

"And you altered the dates and names? You devised this noble plan for breaking my marriage and my heart together? Kind, generous sister, I thank you."

"Oh, Allan!" she broke out with a bitter cry; "forgive me. I said I would not ask it, but I do. If you knew how I have suffered—if you knew how often I have tried to tell you—if you knew how I have longed to die that I might not have to confess the lie and live to bear the shame—oh, Allan, in consideration of all this, will you not pity and forgive? You can afford forgiveness now."

"You know not what you ask," said he sternly. "I am what you have made me, not what I was. It would be easy to say, 'I forgive you,' as easy to act that part as the one I have performed so long; but what can blot from my mind six years of useless suffering? what can make me forget that you wantonly inflicted it? The confession you have made now might as well have been made six years ago; you knew of no reason to the contrary. But as he spoke a new idea seemed to flash across his mind, and he stopped abruptly. She did not notice it."

"If you had but said a word to lead to it, Allan; one word to make it easier to me,—I have waited so often—

"It was not for me to speak. You had made the wound; it was for you to heal it, were healing possible."

"Allan, forgive me," she said again. Perhaps he did not know how much the words meant coming from her. It was a new sensation to Charlotte Falconer to pray for forgiveness.

"What induced you to keep up such a deception? How could I be such a fool as not to see the truth?"

"I wondered you did not; I hoped you would. Your likeness to the family—the little I had told you, and with which I wondered you were content—your slight examination of the papers—everything made me hope that you would suspect and investigate the truth. But you never did—though at any moment I would have told you all."

"The reason why I should have avoided the subject is plain: I was conscious of my own baseness, and never suspected yours."

Guilt is its own punishment; had I been willing sooner to own the truth I should have been sooner free."

"Will you try to forgive me, Allan?" she said once more.

"Yes, I will try. I had better leave you now. Give me those papers—I will examine them more carefully this time—and let me go."

"She gathered up her own, and laid them by, and rose to leave the room. "I will get them, Allan. You will retain Percie's guardianship now? It was Percival's last wish."

"Yes; if I am really the boy's uncle I have a right to that. And about my father. You had better come. You will see but little of me—less than ever now—and it will be a great comfort to him."

"I could not do it, Allan. Late events have unfitted me to be anyone's companion but my own; and I do not wish to leave the place where I have spent all my married life, and where my husband died."

"You will let the boy be at Donningdean as much as you can? You have no objection to his being with me when I am at home?"

"Oh, Allan, you know I have not. He may be at Donningdean as long and as often as you and my father please. Allan, may I dare to ask you a question? Do—you mean never to give the old place a mistress? do you intend to be the last of the name?"

His face darkened; "I know what you mean," he said sternly. "No wonder you are afraid to touch on the subject. Say no more. But I can assure you of one thing—Donningdean will never have a mistress in my wife."

CHAPTER IV.

From that time until the period arrived at which he was to go to school, little Percie Falconer was as much at Donningdean with his grandfather and uncle, as at his own home. He was very fond of Allan, who returned his affection, and the child was more obedient to him than to any one else now his father was gone. This is saying but little, it is true; for as time went on his disposition became more