

of the room, a miserable rushlight burned on a table, so placed as to prevent the glare from falling on the sleeper's face, and seated beside it, her head bowed intently over some needle-work, was Nina Aleyn. Four years had also passed over her since last introduced to the reader, and though her pale cheek had grown paler, and her slight form more fragile, she looked not older. Passion, remorse or sin, had never stamped their fiery characters on her brow; but suffering, alas! and heart sorrow, were there—sorrow which beamed in the dark eyes that turned so restlessly to the couch on which the other occupant of the chamber reposed.

"She sleeps still," she murmured. "Oh! better for her, were she never to awake, and, well for me, if I could lie down beside her, and share that eternal sleep. How my head throbs!"

She threw down her work, and pressed both hands upon her forehead, with an expression of weary pain.

"Three days and nights without one moment of sleep or rest. My aching eyes ever strained over their wearisome task—and were that all! Ah!—I would be only too happy; but I must turn to it again; there is no repose for me, at least, on earth."

She had just resumed her work, when the patient's weak voice was heard. Instantly, Nina was beside her.

"How do you feel now, Mary?" she asked, carefully raising her head.

"Better, much better, for I have the blessed consciousness that I have not long to suffer; but come and sit near me awhile, my child, for I have much to say, and we may not be at liberty to converse again."

The young girl obeyed, but from time to time she cast a restless, timid glance towards the door.

"Nay, do not fear. He has gone to the next village, and he cannot be back for some hours yet. No wonder, my poor one, that you should tremble at his step, when I, his wife, feel the blood in my veins freeze with terror at his approach. Oh! infatuated fool that I was, to barter the peace, the comfort, I once enjoyed, for the privilege of being his wedded slave. It was that accursed union that drove you from us, to seek a home in a foreign land, and then to return with a breaking heart. Since that return, my God! what have you endured! Toil, want, brutal tyranny!"

"Pray, do not speak of it, Mary. It might have been much worse—let us turn to a less distressing topic."

"No, for this is one, my weak, unworthy heart, has shunned too long. But what ails you, my child?"

"'Tis he—he's coming!" whispered Nina, springing to her feet with a terrified look, as the door burst open, and a tall, ruffianly looking man entered.

"What! plotting again," he fiercely ejaculated. "Begone to your work, you pale-faced imp, and if you leave it again without reason, you will feel the consequence."

What a fearful tale was revealed in the instinctive shudder with which the girl recoiled from his threatening arm, the quiet submission with which she obeyed his brutal mandate. Alas! such scenes to her, were neither new nor strange. For a time he strode up and down the narrow room, his head almost touching the ceiling, but suddenly he paused before his trembling wife.

"Do you hear me, woman? I want money, and money I will have. Give it to me at once, peaceably."

"I have already solemnly assured you, Lutteridge, that I have none. For God's sake, leave me to die in peace; I will not trouble you long."

"Leave you to die in peace," he returned, with a brutal laugh. "And how long, pray, do you intend to take to die? For more than a month, this has been your daily song, and yet, at the present moment, you seem to have no more intention of dying, than I myself have. Come, you will fool me no longer; give me without delay, what I ask."

"How can I, when I have none?" was the imploring rejoinder. "Have you not already received everything?"

"Where is the money you got for the last sewing that girl there did?"

"It is not sold yet—we have not had time to dispose of it."

"Then, where is the use of her doing any more?" he returned, making a sudden spring at the trembling Nina, and snatching the needle-work on which she was engaged, from her grasp. "There," he added, as he tore it into shreds, and trampled it under his feet; "you may find some other amusement to employ your industrious fingers."

As he turned again to the bed, Nina stooped to push the object of his late fury out of sight. Suddenly her eye brightened, and she raised her head with an eager, listening look, for a sudden confusion in the adjoining room, with the sound of strange voices, betokened the arrival of travellers, and there was comfort and protection in the very thought. Fearing that her hopes might have deceived her, she turned with her head nearer to the door, to satisfy her doubts, when her attention was painfully absorbed by the earnest, though inaudible dialogue passing be-