

For about an hour the good clergyman continued reading and praying with the prisoner, and before he left him that evening, he was in his own mind convinced of his innocence. Sadly and solemnly the hours drew on that brought the morn of his execution with death-bed clearness face to face. He had joined in the solemn duties of the Sabbath. It was to him a day of peaceful rest, a foretaste of the quiet solemnity of the grave. In the evening, he was visited by Frederick Wildegrave, who had been too ill after the trial to leave his bed before. He was pale and wasted with sorrow and disease; and looked more like a man going to meet death, than the criminal he came to cheer with his presence.

"My friend and kinsman!" said Frederick, seating himself beside him. "My heart bleeds to meet you thus. I have been sick. My spirit is broken with sorrow, or we should have met sooner."

"You do indeed look ill," replied Anthony, examining the altered face of his friend, with painful curiosity; "and I much fear that I have been the cause of this change. Tell me, Frederick, and tell me truly—do you believe me guilty?"

"I have never for a moment, Anthony, entertained a thought to that effect. Although the whole world should pronounce you guilty, I would stake my salvation on your innocence."

"God bless you! my friend—my true, faithful, noble-hearted friend!" said Anthony, flinging himself upon his breast. "You are right; I am not the murderer."

"Who is?" said Frederick, darkly.

"Anthony answered with a deep sigh!"

"That infernal scoundrel, Mathews?"

"Hush—not him."

"Godfrey?"

"You have said it! Ah, Frederick, had you seen the livid smile that passed over his lip, at the moment that I received sentence, you could not doubt it. The mask fell from my heart. I saw him in all his fell depravity. I heard not the sentence. I saw not the multitude of eyes fixed upon me; I only saw him—I only saw his eye looking into my soul, and laughing at the ruin he had wrought. But think not that he will go unpunished. There is one who will yet betray him, and prove my innocence. I mean his hateful accomplice, William Mathews."

"And can nothing be done to transfer the doom to them?"

"We want proof," said Anthony. "We know them guilty; but the world knows them not—would it believe my evidence—would it not appear like the wolf accusing the lamb. Leave them to the enjoyment of their ill-gotten wealth. I would not waste the few hours. I may yet number on earth, in such vain regrets. How is it with dear Clary? How has she borne up against this dreadful blow?"

Frederick's sole answer was a mournful glance at the deep mourning suit in which he was clad.

Anthony comprehended the full meaning of that sad look. "She is gone," he said. "She, the beautiful—the innocent—yes, yes, I knew it would kill her. The idea of my guilt—alas! poor Clary."

"She never believed you guilty," said Frederick, wiping his eyes. "She bade me give you this letter, written with her dying hand, to convince you that she knew you were innocent. Her faith towards you was strong as death. Her love for you snapped the fragile cords that held her to life. But she is happy—dear child; she is better off than those who now weep her loss. And you, Anthony, you, the idol of her young heart's fond idolatry, will receive her first welcome to that glorious country, of which she is now a bright inhabitant."

"And she died for grief—died because others suspected of guilt, the man she loved. Oh! Clary, Clary, how unworthy was I of you love. You knew loved another, yet it did not diminish aught of your affection for me. Ah! that I had your faith—your love!"

He covered his face with his hands, and both were silent for a long long time. The hush of feeling was so deep that either, had he listened, might have heard the beating of the other's heart.

"Frederick, we must part," said Anthony, at length raising his head; "part for ever."

"I shall see you again tomorrow," said his friend.

"On the scaffold!"

"Aye, on the scaffold, your place of martyrdom."

"This is friendship indeed," said Anthony, pressing his kinsman's hand to his heart. "Time may prove that Anthony Hurdlestone was not unworthy of such love."

Frederick Wildegrave burst into tears and left the solitary cell, and the prisoner was once more left alone, to commune with his own thoughts, and prepare for the awful change that awaited him.

He had shed no tear for the death of Clary. His spirit, weaned as it was from the things of earth, contemplated with a melancholy pleasure the event which had placed his sweet young friend beyond the reach of human suffering.

"She is with the Eternal Present!" he said. "No dark mysterious future can ever more cloud her soul with its heavy shadow. Tomorrow—and the veil will be rent in twain, and our ransomed spirits will behold each other face to face. What is death? The eclipse for a moment of the sun of human life; the shadow of earth passes from before it, and it shines forth with renewed splendour in another hemisphere."

His reverie was interrupted by the entrance of the jailer, followed by a tall figure, wrapped up in a thick riding cloak. "The stranger," he said, "wished to exchange a few words with the prisoner."

Anthony arose from his humble bed, and asked,