

undress, after which she dismissed her maid, and burying her head in her hands forgot all but the irrevocable past.

"Past four! a fine morning." Bessie started; and raised her heavy eyes to the window—the monotonous words were repeated. She looked wistfully at the bed; but no—she felt she could not sleep. Her head sank again on her hand; vague feelings of wretchedness and self-reproach weighed on her soul; and too weary, even to weep, she remained listlessly dreaming, till a sudden beam of the morning sunshine lit on the ornaments she had worn the night before, and started her into consciousness. Her clasped hands dropped on her knee as she gazed on the sweet sky which heralded her wedding day. The sun rose higher and brighter—the heavens grew bluer—the indistinct and rarely heard chirping of the earlier birds changed to a confused twittering, varied by loud cheerful notes, and the clear carol of the black-bird and thrush; the fresh wind blew on her weary, aching brow, as if seeking to sooth her misery, and Bessie Ashton sank on her knees, and, stretching out her arms to Heaven, murmured some passionate invocation, of which the only audible words were: "Claude, dear Claude!—Oh! God forgive and help me! *that love is sinful now.*"

Few would have recognised the pale and weeping form which knelt in earnest agony then, in the bride of the evening. Wedded by special licence to an Earl: covered with pearls and blonde: flushed with triumph and excitement: the Countess of Glenallan bent, and imprinted a light cold kiss on the forehead of each of her beautiful bridesmaids: bowed and smiled to the congratulating beings who passed her; received the stiff and self-complacent parting speech of her aunt, Lady Ashton; and descended the magnificent staircase with her happy bridegroom. One adieu alone disturbed her. George Ashton stood at the hall door, and as she passed, he took her by the hand and murmured "God bless you, Bessie!" Involuntarily she wrung the hand she held: involuntarily she returned the blessing; old memories crowded to her heart!—tears gathered in her eyes;—with a burst of weeping she sank back in the carriage, and when