

soothing cares and endearments restored her to life and self-possession, and she soon relieved her aching heart by a burst of kindly tears: then suddenly checking them, she said:

"Now, dear sister, kiss me in honour of our new relationship, and go down and tell the company that if they will have patience one half hour longer, I will still enact the bride most bravely."

"I cannot, indeed, dear Frances; you must exert yourself no more today."

"Now or never," interrupted the invalid. "I shall never have courage for another effort after today. So go, my love. I have need of solitude, and will ring when I am ready to go down."

Emily pressed a kiss on the pale cheek of her beloved friend, and reluctantly descended, to convey the message with which she was charged to the anxious assemblage below; but she could scarcely look without loathing on a man so destitute of all good feeling, so supremely selfish as Major Williams.

The half hour elapsed, and no bell announced the wish of Frances to rejoin the expecting circle.

"I will go to her again," said Emily; "her door has been locked for some time, but it may now be open," and she ascended to the door of the chamber. She knocked, but no voice responded to the summons. She tried the lock and the door opened to her effort, but where was her friend? The "bridal robe" was spread upon a chair; but where was its owner? Emily gazed with apprehension—she searched for the bonnet of her friend, and it was gone. The truth flashed upon her mind, and joy sparkled in her eyes.

"She has fled to avoid this hated marriage, and I rejoice at it."

"And so do I truly," cried a voice behind her. She turned and beheld her husband. He held a letter in his hand. "Here is an epistle to my father which will undoubtedly explain all the mystery of her conduct. We will send for him."

Emily met Colonel Hargrave with "a smile on her lip and a tear in her eye," and told him of the absence of his daughter with mingled emotions of pain and pleasure.

"Dear, unhappy girl!" he exclaimed, "whither can she have fled? How can I excuse this step to the major? how atone to him for this breach of my word?"

"Your honour is still unsullied, my father, for you were ignorant of this step of my poor sister—and as for Major Williams, we will request him to meet us, and hear this letter which Cæsar has just put into my hands. It is from Frances herself."

The major met them in the little parlour—his rage was unbounded, and he threatened vengeance.

"Let us suspend our anger," said Edward, calmly, "until we have learned on whom it is to fall."

Will you read the letter, sir?" addressing his father.

The colonel tore it open, and read aloud:

"Forgive me, dear father and brother,—forgive me, dearest Emily,—for I have deceived you all; but it was unavoidable. I would not mar the happiness of your marriage by leaving you sooner, nor, indeed, so soon, had not my strength proved traitor to my purpose: I would have played the bride for an hour to that unfeeling man, who would thus compel me to be his, when he knew my heart was the property of another, and I would have rejoiced at his disappointment when he discovered that *another* ring than his was already on my finger. Yes, dear friends! I was already a bride, and only waited this event, to make it known to you. At the camp meeting, when the watchful guardian to whom you entrusted me, thought me safe in my apartment, with Amy for my attendant, I slipped out of the tent, met Foster, who was awaiting me for the purpose, provided with the two indispensables, a license and a friend, and we were united in the grove by Emily's friend, the 'Striker.' You have been witnesses of my unhappiness since taking this step, for I have feared its effect upon you, my dear father; but I know your reverence for your own word, and it was my only resource against misery. Pardon us both, dear friends, and we promise never to do so again. Foster has recently received the bequest of a relative, which will place us in comfort, when assisted by his talents for business, and mine for economy. We are near you—send your forgiveness by Amy, who is the bearer of this, and we will hasten to throw ourselves at your feet, and assuredly no hearts will then be more truly happy than those of your own Frances and her husband."

"Thank God!" cried Emily, fervently; "she is safe, and Frances still—this letter is perfectly characteristic. You will complete our happiness by sending for, and forgiving her; will you not, my dear sir?"

"She deserves never to be forgiven," growled the Major. "She is a deceitful!"

"A what, sir?" cried Edward, sternly—"passion deprives you of reason; but I appeal to your honour, sir; has not my sister invariably declared her dislike to an union with you?"

"She certainly has—but if she meant so, why did she consent to it? you will allow she deceived me at the camp meeting?"

Edward's lips trembled; his young bride saw the threatening storm, and hastened to allay it; she pressed his arm as she replied: "I think, sir, this letter fully explains her reasons for her apparent assent to your proposals—but when entrusted to your care, surely you should have guarded your trust better."

"Aye, sir," thundered the Colonel, "she must have met Foster previously to her marriage, where