

Still it was soothing and pleasant to that solitary and friendless man to have the orphan girl so near him, though, why she came so often, and lingered so long about him, he was wholly at a loss to imagine. She herself scarcely knew the nature of her own feelings. That she loved him for his own sake, was scarcely to be supposed; and yet she did love him with a strange kind of tenderness, which made her long to call him father; and one day, when they sat together in the sunshine at his door, and his manner was more than usually cordial, she looked up into his face, and ventured to ask him if she might call him father. But a cloud immediately settled upon his features, and he answered in words which poor Grace was never able to forget.

"No, no, child. You are going too far now. That I like you to come here, I will not deny; and that you sometimes wile away the long hours, and make my life less weary, I can say with truth; but that any other voice than *his* should call me father, is a thing that cannot be. No, no. When you have known what I have known, you will understand how nature has her broken cords, which it would be a poor mockery to pretend to tie again. No, no. I have been a parent, and I have heard the cherub-voice of infancy lisping the name of father. As time rolled on, I have listened to the same sound, until it swelled into more meaning, and sunk into my soul, filling all its vacant chambers with the melody of love. Yes, morning after morning, I have been aroused from slumber, when the early birds had scarce begun their song, by the fond and playful touch of my own, my only child. And now these things come back to me in my desolate old age, and I cannot—no, I must not, let you call me father."

"Forgive me," said Grace, with a voice that could scarcely articulate, "forgive me. I am an orphan. I never knew what it was to use the name of father, or mother."

"Poor child!" said Kennedy; and he took her hand, and drew her so near him, that she ventured for the first time to lean her head upon his shoulder, and weep.

In the mean time, all was peace and joy in the habitation of Mrs. Falkland. It was frequently observed of the good lady herself, that her youth had returned with all its freshness and vigour; for her cheek now bloomed with health, and her step was light and active, as in by-gone days. It was impossible for her son not to notice this change, or to deem it otherwise than cheaply purchased by the sacrifice he had made. Not that he ever estimated very highly the mere personal gratifications he had now given up; the sacrifice was, in the position he had held amongst a certain class of society, who now looked upon him as a sort of traitor to the pledge of good-fellowship which his previous conduct had implied. Nothing was said to him on the subject, for there was a dignity and determination about George Falkland, which effectually repelled familiarity, whenever it was his wish to do so; but his presence became evidently an intrusion amongst his former friends, diffusing over every countenance a silent gloom, like that which would naturally be produced by the entrance of a suspected person into a secret council. He was, in short, considered as a sort of spy upon their actions, and such being the general feeling towards him, it became less difficult to withdraw himself entirely from their society.

Still there were some who entertained for George Falkland more than the common regard of mere acquaintanceship, and who felt a sincere regret to lose from their social circle a companion whose position in society, whose talents, and gentlemanly manners, all combined to render him a valuable acquisition to whatever class he might attach himself.

With the friends it was a real difficulty to Falkland to maintain the ground he had so recently, and, in their opinion, so unreasonably taken.

"Why should you think so much," they used to say, "of that luckless Kennedy? He was a low fellow, after all, and if he was drowned by the rising of the tide, it has only made us all the wiser, by teaching us not to ride home by the beach when we have been out to dine."

To these remarks George Falkland would sometimes reply with a visible shudder; for, as he told his cousin Grace, he never afterwards could rise from the dinner-table without realizing again the grasp of that clenched hand, when the last hold of the drowning man was upon him.

There was one family in particular, with whom George Falkland always found it difficult to adhere strictly to the resolution he had formed; and on one memorable day, he had just begun to think, that as more than a year had passed since the death of poor Kennedy, he might surely satisfy his friends by remaining

with them at least an hour beyond his usual time. He had even filled his glass again, on the strength of this determination, when his better feelings gained the mastery, and he rose suddenly from the table, and wished the party good-night.

It was a fine moonlight evening in October, when he rode slowly along his lonely way, too happy to accelerate his speed, in the thought that he had escaped, though narrowly, from breaking his solemn vow. Wrapped in these reflections, and the many thoughts to which they gave rise, he was suddenly startled by the sound of a carriage advancing with unusual rapidity towards him; and, drawing up his horse to listen, he heard the clatter of horses' hoofs at full gallop. His next impulse was to alight, and it was well that he did so, for in a few seconds the carriage was before him, and it was only by the steadiness of his eye and hand, that he was enabled to lay hold of the rein of the affrighted animal, and arrest its furious course.

"My father!" cried a feeble voice at that instant, and Falkland then saw for the first time the figure of a female in the carriage, who implored him with all the strength she retained, to assist her to go back in search of her father. With difficulty, however, could she make herself understood, and such was the agitation under which she laboured, that her simple story was long in being told. It was no other than this, that her father having got out of the carriage to adjust the rein, while thus engaged, the horse had suddenly started off, and, as she believed, had dragged the carriage over him; and with astonishing presence of mind, she had remained perfectly quiet, while the horse was going at its utmost speed. Had Falkland been a few minutes later, a sudden turn in the road, with a steep descent on one side, would probably have terminated her existence; while, had his eye been less steady, or his hand less firm, he might never have been able to stop the terrified animal, and thus to rescue from an awful death, the gentle being who now leaned upon his arm, and urged him to go faster, and faster still, though her own strength was scarcely able to support her to the spot where she believed her father to be laid.

What, then, was her astonishment, to see his well-known figure hastening towards her evidently in the possession of his accustomed health and strength. The consequence was a very natural one. Her reason, which had withstood the shock of terror and distress, gave way under that of unexpected joy, and the daughter sank senseless into the arms of her parent.

The following morning found both the strangers welcome visitors beneath the roof of Mrs. Falkland. Miss Cameron, for that was the young lady's name, was sufficiently recovered to know that her father was safe, and by degrees the whole came back to her recollection, and she talked and smiled with the rest of the family, at the providential meeting between her and George Falkland, who did not fail to recall, in his own mind, the temptation he had been under to remain an hour longer with his friends, by which means he would not only have broken a promise now kept inviolate for more than twelve months, but would have lost the opportunity of saving the precious life of a being, who struck his youthful fancy as the loveliest he had ever beheld.

Mr. and Miss Cameron were well known in the neighbourhood but it so happened that they never had been introduced to the Falklands before. Their meeting now was of a kind to make their acquaintance more intimate than years of common visiting could have rendered it; and the first awakening of kind interest to which an awful and alarming event had given rise, was followed by a frequency of intercourse, in which George Falkland considered himself richly rewarded for a few instances of self-denial in which his natural inclination had been crossed; but most of all, for that particular instance which had been the means of introducing him to the society of Miss Cameron.

But why prolong a story of love, which all understand, though few know how to speak of. Suffice it, that not twelve months after this event, the bells of the village church were ringing merrily one fine evening in July, and Mrs. Falkland and her family were all in readiness to welcome home the heir of her house and name, with his beautiful bride, once Miss Cameron, after their marriage tour. And not the inmates of his mother's establishment only, were expected to rejoice, for there were tables spread upon the lawn, and rustic seats made ready, and Grace Dalton was passing from one to another, placing the crowning dish of plenty on the board, and arranging the accommodation of all, even the poorest and the meanest of her neighbours from the village.

At last the sound of carriages was heard. The gates were