

Amy uttered an exclamation of grief, and sank down on the nearest seat :

"I beseech you, tell me what can have caused such a lamentable catastrophe," she said, bursting into tears.

The woman drew close to her, and, in a low tone of voice, replied :

"I must not let *them* hear me, my lady ; they are in sorrow enough, and good cause have they for it. Yesterday morning, Susan asked her mother's permission to go to the Falcon's Nest ; she said it was for something very particular. Her mother told her she could not spare her, as she wanted her to carry a basket of eggs to the town. Susan looked sadly disappointed, and begged hard for one hour ; when her mother became impatient, and struck her, calling her idle and many cruel names ; and that, if she only went to school to learn disobedience, she had better stay at home. Susan meekly replied :

"Dear mother, I did not mean to be disobedient—I beg your pardon ; give me the basket, I will carry it with pleasure." Dame Grey was softened by this reply, for truly does scripture say that a soft answer turneth away wrath ; and she told her if she made haste back, she might still have time to go to Lady Emily. The child accordingly set out, and wandered some way, until the snow-storm came on—when, in her alarm, she missed the right track. It appears she enquired from many persons the road, but none took the trouble to guide her. The last place where she was seen alive was in a farm-yard, where she had gone for shelter ; from this she was driven out by a large mastiff—when, faint and weary, she laid herself down, with no one near to take pity on her—no door ready to receive her. And this morning she was found by her own father, who had gone out to seek for her, laying quite dead, with her little basket by her side."

The redoubled sobs of Mrs. Grey, when the woman ceased speaking, showed that this tale of woe had reached her ears ; while Amy was so painfully distressed at its recital, that the sudden change from the buoyant, happy feelings with which she had entered the cottage, to the reverse, quite overwhelmed her ; she felt a pang at her heart which drove the colour from her cheek—she gasped—she tried to speak, but she was unable. The woman became alarmed, and threw open the cottage door, to admit the air. Sir Charles was standing outside, apparently in no pleasant mood, for he was stamping his feet, and endeavouring, by various means, to keep himself warm, occasionally muttering invectives against wayward girls and their visits of charity.

"The young lady is ill, sir, pray step in," said the woman, on perceiving him.

Sir Charles threw up his hands and eyes.

"Never will I promise to wait outside a cottage door again on a winter's day, particularly for a young

lady who has been disinherited by her father," were his thoughts on entering.

Amy, in the meantime, had struggled with her feelings ; she felt that the intrusion of strangers, in such an hour of sorrow, was improper.

"I will not stay to add to your trouble," she said to the woman ; "do all you can to comfort these unhappy parents, who I will see when they are more composed ; in the meantime, pray take this," and she placed her purse in the woman's hand, "it may be wanting."

"God bless your ladyship," she replied, courtseying, "but would you not like to step in here, and see the dear child for the last time—she looks so sweet, so calm ?"

"Oh, no, no, not now—I could not bear it," cried Amy, covering her face, and hastening from the cottage, followed by Sir Charles, to whom, as they walked slowly home, she related the story of poor Susan, begging him not to mention it, as she would not like to distress Lady Emily on the day of her brother's arrival.

"A most unfortunate occurrence indeed," replied Sir Charles, tenderly—"I vow, a most unpleasant thing to happen—but see, it is getting quite dusk, and has become extremely cold, and I confess I have no fancy that we should be so lost in the snow—shall we hasten our steps, Signora ?"

Amy tried to redouble her speed ; she thought if Lord Blonderville or Mr. Martyn had been her companions, how different would have been their sympathy in such a heart-rending case, and she spoke no more until they reached the entrance door at the Falcon's Nest, which was opened for them by Vernon. On entering, she perceived Mr. Martyn, walking up and down the hall. She flew towards him, throwing herself into his extended arms, and exclaiming :

"Oh, my own dearest papa, thank God you are come ; but where is *he*—are you not both here ?"

"Yes, my child," replied Mr. Martyn, "Blonderville is gone to his room—it is late ; is it usual for you to take these late walks, Amy ?" and the tone of his voice was grave, if not sad.

"Oh no ; indeed," she returned, while tears rose to her eyes ; "I cannot tell you now what detained me, but you shall know tomorrow."

"You seem agitated and fatigued," continued Mr. Martyn, "you had better retire, my dear child. I only waited here to see you for a moment when you came in," and he led her to the foot of the staircase, and shook his head mournfully as he saw her slowly ascending :

"And is *that* hope to be withered also," he said, clasping his hands together, "and yet thy will, and not mine be done."

Amy found Mrs. Somerville impatiently awaiting her in her own room :