

"Why has Edward concealed his intentions from me?"

"It is only since his return that he has had any hope of success, and he intends immediately to entreat your approbation of his wishes."

"Meantime he deputed you to break the ice for him?"

"No, dear papa; Edward knows nothing of the subject of our conversation—the wish to prepare you for his application originated in myself," and she hung affectionately upon his arm, as she added: "you will consent to his marriage, and insist that it shall take place at the same time with my own—will you not?"

The colonel hesitated—a mighty struggle agitated his breast—at length he said:

"I must have time to think, my dear—go and join the lovers and leave me alone."

He handed her to the door, which he closed after her, and resumed his walk.

"And this," he said "is the end of my blissful dreams! dreams!—they were, indeed, dreams of the wildest fancy. That I should have been such an idiot as to imagine I could succeed with a lovely, fascinating girl, when so fine a young fellow as Edward was in pursuit. I hope no one suspects my folly; it is plain that Emily does not, nor Edward, and if Frances' penetration has discovered it, she is too shrewd to allow me to know it. She was in the right to prepare me, or I might have betrayed myself. Poor girl! I wish I could repay her for her disinterested affection, but it cannot be in the way she wishes," and he sighed heavily. "I must find my own happiness in securing that of Edward and Emily, and will immediately write her friends upon the subject."

As Frances tripped after her friends, her meditations were upon the course she had adopted.

"Well," she thought, "that duty is done, unpleasant as it was, and I have saved my father from exposing himself to my brother, and Ned from the disagreeable idea that he is his father's rival; and now for one more trial for my own happiness. Oh! if he would free me from that hateful major!"

She soon made the trial, and returned weeping from the interview. Her father was inflexible, from his rigid sense of honour, from the forfeiture of which he declared only the major could release him. She threw herself upon that gentleman's generosity—but the prospect of uniting himself to wealth and beauty, even though accompanied by hate, was too delightful to be relinquished, and the poor girl left him in utter detestation of his selfishness. Edward was more fortunate—he sought and obtained the consent of his father to his marriage with Emily, who was acknowledged as a daughter by the colonel, and as a sister by Frances.

As pleasure does not actually hasten, so neither does pain retard the wheels of time, which "rolled

their ceaseless course," bringing nearer the fated morning, so ardently desired by one party, so vehemently dreaded by the other. The cheek of Frances grew pale as it approached, and Emily could not witness without distress the altered appearance and strange manner of her friend—now full of that wild merriment which indicates strong excitement—and again drooping in silence and sadness. She sought Colonel Hargrave.

"I am come," she said, "to entreat you to spare our dear Frances. May I not claim your promise to that effect?"

"I remember no promise to that effect, Emily. I offered to delay her marriage on certain conditions."

"Which are acceded to," replied Emily, blushing.

"Perhaps so; but Frances declines any delay. Believe me, I would willingly make any sacrifice, but that of honour, to release her from her unhappy engagement. Poor girl! her father's heart bleeds while he compels her to obey him. Comfort her as well as you can, Emily, and tell her she may still defer her marriage, and we will have but one wedding today."

Emily hastened to her friend, and repeated the conversation.

"And does papa think I will relinquish my share of the bustle today?" she gaily answered. "No, no; but I will allow you the honour of being tied first and then what an interesting bride I shall make! like Niobe, all tears—a happy man the major will be!"

"Frances, I cannot understand you of late—surely you intend to do nothing rash?"

"Nothing, I assure you, but to stand up beside you, and become a pretty bride after you; so now rest easy, and let us hasten to dress, for I do believe the good parson is already here."

At twelve, the hour appointed for the performance of the double ceremony, the two brides elect were led into an apartment filled with expecting friends, by their happy lovers. In dress they were alike—but while the cheek of Emily was suffused with the blush of the rose, that of Frances was whiter even than its snowy sister flower. The bridal ring was placed upon the finger of Emily by her exulting Edward, and the voice of the priest pronounced them one—united by a higher, holier power. He then hurried to commence the same sacred ceremony with the other pair—but Frances was fainting, and was caught in the arms of her anxious parent, only in time to prevent her falling to the floor. He bore her from the apartment, followed by Emily, and the major would have accompanied them, but the colonel sternly desired him to return to the parlour, and there await his bride—and he obeyed.

The unconscious girl was conveyed to her apartment, and consigned to the care of Emily, whose