

book; do not speak to me; do not look at me. Leave me—leave me to myself.”

“To your worst enemy——”

“You have said truly, Alice. I have been a bitter foe to myself—and not to myself alone, but to you also. But do, there’s a kind, good sister, leave me; I shall soon regain my spirits. But when the heart’s sore it will ache.”

Thinking that she alluded to the sudden departure of Captain Ogilvie, and convinced that Sophia was not indifferent to him, and that she deeply regretted his absence, Alice forbore to ask another question. Folding the weeping girl in her arms, and imprinting a fond kiss upon her rigid brow, she said, “May God give you comfort, my dear sister, and enable you to bear with fortitude the disappointment of your fondest hopes.”

“You are mistaken,” murmured Sophy; “Captain Ogilvie loves me. His absence has nothing to do with my present grief,”—and leaning her head upon her hands, she relapsed into the same gloomy silence.

CHAPTER XXV.

COULD Alice Linhope have guessed the cause of her sister’s distress, her agitation and grief, though produced by very different feelings, would have equalled, if not surpassed, Sophia’s. For some time past, the latter had been harassed daily by Mrs. Lawrence for the payment of her bill. Sophia had solemnly promised to liquidate it in a month, for she entertained the most sanguine expectations of Captain Ogilvie making her his wife. But when three months had elapsed, and she was not any nearer the fulfilment of her wishes, and no money was forthcoming, Mrs. Lawrence, who began to suspect that all was not right with the young lady, and that the Captain was more a man of the world than she had anticipated, and was not so easily forced into marrying a portionless girl, became clamorous for her money. When she perceived with what alarm Sophia listened to her insolent threats, she sent up a note on the preceding evening, enclosing an extravagant bill, amounting to upwards of forty pounds, for which she demanded instant payment, threatening, in case of a refusal, to inform Mrs. Linhope of the debt, as she was certain that that person was not aware of her daughter’s proceedings.

Had Sophia acted wisely, and as I would advise any imprudent girl in the same unfortunate circumstances to act, she would have carried the bill and Mrs. Lawrence’s insolent note immediately to her mother, informed her of her past imprudence and folly, and entreated her forgiveness and assistance. But guilt is ever timid. Sophia wanted the moral courage to do this; and the false pride, which had betrayed her into error, was not backward in suggesting the necessity of concealment. She was thunderstruck at the amount of the bill, but she

knew that to remonstrate with such an unprincipled woman was fruitless, and although fully aware that she had not ordered all the articles placed to her account, she perceived that she would be compelled to pay for them.

She wrote a very humble note to the milliner, begging her forbearance for a few weeks, couched in the most abject terms, and she passed the rest of the night in a state of restless anxiety, useless tears, and bitter self-upbraidings. The sudden departure of her fashionable lover, and her mysterious encounter with the strange old gentleman, rendered her misery complete. How the money was to be procured she could not form the least idea. She was too proud to confide to Alice her distress, lest it should draw upon herself a severe reproof. After many hopeless conjectures, she at length resolved to write to her cousin Arthur, inform him of her past folly and present distress, and ask his advice and assistance. She had just opened her desk in order to carry this scheme into practice, when her mother entered her apartment, and told her to walk as far as the Abbey Farm, and order some new-laid eggs for her grandmother. Glad of escaping from herself, Sophia tied on her bonnet, and not wishing to encounter any of her gay friends in the town, took an unfrequented path to the Abbey, which lay through the wood-lane, which we have so often described. Shortly after Mr. Granger had parted with Alice, he overtook Sophia, who turned away her head, in order to avoid being recognized by a person whom she both feared and hated.

The old gentleman raised his hat, and gave her the usual salutations of the morning, as she passed, when the thought suddenly struck him that he would try if Sophia was as proof against temptation as her sister; and, when at some distance, he dropped his purse in her path, without attracting her observation. He was nearly out of sight when Sophia reached the spot where the tempting treasure lay. She took up the purse, and eagerly examined its contents. Enclosed she found twenty sovereigns, and several pounds in silver—and the idea of appropriating its contents, and satisfying Mrs. Lawrence for a time, instantly darted into her mind; she knew that the purse must in all probability belong to the stranger, or he would have picked it up, as it lay directly in his path; but he was no longer present, and this circumstance favoured her design. She suddenly stopped, and, with a beating heart and a hurried glance around her, began to revolve in her own mind the important question, “Shall I take it—or shall I not—and free myself from my present dangerous situation?” Once to deliberate on the commission of any crime is almost a certain sign that we shall yield to the temptation; familiarizing the mind to dwell upon the possibility of doing aught that our conscience disapproves, is in itself criminal; and no person of upright principles will