

follow the current of his affections, yet he resolved to behold once more the maiden he loved with an ardor almost surpassing his own belief.

One cold, dull morning, towards the wane of the year, when the heavy drops lay long on the lank herbage, no sun-beam yet loitering through the damp, chill atmosphere, but the sky one wide and unvarying expanse—a sea of cloud; here and there a black scud passing over, like a dim bark sweeping across the bosom of that “waveless deep,” a stranger stood by a low wicket near the mansion of Grislehurst. He looked wistfully at the gloomy windows, unlighted by a single reflection from without, like the rayless night of his own soul: they were mostly closed. A mysterious and unusual stillness prevailed. The brown leaves fluttered about, unswept from the dreary avenues; decayed branches obstructed the paths; and every object wore a look of wretchedness and dilapidation. The only sign of occupancy and life was one grey wreath of smoke, curling heavily from its vent, as if oppressed with the surrounding gloom. The melancholy note of the redbreast was the only living sound, as the bird came hopping towards him with its usual air of familiarity and respect. Enveloped in a military cloak, and in his cap a dark feather drooping gently over his proud features, the stranger slowly approached the house; a side-door stood partly open; he entered; a narrow passage led into the hall. No embers brightened the huge chimney; the tables showed no relics of the feast—no tokens of the past night’s revel. The deer’s antlers still hung over the master’s place at the board, but the oaken chair was gone. Dust and desertion had played strange antics in these “high places.” The busy spider had wreathed her dingy festoons in mockery over the pomp she degraded. He listened, but there was no sound save the last faint echo of his footstep. Turning towards the staircase, a beautiful spaniel, a sort of privileged favourite of Constance, came, with a deep growl, as if to warn away the intruder. But the sagacious animal suddenly fawned upon him, and with a low whine ascended the stairs, looking

back wistfully, as though inviting him to follow.

Scarcely knowing why, or bestowing one thought on the nature of this intrusion, he ascended. The place seemed familiar to him. He entered a narrow gallery, where he paused, overcome by some powerful emotion. The dog stood too, looking back with a low and sorrowful whine. With a sudden effort, he grappled with and shook off the dark spirit that overwhelmed him. A low murmur was heard, apparently from a chamber at no great distance. Without reflecting a moment on the impropriety of his situation, he hastily approached the door; his guide, with a look of almost irresistible persuasion, implored him to enter.

It was the chamber of Constance. A female was kneeling by the bed, too much absorbed to be conscious of his approach; she was in the attitude of prayer. He recognized the old nurse; her eye glistening in the fervor of devotion whilst pouring forth to her God, in secret the agony of soul words are too feeble to express.

Bending over the bed, as if for the support of some frail victim of disease, he beheld the lord of the mansion. His look was wild and haggard; no moisture floated over his eyeballs; they were glazed and motionless; arid as the hot desert, no refreshing rain dropped from their burning orbs, dimmed with the shadows of despair.

Stretched on the bed, her pale cheek resting on the bosom of her father, lay the yet beauteous form of Constance Holt. A hectic flush at times passed across her features. Her lip, shrunk and parched with the fever that consumed her, was moistened by an attendant with unremitting and unwearied assiduity. Her eye often rose in tenderness to her parent, as if anxious to impart to him the consolation she enjoyed.

“Oh, I am happy, my father!” Here a sudden change was visible; some cord of sorrow was touched, and it vibrated to her soul.

Her father spoke not.

“I have loved! Oh, faithfully. But now—let me die without a murmur to Thee, or one wish but Thy will, and I am happy!” Her soft and streaming eyes were raised towards the throne of