitive delicacy that characterized her, taken the cherished picture of Delancey from her bosom, and with one last and agonizing burst of sorrow, hid it from her sight.

"I have no longer a right," she said, "to feed my gaze upon an image, the constant presence of which must necessarily unfit me for the faithful performance of those duties, I shall soon owe to another."

When Mowbray advanced to receive her as she descended the stairs, and saw that she had indeed persevered in wearing her mourning garb, a presentiment of evil filled his heart, and he could almost have reproached her, for casting this shadow over his joy. But as he fixed his gaze upon her face, he thought he had never seen it look more exquisitely lovely—her veil floated like a fleecy cloud around its perfect beauty, giving sweet glimpses of the glowing cheeks and lips, to which deep, but not joyful emotion, had restored the vivid hue of health. A stranger might have mistaken the downcast eye, the trembling step, the hurried manner of the usually self-possessed and graceful Annabelle, for the natural timidity of a bride, when in reality the very emotion which heightened the excess of her beauty, and lent disturbance to her manner, arose from the utter abandonment of hope and happiness, to which she had now resigned herself.

When the party, which included Mrs. Seldon, Mr. Denham, who had returned to Willow Brook to act as groomsmen to Mowbray, and Mr. Grayson, a friend of Mr. Hope's, who was to give the bride away, alighted at the church door, Annabelle saw that the petals of a white rose which Mowbray had given her as he assisted her into the carriage, had fallen from the stalk, and were lying in her lap, and as she showered them carelessly upon the ground, and cast the stem away, she happened to look up and caught Mowbray's glance of chagrin. There was a lowering frown upon his brow, and a heightened colour in his cheek, for he had attached a value and a meaning to the gift, trifling as it was, which he was deeply mortified, to see she regarded with so much indifference. It expressed more forcibly than her lips had ever done, the utter coldness of her heart towards him, and had he loved as some men love, he would even at that late moment have turned away, and refused to receive her plighted vows at the altar. He

did not expect fervent love from her, but at the very moment when they were on the point of forming the holiest and most intimate of ties, he found he had deceived himself in hoping that something like tenderness, would be awakened in her soul towards him.

There was another individual in the crowd that had gathered round the church, who witnessed with malicious joy the incident of the falling rose, and the emotion to which it had given birth in Mowbray ; and as the bridal party passed on, a low stifled laugh met his ear. He turned quickly and encountered the restless eye of old Mabel, who had placed herself so as for a moment to impede his progress.

"A fair omen," she said in a hoarse whisper, and bending eagerly towards him ; "but heed it not—pass on, gallant bridegroom,—the priest is waiting—the book is open,—the ring is ready ; and remember ! I have won my reward, even though another snatch the golden circlet from you, before it binds you to your bride."

In an instant she darted away and was lost among the throng. Mowbray started—could she have heard any thing, he thought, to threaten even now an interruption to his happiness. "Impossible ! impossible !" he inwardly ejaculated, and striving to cast off the uneasy sensation that oppressed him, he passed on, and the whole party entered the body of the church. In another minute they stood before the altar, Mowbray with recovered self possession, beside his beautiful betrothed, and the ceremony commenced. But it had not proceeded far, when the door of the church, which had been closed against the crowd without, burst violently open, and a person in a soiled and dusty travelling dress, advanced rapidly up the aisle, vehemently exclaiming, in a voice breathless from haste and emotion :

"Stop, upon your peril ! I forbid those bans !"

The clergyman paused, and the book fell from his hands, while Mowbray, though pale as marble, and dreadfully agitated, turned boldly round and gazed with an air of stern defiance upon the intruder. But unceremoniously thrusting him aside, the stranger cast himself at the feet of the trembling bride, exclaiming in impassioned accents :

"Annabelle, I have returned to claim your plighted faith, and I find you standing at the altar with another—tell me, for I would hear it only from your own lips,—is this man truly the chosen of your heart, and am I remembered but as one dead ? If so, I will never mar your happiness—go on to ratify your vows, and I will arise and depart from you for ever."

No sound issued from Annabelle's pale lips, as she stood gazing statue-like on the sudden apparition of him, whom she had so long mourned as dead. But as the glad certainty that she indeed beheld him still living, forced itself upon her, her bosom heaved, her eyes closed, and unable to support the unexpected joy, she fell insensible into the arms of Delancey.