

grounds of Woodland, which they extended even to the borders of the wood, our happy party returned to the house, when the Sabbath evening closed in praise to Him from whom all mercies flow, and to whose care the Rector, as he solemnly placed the hand of Blanche in that of Lord De Melfort, ere they separated for the night, he committed this his only and most beloved child, in the fullest trust that He who had led her at her tender age to know the blessings emanating from true religion, would not leave the work unfinished in her heart, until the glories of a higher world were unfolded to her enraptured view.

It was with natural feelings of regret that Blanche prepared for her departure, on the morrow, when Lord De Melfort held a long and confidential conversation with her father previous to the arrival of Lady Neville, who came, true to her appointment, to convey her niece to the Priory. The hall was lined with domestics, as the Earl conducted the lovely girl to the carriage, and as she bowed to them in passing, many a kind eye followed her, united to the wish that she might return again to Woodland, the bride of their noble Lord. The Earl affectionately pressed her hand on assisting her into the carriage, taking that opportunity to slip into it a small sealed packet. She turned to him for an instant in surprise, when meeting his tender gaze, accompanied by that smile so peculiarly his own—she sprang in with a heightened colour, unable to utter the words which were hovering on her lips. Lady Neville then reminded him and Colonel Lennox of their promise to dine at the Priory on the following day.

"Fear not our forgetfulness," said Colonel Lennox, "while the magnet is with you, our compass can point but in one direction."

"And you are quite happy now, dearest Blanche," said Lady Neville, folding her niece to her maternal bosom, as the carriage drove down the broad avenue.

"So happy, my beloved aunt," replied Blanche, clasping her hands, while her eyes filled with tears of grateful joy; "that I dread to awaken and find it but a bright vision of the night—would that I were more deserving of the mercies thus heaped upon me—but when I compare them with my merits, how humbling is the comparison."

On passing the spot where her peaceful home had so lately stood, Blanche looked wistfully towards it. Nothing now was to be seen but a blackened heap of ruins, presenting to the eye the very picture of desolation, while the flower garden, completely trodden down and destroyed, added to its melancholy, one human form was alone visible, groping about among the broken and disfigured masses, and this was the gipsy, whose prophetic words now rushed on the memory of Blanche. She raised her head as the sound of the carriage wheels drew near, and meeting the saddened gaze of Blanche, she recognised her at

once, and immediately drawing herself up to her full height, with one hand she held the tattered remains of her scarlet cloak around her, with as much dignity as if it had been an ermined robe, while with the other she pointed towards the ruined house, a lofty air of triumph expressed on her dark and furrowed face. To the enthusiastic mind of Blanche she appeared at that moment like the inspired Pythoness of old, and she almost shuddered as she marked her wild and mysterious gestures. On arriving at the Priory, Blanche was distressed to find Rosetta still so seriously indisposed; she had left her room, but she appeared weak, languid and much dejected; she welcomed her cousin with a glad smile, saying as she embraced her:

"Do not think me selfish when I own that I rejoice in the destruction of the old rectory, since it gives me the happiness of your society. I shall soon be myself again, now you are come to stay with us."

The deep sigh which followed touched the tender heart of Blanche, who kissed the sweet girl with all a sister's love. She determined from the moment of her arrival to devote herself entirely to her, and to exert every power she possessed to divert her from her melancholy retrospections. There was a clinging tenderness in the disposition of Rosetta which exacted much in return for her affection; she once had fondly imagined that in Captain Forester she had discovered one who would amply answer her highest anticipations; but how had she mistaken his character, could she have beheld her idol stripped of the veil in which she had infolded him, how would she have marvelled that she had wasted love on him, who immersed as he was in every thoughtless, wild and sinful indulgence, was incapable of understanding the depths of a virtuous woman's feelings—their purity, and the return they look for. As a lover, he might assume for a time the devotion required to gain his object, but once a husband, how soon would this have been cast aside, and replaced by neglect and a reaction of all his natural propensities. Rosetta knew not this; the glittering exterior had won her young heart, and imagination filled up the picture with its own brightest colours. In the only two private interviews, she had held with him, she could not fail being struck by his irascible behaviour, and his total want of deference to her sense of filial duty; but for these she made excuses, while the idea that he was suffering, and unhappy on her account, rendered her completely so. Blanche at her earnest request, shared her apartment, and became the patient repository of her every thought; with instinctive delicacy, she forbore to touch upon her own happy prospects, until encouraged to it by Rosetta, who appeared warmly interested in all that concerned her and Lord De Melfort.

"I told you that he loved you from the first," she said; "but you would not believe me, and oh how coldly have I seen you return his attentions."