

has been whispered to me, to-night. 'Tis worse than death to doubt you."

"Of what am I accused?" she at length, faltered.

"Of what are you accused! If your own guilty heart has not already told you, I will. You are accused then, of hypocrisy, ingratitude, and the basest falsehood—of wearing the miniature of one lover, while you are betrothed to another."

"Of wearing the miniature of one lover," murmured Nina, with a bewildered air.

"Yes! and of cherishing it too," he added, his exasperation increasing with the mention of his wrongs. "Florence asserted that she had held it in her very hands, and worthless as she is, she dared not have invented so maddening a falsehood. Show me that miniature, then—quick, at once,"

and he pointed to the small chain, glittering conspicuously on Nina's dark robe. Her trembling fingers had scarcely time to disentangle it from her dress, when he tore it from her grasp, and with a countenance whose stormy violence no description could render, surveyed the youthful and nobly handsome features it represented—

"Traitor!" he muttered, between his closed teeth, "this, then, is the likeness you cherish, whilst mine is thrown aside in some forgotten nook, looked upon only to smile at the idiocy of the poor fool who gave it."

"Percival! you wrong me much," at length, faltered Nina, recovering in some degree from her stupefied terror. "Hear me, I entreat, I implore of you! Innocent I am, of even one thought that could wrong you. That miniature is Henri Gesner, my childhood's friend, my foster-brother."

"Your Swiss lover, you mean," interrupted Clinton, with a bitter laugh. "Girl, girl! do you take me for a fool, to seek to blind me with such a tale! Had this picture, which you love so well, been old and plain, I might have believed you—yes! even though it has been your fondest companion—even though it has been worn next your heart night and day, in preference to that of your affianced husband. But, not it bears your condemnation in its own devilish beauty—in your guilty face. Look here, how I credit your vain words," and he dashed the miniature on the ground, and crushed it to atoms beneath his feet. Nina, who had recoiled like a frightened deer from his fierce anger, stood pale and silent a few paces from him, trembling in every limb.

Having exhausted his vengeance on the portrait, he turned towards her, exclaiming:

"Aye! thus would I treat the accursed original, were he here. But you need not look so terrified,

so corpse-like. False, worthless as you have proved, do you think for one moment I could harm you? True," he continued, in accents of bitter mockery; "true! I may not have the gentleness, the confiding affection, or the thousand perfect qualities with which you have doubtless invested your cherished *Henri*—but still, fierce, impetuous as I am, it is to be hoped you need have no actual fears for the safety of your life at my hands. You forget perhaps, too, Miss Aleya, that you are now sole mistress of your own actions and affections,—that Percival Clinton has no longer the right to direct the one or engross the other."

"I do not forget it, Mr. Clinton," and Nina's voice, though low, was firmer and more distinct than before. "It was unnecessary for you to remind me of it, for a traitress, a base, unprincipled woman, as you have termed me, could never become your wife. I deem it my duty, however, in justice to myself, to tell you ere I leave you, that the portrait—"

"Silence, Nina! silence on that topic," sternly interrupted Clinton, almost fearing to trust himself to the strange influence of her quiet convincing tones. "Degrade yourself not lower in my estimation, by heaping falsehood upon falsehood. I have loved you deeply, passionately, but not blindly—and no vows, no protestations on your part—no power on earth can ever make you in my eyes what you once were. Speak, if you will! but not of that—speak, if you have any palliation of your guilt to offer—any reason why we should not part for ever."

"None, whatever, Mr. Clinton," calmly rejoined Nina, turning her countenance, which had been partly averted during the two or three preceding moments, full upon him. Though still deadly pale, every other trace of emotion or fear had vanished from it, and in the same low, but composed accents, she continued:

"After what has passed between us, I need not say, my anxiety for an eternal separation equals your own. Though you have wronged me, by insulting suspicions, and bitter words—though you have disdainfully refused me the poor privilege of uttering one word in my own defence—still, I may say, from my heart, I bear you no anger or ill-will. What has passed, has only shewed me my vain folly in daring to dream even for a moment, that happiness might be derived from a union between two so widely, so strangely opposed as we are, in rank, fortune, and every other respect. 'Tis better we should part." And with her customary calm step, she left the conservatory.

Clinton stood gazing after her a moment—a look of restless, uneasy doubt resting on his pale